

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE

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CHILEAN PATCHES  
ASSEMBLY LINE POLITICS  
RADICAL SERVICES & SERVICE WORKERS

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# **RADICAL AMERICA**

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# INTRODUCTION

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment of women workers is not incidental, but virtually universal. There are few women who have been employed without having faced this problem, except those in totally sex-segregated situations. The failure to understand this universality results from blaming-the-victim attitudes, the idea that women themselves somehow stimulate the harassment; for instance, many falsely assume that mainly young or pretty women get harassed. Sexual harassment is rather part of the very language of communication between the sexes, part of the essence of gender in our male-supremacist culture. And as such it is a vivid and important illustration of how relations not exclusively defined by the capitalist mode of production invade the process of production.

Sexual harassment is a form of social control of *all* women and of a large segment of the working class. In recent years the women's movement has reminded us not to underestimate the role of direct violence and the fear of it as a form of social control, even as we must also remember more ideological means of ensuring conformity. The feminist attack on this problem is not new; as Mary Bularzik shows in her article in this issue, nineteenth-century women labor organizers also tried to struggle against sexual harassment. They faced then, as others do now, the misconception among most trade unionists and socialists that the problem is an anomaly, a minor addition to the general problems of women workers. Instead, sexual harassment is one of the central issues in the struggle for better working conditions; and we see Bularzik's research about it as an

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important contribution not only to women's history but to working-class history.

Sexual harassment reminds women that their primary social definition is in sexual relation to men, and that this sexual relation is indistinguishable from a general relation of submission to dominance. Bularzik's article also suggests that the particular function of workplace harassment is to make waged employment, like all public activity, uncomfortable for women. The notion that women belong at home has been only slightly transformed; outside the home women are socially defined as having no privacy nor personal integrity. Clearly there is a tension here, as Bularzik shows, between the need for women's labor and the maintenance of female subordination which is founded on women's special role in the family. Nor can this form of sexism be seen merely as a tool of "the bosses," manipulating women in and out of the labor force. Historically, workingmen have often fought to maintain their relative occupation privilege by keeping women out of jobs, out of skilled jobs, and out of craft unions; and sexual harassment was one of their weapons.

One of the complexities of understanding, and struggling against, this problem is that there is a thin line between harassment and teasing. At some workplaces men and women are acquaintances, occasionally friends; and even become lovers or marry. Women as well as men can enjoy sexual play and sexual attention, and where work is oppressive such play becomes particularly pleasurable. For women specifically, employment is often desirable specifically because it provides space for wider sociability and personal freedom hard to get as a full-time housewife. The sex/gender system, like it or not, has constructed categories that push sex play into patterns of dominance-submission; and women can often enjoy even this patterned play when it does not violate

their dignity. (Though some women find they must suppress their own sexuality because the rules of the game are so oppressive.) It is very difficult for an outsider to know when a man's whistle or off-color invitation is offensive. And it is possible for concern with harassment to lead to moralistic, prudish positions if we are not thoughtful, a problem feminists have always had.

The damage to women from workplace harassment has been substantial. Lack of comfort, at best, fear for safety at worst, have dissuaded many women from challenging sex segregation in jobs, from participating in workplace politics, from being able to see themselves as members of the working class as well as women. Within the general context of sex discrimination, sexual harassment has thus been partly responsible for women's greater poverty, lack of saleable skills, and lack of political power. Even the most gutsy women have found it hard to resist the idea that somehow we should be able to escape harassment if we could find a safer way to dress, a milder way to act. Harassment has made women long for invisibility.

At the same time sexual harassment (and telling about it afterward) is a social practice through which male groups unify. Such groups can pressure individual men to participate in the practice and prevent them from opting out or relating to women differently. The system can set up the illusion of a zero-sum game in which a woman's gain in respect is a man's loss. Our point is not that men are equal victims. By participating in sexual harassment men gain certain benefits, power. Our point is that sexual harassment is not only an individual transaction but a socially enforced pattern.

## SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS

For the last decade or so, the growing social service sector has been of particular interest to

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socialists. In addition to analyzing the nature of this sector and the reasons for its growth, socialists have participated in many of the reform struggles which won new or greater services. Unionization of service workers, and struggles by workers and clients against cutbacks in services and staffing, have been particularly important in the last few years. And many conflicts arising within the social services involve crucial issues of race and sex.

An increasing number of socialists and radicals can be found in service work as a job or as a career. For them, these larger issues are played out against the day-to-day reality of bureaucratic paralysis, an impossible work load, a lingering mystique of "professionalism," and job insecurity. Many people have entered service work jobs for the same reasons that they became socialists: an opposition to capitalism and a desire to (at least) change it; and because they are concerned about human pain and suffering and want to be directly involved with people of different classes. For many workers in the social services, the daily exposure to the "functioning" of the system has driven them beyond the belief that minor adjustments of our society would be sufficient, and towards a socialist alternative. In either case, those in social service jobs who actively try to use their positions to better the lives of clients find themselves in the dilemma described by the Ehrenreichs in their recent *Radical America* essays on the "Professional-Managerial Class." That is, social service workers who would be the advocates of the oppressed find that their jobs are designed to make them behave as the long arm of the oppressor.

The state has not been the only provider of social services. For decades, socialists and radicals have attempted to establish some kind of service work as an adjunct to their "more political" work; and debates over breakfast

programs, health clinics or free schools have consumed many hours of their time. What can these experiences in doing service work do to illuminate the situation of a radical or socialist service worker employed in state or private agencies? This is the subject of Ann Withorn's article, "Surviving as a Radical Social Service Worker." Examining the service experiences of the Farm Workers Union, Students for a Democratic Society, the women's movement, the Black Panther Party, and the Communist and union movements of the 1930s, she finds that many of the issues raised within them are similar to those arising in the context of more established work: problems with defining quality of service, the difficulty and importance of providing explicitly "political" service, and the ambiguous relationship between clients and workers. Moreover, many people involved in doing service work as part of a political movement have tried to organize their work, and to create relations among workers and between workers and clients, that reduce the alienation and objective antagonisms that are built into the work of state or private agencies.

### SHOPFLOOR POLITICS

We have received many favorable comments about a recent *Radical America* article by John Lippert describing and analyzing a wildcat strike at an automobile assembly plant in Detroit ("Fleetwood Wildcat," *RA* Vol. 11, No. 5). In the course of this analysis, Lippert stressed the greater strength, solidarity, and leverage of workers *inside* the plant, and the dissipation of this strength that occurred once the workers had walked out.

In this issue we are printing a speech given by Lippert to students at the Weekend College of Wayne State University. Here he analyzes in greater depth the organization, social relations, and different day-to-day concerns of workers in the plant where he works. Of particular

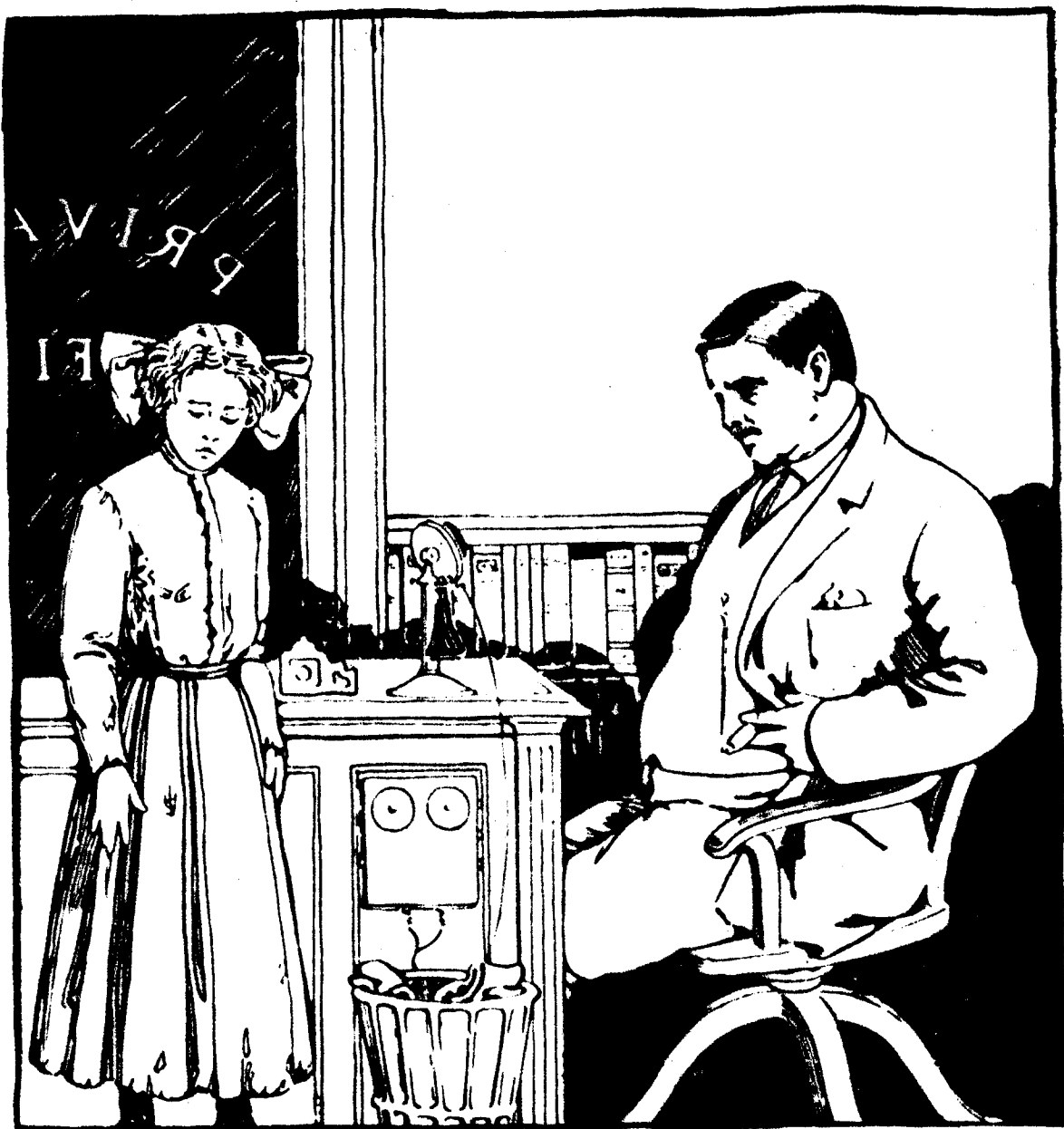
importance is his identification of "vanguard" workers — those workers, mostly young, who take the lead in resisting management's plan of getting the greatest amount of labor for the least amount of money. Many on the left use the term "vanguard" to describe those workers who agree with their particular program or line. Lippert uses the term differently, focusing particularly on the "vanguard" worker's rejection of the fundamental premise of modern labor relations and even of many on the left: that there is such a thing as "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work." Instead, by closely examining the actual experience of production, Lippert shows the way in which the "vanguard" workers take the lead in the daily shop floor struggle to reject the "work for wages" exchange, and to establish a greater degree of workers' control in the non-stop struggle over the intensity of labor.

We have far too few analyses, such as Lippert's, of the daily struggles over work, and it is hazardous to generalize from those we do have. Yet Marxists have generally held that industrial production is progressive in the sense

that it "socializes" and "disciplines" the workers, creating the preconditions for socialist consciousness and organization. Whatever the historical truth of this observation, Lippert shows that the "vanguard" workers in his plant are precisely those who have *not* internalized the need to produce, who are in a sense the least "disciplined." And other past and present experiences tell us that industrial struggles have been generally initiated by newly proletarianized workers — by the young, or by those recently forced off the land. Following Lippert's observations, we are reminded of the radical significance involved in rejecting the definition of oneself as "a worker."

Strategically, Lippert gives us no easy answers. He calls for an increasing self-consciousness on the part of the "vanguard" workers, and an attempt to organize greater coordination and articulation among such workers in different work places. While this may be somewhat romantic or utopian as a strategy, its core of truth is that alienation can be fought and overcome by those who have reason to hate it, and work will be transformed by those for whom it is a necessity.





*Cartoon by Frank Hazenplug for the Womens Trade Union League, c. 1912.*



# **SURVIVING AS A RADICAL SERVICE WORKER**

## **Lessons From the History of Movement-Provided Services**

*Ann Withorn*

Over the past fifteen years there has been a great increase in the importance of what we call "social services". Nationally, over five billion public and private dollars are currently spent on a wide range of activities: day care; homemaker services; drug and alcohol services; community residences for youth, the mentally retarded or the mentally ill; specialized advocacy programs for children, old people or the handicapped; to name only a few. The number of workers employed throughout these services is uncertain; but estimates are that more than a half a million people are employed in such programs, excluding health workers and school employees.

Although no one can estimate numbers, anyone with experience in social services knows that there is a small but noticeable number of self-conscious radicals out there doing social work in a wide range of settings. We find feminists, third world activists and socialists in day care, mental health, drug and youth services and in public welfare bureaucracies. As individuals, many of these leftists are struggling to define a sense of what it means to be a radical in their workplace. Sometimes small groups are organizing, either around traditional trade union issues or around more amorphous questions of "radical practice" and "quality service." A small and growing socialist literature is developing which addresses these problems (for example, *Catalyst: A Socialist Journal of Social Services* has just begun publication in New York City), but social service workers are still at an early stage of self-awareness about the radical potential of their activity. The purpose of this article is to examine the experience of radicals who have provided services in structures

which are directly linked to their politics: feminist health workers, members of the United Farmworkers Unions, Black Panthers and others. The issues which have arisen in such movement-provided services are similar to the problems which face service workers in the established system today: How can service provision be an integral part of our political work? Can we create services which are not exploitative and hierarchical? What type of service work is most in harmony with a radical political vision?

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

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

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

deny any of the immediate usefulness of our work.

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

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

Finally, we need to develop a clearer sense of how our service activity — as individual workers and in groups — is connected to broader social and political movements in the society. This is

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

Movement service efforts throughout this century explicitly addressed all these questions, by trying to explicitly define service work as a potential tactic. Although there are no obvious answers in the history of such endeavors, there may be some suggestions as to how to more realistically approach the problems imbedded in the tasks.

#### **SOCIAL MOVEMENT SERVICES: PRE 1960s**

At one time or another, most of the important social movements in the United States have engaged in service work as part of their political activity. Although they differed in the degree to which they acknowledged and valued services as a tactic, there are many similarities and patterns which emerge from even a brief history of their efforts.

Early feminists (late 19th early 20th-century) provided adult education, employment services, day care and even refuge houses for women. Although always tinged with the class confusion so characteristic of that period, these activities were, nevertheless, important in establishing a definition of feminism which, for many, went beyond the limited notions of suffrage. These feminists established an historical tradition for wide-ranging activities which would resurface later in the century.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also engaged in service work. The idea of "one big union" lead them to create clothing exchanges, soup kitchens, lending libraries and even flop houses in the areas where they organized. Such services were especially important in organizing miners in the west, where few public or private services were available. The IWW exhibited a problem typical of left services, however: their lack of organizational stability and structure made it difficult for them to maintain the services they organized for any extended period of time and the services themselves suffered because they lacked continuity.

The European socialist workers who organized the Workmen's Circle at the beginning of this century had a different problem. The Workmen's Circle was explicitly organized to provide insurance, burial assistance, and other services to "progressive" workers. It was not overtly linked to either the Socialist Party or the AFL. During the 1920s the organization expanded in terms of services offered to workers and increased the number of workers it attempted to serve. However, in order to avoid the political upheaval caused by splits between socialists and communists, it was forced to retreat from its earlier, more explicitly socialist, focus and as a result became almost identical to other private service agencies.

Services have also been a part of the activities of many Black groups throughout this century. Marcus Garvey, for example, established a corps of "Black Cross" nurses and more general service centers which helped with housing, employment, and income problems. The Black Muslims and other nationalist groups have also invested major amounts of time and resources into service work. Here the strong sense that Black people were victimized by white society provided an immediate rationale for whatever service work was attempted; a rationale not so available to socialist and other left groups who

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were often more interested in emphasizing the potential power of the working class than its victimization.

American Communists in the 1930s and 1940s engaged in extensive service activity, although usually in the name of the Unemployed Councils or individual CIO unions, and not as Communist Party services. These included, but were not limited to, housing assistance, clothing exchanges, and help with attaining welfare benefits. Many CIO unions such as the UAW, the Longshoreman's Union, the United Electrical Workers and the UMW, created service programs during the 1940s. Such union-run programs were wide-ranging and, on the whole, far more imaginative than those of either public or private agencies. Usually run by leftists within the unions, these programs provided health services, counseling services, aid in provision of welfare benefits, housing services, educational services, and recreational services to union members and their families. Because of their more secure funding sources and organizational bases, these CIO service programs of the 1940s are the most successful examples of service work done by leftists prior to the late sixties.

Bertha Reynolds was a social worker and leftist who established the United Seamen's Service program in New York City during World War II. Her experience there led her to see great promise in service work as a political tactic. As she said:

*When we met workers and talked with them about their problems — especially when we were able to actually be of help — they began to trust us, as activists. So, it was not just as progressive trade unionists that we made an impact on the merchant marine, it was as service workers too.*

Unfortunately, the anti-Communist forces in

the CIO recognized this potential also. When Communists were purged from the CIO, their service work came to an end as well. The unions went even further: they abandoned altogether the notion of having service programs as integral parts of trade union activity. Instead, the CIO unions, and the AFL-CIO as a whole, chose to affiliate with local "Community Chest" or "United Funds" to provide services that might be used by union members. Only a few unions, most notably the UAW and the Mineworkers, maintained strong service programs and with them, any idea that there might be more to a labor movement than higher wages and "fringe benefits".

Despite the variety of early movement efforts, two common trends are evident from even a brief overview. The first is simply the recognition that service work almost always emerged as one means of expressing left politics. Desire for social change was often combined with the urge to do something immediate about the human pain which resulted from the old order. Indeed, perhaps it is fair to say that *all* early left organizing included service work, but that some groups were more self-conscious about their services than others.

Coupled with this seemingly inevitable urge to provide service, however, came an almost equally predictable debate around the appropriateness of service work. Is it "reformist" to provide services; do they decrease militancy in confronting the system? These arguments occurred within the Women's Christian Temperance Union as well as the IWW and Communist Party.

While they were seldom resolved, it is clear that having a clear, limited constituency helped make service work easier. Early feminists and black nationalists could provide services to women and blacks without letting down their confrontive stature in regard to men or white

society. Left (male dominated) services often seemed much more limited by the idea that providing services was a sign of weakness, or only a soft diversion from the "harder" task of creating militant situations. Even CIO unions were only most able to provide services during World War II, when workers' services needs could clearly be blamed on "the war effort", not on any purported weakness in themselves.

### RECENT MOVEMENT SERVICES:

The 1960s brought about an expansion of political activity and a loosening of radical organizational forms. The Women's Movement, the New Left, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements all engaged in political work which was less concerned with defining "correct" tactics than with developing a range of forums for political consciousness raising and activity. This was an environment which more readily supported service work as a legitimate radical activity because it included more of life in its definition of what was "political." Accordingly, the community organizing project of SDS, the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) engaged in extensive service activity in poor urban communities. SNCC provided a similar (if more besieged) experience in the rural south through its provision of Freedom Schools, community centers and child care services.

ERAP projects operated in approximately ten cities for usually less than three years, from 1963-1965, and were seriously tainted by the paternalism inherent in white organizing of a black community. While they varied immensely from project to project, almost all provided some employment, housing and welfare counseling, some community child care, tutoring and adult education. Women in the projects were especially likely to provide the services, sometimes for the sexist reason that they were not seen as effective at the "heavy" block organizing which

## MENTAL HEALTH

- I. Guidelines for Choosing a Therapeutic Environment
- II. Resources for Counseling and Training

- III. Help and Hotlines
- IV. Halfway Houses
- V. Challenging the Mental



was the only activity deemed (by the male organizers) to be "politically important".

In spite of the lack of value placed on service work by male organizers, however, most ERAP projects continued to provide services. The ultimate reason for doing so was often offered apologetically, as in the Report from Chester (PA):

*Such projects tend to be of a scale that is much more easily accomplished initially and it is necessary to have some sort of project in which people can have the experience of working together.*

Women went on from ERAP (and from a similar situation in SNCC) to adopt a much less utilitarian view of service work. The Cleveland ERAP project, especially, began to value services for themselves, because they provided a way to give immediate, real assistance to people, to explore the meaning of participatory democracy, and to expand the notion of what a broad social change would entail. As women from Cleveland, Trenton and Mississippi began to form the first parts of what would become the

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Women's Liberation Movement, many brought with them a set of experiences which demonstrated that child care, health and housing services, etc., could be directly and fruitfully linked to the goals of radical change.

When this concept of services was wedded to the broad understanding that "the personal is political", the stage was set for large-scale provision of services by feminists. Very early in the Women's Movement, then, child care, health care, general welfare and housing services became key political tactics. In almost every major city, radical women — as well as more moderate women in organizations like NOW — provided referral services, health information services, child care services, adult education services and welfare advocacy. Feminists took their service work seriously as political work so that much more thought was given to the *process* of service delivery and to the appropriate work relationships around services than had ever been the case in ERAP and SNCC where services were usually characterized as mere "support work." Women seriously considered services as recruitment vehicles, for example. Much more time was spent in the design of space, the content of the service encounter and other concerns which helped to more thoroughly link feminist services with broader feminist goals.

Problems remained with feminist services, however. Most important, the loose or non-existent organizational form of the women's movement often left women's service efforts isolated, hard-pressed to identify the feminist movement to which they belonged:

*In the beginning [said one woman health worker] we could send women who came to us to our own broader organization for further discussion and other activities. Now we can only send them to the women's bookstore or to other*

*women's services, but there are not as many general feminist activities to be involved in. So people want more from us.*

The sheer extensiveness of women's services increases the ever-present funding problems of any service activity. And the constant attempt to create a non-hierarchical, non-sexist, women-identified practice has made continual participation in feminist service work an often personally painful task. Even so, it is certain that the extent and success of feminist service delivery (especially in health care) existing today has been critical in maintaining the women's movement through a period when other mass movements became weaker, and in providing employment and a sense of political purpose to large numbers of women.

The United Farm Workers Union has, since its inception in the mid-sixties, taken on the tone of a popular movement. Under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, health and other services have been provided wherever possible, as an adjunct to organizing and as a goal of the Union. Translation services, help with unemployment, welfare and social security benefits, assistance with immigration and housing problems have all been provided, sometimes by Anglo volunteers, but often by UFW members themselves.

UFW services reflect the historical experience of the union — during the major strike and boycott periods there were relatively fewer services available; more were provided when organizing and contract negotiations were predominant. But there has always been an attempt by Cesar Chavez and the UFW to combine service work with union organizing. Service Centers — Campesino Centers — were established during each organizing drive. These centers consciously attempted to make the link between the need for services and the need for a union and a movement.





The UFW has taken a unique approach to its service work. When a worker receives a service from the union, whether it is a letter translated or a social security claim filed, she or he is asked to "trade" with the Union, that is, to give back a service. In actuality this means that workers are asked to leaflet for a meeting, or to make some telephone calls for the Union, or to provide transportation to picketers, in exchange for receiving a UFW-provided service. Chavez is clear on the rationale for this approach:

*The Union was built with house meetings and the Service Center. It's like the Church in China — they gave out rice to Christians. The minute*

*National Farm Worker Health Group*

*there was no ... there were no Christians. The goal is to help people help themselves. You don't do it because you're a nice guy — you can't expect people to appreciate your help. We're there to help our brothers, not to be appreciated. It is good to be in love with people, but it is also good not to let them use you.*

*The goal is to help workers organizing themselves by getting power. Power is an enabling goal, not an end goal. You should not be afraid of power. If you are efficient, you will attract people. The goal is to build power. You become part of that power — but that's not bad. It's bad to say, "I helped you, now you help me." But to say, "I helped you, now you help me to help*

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others is good.

The importance of this approach is that it addresses an objection often posed by more traditional activist approaches — that service work must, by definition, be patronizing and demeaning. Here the UFW is in harmony with the development of current feminist self-help activity. Both are attempting to create spaces where services can be mutual and shared, where a radical ideology can allow the service encounter to be a truly non-hierarchical, liberating exchange, not a place where “we” — more wise, more trained — provide services for “them” — less developed, less aware.

The UFW has been a significant influence on many leftists since its beginnings. Although the Union’s future direction (as it becomes more and more involved in the everyday work of a functioning trade union) is unclear, its sense of the importance of service work for effective labor organizing should not be forgotten. Just as the Black Panther breakfast programs and other similar service programs are remembered, long after the organization itself has faded or been destroyed, the UFW’s position that a union could be involved in all the workers’ problems, not just their “job” problems, can fundamentally affect the concept of what it means to engage in radical workplace organizing. Recently, the Mineworkers’ struggle was a striking example of the argument that unions are strongest, and workers will fight hardest for them, where unions are involved in the whole of workers’ lives.

#### ISSUES AND PROBLEMS WITH MOVEMENT PROVIDED SERVICES:

Even such a short review suggests some important reasons why contemporary leftists have provided services as a part of their political

strategy. One major reason is that it is extremely hard to do mass organizing and avoid service work.

When we open a storefront office, a women’s center, or establish a left caucus within a union, we are saying that we have some ideas about the causes of social problems, and that our analysis offers some suggestions about how those problems might be solved.

Usually people will respond by bringing immediate concerns about their jobs, their neighborhoods, or their families. In order to raise broader “political” questions we must demonstrate the links between our analysis and their immediate issues. We have to listen and respond — that is the beginning of service work.

Indeed, historically, most “services” provided by radicals began unselfconsciously, as spontaneous, immediate responses to the types of problems that came to them as feminists, organizers, or public figures. It was usually after the fact that organizers began to realize that much of their time was spent in “service work.” The experience of a UFW service worker echoes that of many other radicals:

*I was hanging out in the Union office because it seemed important to be there. I started helping people with problems, like with their landlords or the welfare office. I had been working for two months before somebody told me I was doing “service work”.*

The most successful service efforts, however, usually are those which are acknowledged and planned for. Women in ERAP, for example, were often criticized for “wasting their time” on the very same activities that at a later point the Panthers or the Women’s Movement would see as an entirely natural function of political activity: helping people with their pressing day-to-day problems — problems the general

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society by its very nature created and ignored.

Once radicals begin to take this seemingly inevitable service work seriously, other "reasons" for doing it emerge. Services provided with a thoughtful and explicit political analysis, rather than on an ad hoc basis, can help to radicalize people, can help them see how their "personal" problems are at the same time "social" problems, how what they had previously perceived as their own "misfortune", was in fact, the direct result of systematic injustice. The women's health movement has been especially good at making this connection, at helping women to see that problems with birth control, or their own "neuroses", are often the results of sexism, a patriarchal social system and a capitalist medical system. It is feminists who have recognized that services can be a vehicle for appealing to women who would not otherwise be attracted to movement activities:

*.... many women who would not feel comfortable seeking out a women's discussion group or rap session will come to a clinic for their medical needs. Once there, they can talk with staff members and other women around them and are casually invited to a rap session (which involves commitment) while waiting for the doctor. Through these experiences, we all have the opportunity to hear and discuss many important aspects of our lives and situations as women. It is this sharing process which is so important to the growth of the women's liberation movement.*

Not only feminists, but other radicals as well have acknowledged this function of service work. The Black Panthers, for instance, were well aware of the fact that their breakfast programs and clothing exchanges were ways to attract, or at least placate, members of the Black community who were frightened by their mili-

tant, gun-carrying media image.

Service work can be just as important for those who are already radicals as for those who might be radicalized. Communist Party newspapers in the 1930s used to chide members for becoming "too distant from the masses". Anyone who has ever lived an intensely "political" life knows how easy it is to become removed from the "everydayness", the ordinary (but vital) concerns of people, to become disconnected and unaware of the specific, concrete problems that confront the working class, or women, or Third World people every day. Many have recognized that service work is a way to avoid such damaging isolation, to maintain a meaningful base for work with the people. One UFW organizer had this to say:

*It is easy for us to get so involved with building the Union that we forget why we are doing it. We forget why it's hard for people to strike or vote Union. Service work keeps us in touch with people's lives away from the Union, with their problems and the reasons for their fears.*

*It's not that I should feel sorry for people or excuse them for not supporting us because they are poor or have a sick mother, for example. It's just that I need to keep remembering those things so that I can name those things and say how the Union can help them. If I do this, then workers know that I understand them and they are more likely to join. Service work helps me know what's on their minds.*

Service work can offer a more full range of political activity for radicals. It can offer socialist activities which are not narrowly confrontive or one dimensional. All too often public speaking, handing out leaflets and demonstrating provide no possibility for interaction with non-movement members. Service work can allow us to have encounters with people which are less angry and demanding, but which allow



*Black Panther Breakfast for Children Program. Photo by Steven Shames.*

us to positively show the meaning of our politics. It can also give activists a real sense of individual accomplishment, something that comes all too rarely in political work. A good child care center, an attractive and efficient health clinic can stir up energy in those who work there. Occasional experiences, such as helping someone actually get the benefits she deserves from Welfare or Social Security, can sustain an activist over many, many days of frustration. In fact, services may address the problem raised by Barbara Haber and Al Haber in 1967 when they wrote:

*It is fruitless to ask people to focus their lives in obligations they cannot fulfill well... when a movement tries to objectify its members, or deal with only a part of them, or a mythical version of them, then members become fragmented, cracked.*

There are, however, some sound reasons why leftists have found cause to be careful in undertaking service activity as a major organizational tactic.

Obviously, the first is money. It takes money to provide almost any service, even if staff are

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not paid. Eventually space costs and fundraising for salaries can be overwhelming. The need to solicit money from the government or less political donors can subtly influence the goals of any program. And political issues around fee schedules or appropriate proposal language can create serious tensions within any group.

Service work has its emotional costs also. Responding to the day-to-day needs of people is hard work, draining of time and resources. We are radicals exactly because we know that individual solutions cannot solve social problems, that life as a worker/woman/minority under capitalism is inevitably oppressive. Yet when we provide services we are caught in the contradiction of trying to help people cope in the short run with a situation that requires much more long-range responses. It is difficult and tiring to remember why we are delivering services, to keep both the social goals and the immediate task before us:

*I wanted to do feminist health care because I wanted things to change for all women in every way, and health seemed an important place to start. But once I started doing this I became overwhelmed with the immediacy of health issues and found it hard to think about all the other issues. Or if I did try to think of bigger things it seemed to get in the way of daily work. Sometimes as a collective we would decide to read feminist theory, but there was never time. And sometimes I felt like I just needed to know more about health in order to do a better job.*

The seemingly endless demand for service — which again a socialist analysis can predict — may lead to other problems. We often feel the need to expand, to serve more and more children, to provide increasingly more abortions. Our services are likely to be better than existing ones (if only because we have more empathy and

anger and less constraints), so we can become easily compelled by the same desire to serve everyone that causes non-movement services to grow. There is a clear history which shows the danger of becoming institutionalized, of losing political roots and becoming no different from traditional services — the Workmen's Circle and certain early feminist services are good examples.

Problems, however, can result from too strenuous an effort to avoid institutionalization. In trying too hard to imbue all aspects of our service work with purist politics we can create structures which are impossible to maintain. The tensions created around total "collectivity" in feminist health care, for example, have sometimes undermined the ability to achieve desired goals. At the same time the tendency to mirror in form the "legitimate" services must be constantly questioned. As a rule there seems to be a frustrating, costly pattern of pendulum swings, between an emphasis on quality care and correct politics:

*We spend a while worrying about our politics, the meaning of what we are doing for the community, for women. Then something happens, a file gets misplaced, an examining room is found dirty and then we all freak out about how bad our services are, how little good we can do for people if we don't know our stuff. So we all shape up, study in groups, take courses and really work at providing good health care. Then somebody starts to complain that we don't have any politics anymore, that we are just like the hospital. And it all starts over again.*

The most significant danger, however, is seldom discussed. Leftists too can provide services that hurt people. Just like traditional services, we can make people's lives worse. If we do not know the welfare rules we can "help" someone into being caught for fraud. Sanitation

and safety considerations cannot be forgotten in health clinics or child care centers. Further, people (not to mention the movement) can be hurt by promising what we cannot deliver, by raising personal hopes that cannot be met. While we cannot be paralyzed by the fear of hurting people, the experience of movement-provided service efforts suggests that service activity *must* be taken seriously, or not undertaken at all.

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

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

Similarly, it is the rise of narrow Leninism today which is largely responsible for decreasing the amount of service activity on the Left. Not

that service work is directly opposed. Rather, as Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter pointed out in their article on the New Right (*RA*, vol. 11 no. 6) the Leninist today has retreated from a broad set of concerns over the (political) quality of life. When a group or movement does so then the tensions inherent in service work become less bearable. Only when a wide range of life's issues and problems — sexuality, the family, culture — are explicitly considered political, is it possible to endure the personal and structural difficulties of service provision.

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

There is no need for us to aim for comprehensiveness; we are trying to build a movement, not create the ideal social service system. Indeed, movement services are generally most successful when they are small, when they provide almost pre-services such as connecting people to other services, assisting them in attaining welfare or food stamps. Basic counselling and advocacy services can be helpful and mind-opening. Radicals do not have to open large child care centers, clinics or "full-service" centers, especially if we do not have the workforce to staff

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\* There were conscious efforts in some ERAP projects to limit the number of housewives and older people who came to meetings for example.

them adequately. As leftists, we do not have to provide service to everyone. We are not likely to provide services to the terminally ill or severely retarded, so we should feel comfortable in focussing our service work on those we feel are most likely to be attracted to our analysis.

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

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

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE WORKERS:

The overwhelming political reality today is the lack of a mass radical movement and the corresponding paucity of small, viable movement organizations. This means that far fewer leftists have the option of providing a movement-defined service. For most the options if we choose to provide services are to work in existing agencies, either for a large public bureaucracy like Welfare or Mental Health or in some smaller community-based agency which is probably funded by public and private contracts and grants. As workers in such settings, we have far fewer options to control our work than women in feminist health clinics or UFW service workers. Yet there seems to be some lessons from the

experience of movement service workers which can be important to us.

The first is simply that our task is hard, that it would not be easy to provide good socialist or feminist services even if our agencies weren't public or private bureaucracies serving the interests of the capitalist welfare state. Nowhere has the formula been found for defining what quality service is, or even the best ways to link service work with absolutely effective political consciousness raising for ourselves, our co-workers or for service users.

Another important insight is that as individual service workers, or as worker collectives, we are likely to experience the same pendulum swings as movement service workers between our sense of long-range political goals and concerns about our short-term effectiveness. Such shifts of emphasis are probably inevitable and can be functional. Too much concern for changing the welfare dependent and exposing the politics of social service funding can be very demoralizing, given our lack of power. Our ability, even our need, to change gears and consider the quality and meaning of our person-to-person service encounter can keep us sane.

There are lessons here about how to organize also. Sometimes we feel that the only legitimate radical activity is to organize a trade union for service workers. Many of us spend a great deal of time and energy organizing unions which often do little more than represent us on the narrowest wage and benefit issues, and sometimes are negative in their effect on our ability to provide good services. (See Judy Syfers on Paraprofessional organizing *RA* Vol. 12, No. 2). The experience of movement service workers suggests that there may be exciting ways to organize around the content of our work and the process of our activity without limiting ourselves to narrow trade union forms. At the very least, we



Woodcut by Frans Masereel

should be encouraged in our efforts to include such service-related issues in our union organizing efforts.

The constant re-occurrence of services as a movement tactic should help us better understand our motives in being social workers, community workers and other types of service workers. Sometimes as radicals we are very hard on ourselves, questioning all our motives constantly. We often feel that we are only service workers because of the small class privileges the jobs entail, such as more meaningful work or even a sense of power over our lives or the lives of others. The historical congruence of political work with service activity should help us validate the radical origins of our work: the urge to work with other people, to see and respond to human suffering are clearly the roots of our politics as well as of our service activity. Our acceptance of

this overlap should provide strength to our ability to organize other service workers and to defend the valuable parts of our ageing work.

The experience of others who have provided overtly political services should give us strength to make our practice as explicitly political as possible. Often we are afraid to openly acknowledge our politics, not only out of fear of reprisals from supervisors, but because we think that service users will be "put off" or frightened by our views... a clear lesson of movement service work is that many people are not frightened by left politics if they are coupled with honest and humane service delivery. In fact, our politics may be one of the only ways we have to overcome the inherent negative expectations that people bring to service situations:

*I found that many people came expecting me to be another Anglo who would treat them badly and not give them what they needed. It was only after we discussed our mutual hatred, and fear, of the growers that people were willing to begin to trust me and to discuss some of their important problems. (UFW worker).*

Finally, the movement service delivery efforts of this century, and especially of the past fifteen years have proven that legitimate political activity is more than organizing strikes, demonstrations and militant confrontations with authority. To be effective as movement organizations, groups need a variety of tactics for responding to the whole range of social problems created by the capitalist/racist/sexist society. Perhaps too, as individual radicals, we can come to accept and value that attempting to do radical service work is as valid a personal political choice as choosing to organize "at the point of production".

One woman health worker put it this way:



*I'm not sure how to bring about radical change — Everything seems so hard these days. All I know is that we do some work here at the center which objectively helps some women, that we are learning and growing ourselves as feminists through our work and that I don't see anyone else out there with that much of a sure-fired, guaranteed way to bring on the revolution. Until I do, I'm not going to apologize for not working in a factory or at whatever else other people are so sure a true vanguard should do.*

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*Photo by Ellen Shub*



# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE

## Historical Notes

Mary Bularzik

### INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

In 1908 *Harper's Bazaar* printed a series of letters in which working women wrote of their experiences of city life. (1) A typical experience was reported by G.E.D., a New York stenographer:

*"I purchased several papers, and plodded faithfully through their multitude of 'ads.' I took the addresses of some I intended to call upon. . . . The first 'ad' I answered the second day was that of a doctor who desired a stenographer at once, good wages paid. It sounded rather well, I thought, and I felt that this time I would meet a gentleman. The doctor was very kind and seemed to like my appearance and references; as to salary, he offered me \$15 a week, with a speedy prospect of more. As I was leaving his office, feeling that at last I was launched safely upon the road to a good living, he said casually, 'I have an auto; and as my wife doesn't care for that sort of thing, I shall expect you to accompany me frequently on pleasure trips.' That settled the doctor; I never appeared. After that experience I was ill for two weeks; a result of my hard work, suffering and discouragement."* (2)

The incident illustrates a common occupational hazard of women in the labor force: sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, defined as any unwanted pressure for sexual activity, includes verbal innuendos and suggestive comments, leering, gestures, unwanted physical contact (touching, pinching, etc.), rape and attempted rape. It is a form of harassment mainly perpetrated by men against women. As in many other forms of violence

against women, the assertion of power and dominance is often more important than the sexual interaction. Sexual demands in the workplace, especially between boss and employee, become even more coercive because a woman's economic livelihood may be at stake.

Sexual harassment of women in the workplace is one manifestation of the wider issue of the oppression of women. Violence is central to that oppression, an essential part of establishing and maintaining the patriarchal family.

Until recently violence has only been studied psychologically, as an aberration, not as a norm. When violence occurs in the nuclear family, it is treated as the occasional act of a deviant rather than a prevalent and socially sanctioned way of enforcing the status quo. Statistical evidence shows violence to be pervasive, yet this is ignored. Rape, for example, despite repeated studies showing it is extremely common in many social settings, is still often described as the isolated act of a stranger. Wife-beating was treated as a similar infrequent (though regrettable) event.

Sexual harassment at the workplace is, I would argue, an analogous problem. It is consistent, systematic, and pervasive, not a set of random isolated acts. The license to harass women workers, which many men feel they have, stems from notions that there is a "woman's place" which women in the labor force have left, thus leaving behind their personal integrity.

I would like to propose a model which sees violence, and more specifically the threat of violence, as a mechanism of social control. It is used to control women's access to certain jobs; to limit job success and mobility; and to compensate men for powerlessness in their own lives. It functions on two levels: the group control of women by men, and personal control of individual workers by bosses and co-workers. Violence is used to support and preserve the

institutions which guarantee the dominance of one group over others. Sexual harassment is one form. The threat of lynching hanging over Blacks in the South at the turn of the century was another such instance of the use of violence. So is rape. In neither case are the perpetrators of the "crime" totally condemned by society; though there are laws on the books against such behavior, it is clear to the victims that it may be dangerous to bring charges; and the victim is "marked" by the crime (or dead) while the attacker is considered "normal". Both "crimes" serve as warnings to certain groups not to walk the streets alone at night.

Words, gestures, comments can be used as threats of violence and to express dominance. Harassment often depends on this underlying violence — violence is implied as the ultimate response. Harassment is "little rape," an invasion of a person, by suggestion, by intimidation, by confronting a woman with her helplessness. It is an interaction in which one person purposefully seeks to discomfort another person. This discomfort serves to remind women of their helplessness in the face of male violence. To offer such a model is to suggest that it is not simply an individual interaction but a social one; not an act of deviance but a societally condoned mode of behavior that functions to preserve male dominance in the world of work.

The economic aspect of sexual harassment in the workplace differentiates it from other forms of violence against women. A rationalized capitalist economic order tended to separate spheres of sexual power (in the family) and economic power (in the workplace). Sexual coercion in the workplace reasserts the connection between the two. While the women involved did not see sexual favors as a right of their employers and male co-workers, their fear of losing jobs often stifled effective protest.



NEXT



WELL ACQUAINTED  
WITH THE TYPEWRITER



READY

To capture the boss,  
designing Miss,  
Is your fantastic  
dream of bliss.  
That you will trap him,  
I much doubt —  
The chances are  
he'll fire you out.

— Verse from a valentine 1924



SHORTTIME - SPOONTIME



Working over time



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## II

This paper will consider the historical conditions of sexual harassment and focus on white urban working women, primarily in Northern cities, and primarily in working class jobs. Most of the evidence concerns single women, who predominated in the female labor force before the 1940s. (The entrance of many more married women into the labor force during and after World War II added another dimension to the problem which will not be considered here.)

Sexual harassment was a problem faced by paid women workers in the United States from colonial days. Violence and sexual coercion did not originate with industrialization. However, the dynamics of these issues were different in a paid labor force than in a pre-industrial economy. The family setting of work in colonial days makes the incidents of sexual violence part of the history of violence in the family. In a capitalist industrial society, sexual harassment often became an interaction between strangers, not relatives or neighbors, which changed the psychological framework of the sexual violence.

There are scattered instances of women in colonial times protesting violence by male employers against women workers. In the January 28, 1734 issue of the N.Y. Weekly Journal, a group of women servants published a notice saying, "...we think it reasonable we should not be beat by our Mistresses Husband(s), they being too strong and perhaps may do tender women mischief." (3) Court records reveal many instances of servants being seduced by their employers. Since the status of domestic servants is complicated and little historical research has been done on their working conditions, I am not further considering them in this paper.

Much male public opinion didn't distinguish between women workers, prostitutes, the destitute, and the criminal classes in the industrial-

izing stages of the economy. This was due to a complex of factors such as the necessity for women from poor families to be in the labor force, the unusualness of women working outside the family, the analogy between the prostitute and the paid women worker, both in some sense "escaping" from male control, and both "unprotected" and thus fair game for male lust. More thoughtful observers saw that low wages and poor working conditions in factories might make the temptations of the better-paying job of prostitute too much for some working girls to resist (or a logical choice from an economic point of view). As early as 1829, Matthew Carey offered a prize for the best essay on "the inadequacy of the wages generally paid to seamstresses, spoolers, spinners, shoe binders, etc., to procure food, raiment, and lodging; on the effects of that inadequacy upon the happiness and morals of those females and their families, when they have any; and on the probability that those low wages frequently forced poor women to the choice between dishonor and absolute want of common necessities." (4) Thus from the early 19th century on, we have a series of studies and investigations of the connections between low wages and vice, culminating in the "Purity Crusade" of the Progressive era. The concern for the working girl shown by the middle class reformers who conducted these studies was double-edged; working women often saw it as condescension, and resented the implication that they were morally weak.(5)

The experience of the women workers in the Lowell mills is an example of the assumed connection between the working woman who sold her labor power and the prostitute who sold herself. The idea that factory girls had loose morals was a commonplace in England,(6) and this concept was also prevalent in the United States. Current work on the Lowell mills emphasizes the "protection" offered by the boarding

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house system, and implies a concern for the moral welfare of their employees by the owners. However, some contemporary accounts indicate public concern about the behavior of the women in the mills. Newspapers carried accounts by physicians and other prominent citizens of immoral activities:

*There used to be in Lowell an association of young men called the "Old Line" who had an understanding with a great many of the factory girls and who used to introduce young men of their acquaintance, visitors to the place, to the girls for immoral purposes. Balls were held at various places attended mostly by these young men and girls, with some others who did not know the object of the association, and after the dancing was over the girls were taken to infamous places of resort in Lowell and the vicinity, and were not returned to their homes until daylight. (7)*

While these stories often were not verifiable (and were attacked by the women as lies), they do indicate an identification of the single working woman with the prostitute, and a refusal on the part of some men to distinguish the woman willing to sell her labor power with the woman willing to sell herself.

Other material shows evidence of sexual exploitation by supervisors. An article in the *Voice of Industry* told of a factory girl rumored to have saved \$3,000 from her work who purchased a farm for herself and son (a favorite Cinderella theme of the management.) The women's paper declared not only that the worker in question had less than half the sum, but that half of this "it was strongly suspected, was obtained as hush money of a prominent factory man who had been intimate with her and was the father of the boy now living in the country." (8)

Contrary to the view of the mill owners as concerned for the morality of the decent girls they hired, the reality may be that they "consciously fostered the idea that the operatives were 'bad' women. Their advertisements carried special pleas for 'respectable young women.' In fact, so prevalent did this idea become that the girls themselves issued a statement (which included) 'we beseech them not to asperse our characters or stigmatise us as disorderly persons!'" (9)

A theme in the study of sexual harassment begins to emerge here. The 19th century ideal of True Womanhood required women to be the guardians of purity; if a sexual episode occurred, it was the woman's fault, and she was "ruined for life." In practical terms, this meant she might be thrown out of her job and house. "Ladies" were not to know even of the existence of sexual passion. To admit that sexual contact, even conversation, occurred, was to be blamed for it. Thus the double bind — while women workers were often at the mercy of male supervisors, the repercussions of admitting incidents happened were often as bad as the original event. This conflict between the "lady" or "good girl" who is above sexuality, and the "bad girl" or "whore" who is involved with it, is a major theme in the history of sexual harassment. (10)

Another dilemma for working women was the conflict between labor force participation and the pressure to stay in the home. The way in which industry was organized required a source of cheap labor; in many cases this was furnished by women workers. But traditional masculine control in the family was threatened by waged women; thus the social pressure for women to stay in the home intensified along with early industrialization. The social pressure to stay home was strongest for middle class women as the ideology of the Home emerged as a companion ideology to True Womanhood in the

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mid 19th century. The economic pressure to work, on the other hand, was strongest for working-class women, and of this group, for single, divorced, widowed women (ie., those not tied in marriage to an individual man.) Women were conflicted about being in the labor force; however, for working-class women, this conflict was not simply competing "attitudes" about their place, but in many situations a "choice" between starvation if unemployed and attempted rape on the job.

Sexual harassment served to reinforce those attitudes pushing women out of the labor force. Yet this was an untenable goal in an industrializing economy. A fall-back function of sexual harassment, then, was to reinforce women's feelings of powerlessness at work.

Again, if sexual harassment was completely effective at driving women out of the workforce, it would work against the interests of management and capitalists as a whole; for an industrialized economy needs women as a source of cheap labor. According to this line of reasoning, one would expect to find some support by management for measures to reduce sexual harassment by supervisors against working women if it threatens the efficiency of the labor force. The individual benefits accruing to males from sexual harassment (personal power) are thus not identical with, and at times contradict, benefits to the capitalist class (of controlling the workforce). At other times these benefits reinforce each other, as it may be cheaper for companies to allow executives the "free" benefit of harassing their secretaries than to give them a raise.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the increasing participation of women in the labor force went along with a pattern of segregation into low-paying jobs. If, as previously argued, women's occupational mobility was checked by sexual harassment, one would expect to find

many instances of sexual harassment in this period. And indeed we do.

The most common description of the harassment victim at that time was — young, single, immigrant, uneducated, and unskilled.<sup>(11)</sup> This is of course also the description of the typical woman worker. Thus it suggests only that *most* women were harassed, not any particular type of women.

Furthermore, harassment victims could be found in a wide range of occupations. Not only waitresses and domestic servants, but also elevated railway cashiers, union organizers, garment workers, white-goods workers, home workers, doctors, dressmakers, shopgirls, laundry workers, models, office workers, cotton mill workers, cannery workers, broom factory workers, assistant foremen (sic), stenographers and typists, soap factory workers, hop-pickers, shoe-shine girls, barmaids, legal secretaries, actresses, sales demonstrators, art students, and would-be workers at employment interviews.

The severity of abuse ranged from verbal suggestions, threats and insults, to staring, touching, attempted rape and rape. Women were propositioned; promised money, jobs and automobiles (!); and then threatened with loss of jobs and blacklisting.

Harassment certainly crossed ethnic lines. Jewish, Italian, WASP, Southern White and black women were all harassed. Black women, however, often interpreted sexual harassment as racism, not sexism. Two Atlanta women talked about their experience in the 1930s:

*Isabel: Some of the girls wanted to work downtown as waitresses, you know, and I asked my daddy if I could — to earn extra money. Daddy said, 'You will never work downtown. Not the way white men think about black women.'*

*Eva: Yes, a black woman was fair prey, you know.*



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*Isabel: You see, a white man that might not dare accost a white girl is safe in his advances on a black girl. Why? Because in court her papa or brothers or any black man — even a black lawyer — wouldn't dare stand up against one white man.*

*Eva: The answer to all that was to protect us from it ever happening.*

While this is both a middle-class and male-identified solution, the message is clear. As Eva pointed out, "the idea was that if you were a black girl outside your area, and a white man decided to insult you... nothing could be done." (12)

The reactions of women to the workplace hazard of sexual harassment can be divided into individual and group responses. There are several components of this problem. Women may have seen sexual harassment primarily as a social problem, or primarily an individual problem (i.e., one's personal bad luck to have a lecherous boss). Seeing it as a social problem led to group responses (unions, protective associations, settlement house organizations), and was a motivation for organizing. Another possible response was legal action. The joining of the group response with the attempt to achieve legal protection in the drive for protective legislation had as one motivating factor, the protection of women from sexual harassment.

The initial move for protective legislation came before the Civil War. However, these laws were overturned, and a second wave of agitation for protective legislation for women began in the 1870s. Not until the *Muller v. Oregon* decision of 1908, though, was the principle of legislative limitation of women's hours upheld by the Supreme Court.

What were the motivations of those pushing this legislation? The weakness of the woman worker was the main reason often given —

weaker in terms of physical strength, in terms of bargaining power, because of having other drains on their energy (housework), and having more to fear from factory employment.

Threats to morals were prominent among these "dangers" of employment to women. The general opinion was that women workers were subject to harassment of supervisors, and thus should be prohibited from certain occupations, and night work, for their own protection. Smuts, in *Women and Work in America*, writes:

*Disrespect for the working girl sometimes led to sexual advances by supervisors or male workers. Girls complained of stolen embraces, pinches and vulgar remarks. It was widely believed that many prostitutes were former working girls, first corrupted by supervisors who had threatened to fire or promised to promote them.* (13)

Current studies found it an issue of concern for Jewish garment workers and Italian cannery workers. (14)

Many of the "participant-observer" investigations of working women, as well as early sociological analyses, reached the same conclusion. Maud Nathan writes of salesclerks:

*"Floor-walkers in the old days were veritable tsars; they often ruled with a rod of iron. Only the girls who were 'free-and-easy' with them, who consented to lunch or dine with them, who permitted certain liberties, were allowed any freedom of action or felt secure in their positions."* (15)

Individual reactions of victims of sexual harassment encompassed a wide range of emotions. Many women felt guilt. S.H., a clerk in a store in Los Angeles wrote of this:

*"I don't think there was one evening during that*

time when I worked in that store that I went home unmolested. I have walked block after block through the business part of the city with a man at my side questioning me as to where I lived, and if I would not like to go to dinner, how I was going to spend the evening, etc. I never answered, except to threaten to speak to the police. That I was ashamed to do, thinking it must be my own fault in some way, and that I ought to possess dignity enough to make men understand they were mistaken." (16)



*American Woollen Company, Boston, 1912.*

And some women who had "made it" blamed those who didn't. M.C.P., a government worker in Washington, D.C., who made \$1,200 a year in 1908, commented:

*"Referring to the moral dangers of city life, of course there are many dangers, but it largely depends on the girl, in my opinion, whether she is led into temptation or not."* (17)

Fear was another dominant reaction. Elizabeth Hasanovitch was so afraid of her boss after he attempted to rape her, that she never returned to collect her pay.

*"I felt what that glance in his eyes meant. It was quiet in the shop, everybody had left, even the*

*foreman. There in the office I sat on a chair, the boss stood near me with my pay in his hand, speaking to me in a velvety, soft voice. Alas! Nobody around. I sat trembling with fear."*

But looking for a new job was agony for her:

*"The thought of a new job made me so uneasy that I could hardly sleep. My bitter experience with my last shop pictured me all the bosses as vulgar and rude as the one from whom I ran away on Saturday."* (18)

Rose Cohen was too stunned at thirteen to respond effectively to her boss' proposition:

*"After a moment or so he said quite abruptly, 'Come, Ruth, sit down here.' He motioned to his knee. I felt my face flush. I backed away towards the door and stood staring at him."* (19)

A Russian Jewish shopgirl wrote to the Jewish Daily Forward in 1907 after she had lost her job because she refused the foreman's "vulgar advances:"

*"The girls in the shop were very upset over the foreman's vulgarity but they didn't want him to throw them out, so they are afraid to be witnesses against him. What can be done about this?"* (20)

Sometimes their fear was replaced by anger. Elizabeth Hasanovitch expressed her rage:

*"If only I could discredit that man so that he would never dare to insult a working girl again! If only I could complain of him in court!"* [21]

But more often the major reaction was confusion: guilt, anger, fear, and a feeling that attention paid to one as a sexual being was supposed to be appreciated, all intermingled.

Even organizers were torn in their reactions. When her supervisor talked to her and asked her to be his girl, a young organizer in a garment shop laughed at him. But he persisted:

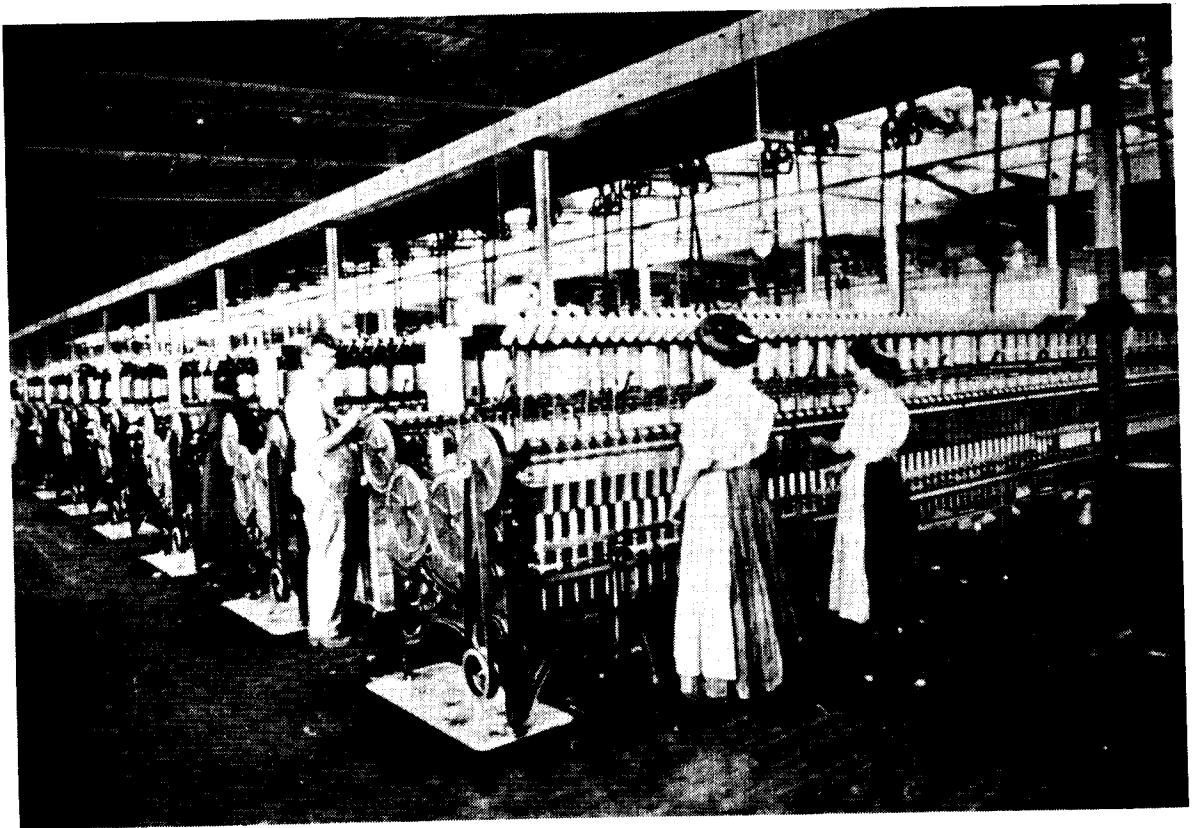
*"He went on 'You know it's a rule not to pay the girls the first week, but I like you, and I'm going to pay you the first week.' When I came home from work I told my sister about it and said, 'I don't know if I should feel flattered or insulted'." (22)*

A Cleveland manicurist reported an experience comparable to a 19th century potboiler. Alone in the city and propositioned by a friend

of a friend to whom she has applied for a job, she was totally traumatized:

*"How I ever got out of the building I do not know, I was so blinded with confusion and shame. I did not take the elevator, but reached the street somehow by the long stairways, with the last words of this man ringing in my ears: 'You will be glad to take up with my offer, after you have searched elsewhere'."*

Her subsequent failure to get work led her to plan suicide. On her way to drown herself in the harbor a young man whom she met at a restaurant offered her aid, lent her \$5 and



*Lynn, Massachusetts, 1895. Photo by Frances B. Johnson*

encouraged, she went back to the city and found a job.

*"Later I married the young man who gave me a helping hand." (23)*

While most reactions were not as melodramatic as this (and marriage as an escape from sexual harassment may be questionable), the problem of sexual harassment was a serious threat to the health and well-being of women workers. Power and domination outweighed the sensual or sexual aspect of these incidents in women's working lives.

Sexual harassment was addressed in *Life and Labor*, the publication of the National Women's Trade Union League. In a 1911 editorial on the clothing trade, a section on "The Tyranny of Foreman" claims that:

*Abusive and insulting language is frequently used by those in authority in the shops. This is especially intolerable to the girls, who should have the right to work without surrendering their self-respect. No women should be subjected by fear of loss of her job to unwarranted insults. (24)*

Stories of harassed women workers were published in the magazine. While these may be composite stories, they do indicate the range of harassment, the results, and the anger of women at being sexually as well as economically exploited on the job. An example is "Rosie's story", the account of a seventeen year old worker in the needle trades.

*"The boss from the shop was always fresh with the girls. He liked to see us blush, so we made a society, called 'The Young Ladies Educational Society,' and we was not to stand the freshness of the boss. But we was afraid of him, and so we*

*couldn't help each other. Once he touched me, very fresh like, and I cried, and he said, 'Lets be good friends, Rosie, and to show you how good I means it, you take supper mit me in a swell hotel, with music and flowers, see?'" And I says, "So! Supper mit you — swell hotel! Well I ask my ma," and he said, "Don't do it. You say you going to sleep at a friend's house" and I was trembling so I couldn't nearly do my work, and when my ma sees me, she says, "What's the matter, Rosie?" and I says, "Nothing," because she's sad, my ma is, 'cause I have to work so hard and can't have no education, and she says, "Rosie, you got to tell your ma what's wrong," and we both cried together, and so the next day I went to another shop, and I told the first lie I ever told in my life. I told the boss I come from another city. I liked this new boss; he was not so fresh and I had a seat by a window, and my ma and me, we was so happy we laughed when I told her about the nice shop and fresh air, and then the next day the boss he come to me and he says, "I'm sorry, Rosie, we like your work, but your other boss he telephoned he no discharged you and so we can't keep you here." (25)*

As did Rosie, many women reacted on an individual level. But Rosie and her friends also saw that this problem wasn't something they were asking for, and did try to meet it on a group level; they formed a "Young Ladies Educational Society" with the purpose of resisting the boss' harassment. The fact that their boss was a habitual harasser, and recognized as such by the group, was not that uncommon a situation. Dorothy Richardson in *The Long Day* (her account of how women workers were exploited at the turn of the century) wrote that after her boss approached her ("...in a moment he had grasped my bare arm and given it a rude pinch"), "...the rest of my companions repeated divers terrible tales of moral ruin and

betrayal, . . . wherein the boss was inevitably the villain." (26) S.R., a saleswoman, suffered repeated harassment and propositioning on a new job before she discovered that she was not the only one:

*"I never heard the other girls complain, so supposed for some time that they were not bothered; but when I knew them better I found they had the same trouble. . . "* (27)

There were other instances of groups being formed. In some cases these were more successful than the attempt of Rosie and her friends. Alice Woodbridge, the "moving force and guiding spirit of the Working Women's Society" (the forerunner of the WTUL), was politicized as the result of such experiences,

*"She had held at various times positions in offices; these positions had promised to be lucrative, but because of insulting proposals from employers she had been obliged to give them up; she had been buffeted about for many a year, trying to earn an honest living and trying to live on the low wages offered her."*

Protection of working women from unwanted sexual advances was a major aim of the Society.

*"... it was her purpose to endeavor to shield other working girls from the hideous experiences which had been hers, in her efforts to lead an honest, upright, independent life."* (28)

But what could be done to stop sexual harassment? The sisterly support of Rosie's group ("we was not to stand the freshness of the boss") had its obvious limits. The women were afraid of the power of the boss, and with good reason; even more than today, he had the power to fire them at will. As in Rosie's case, he could force them

into a position where they felt if they didn't quit they'd be raped. Alice Woodbridge was forced to leave many jobs. When Dorothy Richardson's boss returned and "after looking me over thoughtfully, informed me that I was supposed to be promoted Monday morning to the wrappers' counter," she feared for her own safety and quit. Elizabeth Hasanovitch was so afraid of her former boss after his attempted rape that she never returned to collect her week's wages, although she was at that point almost penniless.(29) But groups to combat harassment were not common, which suggests that women had little faith in their power to change their own lives.

In the short run, less politicized women looked for ways to protect their individual personal safety. This is not to say that they denied the group aspects of the problem, for they often tried to share such knowledge. Their coping strategies included warning other women about "fresh" bosses and supervisors, quitting, finding new jobs, sharing verbal ways to reject passes, staying out of empty offices, and giving in to keep a job. In her first job in a garment shop at the age of twelve, Rose Cohen often felt uncomfortable because the men told dirty jokes.

*"I could never keep my face from turning red. One day when Atta (the only other woman worker) and I were alone at our table she said: 'It is too bad that you have a tell-tale face. You better learn to hide your feelings. What you hear in this shop is nothing compared with what you will hear in other shops. Look at me.'"*

Atta was an expert at dodging the boss and threatening him with her needle when he tried to grab her. The first English sentence Rosa learned from her was:

*"Keep your hands off please."* (30)

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A social worker posing as a cannery worker to investigate working conditions for the New York State Factory Investigating Commission (1912), was warned by sister workers to stay away from the men:

*"...an Italian girl told me that one must be careful not to get fresh with the Italian boys, because they were dangerous.*

She herself was offered an opportunity to make

*"two or three dollars on the side any time, if you come up here to work at night, we can go for a stroll. That was the timekeeper and his name was Gillette."*

The other workers corroborated her experiences.

*"A great many girls told me he was fresh, and he was boss, and it was best to keep away from him."* (31)

Occasionally women took harassers to court. In 1908, Grace Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge took a saloon-keeper to court in behalf of Bozena, a young Bohemian Immigrant. Her employer had "abused her shamefully and then turned her out when he found that she was to become the mother of his illegitimate child." They lost the case, "because the charge was a penitentiary offense, and the judge was lenient." Not surprisingly, the judge empathized with the defendant rather than the victim.

Grace Abbott had such cases in mind when she started immigrant protection associations in Chicago. Protecting immigrant girls from lecherous bosses was, again, a major theme in organizing. (32) In this case it was because of the middle-class social workers' intervention that Bozena's case was taken to court at all; most women, feeling less able to cope with the

male-dominated legal system, would hesitate to bring their case to court. And even the feminist solidarity of the Hull House activists with Bozena did not win her case.

Working women themselves wanted to resist. Elizabeth Hasanovitch's fear was replaced by anger:

*"If I could only discredit that man so that he would never dare to insult a working-girl again! If only I could complain of him in court! But I had no witnesses to testify the truth; with my broken English I could give very little explanation. Besides that, if I were working in a shop and were called to court, the firm might suspect some evil in me and send me away."* (33)

Her confrontation with this dilemma led her to the conclusion that working women must organize; this seems to have been one of her personal motivations for joining the Waist and Dressmakers Union. As an individual member of a union in a basically non-unionized industry, a woman might not immediately improve her own conditions. Elizabeth Hasanovitch's new foreman, who had previously treated her in a friendly if condescending manner and called her "little daughter" (though she adds he's "too young to be my father") began to criticize her work and harass her until she got terrible headaches and ultimately quit. Unions, then, did not always protect women workers. But the issue of women in unions is complex, and needs to be looked at specifically.

### III

#### UNIONS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT FROM CO-WORKERS

Looking at unions' role in combatting sexual harassment will also focus our attention on the relation of co-workers to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment was not simply a boss-employee interaction, but in many cases an interaction between co-workers. Here, of course, the dynamic was somewhat different, as co-workers do not have the power to fire a woman or offer promotions. However, sexual harassment by co-workers can make a job unbearable for a woman; if she publicly complained, she was as likely to be blamed as the harasser, for "leading him on." To the extent a woman internalized the socially conditioned guilt of being responsible for controlling sexuality (while males were allowed to initiate it), she was vulnerable to this kind of manipulation. And real consequences ensue; Brodsky's study of workers victimized at work showed that employers tended to lay them off:

*"Employers are not disturbed by the fact that their female employees have been spoiled or contaminated, but they are concerned that this employee might make for further 'trouble.' Employers want peace. They do not want workers who disturb the tranquility of the organization in any way, not even as a result of bad luck. Employers whose workers are raped would like to have the victim disappear and not disturb the smooth functioning of their organization."* (34)

Because of this tendency to "blame the victim," co-workers do have power over women's jobs and economic security. This division in the workforce, like any division, can also benefit employers.

Unions' position on women workers have been contradictory. On the one hand, unions have tried to keep women out of their occupations, or struck to avoid working with women. On the other hand, some male union organizers have been aware of the danger to workers' solidarity in ignoring women as potentially organizable

workers, and have attempted to organize them. Gompers and the AFL held officially (at times) to this second position, but in practice did the opposite — ignored women workers, denied women's locals charters, or sought to exclude women from men's locals by complex rules. (35)

Union members harassed women potential members in various ways which preyed upon their anxieties and kept them home. One example was union meetings. Mary Anderson, later head of the U.S. Women's Bureau, wrote of early union meetings:

*"The men met in halls that were often in back of a saloon, or in questionable districts, dirty and not well kept. I remember the so-called labor temples that were anything but temples. The girls would not go to meetings in these places and we could not ask them to go under the circumstances. Then, when it came to paying dues at the headquarters of the union, the girls found it very distasteful to go where there were large groups of men playing cards and hanging about..."* (36)

This is a good instance of the implied threat of violence operating as a social control mechanism. It also shows the connection of workplace-union-street violence in women's actual experience.

Women organizers "realistically" evaluated the ways in which they themselves were treated by their co-workers (ie., male union officials). After a dispute with the male leadership of the ILG in Cleveland, over the issue of equal pay for women organizers, Pauline Newman described the women that John Dyché (the unions' executive secretary) selected to replace her: "Well they are not too bad looking and one is rather liberal with her body. That is more than enough for Dyché." (37)

She, like other women organizers, also tried to

solve problems of sexual harassment outside the union grievance structure. Faced with a complaint that a factory owner's son and his superintendent had taken liberties with female employees, she argued:

*"There is not a factory today where the same immoral conditions [do] not exist. . . this to my mind can be done away with by educating the girls instead of attacking the company."* (38)

Rose Schneiderman, however, tried to use the unions to fight sexual harassment. Having organized the Aptheker shop she received a complaint from the chairwoman.

*She said that Mr. Aptheker had a habit of pinching the girls whenever he passed them and they wanted it stopped. I went to see him, and in the presence of the chairwoman told him that this business of pinching the girls in the rear was not nice, that the girls resented it, and would he please stop it. He was a rather earthy man and looking at me in great amazement, he said, 'Why Miss Schneiderman, these girls are like my children.' The chairwoman without a blink answered, 'Mrs. Aptheker we'd rather be orphans.' Of course it was stopped."* (39)

Mary Anderson also wrote of a strike in a broom factory in which sexual harassment of the workers by the foreman was a major issue. Since the foreman was one who "did not stop at anything," some of the women carried knives to protect themselves. She went to talk with the employer:

*"I told him that I had heard stories about one of his foremen, not only of his brutality in dealing with the women, but also that he was immoral and that immoral conditions existed in the plant because of him. The employer said he knew this*

*was so. . . finally the strike was settled, the foreman was fired, and the wages raised a little."* (40)

Unions, then, have at times provided protection from sexual harassment for women. However, they have also been simply additional places where women experienced sexual harassment. This is one reason why women turned from strategies of group action to protective legislation to protect their interests at work.

## CLASS DIFFERENCES AND WOMEN'S CULTURE

What type of women are harassed? The simplest answer is all types of women. No sociodemographic characteristic saved a woman in a sexist society from the possibility of sexual harassment, and the implicit threat of violence. However, there is evidence that the specific forms of sexual harassment did vary according to occupation and social class. All women were subject to at least the subtler forms of sexual harassment (verbal suggestive remarks, dress codes) but physical violence was more common and expected by women in menial jobs.

An examination of the kind of sexual harassment faced by early women doctors shows a pattern of harassment used to force women out of privileged, male-defined jobs. Women's role as professionals in the healing professions had been systematically eliminated by the mid 19th century.

The first women to attempt to become licensed physicians in the United States faced much harassment — psychological, verbal and physical. Most of it came from male co-students (with the tacit approval of their supervisors?), an example of the power co-workers have over a woman's job. Alice Hamilton, an early pioneer in industrial health, suffered from similar treatment as a sex object. (41)



Emily Barringer, the first woman doctor to with an appointment to the staff of Gouvernor Hospital, the downtown branch of Bellevue (N.Y.) found her appointment was resented and opposed by the male appointees:

*"But it came to me as a sickening realization that the real opposition I was to meet was to come from my own peers, educated brothers with medical degrees."*

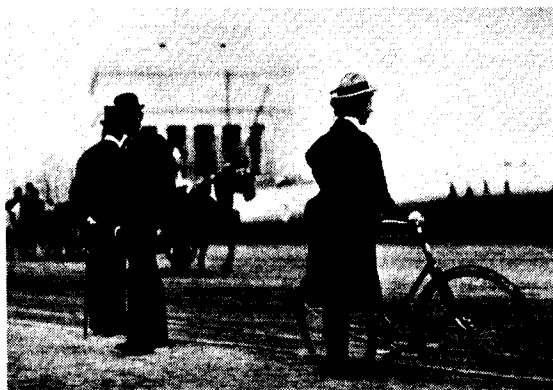
An intense campaign of psychological and verbal harassment ensued. For example, other male co-workers discussed graphic details of rape cases at the dinner table, with obvious enjoyment at her discomfort. What she wrote of this experience is revealing of the differences between the experiences of a middle-class professional and an immigrant worker in withstanding sexual harassment. She didn't expect physical violence, a reality to immigrant workers; yet her life was constrained and controlled by this harassment:

*"Yes, I could and would endure any taunts or gibes or outrageous insults that these ingenious young men could think of. No matter how degrading their onslaught was, I would stand for it. But if ever in their machinations they should as much as lay a finger on me physically, there would be an immediate reckoning. They knew this perfectly well and always kept completely within bounds. I was as safe in their midst as if I had been surrounded by the strongest iron cage."*

Despite this 'confidence,' she kept her door locked nights, and wouldn't open it to any "fellow" male students. (42)

The weight of the evidence indicates that women in working-class jobs, on the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, and also on the bottom

of the social hierarchy, were the most likely victims of harassment. While this is plausible, the way the evidence is recorded also biases the sample. Much of the recorded instances of harassment are reported by middle-class observers, who would, because of the consequences and implications, be less likely to report their own similar experiences. During this period, middle-class women were ladies who were considered "above" sexuality, and thus would be "tainted" by being involved in incidents of sexual harassment. To the extent that they accepted the idea that women were responsible for controlling sexuality, they would have trouble recognizing and dealing with such incidents in their own lives.



The language used by many women in reporting such incidents in the late 19th century and early 20th century indicates the inability of Victorian society to deal directly with sexuality. Women reported their boss' and co-workers' conduct as "vulgar remarks," "shameful behavior," "unspeakable suggestions," "things no lady should bear." When Grace Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge accompanied Bozena to court, they transgressed these bounds of lady-like behavior:

*"... a young lawyer on the State's Attorney's*

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*staff who had known Miss Breckinridge at the University rushed over to her and said, 'Oh, Miss Breckinridge, you and Miss Abbott must not stay here. This just isn't a fit place for women like you. It's a terrible case for you to hear.'* (43)

This inability of women to speak directly of their experiences had several implications. It led to sexual harassment being greatly under-reported along with other instances of sexual violence, as rape. Women felt guilt rather than anger after such incidents; and fear, not without reason, that the stigma resulting from public association with sexual issues would outweigh any "justice" they might get by reporting the incident. If they had been friendly to the male involved, they would be accused of complicity; when a more likely explanation of what was going on was that the women were looking for husbands, and were responded to as prostitutes. This leaves us with the problem of interpreting vague accounts of behavior, and occasionally makes it hard to determine whether a specific incident really is "unspeakable behavior" or an off-hand vulgar remark.

The other issue this raises is whether women were over-reacting to typical male language. If women and men in the 19th century were raised in separate spheres — in homosocial networks — with different customs, ways of interaction, speech patterns, and expectations, then such a response on the part of women to men's "normal" behavior seems plausible. For immigrant women to respond to the more open social mores of the United States in the same horrified manner is also plausible. This explanation implies that much of what is considered "harassment" behavior by women is simply "teasing" or "humor" or "informality" on the part of men. (44) While this may occasionally be true, this explanation fails to account for the

majority of cases; doesn't account for the overtones of terror, force, domination and violence felt by the women in such situations; and doesn't account for the many cases in which severe reprisals (firing, blacklisting, refused promotions, attempted rape, rape) were perpetrated on women who refused to accept such "teasing" as part of the job. It is also clear that sexual harassment is basically a man-against-woman interaction; there are few reported cases of either men-against-men or women-against-men harassment. Although men "tease" other men in the workplace, and use non-sexual types of harassment against each other, neither historically nor currently is there evidence that sex is a common component of this harassment. (45)

The major function of sexual harassment is to preserve the dominance of patriarchy. The use of sexual harassment to push women out of specific jobs may well be a new version of an old phenomenon. Even for older societies which accepted a "men's sphere" and a "women's sphere" as both equally necessary to the survival of the community, there is evidence that women were sexually harassed to keep them from stepping out of line in other ways.

Sexual harassment is a phenomenon that crosses class lines, though it does have a class dimension. It cannot be reduced to bosses exploiting workers, because the problem of harassment by co-workers is so extensive. In addition, harassment by supervisors and co-workers does not necessarily support the needs of a rationalized, profit-oriented production system, and may even work at cross-purposes to it. Furthermore, for many men, sexuality and domination were not entirely separate; thus social control and sexuality are not totally distinct phenomena. And for many women, being defined as sexual beings meant that sexual harassment posed both a "compliment" and a threat to their autonomy and safety.

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This suggests that to understand the problems of sexual harassment we must analyze both the organization of capitalism and the organization of male dominance.

I would like to thank Roslyn Feldberg, Susan Forbes, Alexander Keyssar and the members of the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion for their helpful criticism and discussion of the ideas presented in this paper; and Elizabeth Pleck and Judith Smith for supplying references and supporting my interest in this topic.

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*Lunchtime, 1915. Photo by Lewis Hine.*

## NOTES

1. "The Girl Who Comes to the City, A Symposium," *Harper's Bazar*, March 1908, p. 277.

2. Sources for this topic are scattered yet cumulatively persuasive. They include autobiographies, letters, social worker's reports, state investigating commissions, labor newspapers, women's magazines, oral histories, surveys of women's work, studies of women in history, studies of women in ethnic communities. Future sources include union records, personnel records, workmen's compensation claims and legal records. All require vast amounts of reading for small bits of evidence.

I also looked at works on protective legislation and prostitution to make connections between sexual morality, economics, and violence in society. I investigated incidents as case studies in the dynamic of sexual harassment, in order to develop a theory of sexual harassment as a mechanism of social control, which theory can be tested by further historical research.

3. Phillip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in The United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), V. 1, 26.

4. Frank Carlton, "Crusade To Improve Working Conditions," *Life & Labor*, Vol. 4 No. 4, 108-9.

5. Leonora O'Reilly resigned from the WTUL in 1905-7 over such a dispute. See Lieberman, "Their Sisters' Keepers: The Women's Hours and Wages Movement in the U.S., 1890-1925," Ph.D. diss., Columbia, 1971, pp. 87-88. Also see Rosen, ed; *The Maimie Papers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1977), Introduction.

6. Neff, *Victorian Working Women* (New York: Columbia University, 1929), pp. 54-5.

7. Boston *Daily Times*, Jan. 16, 1839. There were other articles in the *Times*, the Boston *Quarterly Review*, and the Lowell *Courier* similar to this. Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), p. 81.

8. "Vox Populi," *Voice of Industry*, Sept. 11, 1845. Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker*.

9. Theresa Wolfson, *Women Workers & Trade Unions*, p. 103.

10. For discussion of the "Nice Girl" construct and social control, see Greer Litton Fox, "Nice Girl: Social Control of Women Through a Value Construct," *Signs* V. 2 No. 4, pp. 805-817, especially pp. 805 & 809.

11. See, for example, Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow* (New York: George Dovan, 1918), Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One of Them* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), Helen Campbell, *Prisoners of Poverty* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1900), Mrs. John & Marie Von Vorst, *The Woman Who Toils* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904).

12. Jeanne Westin, *Making Do* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1976), p. 96.

13. Robert Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 88.

14. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977), p. 199 and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Organizing the Unorganizable", *Labor History* V. 17 No. 1: 5-23.

15. Maud Nathan, *The Story Of An Epoch-Making Movement* (New York: Doubleday, 1926), . 7.

16. *Harper's Bazar*, July 1908, p. 693. Also see *One of Them*, pp. 108-110, and *Out Of The Shadow*, pp. 127-9.

17. *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1908, p. 1141.

18. *One of Them*, pp. 108-10-11.

19. *Out Of The Shadow*, pp. 127-9.

20. Isaac Metzger, ed. *A Bintel Brief, Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 72.

21. *One of Them*, p. 110.

22. Andria Hourwich, ed., *I Am A Woman Worker* (New York: Affiliated Schools For Workers, 1930s(?)), p. 86.

23. *Ibid*, December 1908, pp. 1230.

24. *Life and Labor*, Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1911, p. 14.

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4 No. 8, August 1914, p. 242.

26. Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day*, p. 260.

27. *Harper's Bazaar*, July 1908, p. 693.

28. Maud Nathan, *Epoch-Making Movement*, pp. 15-16.

29. Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day*, p. 263; Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One of Them*, p. 110.

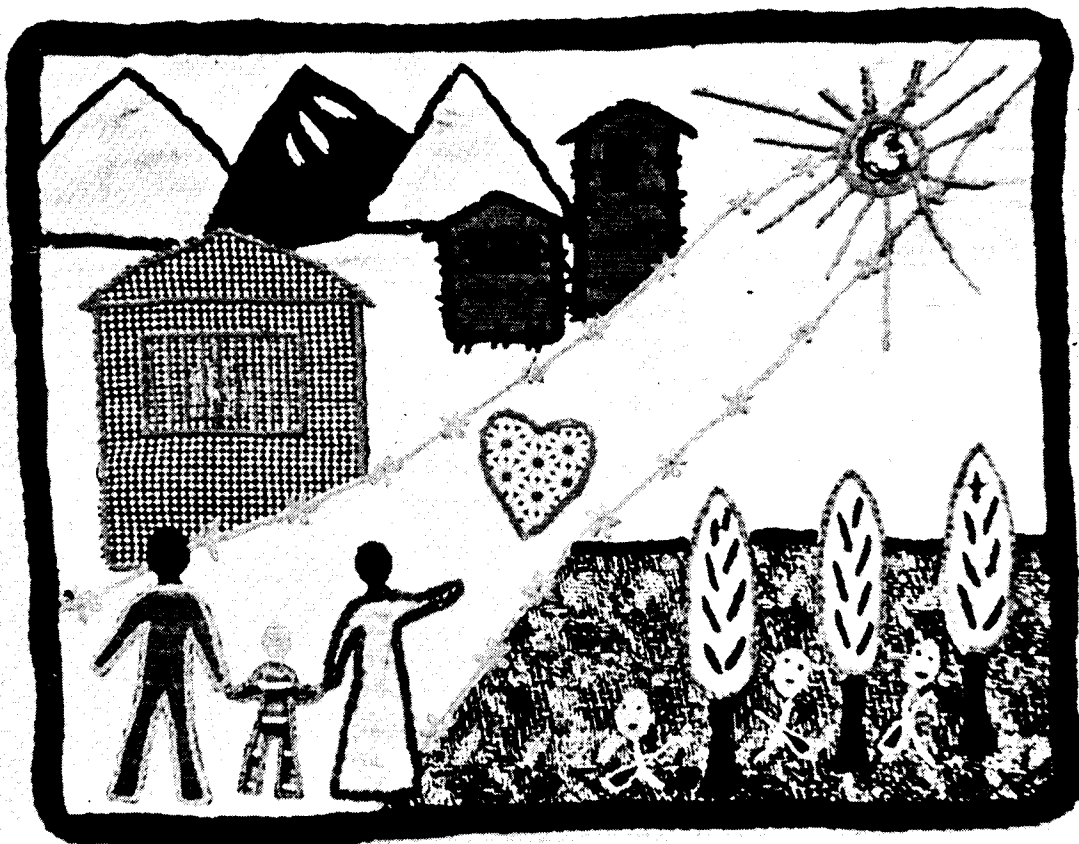
30. Rose Cohen, *Out Of The Shadow*, p. 851.
31. *New York State Factory Investigating Comm.*, 2nd Report, Vol. 3, 1913, Testimony of Mary Chamberlain, pp. 1016, 1004.
32. Edith Abbott, *Unpublished Biography of Grace Abbott*, Chapter Two, "Lost Immigrant Girls", The Abbott Papers, University of Chicago, Box 1, Folder 16, Addenda 2.
33. Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One Of Them*, p. 110.
34. Carroll Brodsky, "Rape At Work," in Walker, *Sexual Assault*, (Lexington: DC Heath & Co., 1976), p. 48.
35. Lieberman, p. 84. Also, for example, See Gompers, S., "Don't Sacrifice Womanhood," *American Federationist* 4:186-187 October 1897 and "Female Labor Arouses Hostility And Apprehension in Union Ranks," *Current Opinion*, 64: 292-4, April 1910.
36. Mary Anderson, *Woman At Work* (Minneapolis: U. of Minn., 1951) p. 66. Also see, *Life & Labor* V. 3 No. 4, p. 103 and Theresa Wolfson, *Woman Worker and Trade Unions*, p. 55.
37. P.N. to R.S. Nov. 14, 1911. R.S., A 94 quoted in Harris, *Labor History* article.
38. P.N. to R.S., July 11, 1912, R.S. A 94.
39. Rose Schneiderman, *All For One* (New York: Paul S. Erikson, 1967), p. 86.
40. Mary Anderson, *Woman At Work*, p. 56, incident about 1915.
41. Alice Hamilton, *Exploring The Dangerous Trades*.
42. Emily Dunning Barringer, M.D., *Bowery To Bellevue* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 184.
43. "Lost Immigrant Girls", *Abbott Papers*, pp. 2-3.
44. On homosocial networks and sisterhood, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," and Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*. For differing perceptions of harasser and victim, see Carroll Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker*.
45. On current conditions, Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker*, and interview with members of the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, a Boston group working on this issue. Prison may be a significant exception to this as a situation in which men are frequently subjected to sexual harassment. See, for example, the interviews with prisoners in the film *Rape Culture* (Cambridge Documentary Films).

## ANTIPODE — RECENT ISSUES

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*The three poplar trees always refer to the Tres Alamos prison camp, which is 'open' in the sense that the political prisoners can receive visitors. The buildings on the left are the closed prisons or the secret places where 'disappeared' prisoners are taken. A road, lined with barbed wire, leads from this bitter present, through solidarity and hope, to the future.*

*Photos by Catharine Waley.*

# PATCHWORKS FROM CHILE\*

Guy Brett

On June 14, 1977, 28 Chileans — 26 women and 2 men — entered the offices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the capital city of Santiago. They were relatives of some of the “disappeared” political prisoners in Chile; they declared a hunger strike and they refused to leave until they were told the fate of these 2,000 people arrested by the military junta and then listed merely as “missing”.

Because of international scrutiny and domestic resistance, the Chilean junta prefers not to openly arrest people any longer and put them in recognized prisons and camps, but to seize and torture them secretly, without naming them, without charging them. Any attempt by their families to try to trace them is met with harassment, especially by the DINA\*, Chile’s secret police.

The demonstrators sent an impassioned message to Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, and he responded by invoking extraterritorial privilege for the mission in Santiago (i.e., that legally it was not part of Chilean territory), so the strikers could not be molested by the Chilean security forces. International response to the occupation was so great that Pinochet (the leader of the junta) was forced to agree, at least ostensibly, with two of the strikers’ demands — to look into the cases of their disappeared relatives, and not to take reprisals for the demonstration.

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\* This article is reprinted with permission from *Spare Rib*, October, 1977. Since this article was first printed, the Chilean junta announced the dissolution of the DINA and its replacement by an organization called Central Nacional de Informaciones (National Information Center). Despite the innocuous name, nothing has changed.

Several hundreds of patchwork pictures have been made in Chile in the last two years, despite the atmosphere of terror. It is a popular art of resistance invented by the people themselves because of an overpowering need to express the bitter experiences they are going through and to find a channel of communication to the world outside. Some of the first of these patchworks were made in the prisons, but now they are nearly all made by women (usually the wives or mothers of political prisoners) living in the shanty-towns, the poorest areas, around Santiago. They are not professional artists or artisans, and in general they have worked up and adapted a popular form of embroidery traditionally used to decorate bags and baskets. But their message can be understood anywhere in the world.

These rag pictures come out of poverty. They depict the brutalities and suffering the ordinary people have had to endure from reactionary rulers. They show them in detail. But in doing so they take none of the inhumanity, rigidity and coldness of their oppressors. They can express serious sorrow and at the same time be full of imagination and spirit. In the patchworks this comes out in the brilliant colors, and also in the witty and poetic way the scraps of patterned, mass-produced fabric have been used. Not only the subject, but the whole way they are made is like a message saying that the people will not be crushed and reduced to silence.

How did this movement begin?

The appearance of these patchwork pictures cannot really be separated from a very broad wave of cultural activity in Chile over more than ten years. It began before Allende came to power and continues today despite the intense efforts of the present government to crush it. It has always had a popular character. It has been linked with a movement of masses of people against the conditions, physical and mental, of "underdevelopment". Many popular art forms

sprang up in Chile during the Popular Unity period, although they had little time to develop: the New Song Movement, street and field theatre, mural painting, publishing of popular educational books and magazines which reached enormous readerships for a Third World country, new-style comics, the revitalization of handicrafts which were languishing, and so on.

Among these crafts was one of making pictures from different colored wools, which was specially admired and encouraged by the poet Pablo Neruda and by the folksinger and painter Violetta Para. This peasant art is the nearest antecedent to the present-day patchworks, but really the patchwork-makers have no formal tradition to draw on and express themselves in a direct and child-like way.

The strength of the cultural movement is clear from the way, under the extreme persecution of the right-wing junta, it has adapted itself and survived in new forms. Chileans in exile have got together to form new music and theatre groups. Poems, plays, pieces of metal- and wood-carving have found their way here even from inside Chilean prisons.

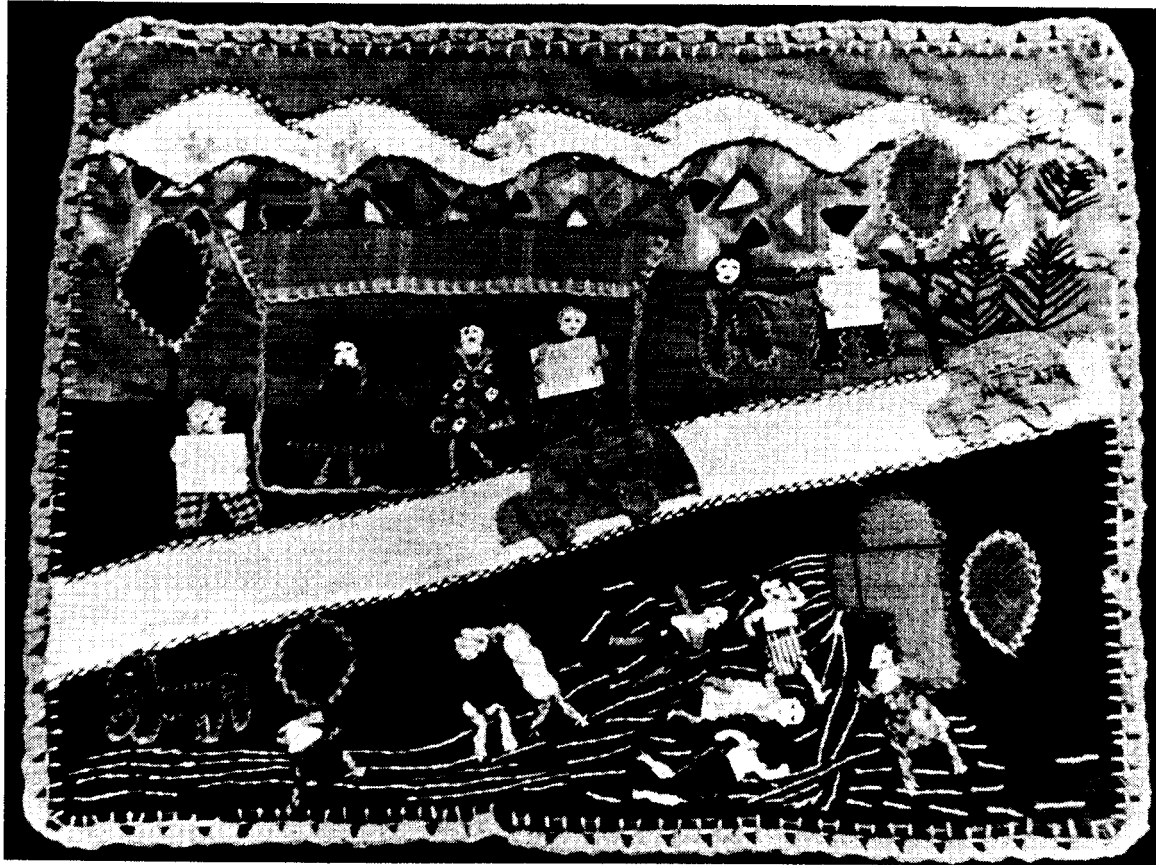
The first patchworks after the Coup in 1973 were made to denounce the junta and expose their crimes. It is hard to be sure exactly how it began, but most likely women political prisoners inside the jails and camps saw first the possibility of using an apparently innocuous form like the patchwork — so homely and "innocent" — as a means of protest. The movement quickly spread wider and wider. Patchwork-making became one of the forms of work organized in the shanty-towns to combat the massive unemployment produced by the junta's economic policies. Some of these workshops are organized by the people themselves and some by the Catholic Church, which in Chile has become increasingly opposed to the military government. Patchwork-making, like



laundering and sewing, produces a minimal income for women to buy some sort of food and medicines for their children. At first they were sold inside Chile, now abroad as well as at solidarity meetings and events.

Because people's survival depends on them, these workshops are carefully organized. Production has to be rationalized. They usually consist of not more than 20 women. A treasurer distributes the money obtained from sales. On the whole, money goes to the person whose work is sold; but everyone puts 10% into a common

fund to be used for buying materials and for emergencies. The number of patchworks produced has to be controlled. Usually one person makes one a week, but "women in a bad situation are allowed to make more patchworks than others." At a weekly meeting the new patchworks are looked over and discussed by women in the group and generally judged against the following criteria: that they should be well-finished; that the forms should be well-composed; that the subject should be truthful, and really "say something."



*The life of the children in Chile today. The road seems to split their life in two. Below they play in the water from a fire hydrant, and, above, the struggle to survive by selling sweets to the occupants of buses and cars along the Avenida Matta, one of Santiago's busiest streets.*

In fact in the details of these pictures — sometimes disguised and “coded” because of censorship — is contained a whole chronicle of the lives of Chilean workers today, their problems, all the things that affect them most. You see the day of the Coup, the troops running wild in the streets; you see the prisons, especially from the point of view of women visiting their men, or trying to find out where they’ve been taken. You see all the problems of the shantytown: the *comedors* (collective kitchens organized to feed the children); a woman going from house to house asking the neighbors to look after her child while she searches for work; children selling sweets along the main roads in order to survive; searching the dustbins at night for scraps of food; the cemetery crowded with family names. When the artists try to synthesize or sum up the situation, two definite tendencies appear. One is the religious explanation. Suffering is shown as a modern Way of the Cross; or, for example, a flock of sheep is shown attacked by an eagle. This is the style of lamentation. The other is the analysis of society and of class, the militant style. An example of this kind is the diagram-patchwork showing the dollar hovering over the Chilean economy. On the whole, there are few pictures which do not contain, in some segment, in some detail, an element of hope.

I mentioned before the “childlike” style of these pictures. The development of modern art has made people in Western countries receptive to the appeal of naivety in art. We have followed painters like Picasso and Klee as they adopted in their own work the spontaneous styles of untrained people, or of artists outside European traditions. This in turn has stimulated a market in which naive art has become a commodity, a fixed category which cannot be allowed to change. To look at the Chilean pictures from that point of view would be patronizing and wrong. Their technique is what it is because of



*At night in the shanty-towns mothers are searching the dustbins for food. 70% of children in Chile today are undernourished.*

circumstances. To get to grips with reality, to go into it deeper, they have every reason to develop their expression. And in fact already certain details which might appear merely charming and naive (for example, the “farmyard” scene in the patchwork of the circus we have illustrated) are deliberate disguises for references to real people and places in Chile which cannot be openly shown. As well as this, the pictures contain many elements which are not dependent on a “primitive” mode of expression, indications of a popular, democratic art and attitude to life which can be found in any nation and can be expressed in any number of ways.

Even in the most elementary compositions there are still details which are given great exactness: for example, how manual work is done; “machines” which make life easier (e.g. the gas burners under the cauldrons of soup in the *comedores*); the playfulness of children; and always as a background, in any number of colors, the Andes, the magnificent mountains which surround the city of Santiago and stretch like a backbone through the whole of Chile.

It could be called a matter of dignity, of one's conception of oneself as a human being, which leads the people making these patchworks, however bitter the subject, to use all the art they know, to bring out the hidden qualities and beauty in the thrown-away scraps of material.

"Apart from all this, it's a great joy that people consider that we are making art, that we are artists in this. For us, as housewives, we've never been, or dreamt of being, artists or working in that sort of thing. In this there's some compensation for all that's happened. It gives us more strength to go on, to go on

struggling to live. God willing, we'll be able to make them better every day."

The shanty-town itself has a double character. The poverty of the houses is not glossed over, the single crude lavatory of the whole settlement is shown, even that it's full of flies. But other details are included with pride: a table and chairs inside each house, flowers, the electric street lamps and their cables. And there are always people. The way the shanty-town is depicted carries the message that the people must advance step by step from the real situation they are in, and that their advance

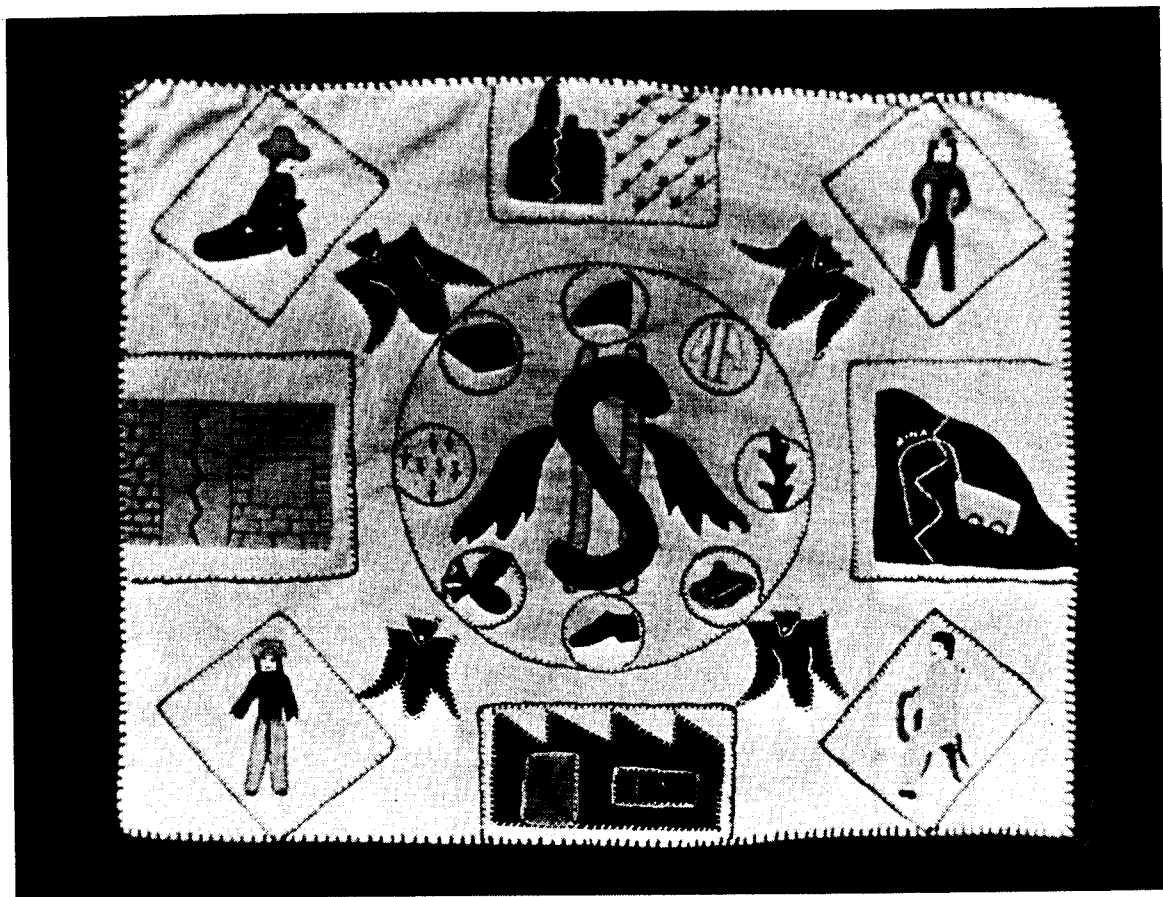


*Political prisoners at the bars of the cells like caged animals in the bleak architecture of the prison. Their families in the shanty-towns have to go on with normal life, but the world is split in two.*

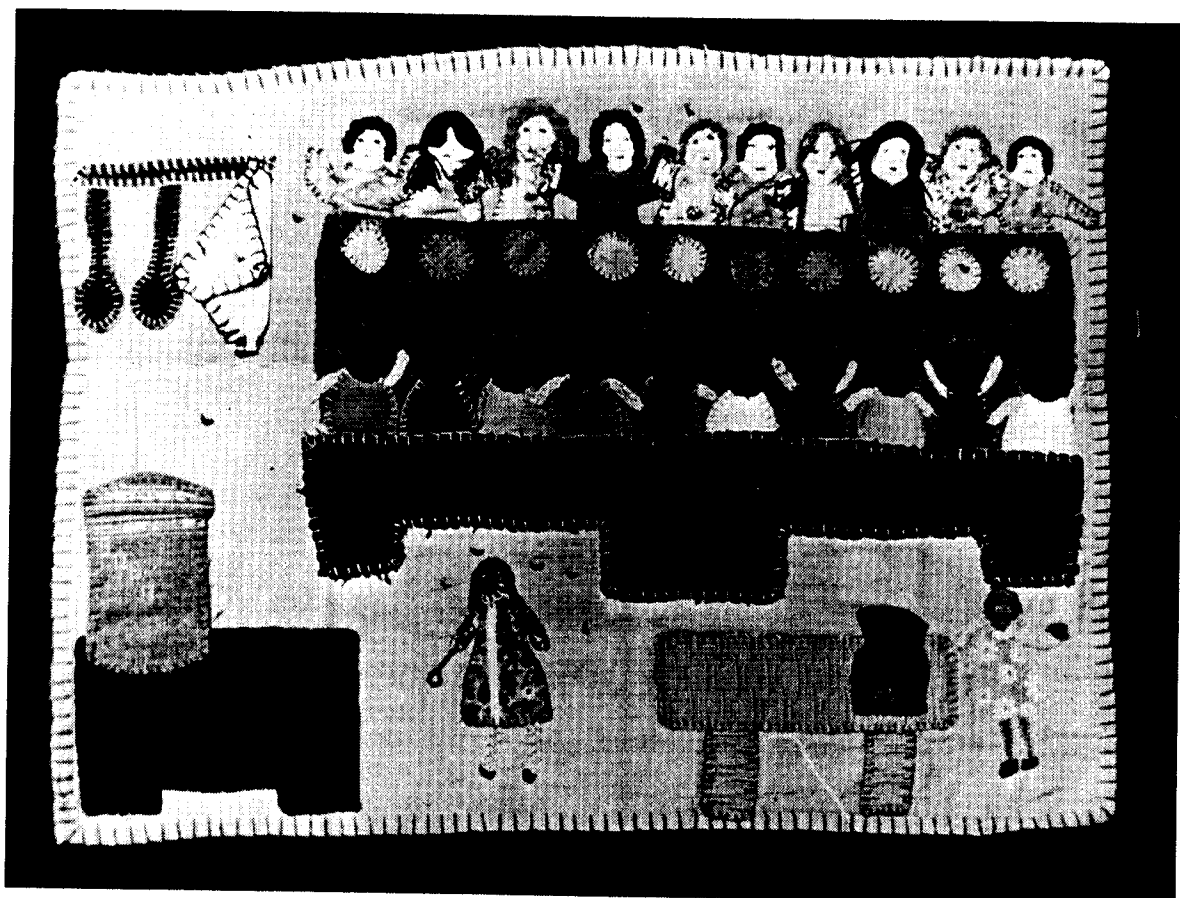
must be a common one that all benefit from.

There is no rhetoric in these pictures, and very rarely is an expression isolated and carried to extremes. All the undertones and incidentals in the patchworks give an impression of tremendous reserves of strength, of a kind of balance and resilience in the people, in the face of the worst the authorities can do.

*OPHRICH (Office for Political Prisoners and Human Rights in Chile) sells crafts from Chile; money collected goes to aid the Resistance. For information, write OPHRICH, 156 5th Avenue, Room 521, New York, N.Y. 10010. Notecards with pictures based on the patchworks are available from Bureau de Prisoners Politicos de Chile, 1731 Rue Visitation, Montreal, Canada.*



*The US dollar lording it over the workers and production of Chile. Chile's main products appear in the small circles around the centre (e.g. copper, shoes, textiles, foodstuffs, etc.). On the edge are figures of workers, factories, fields and mines disrupted and closed by the junta's policies. The four members of the junta appear as sinister bats.*



*A comedor popular — collective kitchen. In all the shanty-towns of Chile's cities and in many rural areas, the people have faced the problem of starvation by setting up public canteens for under-nourished children. Here food is given to about 40,000 children who would otherwise have nothing to eat at all. The food is supplied as far as possible locally but often the churches have to give help too. These canteens are not only saving children from deformity through undernourishment but they also provide a focus round which their parents can meet and talk without fear.*



# SHOPFLOOR POLITICS AT FLEETWOOD

*John Lippert*

I work at the Fleetwood Fisher Body plant in Detroit. A lot of you have probably seen or heard of it — it's that big old factory over on Fort St. where we make bodies for Cadillacs.

I want to talk to you today about what it's like to work at Fleetwood. But instead of describing my individual experience at Fleetwood, I want to try something a lot more ambitious: I want to analyze the collective experience of *all* the workers at Fleetwood. But this is not just analysis for the sake of analysis. I want to use my analysis of Fleetwood to uncover ways in which not only myself but a lot of workers can assume more control over our working lives.

Let me outline my argument so that you can see what I'm driving at:

In terms of economics, the main struggle going on at Fleetwood is between the workers and management over the amount of labor that will go into the Cadillacs. In terms of politics, the main struggle is between two groups of workers who are competing with each other over how that struggle with management will be carried out. One group of workers (who are usually but not always old) are trying to force management to bargain more equitably around a labor/money exchange which is itself not fundamentally questioned by these workers. The other group of workers (who are usually but not always young) have yet to accept the validity of that labor/money exchange and are in constant rebellion against it.

I call this struggle political for the simple reason that many of the participants in it are quite aware of what's going on. The workers are constantly thinking about the economic necessity and the structure of authority that forces them into the plant in the first place.

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And they are constantly trying to figure out what to do about it.

The struggle between these two groups of workers gives rise to what I'll call an advanced set of political issues and a conservative set of political issues, both of which are expressed quite clearly in the plant. On the basis of the advanced issues, some workers are questioning the very nature of their role as producer in the society. On the basis of the conservative issues, other workers are trying to use their role as producer as leverage to get what they can get.

My goal today is not just to analyze these political currents in the plant. I want also to analyze as precisely as I can the theoretical and organizational dilemmas which confront people who are pursuing the advanced issues. And I want to analyze ways in which these dilemmas can be broken down.

So now I want to begin my description of shopfloor politics at Fleetwood:

The first thing I have to point out, unfortunately, is that competition forms the initial basis for all our social interaction in the plant. This is true by definition: we're at Fleetwood to sell our labor, and so we compete in a tight market with others who have the same commodity to sell. We compete primarily with people outside the plant who are looking for work. But we also compete with other workers in ways which have great impact on the terms of our employment. Some jobs are better than others. Some pay more than others. A lot of times we need favors from the foremen, so we compete with each other over them. For instance, it's always easier for some people than others to get a pass to go home early.

It's important to start with this notion of competition because this provides the framework within which all our other collective efforts must develop. Strictly speaking, our collective identity is not one that's defined by unity and

common interests. Our collective identity is defined by disunity and competing interests.

I'm glad to say, that competition doesn't form the totality of our interactions in the plant. There's cooperation inherent in any mass industrial enterprise (although as it stands now this cooperation is advantageous mainly to the management). But outside of the work itself, groups of workers do associate on the basis of coherent group identities. And strong individual friendships do emerge among a lot of people.

Now in a situation as complex as Fleetwood, you have a lot of different groups doing a lot of different things. When I talk about how advanced and conservative issues arise in the plant, I'm obviously referring to what people do and think in relation to their work itself. Work at Fleetwood has a certain homogeneous character — it's an assembly plant. And so there are a certain range of possibilities of what people can think and do about their work.

My main goal today is to demonstrate to you the existence of a group of workers who I will call the vanguard group. I define the vanguard group in this way: they are a coherent group of people who are consistently trying to push through on the most advanced possibilities and most advanced political issues in the plant. I want to make it clear that this vanguard defines *itself* by what it does, by its own *practice* in the plant. They're not fulfilling some prophecy that was laid down a couple hundred years ago.

Now what are the advanced issues that the vanguard group attempts to act on? I define those issues in this way: the vanguard group is composed of those people in the plant who resist the reduction of their needs, personalities, and individualities to fit the needs of assembly line discipline. The vanguard group is composed of those people who refuse to think of themselves as only autoworkers, who refuse to act as if they are mere appendages to this giant mechanical



monster.

But I have to give you some facts so that you have a better idea of what I'm talking about. Let me say first that 20% of the workforce belong to this vanguard group. Not all the people in the plant are trying to resist assembly line discipline. Here are six other coherent groups who identify themselves by their *practice* in the plant:

1) there are a lot of old people in the plant who are just hanging on until they retire;

2) there are a lot of recent immigrants who are still pretty confused by their new environment;

3) there are a lot of people who lack self-confidence to such an extent that they actually need the identity which is supplied for them by the line;

4) there are a lot of small businessmen who are delighted to have a captive audience on which to operate: you've got all kinds of loan sharks, dope peddlers, numbers men and so on;

5) there are a lot of brown-nosers who openly collaborate with the foremen to such an extent that they actually *benefit* from the structure of authority; and

6) there are a great mass of people who are dissatisfied with their work environment but who are not actively trying to change it: their main goal during the working day is to just "get by."

So here are six groups of workers whose practice in the plant can be called conservative. I want to return later on to describe these conservative workers in more detail. I'm just pointing them out here to give a better idea of who the vanguard workers are.

But now I want to make some descriptive generalizations about the people in the vanguard group. Within the group, blacks and whites are equally represented and there's a small number of women. Their age is between 25 and 32. The people might have come from other areas of the country, but they are now com-

fortable within a complex urban environment. A lot of them have fought in Viet Nam. Most have families. Most have high school diplomas. And some have taken courses at local colleges.

But as I said before, a vanguard defines itself by what it *does*, and in order to fully describe what I mean by vanguard, I have to describe what these people *do* to actively resist factory discipline. In order to do this, I want to focus for a few minutes on one section in the plant, the Kotan section. This is generally believed to be the most militant section in the plant.

The most obvious activity of the vanguard group in the Kotan section is that they lead the yearly slowdown over manning levels in the department.

The Kotan job is a unique job at Fleetwood in that it requires a lot of skill on the part of the workers. Their job is to install the vinyl tops. They have to place the top on the car, stretch it to get all the wrinkles out, cut it to precise length and so on. All of this can take 20 minutes or more, and so they have about 40 teams of two people each working in rotation while the line is moving. That means there's a lot of people working on the job — with reliefmen and extras the total comes to about 110. This is another unique aspect of the Kotan job: there's so many of them that when they act in unison they have a lot of power.

Every year there's a model change at Fleetwood, and every year work is added to the Kotan job and workers are eliminated. So every year the Kotan people take the job in the hole. This is a fairly common event at Fleetwood. But when the Kotan people do it it's extraordinary. They don't just take the job in the hole 50 or 60 feet. They take it down 500 or 600 feet. And they cause a lot of disruption.

But I want to focus on the activity of the vanguard group in this struggle. First of all, they are the ones who initiate the slowdown and who

articulate the demands. There's always a lot of rumors and threats that fly around before the slowdown begins. The foremen go around and say that everyone will be fired or that the corporation is so sick of having trouble at Fleetwood that they want to shut it down entirely. The union comes around and says the slowdown won't be necessary since progress is being made in the negotiations. A lot of workers will be swayed by these rumours, since they're hoping to avoid a drawn-out struggle anyway.

So it's up to the vanguard to take the lead. They have to say first of all that it's not impossible for workers to take the company on and win. They have to say also that it's not impossible for workers to act as a group. And they have to say that it's only on the basis of pressure from the shop floor that the union will be able to do anything in the negotiations anyway. So off they go down into the hole.

Most workers in the Kotan section would never initiate the slowdown. But they will follow the lead of the vanguards. There are plenty of brown-nosers who don't want to go along. And so it's up to the vanguards to convince them, something which might require physical harassment. There are certain forms of sabotage which can go along with the slowdown. And the vanguards have to keep a close eye on the union, to see what kind of deals are being made.

But another responsibility of the vanguards is to keep the slowdown going once it's begun. The battle often lasts for weeks, and the pressure is intense. The vanguards have to keep people's spirits up, to see that they avoid unnecessary mistakes and so on. Once a speed-up grievance has been filed by the union, it's impossible for the company to discipline people for simply being in the hole. But they can throw people out for mistakes of workmanship or for coming back late from break. The company is clearly most interested in nailing the vanguards for this kind

of thing: sometimes they just make up lies about what a certain person did. And so from the first day of the slowdown, the company begins throwing people out into the street. One of the most thrilling things for me as I watch this is to see new leaders step forward as the old ones get thrown out.

But the most exciting thing about the slowdowns is that you can actually see workers winning victories. This happened in 1976. The battle lasted for weeks, and more and more people were thrown out. But finally, on a certain Friday night, the company couldn't replace all the people they had thrown out and still cover for normal Friday night absenteeism. That meant they had to let one out of six cars go down the line without a vinyl top. The repair costs were staggering, and so on that night the company gave in. Manning levels were increased in the department and everyone who had been thrown out was brought back with full pay.

Now this was only a short-term victory in the sense that several months later the company cut back on the manning levels, and because the whole battle began again with the next model change. But through the year, the vanguards had preserved the comraderie that had developed during the slowdown. And so when the next battle came, they were ready. How did these workers preserve their identities through the year?

One of the big prizes the Kotan people get by winning these slowdowns is that they get a little extra time between their jobs. They tend to congregate then in coherent groups in specific areas on the department. The identities of the groups are defined mainly by what people *do* in relation to factory discipline. The old men huddle along the line between the stock area and the area where the glue is sprayed on. The brown-nosers hang out over by the foremen's desk. The bible readers hang out in the back,

where they discuss philosophy and stuff. There are a group of black moderates and a group of white moderates who hang out at the picnic tables by the foremen's desk. And the black and the white vanguards hang out over by the windows.

The main thing that goes on over by the windows is that people are self-conscious about maintaining the community and the comraderie which was formed during the slowdowns. If the slowdowns were just sporadic events, maybe participation in them wouldn't be sufficient to justify calling a certain group vanguard. But if the slowdowns happen every year, if the same people lead them, and if those people try to preserve their community year in and year out, then the concept of vanguard becomes much deeper. But what are the daily sort of events which keep the community going?

In the first place, there's always some sort of specifically collective event going on by the windows. Maybe it's a group dinner a few guys are preparing. Maybe people are collectively reading and discussing the newspaper. Maybe they're getting together a softball game or a picnic outside the plant. And people are always just standing around and talking. There's an information network for militants that extends throughout the plant, and people are always discussing the latest rumor, the latest move by the union and so on. But they also talk about anything else that comes up: they might talk about religion, about marriage, about bringing up kids, about fixing up their houses, about keeping their cars running and so on. These are not superficial discussion. People talk about their values, their beliefs, their fundamental perceptions of the universe in which they find themselves.

The funniest thing that goes on by the windows is that there's a constant rowdiness back there. People are always up to something.

The big thing last fall was pitching quarters. It was initiated by some of the white vanguards, and pretty soon the games grew into big events — people would gather around and cheer and so on. Eventually the foreman came over and told people to stop, and then it became a game of hide and seek — people would sneak in a few games while the foreman wasn't looking. Pretty soon some of the black vanguards started playing, then some of the white moderates. Pretty soon people all over the department were playing, partly for the fun of it and partly for the joy of outfoxing the foreman. The game even caught on in the back corner where I work, but only after it had died down in the Kotan area.

After the pitching quarters game faded out, the new game became basketball. People would carve hoops out of packing material and shape balls out of tape and cardboard. And then they'd have really dynamite games of two on two or three on three. This lasted for a couple weeks, and then the foreman started tearing down the hoops.

The big event at Christmas (besides the party) was that the whole group participated in making a Christmas tree. They cut the tree out of some cardboard, stapled it to some wood from a packing crate, and then painted and decorated it with anything they could find in the plant. It was really elaborate. It was eight feet tall; it had Christmas balls and candy canes on it; it even had a chimney with stockings and logs burning in the fireplace. It was a work of art. But then, lo and behold, the foreman came and tore down the tree. It wasn't that there was anything so destructive about the tree. It's just that the foreman had been trying all year to break the identity of that group — these were the same people who lead the slowdowns. I should say for the record that the general foreman later ordered the foreman to put the tree back up. But it didn't matter much then. The Christmas spirit

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had been ruined.

Now this, I think, constitutes a good description of the vanguard group in Kotan. But Kotan is a unique section: it's unique in ways which make the vanguard activity much easier to see. But there are a lot of vanguard people in the plant who are isolated, and so what they do is much harder to see. How do these vanguard people express themselves in isolation?

Well I'm going to take myself as an example of this. I work in the back, about fifty yards from the Kotan area. It's a pretty quiet corner. The group interaction is nowhere near as intense as in Kotan. And most of the people are committed to what I'll describe later as conservative courses of action.

The job I do is also different from Kotan in that there's no skill involved: I don't do any one coherent operation. I do a lot of different things on each job. This is the typical kind of job we have at Fleetwood.

On the Eldorados I have to shoot a retainer inside the quarter glass window. A retainer is a short strip of metal: I'm not sure what its purpose is. On the Sedans and Broughams I have to shoot a bumper inside the front door. A bumper is this small piece of plastic that goes "bump" when you close the door. And on these cars and the Coupes and the Seviles I have to put masking tape on the surfaces near where the vinyl top will go. My tape is to prevent glue from getting all over when they spray the cars before installing the vinyl tops. I put yards and yards of masking tape on each car. The tape has to be in precise position and it has to be slicked down.

There's nothing hard about the individual components of the job. My work is light and fast. It might take several weeks to learn to co-ordinate the various tasks. And it might take months to get really good. But eventually the main problem is *time*: you have to come to grips

with the necessity of actually having to *do* that shit. You have to come up with some way of making sure your identity doesn't get destroyed by your work.

The main way I try to do this is to minimize the thought and labor which are required to do the job. I don't have to think too much about what I do: I just start running and let the momentum carry me. But I have to be careful not to get into a bad mood, not to let my morale slip, not to be aware of the passage of time. As far as the work goes, I'm always cutting little corners, finding little shortcuts. I don't want to describe too much of this publicly since they might start watching me, but let me say that most people at Fleetwood are surprised at how many shortcuts you can take and still not get caught. I want to be clear here that I'm not the only worker playing this game: almost everybody does it. The assembly line gives very little incentive to do otherwise. And I should say also that the foremen and the general foremen and the superintendents and the plant managers are also playing the game: they're all trying to see what they can put over on higher levels of management. If you think all this has an impact on the quality of the final product, you're right. Poor quality is not an accident these days: it's built into the very essence of the system.

But what do I do as an individual worker with the time I save by taking these shortcuts? I'm good enough at my job now that I can do two or three cars in a row fast and then have maybe 15 or 20 seconds for myself in between. The main thing I do with these interludes is read. I read the paper every day and I read books. Some of the books are quite complex. The main thing I've had to learn in order to read under these conditions is to remember what I've read and to be able to quickly find where I've left off. Reading is very important to me. It takes my mind somewhere else. I'm not the only one who

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reads; a lot of people do it, except that they might read magazines or do crossword puzzles; some people might knit or sew, but people can generally keep busy during the little gaps between their jobs.

And like most people, I do a lot of talking when I'm working. I talk to people next to me or to people who are passing through. And in the same way as a lot of people, I consciously try to circulate around the plant during my break time. There's a whole network of these vanguard people who seek each other out and visit. The discussions are not always political. People are just trying to make the day go by a little faster. They're trying to make the day more interesting.

Another major social event is at lunchtime. A lot of people go out to the bar across the street or they sit in their cars and talk. I go out every day. I usually have a beer or two. It's a chance to relax a bit, to enjoy a change of scenery. Pretty soon there's a coherent group of people in the plant who have come to know each other through their interactions in the parking lot.

Another major way that people resist the discipline of the factory is through absenteeism. Most people in the plant work every day, but that's just because they need the money. There's a certain percentage of people in the plant who aren't so pressed for cash and so they don't feel the need to come in every day. The company has been trying for years and years to get these people to come in, but there's really not much the company can do about it.

Another major event which defines this vanguard group in the plant is the wildcat strike we had at Fleetwood in the summer of 1976. The shop committee of the local called the strike, but they got their signals crossed badly. So at the time of the walkout there was a lot of confusion as to who was going and why. A lot of people turned back or waited at the door to see what would happen. 600 people walked out, but it was

only because they felt it was time for a walkout regardless of the union's ability or inability to lead it. There were a lot of positive and negative consequences of the wildcat; some people got fired and all the rest. But one thing I do want to say is that that group of 600 people survived the walkout relatively intact, and they have continued to participate heavily in the other kinds of vanguard activity I've been describing today. (*RA* Vol. 11, No. 5)

So this, I think, is a fair description of the vanguard activity in the plant: you have periodic slowdowns; a lot of day to day interactions which keep the militant community in the plant alive; a lot of people struggling in isolation to not let their identities be totally overwhelmed by their work; chronic absenteeism and occasional explosive events like a wildcat. People are always pushing, always moving, always looking for some kind of change. People are always thinking and talking, too. I want to ask now a very important question in trying to assess the political importance of this activity: I want to see what kind of consciousness is being expressed by what people are doing. What do people believe about themselves and society to make them act this way?

I think there are several generalizations which can be made about what these people think. The first thing to point out is that their shop floor militancy is from their own point of view a reflection on what they think of the entire society, not just what they think of Fleetwood. Their experience throughout society has taught them that they have to fight for anything they're going to get. A lot of them have fought in Viet Nam; both blacks and whites have had to contend with state authority in the streets and in the welfare office. If they perceive a bottleneck in the production process, if they perceive that a slowdown in Kotan can be a very powerful thing, then they're ready, willing and able to take

advantage of it.

Another primary belief among this vanguard is that there is no equality of opportunity in the society and that they themselves are working far below their capacity. This is felt particularly among blacks. Most people talk about getting out of the plant. But few people ever make it.

It's a common belief among these people that basically you have to hustle just to survive at Fleetwood, that you have to work hard to maintain your morale and your self-image. This is the main purpose of the small groups that people are a part of on the shop floor. It's also the main purpose of the shop floor militancy itself.

These workers have long since given up any hope of satisfaction from their work. They try to have a good time with people around them. But they seek their main satisfaction at home. People have hobbies that they're into. And they have great hopes for their marriages and their relationships with their kids. But there's a lot of tension and hard work that go along with having a family. So for many people it seems like real satisfaction is more the exception than the rule.

These workers have some sense about how the work is affecting their health in the long run. They worry about stress, about drinking, about popping too many pills. But they have very few alternatives in the short run, so they figure, "What the hell can you do?"

These vanguard workers generally feel that Fleetwood is going downhill. The dominant outlook in the plant is that "All you can do is hang on and make as much money as you can before the bottom falls out." People basically feel that you have to have twenty years in the plant now in order to have a decent shot at getting a full pension.

This perception of instability and decline contributes to a general cynicism about their own ability to act as a group. They understand

correctly that they are powerful only in so far as they can impede production. And so they sense how they are undermined if they are based in a declining industry. This also dampens their enthusiasm for traditional liberal rhetoric about "Saving our Jobs." People know intuitively that this has very little basis in political economy.

This is similar to the long range outlook of people in the Kotan area. People are convinced that eventually the company will eliminate the section, either by installing the tops automatically or by having two-tone painted tops and so on. The Kotan people don't respond to this by staying out of the hole now. But they are not very hopeful about the future.

The best of these people, the real vanguard, are also very cynical about the general prospects for change in the society. They've already tried, through these slowdowns and things, to challenge portions of the power structure, and so they know how well entrenched it is. And they're also very cynical about the ability of workers to act collectively. How can it be otherwise, when they've literally had to fight to organize something as seemingly fundamental as a slowdown in the department over speedup? What does this say about the possibility of broader actions?

This vanguard group at Fleetwood has been exposed to socialist or communist movements in this country for many years, and have a pretty sophisticated opinion of where the left is at. One guy put it to me this way, "Revolution is a nice idea. But it's one of those things that you can talk all day about and never quite get anywhere." People aren't unsympathetic to the left. It just doesn't mean much to them.

Most people don't think the union is any kind of long term solution to their problems. And they have little faith in what it can do in the short run. But they tend to defend the union from company attack. And they don't like it when people attack the union when there's

nothing available by way of short term alternatives.

Part of their lack of faith in the union is that they perceive it as tied to wage and benefit packages. They'll take the money and the benefits. But they say quite clearly that these alone will never add up to a solution to their problems.



EPA Documerica Photo, 1973.

So in general, I'd sum up the outlook of this vanguard in this way: They're extremely alienated from their role as producer in the society. They have an ability to organize to get what they

can in the short run. They have a perception that long run change will require broad collective effort on the part of the workers. And they're generally cynical about the prospects for these changes to come about.

One of the first questions people ask about this vanguard is where did they come from? How long have they been in the plant? How do you trace their development historically?

I'm not a historian, so I can't give a complete answer to these questions. But I know of two general ways that people try to answer these questions.

The first is a demographic answer. There's a lot of theories floating around that a certain age group of people, namely the people born after the baby boom after World War II, have been a characteristically rebellious group through various stages of their participation in society. This is the so-called cohort theory: cohort is a word that refers to a specific age group of people who travel through life together. *Business Week* (Feb. 20, 1978) had an article about this only two weeks ago. I want to quote them:

*... problems brought by the entrance of the baby boom generation into the labor force began surfacing years ago. This generation, having no remembrance of the depression and economic hardship, grew up in the affluent — and permissive — atmosphere of the 50s, and matured during the social upheavals of the 60s. Not only did it bring marijuana into the workplace; it also brought a dislike for union and management bureaucracies and a demand for more challenging work.*

The other way of describing shop floor militancy is to say that it's a basic worker response to the way cars are produced, and that it's been around as long as the assembly line

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itself. There's probably a lot to that theory, but it's hard to evaluate since so much of labor history today is confined to a study of the unions. I think there were a lot of radical people involved in the formation of the unions, and a lot of workers joined the unions as a radical step in transforming their work environment. But I think a lot of conservative people were involved in the unions. And there were a lot of sophisticated people in the government and in some sectors of business who saw quite clearly how the unions could be used to stabilize the rapidly expanding industrial sector. I think the radical people knew they were making a compromise with these conservative elements — if they didn't make such a compromise there wouldn't have been a union. The compromise was a necessary one, but it fatally limited the ability of the radical people to get what they wanted out of the union: namely an institution through which workers could transcend their role as producer in the society. And so I think the union we know today is an imperfect reflection of several different social forces which were operating on the shop floor at the time it was formed.

So then, why are these vanguard groups important? I would say first that the collective identity of these vanguard groups is in essence the composite of many individual efforts to not let our individual identities get wiped out by the work we do. We take part in a collective identity which is entirely of our own making. We've already overcome the competition which lies at the bottom of initial interactions. We've rejected the notion that what we get from the society comes through exchanging our labor. What we get now comes through our own ability to organize and fight for it. In fact, we've organized now to fight for something which the company can't give us anyway, which is our dignity and integrity as human beings.

I think the activity of these vanguard groups is important also because it embodies a vivid condemnation of how society is organized today. In fact it's hard to imagine how any society could be organized such that the demands of these vanguard groups could be met. The activity of these groups, in fact, give me the best clues I've ever had as to what a truly revolutionary society would look like. These workers would never accept a society that called itself revolutionary if the unskilled workers were simply ordered to do arbitrary, repetitive labor. Any technologically advanced society is going to require a division of labor between mental and manual laborers. But these vanguard workers of today would never accept a division of labor in which they were not fully active, fully conscious participants in the decision-making process. If unskilled labor is required by a revolutionary society, it won't be arbitrarily imposed on the workers. They will have a lot to say about the terms and the conditions under which they will work.

But beyond that, the existence of these vanguard groups in the plant is important because it proves that people's identities *can't* be stamped out by this system of production. These vanguard groups make it possible to imagine conscious mass participation in a movement to change this society. And these vanguard groups throw out hope that a society characterized by conscious mass decision-making can indeed emerge.

But I don't want to get too carried away when I say this. I don't want to say that the revolution is occurring down at Fleetwood. In fact, these vanguard groups would be the first to say that they're not organized to achieve anything more than they've got, which is a slightly more humanized existence at Fleetwood.

And furthermore, people have a deep understanding of how dangerous the powers-that-be



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are. They're not about to take any chances, any more general steps unless the goals are pretty clear and unless they have some reasonable chance to succeed. It's like what a lot of people have discovered when they take their jobs down into the hole: it's a very unpleasant experience to have nine or ten foremen standing in your face.

And so fear, fear itself, is a very important part of the outlook of people at Fleetwood. A lot of people look at what happened to John Kennedy or Martin Luther King and say, "If people like that can get killed, we don't stand a chance." People may not know who killed these men or why. And they may not be trying to analyze the dangers that would actually be faced by a movement of workers. But the subjective implications of this fear are still very important. People say, "The hell with it. I'll just get along as best as I can."

And people are still basically cynical about the ability of workers to act collectively as a group; this is the single most concrete expression of how people perceive their powerlessness today. They feel like even if they did create some worker organization to fight for their interests, pretty soon somebody from the rank and file would rise up and sell it out. Workers talk almost wistfully about how different it was 10 or 15 years ago, when things were different, when people did stick together. The union was a much bigger part of people's lives then, so I ask people if the union has changed. People shake their heads and say, "No, it's the people. The people have changed." Nobody can be more specific. People just lower their heads and walk away.

So even though the vanguard exists at Fleetwood, even though they're a very powerful force on the shop floor, I'd still have to call the atmosphere at Fleetwood a generally conservative one. I don't mean that people believe in George Wallace or anything like that. I just

mean that people aren't into taking too many chances. They're apprehensive about the future, and they believe they'd be doing well to just maintain the life they've carved out for themselves at this point.

Now I want to describe more fully these conservative currents that run through the plant. I've spent all this time talking about the vanguard group but I don't want to distort their importance. The vanguard group comprises no more than 20% of the workforce, and they are not the dominant group in the plant. I want to talk now about what the rest of the people, these 80% are doing.

The main conservative current is expressed when people simply don't challenge their work environment. They accept it as given and then try to find little nooks and crannies within which they can express themselves comfortably. Very few people actually like their work or take pride in it. Very few people believe that there's an equitable exchange going on between workers and management. But for a lot of different reasons, a lot of people don't challenge what goes on around them.

A lot of people who fall into this category are just timid; they're people who are not accustomed to leaving an imprint on the people around them. Most workers have been told from the day they were born that their perceptions of the world are not important to anybody. A lot of people actually believe they don't have anything important to say. A lot of people don't circulate too much in the plant: they may never talk to people 30 or 40 feet down the line from them. Maybe they lack self-confidence. Maybe they are recent immigrants and are still confused by the language and customs around them. And there's a lot of old people in the plant who have seen shop floor struggles come and go in the plant for years, and who have long since given up the hope of seeing any fundamental change. All they want

to do is get out.

Most of the people in the plant are just into getting by. They maintain a low profile in the plant. They interact with a small group of friends. They do their job and go home. That's it.

A lot of people, maybe 20%, are into making individual deals with the foremen. These deals can be quite extensive and can radically alter their working experience. Maybe they'll get out a little early. Maybe their job won't get any more work put on it. Maybe they'll get extra overtime or a specific date for a vacation. And these people will do lots of things for the foreman in return. Maybe they'll cover a certain job if somebody doesn't show up. Maybe they'll come in early to stock the line before it starts. These people obviously contribute to the conservatism of the situation: they're not about to rock the boat because they don't have to. We have two women in our area who have hot coffee and doughnuts ready for the plant superintendent each morning. This superintendent is a particularly devilish man — he's the one responsible for setting up all the jobs; he personally implements the speedup in the plant. Now I have nothing against personal friendship. But of all the people in our section, these two women were the only ones who got work taken off their jobs by writing a speedup grievance with the union. So there is definitely something fishy going on.

Conservatism is also built into the hiring policies in the plant. 90% of the people hired there in the last 5 years have had a brother or a mother or a cousin working there. Anybody else who got hired was just plain lucky. This practice doesn't totally coopt the workforce, but it helps. It helps create a situation where people are trying to get ahead by flowing with the system instead of against it.

Something else contributes to the conservatism of the plant: lots of people concede so much to management before they begin to fight

that it's hard for them to win anything. This is the basic weakness of people caught within the labor/money exchange.



I had a fight once with my partner Frank that illustrates this. He wanted me to stop reading my books because he was afraid the bosses would use it as an excuse to give us more work. Frank is the kind of guy who can never think of anything else but work in the first place, so at first I wasn't sure what to make of what he was saying. But he insisted so finally I went along. But after several hours I started up reading again. Part of it was that I was going crazy. And part of it was that I felt like not reading was putting us in a position of weakness vis-a-vis the foreman anyway. I don't want to always be worrying and posturing toward what they *might* do. If they're going to do something, let them go ahead and do it. And until that time comes, I'm going to worry about what *I* want to do. I knew I was taking a chance by reading. But part of what I was telling the foreman by reading was that he would sure as hell have a fight on his hands if he came around messing with us. That seemed to me to be a much stronger position to be in.

This bargaining-from-weakness is also clearly characteristic of the union. The union is not an

offensive organization in that it attempts to advance the interests of the workers even if that means fundamental changes in the society. The union is a defensive organization. It's trying hard now to maintain a certain terrain on which it and the company can bargain to their mutual advantage. It is possible for the union to win concessions from management. But management can win concessions from the union — primarily it wants the union to guarantee labor stability. So the union is required by definition to try and force the workers to funnel all their discontent into the grievance procedure.

Now I hope it's clear from what I've said so far that the union is not at all successful in doing this. Workers have a lot of other ways of fighting back. There are a lot of good strong militants who refuse on principle to call the union. Most people will call the union because it is one option open to them and because it does complicate the life of a foreman. But it's not their main tactic: people know that if all they can do is write a grievance about something then they are in a lot of trouble. One of the most telling indications of the state of the union today is that the best militants, the leaders of this vanguard for instance, don't run for union positions. Instead what you get in the union are the politicians, the people who feel some personal motivation to play that kind of role. The decision about who would be a good rep is almost never a collective decision in a department.



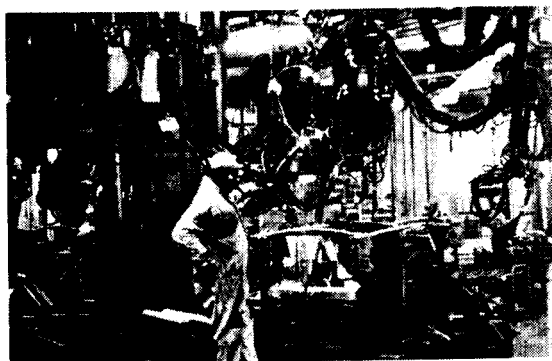
The basic weakness of the union is that it's tied directly to the labor/money exchange and it can't move away from it. The union tries to alter that exchange so that the balance is more in favor of the workers. But it's constantly on the defensive. A good example of this is that the company has in the last year fired several people for collecting unemployment or welfare at the same time they were on the company payroll. Some of these people got their jobs back, but the company obviously extracted a price. By being forced to deal with those kinds of issues, the union is continually sacrificing its ability to push for more offensive gains. Another example of this at Fleetwood is the paralysis of the local union. We haven't had a local contract in about 18 months. For much of that time the local union has been begging the International to let them go on strike. But the International constantly jams them up. So now, all of a sudden we've got a soft market for Cadillacs and we've got the threat of layoffs because of the coal strike. So now, lo and behold, the International is supposedly ready to let us go out on strike. It's ridiculous.

Probably the saddest statement about the union today is that in many ways it actually works against the development of a collective identity among the workers. They don't settle grievances on their merit; they trade groups of grievances off one against the other. That means almost by definition that the interests of the younger workers are sacrificed for the interests of the older workers. Workers are not allowed to comment on any grievances but their own. Departmental meetings to discuss union affairs are avoided like the plague. And the only real cooperation between different locals is over the wage and benefit packages in the national agreement. On matters of health and safety and so on, each local is left to slug it out alone.

Now I'm not suggesting doing away with the

union or anything like that. Sometimes that's all you've got. I myself was fired at Fleetwood once, and I spent the next four months on the telephone. I was almost begging those union guys to take up my case. The weakness of the union is built into the very essence of the institution. It's not dependent on the personalities of certain "bureaucrats" or anything like that.

This is especially true when the union is rapidly deteriorating into a simple interest group mechanism. The union today is clearly moving toward protectionism. It's not moving toward more militant pursuit of the workers interests.



The auto industry is not in very good shape today. It's in a short term slump which they didn't anticipate and which they are *hoping* won't be too severe. And the long term stagnation the industry faces is obvious: the industry is on an international level too big. They have the capacity to build more cars than the market can bear, but they have to run the system at near or full capacity in order to be profitable. We'll be seeing cutbacks in the next few years as some of the older plants get phased out. And we'll be seeing a series of classic business cycles in which the market is periodically flooded and then drained of cars. And in

an atmosphere already characterized by high unemployment, autoworkers will be increasingly on the defensive. And the auto companies will use their plight to extract concessions from the workers, the unions and anyone else they can get their hands on: witness what Chrysler is doing now to the city of Trenton.\*

Of all the issues that come up in the plant, the issue of layoffs is one of the most difficult for me to relate to politically. It cuts the guts right out of workers struggles in the plant. Most workers see the handwriting on the wall and regard it with resignation, because they see clearly how the layoffs cut into their own ability to fight. How do you fight something that big, especially when all the options are lousy? A lot of politicians are into throwing around the slogan of "Save our Jobs." But all these ideas are variations on the same theme: the government steps in to either prop the industry up or else to cut off foreign imports. Neither of these suggestions could fundamentally change the economy to the long-term advantage of the workers. Both these suggestions leave the workers in a totally defenseless position in the plant, and leave autoworkers pitted against other groups in the society: either other

\* Trenton is a small industrial suburb south of Detroit. Chrysler has been operating an engine plant there for years. They want to phase out most of the old operations and start up some new ones. But before they begin the conversion, they're demanding \$36,000,000 worth of tax incentives from the city. The Trenton City Council has so far balked; the president of the school board has said the schools will be bankrupted if they comply with Chrysler's demands. They say the best they can do is \$23 million. So in retaliation, Chrysler has begun negotiating with the state of Ohio and with several other cities in Michigan, all of whom want Chrysler to locate the new operations in their area. The decisions haven't been made yet. But whatever happens, the City of Trenton will be devastated.

displaced groups who could also use the government money or else autoworkers in other countries who could also use the work. And so all of these scenarios set up tremendously volatile political pressures in the society.

The union, of course, will fight to hang on to its present base of power. It's simple: the less members it has the less clout it has. And so they'll get sucked right into the protectionist tide. This has already happened in such industries as steel and clothing, where the companies and the unions march hand in hand down to Washington to plead for relief. A good thing to watch will be if the UAW abandons its traditional policy against import controls on foreign cars. I would go so far as to predict it'll happen soon, and when it does, you know they're running scared.

I've been listing all these conservative trends in the plant, and I can't finish up without listing the most conservative trend of all, and that is the government itself. It's not just conservative; it's downright repressive. And it's the ultimate obstacle that autoworkers face today.

There's no better example of this than what happened down at the Trenton Engine plant this summer. They have a problem with heat down there; the temperature can go up to 130 degrees in the summer. After many years of struggle about this the company finally agreed in writing to give people passes to go home early if it got too hot. But during a heatwave last summer the company suddenly stopped giving people passes. A lot of bitterness resulted and then a walkout. But after a few days of this, the company called in the government, and the government was more than happy to oblige. They issued an injunction against picketing, and then they hauled seven people at random out of a crowd and charged them with contempt of court. These people actually went to jail. The strike ended and a lot of people were disciplined. And by then the only thing the union could do was to try to

get some of the penalties removed. All but one of the people who were fired were eventually brought back. But the plant is still hot. The union is still pretty helpless in trying to do anything about it. And the workers now know that if they take matters into their own hands again they'll have to take the government all over again to get anywhere.

Now I don't want to sound like a pessimist or anything. I think that what the workers did at Trenton was fantastic and I think they deserve all the support we can give them. But we have to be clear what the dangers are: the stronger the workers got at Trenton the more heat they brought down on themselves. And if it happened at Trenton it'll happen at Fleetwood or anywhere else workers get too strong. If we're talking about any fundamental changes taking place on the shop floor, the government is the ultimate obstacle we'll have to contend with. The same thing is pointed out very clearly by the coal strike.

## CONCLUSION

The advanced currents in the plant do contain the potential for changes in the society. But people committed to them face a lot of problems. The most immediate dilemma faced by these vanguard workers is that they have to continually reaffirm their short term interests as workers in the society even though they're rebelling against that very role in the long run. Each day for them is a continuing, painful purgatory. They make compromises which are even more painful for them because they are acutely aware of their powerlessness. The vanguard people know they need to work in order to survive, even though they hate that work from the start. They know they need the union, even though it's clearly an expression of their weakness more than their strength. They know a layoff would make them weak, even though their presence in the plant has been the focus of their

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rebellion for years.

Another basic problem of the vanguard workers is that they are frozen into place now because so many workers around them are committed to conservative courses of action. And they are frozen into place by their isolation in one plant: it's very difficult for these vanguard groups to link up between plants. It's very difficult for them to link up with other sectors of the population who share their basic alienation from the present organization of society.

Now I don't have the answers to these dilemmas in the classic sense. I can't roll out a magic formula that will solve the problems overnight. All I can do is point out one or two things that can be done to move the situation ahead from where it is now.

The main thing I'd like to see in the short run is for the vanguard groups at Fleetwood and elsewhere to get more articulate and outspoken about what they do. Their activity provides not only a vivid condemnation of how the society is presently organized. It also provides a lot of clues about how the society can be transcended. I'd like to see these groups have public meetings to actually express their views to the rest of society. An immediate advantage of this is that the vanguard groups could fill a tremendous void in the society. Politicians from Jimmy Carter on down justify what they do at least rhetorically by claiming to speak for "the common man". If workers themselves said what they think, particularly if these vanguard groups said what they *don't like* about the society, the entire political complexion of the country would change. If these vanguard groups could coordinate their activity on a multi-plant basis, they'd be an incredibly powerful force in the society.

Now maybe I can be accused of putting the best possible light on the subject, but I am convinced that these vanguard groups are

becoming more articulate these days. I think the fact that I've been able to make this kind of speech to this kind of group is evidence of this fact. This articulation is a very slow process of course, and there are a lot of problems.

I think one of the main problems is the language itself. Workers are not trained to think that their perceptions of the world are important. And so many workers are not skilled in the arts of communication. A lot of workers don't read. Very few write. Our language is the language of domination of the people at the bottom of society, not the language of their self-expression.

Another linguistic problem is political: what would you call a meeting in which vanguard groups of several plants got together? Would it be a "socialist" meeting? Would it be forming a "party"? I don't know. I've had more exposure to these words than most people in the room, and it's still hard for me to say what they mean. And most of what they ordinarily mean is bad. But what words would you use to describe what you'd be doing?

Another problem is time: workers are generally so busy just trying to survive that they can't be running around to meetings all the time. This is particularly true if the premises of the meeting aren't all that clear.

But in general, I'd say the main problem facing these vanguard groups is *theoretical* in nature. Right now, they're organized in a negative way, around what they *don't like*. In order to switch over to a positive organization, in order to fight for what they *do like*, they'd have to completely transform their outlook. They'd have to begin to try and *create* something that they thought was important.

This is a very cynical age we're living through. And workers have more reason to be cynical than most people. To create a *positive* organization in such an age is a difficult thing: it's time consuming; there's lots of unclarity about what

you'd be doing; and the forces of repression are never far behind.

But if these vanguard groups did opt for a positive organization, they'd have a lot to gain. Their activity already embodies a serious alternative to this society. Any further articulation and coordination of that activity would allow them to swing a lot of weight.

The initial step is for these vanguard groups to begin seriously communicating their views to the rest of society. In so doing, they've already rejected the dominant notion in the society that workers have nothing important to say. They've already rejected the cynicism and self-contempt which are part of being a worker today; these attitudes are nothing but a reflection of powerlessness. In trying to build these positive organizations, these workers would actually

have to achieve the age-old dream of becoming "actors on the stage of history". They'd be completely transcending the role of worker as we know it today.

The potential for these developments is clearly present at Fleetwood and elsewhere today. How far it can go, what obstacles remain: there's still a lot we don't know yet. But one thing we can say for sure. The situation in the plant is such that we are not starting from scratch.

*JOHN LIPPERT is an auto worker who lives in Detroit. This article is the text of a speech which he gave on February 26, 1978, at the Weekend College of Wayne State University, where many of the students are auto-workers. He welcomes comments (Box #32047, Detroit, MI 48232).*

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# LETTERS

To the Editors of *Radical America*,

We were stunned to see the cover of your last issue (Winter 1977-78) featuring the extremely powerful and well-argued article, "Sexual Politics and the New Right" by Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter. The contrast between the political sensibilities of the article and the outrageously stereotyped right-wing woman on the cover is startling. Do you really want to convey the message that the strength of the New Right is based on women with high heels, bright lipstick and low-cut dresses?

The article stresses the New Right is "dominated by leaders from the petite bourgeoisie, and politicians, churchmen, and some professionals." (p. 15) Are these groups known for their female leadership? Even though women appear active on the community level, the article rightly goes on to point out that in the growth from "community to city to the national level, men reassert control." (p. 17.)

If you wanted to stress the role of women in the movement, a more appropriate portrait might be one depicting the fear and loneliness resulting from the decay of family and personal life fulfillment that the New Right so successfully appeals to. Or why not the Dioceses and Archdioceses from whom the Anti-Abortion Movement raised \$459,403 in one year? (Statistics from the National Committee for Human Life Amendment.) Instead you chose a misogynist caricature of a silly woman to represent a movement with roots in the *structure* of contemporary class divisions, culture and institutions. Why?

Peggy Somers, Cambridge, Ma.

Bob Wood, Somerville, Ma.

*Several readers criticized this cover, and we recognize that our attempt at humor offended some of our friends, including some of us editors! We want to apologize for our insensitivity.*

*But we think that Peggy Somers and Bob Wood overstate the criticism somewhat, and in doing so they suggest some of the complexities that we have encountered in trying to use parody, caricature and*

*other forms of humor. We resist the position that we should never caricature women, blacks, working-class people because they are oppressed; and yet caricature, drawing as it must on cultural stereotypes, has to be evaluated differently depending on its object. We'll try to do better in the future.*

*We don't accept the criticism that it was wrong to show a woman carrying the signs of the New Right. It is a socially important fact, we think, that women are dominant among the spokespeople of these campaigns. We think your selective quoting from the Gordon-Hunter article tends to want to dismiss the unpleasant fact that women are being mobilized in these causes. To have depicted a man carrying the sign would have been less accurate a comment than this cover. This is because we don't agree that this movement has its "roots in the structure of contemporary class divisions." The article precisely argued against this reductionist view, for an understanding that sexual politics itself is supplying the dynamic behind this movement, and that women are not simply victims of "fear and loneliness" but are also active in what they conceive to be their own interests.*

*The Editors*

Dear *Radical America*:

"American Leninism in the 1970's" and "Sex, Family and the New Right" accurately describe many of the problems I faced as a member of a Leninist group, the Young Socialist Alliance/Socialist Workers Party. There are indeed many severe self-made problems in regard to a lack of organizational democracy, the stifling of creative thought, destructive interventions in mass movements, and a dismal failing to confront the issues of sexism, family and relationships in more than a dilettantish fashion. Though these problems are common among left organizations, in Leninist groups they are buttressed by the necessity of fitting American political, social and economic realities into a theoretical mold formed to deal with revolutionary traditions foreign to the American experience. As O'Brien's article stated, many of the Leninist organizations openly reject the democratic and feminist ideals that have become essential to most of the unorganized left and

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non-party left organizations. But it did not describe how Leninist principles can work within a group that proclaims its commitment to these ideals to effectively nullify anti-sexist and democratic dissent in the internal workings of the organization.

In my YSA/SWP experience, political dishonesty was viewed as essential to the organization's advancement. New recruits and potential members were never told what all the political positions of the group were, much less that they would be "disciplined" if they openly criticized them. The only politics typically discussed with new members are issues related to the cause that brought them in contact with YSA/SWP in the first place (e.g., feminism, unions, racism, etc.). It is quite common for new members to be shocked by positions they've never heard of before. This situation exists because of the insistence of the leadership on maintaining an illusion of complete unity to attract new members. It also reflects a basic insecurity in regard to the organization's political stands. Thus, new members and potential recruits are zealously guarded from dissidents within the YSA and the Party. They are also kept uninformed about the countless splits the organization has undergone (due to its rigidity on dissidence) and bad reputation it has among many political activists, especially in the women's movement. The leadership knows very well that democracy cannot flourish within the organization if the new members are kept uninformed (discovery of the hidden reality is primarily responsible for the large turnover in membership). Democratic centralism is defined to new recruits as simply a principle of majority rule. They aren't told that they lose their right of dissent or the right to work to effectively put across their own ideas to other members. I will give you some examples of how even relatively mild dissent is quickly stifled.

*At a "public" socialism class sponsored by the YSA I questioned the speaker's statement that the overthrow of capitalism will automatically guarantee the goals of feminism. After the class I was told that my question may have persuaded some potential recruits from the Farm Labor Organizing Committee not to join and was told that such questions were forbidden in any public forum.*

*I was very upset by a distorted and mendacious article in The Militant (the SWP newspaper) criticizing Susan Brownmiller's book on rape, Against Our Will, and mentioned my feelings to two new members, one of whom was a personal friend of mine. Whenever I was publicly seen with my friend from then on she would be called and interrogated as to whether I had made any political criticisms. She was also told not to associate with me because I was "counterproductive."*

Also, I had the experience of a YSA organizer ordering me not to say that the organization was not democratic. And because of criticisms I made about the blatant toleration if not encouragement of sexism within the YSA/SWP, another YSA organizer (male) told me I would "not be permitted to work in women's liberation again."

Destructive interventions are a definite reality. Considering the small number of people at many political meetings it is quite easy for an organized group to put forth a political or organizational strategy without identifying themselves or all their members present. For example, all YSA/SWP female comrades were told to join N.O.W., but those who go to meetings must vote as told. If a woman disagrees with the YSA/SWP position and expresses herself accordingly, she will be told to stay away from N.O.W. meetings or the meetings of any other organization that the YSA/SWP is intervening in. Also, an organization can be easily co-opted when the members lack certain technical skills essential to political work that YSA/SWP members have experience in. In essence, when you run the mimeograph you run the organization. It follows then that members of the co-opted organization who are not seen as potential YSA/SWP recruits are eased out. Many creative ideas are lost this way because the YSA/SWP has intervened with a pre-planned strategy that tolerates no opposition.

The avoidance of any potentially embarrassing political discussion permeates what passes for elections. Candidates do not distinguish themselves on the basis of different ideas. Instead, "motivations" or suggestions on who to vote for are made by leaders. Because of the uninformed and disorganized state of the rank and file membership these "motivations" are usually

accepted since no organized alternative is allowed to present arguments on its own behalf. This maintenance of a facade of unity, coupled with the undemocratic practice of party "discipline" in the name of democratic centralism, reflect the basic impotence of the organization's political philosophy and the insecurity of the leadership as to the validity of that philosophy and its ability to hold up under personal scrutiny.

While it is practically a basic tenet of the feminist movement that "the personal is political" this idea is totally unacceptable within a Leninist organization. To the Leninist the primary purpose of the party or organization is to expand itself, and anything that does not contribute to party-building is rejected as unimportant or unable to be dealt with this side of the revolution. This is why the YSA/SWP has ignored the anti-rape movement (except to denounce it) and the problems of battered women. The victims of these social problems are not seen as people who initiate large demonstrations ripe for intervention, and they do not constitute a class or nationality or anything else Lenin or Trotsky wrote about. Thus, they do not exist. The only rape cases the YSA/SWP chooses to deal with are those which can be explained in the traditional Marxist terms (e.g. racist rapes racial minority female or fascist rapes leftist). If the class and caste positions of the victim and assailant are not so conveniently placed, however, the problem is ignored. Worse, if the victim has even the slightest class or caste advantage over her assailant any expression of outrage on her behalf is denounced as another form of racial or class oppression. Within the organization itself this attitude results inevitably in the toleration or even the fostering of sexist behavior. In my experience, for example, an SWP organizer's contempt for women was widely known and even acknowledged but he was considered acceptable as long as he perfunctorily adopted a pro-feminist public stance. A man can (and did) literally beat his wife while in the YSA/SWP and then be sent to share a podium with a N.O.W. representative. No criticism of his actions (much less discipline) is forthcoming unless he hits her publicly and thus embarrasses the YSA/SWP. Also, women who criticize these actions and attitudes, whether inside or outside the organiza-

tion, are subject to "man-hater" baiting.

I hope these observations have provided some enlightenment. It is a great tragedy that so many good people are wasted and discouraged by falling into organizations as dogmatic and deceptive as the one I have described. Though the political and organizational rigidity of groups like the YSA/SWP will keep any of them from ever becoming a mass socialist party, their dogmatism and dishonesty will set a bad example for the unorganized socialists they bring into their organization. Too many of these people will be disgusted and burned out by the time a credible socialist party finally arrives on the scene.

Angela Powell

Dear Editors:

The editors of the Winter '77-'78 issue of *Radical America* are to be congratulated on having noticed "the fact that Leninism is not the only revolutionary tradition." (p. 6) "The jury is still out" on the future of alternative revolutionary traditions; meanwhile articles like S. Cowan's apologia for the Italian CP and D. Hunt's nostalgic account of "the thrilling spectacle of people performing miraculous feats" for the benefit of the Stalinists in Hanoi are "balanced" by Carl Boggs's article on "prefigurative communism." For this reason it's too bad to have to note the astounding level of historical inaccuracy in this article — as well as its failure to escape the Leninist frame of reference.

First of all, to speak of pre-1914 anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as "scorning politics" and "celebrating spontaneity," in the sense of not trying to create organizations or develop strategies, ignores the actual history of these movements. In addition, it's strange to describe these currents as "a response to organized Marxism;" surely they were primarily responses to the social conditions prevailing in Spain, France, Italy, Russia at the time of their development. On the other hand, it is odd to treat "prefigurative" movements generally as "developing mainly outside Marxism." (p. 100) To take only the three areas Boggs discusses: *State and Revolution* shows the extent to which at one moment even Lenin thought Pannekoek and bolshevism compatible; in Italy the presence of Gramsci demonstrates the relation between the Turin occupations and Italian Marxism; while in Germany

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Luxemburgist social-democracy and its council-communist heirs developed specifically and explicitly within Marxism.

This brings us to the factually weakest part of the essay: the treatment of the German council movement (Boggs seems unaware that this was part of a much wider central European phenomenon) and its theoreticians. I quote:

*While still suspicious of all "political" activity, the council tendency did attempt to integrate the best elements of both traditions. Council theorists such as Pannekoek and Gorter, for example, moved beyond a strict commitment to spontaneous and local movements,*

etc., etc., (p. 105) In reality, of course, Pannekoek and Gorter, like the other councilists, passed their lives in political organizations (Gorter indeed conceived of the KAPD as a vanguard party). And the council movement, far from being "suspicious" of politics, was first and foremost a political movement — anti-war and republican — led by political militants, in general dominated by the SPD.

The writings of Pannekoek and Gorter, as well as of many other councilists, are readily available. There is an enormous literature on the council movement. If Boggs has consulted it, we can not tell; instead he seems to have drawn his ideas from an article by the aptly-named Sergio Bologna. That anyone can take Bologna's bizarre hymn to Lenin seriously as an account of the council movement betrays an appalling lack of judgement. Specifically, Bologna's resuscitation of the concept of a "labor aristocracy" to explain a supposedly anti-political and corporatist ideology of "councilism" has no basis in fact. This "councilist ideology" did not exist — hence the lack of a single quotation from a "councilist" theoretician in either Bologna's or Boggs's articles. And the movement did not have its basis in a stratum of skilled workers. The council movement began in the Navy, and spread rapidly over the entire country, with councils elected in every sort of factory and enterprise as well as throughout the armed forces. As a matter of fact, the area where the councils occupied themselves most concretely with questions of workers' control — though

not in a corporatist way — was not in metalworking but in the mining areas of Halle-Merseberg and the Ruhr. By its very nature, the council form is ill-adapted to the defence of craft or sectional privileges; its spirit is rather that of the UPSD declaration of March 1919:

*The class-conscious proletariat has recognized that its struggle for liberation can only be carried out by its own forces; the existing organizations are not enough, a new proletarian fighting organization is needed.*

*In the council system the proletarian revolution has created this fighting organization. It welds together the working masses in the factories for revolutionary action. It gives to the proletariat the right to self-government in the factories, in the communes and in the state. It carries out the transformation of the capitalist system into a socialist one.*

How can we explain the readiness of Boggs — and of many others — to accept Bologna's account of the council movement (especially since his article contains not one single reference to any source of information on this movement, but consists entirely of unsupported assertions)? The only explanation I can think of, is that this attack on a "councilism" which never existed has the function of preserving the core idea of Leninism — the necessity for political and ideological organization, with "hegemony" over the sectionalist workers' movement. Thus Boggs berates "councilism" for its failure "to produce a mature revolutionary strategy that could be translated into a sustained movement" (p. 105): "Lacking a general class perspective," we are told, "the leading sectors of the ... movement" (who on earth is he talking about?) "could never generate broad struggles" (p. 117). Similarly, the new left is said to have collapsed from spontaneism (a curious charge for such an organization-ridden phenomenon), producing no "strategic expression." (pp. 119, 120) All this still puts the problem in the old Leninist way, as if the "strategies" and "perspectives" of leaders or organizations produce struggles and movements. But the failure of the revolution in Germany, for example, was due not to the absence of revolutionary perspectives, strategies, and organizations, but to the fact that the mass of the workers rejected the perspective of the council

communist minority, fighting instead for peace, parliamentary democracy, and the rule of the SPD. (This is why it would also be a mistake to make a shibboleth of the council, as an abstract form of organization: while the council, soviet or shop committee is seemingly the natural form of workers' struggle, it does not determine the goal of struggle.) Socialism is the one revolution that cannot be made by leaders and organizations, however insightful their programs, but only by the workers, as a class, themselves.

It must be said that Boggs makes an effort, in however ambivalent a Gramscian way, to look over his Leninist spectacles. But these spectacles should really have been completely crushed in the last sixty years. Indeed, it is only in the United States that "councilist" theory, and revolutionary Marxism generally, remains a largely unknown territory. If it leads to further exploration of this area, we shall have to thank Carl Boggs for his article after all.

Paul Mattick, Jr.

Carl Boggs responds:

Anyone reading Mattick's response who was unfamiliar with my article would readily conclude that I was a Leninist out to demolish the council tradition. My intent, however, was precisely the opposite — to historically assess and build upon what I called "prefigurative politics" as the basis of superseding the statist limitations of both vanguardism and structural reformism.

While I concede that my argument probably needed greater elaboration, the core of the problem does not seem to be one of communication. In particular, Mattick's confusion has two major sources. The first is his failure to distinguish between critical historical analysis and wholesale attack and rejection, as if any departure from total, dogmatic support of all previous anarchist, syndicalist and council movements automatically consigns me to the enemy camp of "Leninism." The second is his facile (and self-contradictory) equation of organizational forms, political leadership, and strategic conceptions of whatever sort with Leninism — in this case, moreover, a diabolical and conspiratorial Leninism that lurks behind every activity.

Mattick argues that I distort the pre-1914 anarchism and syndicalism by exaggerating their spontaneist and anti-political currents as well as their distance from organized Marxism. But his response contains no reference to this pre-1914 tradition. His "refutations" — the theoretical models of Pannekoek, Gramsci, and Luxemburg — are all based upon *later* developments that I had contrasted with the earlier movements exactly because of their more comprehensive strategies.

The post-World War I council struggles, as I had emphasized, were closer to Marxism than was classical anarchism to the extent that they sought to create new revolutionary *political* institutions. Ideally, at least, the conciliar assemblies (or confederations of assemblies) were to constitute the nucleus of a future socialist state. For the most part, pre-1914 anarchism never reached this level of strategic coherence: it was localist in its hostility to the idea of societal-wide organization, often romanticist in its deep attachment to the countryside and to rural traditions, and militantly abstentionist not only in its refusal to participate in elections but in its unwillingness to strategically confront the bourgeois state. This is the sense in which it "scorned politics." Since European Marxism during this time was monopolized by the Second International, it is hard to imagine how the forces of anarchism and organized Marxism could have avoided sharp conflict. Antagonism was in fact the case virtually everywhere, as reflected not only in their often violent organizational feuds but in the unmistakable anti-Marxist influence of thinkers like Bakunin, Kropotkin and Sorel (to name the most representative).

Mattick's examples are drawn from that historical moment — the peak of the council struggles between 1917 and 1923 — when the prefigurative and Marxist traditions most closely converged. Significantly, the breach between the two reappears later: one would be hard-pressed to demonstrate that the most popular subsequent anarchistic movements, notably the Spanish insurgency during the 1930s and the new left upheavals of the 1960s, owed very much to Marxism. And while no one doubts that the new left created its own structures, the problem was not one of numbers or even the size of such structures but of their political

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content, durability and above all strategic focus. To say that a movement is trapped in its spontaneism is not the same as saying it lacks organization; what it does mean, as my article clearly suggested, is that the movement provides "little strategic expression to its vision of liberation."

As for the councils in Germany, Mattick somehow concludes that I was attacking the very theoretical conception of Council Communism as well as the integrity of Pannekoek's commitment to it. For me, this was never at issue. The point of my analysis was that this theory, while definitely more advanced than its precursors, became increasingly divorced from the actual practice of the working-class movement (including even the councils). Citing passages from Pannekoek or Gorter or anyone else will not help illuminate this historical process. Theoretical proclamations and political intentions are often undermined by many factors — in this case by the economic trajectory of German capitalism and the corporatist role of the Social Democrats, among others.

Mattick at least agrees that the councils failed to generate a lasting revolutionary movement in Germany. In dismissing Bologna's argument based upon the dominant role of skilled technical workers in sectors that had yet to undergo widespread rationalization, Mattick suggests no alternative explanation of his own. Nor does he present any sources of information on social composition of the councils that would contradict Bologna's generalizations. Surely more extensive research is necessary, but Mattick nowhere indicates any new directions. He is left with the profound assertion that the "mass of workers rejected the perspective of the council communist minority" while opting for the rule of the SPD. But this merely begs the issue: why did the workers come to accept SPD hegemony, and why did the existing councils wind up as appendages of the trade union and managerial structures?

We also learn from Mattick that the council by "its very nature" cannot be an expression of special craft interests or privileges. But what exactly is this ascribed essence of the council? Here Mattick violates his own caveat — that the form and content of the councils cannot be viewed as identical. Historically, the councils were never confined to a single model:

they not only varied immensely in their origins, but (like other forms) they commonly adapted to capitalism and underwent serious transformation. The ideal type of council that Mattick apparently envisages is, unfortunately, not the one we are most likely to encounter in history.

We finally arrive at what seems to be disturbing Mattick the most: my presumed attempt (via "ambiguous Gramscian" mediations) to preserve the "core idea of Leninism," by which he means the imposition of organizational hegemony on the self-activity of "sectionalist" working class movements. For Mattick, my mixed assessment of past council struggles constitutes ipso facto an endorsement of Leninist strategy — a heresy to which I succumbed despite my better intentions. My confession is that I did not want to deny an overwhelming historical reality — namely, that the major prefigurative movements have suffered defeat, even at the moment of their most heroic struggles. I argued that this failure took three different forms, and that central to each was the inability to develop coordinated strategies and organizational forms. There is of course no existing formula for solving this problem, but without at least an analysis of past limitation it is hard to imagine how a revolutionary movement could be built that is not only prefigurative but politically effective. In any case, Mattick's invocation of Leninist demonology in this context only serves to obscure the problem and the tasks.

The world Mattick sees is neatly divided into two spheres — the one inhabited by the working class, which through its pure and unmediated self-activity will make the revolution, the other by an assortment of "Leninists," with their "organizations," "leaders," "strategies," and "perspectives." It's a simple world in which the revolutionary process becomes a matter of "class" destiny, where politics is reduced to spiritual commitment. The mundane preoccupations and debates that have always consumed leftist movements on their finite historical terrain are thus conveniently sidestepped — while the imaginary "Leninism" is fiercely combatted.

Dear *Radical America*:

In their letter in response to critics of their earlier articles, Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich claim that an article of mine published in another journal exemplifies a refusal (for reasons of political expedience) to attempt a class analysis of the groups they label the "pmc." It was surprising to see my article criticized in the context of a discussion in which I haven't directly participated. Rather than restate the themes of my article (which was printed in *Socialist Review* #37 as "American Politics and Class Forces in the 1970s"), I would like to suggest several problems with both the response to critics that the Ehrenreichs have produced and their original articles.

First, the Ehrenreichs reduced "class analysis" as a method to their insistence that the results of this analysis ought to designate a clear set of class categories into which all social positions can neatly be inserted. This reduction has no theoretical legitimacy. Given that classes are formed through conflictual processes, almost all societies will contain significant strata in transition between classes, or not directly a part of one of the primary classes through their economic position. Identifying "middle strata" or even "contradictory class locations" is potentially vague, but incorrect in principle only if one views class categories as labels that can be affixed to all the social positions in a given society.

Second, the Ehrenreichs rely on a functionalism in their response that is even cruder than the one which characterized most of their articles. They claim to have "identified underneath the welter of occupational and ideological differences within the middle strata a certain commonality of function which defined an objective class interest apart from that of either the working class or the bourgeoisie, and in part antagonistic to both." The leap made — from identification of a common functional element in a group of social positions to the designation of a class with its "objective interests" — leaves aside any analysis of the overall position of the groups treated with respect to the accumulation process.

The Ehrenreichs' only gesture in the direction of a general analysis of the status of the "pmc" is to argue that this group primarily reproduces capitalist relations of production. However, they provide no account

of "reproduction" in contemporary capitalism that could permit distinctions to be made among engineers, managers, police, and cashiers, and as a consequence, they mark their "pmc" off from other strata involved in "reproduction" in one way or another only through income and cultural criteria. Their basic error is to misunderstand radically the relations between the division of labor and the accumulation process. In the account of capitalist development that they offer, the modern division of labor is reduced to the functional needs of capital for greater control over the working class. This vulgarizes already dubious tendencies in the work of Gorz and others; technical progress, the division of labor, and accumulation, are related in much more complex ways than the Ehrenreichs indicate.

Capitalism produces a massive development of the forces of production, through a particular social division of labor. Some aspects of working-class power are diminished by this process. (It is important, though, to reject the romantic vision of pre-Taylorist capitalism underlying many of the sources on which the Ehrenreichs depend, in which the craftworker is the dominant figure, and the central role of massive amounts of unskilled labor disappears from the story.) But it's wrong to claim that modern technical knowledge has simply been taken from the working class, as the Ehrenreichs repeatedly argue. Instead, a division of labor has emerged within which large amounts of new knowledge are produced, while various social divisions are maintained and sometimes deepened.

This expanded incorporation of scientific/technical knowledge in the process of production means that a new analysis of the sources of (surplus) value and the forms of its production is required, as a crucial part of a class analysis of contemporary capitalism. New working class theories, for all their defects, had at least the virtue of posing these problems. The Ehrenreichs avoid them, and confuse the question of the potential division of labor in a socialist society with the question of the contribution of different positions in the capitalist division of labor to production in this society.

The objective positions of the diverse groups that the Ehrenreichs include in the "pmc" are not

sufficiently unified by a common element (in terms of the reproduction of capitalist social relations) to provide the basis for a process of class formation, given the diverse relations of the groups in question to the accumulation process. In fact, despite the (by now routine) citation of Thompson, no real account of the historical emergence of a new class is offered. In the discussion of progressivism in the first of their two articles, the Ehrenreichs identify professionalist/progressive ideologies in the early twentieth century, recognize that some of the people advancing those ideologies were professionals, and that the size of many professional and semi-professional occupations was expanding, and then conclude that a new social class did in fact emerge. Their procedure assumes what ought to be proved — that ideologies of professionalism represented the emergence of an autonomous class. (And quite a privileged class, at that, to arrive on the historical scene with an ideology so closely fitting its "objective interests.") In the second of their articles, no account of the broader movements in recent decades within the groups they include in the "pmc" is presented. Such an account would have to note the diverse and often conflicting political and social trajectories of the groups that they include in the "pmc" — and from that recognition

would find it hard to sustain the notion of a distinct new class. In the end, the Ehrenreichs' "pmc" corresponds very closely to the "modern middle class" of development theory — like the latter, the "pmc" is primarily an ideological construct, though constructed for different reasons. Fortunately, neither a "pmc" nor a "modern middle class" exists as a force strong enough to play the role imagined for them by their theorists — to provide a basis for the stable development of capitalism in the context of the continued erosion of the traditional petty bourgeoisie.

If the Ehrenreichs have failed to produce a theoretical or historical analysis that contributes much to resolving the questions with which they are concerned, they have at least contributed a new term of abuse, in claiming that Wright, Healey, and others who refuse their categories are "objectively" supporting the class interests of the "pmc." As the conventional accusations of bourgeois or petty bourgeois self-interest have lost much of their force in discourse on the non-sectarian left, the Ehrenreich's new term may perhaps energize polemics with some of the moralizing self-righteousness that is so important for the progress of our movement in the present period.

David Plotke  
San Francisco

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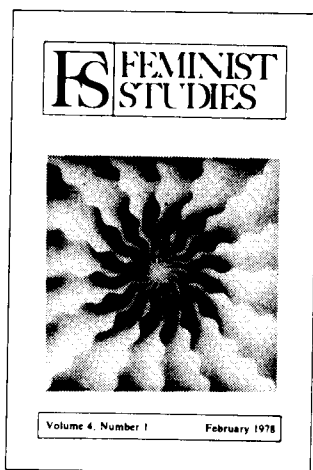
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