

HISTORY OF WELFARE RIGHTS

# RADICAL AMERICA

VOL.11, NO. 5

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THE NO-NUKE MOVEMENT  
ANATOMY OF A WILDCAT STRIKE

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*We have received many helpful suggestions and comments on our new format. We know that the new style makes Radical America appear shorter than it used to be. We want to assure you that in fact we are printing as many words as ever. We have changed from the old style in an effort to make the magazine more readable and less formidable in appearance.*

*The vast majority of our income goes to printing the magazine. Unlike most other magazines, we have no paid staff. In addition to being easier to read, our new format allows us to keep down the total number of pages per issue and hence reduce our printing costs. Almost all of the income that keeps Radical America going comes from subscriptions and newsstand sales. Although many friends have responded generously to appeals for aid in the past, we have no large financial backers. Also, the income from each newsstand sale does not cover the cost of each issue. Therefore, if you bought this copy at a newsstand, please consider subscribing instead. And if you already subscribe, please consider becoming a sustaining subscriber or buying a gift sub for friends who borrow your copies. Thank you for your support. And as always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.*

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*Cover: The first convention of the National Welfare Rights Organization. Photo by Bill Pastereich.*

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# **RADICAL AMERICA**

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# INTRODUCTION

When popular militancy occurs, questions arise within the left about how best respond — how to build a socialist or revolutionary strategy out of these expressions of mass anger. What kind of leadership is most effective in directing future actions? Which organizational forms will be most responsive? How can socialists intervene without assuming undemocratic control?

Stressing the importance of self-organization by working-class people, *Radical America* has frequently published articles critical of top-down, hierarchical organization building. However, many criticisms of left organizing and party building have been somewhat abstract, focusing on historical debates. We think it important to learn more about contemporary mass movements and direct actions in the United States in order to make our discussions of organizational strategy more historically specific, concrete, and practical.

The articles in this issue, each an evaluation of direct experience, address some of the important organizational questions although they offer no easy answers. John Lippert's article on the 1976 wildcat at the GM Fleetwood plant in Detroit describes the declining shop-floor strength of the UAW, the limitations on the ability of leftists to enlist support for reforming the union, and implies that some traditional left wisdom about how to understand and "organize" militant workplace protest may be unreliable. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, in their analysis of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), argue the inevitability of failure for a large stratified organization with a membership constituency and paid staff; a structure which was developed

by that organization in response to the widespread protest of the urban poor in the 1960s. Finally, Marty Jezer evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the "no-nuke" movement, and asserts the opportunity for socialists to have an impact on this movement. While none of these articles attempts to formulate an over-all strategy for socialists in the United States, their insights about particular situations can help to inform such a strategy.

## WILDCAT

John Lippert's article is above all a description of the personal experience of taking part in a wildcat strike. This story of what it means for workers to leave their jobs, of how they made decisions about what to do, and about the personal pressures they felt adds a vital, subjective dimension of political activity usually missing from accounts of strikes.

Lippert also raises questions about a form of working class action to which the revolutionary left has attached a great importance since the 1930s. Leaders of bureaucratic unions, removed from the rank and file membership, place primary emphasis on contract negotiations; and official strikes are called as a show of strength behind the leaders' bargaining positions. Wildcat strikes, in contrast to official union strikes, are launched by the workers themselves, come out of immediate issues and frustrations on the job, and are usually without union approval. Union officials usually oppose wildcats because they violate union-management "no-strike" contract terms and threaten the union bureaucracy's control over the rank and file membership.

Lippert's account of his experience in Fleetwood provides evidence of how important direct action is to the workers themselves. The wildcat strike clearly gave workers a sense of power, exhilaration and increased comradeship. But the

role of socialists or socialist organizations in responding to wildcats remains ambiguous. Lippert saw some leftists assume unofficial leadership during the strike, but also saw them isolated and unable to mobilize support among the other workers for their positions. Once outside the plant, shop-floor alliances shifted and, as the strike's momentum decreased, the only position that gained support was for the reinstatement of all strikers.

Lippert believes that workers have much more power if they struggle inside the plant. He argues that walkouts make workers, especially leftists, "too vulnerable" by removing them from the workplace. The day-to-day struggle, as he sees it, is conducted guerilla fashion through informal work groups that form inside the plant. He sees these groups as the primary loci of collective consciousness and action at the point of production. Lippert turned to his primary work group during the wildcat, first for an indication of whether to walk out, and later as a support group outside the plant. It became, in a sense, his affinity group.

Based on his experience at Fleetwood in the summer of 1976, Lippert is skeptical about the efficacy of repeating the walk-out. This skepticism may be shared by other workers. However, this summer's wave of wildcats in the auto industry proved quite effective in winning quick victories for the workers around health and safety issues, speed-ups and other problems which union grievance procedures failed to solve. Many of these recent wildcats were also solid enough to protect militants against firings, a problem which looms large in Lippert's account of the Fleetwood strike.

## WELFARE

Unlike wage earners, the poorest of the working class — those on welfare or eligible for welfare — have no specific workplace in which

to organize. The poor must often channel their protest into demands for more relief or into threats of disruption of a welfare system which is not highly valued in society anyway. Socialists have long been confused over how to relate to the anger of the most poor. The capitalist welfare state has been extremely effective in generating large-scale working class anger toward welfare recipients, anger compounded by racism and sexism. Socialists have, therefore, found it difficult to conceive of a strategy for working class unity around welfare issues. Even the Black civil rights leadership, as Piven and Cloward point out in their article, were very hesitant to identify with the cause and concerns of the Black people on welfare.

Yet conditions of living on welfare, as well as the demeaning procedures required to apply for it — the multitude of rules and regulations which are enforced arbitrarily in discriminating ways — led, in the late sixties, to indigenous protest by women on welfare. Welfare mothers marched, sat in, and created chaos in the welfare system before the formation of any national (or even local) organization.

The response of George Wiley and other organizers was to create a national, mass-membership organization with certified chapters and a large staff of organizers. The rationale for such an organization was that the protest needed to be more focused; that without leadership and national cohesion, the movement would dissipate into frustration. As presented by Piven and Cloward, the history of NWRO suggests that the nature of the organization itself helped to defeat the growth of militancy. Even at its peak of national exposure the organization was collapsing under the weight of bureaucratic constraints and rivalries.

Piven and Cloward suggest that, while many forces (most notably the decline of the civil rights movement and Black militancy) lead to

the demise of the welfare rights movement, the organization form itself helped to insure defeat. They argue that leftists should have organized *themselves* and attempted to thereby support and mobilize local disruption efforts, but should not have attempted to create a mass-membership, structured organization. Such membership organizations can have little real power, according to the authors, and only serve to misdirect the energy of the people on welfare from what they *can* do — extract immediate benefits from the system under threat of disruption and violence. They argue that, instead of concentrating energy on lobbying for legislative reform of welfare laws, organizers should have put their efforts into getting as many people as possible on the welfare rolls. Since nowhere near all the people eligible receive welfare benefits, such an increase in demand for benefits would in and of itself disrupt the state and local welfare systems and push powerful interests in the Democratic Party to make welfare a national system which would provide more benefits.

While the history of NWRO demonstrates the problems with such mass-membership organizations, and with reform organizing in general, there may also be problems with the cadre approach advocated by Piven and Cloward. First, it seems to abandon hope of the left's ability to instigate militancy; all we can do is support it and try to get immediate benefits from the system in response. Second, the problems of maintaining democracy — while never solved by organizations — seem even more difficult with a cadre approach. Old questions about legitimacy and control of the organizer/mobilizer seem overwhelming. Still, it is necessary for the left today to look for new forms and modes of organization. Large structures with formalized, largely passive membership, such as NWRO, seem historically unable to sustain creativity and vision.

## FROM THE MOVEMENT

In this issue we begin a section of *Radical America* which we hope will address organizational and strategic questions. In our new "From the Movement" section we plan to publish short articles (3000 words) about current left activity — pieces which will specifically consider the strategic implications of current organizing. Marty Jezer's timely article on the Clamshell Alliance is the first contribution to the series. In it he argues that a real opportunity exists for socialists to work in the rapidly growing anti-nuclear movement. His article is an example of the type of article we hope to print, in that it is written by a participant in the organizing effort and attempts to discuss the broader issues raised by organizational activity.

We would like to encourage those who are similarly involved in current organizing efforts to send us articles which raise strategic and organizational questions for the left. We are more interested in analyses of the sources and implications of current organizing than in position papers or blow-by-blow descriptions without critique. We hope this section can serve as a forum for many of the unsolved and crucial questions facing the left today.

The *Radical America* Editors

## *cineaste*

### SUMMER 1977 ISSUE

"Frank Capra and the Popular Front"; exclusive interview with Tomas G. Alea, Cuban director of *MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT*; "A Second Look at *CASABLANCA*"; interview with Roberto Rossellini, who talks about his (last) film on Karl Marx; interview with the filmmakers of *HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.*; plus reviews of *BOUND FOR GLORY*, *NETWORK*, *ROCKY*, *UNION MAIDS*, *CARRIE*, *3 WOMEN*, *PUMPING IRON*

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FLEETWOOD



# FLEETWOOD WILDCAT

John Lippert

## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of the wildcat strike we had at the Fleetwood Fisher Body plant in Detroit on August 26, 1976. The story contains a lot of historical information: I present the strike as part of a series of logically connected events which came before and after it. And the story contains a lot of political information: I draw lessons from the strike which will be useful when we at Fleetwood or at other places are confronted with similar situations in the future.

But the story is neither historical nor political in the traditional ways. Because in telling the story, I present my own subjective perceptions of the event along with these historical and political aspects of it.

I tell the story in this way because I want it to be part of a mass movement — the autoworkers' movement. In building this movement, we need precise historical and political formulations. But in addition to these, we need to foster a subjective sense that all of us as workers are in the same boat. We need *comraderie* which goes beyond that which ordinarily exists on the shop floor. And we need self-organization which goes well beyond the unions. More than anything else, we need to tell our stories ourselves. We're in the same boat not just because of what "the system" is doing to us. We're in the same boat because we can only look to each other in challenging that system and fighting for our long-term survival.

I'm trying, then, to make this event come alive. Most of the people who walked out of Fleetwood last summer are still working there. The crises which provoked our action then

are still real ones. We're still confronting and collectively discussing the weaknesses in our situation — weaknesses which made the strike only partially successful. A lot of people are asking this question: "How can we do better next time around?"

The first step in telling the story is to set the stage on which it took place. Fleetwood is a major automotive assembly plant. We build bodies for 95% of all Cadillac cars. The bodies are complete when they leave the plant — all the windows, paint, interior and exterior trim are in place. The bodies are then taken by truck about two miles over to the Cadillac assembly plant, where the chassis, front end and engine are added. The line at Fleetwood runs at the speed of 72 cars per hour. Fifty-five hundred people work on the line at Fleetwood. Another nine thousand work over at Cadillac.

Fleetwood and Cadillac are exceptional plants in that they had only minor layoffs during "the energy crisis" and recession. And we've been working extensive overtime for several years now. This is important because as workers it places us in a very powerful position. General Motors wants Cadillac bodies badly, and right now they have to come to us in order to get them. And everybody who works at Fleetwood and Cadillac knows this. The conditions we face are common to auto plants throughout North America. But in the summer of '76, we were in one of the strongest positions to resist them.

The workforce at Fleetwood, like the workforces in auto plants all over the world, has been shaped by mass migrations. The largest group is made up of black people. The next largest group is hillbillies. Most of these people have actually been born in the South, although they've been around Detroit long enough now that their children and even grandchildren are coming into the plant. More recent

immigrants come from Mexico, Eastern Europe, Malta, Yemen, and the Middle East. Only the blacks and the most recent immigrants live in Detroit itself. Most of the whites live in a cluster of working-class suburbs to the west and southwest of the city.

The plant is located in the heart of the American industrial empire. From one end of the plant you can look out and see the Ford Rouge complex towering over the Arab ghetto of East Dearborn. To the left of that, you can see an oil refinery, a salt mine, a waste treatment plant, a paper factory and a giant steel mill. From the other end of the plant, you can see the Cadillac Assembly plant rising over the Mexican and hillbilly neighborhood of Southwest Detroit. Behind that you can see the General Motors World Headquarters. And to the right of that you can see downtown Detroit, capped now by the brand new Renaissance Center.

The neighborhoods around Fleetwood and Cadillac are seas of unemployment. Last fall, on the basis of an internal plant rumor at Cadillac, 5,000 people lined up in the darkness and early morning hours, hoping to get an application. Their efforts were in vain, though. There were no jobs, just a shortage of applications on file.

There were two specific and overlapping crises which provoked the walkout last summer. These crises will provide two of the major themes which will guide my description of the event.

The first crisis was on the shop floor itself. The issue was speedup. They had a big changeover at Fleetwood last year. Three of the cars we were building were completely redesigned. And one was eliminated. It was part of an international effort on the part of General Motors to make their cars smaller, lighter, and more integrated (and to make their

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workforce smaller as well). All of the jobs at Fleetwood were new. And they were *all* overloaded.

In response to this, people were fighting all over the plant to get work removed from their jobs. The main tactic was to take your job into the hole, that is, to work past your designated work station. Eventually you had to let some of the jobs go by untouched. And eventually you started disrupting jobs farther down the line. A lot of jobs were simply physically impossible to keep up. But a lot of jobs were kept in the hole deliberately.

Most of the foremen have worked on the line themselves, so of course they're aware of all this. It's hard to prove that someone is working in the hole deliberately, but they have a variety of other ways to pressure people. The easiest solution for them is to put new-hires on the job. People are on probation and don't have any power at all until they have their 90 days in. Maybe the foremen will discipline somebody for "bad workmanship" or for coming back late from a break. A lot of times, the foremen will add extra work onto the job, even if they know it will be removed later. They save a little money in the short run. And basically, it's like over-pricing your used car when you go to sell it: you anticipate the buyer will offer you less than you ask. So then the foremen propose to remove  $X$  amount of work from the job. The workers propose to remove  $X + Y$  amount of work.

Changeover came at the end of June last year, and a lot of jobs still aren't settled. The tension has frequently exploded into a crisis, and it's never been far below the surface. When the time came to walk out, a lot of people were angry enough to do it.

The second crisis which provoked the walk-out was in the union itself. At the time of the walkout, there were a couple thousand grievan-

ces outstanding on speedup alone. The grievance procedure had simply ceased to function as a way of resolving speedup disputes in the plant. The company was refusing to seriously bargain with the shop committee. The International Union wasn't giving the shop committee any help. And so the committee, never known as a hotbed of radicalism, found itself isolated and forced to explore a new set of tactics.

There's a third theme which will guide my description of the event. I'll follow closely the actions of a group of leftists who worked in the plant. I'll follow them not just because they were an organic part of the event itself. I'll follow them because what they did raises a lot of general questions about the nature of left activity in this country.

Part of my interest here is in self-understanding. I've been associated with left movements in the past, and I'm constantly reassessing the nature and meaning of this association. I'm not now a member of a party or group or anything. But that's only because I can't find one I like. It'll soon be obvious, though, that my perspective in telling this story is informed at once by my dual identity as a worker and as a leftist.

My association with the left goes back to when I was 17. At that time, my relationship with my parents collapsed and I rebelled against my high school. When I became aware of the Vietnam War I was horrified, and naturally, I was attracted to the anti-war movement. When they tried to draft me I registered as a conscientious objector. It was just an easy way out at the time, but I've since grown proud of the moral statement it represents. That was in 1971, long after the anti-war movement had peaked, but when it had begun to touch other sections of the society besides just students and GI's.

After high school I bummed around for a

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while and wound up in college. I didn't have a "career" in mind. It was just something to do. I stayed for two years, during which campus radicalism concerned me more than anything else. But then the school ran out of financial aid and I ran out of money. So I went to work for Fisher Body in Ohio. That was four years ago. I got laid off during "the energy crisis" and at first I was glad. But after several months of desperate unemployment, I was overjoyed to get back into the plants. I've been at Fleetwood now a year and a half. And at the moment I'm 24.

I was never part of that group of leftists who considered themselves "colonizers," to whom working in a plant was a sacrifice. I've always assumed I'd operate within the unskilled labor market. And within that, working for General Motors is "a good job." If I didn't feel that way, I would have quit a long time ago.

Also, I'm not describing my background in the left because I want to address the left as such in this article. I'm just trying to indicate where I'm coming from. I'm seeking an audience in the plants, among people who have been involved in walkouts before and who are trying to assess that experience.

This is, of course, only a limited audience; I have only limited goals for the article. Auto-workers are militant and powerful almost by definition. But it's obvious we can't get very far unless the working class as a whole moves forward. We're confronted with divisions within the working class which run deep. And we're confronted with theoretical and organizational questions which are immense and which can't be addressed solely in terms of our day to day struggle.

But in making this day to day struggle our starting point, at least we'll be starting from somewhere concrete. If there's universality in what we do, we can't hide it. And we must

always be concerned with linking up with others within the working class to make both them and ourselves stronger. But initially, our most important concern has to be to remember where our roots are.

I have to specify one more thing before beginning the story: my participation in the walkout itself was guided almost entirely by my instincts as a worker. I had no public political presence, and I wasn't connected with the leftists in the plant. This happened in part because I had returned from layoff only four days before the walkout, and I was thrown into a strange department on a different shift. I didn't know anybody, and it was hard for me to figure out what to do. But to a large extent, I was avoiding a public political role because I wasn't sure what that role should be. My years in the plant and my background in the left hadn't produced any easy answers. And so I was concerned mainly with listening and learning as much as I could.

I'm hopeful that my storytelling here can be the last stage in my apprenticeship....

## II. WALKOUT

The wildcat started on August 26, 1976. It was a Thursday, payday on second shift. It was a beautiful day in Detroit, hot and sunny. That's one of the reasons I asked Bruno, my foreman, for a pass to go home early. It was very, very hot inside the plant. And I didn't particularly feel like working.

But the other reason I wanted the pass was because I wanted to spend time with Jane, the woman I live with. This was only my fourth day on second shift, and already I was getting bummed out because Jane and I were seeing so little of each other. She works dayshift in a hospital. We had had a fight that Tuesday, and we still hadn't recovered from it. Each day I felt lower and lower. By Thursday I was just plain

down.

I got fucked, though. I got to work only three minutes before the line started. So when I asked Bruno for the pass he just laughed at me. There were seven people ahead of me in line for a pass. I had to stay.

But then the day started, and I began to get immersed in the scene around me. The first thing I did was give this guy Kenny some money for dope. I had been in the department four days, and I had received many offers of dope for sale. Finally I received an offer that made sense. Some guy on the fifth floor was selling blond hash for four dollars a gram.

Then I had a good talk with Jerry, this white biker. He's big and strongly built, wears a Fu Manchu moustache and a belt made out of chain link from a motor cycle. He and I got along good, though. He used to call me "Smiley" because I tried to get along with everybody. He was deep into talking about his family. He said sometimes his kids drove him up a wall, but that he wouldn't trade them for anything. He was in the middle of a divorce. He was demanding custody of his four kids because he thought his wife was too crazy to care for them. He said he had gotten into trouble by becoming "an instant father at nineteen." He said, "When you got people depending on you, it makes it a lot harder to work here. Shit, when I hired in, all I had to pay was \$25 a week room and board with my folks and \$75 a month car payment. Man, I was earning \$200 a week. I used it to go out and buy shit I didn't even need. That was five and a half years ago, and now I can't afford to miss one fucking day of work." After a while, we got onto more cheerful subjects: he was planning to go on a freedom ride that week to protest the helmet laws for bikers.

I was working all through the conversation. My job was to repair and put tape around the

quarter glass on the coupes. Quarter glass is the little window on the side of the car that doesn't open. The moulding around the window was all messed up. My job consisted of banging the mouldings back into place with a hammer, filling the various holes with putty, and taping the whole thing up so it would look smooth when the vinyl top was installed. It wasn't a bad job. They were running other cars besides coupes. So it gave me time off the line, time to talk.

Other people in my work group were doing similar jobs. Some people were installing the quarter glass. Some were drilling holes in the mouldings around the glass. Others were shooting the screws to hold the mouldings in. The people right before our group were installing back windows. The people right after us were shooting rivets around a big plastic moulding that went around the back window. This was all basically in preparation for installing the vinyl tops.

We had a lot to talk about that day. The day shift had been sent home at lunchtime, but nobody could figure out why. One rumor was that Cadillac Assembly had had a breakdown. Another was that there were so many repairs that they couldn't run the line any more. Soon we heard that the day shift had been sent home early since they had intended to walk out. Apparently something had happened to the leaders of the union. President Rufus Coleman, a black guy, had been suspended. Shop Chairman Jim Gabbard, a white guy, had been fired. Or so the rumors went. Nobody could tell for sure.

People reacted to all this cautiously at first. But the rumors were pretty dramatic, and after a while people started to get upset. "What the hell kind of union have we got if the company can throw the president out any time they want?" "The union ain't got no backbone any-

way.” “If the company can get away with this, pretty soon they’ll only pay us two dollars an hour to work here.” “How come the fuckin’ candy asses on day shift didn’t walk out? They said they were goin’ to and then they chickened out.” Then somebody suggested maybe we should walk out. The response here was more sober. “Hell, I’ll walk out if everybody else does. But I’m not gonna walk outa here myself.”

We spent more than half an hour in this kind of confusion. Apparently, both Gabbard and Coleman had been given time off. They had been in a fight with some Labor Relations people, and Plant Security had thrown them out of the plant. But what provoked the fight, nobody knew.

This discussion was going on within our immediate workgroup. Everybody was upset. Black and white people were both upset: the fact that Coleman was black didn’t have immediate relevance. Everybody who was walking by was talking about it, too. And from experience, you knew *everybody* in the plant was discussing it as well. That’s true because of the assembly line itself: it confronts everybody with the same issues. Like at that moment everybody was angry about the speedup. Everybody wanted to get out because it was hot.

Then word came that we were walking out at seven. The “word” materialized in the form of Trane, a black reliefman in our department. He had been down on the third floor checking things out. He went around saying, “I just talked to the man. The man said not to call no names, but we goin’ at seven.” I asked him who “the man” was, and he looked at me like I was crazy. He said, “Man, I just got done tellin’ you I ain’t gonna call no names.” This one guy in our group, Jim, went running around saying, “Man, these guys ain’t even gonna wait until we get our checks.”

I had a chance to talk to Andy, who had broken me in on my job. Somehow, Andy had managed to stay calm through all this. He said the walkout was being called by the shop committee of the union. He said, “They can’t come right out and call for it, though. That would be calling for an illegal work stoppage.” He said not to worry, though. He said they’d back us up if we walked out: “They’d never call for something like that and not back it up.”

Everybody was walking back and forth and discussing all this. But after a while, people stopped talking much about Gabbard and Coleman, about what had gotten them in trouble, about what a walkout was intended to do and so on. It wasn’t that people weren’t thinking analytically. Rather, the issues at hand and the reactions were so clear to everybody that people didn’t need to discuss them much. After a while people were unanimous: “It’s about time somebody stood up to the shit that goes on around here.”

The most immediate concern people were expressing was around the attack the company had made on the union. Gabbard and Coleman have little importance as individuals here (they know this better than anyone). People wanted to defend the union itself. People were saying, “The union is only as strong as we are.” “If the union can’t do the job, then we people in here are going to have to do it ourselves.”

But talk about the union served quickly to spark a bigger, more generalized protest. Very soon, the walkout came to be seen as part of the on-going struggle against the speedup. One white guy, Little John, said it this way: “Hell, John. Look at this job I’m doing. They got me workin’ like a fuckin’ dog in here. I can’t work like this all year. Damn right I’m gonna walk out.”

Everybody was talking at once. Issues, bitterness, rumors and anxiety were swirling

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around me. My own thoughts were as confused as anyone's. I kept looking at my watch and thinking, "Oh my god. In a few minutes I'm going to have to make a *decision* here." Something really dramatic had taken place at Fleetwood that day. People were ready to go.

It was this fact, more than anything else, that made me go out. Obviously something was going to happen at seven o'clock. And I'd be damned if I was going to be left on the inside, wishing I had gone along. And you knew that if everybody went the individual risks would be minimal. Most people were thinking this way. Specific events had set the ball rolling. But after a certain point, we were responding to the motion of the ball (and our overall situation) rather than to those events themselves. After a certain point, nobody asked, "Do we *need* a walkout?" People asked, "Are you *going*?"

At twenty minutes past six I got my break, and the first thing I did was call Jane and tell her I might get out early that day after all. I told her what was happening and she wished me luck. Then I walked around for a while trying to find out just how strong support for the walkout was. People were making the decision to walk out primarily within their own work groups. But there was a lot of circulating back and forth to verify that different groups felt the same way.

A lot of people told me to keep an eye on the Kotan section. That's where they put the vinyl tops on the cars (the word Kotan refers to the material the top is made from). Kotan is probably the most militant section in the plant. This is true mainly because they have a lot of power. In the first place, the job requires a lot of skill. You have to set the top on the car, stretch it, and cut it to precise length. All this takes twenty minutes or more. So they have 35 teams of two people each working in rotation while the line is moving. With relief men and

extras, there's more than a hundred ten people working on the job. When they take that job in the hole, they have the power to cause a crisis. Jim, this white guy that worked next to me told me, "If you see Kotan walking out, go with them."

I can only remember one guy who said he wasn't walking out: Catfish, a white reliefman in the Kotan section. When I asked him if he was walking out, he said, "I don't know. I walked out with them guys in the body shop back in '69 and I don't know if we got anything for it or not."

A lot of other people were running around, too. At one point I saw Rick, a friend of mine when I had been on dayshift. I yelled out to him, "Hey Rick. What's up?" He was in too much of a hurry to stop, so he held up his hands to form the number 7. That's the time we were set to go out. I yelled back, "Right on, brother," and we both laughed. After that I saw a friend from the body shop. Apparently everyone down there was set to go out. Finally I decided, "Fuck it. I'm as radical as anybody else. I'm going out too."

When seven o'clock came, people started milling around the stairwell. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a bunch of people moving out of the Kotan area, and I knew we were going. I looked over at Andy, who nodded his head and said, "Here we go." I grabbed my lunchbox and started running for the door. I was really scared.

In the rush of things I got separated from Andy and the rest of my work group. And I was immediately aware that a lot of people *weren't* walking out. Only about a third of the department was moving toward the door. When we got to the door, a bunch of people turned back. I heard one guy say, "I'm going to see what happens."

We were coming down off the sixth floor.

When we got to the fifth floor, only a couple people came out. When we got to the fourth floor, nobody at all came out. When the same thing happened on the third floor, I almost choked. Trane, that black reliefman in our department, ran back downstairs and started yelling, "Come on everybody. Come on you motherfuckers. Let's go." I kept going, though, so I never saw if he had much effect. There's a hallway that runs the whole length of the plant on the first floor. When we got to that, I thought, "Well good, we'll see a mass movement down here now." But when I looked down the hallway, it was empty.

A lot of people turned back then, but some people kept going. I wasn't sure what to do. Then I saw the look on Brian's face. Brian was a guy that worked right next to me on the line. His face said, "Goddamn right I'm not gonna turn back."

The guards didn't make any attempt to stop us as we ran out the gate. You could hear their walkie-talkies crackling: "Going out at Gate 4. Situation normal at Gate 7." There were only about 75 people at my gate then. The momentum of the walkout carried us past the gate, but then it started to splinter away. Groups of people moved toward the parking lot. Some people crossed the street. Some headed for the bar. The thing that freaked me out was that Andy and the people in my group had disappeared. I attached myself to the group heading for the bar. But basically, when I hit the street, I was *alone*.

### III. ON THE STREET

When I got around the building, I could see some people at the other end. But it was a pretty small crowd. A lot of people were lined up at the windows, shouting at us. I don't remember what they were saying. We shouted back, "Walk out. Walk out. Come on you

motherfuckers." Just as I was crossing the street, somebody dropped a lunch out of a sixth floor window. It smashed into the sidewalk just inches away from somebody walking in back of me.

When I reached the bar my hands were shaking, and I drank some scotch to try and calm down. There were only a couple of people in the bar, and they were in the same shape I was. A couple of them were talking about "the candyass motherfuckers" that start to walk out and then turn back. I had no idea what was going on. I just wanted my hands to stop shaking.

After a few minutes a crowd began to form outside the bar. People were pulling their cars up and parking. Plus people were finally coming around from the body shop gate on the other side of the plant.

The police arrived on the scene within minutes. They said there wouldn't be any problem as long as we didn't block traffic. That presented us with a problem, since the crowd was beginning to spill out into the street. Then somebody announced that the gas station next to the bar would let us stand on their property. The station was owned by some Arabs who had a lot of connections with Arabs inside the plant.

There was still some hope that the rest of the people would walk out. People lined up and chanted, "Walk out. Walk out." A few tried to lead the chants. Sometimes they were successful and sometimes they weren't. One of the people trying to lead the chants was this guy named Dave Hart, who I recognized from the Kotan area. After listening to the leaders, Brian, who had inspired me not to turn back, recoiled in disgust. He said, "I don't want any part of them Commie motherfuckers."

The main concern was to find out if we had actually shut the place down or not. The crowd outside the bar had grown to about 200 by then.

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But there was no way of knowing how many had actually walked out. We spent a lot of time speculating about this. After a while, people began to agree on the number 600. We could see open trunk lids on all the cars up on the fourth floor. We saw them start to move at about twenty minutes past seven. The line ran for about two minutes, then it stopped. It didn't run again for the rest of the night. We had shut the fucker *down*.

People started forming into groups around the bar. From what I could tell, the groups duplicated the groups people work in every day. I finally saw Andy, Kenny, Jim, Hook and the rest of the people in my work group. My relief was immense. It wasn't until then that my hands stopped shaking. The first thing I did was jump in the car and go to the beer store. Me and Kenny brought back a bunch of beer and passed it around to everybody.

We spent a long time talking about exactly who did and who didn't walk out. "Where's Rich?" "He started to walk out but he musta turned back." "Where's Randy, that cock-sucker?" "I thought I saw Mel out here." "I did, too. He musta split already." One guy from our group, Danny, didn't walk out, but he came to the window on the second floor right across from us to explain why: "I got a month (suspension) on paper, man. I can't do shit." Apparently he had just returned to work from being in jail. If he had walked out he would have been gone for sure. Everybody sympathized with him.

Being with these people and reconstructing our group was important for me. Already I had begun worrying about reprisals when we got back. When I asked Andy about it, he said, "Don't worry. They won't do nuthin'." I made a decision at that point that I wouldn't make any decisions about the wildcat unless those people were with me. I didn't even know the

names of these people when I walked out. And already I felt close to them.

I began to feel this respect for everyone on the crowd, not just the people in my work-group. I walked around trying to find out who these people were. I saw Rick and Willie, two guys I had known on dayshift. It made me happy to see them. It confirmed the trust I already had in them. And it validated my decision to walk out. I talked with both of them, and it was clear that they felt the same way bout me.

But then I realized that Willie and Rick didn't even talk to each other in the plant (Willie's black and Rick's white and this is *definitely* part of their dislike for each other.) It struck me that an incredible variety of people had walked out: as many white as black, as many women as men (I'd say proportionately many more women than men came out), as many old as young, as many married as single, as many with families as without. The only group that wasn't clearly represented out there was skilled trades, but maybe I just wasn't able to recognize those people.

It soon became apparent that specific areas of the plant had participated in the walkout more than others. A lot of people were talking about this. But nobody was sure why this was so.

Certain areas, like Kotan, had a long tradition of militancy and you could just about assume that a lot of them would walk out. There were other sections like that around the plant. But basically, people felt like certain sections of the plant weren't out there because the union had fucked up and not told them. People were pretty angry about that. One guy was saying, "If you want a walkout you either call it or you don't. But you don't go half way. That just gets everybody in trouble."

We had all walked out with the idea that

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everybody was coming with us. But in the end only five or six hundred out of three thousand had walked out. Suddenly, we were not just a minority, we were the *radical* minority. We had put our asses on the line. I might have walked out anyway if I had known this would happen. But it still came as sort of a shock.

My first reaction to this was to hope that once we got back there wouldn't be too great a division between those who walked out and those who hadn't. That would make for a big mess when we tried to pick up the struggle on the inside. But basically I felt like, as unfortunate as these divisions might be, I was glad as hell to be on the outside of the plant then and not on the inside.

The union might have had enough credibility in the plant to *call* the walkout. But it's just not responsible for the fact that *some of us didn't turn back*, even when it was obvious that a lot of people weren't coming with us. By the time we reached the sidewalk, it was *us* who shut the plant down, not the union or anybody else. If the union survives the attack the company is making on it, it's because *we* have chosen to act in its defense.

Why didn't we turn back? The reasons are complex. For most of us, "the system" is not something we belong to. It's something that exists in opposition to us. Our work is not something given willingly, but only as something necessary for survival. We compromise with "the system" always. But on that particular day, we had a little space within which to maneuver. We could postpone the compromise if we choose to. A lot of us grabbed that space. And once we had it in our hands we weren't about to let it go.

It's taken me a long time to be able to articulate what happened on the sidewalk that day. These are my recollections of a collective discussion that took place among 200 people

for about two hours. My state of mind then was nearly euphoric. The same was true of many people in the crowd. It was as though we had unlocked something inside ourselves by what we had done.

Ordinarily, our perceptions of Fisher Body are ambiguous. There's bitterness, pain, some positive feelings (in relation to the other workers), lots of resignation, and a widely-held view that you have to hustle just to survive in that place. Most of the time, that hustle, that struggle, goes on in isolation. It's not clear what you've won on any given day. And no matter what you win, you always have to come back the next day to struggle all over again.

Perceptions of self-activity, of how we act as a group to better ourselves, are there on a day to day basis. But they're clouded over. They exist alongside many ambiguous and contradictory forces. But on the day of the walkout, if only for a moment, things were clearer. We were on the offensive. Our self-activity became central.

We had some time to kill on the sidewalk that day. We used the time to regroup our forces, to assess what moves came next and so on. But after a while, we began to *celebrate*. We began to solidify a *community* we had created through our walkout. I found the precision and clarity with which people analyzed the situation electrifying. I only wish I could remember more specific comments. I remember saying over and over to myself, "I wish I had a tape recorder."

One comment I do remember. A bunch of us were discussing the people who hadn't walked out. This one guy, Mike, was saying, "Nobody forces you to stay inside the plant. You can walk out any goddamn time you get ready. If they try to make you stay, you sue them for kidnapping. That's why you have to walk out once in a while. Just so the company will treat you like men and not like dogs."

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After a while I called Jane. I told her she could come down there if she wanted, that we were having a big party. It was true. People were scattered all over, drinking, talking, moving back and forth from group to group. It was late summer by then, so it stayed warm long after the sun went down. At long last, people were beginning to unwind from the strain we were all under.

Ever since we had been on the sidewalk, cars had been stopping along Fort St. to ask us what happened. A lot of cars honked their horns in support. Some TV cameras came. We put on a little show for them, and we all agreed we've have to be back home in time to watch the news.

Not long after that, people started talking about going over to the union hall for a meeting. Apparently, while most people were partying down in the parking lot, some people were trying to figure out what to *do*. I didn't know who was pulling the meeting together, but it didn't matter. Most of the crowd was going over. And it did seem like we had some business to attend to.

#### IV. GATHERING AT THE UNION HALL

When we arrived at the union hall, my first reaction was surprise. The scene there was completely different from the one we left behind on the sidewalk. Back there, the atmosphere was almost *serene*. At the union hall it was *chaotic*. Everybody was still standing in small groups, but the groups were jammed into an incredibly small space. The noise was horrendous; you had to shout to talk to the person next to you. Everybody was asking everybody else what was going on. But nobody seemed to know. I saw some people standing in the financial secretary's office. So I squeezed my way in to join them.

It was pretty exciting to be in that office. It

was like doing something illegal, like kids making off with the cookie jar. I found out later it actually was illegal: we had no authorization to be in the building. Apparently some people had convinced the custodians to let them in to use the phones, and instead, the people opened the place up to everybody else. I didn't know what the custodians were thinking by this time. But luckily, nobody called the police.

After a while, we moved into the meeting hall. It was pretty small; we had difficulty fitting 200 people in there. At first I thought nearly everybody had come over from the sidewalk. But the crowd was smaller, blacker, and younger than the crowd on the sidewalk. There still seemed to be a wide range of plant seniority, though. It was clear that most of the people hadn't been involved in a meeting like that before.

The first person to talk was Dave Hart. He wasn't actually talking. He was shouting, trying to get the attention of the crowd. He started by saying, "We need a little order here, a little discipline. We've got to show them that the rank and file can run a good, democratic meeting. If it's all right, I'll chair the meeting. I'm just doing it because nobody else has stepped forward. So if nobody has any objections, I'll just go ahead." He paused for a minute, and then said, "OK, I'll go ahead. I think the first thing we should do is elect a committee that will be our leadership during the strike. If nobody has any objections, I'll start the nominations off by nominating Alice. Everybody knows Alice, from the third floor. I nominate Alice."

I didn't know this at the time, since I was new on second shift, but Hart was well-known as a radical in the plant. He was involved in passing out a small shop bulletin called the *Fleetwood Reporter*. He led a semi-successful boycott of

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the plant's coffee wagons when they raised their prices. He was always bugging the company about safety regulations in the plant: I heard once he called in Federal Inspectors to check on the noise levels. And he was always bugging the union: trying to get them to open up, to be more democratic, to be more responsive to the needs of the workers. Hart might have tried to explain this activity in terms of being "a concerned rank and filer." But it was obvious he was into it more than most people. So he was generally perceived in the plant to have some communist or left-wing connections. And just by stepping forward, he made these connections a central part of the agenda of the meeting.

But it was on the basis of a lot of hard work that Hart was taking the lead at that moment. He had proven himself in shop floor struggles. He had demonstrated his willingness to fight for his ideals — a lot of people respected this even if they didn't exactly agree with what he believed in. And Hart had been able to withstand vicious company counterattacks. They had been trying to get him for years. At the time of the walkout, in fact, he was down in Labor Relations. They had busted him for playing cards, which is technically illegal, but which goes on day in and day out anyway.

You have to be careful in evaluating the kind of threat people like Hart pose to the company and the union. It's a real threat. But basically the only thing Hart and people like him do is to articulate and pursue more militantly the struggle which goes on day in and day out in the plant anyway. But most workers aren't too outspoken about what they do. And they're generally into avoiding direct confrontation. When somebody like Hart goes around in public saying that the struggle of workers should not only be pursued more strongly, but also that it expresses some positive social values, the union

and the company go berserk! They want to cut out that kind of talk right from the start. Also, Hart and people like him are just the latest generation of labor radicals who have been in the plants right from the beginning. And the company (and the union which was created by them) have been trying to stamp them out for years.

But in saying all this, I have to point out that anti-communism is strong in the plants as well. And there's some good reasons for this. Everybody has experience with radicals who came on real strong and then sold out. But also, with the massive repression this country saw during the McCarthy era, the left-wing community today has only shallow roots inside the industrial working class. When left wingers step forward, people don't understand their motives and so don't trust them. This is compounded by the fact that most left-wingers today have been to college. In the experience of most people in the plants, colleges train people (e.g., teachers, social workers, engineers) to do one thing: to keep the workers in line. The best that can be said about someone who went to college is that they'll probably be here today and be gone tomorrow.

I was watching Brian as I thought of this. His eyes were sparkling as Hart spoke. Brian was one of the strongest shop floor militants I had met in the department; he was the one who inspired me not to turn back. And yet he had recoiled in disgust when Hart had tried to lead the chants. "I don't want any part of that Commie motherfucker," he said. I knew I didn't agree with Brian's ideas about radicals. But I was worried that his strength and militancy wouldn't get expressed in a meeting dominated as this one was by radicals.

For some reason, the meeting wasn't going well. Something started to go wrong with the committee selection almost as soon as it began.

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When it came time for the body shop to pick a representative, everybody yelled, "Old Mike, Old Mike." Mike turned out to be this big old guy with gray hair, boots, and coveralls covered with dirt from the body shop. He came to the front of the room and started yelling, "I've been working at Fleetwood since before we had a union. I was in the sitdown strike we had here to get the union in. That's why I know you can't do anything here without your *officially elected union representatives*. They've been called on the phone. They'll be here shortly. Please. Please. We must wait till they get here before going any further."

People were taken aback by what Mike said. Some began to boo and hiss as he spoke. Somebody yelled, "We ain't got no union representatives, Mike. They all got fired. That's why we're out here in the first place." After Mike realized he wasn't getting anywhere, he sat down in disgust. People were surprised, but they were glad Mike had given up. He didn't belong to any committee talking like that.

After a minute, Hart continued with the committee selection. He would call out, "Second floor." Then there would be a little demonstration: "Here we are. Right on, second floor. Second floor is the baddest floor in Fleetwood." Then Hart would ask, "Who do you nominate?" The reply: "You do it, Bill." "No, Rick, you do it." Then Rick would say, "OK, I'll do it." Hart: "All in favor?" Then, another demonstration: "Yeah, Rick. You're our man, Rick. Give 'em hell, Rick." And around the plant we went. Each floor, the body shop and the paint shop all had representatives.

When it came time for the sixth floor to choose, a young black woman raised her hand and was approved. I didn't know her and I noticed a lot of people from the floor who didn't participate in her selection. That made me think she really didn't represent too many

people from the floor. It was strange, because she took her place in the front next to Alice, a woman who clearly did have the respect of a lot of people.

After everybody was selected, Hart called them to the front for a meeting. They huddled in the corner for a minute, and the larger meeting began to break down into very loud, individual discussions. There were two or three people trying to get the attention of the group at once. Hart kept trying to alternate between the larger meeting and the smaller meeting in front. Probably 60 to 70% of the people were sitting in silence, watching the scene unfold.

Under this kind of pressure, it wasn't long before the committee fell apart entirely. Nobody was waiting for them to get their shit together. The committee members themselves were paying more attention to the larger meeting than to the small meeting they were supposed to be having in the front.

It's unfortunate this happened, because the committee idea did make a lot of sense. We did have some collective tasks to deal with, and we did need a way of assigning responsibility. But the committee never made it, I think, because we never had a chance to *think* about it. People were chosen on the basis of popularity and respect, but not in relation to specific *political* expectations the group would have of them. Of course, it's easier to see these things in retrospect. At the time I was as bewildered and as silent as anyone else.

Hart had made an attempt at a democratic process, but it had come on a technical, not a political level. Democracy is a form of self-expression. People have to say what's on their minds: all people, even if the views are in conflict. The structure and the decisions flow from there. At the very least, when the process is over, people have to *feel* like they were involved.

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People didn't feel involved in the committee structure and as a result, couldn't and didn't support it. And the collapse left us ill-equipped to develop any kind of collective process for the duration of the walkout. Many tasks which ideally would have been collective became Hart's more by default than by consensus.

To a certain extent, Hart was responsible for this collapse. He introduced an agenda for the meeting that was a couple steps removed from where the workers were at just then. It's hard for me to criticize him for this, because even to introduce that agenda took courage and clarity of thought which under the circumstances was amazing. Probably he acted as he did because he had in mind an agenda for such a meeting long before it actually occurred. In fact, all his years of radical activity had prepared him for just such an occasion.

But I think there's a deeper reason for the collapse of the committee. I think all of us (including Hart) were in the process of discovering that there wasn't really much we could do in that situation. Once we left the plant, we left behind all the traditional ways of exerting pressure on the company. All we could really do then was decide when to go back. To do any more would have required prior preparation and organization: deeper unity in the plant, support in other plants, support in the community and so on. And for that kind of organization, we had right up until that moment been relying on the union. When the union collapsed we were left holding the bag and we were ill-equipped to cope with it. The odds were totally stacked against us at that point.

And so after the committee fell apart, the meeting never really recovered its momentum. We were left groping. Everyone was trying hard to define the issues, though. I remember this one black woman who spoke. She was excited; it was probably the largest group she had

addressed in her whole life. Her main point was that she hadn't walked out only for Gabbard and Coleman, but also because "my job has too damn much work on it. *That's* the issue for me." She paused for a moment as she said this. It was as though she were hoping her excitement would turn the tide of the meeting. When the reaction of the crowd was ambiguous, she too lost the track, rambled, and then sat down, frustrated. This happened to a lot of people.

This one black guy suggested that we return the next day to hold out the day shift. He said, "We'll be in a whole lot of trouble if them people go to work tomorrow." He said they'd probably support us, but "they can't if they don't *know* about it." Hart said, "We'll have a leaflet out there tomorrow when the day shift comes in" — it wasn't clear who he meant by "we."

Somebody else, a hillbilly, suggested that we go back to the plant at lunchtime on the night-shift. He said that if people came out of the plant for lunch "you kin bet your ass they won't be a-goin' back in there tonight." I agreed with his point, but I wasn't sure just how far he was prepared to go to keep people out.

After a while, this other communist guy got up. You could tell he was a communist because he always talked about the "capitalist class" as though he thought it was important in and of itself to use those words. Hart didn't want to call on him: you could tell the two of them had fights with each other in the past.

What the guy said wasn't bad, though. He said we needed a set of demands. He held his hands above his head as he counted off four of them: 1) reduce the work on overloaded jobs, 2) call all laid off brothers and sisters back from layoff, 3) no reprisals against any brother or sister who walked out, and 4) reinstate Gabbard and Coleman. He said, "We have to

be back here tomorrow morning prepared to fight for those demands.”

I was impressed. I had heard it all before. But the guy had a way of putting it all together that gave it some coherence. And we needed coherence more than anything else at that moment.

But through all of this, a consensus began to emerge. It was important to be back the next day to hold out the dayshift. There was vague support for the four demands. And Hart and some other people would put out a leaflet.

Nobody spoke out against the leaflet. People liked the idea. They would have spoken up if they hadn't liked it. But people felt uninvolved in the leaflet project in the same way that they had felt uninvolved in the committee thing. Hart referred to it this way: “We'll be out there tomorrow with a leaflet and people should take some to hand out.” But it was obvious the leaflet would go through if you volunteered or not. So support of the leaflet was there, but it was shallow. I think now that Hart left the meeting thinking he had a stronger consensus than what he had.

## V. THE EVENING CONCLUDES

When we got back to the plant, there were people gathering again at the gas station. But the crowd was much smaller than before. A couple union people were out talking. Of course they wanted us to go back. It turned out that people were actually getting ready for violence. The police were getting ready, too; they were out in greater numbers than before.

Everybody was concerned about people coming out for lunch and then re-entering the plant. I kept asking people if there would be trouble, and people said, “I don't know. Everybody's pretty hot. There could be some cars rolled over and that kind of shit.”

People used the word riot — a classic Detroit expression — to describe what could happen.

After a while, the Fleetwood Inn closed up. They were afraid of trouble inside the bar. Plus they probably figured they had already made their money for the night. I was getting worried, but I wanted to support what people did....

Luckily, the company avoided the crisis by sending everyone home at lunchtime. The line hadn't run since seven o'clock, and people had been just laying around since then. They were pretty worried when they came out. They had been hearing rumors about how we were beating up cops and burning cars in the parking lots.

Later that night, I watched the news. I saw myself and some of my friends. It was really neat. I was pounding on the chair and hollering, “Right on. Fuck them motherfuckers.” They said it wasn't clear what had provoked the walkout. They said Cadillac assembly had been shut down at lunchtime. That was pretty neat: it meant about fifteen thousand people were out of work because of the strike. It gave you a little sense of power. The other thing they said on the news was that at 8:30, an hour and a half after we walked out, the International Union issued a statement saying the strike was illegal and ordering us back to work. My reaction to that was, “Shit, I knew it was illegal before I even walked out.”

## VI. FRIDAY MORNING

I was back at the plant at about ten after five. Everybody had agreed that it was important to hold out the dayshift. But I had no idea what it would take to accomplish this. The first thing I did was hook up with people in my work group. It made me happy to see them. I was still going by my decision not to make a move without consulting them first.

A crowd was starting to gather at the front gate. Some people had returned that morning

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and some hadn't. I'd say about 150 out of the 600 who walked out did return. Most of the nightshift people were across the street in the gas station. Hart and some of his friends were out with the leaflet and bullhorns. Hart was joined at this point by Lori Saunders, a leftist woman who worked in the plant, also. I don't remember what the leaflet said; basically it listed the four demands we came up with at the meeting the night before. There was a second leaflet; apparently it had been run off by some people who had been at that same meeting. A lot of people had brought signs back down. Some people were chanting.

I went down to the back gate with some of the people in my work group. There were about a thousand people milling around the gate. A lot of people read the leaflets. And everybody talked to people they knew from the nightshift. There was no physical attempt to keep people from going in the gate. Perhaps five hundred people did. But when six o'clock came, it was not nearly enough to run the line. We had achieved another victory. The crowd remained for an hour or so. Then it began to disperse.

One thing that struck me during this was that people were at every point during the strike prepared for violence. That morning, this young, white hippie guy kept yelling at people to stay out. He was obviously high on some kind of drug. He kept running out and pounding cars as people drove into the parking lot. One time he did that, and the driver of the car got mad. The driver swerved the car sharply to the right, hit the fence, got out, and started running back to the hippie. I thought, "Oh my god, here we go." You could feel a sense of panic surge through the crowd as everyone turned round to watch. Evidently the guy in the car knew the hippie, or else they settled their dispute quickly. In a few minutes they were shaking hands and the guy got back in his car

and drove away. Everybody relaxed immediately. But people were saying, "Man that was a close call," and "Shit, I thought we were going to have a riot out here today."

I still hadn't learned what had happened to get Gabbard and Coleman in trouble. One rumor I heard was that the trouble started when the company transferred this guy with twenty years seniority into the body shop as punishment for calling a committeeman. I saw this one union guy, and he told me a different story. He said the trouble started on the fifth floor on the afternoon shift when some foreman tried to get people to sweep the floor when the line was down. Of course, people refused. When the union guy came down, he supported the workers, and he got busted for "interfering with the rights of management." Both the union guy and the workers were given time off. When the dispute got down to labor relations it exploded. A shoving match ensued between Gabbard and the Director of Labor Relations, a man called Grogan. Coleman was on the sidelines of this, swearing at Grogan. So Grogan got Plant Security to throw both Gabbard and Coleman out of the plant.

I was absolutely amazed by what the union guy was telling me. I had shivers running up and down my spine as I thought about it. I couldn't believe that the union, and the grievance procedure that lies at the core of it, had been dealt such a violent, staggering blow.

People don't have to work when the line goes down. That's the most basic right the workers have in that place: it's like their revenge for being so subjected to the line in the first place. And Shop Chairmen and Labor Relations people aren't supposed to shove each other. They're supposed to talk. They're supposed to be "responsible" and "businesslike."

If this is what it took to provoke that strike, I was just amazed. The normal social relation-

ships which govern that place were totally disrupted. And it was still too early to tell what they would look like by the time the strike was over . . . .

But by this time, the crowd at the back gate was dispersing, so I went around to the front. The first thing I saw was that the company was out with videotape cameras, filming the crowd. It was really wierd. I couldn't figure out if they were collecting information or if they were trying to intimidate us. People were saying, "Big Brother is watching you."

The next thing I saw was President Coleman. He was standing in the front door of the plant, talking through a bullhorn about how we should go back to work. People were saying he had to do that or else he'd be fired. But it was still pretty offensive, since we had walked out in part to support him. It also seemed like if he was merely complying with the law he could do it in a way that would indicate he had opinions of his own. People were pretty upset. They'd drown him out with boos every time he spoke.

I didn't know this at the time, but a meeting took place that morning between Coleman, Hart and his friends, and some other people from the plant. I don't know exactly what had happened, but apparently people got up one after another to denounce Coleman and he didn't say much of anything. People were trying to get him to call a special membership meeting that Sunday to discuss the whole thing, but he refused. So people started talking about calling their own meeting on Sunday.

Hart and some other people spent part of the day trying to harass some upper level union people. They went out to the Regional Office on Telegraph Road. Nobody out there would talk to them. Then they went downtown to Solidarity House, the Headquarters of the International Union. They talked to some assistant to the assistant down there. But he

said everything had to come to him through the Regional Office.

Apparently all the union people from the plant were summoned to a meeting that day at the Regional Office. The Regional and the International officers were out in force. They lectured the local people about how it was the union's responsibility to get people back to work, about how this had to be accomplished at any cost, how the local could wind up in receivership and so on. At some point during the day, perhaps at this meeting, they changed their story about what had happened. They said Gabbard had taken an early vacation. And they said Coleman had "merely" been given a paper suspension (that is, it would just be put on his record to be used against him later).

At one point during the morning, a bunch of workers from the dayshift lined up outside the front gate to get their paychecks. But then the company announced they wouldn't pay anybody that day as sort of a punitive thing. And people started screaming. One guy put his foot through the window of the front door. A friend of mine who was there described it to me as a "riot." Police (including some in a helicopter) swarmed onto the scene. Tempers in the crowd went even higher. And then the company agreed to pay everyone.

I watched TV at lunchtime. Fleetwood had purchased a bunch of short time slots. The announcer would say, "Attention. Attention. The management of Fleetwood Fisher Body advises all workers that the strike is illegal. All workers should report to work at the usual time."

After that, the news came on. They were talking a much harder line against the workers and the union. They kept saying "an unfounded rumor" had sparked the walkout. They said President Coleman hadn't been suspended. He had merely received a paper suspension.

They said it was this misunderstanding that sparked the walkout. I pounded on the chair and said, "Fuck you, goddamit. I know what I'm on strike for." I couldn't believe it. They had come right out and called the workers stupid. Then they said the International Union had issued another statement ordering us back, but that "the workers obviously aren't listening to their union, and company officials aren't sure when production will resume." That was a low blow there. The company was really trying to make the union look bad.

## VII. FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Jane came down to the plant with me that afternoon. I wasn't really planning on going to work. And I wanted to share some of this experience with her. We went to the back gate, because that's where Marty and some other friends had said they'd be. Again, I was intent on hooking up with the people in my work group. There were a couple hundred people hanging around the gate. But I didn't know any of them. And I didn't see anyone from my work group.

As five o'clock approached, when the shift was supposed to start, this got to be more and more of a bummer. I suddenly found myself under a lot of pressure. I had to decide whether or not to go to work. It was an important decision, and I had anticipated making it as part of a group. Now suddenly the group was gone. And I had to decide alone. The pressure became greater and greater as five o'clock approached. I found myself *agonizing* over what to do.

I saw Bruno, my foreman, across the street. He was leering out from behind the fence, making note of who was around. I was sure he saw me, and that didn't make me feel any better.

At a quarter to five, most of the people who

had been standing around the gate went in. It was demoralizing as first one group then another broke ranks and then went in. I felt confused and defeated. I felt like I had no choice but to go in. Jane agreed. But I waited until the last possible moment.

Just then Kenny came up. He worked right next to me on the line, and he was one of the more together people in the work group. He said he wasn't going in. He said it in a calculated sort of way. He had just been busted for bad attendance before the walkout, and figured with that on his record he'd get about three days off for the walkout. But that seemed like a reasonable chance to take. He also said that we were already in trouble, and that whether or not we went in that afternoon didn't make a lot of difference. When I heard Kenny talking like that I said, "Fuck it. I'm not going in either." I figured at the very least we'd suffer the consequences together.

But then I realized the crowd out there was tiny compared to the one that had been there that morning. Suddenly I realized almost no one had shown up for work that day! I jumped on a car to check, and sure enough, the parking lot was only about a third full. There was no way in the world they could run the plant that day. I started to get excited then. We had achieved another victory.

And then Jane and I went to the front gate, and there were about 500 people up there. I couldn't believe it. We had been at the wrong gate! I walked around a bit, and immediately I found the rest of the people from my work group. Of course they had all stayed out, and my decision to stay out was completely validated. It was a joyous reunion. People said, "Where the fuck were you?" I told them how I had been agonizing in the back about what to do and they all laughed. I said, "If I was inside right now I'd probably start crying." One guy

said, "John, you should have known to come around to the bar looking for us. You should have known we're a beer lovin' kind of people."

President Coleman was out there with a bullhorn again. He was saying he hadn't been suspended, that he had just received a paper suspension. People were pretty disgusted. They would drown him out with boos when he talked.

After a while, Jane and I went down to the Fleetwood Inn. It was packed. Once again, we had shut it down. Plus we had a Friday night off in the summertime. Things were looking pretty good. We'd have to account for what we had done. But we'd worry about that on Monday.

After a while, Hart, Saunders, and some of their friends came in. Hart was saying he had just been jumped by a union guy named Wayne Powell. Powell was apparently some kind of arch-conservative who hated Hart's guts. From what I could tell, Powell had jumped Hart from behind, knocked him down, and ripped the leaflets from his hand.

A lot of people were talking about a meeting on Sunday. There was a rumor going around that we'd try to hold the plant out again on Monday and then go back on Tuesday. I was pretty skeptical. It wasn't clear what we could accomplish if we stayed out another day. And it seemed like we'd be stretching the momentum of the walkout pretty thin.

My skepticism was confirmed when I located people in my work group. Brian, Hook, Mike and the rest were in the back of the bar playing pinball. After a while, we talked a little strategy. The assumption was that we'd return to work on Monday. We were beginning to discuss how the walkout would affect the on-going struggle on the shop floor.

We started by talking about the meeting on

Sunday. Some guys were going and some guys said they weren't. My impression was the most people wouldn't go. Then Hook said, "I know just what Bruno's gonna say when we get back. He's gonna say, 'OK, if you guys drop all the '78's (speedup grievances), I'll drop all the penalties for the walkout.' When he says that, I'm gonna say 'no fuckin' way, motherfucker. If you want to take me downstairs let's go. I could use a couple days off anyway.' " Then Hook started talking about a way to fuck Bruno when we got back in. He said, "Here's what we should all do. When he takes us downstairs, we'll tell them *Bruno* was the one who told us about the walkout. We'll say, 'We were all sitting at the picnic table on break. Bruno came up and said he heard there'd be a walkout at seven. He said he was only talking off the record, but that he'd advise against walking out.' We'll tell them that's the only way we knew about the walkout! Bruno will be in so much hot water even *he* won't be able to talk his way out of it."

Hook, the undisputed leader of our work group, had done it again. He had set the stage for Monday with a stroke of genius. We couldn't stop laughing as we walked out of the bar.

#### VIII. MEETING ON SUNDAY

For me, nothing much happened in relation to the walkout on Friday night or Saturday. When it came time to go to the meeting on Sunday, I didn't feel particularly enthusiastic about going. But I knew it was important to be there.

When I got to the union hall, it was locked, and a small crowd was gathering in a vacant lot across the street. The lot was covered with gravel, and next to it stood a big, old and apparently abandoned warehouse. As I came across the street, Hart and some other people

were setting up loudspeakers. They were running the sound through a small, portable phonograph. After a while, they got someone to pull a pickup truck around to the front. People were to stand in the bed of the truck as they spoke.

There were about two hundred people. The crowd seemed older and whiter than the crowd that had been at the union hall that first night. I didn't recognize too many people, so I had the impression that a lot of people at the meeting Sunday hadn't participated in the original walkout. I talked to a couple people who hadn't walked out, but who came to "see what was going to happen."

None of the people in my work group were there. That was a drag. And it occurred to me that the crowd was standing in groups of two's and three's instead of eight's and ten's as on the first night. That made me think very few work groups were reconstructed at the meeting. This made me apprehensive because it was on that level that most of the important decisions were being made about the walkout. I thought it would be hard for the meeting to make decisions which represented a *workers* point of view, even though there were a lot of individual workers present.

Hart began the meeting by saying that he'd like to be the chairperson, but that if anybody objected he'd step down. When nobody did object, he continued. He talked a lot about the irony of meeting in a vacant lot. He kept pointing over the the union hall and saying, "There it is. We bought it. We paid for it. And now we can't even use it." He said union officials at all three levels had been notified about the meeting, but none had come. He said we'd have to carry the burden of the walkout alone. Again he said it was important to show the union that the rank and file could run a good, democratic meeting.

Hart then listed what had happened so far. He stressed that Gabbard and Coleman had indeed been suspended. He said they put out the story about vacations and paper suspensions only after they had been pressured from higher up in the union. He also stressed that the shop committee had definitely called the walkout: he said they shouldn't be allowed to avoid responsibility for that. He criticized the union people for being at the gate on Friday trying to get us back. And he criticized President Coleman specifically for refusing to call a special meeting to discuss the whole thing.

Hart said, "That's why we're out here today." All the way through the rap, he praised the willingness of the rank and file to act in the absense of any effective leadership from the union.

Hart ended by talking about the demand for no reprisals. He said the rank and file had acted because of the failure of union leadership. He said that people who had acted in good faith were now in danger of getting fired. He said we couldn't expect the union to back us up on this. Any support for the no-reprisal demand would have to come from the group assembled there.

The first person to take the microphone after Hart was this middle-aged black guy. He's one of those who's physical presence communicates strength to everyone around him. Plus he was a powerful speaker. I was alarmed by what he said, though. He said, "If we go back tomorrow, we will have been defeated. We'll crawl back into the plant. And a lot of good people will get fired." He went on to talk about holding out until we had a guarantee of no reprisals.

A lot of people clapped when he said that. I was upset, though. I hadn't considered the walkout as something that could be won or lost. Rather, it was what it was. Most fundamentally, it was part of the day-to-day workers

struggle that went on before, during and after the walkout itself. I was more interested in discussing the ways in which the walkout had affected *that* struggle. Besides, it wasn't clear to me that we had the strength to hold the plant out anyway. I was worried because that question hadn't even been posed during the meeting.

This black guy was looking at the walkout in a different way, though. And it made me upset, because he seemed to set the tone for the ensuing discussion even more completely than Hart had. We were having a moralistic, not a political discussion of our situation.

About ten or fifteen people spoke after he did. A couple people talked about how they had walked out because there was too much work on their job, and since that issue hadn't been resolved they had no intention of going back. A bunch of people talked about how the union had fucked up. I remember this one black woman in particular. She said she had been insulted when Coleman had been out there talking through a bullhorn. She said she had walked out "to save his ass in the first goddamn place." Then she continued, "And I can't understand why we have to meet in a damn parking lot. We paid for that union hall over there. And now we can't even use it." She almost had tears in her eyes as she said this. A couple people talked about the defeat of the walkout itself. They said things had looked real good on Thursday night, and they didn't want to go back into the plant feeling scared or defeated. People would generally applaud as a speaker finished. Then there would be a long pause until someone took up the microphone.

Another communist guy got up to speak at this point. He was the one who talked about "the capitalist class" all the time. He talked about how we needed a strike committee and that we should go around trying to get other

factories to strike in support of us. Then John Anderson spoke. He's an old-time labor radical who's been involved in Fleetwood politics for decades. He gave a rousing, soap-box type rap. The main thing he said was that, since he had been through those strikes before, he saw "no reason in the world anybody has to get fired for this walkout."

By this time, I was getting pretty upset. I wasn't happy with the way the meeting was going, but I felt powerless to intervene. The first thing I wanted to say was that I didn't think the meeting would have much of an effect on what would happen the next day. People were basically going to do what they wanted to do. And based on the discussions within my work group, I felt like people were going back. And I wanted to say this wouldn't necessarily mean defeat.

I was unable to get up and speak, though. Partly this happened because I knew I wasn't much of a public speaker. Also, I was confused. It's taken me a long time to sort out some of these issues. It seemed like somebody would get fired. I was hoping it wouldn't be me. But I had no idea how to prevent it. Also, I didn't talk because I knew my comments wouldn't be appreciated in that meeting. My comments would have been perceived as negative, as conservative. There would have been a dozen people shouting at me: "How can you think of going back when we all might get fired."

The heart of the problem here was the demand for no reprisals. The company would obviously come down hard on somebody. But they couldn't fire all of us. There were too many people involved for that. We would have been able to attract wide support for our cause.

So the company would only fire a couple of us. They'd get the "ringleaders," the "trouble-makers." They'd use the occasion to nail some

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of the people they wanted to get anyway. I myself was worried because I had already been fired from Fleetwood and I've never had a good attendance record.

But of all the people in the plant, Hart, Saunders and some of their friends were the ones the company had been trying to get most consistently. And they were playing key leadership roles in the strike. A lot of people were worried about reprisals. But it was clear in everybody's mind that the leftists had more to worry about than anybody else.

It's important to be clear here about the kind of leadership the leftists actually had to offer during the strike. Partly they came forward in a vacuum. The leadership of the union really had broken down, and most workers were unprepared for the specific organizational tasks which the walkout placed before us. Partly they came forward because they had technical skills which were vital at that moment. They could get up at a meeting and talk. They had access to loudspeakers. They could run off leaflets.

But it's important to recognize also that they came forward because they wanted to. They're *radical* people. They want *radical* changes to occur in society, and they're willing to take *radical* chances to make those changes come about.

That one communist guy seemed obsessed with this idea of "the capitalist class," and he apparently thought the walkout was an occasion to launch a full scale civil war. Hart, Saunders and the others, obviously more rational, wanted to see emerge a much stronger rank and file movement to reform the union. They said it over and over again. They saw themselves as honorable rank and filers acting in response to the collapse of union leadership.

But they weren't *just* rank and filers. They were leftists as well. This is an essential distinction to make here. That's how their

actions were perceived by everyone in the strike. And that's the only way to explain the widening gap between themselves and the rest of the workers.

As leftists, Hart, Saunders, and the rest were totally committed to this idea of reforming the union. They have a whole theory on how the radical transformation of society will be based on these union reform movements. The wildcat was an event which clearly brought to light the bankruptcy of the union. And it clearly demanded leadership from somewhere else. And because of this, Hart and Saunders saw it as an opportunity to commit *all* their resources to push the rank and file into a more offensive posture vis-a-vis both the union and the company.

I'm sure most workers would like to see such reform come about. And as the walkout itself demonstrated, people are willing to take risks to see that the union will at least survive. But at that moment, people weren't willing to commit *everything* to force the union to change. This is the essence of the difference between the leftists and most of the workers in the walkout.

I think the workers acted that way basically because it wasn't clear how the reform movement would at that moment draw on power that's already been established on the shop floor. Right now, the ability of the working class to win a wage at the workplace is one of the few things that protects people from outright starvation in this country. And people are engaged in a daily battle to win that wage with the least amount of suffering possible. People aren't prepared to move too far off that base of power. And they're not prepared to take chances which will fuck that base of power up. By walking out, we had extended our power as far as we could go at that point. (I don't mean to imply that the working class lacks other bases of power. I'm just talking about the

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subjective implications of power in one specific circumstance.)

This also explains the inability of a lot of people (including myself) to express themselves during the walkout. Political clarity does not exist in a vacuum. It's related to power. On the shop floor, where people feel quite strong, they express themselves quite clearly. Away from the shop floor and that base of power, people become confused because the issues are less clear.

There's another reason people weren't prepared to commit everything at that point. I think people were anticipating that the base of power on the shop floor would be relatively intact after the walkout, even though the union would still be weak and even though there would be reprisals. We just didn't have our backs to the wall at that point.

Another factor in the gap between the workers and the leftists was that the leftists were too eager to substitute their own initiative for real rank and file initiative. A lot of times, the workers sentiments were ambiguous. The issues were complex. People were caught in the rush of events. The walkout gave people the opportunity for self-expression in some ways. But in other ways, the opportunity just wasn't there.

The leftists were relatively clear about what they wanted to do. And in situations where the workers weren't sure or had stopped moving forward all together, the leftists went ahead and did what they thought was best. Some of what they did had the direct support and participation of a lot of workers. Some of what they did had support but no direct participation.

But in the end, when the leftists had to hold out for no reprisals, they were basically caught in that position alone. They had to hold out. They were the ones in most danger. It was their last opportunity to rally support for their

decision to take on the union once and for all.

It's ironic in a way, but you could say that "communism," as it was understood in that particular situation, became the last issue in the strike. People weren't thinking of communism as "a system of social relations in which exploitation has been eliminated." And for younger workers, who grew up with Vietnam and Watergate instead of McCarthyism, communism wasn't understood in terms of Russia. More and more now, American workers understand communism in terms of who communists *are* and by what communists *do*. What happened at Fleetwood is a classic example. Communists are committed to trade unions; they have technical skills; and they take extreme risks. Communists obviously have some support in the American working class today. But people are by no means prepared to risk *everything* to back them up.

Again, these are not things I understood completely at the time of the walkout. But I was disturbed at that meeting on Sunday. I knew it, and I wanted to know why. It's taken me a long time to come up with some answers.

After a while, Hart put the question to vote: "Do we want to go back tomorrow?" "No." "Will we be back at the gate to try and hold people out?" "Yes." The vote was unanimous. People shouted and raised their hands in support. The crowd had attached some emotion to the vote, and for a moment I was carried away by it.

I was bummed out, though. I knew at that moment that work would resume at Fleetwood the next day. And I knew the leftists had themselves hopelessly cut off. But mostly I was mad at myself for my inability to speak. What I wanted to say needed to be said. But by then it was too late.

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## IX. RETURN TO WORK

I didn't go down to the gate on Monday morning. I found out later what happened. The union really put on a show of force. They had all the local people out there, plus people from the Regional and International offices. Curtis McGuire, the Regional Director, was out there in person. They all had big coats on (in the summertime). They were using the coats to conceal weapons — chains, clubs and so on. But occasionally they'd expose some of the weapons to let people know just how far they were prepared to go. The police weren't around. One guy was quoted as saying, "Anyone who stays around here will get hurt real bad."

On the other hand, there were only about twenty-five people trying to hold the plant out. It was basically the leftists and their staunchest supporters. Their wider base among the workers had collapsed entirely. The day before, two hundred people had agreed to be at the gate, and the leftists must have felt they were on firm ground. But then only twenty-five people showed up. It was a disaster.

I got to the plant early that afternoon. I knew we were going back. But there was still some uncertainty in the air. I went to the bar and drank some to calm myself down. I waited until the last possible moment, gulped down a final drink, and then headed in.

When I got into my area, everybody else had returned that day as well, and they were getting ready to start up work as always. The attendance was actually pretty good that day. Pretty soon people were bickering about who would get a pass to get out early that day.

Things were so normal, in fact, that I got pretty demoralized. It was hot. The line was running just like always. It was almost like I had never left, and now I was doomed to stay forever. The line is something that destroys the

memory of everything except itself. It forces you to stay glued to the "here and now." No matter how hard you work on a car, you have to jump ahead immediately to work on the next one. All the comradery, all the spirit we had about each other during the walkout became part of the distant past almost as soon as the line began to move. Of course, there's a comradery that's part of the shop floor struggle itself. But that's different. And it hadn't yet re-established itself after the walkout.

The other bummer was that our foreman Bruno immediately put us on notice for disciplinary action to be taken against us later. It really made us jittery: there would be reprisals after all. The worst part was that, at least in relation to the reprisals, we were in a completely passive position. All we could do was wait for the company and the union to decide what to do. Of course, the rumors started flying immediately, and after a few days I was sick of them. One minute you'd hear that we'd all been fired. The next minute you'd hear that nobody would get it. Then you'd hear of a big meeting at the General Motors Building on West Grand Boulevard. Apparently our fate would be decided high up on the throne somewhere. My stomach would twist and turn with each one of these rumors.

People were growing more and more upset with what the union had done. They felt like the union had called the walkout and then sold it out. I remember this one guy who said, "I'll never walk out again as long as I work at Fleetwood. Fuck it. I don't feel like being used as a puppet by the union. I walked out thinking the whole fucking plant was coming out, too. When I got out on the street, I saw only a couple of people, and I said, 'Fuck me. I let the union sell me a lot of bullshit and now I might lose my job.' I just got in my car and went

home." The union definitely lost a lot of credibility because of the walkout. Before it happened, the union could at least *call* for something like a walkout. Now they couldn't even do that.

One thing bothered me about the way people were talking, though. All the way through the walkout, we had referred to each other as *we*, and we had a clear idea about what *we* were accomplishing. "*We shut the plant down.*" "*We didn't turn back.*" But now people weren't using the word *we* any more. They talked about the union being fucked up and about the company getting ready to unload on us. But in relation to the walkout at least, we weren't the subjects any more. We were the objects. Of course, people hadn't lost their subjectivity in relation to the shop floor struggle. But I was still disappointed: that subjective sense of *we* had been one of the most important aspects of the walkout for me. Without it, that whole walkout was being seen more and more as a mistake.

After a while, the reprisals finally came, and they were devastating. Ten people were fired. Fifty-five people were given time off. And the rest, perhaps four or five hundred, were given a week off on paper. It was a package deal worked out between the International Union and some higher ups in the company. Technically, that's a violation of the contract, since the International is not supposed to take over Local affairs like that. Of course, the Local could have refused the settlement that the International came up with. But the Local was in disarray by then. There's been some talk since then that the Shop Chairman, Gabbard, actually forwarded to the company and the International a list of people he thought should be fired.

Predictably, Hart and Saunders and a few of their closest friends were on the list. The rest of

the people fired were from opposite ends of the plant and didn't even know each other. They weren't particularly outspoken during the walkout itself, although they might have been before the strike took place. It may have been that the company and the union decided to fire a couple extra people just so it wouldn't look so blatantly political.

The reaction in the plant was outrage. Hart and the others may have been radicals, but they had a right to eat just like everybody else. And there was no way to escape the fact that the union called the walkout in the first place. John Anderson, the old time radical, said it best in a leaflet he distributed in the plant that week:

*A case of rank and file union members trying to defend their union had turned into a case of union officials attacking their own rank and file. It was a shameful sight, as shameful as any I have seen in my forty years in the UAW.*

Both Anderson and Hart, in a leaflet distributed a couple days later, urged everybody to attend the union meeting coming up that Sunday. It would be the first real test of the strength that the fired people had in the plant.

I felt torn about going to the meeting. There were obvious reasons for going. But at that moment, I needed all the personal space I could get for my own problems. I was working six days a week on the nightshift. And Jane was working five days a week on the dayshift. That meant we had only forty-five minutes together between the time she came home from work and the time I had to leave. We had only one full day together every other week. It turned out that full day fell on the same day as the meeting. And I wasn't about to give it up.

But besides that, I have an intense dislike for union meetings. I've only been to three in four years of working for General Motors. And I always resolve never to go again. And I'm not

the only one that feels that way: nearly everyone in the rank and file come away from those meetings feeling bitter. The meetings are a forum which is downright hostile to what workers have to say.

I think now, however, that I made a mistake in not going to the meeting. Personal sacrifices are necessary at times. And the main point, which I didn't see at the time, is that when people are fired up in a situation like that, getting them back to work is more important than anything else. And the meeting was, in fact, an opportunity for the workers to express their outrage. Over 300 people were at the meeting, and others had to be turned away at the door. Time after time, people got up to denounce President Coleman and to demand that everybody be rehired. Coleman was really on the defensive. He finally admitted in public that the union had called the walkout: "When the union guys tell you to walk out, they're wrong, and nobody should suffer for it. I'm not in accordance with any of the penalties you all received." The meeting passed the following resolution:

*The membership of Local 15, as the highest governing body of the Local, instructs the Shop Committee to inform Fleetwood management that no proposed Local Agreement will be accepted that does not include: reinstatement of all those charged and removal of all penalties resulting from the strike of August 26, 27, with full back pay.*

When Hart and the others reported the results of the meeting back in the plant through a leaflet, they were euphoric: "Local 15 was finally united for one cause: to gain back respect for our union by showing Fleetwood that we would support each other all the way." And, "The Local 15 membership can be proud

of the unity we showed on Sunday."

But by then, nearly a month had passed since the walkout, and it was becoming a less and less visible issue on the shop floor. People would read the leaflets, comment occasionally, and so on. But essentially it was a drama taking place in the distance — over at the union hall. People didn't perceive a direct personal stake in it. They would refer to the walkout itself only rarely, and then only in passing. After a while, we heard that Hart and some of the other people had received letters from the International saying that all the penalties were settled and that no one would be rehired. These letters seemed to settle the issue in the minds of most people. This one guy, Jim, turned to me and said, "Well I guess that's it for them people, huh."

The fired people hadn't given up, though. They launched a petition campaign. Over a thousand people at Fleetwood and people at other plants signed a petition to support them. They came to each union meeting to state their case, and for a while they attracted some support. But then attendance at the meetings began to slip back to pre-walkout levels. They put out leaflets for a while trying to relate their case to the deterioration of conditions on the shop floor. But as time went on, they became more and more isolated from the shop floor struggle, and eventually they had to abandon that approach altogether.

There was still an awareness inside the department of who walked out and who didn't. But the image was fading fast. As it turned out, the division wasn't as destructive as I had anticipated. This was true mainly because that division nearly duplicated another division within the department: the division between the people who make individual deals with the foremen and people who don't. People had long since become used to living with this split.

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It's the fundamental division in the workforce: it goes far deeper than polarities around race, sex, age or anything else.

My biker friend Jerry didn't walk out. I would have guessed he would have. But he was jammed up by his divorce just then. And it turned out he and Bruno were great friends: Bruno is the only foreman Jerry's ever worked for, and Bruno lets him stay over four hours every night to work on stock. If Bruno ever cut off that overtime, Jerry couldn't feed his kids. So Jerry doesn't rock the boat. He doesn't take his job into the hole.

I know all this about Jerry. And I don't exactly approve. But still, I can't hate the guy for it. For a long time, we worked right across the line from each other. And we were either going to get along or we weren't. And so we avoided the painful topics and stuck to the cheerful ones. We discussed cars, football, boredom. Once we had this delightful two-day discussion about whether or not to marry someone after you've lived with them for a while. But in all the time we worked together, we never discussed the walkout once.

On Friday, September 17, I was finally taken down and given my penalty. There was actually some pressure involved in the interview. You could fuck up and say the wrong thing. And you were isolated. The *comraderie* of the walkout was a distant memory. Even the *comraderie* of the shop floor was temporarily cut off. You were along with two company people and a union guy.

"Why did you walk out?"

"I saw everybody else go."

"Who told you to walk out?"

"I never saw the guy before." I slipped here. I should have insisted that nobody told me anything. Bruno was quick to jump on my error.

"You mean he was a complete stranger."

"Yeah. He must have come from the body

shop."

"Come on. You must know who the guy is. What did he look like. Was it him (pointing to the union guy)? Was it me?"

"Actually, he did look a little like you, Bruno. He had a tie on. He had gray hair. He might have been Italian."

"OK, OK. What time did you walk out?"

"I can't remember. Some time around seven."

"Do you know what paragraph 117 of the National Agreement is?"

"No."

"You are hereby assessed the penalty of a one week suspension. This is a paper penalty only."

"Does that mean I get the time off?" Bruno reacted sharply to this.

"Do you want the time off?"

"No, no. I was just asking." But to myself I said, "Fuck. If I want the time I'll just take it."

"After we were done talking, the union guy and the two company guys scribbled madly for a while. They had to go through this routine five hundred times, and they were in a hurry. I refused to sign the penalty. Instead I signed a grievance protesting the penalty. They gave me a blue carbon copy of my penalty. And then it was over.

## X. CONCLUSION

Well, the main point I wanted to make about the walkout is that it wasn't an isolated event. It's still going on in many ways: workers at Fleetwood tried that particular tactic last summer; tomorrow the tactic will be different. And the managers of Fleetwood are outraged by this: they're just waiting for the day when they can crush the workers once and for all.

For a while after we got back the struggle simmered along under the surface. People had to recover from the walkout, and the line had to

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start running full before it made sense to take the job into the hole. But on Monday, September 27, the line did run full and the battle began in earnest. The people in the Kotan area were in the strongest position so they moved first.

On both shifts, over a hundred people cooperated in taking the job into the hole. At times, people were two thousand feet from their original work stations. The plant was in chaos. The company responded by throwing people out for "bad workmanship." They would nail people for the slightest mistake, so the tensions ran pretty high. Dozens of people were fired or given time off, and to replace them the company brought in people from other departments who had done the job in the past. This continued for two weeks, but by Friday, October 8, they had fired so many people that they couldn't replace them all and still cover for normal Friday night absenteeism. They had to let one out of every six jobs go down the line without a vinyl top. The cost to repair these jobs would run in the tens of thousands of dollars. So on that night, the company gave in. The number of teams on the Kotan job went from 35 to 39. Everyone who was fired was brought back with full back pay. People were celebrating a victory. And Kotan was just one example: this victory was repeated on smaller scales all over the plant.

These were short term victories to be sure. Several months later, the company cut the Kotan teams back to 37, ostensibly because they were running more cars that didn't need vinyl tops. With the next model run they'll start the whole battle over again. And they're moving slowly but surely to do away with the Kotan job altogether: they're working on a machine that will install the vinyl tops automatically. On a larger scale, they're also moving to cut their dependence on the Fleetwood and Cadillac plants: they're setting up Cadillac

assembly operations in Linden, New Jersey, and in Iran.

The local union, in the meantime, was still in disarray. The committeemen spent months assembling the grievances off the floor and processing them through the initial grievance procedures (1st step and 2nd step meetings). But before going any further with the grievances, the committeemen needed approval from the Regional and International union people. I was shocked when I learned this, but the Regional Director and the International Rep can, on the basis of their personal inspection of the plant, completely override the grievances of the workers and the efforts of the committeemen. That's exactly what happened at Fleetwood. On his first visit to the plant, Curtis McGuire, the Regional Director, said he found 80% of the workers on the 3rd and 4th floors "reading books and waiting for their jobs to come up." He said there was no problem there. On his second visit, McGuire left the plant after a few minutes and went out to a bar. He came back so drunk that the Shop Chairman and the Plant Manager asked him to leave the plant.

This wasn't just a personal fiasco for McGuire; it was the final outcome of several bitter, frustrating months of preliminary grievance proceedings. People had been working the overloaded jobs for months now. And now all their grievances were worthless. Things were so bad that the shop committee held a demonstration at Solidarity House to protest the whole thing.

While this was going on, the people who were fired were still trying to get their jobs back. They had an appeal hearing before the International Executive Board. They were supposed to get a reply within a few weeks; it's now about four months later and they still haven't heard anything. The brightest news they got was when

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Hart and Saunders were elected as alternate delegates to the UAW Convention in LA. Their election was a big surprise to everybody (including themselves), but it was a definite indication that they had some support left inside the plant. It was also an expression of the general discontent people were feeling.

In terms of actually getting rehired, though, it's not clear what they accomplished. They got a lot of support from other delegates at the convention. But they were never able to get the case raised on the floor. When a guy from Fleetwood wanted to raise it, the International arranged to not call on anybody from the entire Regional delegation. And when somebody from another region raised it in the context of a debate on human rights, his microphone was shut off and he was ruled out of order.

Back at Fleetwood, in the meantime, things had deteriorated even further. The plant has always had the worst attendance in the Fisher Body Division. To that distinction it now added having the lowest quality audit of any General Motors assembly plant in North America. The shit hit the fan, of course. Cadillac started turning away the bodies we shipped them. And the management people began to flip out: every day the foreman had to go to a meeting after work and explain in front of all the big bosses *every* mistake on *every* bad job that they ran. It was total humiliation. At one point the superintendent started kicking the walls and threatening to fire every foreman in Fleetwood.

For the workers, though, this was all pretty academic. For months the foremen didn't mention quality: they just wanted the jobs done well enough to keep their ass out of trouble. They spent most of their time enforcing the higher work load on people. Now all of a sudden they wanted quality. The workers reaction was simple: hire some more people and you'll get quality. But you can't have your cake and eat

it, too.

By now it was the end of May, and the International was just getting around to authorizing a local strike which the Local had first requested back in February. But the strike deadline wasn't until the end of June, which meant the strike would take place just one month before the end of the model run. This was after people had worked the overloaded jobs for almost a year and just before the company would change all the jobs again anyway.

The workers had voted the previous fall to support a local strike. And that support held firm through the winter and the spring. But striking at the end of the model run was clearly a little different. People were saying, "Why strike now? Let's wait about six weeks and then go out. Hit 'em at the beginning of the model run, right when it hurts."

The International, which obviously planned this out in advance, used this ambivalent worker reaction to crush the Local even further. They demanded that the Local take another strike vote. The local people were furious. A new vote was illegal anyway. And the International was the one jamming up the grievance procedure from the beginning. A strike would probably be approved in a new vote. But if it wasn't, it would be a vote of total no-confidence in the Local. When the Local refused to hold the vote, the International said, "OK, Fuck you guys." And they pulled the strike letter authorizing the strike. That meant no local strike and no contract the entire length of the model run. The shop committee is now badly divided: they're putting out leaflets blaming each other for the disaster. And it's hard to tell if the grievance procedure will mean anything at all as we go into the new model run.

"Labor relations" have been chaotic at Fleetwood for the entire model run. They've continued to grind out the Cadillacs, but not

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because of any internal control the company has on the workers. The control is more external: the economic hardship would be too great if the workers did what their every instinct tells them to do: leave that place behind forever.

All this raises a lot of questions for me, a lot of which I can't answer right now.

One primary question is: why is the company being so vicious in its effort to speed the place up? It's hard to imagine if you've never been through it. But if you have 10 seconds left after a job, they want those 10 seconds. If you have 2 seconds left, they want those 2 seconds. And to get those 2 seconds, they're willing to fuck with you, scream at you, throw you on the street: they take whatever means necessary. The thing I can't understand is why do they need the money *that bad*? Everybody knows that they're "greedy capitalists." But isn't there a deeper explanation than just greed?

One thing I can't figure out is just how healthy is the industry? It seems like GM and Ford are doing great and that Chrysler and AMC are finished. But even at Ford and GM, their rate of return on investment is going down, even though their total profits are way up. But does that account for what they do in the plants? Another thing is that they've cut their workforce dramatically in the last few years, and they're building almost as many cars now as they did with the big workforce. Is that the answer? Does somebody sit down with a calculator and figure  $X$  workers eliminated +  $Y$  speedup =  $Z$  dollars of extra profit? I wish I knew more about how these decisions are made. Another thing I wonder about is "the crisis of capitalism." Even the leaders of the system itself admit that something's going wrong. Is what we're seeing at Fleetwood just the local side of a crisis that's international in scope?

Another thing I wonder about is the future of

the union. Maybe I'm basing everything on Fleetwood, and maybe that's not a good example. But what I see at Fleetwood is the collapse of the union. I don't mean we're moving toward decertification votes or anything. But right now the union is deteriorating to the status of some social service agency: it will preside over the dispensation of fringe benefits. But it will be of no use at all in the workers' struggle on the shop floor. A lot of people see that happening at Fleetwood. Almost daily I hear somebody say, "The union used to be good back in '68 and '69. But now it ain't worth a fuck."

For the company, the problems are obvious. Even a minimally functioning grievance procedure presents a real threat to their efforts to speed the place up. And there are too many extra-legal forms of struggle (such as sabotage, taking the job in the hole, absenteeism and so on) which the grievance procedure can't control anyway. And the fringe benefits agreed to years ago are now costing more than anybody ever imagined. GM now spends more money per car on health care than on steel; it's single largest supplier is Blue Cross; the second largest is Aetna Life and Casualty Co; the third largest is U.S. Steel. The company response to all this is two-fold: cut as many workers as possible to reduce total labor costs, and force the union into a more and more repressive posture vis-a-vis the workers who are left.

The big weakness of the union is that it's divided structurally so that the International has no commitment to supporting the shop floor struggle: it's committed only to delivering wages and benefits through the national contracts. The local people at Fleetwood are by no means radical. They would like nothing better than to establish a certain presence on the shop floor and then enjoy a career based on that. But they can't even accomplish that any more.

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Their careers are getting destroyed by the International. I'm absolutely amazed by what the International is doing at Fleetwood. They're not even supporting one faction over the other within the Local. They're destroying the entire Local union apparatus. Sometimes it seems almost self-destructive: how long can the superstructure last after the base has been swept away?

It's ironic in a way, but the fate of these local people is very similar to the fate of Hart and Saunders. Both groups tried to launch their careers in the plant from the same platform: militant pursuit of local grievancers. But when the grievance procedures collapse, as at Fleetwood, there is nothing left to pursue. By trying to direct the militancy of the walkout back into the union, Hart and Saunders got themselves isolated. The workers were already moving in a different direction. The walkout was a recognition that the union was collapsing, and it was an initial attempt to check out some new ways of fighting back.

The next time people think of walking out at Fleetwood, I'm going to try to persuade them not to. It's not a good tactic. People are too vulnerable. It's hard to force the company to bargain with you once you've left the plant.

They can basically wait for you to come back in.

The problem, then, is to pressure the company from inside the plant. The working class can exert its power by not producing. It can also exert its power by seizing essential components of the capitalist productive apparatus.

But in saying I wouldn't walk out again, I don't want to imply that the walkout was a mistake or a defeat. I don't think it was either of these, and I don't think these terms are very useful in evaluating what happened. The walkout was part of a process: a necessary part of a necessary process. It was basically a new generation of worker that walked out. We had to try it once to see what it was like. And Hart and Saunders represent a new generation of leftists. It's a tribute to everybody concerned to suggest that we act differently next time around.

*John Lippert strongly invites comments, criticisms and contacts based on his articles. Please write to him at P.O. Box 1015A, Detroit, MI 48232. He would like to thank Staughton Lynd for helping on this article.*



*Children's March for Survival, March 25, 1971. Photo by Bill Pastereich.*

# **DILEMMAS OF ORGANIZATION BUILDING**

## **The Case of Welfare Rights**

**Frances Fox Piven & Richard Cloward**

In the considerable literature on protest movements, the most important questions are generally not asked. Those questions concern the relationship between what the protestors do, the context in which they do it, and the varying responses of the state. This kind of analysis hardly exists.\*

Lacking such analysis, certain doctrines persist among activists and agitators who, from time to time, try to mobilize the working class and poor people for political action. Whatever their overarching ideology — whether reformist or revolutionary — activists have usually concentrated on developing formally-structured organizations with a mass membership. What underlies such efforts is the conviction that formal organization is a vehicle of power. This conviction is based on several assumptions. First, formal organization presumably makes possible the coordination of the economic and political resources of large numbers of people who separately have few such resources. Second, formal organization presumably permits the intelligent and strategic use of these resources in political conflict. And third, formal organization presumably ensures the continuity of lower-class political mobilization over time. This, in brief, is the model of mass-based, permanent organization which has dominated efforts to build political power among the working class and poor people.

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\*This article has been adapted from Chapter 5 of our book, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (Pantheon, 1977).

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Since the essence of political action is that formal organization will ensure regular, disciplined, and continuing contributions and participation from its members, the model depends for its success on the ability of organizations to secure incentives or sanctions that will command and sustain the required contributions and participation from masses of people. The presumption of most reformers and revolutionaries who have tried to organize is that once the economic and political resources of at least modest numbers of people are combined in disciplined action, the power structure will be forced to yield up the concessions necessary to sustain and enlarge mass affiliation.

The model has not succeeded in practice. It has not succeeded because it contains a grave flaw. The flaw is, quite simply, that it is not possible to compel concessions from dominant groups that can be used as resources to sustain oppositional organizations over time.

In part, activists do not recognize the flaw inherent in the mass-based permanent organization model because they are attracted to the possibility of organizing at extraordinary times, at moments when large numbers of people are roused to indignation and defiance and thus when a great deal seems possible. Organizers do not create such moments, but they are excited by them, and the signs of the moment conspire to support the organizer's faith. One such sign is the sheer excess of political energy among the masses, which itself breathes life into the belief that large organizations can be developed and sustained. Another is that, in the face of the threat of popular insurgency, dominant groups may offer up concessions that would otherwise have seemed improbable; the victories needed to sustain organization thus seem ready to be won. Most important of all the power structure is more likely at times of mass disturbances to seek out whatever organizations have emerged

among the insurgents, soliciting their views and encouraging them to air grievances before formal bodies of the state. While these symbolic gestures give the appearance of influence to formal organizations composed of working class and poor people, public leaders are not actually responding to the organizations; they are responding to the underlying force of insurgency. But insurgency is always shortlived. Once it subsides and the people leave the streets, most of the organizations which it temporarily threw up and which dominant groups helped to nurture simply fade away. As for the few organizations which survive, it is because they become more useful to those who control the resources on which they depend than to the masses which the organizations claim to represent. Organizations endure, in short, by abandoning their oppositional politics.

Our main point, however, is not simply that efforts to build organizations are futile. The more important point is that by endeavoring to do what they cannot do, organizers fail to do what they can do. During those brief periods in which people are roused to indignation, when they are prepared to defy the authorities to whom they ordinarily defer, during those brief moments when popular groups exert some force against the state, those who call themselves leaders do not usually escalate the momentum of the people's protests. They do not because they are preoccupied with trying to build and sustain embryonic formal organizations in the sure conviction that these organizations will enlarge and become powerful. All too often when workers erupt in strikes, organizers collect dues cards; when tenants refuse to pay rent and stand off marshals, organizers form building committees; when people burn and loot, organizers use that "moment of madness" to draft constitutions.

The study of past movements reveals another

point of equal importance. Organizers not only fail to seize the opportunity presented by the rise of unrest, they typically act in ways that blunt or curb the disruptive force which people are sometimes able to mobilize. In small part, this results from the doctrinal commitment to the development of mass-based, permanent organization, for organization-building activities tend to draw people away from the streets and into the meeting rooms. In part it results from the preoccupation with internal leadership prerogatives that organization-building seems to induce. But in the largest part, organizers tend to work against disruption because, in their search for resources to maintain their organizations, they are driven inexorably to the dominant groups and to the tangible and symbolic supports that such leadership can provide. Leaders in the power structure confer these resources because they understand that it is organization-building, not disruption, that organizers are about.

Ordinarily, of course, elites do not support efforts to form organizations of working-class or poor people. But when insurgency wells up, apparently uncontrollable, the power structure responds. And one of its responses is to cultivate those popular organizations which begin to emerge in such periods, for they have little to fear from organizations, especially from organizations which come to depend upon them for support. Thus however unwittingly, activists and organizers act in the end to facilitate the efforts of dominant groups to channel the insurgent masses into normal politics, believing all the while that they are taking the long and arduous but certain path to power. When the tumult is over, these organizations usually fade, no longer useful to those who provided the resources necessary to their survival. Or the organization persists by becoming increasingly subservient to those on whom it depends.

Either way, no lesson seems to be learned.

Each generation of leaders and organizers acts as if there were no political moral to be derived from the history of failed organizing efforts, nor from the obvious fact that whatever the people won was a response to their turbulence and not to their organized numbers. Consequently, when new institutional dislocations once again set people free from prevailing systems of social control, with the result that protest erupts for another moment in time, leaders and organizers attempt again to do what they cannot do, and forfeit the chance to do what they might do.

One of the more recent cases to which this perspective may be applied is that of the National Welfare Rights Organization which emerged in 1967 and went bankrupt in 1975. NWRO formed at a time when the southern phase of the civil rights movement was ending and when many activists were turning northward, drawn by the increasing turbulence of the black urban masses. The explosive energy of the ghettos in this period encouraged the belief that political power could be developed through mass organization. The emphasis on disruptive protest that had characterized the southern movement was quickly superseded by an emphasis on "community organization." NWRO was one expression of that change, for its leaders and organizers — while animated by the spirit of disruptive protest — were nevertheless more deeply committed to the goal of building mass-based permanent organizations among the urban poor. There were other such efforts in the same period, but none gained the national scope of NWRO. An analysis of the experience of NWRO thus affords some basis for appraising the viability of this political strategy.\*

\*Virtually nothing has been written about NWRO. During its brief life, it received relatively little support from civil rights groups and it has since received little attention from historians or social scientists. The analysis in this article is

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## ORGANIZING VS. MOBILIZING: A DEBATE OVER STRATEGY

A major expression of the post-World War II black movement was the rise in demands for relief, especially after 1960 and particularly in the large urban centers of the North. A great many of the southern black poor who were driven from agriculture in the 1940's and 1950's did not find jobs in the northern cities: extreme hardship rapidly became pervasive. For a variety of reasons that cannot be taken up here, millions began to demand public relief.<sup>†</sup> Many of the poor had apparently come to believe that a society which denied them jobs and adequate wages did at least owe them a survival income. It was a period that began to resemble the Great Depression, for in both periods masses of people concluded that "the system" was responsible for their economic plight, not they themselves, and so they turned in growing numbers to the relief offices.

Accounts of the civil rights era are curiously myopic on this point; the matter is not even mentioned. But in our view, the great rise in relief insurgency ought to be understood as a

therefore based almost entirely on our own observations, for we were intimately involved in the affairs of NWRO: we participated in discussions of strategy, in fund raising efforts, and in demonstrations. Readers should also know that we were close to George A. Wiley, its executive director, who died in an accident in the summer of 1973. He was a marvelously talented leader, and a good friend. We feel his loss deeply.

We were strong advocates of a particular political strategy — one stressing disruptive protest rather than community organization — which was a continual source of dispute among NWRO's leadership. To what extent our involvement and partisanship may have distorted the analysis which follows is for readers to judge.

<sup>†</sup>For an extended discussion of the forces producing the rising demand for relief in this period, see Piven and Cloward, 1971, especially chapters 6-10.

rebellion by the poor against circumstances that deprived them of both jobs and income. Moreover, the relief movement was in a sense the most authentic expression of the black movement in the post-war period. The millions who participated were drawn from the very bottom of the northern ghettos densely packed with the victims of agricultural displacement and urban unemployment. It was a struggle by the black masses for the sheer right of survival, and it was a struggle that was unled and unorganized.

In 1960, there were only 745,000 families on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls, and they received payments amounting to less than one billion; in 1972 the rolls reached 3 million families, and the payments reached six billions. As gains for the poor go, it was a large one. Moreover, the seventies saw the beginning of a new and prolonged recessionary period — the worst in post-war years — and there can be little doubt that the greatly enlarged relief rolls helped many among the American poor to endure this period of intensified unemployment and deprivation.

As this broad-based but unrecognized movement grew in the early 1960s, civil rights activists, and especially northern activists, were shifting their attention from caste problems to economic problems. To them, the rising insurgency among urban blacks signified by rioting, and the new responsiveness of national elites, suggested that a powerful movement directed to economic gains could be developed. It was a moment of high hopes.

One of those with high hopes was George Wiley, the associate national director of CORE. He resigned from that position in the spring of 1966 with the idea of organizing among the northern urban black masses. Unemployment was of particular concern, but it was not clear to him, nor to other activists at this time, how an

attack on unemployment could be mounted. We proposed instead a strategy for dealing with the lack of income — namely, to mobilize campaigns to bring millions of families on to the welfare rolls. We also thought that the local fiscal and political disruptions that would inevitably follow from a great increase in the welfare rolls would create pressure on the congress to override local fiscal dilemmas by enacting a federally-financed national minimum income program. It was a strategy designed to produce immediate financial relief to the underemployed and the unemployed, coupled with the possibility of longer-term economic reform.\*

To consider the question of whether welfare was a promising area in which to mount an initial organizing effort, as contrasted with housing or education or health, George convened a series of meetings with us and a few friends from the civil rights movement during the spring of 1966 in New York City. Much of the early discussion was about the workings of the welfare system itself and about the estimates we had made of the many hundreds of thousands of families with incomes below scheduled welfare eligibility levels in various northern cities. We had also gathered data showing that few of the families already on the rolls were receiving all of the benefits to which they were entitled.

In these discussions, we argued that the welfare system was particularly vulnerable to disruption by the poor because of the large concentrations of potentially eligible families in the northern industrial states produced by migration and urban unemployment. These

states and their localities were the most exposed to ghetto discontent. At the same time, because of the method by which welfare was financed (states with high grant levels — mainly northern states — received proportionately less federal reimbursement than states with low grant levels), these same states were the most susceptible to fiscal strain if demands for welfare mounted. Finally, the northern industrial states were crucial to the fortunes of the national Democratic Party and so disturbances in these states could have large political ramifications at the federal level.

As for the poor themselves, there was every reason in 1966 to believe that they would join in a mobilization to drive up the rolls, *for the statistics on rising welfare application rates demonstrated that they already were, separately but in concert, fulfilling the outlines of this strategy*. In 1960, about 500,000 families had applied for AFDC benefits; by the mid-sixties, the volume of applications was rapidly approaching 1,000,000 annually. All that remained, we argued, was for organizers to enlarge and sustain this disruptive behavior in which masses of the poor were unmistakably beginning to engage.

But organizers in the 1960's took a different view. They had inspected the American political landscape and observed that other groups were well represented by organizations that asserted their special interests. Homeowners formed associations to resist government actions which might lower property values; workers joined unions to advance labor legislation; industrialists joined associations that pressed for favorable treatment of corporations by a host of government agencies. And while homeowner associations were hardly as powerful as the American Petroleum Institute, that seemed less important at the time than the fact that other groups were organized and the poor were not.

\*We published this argument in *The Nation* on May 2, 1966 under the title "A Strategy to End Poverty." This article is also reprinted in Cloward & Piven, 1974.

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Accordingly, it was argued that if the poor organized they too could advance their interests.

For our part, we argued that political influence by the poor is mobilized, not organized. A disruptive strategy does not require that people affiliate with an organization and participate regularly. Rather, it requires that masses of people be mobilized to engage in disruptive action. To mobilize for a welfare disruption, families would be encouraged to demand relief. Just by engaging in that defiant act, they could contribute to a fiscal and political crisis. On the other hand, if they were asked to contribute to an organization on a continuing basis, we did not think most would, for organizers had no continuing incentives to offer.

To mobilize a crisis, we said, it would be necessary to develop a national network of cadre organizations rather than a national federation of welfare recipient groups. This *organization of organizers* — composed of students, churchmen, civil rights activists, anti-poverty workers, and militant AFDC recipients — could in turn seek to energize a broad, loosely-coordinated movement of variegated groups to arouse hundreds of thousands of poor people to demand aid. Rather than to build organizational membership rolls, the purpose would be to build the welfare rolls. The main tactics would logically include large-scale “welfare rights” information campaigns; the enlisting of influentials in the slums and ghettos, especially clergymen, to exhort potential welfare recipients to seek the aid that was rightfully theirs; and the mobilization of marches and demonstrations to build indignation and militancy among the poor.

It was clear, however, that rising welfare costs would arouse large sectors of the public to demand that mayors, county officials and governors slash the rolls and cut grants levels. For our part, we did not think most public officials would accede to such demands while the ghettos

remained in turmoil. For their part, organizers in those early discussions agreed that impulses toward repression would probably be tempered. But they also felt they had an obligation to protect the poor against *any* possibility of repression. The way to do this, as they saw it, was to create an organized body of welfare recipients who could bring pressure directly to bear on public officials, thus counteracting the pressures of groups who would call for restrictive welfare policies.

NWRO organizers also thought that a large-scale poor people's organization with lobbying power would be required to win a national minimum income from the Congress. By contrast, we maintained that the way to bring pressure on government was through the disruption of the welfare system itself and through the electoral crisis that would probably follow. A disruption in welfare could be expected to activate lobbying by other and far more powerful groups for a goal which the poor could not possibly hope to achieve, were they simply to lobby themselves. (This is not very different from what did in fact happen; by the late 1960's political leaders in the fiscally-distressed major northern states became articulate spokesmen for a federal income program.)

But this perspective was deeply troubling to organizers. We were saying that the poor can create crises but cannot control the responses to them. They can only hope that the balance of political forces provoked in response to a disruption will favor concessions rather than repression. To NWRO organizers, this amounted to asking the poor to “create a crisis and pray.” It seemed speculative and very risky. Consequently, they felt that the strategy had to be modified to assure greater control by the poor over the outcome of a welfare crisis. The way to develop that control was by building a national mass-based organization. Then, as political

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leaders weighed alternative ways of dealing with the crisis, they would have to contend with a powerful pressure group that had its own remedies to put forward. We could only agree that our proposal entailed risks. But we believed that there were no gains for the poor without risks.

Moreover, our emphasis on mass mobilization with cadre organizations as the vehicle struck NWRO organizers as exceedingly manipulative. Their perspective on organizing was imbued with values which they considered democratic. The poor had a right to run their own organizations, and to determine their own policies and strategies. Given this perspective, organizers defined two roles appropriate for themselves as outsiders in a poor people's organization. First, they should act as staff, subordinating themselves to policy-making bodies composed exclusively of the poor. As staff, they would contribute their technical skills to the work of the organization. They would, for example, provide information on the extremely complex rules and regulations of the welfare system. Second, they would cultivate those with leadership potential, tutoring them in techniques of leadership in the expectation that the role of organizer would wither away.

Even as these discussions were going on, welfare rights groups were beginning to form, mainly under the aegis of the antipoverty program. The activities that were fostering group formation were directed to "special grants" for clothing and household furnishings which were provided under the law in a number of states. Many recipients had been on the rolls for years without ever having received special grants so that it took relatively large sums (sometimes as much as \$1,000) to bring them "up to standard." The success of these special grant protests was decisive for the organizers in settling the question of the strategy which the movement

would follow. It was a strategy that could produce groups, and groups would be the foundation of a national organization. George thus decided to undertake the formation of a national organization, with benefit campaigns for existing recipients as the inducement to organization-building.

### A POOR PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION IS FORMED

All things considered, a national structure was created with remarkable ease and rapidity. On May 23, 1966, George and a staff of four opened an office in Washington, D.C. called the Poverty/Rights Action Center. Some 15 months later, in August 1967, a founding convention was held, and NWRO was officially formed, with P/RAC as its national headquarters and with George as its chief executive.

The first major opportunity to mark the formation of a national welfare rights organization was provided by groups in Ohio who had joined together in the Ohio Committee for Adequate Welfare. In February 1966, organizers from Ohio decided they would stage a 155 mile "Walk for Adequate Welfare" from Cleveland to the steps of the state capitol in Columbus, hoping thereby to generate support for higher welfare payment levels in Ohio. George and a few others worked feverishly in the weeks before the march to spread word of it among welfare groups around the country and to stimulate these groups to hold supporting demonstrations. The end result was a demonstration of some 2,000 protestors, led by George, which marched in the capitol to argue against Ohio's welfare system.

Simultaneous demonstrations occurred elsewhere. In New York 2,000 picketers, most of them recipients, marched in the hot sun while their children played in City Hall Park. And in fifteen other cities, including Baltimore, Wash-

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ington, Los Angeles, Boston, Louisville, Chicago, Trenton and San Francisco, some 2,500 people in groups of 25 to 250 demonstrated against "the welfare."

The demonstrations received encouraging coverage in the press, including a statement issued by George announcing "the birth of a movement." Shortly afterwards, George called for a national meeting of organizers and recipient leaders to lay the basis for a national organization of welfare rights groups. The meeting convened in Chicago in August; some 100 people attended, both recipients and organizers. The recipients were from groups that had already formed, ranging from the Mothers for Adequate Welfare in Boston to the "Mothers of West Side Organization" composed of unemployed black men, to the "Committee to Save the Unemployed Fathers" of eastern Kentucky. The organizers were members of Students for a Democratic Society, church people and, most prominently, VISTA's and other anti-poverty program workers. The conferees voted to establish a National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups (NCC) composed of one welfare recipient from each of the eleven states where welfare organizing had already led to the establishment of groups. This body was mandated to determine policy for the organization, to make recommendations for the further development of a national structure, and to promote and coordinate a series of nationwide special grant campaigns in the fall of 1966.

This meeting, like others to follow in the first three years, was characterized by spirit and militancy, by anger and hope that bordered on pandemonium. The chairpersons of the various sessions could not hold to the agendas or maintain parliamentary order. People just rose up from their seats — organizers and recipients alike — and lined up at the microphones, as

many as 20 or 30 at a time. One after another they condemned "the welfare" for its abuses — for grant levels so low that nothing was left after the rent was paid, for capricious and punitive rejections and terminations, for invasions of homes, for insults to dignity. The early meetings were like rallies, full of indignation and full of joy that the occasion had finally come for the people to rise up against the source of their indignation.

New groups formed rapidly, mainly in the densely packed ghettos of the midwestern and northeastern cities. NWRO helped stimulate this development by producing and distributing thousands of brochures entitled "Build Organization!" As client insurgency spread, further steps were taken to consolidate a national structure. In December 1966, the National Co-ordinating Committee met in Chicago and designated P/RAC as the headquarters of the National Welfare Rights Organization, thus further buttressing George's claim to leadership of the mushrooming welfare rights phenomenon. In addition, a conference was called for the following February in Washington, D.C. More than 350 recipients and organizers were attracted to this meeting, representing some 200 WRO's in 70 cities and 26 states. A national legislative program was developed to be presented to HEW and to the congress. Workshops on a variety of subjects were held: "How to Form a Group"; "Staging a Demonstration"; "Raising Money"; "Techniques of Lobbying"; and the like. And plans were laid for a nationwide series of "special grant" campaigns (i.e., campaigns to obtain grants of money for clothing and household furnishings).

The special grant campaigns followed throughout the spring and millions of dollars were obtained by recipients. On June 30th, 1967, simultaneous local demonstrations were once again staged throughout the country, and it could fairly be said that a national organization

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had come into being.

Meanwhile, the National Coordinating Committee had reconvened in April to adopt the membership and delegate rules that would lay the basis for a formal national structure. Groups that sent dues to the national office were entitled to elect delegates to future national conventions. The official founding convention took place in August 1967 in Washington, D.C. It is a measure of the extent to which local groups already conformed to the membership, dues-paying, and delegate-designating rules laid down by the National Coordinating Committee that 178 delegates and alternates representing approximately 75 WRO's in 45 cities and 21 states attended to adopt a constitution, elect national officers, endorse a set of goals, all to form the National Welfare Rights Organization — the first national relief organization since the Great Depression. Other welfare rights groups existed, but they had yet to conform with national rules (electing officers, paying dues, etc.) and thus were barred from official participation. Soon, most would conform and affiliate. In a very short time, NWRO had developed an extensive nation-wide, state-wide and sometimes city-wide system of structures.

However, the intricate national structure did not signify that a national mass base had been developed. In 1967, when the details of the structure were being completed, NWRO had 5,000 dues-paying families (who were overwhelmingly black and from northern cities). In 1969, when the membership base reached its peak, about 22,000 persons paid dues. Thereafter the membership rolls declined rapidly, for reasons we shall now see.

## **BUILDING ORGANIZATION BY SOLVING GRIEVANCES**

Welfare rights organizing relied primarily on solving the grievances of existing recipients. This

approach initially worked to attract members, for grievances were legion. Families were often capriciously denied access to benefits, or failed to receive checks, or received less than they were entitled to, or were arbitrarily terminated, or were abused and demeaned by welfare workers. The promise that such grievances could be solved brought recipients together.

Grievances were dealt with in a variety of ways. In the beginning, organizers often performed the grievance work on a case-by-case basis, thereby demonstrating to recipients that the complexities of welfare regulations could be mastered and that welfare personnel could be made to give in. In time, some welfare recipients were schooled in the regulations and in techniques of representing other recipients. Some groups placed tables in welfare waiting rooms or on the streets outside with signs announcing the offer of assistance to people who were experiencing difficulty in the centers. Some of the more structured groups established "grievance committees" to which families with problems were referred.

The most effective tactic was to stage group actions on grievances. A group of recipients descended on the welfare center to hold a demonstration, demanding that all of their individual grievances be settled before the group left, with the threat that a sit-in would follow if the demand were not met. These actions generally succeeded, for with the ghettos of the cities seething, welfare officials feared confrontations. Organizers and recipients understood this vulnerability, and capitalized on it. If welfare officials tried to cope with demonstrators by saying that some of the grievances would be dealt with immediately but that others would have to wait, the demonstrators often refused to leave. They sensed the importance of standing together and they were alert to the dangers of being dealt with one-by-one in back offices



*Furniture sit-in at the Worcester, Mass. welfare office in July 1968. The director of the office is standing in the middle. Photo by Bill Pastereich.*

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removed from the tumult of the waiting rooms. Organizers and leaders usually tried to reinforce this intuition by reaching agreements in advance that no one would leave until everyone's problems had been solved; during the demonstration, group pressure reinforced that agreement.

The objective of these activities for most organizers and recipient leaders, as well as for the national staff, was to expand membership. This meant insisting that recipients join a group, pay dues, and accept a membership card before their grievances would be attended to. The reasoning was that by conditioning assistance on affiliation, stable group membership would result.

However, WRO's did not develop stable memberships. Most families who benefitted from a grievance action then dropped out of the group simply because they no longer needed assistance. To be sure, recipients returned from time to time as new grievances arose, but most did not participate in any continuous way in the life of the organization.

Moreover, grievance work required an enormous investment of time and staff for recipient effort. Such work was also extremely tedious. There were satisfactions, to be sure, especially those deriving from the sense that one has rendered a service to another human being, and there were recipients who gained deep gratification from the effort. But on the whole, the recipients who enjoyed this work were not numerous, and as the months and years dragged by it became increasingly difficult to sustain grievance activities except by continually training new cadres to replace those who wearied and dropped out.

It might also be noted that grievance work was a natural avenue to positions of leadership, for serving others provided a way of building a constituency. But once the grievance worker had succeeded in being elected to office, she usually

came to be preoccupied with the responsibilities and satisfactions of that office. And since the leadership of these groups tended to be stable, new grievance workers could not similarly entertain the hope of winning office through service to others. This circumstance made the drudgery of grievance work all the less attractive. As a result, while WRO's proliferated in the period between 1966 and 1970, these groups remained small, rarely exceeding 100 members. Moreover, the membership of these core groups showed high turnover.

If concentration on individual grievances did not have the potential for building a mass membership, action on collective grievances did appear to, at least for a while. These collective actions, which we referred to earlier, were based on the regulations of some welfare departments which provided that, in addition to regular food and rent grants, families could also apply for "special grants" for clothing and household furnishings as needed. Few people knew about these provisions, even fewer applied for special grants, and still fewer received them. Since these were forms of assistance for which large numbers of recipients were ostensibly eligible, they presented the possibility that group actions could be mounted to solve hundreds and perhaps thousands of grievances at one time, thus bringing large numbers of families into local WRO's with a minimum of organizing investment.

Experiments with this type of action were first conducted in 1965 by a few organizers affiliated with Mobilization for Youth on New York's Lower East Side. They were generally successful: when confronted with 50 or 100 recipients demanding special grants, the district welfare offices in New York City conceded and checks were issued all at once. By the spring of 1967, the tactic had spread to most of the anti-poverty agencies in the city and to some settlement

houses and churches as well. Literally thousands of people joined in special grant demonstrations. As these actions multiplied, a central office was created to stimulate the growth of more demonstrations throughout the city, and the New York City-wide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Groups was formed.

The special grant campaigns and the formation of the city-wide organization generated enormous excitement among activists and AFDC recipients. Weekly meetings called by City-wide were attended by larger and larger numbers of recipients, anti-poverty organizers, and anti-poverty attorneys. At these sessions, the spirit of a movement began to develop; training sessions in the details of conducting special grant campaigns were conducted, and plans for demonstrations — either simultaneously in dozens of district offices or jointly at the central welfare offices — were agreed upon. In addition, tens of thousands of kits of special grant campaign literature were distributed — the main piece being a mimeographed checklist of the items of clothing and household furnishings people were supposed to have (according to welfare regulations). These checklists were distributed by local organizers, people filled them out and returned them, and they were then bundled up and presented to district office welfare directors in the course of countless demonstrations. By the late fall of 1967, this organizing formula had produced a mass movement among welfare recipients in New York's ghettos and barrios.

The militancy in the period was high. AFDC mothers (often with their children in tow) staged hundreds of sit-ins and confrontations at the district welfare offices in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. District demonstrations sometimes attracted as many as 500 people, while demonstrations at the central welfare offices drew as many as 2,000, and social

workers, welfare workers, and other sympathizers sometimes joined in. Sit-ins, which often accompanied the demonstrations, sometimes lasted for several days. Scores of arrests occurred, although generally city officials were loath to arrest recipients in those turbulent times; instead, they issued checks. By the spring and summer of 1968, when the special grant campaigns reached their zenith, the welfare department had found it necessary to establish a "war room" in its central offices filled with telephones and staff members whose job it was to keep abreast of the constant demonstrations taking place in the city's several dozen district offices.

George was so impressed with the organization-building potential of these campaigns that he moved the national organization to push this strategy across the country. However, the only place other than New York where genuinely large-scale campaigns resulted was Massachusetts under the leadership of Bill Pastereich, where millions of dollars were won beginning in the summer of 1968. "Welfare Department figures indicated in the Boston area alone, \$250,000 was distributed in July, \$600,000 in August, and \$3,000,000 in September" (Fiske, 37 and 96).

As special grants campaigns mushroomed throughout the country, local and state governments began to respond by instituting "flat grant" systems. It was an inevitable development. By this simple device, the rising costs of special grant disbursements were curbed and the welfare rights organizations were severely crippled. New York State was first to institute this "reform", for a vast reservoir of potential claimants still existed to be tapped, posing what the *New York Times* editorially called a "threat to [New York City's] treasury." In June 1968, the State Board of Social Welfare approved the flat grant plan, which the chairman of the Board said would both "stabilize outgoing expendi-

tures" and "very seriously handicap" the welfare recipients' organization. In the wake of the flat grant, the local WROs in New York (and Massachusetts) rapidly weakened and the relief centers were largely abandoned. Other states quickly found the flat grant to be a simple and successful way to simultaneously undermine organizing among the poor and curb welfare costs.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The collapse of welfare rights organizing in New York and Massachusetts was deeply troubling, both because some of the nation's most liberal political leaders held office in these states, and because the organized recipient bases in both states were NWRO's largest. If a strategy of building a mass membership by extracting special grants from the welfare system failed under these conditions, what then of the fate that awaited organizing efforts in places with more conservative political leaders and fewer recipients? The groups that remained were widely scattered throughout the United States; few contained as many as 50 members. In fact, by 1970 these groups had also begun to falter. One reason was the development of an elaborate organizational structure, and the constraining influence of this structure on NWRO's leadership.

The development of an organizational structure had immediate consequences for welfare rights groups. The ease and rapidity with which the organization came into being validated the belief in mass-based organization doctrine, in the potential for political influence through organization. Although most WRO's had only a small dues-paying membership — ranging from 25 to 75 members — there were upwards of 500 groups throughout the country towards the late 1960's, each of which was permitted to send at

least one delegate and alternate to national conferences and conventions. These large national meetings conveyed the illusion that the welfare rights struggle involved grassroots forces of massive proportions. Press coverage of demonstrations also buttressed convictions regarding the viability of the community organizing doctrine. People were convinced that the welfare rights struggle was burgeoning, was vital, was making gains, despite the demise of mass benefit campaigns. But the truth is that the development of a complex organizational structure at the neighborhood, city-wide, state, and national level was an inhibiting force from the outset. In particular, it inhibited the expansion of membership.

The main way in which this happened was through the creation of a leadership with large stakes in membership stasis. The elaboration of organization meant the elaboration of leadership positions on the neighborhood, city-wide, and state-wide levels. Considering the hard and dreary lives which most welfare recipients had previously led, the rewards of prestige and organizational influence which accrued to those who could win and hold office were enormous. It was natural, therefore, that leaders became intensely preoccupied with maintaining their positions.

Once a group had formed it developed an acknowledged leadership which tended to focus on cultivating and strengthening its ties within the group. City-wide and state representatives were similarly preoccupied; they concentrated on cultivating and strengthening their ties with local leaders in their city or state. Moreover, since recipient leaders at all levels of the organization had to be periodically re-elected, existing leaders viewed new members as a threat. Struggles for leadership succession might ensue; existing leaders might be toppled. Consequently, leaders resisted new membership or-

ganizing ventures, such as organizing the aged and working poor who were also eligible for relief benefits.

This inability to expand its membership was the major issue which led George to resign from NWRO in December 1972 and to announce that he and Bert DeLeeuw (a longtime aide) were going to undertake the formation of a multi-constituency organization to be called the Movement for Economic Justice. His resignation was a direct outgrowth of his conflict with NWRO's established leadership over broadening the base of NWRO.\*

Indeed, the concept of membership itself had by the 1970's lost much of its meaning. In organizing doctrine, membership means something more than merely formal affiliation through the payment of dues. It also means active participation in the life of the organization — for example, in demonstrations. Mass participation is ostensibly the functional equivalent of the political resources (such as wealth) which interest groups elsewhere in the social

\*When George died some eight months later, DeLeeuw assumed the executiveship of the Movement for Economic Justice.



*Left, Hulbert James, Director of WRO in New York City. Center, George Wiley. Right, Cesar Chavez, United Farm Workers leader. Photo by Bill Pastereich.*

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structure possess. As organizers sometimes put it, poor people have numbers. Membership, in short, means regular participation by masses of people.

But NWRO's history reveals that membership eventually came to mean little more than formal affiliation through the payment of dues, and in the end there was not much emphasis placed even on the maintenance of the dues-system. What mattered was winning and holding office. An illustration will make the point. In the summer of 1970, a recipient leader in New York City, who was then a national officer, undertook a "school clothing campaign." It was, from every perspective, a sad affair. The New York City-Wide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups had for some time been nothing more than a shell, consisting mainly of an executive committee composed of a few recipient leaders from the various boroughs who were still hanging on to their positions although most of the members of the groups which had originally yielded them these positions were gone. This group met irregularly, and its meetings consisted mainly of bickering over the distribution of such funds as the organization was still able to raise.

In the fall of 1970, word was passed through what little welfare rights infrastructure remained in New York City that it would be possible for poor people to obtain a grant of money for school clothing from funds available to the Board of Education. Some 14,000 people signed forms requesting a grant, having been required in advance to sign a NWRO dues card and to pay the annual fee of \$1.00. Little effort was made to integrate these thousands of people into the few welfare rights groups that remained, or to organize them into new groups. However, the 14,000 dues cards that resulted from this campaign permitted this particular recipient leader to win still higher office at the NWRO

convention in the summer of 1971. This is one example of the extent to which the goal of a mass membership had been subordinated to leadership strivings. In these ways, then, the proliferation of organizational leadership positions constrained the expansion of organizational membership. Simply put, organization prevented organizing.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF EXTERNAL LEADERSHIP INCENTIVES

By the late 1960's, it was clear that NWRO was in grave difficulty. Mass-benefit campaigns were faltering; and the leadership was also inhibiting the expansion of membership. Consequently, the national staff was virtually paralyzed; it simply did not know what to do in order to resuscitate its constituency.

Nevertheless, NWRO's organizational apparatus expanded in the period between 1969 and 1972. The national budget rose; the national staff grew; NWRO's national reputation enlarged. That this could be so was a consequence of a swelling tide of support from outside sources. The sympathy and fear generated by the black movement, together with the emerging crisis over welfare, enabled NWRO to present itself to elites as the representative of a large segment of the black poor. Within a year or two after NWRO formed in 1967, various groups — churchmen, public officials, social welfare organizations, unions, civil rights groups, foundations, media representatives — began either to initiate relationships with NWRO or to respond to overtures for relationship. Through these relationships, organizational resources were obtained — public legitimation, money, the appearance of influence.

But this enlarging flow of resources did not lead to enlarged organizing; it further undermined organizing. As NWRO gradually became enmeshed in a web of relationships with govern-

mental officials and private groups, it was transformed from a protest organization to a negotiating and lobbying organization. As Steiner says, its chairman — an AFDC recipient named Johnnie Tillmon — “sits with bureaucrats, scholars, and lobbyists in all-day conferences to plan welfare changes. . .” (285). This transformation was total; it occurred at the national level, and among local groups everywhere. In the end, it produced a leadership deeply involved in negotiating and lobbying, but on behalf of a constituency that was organized in name only.

Militancy, as might have been expected, declined as a result of the heavy investment in coalition building and lobbying. By 1970, recipient leaders who had begun their careers storming relief centers could hardly keep pace with their speaking schedules in one local, state or national forum after another. They had become celebrities and they behaved accordingly. Here is a striking but not atypical example:

The Massachusetts Conference on Social Welfare, a private social-work-oriented organization, made it a practice to select the chairman of the M.W.R.O. to serve on the Board of Directors. When the governor of Massachusetts decided to institute a “flat grant” welfare system [which quickly destroyed the welfare rights movement in Massachusetts], he chose a meeting of the Massachusetts Conference on Social Welfare to make his announcement. The chairman of the MWRO chose to sit on stage near the podium from which the governor spoke rather than lead a group of her members to that podium to disrupt the speech (Bailis, 73).

Attendance at foreign meetings was even justified to the NWRO membership on the groups that a “new international welfare rights organization” was being talked about:

I’ve been out of the country [to attend peace conferences] three times — in 1967 to Paris, in 1968 to Stockholm, in 1970 to Bogota. I just got back from Bogota. . . . These things I go to are important and they are for NWRO — for you, all of you, not me. In Bogota, they talked about setting up a new international welfare rights organization. This would mean NWRO would be in all kinds of different countries and would have a lot more power. This is the kind of thing I’m doing, working for you and trying to make your organization something (Martin, 109).

The forces that shaped the orientation and direction of the national leadership were also at work at the local level. Local WRO’s also received resources that shaped their beliefs and tactics. Sympathetic individuals and organizations publicly identified themselves with the welfare rights struggle, yielding a measure of legitimacy. Anti-poverty agencies, churches, settlement houses and other organizations, including a few unions, provided meeting rooms, organizers, access to printing supplies and machines, and money.

However, the most important integrative relationships at the local level were those formed with the welfare system itself. These relationships were a powerful force transforming WRO’s from protest to lobbying and service organizations. Welfare officials reached out to protestors in the hope of restoring calm, and protest leaders reached out to government officials in the hope of achieving reforms. Thus, as groups of recipients caused repeated disruptions of welfare procedures by picketing, and by sit-ins and demonstrations, welfare officials began to search out organizers and recipient leaders to initiate “dialogue” and, as often as not, organizers or recipient leaders demanded dialogue. The result, everywhere in the country,

was the development of procedures for the negotiation of grievances. Many welfare departments established advisory councils composed of recipients; sometimes recipients were appointed to policy-making boards.

It was not remarkable that welfare officials, confronted by turbulent interference with the operation of their programs, moved to grant the disruptors a symbolic role in the system, for it was a time-honored method of restoring calm. What was remarkable was the ease with which the method worked. The impact on political beliefs of local WRO's was a major reason. Each such "victory" was the occasion for self-congratulations among leaders who, upon reading of their appointments to advisory committees in the press or upon receiving written invitations to negotiating sessions or upon being invited to testify at legislative hearings, envisaged the emergence of a new period of justice for the welfare poor. To be listened to by the powerful conveyed a sense that they were at last wielding a measure of influence, that progress was being made, that reforms would follow.

As a result, militancy also declined at the local level. Government officials agreed to deal with the WRO's, but they did so at a price. Sometimes the price was so subtle as to make it appear that none was being exacted. It may merely have consisted in an implicit understanding, all too readily acknowledged by recipient leaders and organizers, that the proper path to welfare reform was through negotiation by leaders and not protest by unruly mobs.

Relationships of this kind not only blunted militancy, they also interfered with the expansion of membership and even weakened the ties of existing members to the group. Negotiations absorbed the energy and time of leaders and organizers. The more the investment in these procedures, the less the investment in membership. Indeed, formal relationships with

welfare officials had the effect of making membership superfluous. Before such relationships became the rule, it was not unusual for 50 or 100 recipients to burst into a welfare center and demand that their grievances be settled on the spot. This tactic often worked and when it did, it was the *group* that had proved its strength; everyone depended upon everyone else. But once grievances came to be dealt with through negotiations between welfare rights leaders and welfare officials, group action no longer seemed necessary, and group consciousness disintegrated. The sense of participation in something larger than oneself, the sense of belonging to a movement, was gradually lost.

And now a crucial point. As NWRO and its local affiliates moved into the maze of legislative and bureaucratic politics, the failure to sustain, much less to expand, the membership base among the poor was obscured. For as the membership base dwindled and became less militant, the resources which NWRO secured continued to enlarge. *In effect, external resources had become a substitute for a mass base.*

But the availability of external resources upon which the organization depended was not a response to the power of organization; it was a response to the power of widespread black disorder. Once disorder began to subside, these external resources were withdrawn. The result was organizational collapse.

## THE DEMISE OF NWRO

If the developments already described had not caused the decline of NWRO, the passing of black unrest would have produced the same result. As it was, the ebbing of black unrest dealt the death blow to an organization that was already greatly weakened.

Toward the late 1960's, the black movement which began in the mid-fifties subsided, and the poor peoples' organizations which it had

spawned were dying, if they were not already dead. For one thing, much of the leadership of the black movement was being absorbed into electoral politics, into government bureaucracies, into the universities, and into business and industry; correlatively, the ideology of protest was being repudiated, and the efficacy of electoral politics affirmed. As a result, the cadres of organizers dwindled, their ranks diminished by the concessions yielded in the name of the poor.

While there is no way of marking the exact time when the tide of unrest turned, the year 1968 might be considered such a point. It was the last year of major urban rioting (in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination); it was also the year that the Presidency passed from a liberal to a conservative leadership. With the election of 1968 and Nixon's accession to power, the class and racial injustices that had figured so prominently in the rhetoric and actions of earlier administrations, and that had encouraged protest among the black poor, gave way to rhetoric and actions emphasizing law and order and self-reliance, with the effect of rekindling shame and fear among the black masses. During Nixon's first term, in short, a mobilization against the black poor was mounted, with the welfare poor a particular target.

One immediate consequence of this changing political climate was to dry up many of the resources — especially government resources — upon which local WRO's had drawn. As funds for the Great Society programs were cut (and diverted into 'revenue sharing', for example), the already shrunken ranks of organizers were decimated. The welfare rights organizers who remained found that local administrators of the Great Society programs had become fearful, and would no longer support organizing the poor.

Under these influences, the militancy of the welfare poor all but vanished. As we noted

earlier, most local groups across the United States had been based on grievance work. But efforts to settle grievances for people had far less impact when they could not be backed up by demonstrations and sit-ins. With the ebbing of black unrest in the early 1970's, such actions were difficult to stimulate. Some of the few organizers who remained spent hours knocking on doors, manning the telephones, urging people to come out to planning meetings, and all the while exhorting them to keep faith with the vision of a better life which a poor people's organization could presumably bring into being. But the vision was no longer compelling; the demonstrations were fewer in number, smaller in size, and diminished in spirit.

At the same time, local organizers in this period also found that welfare administrations were stiffening their resistance to demands by organized recipient groups. The new national rhetoric diminished their responsiveness to the poor, and the passing of rioting and other forms of mass protest diminished their fear of the poor. If once they had been oriented toward the great turbulence in the streets beyond their office doors, now they were oriented to the growing signs of restrictiveness contained in regulations being issued from Washington and from their respective state capitals. Given both of these conditions, such local organizing efforts as did take place yielded less and less from welfare officials, and the fewer the gains achieved, the more difficult it became to sustain participation by even the more committed and loyal recipients. Month by month, the belief grew that the fight was being lost — even, perhaps, that it was no longer worth being fought.

It was also true that local WRO members themselves had lost whatever inclination they might once have had to help other poor people. The organization and formal grievance systems

served their individual needs, aiding them in solving problems and sometimes in obtaining special grants. In a rapidly changing political climate, and especially with public welfare expenditures becoming a target of public ire, the remaining members became fearful and drew inward, trying to protect their gains and their privileged access to the welfare system. The narrowest possible self-interest, and the ideological justification for it, thus came to dominate the few fragmented groups that survived.

Finally, NWRO's national leadership did little after 1970 to stimulate militancy or to retard the erosion of its membership base. It would have taken a strenuous, devoted, and resourceful program by the national leadership to try to buttress failing morale at the local level. In truth, there is no reason to believe that the effort could have succeeded. The fires of protest had died out, and organizers probably could not have rekindled them. The endless debates over the best means of building a mass-based permanent organization no longer mattered: whether by single- versus multi-issue organizing, or by single- versus multi-constituency organizing, or by decentralized versus centralized staffing patterns, or by placing less emphasis on material incentives in attracting members versus placing more emphasis on "educating" and "radicalizing" the membership. The fact is that an era of protest had inexorably come to a close.

But it was not an analysis of the forces making for the probable futility of local organizing after 1970 that turned the national leadership away from its membership base; it was the promise of welfare reform and of the organizational and leadership rewards which would become available in the course of a congressional struggle for reform. For just when the remaining local groups most needed support, NWRO launched its most ambitious lobbying program in the nation's capitol. Its consequence was to orient

local leaders toward Washington and away from the welfare centers where they still garnered some sustenance for their surviving members.

The occasion for this major lobbying investment was a nationwide radio and television address on August 8, 1969, when President Nixon announced a series of proposals for welfare reorganization. The Nixon proposals — known as the Family Assistance Plan (FAP) — called for the elimination of the AFDC program and its replacement with a program that would have guaranteed every family an annual minimum income on the level of \$1,600 for a family of four, to be paid for by the federal government. Moreover, the proposed program included the working poor (i.e., two-parent families) who would be made eligible for wage supplementation by a formula that disregarded the first \$720 of earned income for purposes of determining eligibility, and imposed a tax rate thereafter of 50 percent, until the family of four had a total income from wages and welfare of \$3,920, at which point supplementation would be discontinued.

The most urgent and the most straightforward political problem with which Nixon was trying to deal in proposing relief reform was the clamor among local officials for fiscal relief, a clamor generated by rising budgets in the states, counties, and cities. Pressure for reform was a direct consequence of the fact that the American poor had made a modest income gain through the welfare system in the 1960's. Enormous political pressure had built up at the state and local level in response to the resulting fiscal strains; in his televised address, the president acknowledged that the rising rolls were "bringing states and cities to the brink of financial disaster."

In the interim between the introduction of FAP in 1970 and its final defeat in 1972 the issue of welfare reorganization was high on the

NWRO had a large national office staff by this time. The operation was expensive to maintain, especially in a political climate that made fundraising increasingly difficult. The congressional struggle over welfare reform promised to give NWRO high visibility, thus enhancing its ability to raise funds. Finally, the interest of many groups and of the press in the issue of welfare reorganization promised to give extraordinary visibility to the representatives of a relief recipients' organization who joined in the lobbying process. The opportunity to achieve a large measure of national recognition for NWRO's top leadership was at hand and that was a powerful incentive. The decision, then, was to lobby.

Thereafter NWRO worked assiduously to produce analyses of the veritable melange of alternative bills and amendments that were placed before Congress, and it distributed these analyses widely through its newsletter and other mailings; it lobbied incessantly with individual congressmen; it helped organize anti-FAP caucuses within Congress; and, finally, it tried to rally local WROs across the country to devote themselves to lobbying activities, such as button-holing their local congressmen and participating in various demonstrations in the nation's capital. From the fall of 1969 onward, in short, NWRO devoted a substantial part of its resources to trying to shape the course of welfare legislation in Congress. FAP subsequently faded, but not because NWRO opposed it; for his own reasons, Nixon withdrew support from the bill.

But NWRO did not lobby simply to be effective in the legislative process. NWRO and its leadership obtained enormous visibility and substantial resources in the course of the struggle over welfare reorganization, thus reinforcing the illusion of its influence. Consistent with this illusion, NWRO's leadership deter-

national political agenda. Despite the furor, we advised George that NWRO should not plunge into the congressional maelstrom. We thought NWRO continually overestimated its effectiveness in the lobbying process. At the time NWRO had virtually no grassroots base left; far from remedying that circumstance (if it could have been remedied), the congressional struggle over the president's proposals would surely be a long and exhausting one, and just as surely it would divert the whole of NWRO's resources away from its base. Instead we thought that NWRO should turn back to the streets and welfare centers, with the aged and the working poor as new targets. The barrage of publicity over Nixon's proposals to supplement low wages might give a new legitimacy to campaigns to mobilize the working poor to obtain supplements through general assistance programs in the northern states.

But George decided otherwise. In reaching this decision he was constrained by a number of organizational problems. He was not, to begin with, unaware of the diminishing membership base and of the weakening militancy of local groups. It was therefore far from clear that an infrastructure existed that could develop organizing campaigns among new groups; it was also not clear that a sufficient grassroots base remained to mount resistance campaigns against the rising tide of welfare restrictiveness. To have announced either kind of campaign, only to have it fail, would have revealed NWRO's weakness at its base. In any case, he could not turn the organization toward multi-constituency organizing (e.g., toward the aged or the working poor) without killing the internal struggle with the established AFDC recipient leadership that had prevented such a turn at earlier points.

On the other hand there were strong inducements to join the fray over welfare reform.

mined to make its presence felt as the Democratic and Republican parties formulated their campaign platforms in the spring and summer of 1972. These events indicate just how invested NWRO had become in electoral politics and in an image of itself as being influential in electoral politics. This turn had been signaled by George at the convention in 1970 when he announced that "We've got to get into lobbying, political organization, and ward and precinct politics" (Martin, 131). With that rallying cry, a welfare recipients' organization which no longer had a constituency capable of storming a welfare center anywhere in the country issued a call to storm the American electoral system.

In June 1972 the NWRO leadership announced to its membership that "We will go to the Democratic National Convention in the same manner we have always dealt with an unjust system — with representation on the inside, but our real strength on the outside, in the streets."

A major demonstration was planned, and at a huge financial cost to the organization and its affiliates, about 500 leaders, members, and organizers actually attended. Given the extraordinary delegate composition of that particular Democratic convention, NWRO obtained 1,000 votes (about 1,600 were needed) supporting a plank calling for a guaranteed income of \$6,500 for a family of four. It was heady stuff. "We lost," NWRO announced in a post-convention newsletter, "but in a spiritual sense, we had won." (Just how great a spiritual victory had been won was to be revealed in November when in part because of McGovern's advocacy, at least in the early months of the campaign, of a guaranteed income of \$4,000 for a family of four, he was obliterated by the voters.) As for the Republican convention, there was no spiritual victory; it was, NWRO proclaimed, "No place for the poor."

A good number of local organizers had come



*Beulah Saunders, vice president of NWRO, speaking at the second convention of Massachusetts WRO in August, 1970. Roberta Grant, chairman of Massachusetts WRO, is on right. Photo by Bill Pastereich.*

in this period to think that there was "no place for the poor" in NWRO's national office. NWRO's national convention in 1971 was the setting for a revolt led by some of the senior organizers who objected to the fact that they were being provided with so little assistance from the national office at a time when local organizing was foundering. The organizer's complaints, however, met with little response from either the national staff or the National Coordinating Committee. In the continuing contest over resources and priorities, the national leadership consistently won, mainly because of their superior capacity to attract money and their superior capacity to attract publicity, even when the publicity was generated by the activities of local welfare rights groups. Consequently, many organizers — especially the more experienced ones — turned away from NWRO following the convention in 1971. Until that time, they had shown great loyalty, and could be depended upon to abide by the decisions of the national leadership. But no longer. NWRO had first lost its membership base; it then lost the allegiance of many of its senior organizers.

In any case, with the demise of the black movement, there were no resources to be had for organizing. Private elites — like government before them — had begun to withdraw support for organizing among the urban black poor. As one funding source after another put it, "We are no longer emphasizing poverty." NWRO rapidly fell deeply into debt, and in the fall of 1974 the national office was closed.

\* \* \* \* \*

NWRO failed to achieve its own objective — to build an enduring mass organization through which the poor could exert influence. Certainly NWRO did not endure; it survived a mere six or seven years, and then collapsed. Just as cer-

tainly, it did not attract a mass base: at its peak, the national membership count did not exceed 25,000 adults. And it is our opinion that it had relatively little influence in the lobbying process to which it progressively devoted the most of its resources.

But, in the final analysis, we do not judge NWRO a failure for these reasons. We ourselves did not expect that NWRO would endure; or that it would attract a mass base; or that it would become influential in the lobbying process. Rather, we judge it by another criterion: whether it exploited the momentary unrest among the poor to obtain the maximum concessions possible in return for the restoration of quiescence. It is by that criterion that it failed.

NWRO had a slogan — "Bread and Justice" — and NWRO understood that for the people at the bottom a little bread is a little justice. Had it pursued a mobilizing strategy, encouraging more and more of the poor to demand welfare, NWRO could perhaps have left a legacy of another million families on the rolls. Millions of potentially eligible families had still not applied for aid, especially among the aged and working poor, and hundreds of thousands of potential AFDC recipients were still being denied relief in local centers. To have mobilized these poor, however, NWRO's leaders would have had to evacuate the legislative halls and presidential delegate caucuses, and reoccupy the relief centers; they would have had to relinquish testifying and lobbying, and resume agitating. They did not, and an opportunity to obtain 'bread and justice' for more of the poor was forfeited.

*FRANCES FOX PIVEN of Boston University and RICHARD A. CLOWARD of Columbia University are the authors of Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail [Pantheon, 1977].*

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*May Day, 1977, occupation of nuclear construction site at Seabrook, New Hampshire. All photos in this article by Jerry Berndt.*

# FROM THE MOVEMENT

## THE SOCIALIST POTENTIAL OF THE NO-NUKE MOVEMENT

**Marty Jezer**

The no-nuke movement is currently the most visible manifestation of radical protest activity within the United States. It has mobilized thousands of people for civil disobedience demonstrations, forced public debate over the issue of nuclear power, slowed down construction at a number of nuclear power plant sites, and put the utility industry on the defensive. The recent May Day occupation of a nuclear construction site in Seabrook, N.H. by some 2,000 protestors, and the solidarity shown by the many hundreds who refused to accept bail until the State of New Hampshire accepted their terms for release on personal recognizance, exemplified the militance and discipline of the movement. The success of anti-nuclear organizations like the Clamshell Alliance — which organized the Seabrook occupation — attests to the fact that the protest spirit of the 1960's, despite innumerable obituaries, is far from dead.

The Clamshell Alliance builds on the tradition of the ban-the-bomb movement and the nonviolent phases of the civil rights and anti-war protests. The model has become a familiar and — to a point — a successful one. Dramatic acts of personal witness publicize an issue and lead to the creation of single-issue mass movements based on moral courage. Morality, at least among the affluent, is a potent organizing tool. Each of these movements grew sufficiently large to force concessions from the ruling class. The Test-Ban Treaty, the Voting Rights Act, and the one man (sic)-one vote court decision, and the limitation on aggression in Vietnam. But concessions defused the issues, and the movements never achieved the political basis to sustain themselves past the initial stage of moral outrage.

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Thus, after more than fifteen years of militant protest, the U.S. is still without a viable leftist party or a cohesive socialist theory.

It is possible that the Clamshell Alliance will follow in this well-defined path. If it succeeds in stopping nuclear power (that is, if the industry finds further investment too risky), its popular base will rapidly disappear. But more likely, the Clam will delay construction but not stop nuclear power. Its reliance on moral witness and direct action tactics will have isolated it from the mass of people, who demand answers to concrete questions about energy, jobs, the material conditions of their daily existence — questions that moral acts of civil disobedience do not answer.

That, at least, has been the pattern of previous mass movements, but the Clam has *evolved* out of that tradition and attempted to learn from past mistakes. The anti-war movement, for instance, was run by an elite hierarchy of movement organizers who planned the mass demonstrations which were what defined the movement's progress. People who were "in the movement" were in the movement as bodies, to do shit work and attend demonstrations. There was little concern for political education, organizational process or long-term grass-roots organizing. For the most part, people were *radicalized*, not *politicized*; that is, they were moved to political action without thinking in terms of political theory or long-term strategy. Sharing the apocalyptic mood of the no-nukers, anti-war protestors were concerned only with stopping the Vietnam war (as a moral necessity), not building a movement that might stop all wars in the future.

The Clamshell Alliance has broken decisively with the main organizational thrust of this model. It is structured to involve everyone in the political direction of the organization. As such, participation in the Clam — even on the most local level — often becomes a political

education. This is very exciting. The majority of Clam activists are new to protest politics and are introduced to the nuts and bolts of political practice. Moreover, the rank and file seem open and willing to discuss and learn about political theory. The anti-intellectualism and spontaneity so endemic to the New Left is for the most part missing. If the Clam seems theoretically naive from the outside, it is because there are not enough politically mature leftists acting as organizers and educators on the inside. The opportunity is there. Individual leftists within the Clam have been able to raise political issues and win support for their positions. In the past year, the Clamshell Alliance has moved away from liberal environmentalism to a more leftist perspective. Important struggles continue to take place around basic political issues: collectivity vs. individualism, confrontational politics vs. base building, environmentalism vs. economic issues, and the single vs. the multi-issue focus.

The discussions around these issues have gone something like this:

**1. Collectivity vs. Individualism.** The Clamshell Alliance has a formal decision-making process which is taken very seriously. Within the process are two contradictory tendencies: collectivism and individuality. Collectivism is expressed by the affinity-group structure. Everyone in the Clam belongs to an affinity group; free-lance participation in Clam activities is actively discouraged. The affinity groups were created for the direct-action occupations, but they have remained as an organizational form in local areas between demonstrations. (A local or regional grouping may be composed of members of two or more affinity groups.) Adherence to a formal group structure emphasizes collective practice and gives people experience in working as a unit. Leadership roles are often revolved and one of the successes of the structure is that members who are new to

politics have risen to responsibility because of their acknowledged leadership qualities.

On the other hand, the collective decision-making process, both on the affinity (or local) group and coordinating committee level, is by consensus. This places power in the hands of the minority, for one person or group can prevent a decision by blocking consensus. Concern that individual rights not be trampled is an essential part of Clam process, but much of this concern stems from an erroneous belief that majority rule is inherently hierarchical and coercive. The result is a form of ultra-democracy that makes decision-making tedious. Even the smallest administrative decisions tend to be passed back and forth between local and coordinating groups for discussion. But, on the positive side, the frustration many feel in coming to a decision has led people to reanalyze the process. Moreover, collective experience tends to temper the fear of hierarchical leadership. Though the tension between the two opposites remains unresolved, a slow but definite drift towards a more formalized collectivity is apparent.

This summer, for instance, the Clamshell coordinating body (composed of a representative from every affinity or local group) voted to set aside the days of August 6th through 9th for local actions. One group in Maine, however, decided to re-occupy the construction site at Seabrook in the hope of inspiring another mass confrontation. At an earlier time, such an action would have had widespread support and sympathy throughout the Clam. The *feeling* would have been that individuals or groups have the right to act as their conscience dictates, moral necessity demands direct action, and occupying Seabrook is what the Alliance is essentially about. This time, commitment to the process took precedence over the morality and spontaneity of the Maine affinity group's feeling. The coordinating body struggled to

persuade the Maine people to carry out their activity in their own local community. When the Maine people persisted in occupying the Seabrook construction site, the Clam gave no official recognition and the rank and file did not lend their support. A small gain for collectivity, but a gain forged from experience and not imposed by an organizer elite, which is what always happened before.

**2. Confrontation vs. Building a Base.** The Clamshell Alliance was organized explicitly to occupy the construction site at Seabrook, N.H., and its organizers saw nonviolent direct action as the principle weapon for stopping construction of all nuclear plants. There is still a widespread belief that if enough people occupy a plant site, nuclear power will be shut down. But this hard-nosed view is being challenged. A tendency within the Clam has come to see the idea of an occupation as merely symbolic. The ruling class cannot afford to be intimidated by direct action tactics, and will use whatever force is necessary to put such a movement down. The civil rights and anti-war movement offer evidence that the State will use violence against nonviolence if nonviolent tactics go beyond symbolic grounds. Moreover, the more isolated the movement is from a base of support, the easier government suppression becomes.

Leftists within the Clamshell Alliance, some of them looking beyond the immediate issue of nuclear power, have been urging the Clam to build contacts with working people and to expand its base of support. The situation is ripe for such a move, and only an obsession with direct action has prevented the Clam from making this a priority. To anti-war activists this might seem like a rehash of the problem SDS community organizers had with the National Mobilization and its emphasis on large mass demonstrations. But there is a distinction. The SDS organizers were either rootless students, or





middle class kids slumming in the ghetto. It is important to remember that nuclear plants are built only in rural areas, and that no-nuke organizations draw their strength from small cities and towns. Whether the activists are natives or newcomers recently migrated "back to the land," all share a desire to put down roots, to become part of the community. Base-building, in this context, means organizing ones' neighbors. Which is to say that the alienation toward middle America that was so pronounced during the anti-war movement is not manifest in the no-nuke movement, though the fear of being rejected remains a hindrance to actually getting down to local work.

This leads into a discussion of class. The Clamshell Alliance is predominantly white, middle-class with a counter-cultural orientation. But with the economic depression, this class is rapidly becoming proletarianized. Most "back to the landers" have not been able to buy land. To settle down in rural areas means going to work side by side with the native working class. Although many people in the Clam have become objectively working class, subjectively the bourgeoisie and counter-cultural values that they bring with them isolates them from the native working class. But breaking this isolation down is more than an ideological necessity ("to organize the working class"). For people in rural areas, it means making friends with their neighbors and becoming integrated in the surrounding community.

The base building tendency is asserting itself within the Clam. Recently, Clam groups in northern Vermont proposed to occupy the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant near Brattleboro in the southeastern part of Vermont. Representatives from the upstate groups came to Brattleboro fully expecting to get enthusiastic support. But the Brattleboro Clam decided that educational outreach within

the local community was more important than a one-shot civil disobedience demonstration that would make a big media splash and disappear. Their neighbors to the south, in Franklin County, Mass. — where two more nuclear reactors are planned in Montague — have already started an autumn-long canvassing campaign. Local organizing, Brattleboro argued, was far more of a challenge than going to jail, and potentially more effective, too. Urging their northern comrades to stay home and organize in their own communities, the Brattleboro people voted not to take part in any civil disobedience at their local nuclear plant — at least for now. (But the Clam being what it is, a few upstaters are going through with the "occupation" anyhow.)

A number of new political understandings are implicit in that decision. People are now beginning to define "direct action" in broader terms. It could mean quiet organizing as well as splashy demonstrations. The apocalyptic fervor has died down; the need for a long-term strategy is perceived. Morality in itself is no longer felt to be a basis for political action. To be effective one has to translate moral outrage into a political analysis. And this all leads to a more sophisticated level of struggle. Once one accepts that talking with one's neighbors and co-workers is more important than civil disobedience and going to jail, the question is raised: What does one say? What political wisdom does the no-nuke movement have to impart that might convince other people to join in the nuclear protest?

### ***3. Environmentalism vs. Economic Issues.***

Until this past year, the nuclear issue was fought primarily on the issues of environmental health and safety. Recently, leftists within the Clam and within the no-nuke movement in general developed an analysis that portrayed the nuclear industry and the investor-owned utilities (IOUs) that control over 75% of all

electricity generated in the United States as a paradigm of monopoly capitalism, with nuclear power plants as an inevitable result. The analysis, in brief, goes something like this: As regulated monopolies, IOUs are assured a fixed rate of return (i.e. profit) over and above their operating costs and capital investment. Because of this guaranteed profit, IOUs have no incentive to cut costs or operate efficiently. Indeed, the very opposite is true. The more money they spend and the more capital that they invest in their plant, the more profit they have to divy up among their stockholders. Thus IOUs have an economic incentive to invest in nuclear power. Nuclear plants are more expensive to build than other generating facilities. The increased capital investment is included in the rate base and passed through to the customer. Moreover, capital to build nukes comes from banks and financial houses who invest heavily in the utility industry. These financial powers benefit two ways from nuclear power: through interest rates and stock dividends. Thus nuclear power is an inevitable result of the expansive dynamics of the utility industry. And, a corollary, such favored reforms as conservation violate this dynamic. A cut-back in electric use lessens the need for an increase in generating facilities and destroys the opportunity for financial interests to profit from capital investment.

This argument is now an accepted part of Clam literature. Not everyone is willing to accept this paradigm as an economic model for the rest of society, but the mystification of economic theory has been shattered and the argument for socialism has ceased to be an ideological abstraction. By looking at the utility industry, people begin to see why socialism is a concrete prescription for running the economy in a humane and sensible fashion.

Once the economic issue is raised the limitations of single-issue environmentalism become apparent. This is especially true with

working people. Certainly many, perhaps a majority, have come to accept the no-nuke arguments about the health hazards of nuclear radiation. But protest is not yet their style; their sense of political impotence is overwhelming. The nuclear industry has succeeded in convincing them that nuclear power is an economic necessity. Agreeing with the no-nuke movement on environmental issues, working people still see the movement as threatening their economic security, their life-style, their jobs. If nukes are shut down, they ask, where will the electricity come from? The no-nuke movement has not come up with concrete answers; and, on the whole, has been insensitive to this kind of issue. This becomes a vicious circle. With no working-class participation, there is no impetus to address working-class issues. This furthers the gap between environmentalists and workers, and makes worker participation even less likely. In the absence of direct worker participation, it becomes the role of the left to make the no-nuke movement and environmentalism in general responsive to working class needs.

Objectively, the movements have much in common. For instance, the environmental movement sees environmentalism as a consumer issue. But the workplace is part of the environment as well. This connection can readily be made. The hazards of radioactivity threaten workers in uranium mines as well as people living downwind from the nuclear plants. Coal as a short-term substitute for nuclear power (until the transition to alternative energy sources is made) is not a viable solution unless miners control mine safety (and have the absolute right to walk out of sub-standard mines). Environmentalists have fought strip mining but have ignored the problems of deep pit mining. Appalachian black lung is not a fair trade-off for a nuclear-free New England. The mine worker struggle,

as a part of the overall energy picture, if explained properly, becomes a part of the anti-nuclear struggle.

Likewise, it is possible to make a class analysis of the energy issue; who is wasting electricity and for what purpose? The no-nuke movement places great faith in conservation, but tends to view it as a matter of individual responsibility: turning off lights, turning down thermostats, slowing down on highways. But working people are not wasting electricity. The average American has no margin to conserve. Instead, it is the monopoly that the automobile industry has over transportation policy, the wasteful advertising necessary to corporate profits in a consumer society, and the stupid glass office buildings that corporations build for themselves (too hot in summer, too cold in winter) that necessitate exorbitant amounts of electricity. By contrast, factories are rarely air conditioned in summer or heated in winter. Energy is a class issue. Rate structures favor heavy users at the expense of working people. Working people subsidize the ruling class' waste of energy.

As the no-nuke movement begins to make, these connections and advance these arguments it breaks out of the bind the utility industry has put it in over the issue of jobs. Nuclear power, utilities successfully argue, is necessary for full employment. Environmentalists, their propaganda goes, are against material progress and want to prevent working people from attaining the affluence that they, the environmentalists, themselves enjoy. The no-nuclear movement responds that alternative energy sources have the potential to provide even more jobs than nuclear construction, and point to studies that indicate that conservation practices and economic growth are not necessarily contradictory. But because the no-nuke movement does not have the resources to develop these jobs, their argument has no concrete basis. This

raises the question of patterns of investment and who controls financial capital. It forces the no-nuke movement to grapple with the whole question of financial capitalism and its need to generate profits regardless of human priorities.

**4. No-nuke vs. a multi-issue approach.** If the Clamshell Alliance decides that nuclear power cannot be stopped by direct action confrontations, no matter how militant or large, it must abandon its single-issue approach, broaden its analysis, and reach out to new constituencies. This is where leftist input could be decisive and the movement's socialist potential realized. But, as of now, the relationship between the no-nuke movement and the left is tenuous. The position of Marxists (vis a vis both nuclear power and the environment in general) is especially ambiguous. The *Guardian*, for example, has supported the no-nuke movement in the U.S., while approving the construction of nuclear reactors in socialist countries on the theory that these countries willy-nilly have worker health and safety uppermost in mind. (Which sounds very much like the old Stalinist notion that if you put a peasant on a state-owned tractor, s/he is no longer alienated and socialism is achieved.) The Soviet Union, which needs oil to fuel its increased production of private automobiles, is, like the United States, becoming dependent on nuclear power. Whether the USSR is a socialist country is a debatable point, but Cuba certainly is, and it, too, is building a nuclear reactor. But, cut off from nearby sources of oil due to the U.S. blockade, too poor to develop its own alternative sources, and dependent on the USSR for oil, Cuba probably has no choice but to follow the Soviet Union toward nuclear dependency. In Western Europe, where the no-nuke movement is stronger than it is here, Communist Parties have generally favored nuclear development as necessary for economic growth. Democratic Socialists (in Sweden, for instance)

have also been on the wrong side of the issue, although in France Socialists have started to give no-nukers tacit support.

Marxists, in general, perceive the environmental movement as middle-class and consumer-oriented. Correctly, they have criticized it for its insensitivity towards class issues and worker demands. But, on the whole, they have not analyzed it objectively to see what environmentalism can and should mean as opposed to what it is now. As I have tried to outline, environmentalism can be articulated along class lines. Moreover, any meaningful socialist movement will have to integrate environmentalist insights into its strategic vision and list of demands.

While Marxists have generally faltered on environmental issues, anarchists have made it their special field, and when people in the Clamshell Alliance begin to move left, it is anarchism that has allure. No wonder: from William Morris' pastoral utopia with its Luddite bias to Murray Bookchin's fantasy of liberated technology in a post-scarcity world, anarchists have put forward attractive visions of a future existence that has deep environmental appeal. Marxists cannot afford to ignore these visions and the questions they raise about small and intermediate-scale technology, decentralization and quality of life. Marxists need to address the issues raised by the no-nuke movement and environmentalism and, at the same time, provide these movements with the analytical and theoretical tools to deal effectively with the economic and social complexities of American life. Left to its own spontaneous development, the Clamshell Alliance — and organizations of its kind — will likely become mired in utopian anarchism; and the already existing polarization between the environmental movement and the working class will be reinforced.

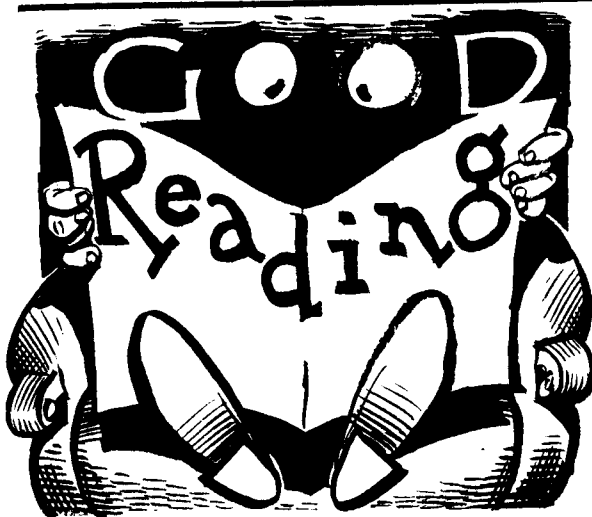
Fusing itself with the working class, building

a working-class socialist movement, is the most important task facing the left. But as environmentalism is not going to go away, it cannot be ignored. Either environmentalism is turned, so as to become class-oriented and in harmony with worker demands, or it will go its own way, splitting constituencies and detracting from the potential of a mass socialist movement.

The Clamshell Alliance offers a vehicle for a synthesis between environmentalism and the left. Insofar as the left can integrate itself with the working class, it offers the opportunity to integrate environmentalism with a working class movement. Leftists willing to work within the Clamshell process and to develop its political analysis can move the organization towards socialism and into the mainstream of revolutionary politics.

*MARTY JEZER is active in the Clamshell Alliance and was arrested during the Seabrook occupation. He is also a part-time farmer, dishwasher, writer, and regular contributor to WIN magazine.*

In "From the Movement" we want to publish short (3000 words) articles about current left activity — pieces which will specifically consider the strategic implications of current organizing. We hope that this section can serve as a forum for many of the unresolved and crucial questions facing the left today. Therefore, we would like to encourage those who are involved in current organizing efforts to send us articles which raise strategic and organizational questions for the left. We are more interested in analyses of the sources and implications of current organizing than in position papers or blow-by-blow descriptions without critique.



Frank Marquart, *An Auto Worker's Journal: The UAW from Crusade to One-Party Union*  
Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pa.,  
161 pages, hardback \$10.00

Frank Marquart began working in Detroit in 1914 (when he left Pittsburg to look for one of Henry Ford's five-dollar-a-day jobs). His wealth of experience in the auto plants, in unions and in socialist politics is reflected in his fascinating, clearly written "journal."

Since Marquart's book is published by a university press and is now available in only a \$10 hardback, it may unfortunately remain unread. There are several reasons for leftists to get this book in libraries if they can't afford to buy individual copies.

Unlike most memoirs written by CIO militants (Wyndham Mortimer on the UAW for example), this book is not written from a Communist Party point of view. Marquart joined the Socialist Party soon after he came to Detroit, and remained active in its left wing for many years. He is much more explicit about his political positions (including his mistakes) than most UAW authors. Marquart attacks the Communists when he thinks they were wrong,

but he is not preoccupied by anti-Communism like the Trotskyists and Social Democrats who have written about the U.A.W. In fact, the author praises the Communists for their work in the late 1920's when they put out "fresh and lively shop papers" in many auto plants.

Besides the interesting insights Marquart provides into Socialist and Communist politics in Detroit, he offers an important analysis of the UAW's bureaucratization (and the creation of "one party unionism.") Militants working in the auto industry will be particularly interested in how the shop steward grievance system was dismantled in a Dodge Local in which Marquart worked as educational director.

Finally, the author's observations on workers' education are extremely informative. Marquart actually gives examples of how he tried to translate socialist ideas into "Plain Talk" for a local union newspaper. He was good enough at his job as educational director of the Ford River Rouge local to be purged by UAW bureaucrats as the Reuther machine began to lay down the "one-party line."

Although *An Auto Worker's Journal* may be difficult to obtain, except by writing to the Penn State Press, it is a valuable book not only for students and teachers of labor history, but for comrades working in the auto industry.

*Jim Green*

Mary Robischon, Bruce C. Levine, and Martin Glaberman, eds., **Work and Society**

Published by Wayne State University's "University Studies and Weekend College Program", c/o WSU, Detroit, MI 48202, 348 pages, paperback, \$5.25.

Although there are several anthologies on work available, not to mention government

reports, oral histories, etc., *Work and Society* stands out as an especially good collection. The editors have assembled a fine range of historical articles on workers and the labor process, including Marxian pieces by E.J. Hobsbawm, Sheila Rowbotham, and David Montgomery, as well as a concise overview of U.S. Labor, 1836-1936, by Bruce C. Levine. There are also selections by liberal academics like David Landes, C. Vann Woodward and Clark Kerr, but these are also informative. The documents include brief selections by Marx, testimonies by workers, and apologies for the capitalist labor process by industrialists.

*Work and Society* also contains several contemporary analyses, one by Andrew Levinson, from a social-democratic viewpoint, an excerpt from the HEW report on worker dissatisfaction, and, most important, an incisive Marxian critique of the "American Economy" by Martin Glaberman and George Rawick.

This anthology will be valuable to radical teachers and students in a number of different contexts. The selections are brief, pointed, and well-written; the book may be more effective for teaching purposes than one comprised exclusively of radical material, because the editors clarify the differences between liberal, conservative and socialist analyses of work.

The book was published as part of the University Studies and Weekend College Program, and must be ordered directly from the University address above.

*Jim Green*

read this — seems likely to be one of the major political setbacks of the 1970s. Allan Bakke, a white male, rejected from the University of California at Davis medical school, sued the University, charging "reverse discrimination," since blacks with test scores and grades allegedly lower than his were admitted. The California State Supreme Court ruled in his favor, and if the U.S. Supreme Court supports the decision, affirmative action programs may be considered unconstitutional. It would be a serious political mistake to assume that affirmative action is mainly of concern to professionals and students; its principles are vital to working-class women and blacks of both sexes, and in fact working-class people are using such legislation more aggressively than the middle class in fighting racism and sexism. The attack on affirmative action is part of a larger program including anti-abortion, anti-ERA, anti-busing, and anti-gay planks around which the Right is now organizing effectively.

Several new publications can help socialists inform themselves about the issues of the Bakke case. The Health/Pac Bulletin of May-June 1977 contains two articles reviewing the discriminatory policies of medical schools. It is available for \$1.50 from Health/Pac at 17 Murray St., NYC 10007. The Boston Medical Committee for Human Rights has published a pamphlet which not only discusses the Bakke case but also shows how poor health among blacks is correlated to the inadequate number of black doctors. It can be obtained for 50¢ plus 25¢ postage from MCHR, P.O. Box 382, Prudential Center, Boston, MA 02199.

*Linda Gordon*

## The Bakke Decision

The Bakke decision of the California State Supreme Court — which may have been ruled on by the U.S. Supreme Court by the time you

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**Phil Mailer, Portugal: The Impossible Revolution?**

Black Rose Books, 3934 St. Urbain, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. 400 pages paperback, \$5.95

This is the best book so far on the Portuguese revolution. Written from a libertarian communist perspective, the book covers developments in Portugal from the military officers' coup of April, 1974 to the temporary setback of the left in November, 1975. The importance of the book lies in its emphasis on the revolution from below: on the activities of workers' committees and neighborhood associations, and on their role in pushing the revolution forward, beyond the limited goals which united the Armed Forces Movement. Another strength of the book lies in its understanding of the programmatic goals of the major political parties. The characterization of the program of the Socialists (PS) and Communists (PCP) as different variants of state capitalism is particularly convincing; and though the author's criticisms of the parties of the revolutionary left will be controversial, they raise important questions for leftists in advanced industrial countries. In particular, the author shows the difficulties encountered by relatively open worker's committees and neighborhood associations in attempting to meet their own needs and develop their own understanding of the goals of the revolution, without succumbing to the often destructive influences of organizations of the revolutionary left and the PCP, which saw these workers' organizations as potential bases for themselves. The book is clearly organized and well-written, and includes an excellent selection of documents and leaflets which marked the major turning points in the revolution.

*Frank Brodhead*

**Children of Labor**, produced by Al Gedicks, Noel Bruckner, Mary Dore and Richard Broadman.

Rental rates and orders from C.D. Film Workshop, 28 Fisher Ave., Roxbury, Mass. 02120. 617-440-7603.

*Children of Labor* is an unusual documentary which focuses explicitly on the radicalism of a certain group of working people — the Finnish immigrants of northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. The film is very useful because it shows us how important socialism was to these immigrants in their daily lives, not only as workers and union members but as consumers and community members. Finnish socialists and communists not only organized radical unions among miners and other workers, they founded viable cooperatives and cultural societies which served the needs of the people throughout the region.

This film should be used widely by the left because it shows why radicalism was important to working people. This documentary is an honest effort by radical film makers to reclaim part of the American left's lost heritage. As a result of its honesty, however, *Children of Labor* is sad in a way, because it shows clearly that the children of the Finnish radicals no longer have much use for their political legacy; it is impossible to watch this film without feeling a great sense of loss.

*Jim Green*

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# LETTERS

## To *Radical America*:

For all of their refreshing application of logic and common sense to the problem of class analysis, the Ehrenreichs' articles only reinforce much of the independent left's unwillingness to acknowledge or take part in the consolidation of a working-class movement with socialist politics. It leaves little room or reason for struggling with the class-blindness (in practice, class prejudice) of many left formations, and little reason for non-working class socialists to examine their own lack of engagement with the working class.

The Ehrenreichs note that any model of class structure tends to get "grey" at the edges. It is precisely for this reason that the "PMC-as-a-class" notion is not a useful concept for formulating political strategy. The PMC is not a class, but an amalgam of occupations drawn from the grey and not-so-grey edges of what can be identified as three different classes. We have working-class occupations (high school teachers, social workers, nurses), professional class occupations (college professors, doctors, lawyers, entertainers, writers, artists), and managerial class occupations (government administrators, factory managers, school principals, administrators in the media, universities, etc.)

From these three classes, the authors pick occupations which share a common involvement in the production, dissemination, and reinforcement of culture. The fact that all of these occupations are related to the production of a single set of goods or services hardly makes them a class — any more than a shared involvement in steel production places stockholders, engineers, plant managers, and blue-collar steelworkers in the same class.

The Ehrenreichs argue that their PMC takes in no broader a range of occupations than those that exist within the more traditional working class. I would argue that the range is qualitatively broader precisely because it crosses the lines of relationship to the production process, authority, privilege, and power that define class.

Concretely, we would say that the case worker in

the Welfare Department is *not* in the same class as her supervisor, who can hire and fire, shift schedules, and re-write job descriptions. There is a division of labor in the delivery of social services just as there is in the production of steel. The social workers' job is not to design or oversee the delivery of services, it is to deliver a pre-designed service. The case worker who hands you a free ticket to \$130 in food stamps today, may give you only \$5 next month if that's what the higher ups order. Similarly, the high school teacher, a relatively privileged worker within the working class, is not in the same class as the high school psychologist who has a profession. The psychologist can quit the school staff and go into private practice. A doctor on salary at a clinic can quit anytime and hang out her shingle, as can the legal services lawyer. Teachers can't quit and start schools, without the capital of buildings, materials, etc., i.e. without having the capital that would put them out of the working class.

Imagine the dilemma of our socialist social worker. On a given Wednesday night, there are two meetings in her town, one of the local PMC Socialist Club, another of a local welfare rights group. Where does the social worker belong? At the PMC meeting, she can discuss or act on political problems with her doctor, her lawyer, principals from the local schools, and maybe an engineer and the public-relations person from the local factory. At the welfare rights meeting, she will be pressed to explain the latest plans for benefit cuts, and to coordinate struggles of social workers for better working conditions with the struggles of recipients for better benefits. Which of these activities is more likely to produce unification between different working-class occupations to fight for classwide interests? The PMC meeting reinforces the false identification of service workers with the managers and professionals who are their bosses. What's worse, it intrudes on the process of two "non-quiescent" sectors of the working class, social workers and welfare recipients, from forging some practical unity around class demands. The PMC meeting is a political swamp, with professional class interests shifting discussions to the right, without a counter-balance of working-class interests. The working-class people present defer to the professionals, and are fewer in number. The welfare rights meeting is skewed more to the left. The recipients are

more likely to be tough on any illusory professionalism by the case worker, more likely to be a multi-racial group, and to have a concrete stake in winning the support of case-workers for more liberal benefits.

The personal implications of the PMC theory for socialists struggling with occupational choices are similarly to turn people away from the working class. The authors are right in debunking the self-styled "new communists" for their often sterile approach to "colonizing" in the shops, but class mobility among socialists is an important personal and political issue. Imagine 28 year old Joe Red, a leftist with two years of engineering school somewhere way back in his checkered job history. He's just started working with some friends doing community organizing, and the question of focusing the work and maybe going into shops comes up. Where does the PMC analysis fit in? Is there something wrong with leftists (particularly those whose family backgrounds or work-histories haven't sealed them into the PMC) socializing themselves into working-class life? Is it wrong for people to seek personal satisfaction by taking jobs which afford them the opportunity to do meaningful political work in shops?

The Ehrenreichs have upheld the importance of not letting personal needs be crushed by political work. Are the personal satisfactions of those who do base work amongst the working-class so few and fleeting that the alternative of doing this work is not worth consideration? Indirectly, the Ehrenreichs again encourage personal aggrandizement, i.e. maximizing one's occupational opportunities, almost as a political strategy. Since case-workers and MSW's, nurses and nurse-practitioners, are all alleged to be in the same class, why not take the promotion? One reason is that it's less difficult to organize your peers than the workers whose boss you are. Few of us have succeeded in approaching sanely the issue of occupational choices and organizing, never mind resolving it. But dismissing the attempts of leftists to proletarianize their life situations as sheer martyrdom doesn't help.

T. McCarthy  
Long-time tenant activist

### To *Radical America*:

In your introduction to the Ehrenreichs' article on the Professional/Managerial Class (PMC), you comment that the New American Movement has a definition of the working class so broad that it is "strategically useless." Though the relation between strategy and descriptions of class structure is a complex one, I would argue that NAM's definition of the "expanded proletariat" does have some strategic implications. For example, it emphasizes the dynamic processes involved in the changes in class structure in advanced capitalism, such as the proletarianization of strata that in previous periods would have been considered part of the middle classes. It also emphasizes groupings such as housewives that are often not considered "worthy" of strategic thinking.

Nevertheless, many of us in NAM, including the Ehrenreichs, are not satisfied with our present description of the class structure in the United States. There are, however, other class analyses of advanced capitalist society which lead in more fruitful strategic directions than the PMC analysis.

An initial problem with the Ehrenreichs' article is that it ignores a long history of investigations of class which begin with the recognition of the complex class structure we have to deal with. Marx certainly recognized this, as demonstrated for example in works ranging from the *18th Brumaire* to the last chapter of *Capital* Vol. III (For more on Marx's ideas, see also Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and Middle Class in Marx", *Studies on the Left*, vol. 7, # 1 (1967).) The question of the middle class was the subject of a debate between Bernstein and Kautsky among others — and Lenin had some interesting comments on their debate (see his *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 202). A number of contributions on this topic have appeared in *Marxism Today* over the last six years. And an important recent contribution to this is by Eric Wright, "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Society", *New Left Review* #98.

On the other hand, I don't know of much discussion among Marxists of what the Ehrenreichs call the "orthodox" two class model. If there is an orthodoxy today, it is in the recognition that between a working class that (usually) includes some white collar workers as well as the blue collar workers, and the capitalist

class, there exists the "middle strata" which includes the traditional petty bourgeoisie, as well as most managerial personnel, many professional and semi-professional and technical people, etc.

Within this type of analysis there are variations as to the class position of a particular group. For example, unlike the Ehrenreichs, I would put most teachers, many technicians, etc., into the working class. There are differences in political thinking and strategic implications between the PMC model and these other models that go beyond the question of categorizing various groups into the working class or the middle strata. The most obvious difference is that the Ehrenreichs emphasize the homogeneity of the middle strata. What we need however is an analysis that reveals as precisely as possible what differences exist in the middle strata.

For strategically it is clear that at least major parts of the middle strata will have to be won over to the leadership of the working class — what Gramsci terms the formation of a new "historic bloc" — if there is to be a successful socialist revolution in this country. We need to know the immediate and long range interests of the various non-working class groupings in order to construct the programs and alliances that will lead to the formation of this new historic bloc. The PMC analysis is not very helpful in this respect. It doesn't facilitate an analysis of class dynamics — how and why various strata are moving closer to the working class through a process of proletarianization.

The basis the Ehrenreichs provide for describing the middle strata as a relatively monolithic unity doesn't aid in deciphering the differences and dynamics of the various middle strata. They argue that the PMC is a separate class because (1) those in the PMC are in positions of control over the working class (2) as mental workers, they have appropriated the "skills and culture once indigenous" to the working class. Their first point confuses the authority of the manager with that of the teacher or nurse. The former is a direct agent of the capitalist class involved in the extraction of surplus value or surplus labor, the latter are not.

Their second point also has problems. It seems both an extreme exaggeration of what the middle strata "took" from the working class, and an inaccu-

rate idea of how socialism will alter the division of labor now in existence under capitalism. That is, socialism will not end specialization or the existence of experts. Rather, their relations will be different than under capitalism. The kinds of status hierarchies and rewards, and class biased selection procedures that operate presently will be eventually eliminated, and so on.

Certainly there exist a variety of contradictions between the different middle strata, and the strata and groupings within the working class (which we have to beware of seeing as completely homogeneous). However, the middle strata are not "hegemonic" over the working class, as the Ehrenreichs at times claim. Rather, much of the middle strata function as agents of capitalist hegemony over the working class — but at the same time are themselves subject to that hegemony. That is, the middle strata don't form an independent force with its own culture that dominates the working class. Moreover some of the middle strata

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have long term interests that are not in "ultimate concordance" with the capitalist class, as the Ehrenreichs argue, but with the working class.

A key strategic question is how that concordance of interests between the working class and certain strata can be realized in terms of real alliances and joint struggles. Class analysis as categorization doesn't help much with this problem. *Class analysis basically has to be concerned with the dynamics of class struggle, with which groupings and sectors are in motion and around what problems.* Class analysis has to focus on politics and ideology, etc. — areas which are not reducible to class structure.

The Ehrenreichs also explain the present state of the US Left — "isolated and fragmented, still based largely in the PMC" — in terms of the antagonisms they see between the working class and the middle strata. This ignores a number of historical factors, the experience of the left in other countries, and the increasing numbers of working class people in the left. More important, it ignores the relation between left organization and mass movement. The left today is rooted in the mass struggles of the 60's and early 70's. Only *mass struggles* on a correspondingly broad scale in other sectors of the population will open the door to commensurate growth in those sectors.

Richard Healey  
Political Secretary  
New American Movement

Dear People:

I agree with *Radical America's* interest in understanding radicals' class background. But I don't think Barbara and John Ehrenreich's "Professional-Manual Class" helps us to understand that or US class structure.

It seems to me that they have provided a theory which justifies the practice of treating the "middle class" as the enemy. On the other side they have also provided a rationale for organizing the college-educated only. Their basic analysis is of the "objective antagonism" between the "PMC" and the working class. Yes, they have a throw-in conclusion about the need for political unity between these groups. But that ending is only a moral exhortation which contradicts their analysis.

The Ehrenreichs' approach of isolating a single segment leads to a one-sided distortion of what must be seen as relations. Part of the problem is matters of historical understanding; for example they look at the "technocratic ideology" and claim it is the ideology of the "PMC". They never look at how it fits the needs of the more sophisticated (corporate liberal) capitalists of the Progressive Era.

But mostly the problem is how they define and use class.:

- The Ehrenreichs start out defining class so flexibly as to talk about groups' "coherent lifestyles" at the same theoretical level as relations to production. They end up using their class categories so rigidly that they treat the sixties/New Left as primarily a class movement rather than view it as a student movement.
- Their definition of class relies on the bourgeois job descriptions of the "PMC" functions and occupations. This skips over the very important analysis of the relations of production (e.g. how foremen or nurses relate to their supervisors and higher-ups). They even go so far as to name their new class with Census Bureau categories.
- The Ehrenreichs look at the positions of managers and see only that they serve an unproductive ideological position of controlling wage labor. They ignore the importance of managers (and professionals) in producing profits. They also do not analyse the managerial function of the early craftspeople. All this for the sake of neat classifications.
- One of the larger political problems is that their education/lifestyle emphasis leads to lumping together managers and professionals, despite their great difference in production.
- Overall, the Ehrenreichs have taken a don't-trust-anyone-before-1960 approach to class theory. By throwing Marx out in a paragraph without analyzing his theory, they avoid some hard and important questions. But it is impossible to move forward without dealing with the past. For the most part I don't think they move much beyond John Kenneth Galbraith's technocratic class.

A contrast to the Ehrenreichs' analysis is Erik Olin Wrights discussion of class (*New Left Review* #98). Wright concludes that there is a range of those who control others' labor power, who are in a *contradictory class location* between capitalists and other wage

labor. He also sees a separate and contradictory group of semi-autonomous employees who range between the other wage laborers and the petit-bourgeoisie, but who only control their own work.

But even Wright's approach is only a crude first step. There is a certain self-indulgence in limiting the debate around class to the middle strata. We need a Marxist analysis of the middle strata, but class analysis should not become therapy for that group. Questions about sex, race, geographic differences, educational and ideological differences, age differences, state workers/private, relations between workers and consumers, paid and unpaid labor, etc. are also very important to answer.

David Webster

#### An Appeal for Help:

Thanks to the positive response to Volume I of *Gay American History* [from which *Radical America* reprinted an article in Vol. 11, No. 4], I am now working on Volume II. For this new book I would appreciate your help.

I am interested in knowing about all kinds of sources documenting various aspects of American homosexual life from colonial times to the present. I am particularly interested in sources that relate personal experiences of ordinary (non-famous) Lesbians and Gay men. Such documents might include diaries, letters, and unpublished manuscripts.

After 1890 evidence is generally more available and for this period I am especially interested in three areas of homosexual life: oppression, resistance, and the varieties of same-sex love. For all periods I am interested in hard-to-find sources referring to Lesbians.

I may not be able to answer or thank you all personally because of the size of this project; but I would very much like to publicly acknowledge all research assistants, so please tell me if such public acknowledgement is acceptable.

Thank you.

Jonathan Katz  
c/o Raines and Raines  
475 Fifth Ave.  
N.Y., N.Y. 10017

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