

THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

# RADICAL AMERICA

vol. 9, no.1

\$1.00



AUTO WORKERS IN DETROIT  
TAYLORISM AND THE I.W.W.  
ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN

# RADICAL AMERICA

January-February, 1975

Volume 8, Number 6

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**RADICAL AMERICA:** Published bi-monthly at P.O. Box B, N. Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140. Subscription rates: \$5 per year, \$9 for two years, \$12 for three years; with pamphlets \$10 per year. Double rates for institutions. Free to prisoners. Bulk rates: 40% reduction from cover price for five or more copies. Bookstores may order on a consignment basis.



# **Changes in World Capitalism And the Current Crisis Of the U.S. Economy**

*Arthur MacEwan*

The period since World War II has been characterized by a continuous increase in the integration of the world capitalist system. However, throughout the period, forces have been building toward the destruction of the stability in that system. By the beginning of the 1970's, those forces had come into their own, and the basis for stability — U.S. hegemony — had been eliminated.

The simultaneous INTEGRATION and DESTABILIZATION of the world capitalist system constitutes an important contradiction that has far-reaching implications. In particular, the operation of this contradiction has put the U.S. economy of the 1970's in a precarious position.

In this essay, I intend to describe some central features of the operation of world capitalism during the post-World War II period and to explain how the very success of those years was creating the conditions for the disruption of the system. I will then be in a position to relate the current crisis of the U.S. economy to the important changes in world capitalism and show how international affairs have played a central role in the development, precipitation and continuation of the crisis. (2)

## CREATION OF U.S. HEGEMONY

At the end of World War II, the United States was in a particularly fortunate position. While the economies of the other advanced nations — victors and vanquished alike — had been devastated by the War, the U.S. economy had flourished. Consequently, in 1945, the U.S. held a position of unique and unchallenged political-military and economic power among capitalist nations.

An era of U.S. hegemony had begun. The U.S. government was able to dictate economic and political policies within the world capitalist system.\* Accordingly, it was possible to re-establish an international order which had been lacking for over half a century — since the time when other nations had begun to seriously challenge Britain's pre-eminence. (3)

The new era of U.S. hegemony expressed itself in several new institutional arrangements. Most frequently noted are the set of monetary arrangements imposed on the other capitalist nations in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference. In the earlier periods of colonial expansion, each colonial power had imposed its currency — pound, franc, mark — within its empire. Now, after World War II, the U.S. established the dollar as the principal "reserve currency" throughout the capitalist world.

The role of the dollar was closely connected to the rapid international growth of U.S. business. The expansion of U.S. banking abroad highlights the general picture. In Europe, for example, U.S. banks had only 20 to 30 branches in the 1920's, and during the 1930's and the War most of these were closed down. The 1950's and the 1960's saw a steady advance to the point where by 1968 U.S. banks had 326 branches in Europe. (4)

The largest industrial corporations were central actors

\*The ability of the U.S. government to dictate was, of course, limited in the ways that the power of any dictator is limited. A dictator must compromise sometimes, must cajole reluctant followers, and must smash rebellions. But as long as he is successful in maintaining the foundation of his power, the dictator remains a dictator.

in the post-War overseas expansion. In 1950 General Motors was annually producing less than 200,000 vehicles abroad. By 1952 it had expanded production to approximately 600,000 units. In another year, with European production being supplemented by Australian and Brazilian expansion, GM was producing over one million vehicles in its foreign plants. And the boom continued on into the 1960's: between 1963 and 1964 GM's overseas production grew by a quarter of a million. (5)

Aggregate data show the same general picture of rapid growth of U.S. foreign investment in the 1950's and 1960's. The value of all U.S. direct investment abroad stood at roughly \$11 billion in 1950; by 1960 the total had risen to over \$30 billion; and in 1970 the figure was over \$70 billion. (6)

The absolute growth of U.S. business interests abroad is impressive, but it should be seen in the context of the establishment of overwhelming U.S. dominance in the international capitalist economy. In Latin America, for example, just prior to World War I, only 18% of foreign private investment and less than 5% of public debt was held by U.S. interests. British interests held 47% of private investment and 70% of public debt. In the early 1950's, direct investment in Latin America from sources other than the U.S. was negligible, and in the early 1960's the U.S. still accounted for roughly 70% of new foreign investment in Latin America. As to foreign public debt, the U.S. was supplying about 70% in the early 1950's and still more than 50% in the early 1960's. (7)

Not only has the U.S. replaced the European nations as the leading economic power operating in the Third World, but the post-War years saw a substantial penetration of the European economies by U.S. business. The value of direct U.S. investment in Europe tripled between 1950 and 1959 (from \$1.7 billion to \$5.3 billion), then quadrupled (to \$21.6 billion) by 1969, and will have roughly doubled again by the end of 1974. (8)

On the political and military level, U.S. expansion kept pace with economic interests. Economic aid, military aid,

and the establishment of overseas military bases helped provide a political environment conducive to corporate penetration. Throughout the European colonial world, the U.S. ambassadors began to replace the European colonial administrators as the dominant political figures. And in line with the new world order, European colonies were transformed to independent nations under the aegis of U.S. neo-colonialism. More and more, the British and French military networks were replaced by U.S.-centered "alliances" such as SEATO and CENTO.

The U.S. took on the role of maintaining an international police force to maintain "law and order" throughout the capitalist world. Moreover, it became the organizer and chief participant in the general effort of capitalist nations to contain and harass the Socialist Bloc.

## BENEFITS OF HEGEMONY

This hegemony had its distinct advantages for U.S. business. To begin with, foreign activity has been a significant and growing source of direct profits. As a proportion of after tax profits of U.S. corporations, profits from abroad rose steadily from about 10% at the beginning of the 1950's to about 20% at the beginning of the 1970's. (9) Moreover, these profits accrue disproportionately to the very large firms in the U.S. economy. Gillette, Woolworth, Pfizer, Mobil, IBM and Coca Cola, for example, all earn more than 50% of their profits overseas. In 1972, the First National City Bank, the world's first bank to earn over \$200 million in a single year, earned \$109 million abroad. (10) In 1965 13 industrial corporations, all ranking among the top 25 on the Fortune 500, accounted for 41.2% of foreign earnings. (11)

In addition to these direct benefits of international activity, the maintenance of an open and stable international capitalist system under U.S. hegemony has provided important elements in the structural foundations of the post-World War II expansion of the U.S. economy.

It has been generally recognized that having the dollar as

the central currency of world capitalism assured that U.S. businesses would always have ample funds to undertake foreign activity. With the dollar-based monetary system, businesses in other nations had an increasing need for dollars in order to carry out their own international transactions. In the 1960's for example, the growth of dollars held outside the U.S. averaged about \$2 billion a year. As a result, U.S. business could make purchases abroad with dollars without having all of those dollars redeemed by equivalent purchases by foreigners in the U.S. The rest of the world was effectively extending credit, to the tune of \$2 billion more each year of the 1960's, to U.S. business. (12)



*Boston Globe/cpf*

**"GOD BLESS AMERICA!"**

Monetary matters are, however, only the beginning of the story. The story continues with the impact of international activity on domestic power relations and with the importance of access to and control over resources and markets.

Manufacturing has been the most rapidly growing sector of U.S. foreign investment. (13) Foreign expansion of manufacturing has been motivated by the dual goals of obtaining a foothold in foreign markets and exploiting cheaper labor. The process has a structural impact on power relations that goes far beyond its direct impact on corporate profits. The ability of capital to move abroad greatly strengthens its hand in disputes with labor. Labor, whether demanding higher wages or better working conditions, is threatened by the possibility that management will choose to close shop and relocate abroad (or simply cease domestic expansion). The effectiveness of the threat has been demonstrated by the extensive expansion of overseas operations of U.S. manufacturers. And that extensive expansion has been greatly facilitated by U.S. hegemony.

Consequently, we may say that one of the elements establishing labor discipline in the domestic economy is the international mobility of manufacturing capital. The labor discipline — or the power relations between capital and labor which it represents — has been a central element upon which the successful domestic expansion of the U.S. economy has been based.\*

\*The argument here should be distinguished from another argument sometimes put forth by opponents of the runaway shop, to wit, that capital mobility means a slower overall growth of jobs in the U.S. economy. It is not at all clear that in aggregate and over time capital mobility means fewer jobs. Of course, workers immediately affected by a runaway shop are thrown out of work. But overall, the effect of foreign investment is clearly to increase the surplus available for investment within the U.S. In any given year, profits returned from former foreign investment exceed the outflow of new foreign investment and, accordingly, contribute to the expansion of the U.S. economy, including the aggregate expansion of jobs. And if the aggregate of jobs is increased, wages are likely to increase also. However, regardless of the aggregate, long-run impact of foreign investment, at any point in time the existence of options for capital weakens labor; or, which amounts to



Another structural basis for economic growth has been provided by foreign investment based on natural resources. While not as rapidly growing as manufacturing investment, resource-based foreign investment has by no means been stagnant. (14) The central issue in assessing the importance of natural resource based investment is control. In the first place, as the past year's experience with oil makes clear, natural resource prices — of copper, bauxite, and so forth, as well as oil — are determined within a fairly wide range by power relationships. The low prices of certain resources which have been important to post-War growth of the U.S. economy can now be seen to have rested on the combined economic and political power of U.S. corporations in the context of U.S. hegemony. (15)

A second factor explaining the importance of natural-resource control is that control provides a basis for security, for both the nations and the companies involved. The U.S. military apparatus is dependent on several imported strategic raw materials e.g., nickel and chromium. (16) Thus, the position of the military and all that it implies is tied to the control of certain natural resources. From the point of view of the corporations, control of resource supplies provides security for their monopoly positions, both domestically and internationally. In oil, in aluminum, in copper, the major companies have used "vertical integration" — i.e., involvement in all phases of the industry from crude material production to sales of final products — as a basis for their power.

In numerous other types of industries as well, international activity is bound up with monopoly power. Domestic

the same thing, the threat of joblessness for a particular group of workers at a particular time means it is less able to make effective demands on capital. Moreover, the sector of labor most immediately affected tends to be the most thoroughly organized, for it is in those cases relatively more advantageous for capital to move abroad. In other words, the argument here is that (aside from groups immediately involved) capital mobility hurts labor in terms of income distribution and in terms of power; the question of economic growth and growth of jobs and earnings is another matter.

monopoly power provides the basis for successful international expansion, and the international expansion further enhances size and power which secure the original monopoly position. A description of the drug industry's activities has been provided by no less a source than Senator Russell Long, speaking in 1966: "For more than a dozen years, American drug companies have been involved in a worldwide cartel to fix the prices of 'wonder drugs'...the conspirators have embarked on an extensive campaign to destroy their competitors." (17)

All of these benefits that have been obtained by U.S. business during the era of U.S. hegemony in world capitalism have not, of course, been theirs alone. Other advanced capitalist nations have participated in and their businesses have gained from the international stability. The U.S. may have led, but the followers have done well for themselves. And therein lies one of the problems.

## CONTRADICTIONS IN THE SYSTEM

The good times for U.S. business could not last because the successful operation of the system was, from the outset, leading toward its own destruction. Simply insofar as the U.S. used its power to maintain stability, it allowed the reconstruction of the other capitalist nations. Success for the U.S. meant stability, but stability would allow its competitors to re-establish themselves.

In fact, the U.S. did far more than simply maintain stability. For both economic and political reasons, the success of the U.S. required that it take an active role in rebuilding the war-torn areas of the capitalist system. Economically, U.S. business needed the strong trading partners and investment opportunities that only reconstruction could provide. Politically, the U.S. needed strong allies in its developing confrontations with the Soviet Union and China.

Consequently, throughout the post-World War II period, the other capitalist nations were able to move toward a position where they could challenge the U.S., both economically and politically. As early as the late 1950's and early

1960's, it was becoming clear that Japanese and European goods were beginning to compete effectively with U.S. products. And other nations began to grumble about the costs of supporting a world monetary system based on the dollar. It was only a matter of time before the economic challenge would become serious, and the other nations would no longer allow the U.S. to dictate the rules and policies for the operation of international capitalism.

Still, "a matter of time" can be a long time or a short time. If the only challenge had been that from the expansion of other advanced capitalist nations, the U.S. might have maintained its position of hegemony for many more years. That was not, however, the only challenge.

The successful extension of capitalism into new geographic areas is — especially in the era of the rise of socialism — a process involving considerable conflict. In providing the police force for world capitalism, the U.S. government has been obliged to engage in numerous direct and indirect military encounters. Greece, Iran, Guatemala, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic only begin the list of nations that have felt the effect of U.S. coercion. In many cases, the overwhelming military capacity of the U.S. was sufficient to prevent serious military conflict from developing.

Indochina, however, presented a different story. The liberation forces in Vietnam were not so easily contained, and the U.S. became more and more deeply involved. A particular dialectic was thus created which had far-reaching implications. On the one hand, unable to win in Vietnam, the U.S. was forced to act in a way that undermined its economic strength. On the other hand, as its economic position deteriorated, the U.S. government was less able to pursue a successful military policy in Vietnam.

This dialectic process combined the contradiction between the U.S. and other advanced capitalist nations and the contradiction between the U.S. (as the central power among the advanced nations) and the periphery of the system (i.e., the Third World). The combined operation of these contradictions has ended the era of U.S. hegemony in a manner

that will be shortly described.

First, however, it should be pointed out that the operation of these two contradictions established the foundation for the operations of still another contradiction. Success in the era of U.S. hegemony meant the integration of world capitalism, the creation of a system in which business was less and less constrained by national boundaries, a system in which capital could move freely. Consequently, a general interdependence has developed within world capitalism. The continued operation of a system of interdependence requires stability and coordination. Without U.S. hegemony the basis for stability and coordination no longer exists. The resulting contradiction between an integrated capitalist system and a capitalist system that has destroyed its basis for stability plays a central role in the crisis of the 1970's.



## GENESIS OF THE CURRENT CRISIS

The crisis of the 1970's has been steadily unfolding since the mid-1960's. As the economy moved toward relatively full employment in 1965 and 1966, certain "imbalances" began to appear on the horizon. Continued expansion would reduce unemployment toward the point where labor's power would be significantly increased. Continued expansion would also lead toward the development of a serious liquidity crisis and toward inflation. A mild recession would have corrected these imbalances without serious repercussions. Thus, from the point of view of the long-run interests of capital, a mild recession could have been useful. (18)

Instead of allowing a recession to develop, however, the U.S. government undertook heavy expansionary actions.

### 1975: ALIMONY



Those actions were necessitated, of course, by the inability of the government to win its war in Indochina. In terms of the immediate needs of the economy the appropriate governmental action in 1967 and 1968 would have been to allow the development of a recession. However, the broader needs of the system required that a war be fought, and that war required a spending program that was expansionary. (It should be pointed out that the government undertook a deficit spending program rather than a spending program accompanied by tax increases because of the political opposition to the War. More taxes would have increased the opposition. So to avoid fanning anti-war sentiment the government ran large deficits which led it into many more problems.)

Two sorts of problems were created for U.S. capitalism by the government's response to the system's international difficulties. First, the war-induced expansion led to relatively low unemployment rates. For four years — 1966 through 1969 — unemployment stayed below 4% of the labor force. With alternative jobs readily available and with more job holders per family, workers were more powerful in their struggle with capital. The power was revealed in the 1966-69 period both by labor's ability to obtain a larger share of total income and by labor's ability to resist speed-up and other forms of labor discipline. Labor's share of national income rose from 72.2% in 1965-66 to 76.3% in 1969; corporate profits, on the other hand, fell in that period from 10.6% of national income to 8.2%. The rate of increase of productivity in the late 1960's reflected the inability of capital to effectively control labor; that is, the increases were extremely slow. (19)

The second problem created by the government's war-related expansionary actions was inflation. Inflation was a problem for several reasons. It created social discontent. It created uncertainties which disrupt business planning. It undermined the capitalist world's international trade and payments system. And it undermined the position of U.S. business in its competition with foreign business throughout the world.

The combined impact of low unemployment rates and inflation was a decline in total profits (corrected for inflation) and profit rates from 1966 on. (20) The decline in profits, the general complications resulting from inflation, and government efforts to deflate the economy led into the recession of 1969-1970. This recession put the final touches on displacing the U.S. from its hegemonic position in world capitalism.

The new situation of the 1970's was marked by both political and economic disruption of U.S. world power. Politically, the experience in Vietnam had demonstrated the inability of the U.S. to effectively police the world. Economically, the shift in the balance of U.S. international trade brought the new reality into stark relief. In the period 1960 through 1965, U.S. power had been reflected in large trade surpluses, averaging \$5.8 billion. The trade surplus began to decline in 1966, and for the 1966 to 1971 period averaged only \$1.4 billion. In 1971, 1972 and 1973 the U.S. ran trade deficits of \$2.7 billion, \$6.9 billion, and \$0.7 billion, respectively. (21)

The challenge from Europe and Japan, which had been on the horizon in the early 1960's, had now arrived. Its coming was greatly hastened by the economic problems which the U.S. economy suffered as a consequence of the Vietnam War. In this sense, the two contradictions of international capitalism had come together to change the system. The change was formalized with Nixon's declaration in 1971 of the New Economic Policy, the devaluation of the dollar, and the destruction of capitalism's international monetary system. (22)

## THE CRISIS OF THE MID-1970'S

The actions of the Nixon Administration in 1971 which were designed to push the economy out of recession were effective in the short run. Wage-price controls served their intended function of boosting profits; devaluation of the dollar and other trade-oriented policies led to a surge (albeit belated) in exports; and a huge government deficit in 1971

fueled the whole process. However, these various programs, at best, only postponed the day of reckoning.

While moving the economy out of the 1969-70 recession, the government's policies worked in tandem with international forces to move the economy toward the current crisis. Two of the internationally related parts of the process will be given attention here: the inflation in food prices and the oil problems.

**FOOD PRICES.** The very rapid increase in food prices in 1973 was a central element in fueling the general inflation, and as such food-price increases helped create the conditions for the 1974 recession. The jump in food prices can in large part be explained as resulting from the government's response to the declining U.S. trade position of the late 1960's. (23)

The government's plan for dealing with the declining position of U.S. exports was laid out in the report of a special Presidential commission. The report, entitled **UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL POLICY IN AN INTERDEPENDENT WORLD**, recognized "that many of the economic problems we face today grow out of the overseas responsibilities the United States has assumed as the major power of the non-Communist world." This document goes on to assert that the "crisis of confidence in the multilateral trade and payments system... can be traced to the pressure of imports in the U.S. market. Moreover, our ability to capitalize on our comparative advantage has been impeded by foreign barriers to our exports."

The principal proposal set forth in the **INTERNATIONAL POLICY** report was for a program to improve the U.S. trade position by expanding agricultural exports. The two central aspects of the program were:

- 1) The negotiation of special arrangements with foreign governments. This aspect of the program was carried out through arrangements including the Soviet grain deal and pressure on European governments to adjust trade regulations in favor of U.S. agriculture.

- 2) The structuring of domestic prices to favor agriculture. This aspect of the program was implemented through



the wage-price controls. Raw agricultural products and exports were exempt from controls, thus encouraging both the growth of agricultural output and its sale on foreign markets.

The program succeeded. The value of agricultural exports is now running three times as high as it did in the late 1960's, while agricultural imports have increased slightly. In the single year 1973, the value of agricultural exports increased from \$9.9 billion to \$17.7 billion, or about 80%. In 1974 agricultural exports have continued to rise, running about 40% ahead of the 1973 levels (in value terms) during the first seven months. (24)



This very large and rapid increase in agricultural exports was an important element in contributing to the price increases of 1973 and 1974. For our purposes, what is important is the causal sequence by which changes in the structure of world capitalism led to a government policy response which helped create the food inflation which was an element precipitating the current crisis. (25)

**OIL PROBLEMS.** The "energy crisis" was a principal catalyst turning the economy into its downward slide at the beginning of 1974. The short supply of fuel caused direct production cutbacks. Also, the energy situation altered spending patterns in ways that have upset important sectors of the economy, particularly through declines in automobile purchases.

The "energy crisis" was set in motion by the major oil companies in an attempt to simultaneously raise profits and improve their overall political power position. (26) Their initial success was impressive. Prices and oil company profits shot upward in 1973 and the first half of 1974, and the oil companies made significant gains against environmental controls.

When, in the late 1960's, the oil companies took the first steps in creating the "energy crisis," they were operating in an international environment still dominated by U.S. power. By 1973, however, conditions had changed, and forces set in motion by the oil companies' actions could not be contained. The oil exporting nations have asserted control over the price and conditions of supply of their oil. They have continued to push prices upward, and price problems have been exacerbated by supply uncertainty.

The actions by the oil-exporting countries, particularly the Arab boycott resulting from the war in the Middle East, would have been unimaginable in the era of U.S. hegemony. These sorts of events could not have transpired, for example, after the war in 1967. The decline of U.S. economic power gave the Arabs an opening they did not have in 1967. The U.S. had lost its power to maintain discipline in the system.

The change, however, is not simply a shift in the direct relations between the Arabs and the U.S. Loss of U.S. hegemony also meant that the unity of the advanced nations was not maintained in the face of the Arab actions. Japan and Western European nations have gone to the oil exporters on their own and do not appear willing to accept a U.S.-dictated unification policy. (27)

The actions of the oil-exporting nations should not be in-

terpreted simply as a consequence of the change in world power relations. The general economic crisis which these actions catalyzed will have a continuing impact on power relations. Moreover, the huge sums of money flowing into the oil-exporting nations are creating new centers of economic and political strength. The way in which they manage their capital, their future pricing decisions, and their political actions will all have far-reaching effects on U.S. and world capitalism.

Oil problems and food problems illustrate the difficulties which US capitalism faces, operating as an integrated part of an unstable international economy. The coming years will see new rounds of oil and food problems, and there will surely be difficulties developing either directly out of or through responses to the changed international situation.

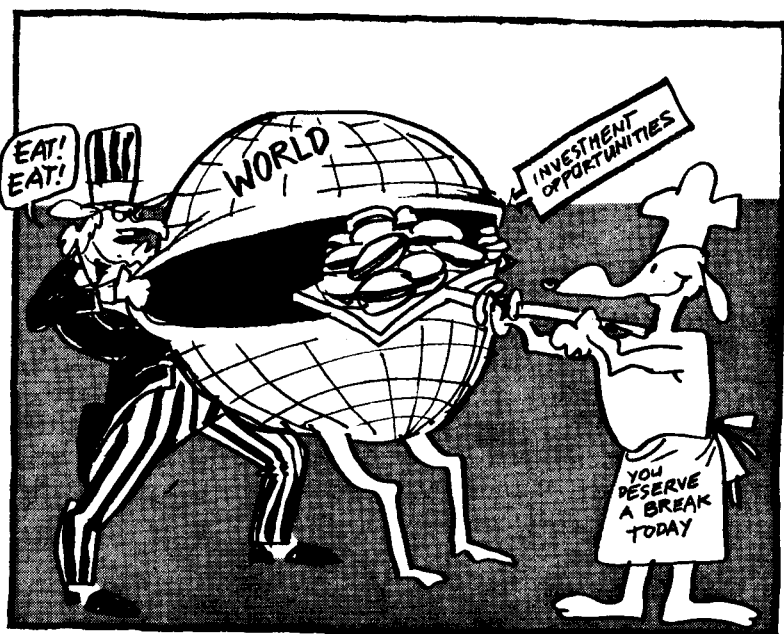
In concluding this paper it is useful to take particular note of the complications that international instability combined with integration creates for the formulation of government monetary and fiscal policy. Quite simply, under the present circumstances the implications of any particular policy are at best unclear.

Most obvious are the difficulties in formulating monetary policy. When in 1971 the U.S. lowered its interest rates relative to those in Europe, a huge unprecedented outflow of capital took place. That experience showed the degree to which capital markets have become integrated and the speed at which money managers respond to interest-rate variations. The situation would seem at least as sensitive today with the large amount of "oil money" moving around the system. Accordingly, it makes little sense for the U.S. or any other major nation to formulate monetary policy and adjust interest rates on its own. In 1974 all of the major nations did, in fact, act in the same manner, maintaining high interest rates and tight money policies. There is, however, no reason to believe that in the absence of coordination they will continue to choose the same policies; different governments will face different circumstances and will act differently. Yet it is not clear how any coordinated policy would be developed.

The problems for fiscal policy are only slightly less immediate. It is at least a possibility that in carrying out expansionary programs designed to encourage investment, the U.S. government will find itself competing with the other advanced nations to see which can provide the most favorable investment climate. The result could be a substantial expansion of overseas investment, lacking any substantial direct and immediate impact on the U.S. economy.

Moreover, under conditions of international integration and instability, the impact of any policy is difficult to predict. When the time comes again for counter-inflationary actions, a deceleration of the economy could lead to a much greater cutback of investment than the government would be aiming for. If other governments were not following similar deflationary policies, overseas options might attract an unexpectedly large amount of U.S. capital. The results of the U.S. action could then be inflation-exacerbating shortages and the development of another round of recession.

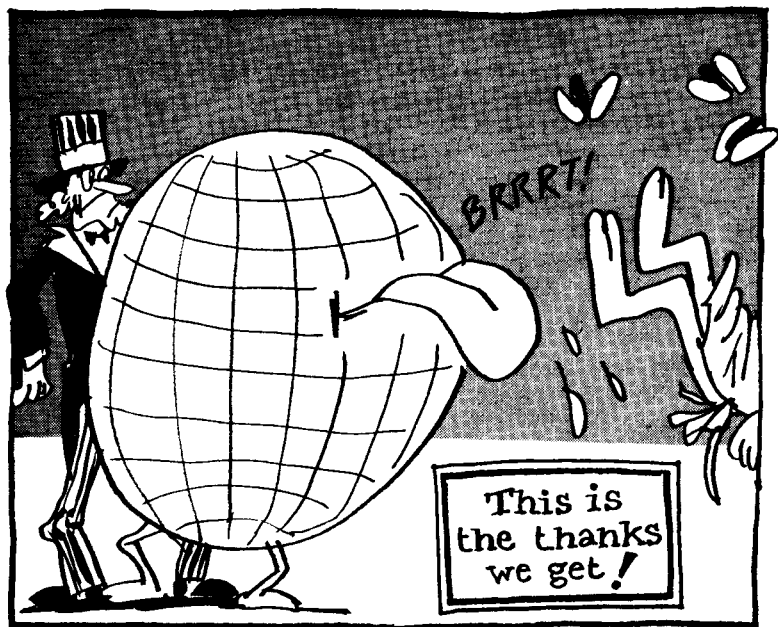
The list of uncertainties and possible problems could be continued. Different nations may attempt to solve their own



problems by raising tariffs; other nations might follow suit and a serious disruption of trade patterns could occur. Alternatively, a series of competitive devaluations may take place, or some nations might impose more stringent foreign-exchange controls. Each such action would present new problems for the U.S. economy.

The governments of the leading capitalist nations are not unaware of the dangers in the current situation, but awareness and ability to cope are not the same thing. In his much publicized BUSINESS WEEK interview, Kissinger put the problem simply: "One interesting feature of our recent discussions with both the Europeans and Japanese has been the emphasis on the need for economic coordination.... How you, in fact, coordinate policies is yet an unresolved problem." (28)

Thus, international instability of an integrated world capitalism will continue to plague the U.S. economy for some time to come. Policy problems, trade and monetary instability, price shocks, and other unforeseeables will all be part of the new agenda.



## FOOTNOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to meetings of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE), San Francisco, December 28, 1974. The author is Lecturer in Economics, Harvard University, and a member of the staff of DOLLARS & SENSE, a monthly bulletin of economic affairs published as a project of URPE. Many of the ideas here have been developed in the context of work on DOLLARS & SENSE. Also, this paper builds on material presented in F. Ackerman and A. MacEwan, "Inflation, Recession and Crisis," *REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS*, Vol. 4, No. 4, August 1972; an earlier version appeared in *RADICAL AMERICA*, Vol. 6, Jan./Feb. 1972.

2. Some qualification is in order at the outset. Consideration of international issues only provides part of an analysis of the current situation. There are many other factors that will not be dealt with here simply because this is an essay of limited scope. Except in relation to international affairs, I am not going to deal with class struggle in the U.S. and its central role in the operation of the business cycle (see R. Boddy and J. Crotty, "Class Conflict, Keynesian Policy and the Business Cycle," *MONTHLY REVIEW*, October, 1974); nor shall I deal with the tremendous liquidity crisis that confronts U.S. capitalism (see P. Sweezy and H. Magdoff, "The Long Run Decline in Liquidity," *MONTHLY REVIEW*, September, 1970). I am also going to exclude consideration of fundamental contradictions contained in the capitalist relations of production that create tendencies toward stagnation and crisis (see P. Baran and P. Sweezy, *MONOPOLY CAPITAL*, Monthly Review Press, 1966). Finally, I have not attempted to say anything about the relations among the U.S., the U.S.S.R. and China. All of these issues are important, but they are not the subject of this essay.

3. One might date the decline of British power as beginning about 1870, when the growth rate of the British economy began to decline. Britain's ability to unilaterally impose order internationally became apparent with the rush for colonies at the end of the century and with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The breakdown in world order and the consequent competition and conflict led into World War I. The War, however, left a totally unresolved power situation and a continuing lack of order in international political and economic affairs. In his analysis of the 1930's, C. P. Kindleberger, *THE WORLD IN DEPRESSION, 1929-1939* (University of California Press, 1974) notes that "the main lesson of the inter-war years" is "that for the world economy to be stabilized, there has to be a stabilizer." Quoted by G. Barraclough, "The End of an Era," *N. Y. REVIEW OF BOOKS*, June 27, 1974.

4. See J. P. Koszul, "American Banks in Europe," in C. P. Kindleberger, ed., *THE INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION*, MIT Press, 1970, pp. 274-275.

5. See J. W. Sundelson, "U.S. Automotive Investment Abroad," in C. P. Kindleberger as cited in the preceding footnote, p. 256.

6. Data through 1969 are presented and discussed in T. E. Weisskopf, "United States Foreign Investment: An Empirical Survey," in R. C. Edwards, M. Reich, and T. E. Weisskopf, *THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972. For 1970, see *SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS*, August 1974. According to Weisskopf's estimates, the value of foreign assets grew almost twice as fast as the value of domestic assets in the two-decade period. All of these figures are for book values; market values would most likely be a good deal larger.

7. See United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, *EXTERNAL FINANCING IN LATIN AMERICA*, 1965, pp. 16-17, 147-148.

8. Sources are the same as in footnote 7.

9. There are various complications in calculating these figures due to difficulties in determining the taxes on foreign earnings and in treating royalties and other payments. Most of the raw data are obtainable in the annual report on foreign earnings that appears each year in the August or September issue of the *SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS*. Profit calculation problems are discussed in F. Ackerman's review of H. Magdoff, *THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM* (Monthly Review Press, 1969), *APPEARING IN PUBLIC POLICY* Vol. 19, No. 3, Summer 1971. Magdoff's book is the most thorough treatment of the various issues discussed in this section. Also, see Weisskopf as cited above.

10. See R. J. Barnet and R. E. Muller, *GLOBAL REACH*, Simon and Schuster, 1975, pp. 26 and 28.

11. See Weisskopf as cited above, p. 433.

12. For more on this, see Magdoff and Ackerman and MacEwan as cited above. By holding dollars as reserves, foreigners were allowing the dollar to be overvalued (i.e., the demand for dollars as reserves pushed the price of the dollar above what it would have been as a result simply of the demand for U.S. goods and services); foreign assets were accordingly cheaper to U.S. firms than they otherwise would have been. While the system was useful for business, its maintenance required that certain costs be born by workers. According to one analyst, the system "put constraints on the use of monetary policy for the achievement of full-employment, so that there had to be a resort to fiscal policy. The passage of the required legislation took several years, during which time, unemployment remained high." H. G. Grubel, "The Benefits and Costs of Being the World's Banker," *THE NATIONAL BANKING REVIEW*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1964.

13. The value of manufacturing assets abroad rose from 32% of the total in 1950 to 44% of the total in 1970. See footnote for sources.

14. The value of foreign assets in petroleum and mining and smelting tripled between 1950 and 1959 (from \$4.5 billion to \$13.3 billion) and had almost tripled again by 1973 (to \$37.1 billion). Sources as in footnote 7.

15. The situation with oil is now relatively well known. For background on control of bauxite, see P. Reno, "Aluminum Profits and the Caribbean People," MONTHLY REVIEW, October 1963, and N. Girvan, "The Caribbean Bauxite Industry," STUDIES IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION, Vol. 2, No. 4, University of the West Indies, 1967.

16. See Magdoff as cited above, p. 45-54.

17. Quoted by Barnet and Muller as cited above, p. 187, from the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD-SENATE, Feb. 10, 1966, 2886-94.

18. See Boddy and Crotty as cited in footnote 2 for an elaboration of this point.

19. The data on shares of national income are taken from Ackerman and MacEwan as cited above, where their meaning is more fully discussed. Boddy and Crotty make a similar point by looking at the ratio of wages to profit which was rising during the period in question. They also provide the data on productivity increases.

20. See BUSINESS WEEK, Dec. 14, 1974. According to BUSINESS WEEK the after-tax rate of return on non-financial corporate capital fell from its peak of about 10% in 1965 and 1966 to less than 6% in 1970.

21. From the ECONOMIC REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT 1974.

22. For an analysis that was on top of the events as they happened, see P. Sweezy and H. Magdoff, "The End of U.S. Hegemony," MONTHLY REVIEW, October 1971.

23. Much of the argument here is adopted from R. Boddy and J. Crotty, "Food Prices: Planned Crisis in Defense of Empire," forthcoming in SOCIALIST REVOLUTION. Quotes from the government report referred to in the text are taken from Boddy and Crotty.

24. From the SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS, various numbers.

25. It is probably reasonable to assume that the price increases resulting from the government's policies were a good deal greater than it expected. That is one of the problems of operating in a changed and unstable international environment—it is not clear what the impact of various policies will be.

26. See F. Ackerman and A. MacEwan, "Energy and Power," MONTHLY REVIEW, January 1974. A more comprehensive analysis is provided by M. Tanzer, THE ENERGY CRISIS: WORLD STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND WEALTH, Monthly Review Press, 1975.

27. In February, 1974, the U.S. attempted to establish some cohesion among the oil-consuming nations. According to the New York Times, "Kissinger's entire argument was couched in terms of 'interdependence,' suggesting that nations which sought to promote their self-interest at the expense of others would wind up injuring themselves — by weakening the entire world system of production, trade and investment for decades to come." The success of the conference was shown by the action of the French: "For its part, France has followed the ancient



doctrine of 'sauve qui peut' — or, roughly, 'every man for himself.'" **NEW YORK TIMES**, Feb. 13, 1974, p. 5.

28. **BUSINESS WEEK**, January 13, 1975, p. 76.

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Section from the mural by Diego Rivera at the Detroit Institute of Art.

# **Black Cats, White Cats, Wildcats: Auto Workers in Detroit**

*Martin Glaberman*

Detroit workers have been through many stages. From carriage production to car production to tank and plane production and back to car production. From prosperity to war to depression to war and back to prosperity and depression. From open shop to union shop; from democratic union to bureaucratic union.

Modern mass production is most closely associated with the introduction of the moving assembly line by Ford before World War I. The combination of relatively high wages combined with the most intense exploitation is also associated with the auto industry and Ford's famous "five-dollar day."

Ford also provides the crucial turning point in the modern history of Detroit. In 1941, the year that Ford was organized, the transition was made from the organizing days to the period of stability and legality. After 1941 what was

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**EDITORS' NOTE:** This article originally appeared in 1969 in **SPEAK OUT**, a socialist periodical published in Detroit. We thought it would be a good introduction to the article which follows, an account of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and its activity in a Detroit Chrysler plant in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

left to be organized was accomplished either by government fiat in the war plants or by NLRB election. The workers were kept out of it.

Just as important was the Ford contract, which was also intended to keep the workers out of it. Everyone was amazed that Ford, who had resisted the union to the bitter end, had granted concessions to the union far beyond what had been won at GM and Chrysler. Full time for union committeemen and the dues checkoff were the keys to the Ford contract. What it achieved was the incorporation of the union in the management of the plant.

The earlier contracts were simple documents which left the workers free to fight with any weapon they chose.

## NEW WORKERS

During the war years there was a tremendous influx of new workers into the auto plants. They were Southerners, black and white, and women. The demands of the war and the shortage of labor combined to give workers substantial weapons in their struggles. Black workers fought for upgrading into production jobs (other than foundries). Women became production workers on a large scale. The union leadership attempted to surrender the bargaining powers of the workers by rushing to give the government a no-strike pledge. Union officials took places on government boards. There began the growing merger of union hierarchy with the political power structure.

The resistance of workers to this process began to widen the gap between the rank and file of the union and the officials at the top. It was in Detroit that this resistance reached its high points.

A struggle against the no-strike pledge was carried on in the UAW against the major caucuses in the union. This reached its peak at the 1944 convention of the UAW when the top officials were chastized and embarrassed in front of the government officials they tried to serve by the defeat of resolutions to retain the no-strike pledge.

A curious example of the problem of working-class con-

sciousness came out of that convention. The question of the pledge was referred to a membership referendum. In this vote by mail, the no-strike pledge was accepted by a vote of two to one. However at the same time, in the Detroit area auto-war plants, a majority of auto workers wildcatted time and time again.

## REUTHER'S CAREER

The Reuther regime in the UAW coincides with the major post-war transformation of the auto industry. The centralization of power with the elimination of the smaller auto companies (Kaiser, Hudson, Packard, etc.) was combined with the decentralization of production in the newly automated or modernized plants. Reuther continued the policies begun by old Henry Ford and followed by GM's C. E. Wilson. The five-dollar day was superseded by the cost-of-living allowance as the golden chain that was to bind the workers to the most intense and alienating exploitation to be found anywhere in the industrialized world. No wage increase can compensate for the fact that the operations required of one worker on an auto assembly line never total as much as one minute.

In 1955 auto workers erupted in a wave of wildcat strikes that rejected the policy of fringe benefits combined with increasing speed-up. They made it clear that what was at issue was the inability of the union contract to provide any solution to the day-to-day problems on the plant floor. In some plants, at the expiration of the three-year contract, there are literally thousands of unresolved grievances testifying to the need of workers to manage production in their own name.

Ever since 1955 Reuther has attempted to incorporate the local wildcats into the national negotiations, with very little success. In the 1967 contract negotiations in auto it took one year, one third of the life of the contract, to wear down the workers, local by local.

## OVERTIME AND PRODUCTIVITY

From 1958 to 1961 the massive reconstruction of the auto industry led to a major depression in Detroit. It made visible the erosion of working-class power engineered by the auto union. Chrysler workers, some laid off for over a year, picketed Chrysler plants (and UAW headquarters) to prevent overtime work. Chrysler was able to get a court injunction against the picketers on the ground that they were in violation of the no-strike clause of the union contract.

## BEYOND RANK AND FILE CAUCUS

In the 1960's, also, the pressure of the black working class was constantly changing the level of employment in those plants that were within the reach of concentrations of black Americans. By the time of the Detroit rebellion of 1967, the majority of auto workers in the Detroit metropolitan area were black. These workers were a combination of older, long-seniority workers who had achieved power and stability in the plants and young militants who took what was there for granted and began the movement toward new forms of organization.

Black workers felt most intensely the exploitation and alienation of auto workers, and they led the way in newer struggles. The Detroit rebellion of 1967 exposed the vulnerability of the auto corporations to the populations of the inner cities in industrial America. One year later was organized the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, which, with companion organizations in other plants, became part of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

What was crucial about the development was that it went beyond earlier black caucuses which were limited to pressure against management and the union hierarchy. And it went beyond earlier caucuses of all kinds in that it was not an electoral machine that functioned as a loyal opposition within the union. It was a direct, shop-floor organization that was willing and able to call strikes in its own name and fight against both the union and the management in a strug-

gle to assert the power of the working class in production.

Tensions between black and white workers have existed in varying degrees since the earliest days in auto. Sometimes they have erupted into open struggle. Sometimes they have been submerged in major battles against the industry. Tensions exist today, especially in relation to the skilled trades, which can easily break out into battles between workers. But that is secondary to the fact that black workers are attempting to assert working-class control on the shop floor.

Detroit, through its black workers, has again taken the lead in showing this nation its future.



*MARTIN GLABERMAN spent two decades in the auto shops of Detroit. He was a member of and frequent writer for the socialist group Facing Reality, and is an associate editor of RADICAL AMERICA.*

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# **Niggermation In Auto:**

## **Company Policy and the Rise of Black Caucuses**

*Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin*

*I work at a small shop in Troy . . . . Three weeks ago a woman on the day shift got her arm chopped off in a press. The week before this happened the press repeated and they said they'd fixed it and kept people working on it and then this lady got her arm chopped off. People were really freaked out; some of the people on days ended up quitting.*

Denise Stevenson, in a statement to a People's Court convened by the Motor City Labor League, April 3, 1973.

One of the major concerns of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was the deteriorating working conditions at the point of production. In 1946 some 550,000 auto workers had produced a little over three million vehicles, but in 1970 some 750,000 auto workers had produced a little over eight million vehicles. Management credited this much higher productivity per worker to its improved managerial techniques and new machinery. Workers, on the other hand, claimed the higher productivity was primarily a result of their being forced to work harder and faster under increasingly unsafe and unhealthy conditions. The companies called their methods automation; black workers in Detroit called them niggermation.

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Still from "Finally Got the News," a film about the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

Niggermation, not automation, was clearly the watchword at Chrysler Corporation's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant. Clustered alongside four other Chrysler plants — Huber Foundry, Winfield Foundry, Chrysler Forge, and Plymouth — Eldon employed a workforce of over 4000, of which 70% was black. Eldon covered over a million square feet, was surrounded by another half-million square feet of storage and siding areas, and housed 2600 machine tools of 170 types. In a report to the National Labor Relations Board on November 30, 1971, Chrysler Corporation described Eldon as "engaged primarily in machining metal parts for rear axles of most Chrysler-built automobiles, for which it is the sole source, and assembling the parts into completed axles." Workers considered this key plant the most niggermated factory in Detroit.

Even though Chrysler acknowledged how vital Eldon was to its operations, working conditions at the plant continually deteriorated. These poor conditions reached such proportions that by 1970 harassment, industrial illnesses, injuries and deaths on the job pushed Eldon workers to the breaking point. After James Johnson shot and killed two foremen and a job setter, his attorney, Ken Cockrel, said, "We'll have to put Chrysler on trial for damages to this man caused by his working conditions." The Johnson jury was taken to Eldon, the "scene of the crime," to observe for itself the conditions which Judge Philip Colista had called "abominable" and which UAW Safety Director Lloyd Utter termed "inexcusably dangerous" and evidence of "a complete neglect of stated maintenance procedures." The jury agreed and concluded that James Johnson was not responsible for his actions. That August, during the local contract negotiations, Chrysler admitted to 167 separate safety violations at Eldon; yet a year and a half later, in January of 1971, the Michigan Department of Labor found hundreds of violations of the Michigan safety code still uncorrected. In a separate case brought against Chrysler by Johnson, he was awarded

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*EDITORS' NOTE: This article is excerpted from the author's forthcoming book, DETROIT: I DO MIND DYING, to be published this spring by St. Martin's Press.*

workman's compensation of \$75 a week, beginning from the day of his "breakdown."

Eldon workers knew that James Johnson was not an isolated case. Serious provocations, injuries, illnesses, and deaths were the realities of their everyday work. On May 26, 1970, less than two months before Johnson fired his M-1 carbine, another death had occurred at Eldon. Gary Thompson, a black 22-year-old Vietnam veteran, had been killed when his defective jitney overturned and buried him under five tons of steel. UAW Safety Director Utter investigated the cause of the accident. On November 12, 1970, his written conclusions were sent as an official union inter-office communication to Art Hughes, the Assistant Director of the National Chrysler Department :

"I examined the equipment and found the emergency brake to be broken; as a matter of fact, it was never connected. The shifter lever to the transmission was loose and sloppy. The equipment generally was sadly in need of maintenance, having a lost steering wheel in addition to other general needs. I also visited the repair area and observed other industrial trucks in this area that were sadly in need of repair, noting: no lights, lack of brakes, horns, broken LP gas tank fasteners, loose steering wheels, leaky hydraulic equipment, etc. I was informed that there is supposed to be a regularly scheduled maintenance procedure for this equipment in this plant. I was also informed that operators are instructed to take trucks to the garage and tag them when they are in need of repairs. However, it seems to be the practice of foremen, when equipment is needed, to pull the tags off the equipment in the repair area that badly need corrective maintenance and put them back into service on the floor.... Finally, a general observation as we passed to and from the location of the fatal accident: there seemed to be little attempt to maintain proper housekeeping except on the main front aisle. Water and grease were observed all along the way, as we proceeded. Every good safety program has its basic good-housekeeping procedures. Proper steps should be taken immediately to improve conditions within this plant."

Thirteen days before Gary Thompson's death, Eldon had claimed the life of Mamie Williams, a 51-year-old black woman who had worked for Chrysler for over 26 years. Mamie Williams had been ordered by her doctors to stay home because of a dangerous blood-pressure condition. Chrysler, however, had sent her a telegram telling her to return to work or be fired and lose all the benefits she had accumulated in almost three decades of employment. An intimidated Mamie Williams had returned to her job on the first shift in Department 80. One week later, she passed out on the line and died shortly after being taken home.

A year before the deaths of Gary Thompson and Mamie Williams, Eldon had taken the life of Rose Logan, a black janitor. Rose Logan had been struck in the plant by an improperly loaded jitney whose driver's vision was blocked. Her doctor told her to stay off her feet, but Chrysler's doctors ordered her back to work. She returned to Eldon from fear of losing her job, developed thrombophlebitis in her leg, and, like Mamie Williams, ended her service at Eldon in a coffin.

Higher production at Eldon had been achieved not with advanced technology and automated assembly-line procedures, but through the old-fashioned method of speed-up. The single goal of the company was to increase profit by getting more work out of each individual worker. Eldon conditions were typical of conditions in the industry. Even when there were technological changes, usually only one segment of the assembly line was automated, so that the workers on other segments had to labor more strenuously to keep up. Often, the automation eliminated interesting jobs, leaving the more menial and monotonous tasks for people. Many of the "new" machines were not technological advances at all, but simply updated models of tools introduced as early as the 1920's and 1930's.

Health and accident data on the auto industry was difficult to obtain. Only in the early seventies did the UAW and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare begin to make studies in this area. One important report did appear in 1973. Called the HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP STUDY OF

DISEASE AMONG WORKERS IN THE AUTO INDUSTRY, it was based on figures compiled by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and was written by two medical doctors, Jannette Sherman and Sidney Wolfe. The report estimated 65 on-the-job deaths per day among auto workers, for a total of some 16,000 annually. Approximately half of these deaths were from heart attacks. There were also some 63,000 cases of disabling diseases and about 1,700,000 cases of lost or impaired hearing. These statistics did not include many long-term illnesses endemic to foundry workers and others exposed to poisonous chemicals and gases, nor did they include deaths and injuries by accident. Even these limited figures made it clear that more auto workers were killed and injured each year on the job than soldiers were killed and injured during any year of the war in Vietnam.

The hazardous conditions were supposedly compensated for by high wages. Auto workers were among the highest-paid workers in the United States, yet wage rates were deceptive. In the 1920's, Henry Ford made headlines by promising \$5 a day to every worker in his enterprises. Ford workers soon discovered that it was not quite \$5 a day for not quite everyone. Fully a third of all Ford workers never got the \$5 a day. Likewise, at Eldon, the 1969 \$4-an-hour average Chrysler wage proved a fiction. Before any deductions and without the cost-of-living factor, which did not cover all workers and was never more than 21¢ an hour, most job categories at Eldon paid around \$3.60 an hour and none paid more than \$3.94. Workers found it difficult to get figures on per-hour pay for their particular job, and they were often cheated out of increases by complex union and company clerical procedures. What the workers did know was that overtime had become compulsory and that most of them needed the time-and-a-half paid for overtime to keep pace with inflation. Census Bureau figures revealed that the value of the products shipped out of the plant, minus the cost of materials, supplies, fuel, and electricity, came to \$22,500 a year per worker, as compared to an average wage of \$8,000 for a worker putting in a 40-hour week. During

the period 1946-1969, wages had increased by 25% while profits went up 77%, dividends 60%, personal corporate incomes 80%, and undistributed corporate profits 93%. The industry moaned about its cycle of booms and busts, but in 1970 General Motors remained the nation's (and the world's) largest manufacturing enterprise. Ford was the third largest. And Chrysler, "the weak sister," was fifth.

Niggermation at Eldon gave rise to three separate rank-and-file opposition groups. The one with the longest record in the factory was a militant trade-union group led by Jordan Sims, the black chairman of the shop stewards' committee. A radical group called Wildcat began publishing a newsletter in February 1970, and ELRUM, the local unit of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, made its official appearance in November 1968. The three groups, separately and in various combinations, produced a steady barrage of information for the workers and succeeded in closing down the plant in several successful wildcat strikes. Chrysler was more than a little concerned about this activity. If Eldon were closed for any lengthy period, all gear and axle production would stop; and with that stoppage, all of Chrysler would stop. Chrysler remembered how, in 1937, General Motors had been forced to recognize the UAW when it occupied Fisher Body #1 in Flint and Fisher Body in Cleveland, the only plants having GM's valuable dies. Eldon had the same sort of pivotal role in Chrysler production. At this point of maximum vulnerability, Chrysler faced one of the largest concentrations of black workers in the industry. Eldon was Chrysler's Achilles' heel. Chrysler knew this, and so did the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

ELRUM's history was similar to that of DRUM. Meetings, rallies, and newsletters built up a hard core of supporters and a much larger number of sympathizers. Leaders of ELRUM such as Fred Holsey and James Edwards found themselves under continual pressure from company, police, and union. Physical assaults were frequent, but the ELRUM leadership did not crack under the pressure. On January 22, 1969, ELRUM led over 300 workers to confront the local union leadership with a grievance list in much the way

DRUM had confronted the leaders of Local 3. Five days later, ELRUM called a strike to back up its demands. ELRUM kept out 66% of the workers the first day of the strike and 50% the second. The company's retaliation was to fire some two dozen workers and to discipline 86 others.

In retrospect, the League evaluated the January 1969 strike as premature. Too many ELRUM members were knocked out of the plant, and the remaining base of support was insufficient to maintain the struggle at the same level as in the previous six months. Despite these facts, ELRUM continued to fight, and it continued to have a cadre and sympathizers in the plant. During the early part of 1970, ELRUM once more took a leading role in plant struggles, and it arrived at a working coalition with other militants.

*You don't have to read about them in NEWSWEEK or see them on television. They're too dangerous. They're too dangerous to the system to have information about the kind of work being done at Eldon to be disseminated widely. This is a war we're talking about. There is literally a war going on inside the American factories. This is a violent struggle. Sometimes it is organized and guided. Most times it is unorganized and spontaneous. But in the course of this struggle more American workers have died than in all the four major wars.*

John Watson, interview in QUADERNI PIACENTINI (Italy), Winter 1970.

One of the key figures in the new series of events at Eldon was a white worker named John Taylor. In August of 1972, he gave the authors a retrospective account of the events at Eldon as he had experienced them. At the time of the interview, John Taylor was a member of the Motor City Labor League. His personal testimony regarding the period from 1968 to 1970 is a textbook of what was wrong with the company and the union. It also presents a candid view of the problems within the ranks of the insurgents themselves:

"My name is John Taylor, I wasn't born in Detroit. I was born in West Virginia. My father was a coal miner who worked in the mines for 17 years. My grandfathers on both sides were coal miners. My grandfather on my mother's side was the recording secretary for the first miner's local in that part of the country back in 1916. We moved to Detroit in 1949 as part of the migration of white Appalachians northward. My father started to work at Chevrolet gear and axle plant as a production-line worker in October 1949 and he retires in 1975. My mother works at the Federals Department Store putting price tags on clothes. She's worked there since 1952 and expects to retire soon. I went to the Detroit public schools and Wayne State University. I came out with a bachelor's degree in English and a law degree. Along the way, I worked eight years for the Better Business Bureau in Detroit, a capitalist front organization, and I worked for Chrysler Corporation on the management side as a workman's compensation representative. That job took me into almost every Chrysler plant in the Detroit area. It put me into contact with literally hundreds of injured workers per week. I worked there from June 1966 to September 1968. In November of 1968, I got a job as a production-line worker at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle factory, the same factory where I had worked for management.

"I was asked to resign my management job because of what they called a 'bad attitude.' The truth is that the company was fucking the workers on compensation. One of their devices was to refuse to discuss the cases with the union. They claimed workman's comp was covered by statute and therefore not part of the contract and therefore not negotiable. My feeling was that while the substance of the decisions was not negotiable, the administration was and was therefore grievable. I thought I should discuss these cases with the various shop stewards. I did what the union should have done. I gave the stewards an outline of the rights of workers — their constituents. I noticed that, during a period of nine days, about every steward in the place was in my office. I didn't find out until several years later that Jordon



Sims had noticed what I was doing and had made it part of his program as Chairman of the Shop Stewards' Committee to send all of the stewards to see me. Finally, he came in himself and we had a long rap. I gave him a copy of the statutes. I used to have almost daily relations with the Labor Relations Committee. I remember on more than one day how they would say, 'Oh, we're going to have a rough afternoon coming up because Sims is coming to bargain.' That's the kind of reputation Sims had.

"After I got kicked out of Chrysler management, I went back to Wayne State; but I didn't want to be a lawyer or a teacher. I wanted to organize, and the logical place seemed to be the plant. I had the reputation in the Eldon Personnel Department of being the best comp man they had ever had. I talked them into letting me work hourly, and they put me into Department 75, first as a conveyor loader and then I worked up to being a precision grinder. That's the best job I ever had in my life. I didn't have any organizing agenda at that time. The only politics I had came out of the FIFTH ESTATE, Detroit's underground paper. I had never read Marx or Lenin. The first time I read the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO was late 1969. I thought, "This is far out. They are talking about this plant." That was an important event for me.

"One funny coincidence from that time is that I entered the plant on November 8th, 1968, and on November 10th some black workers in other departments founded ELRUM, the Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement. They had been turned on by the agitation at Dodge Main and became an affiliate of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. I would like to relate these events in the sequence I lived them, rather than strict chronological order. I will come back later on and fill in the most important dates and events.

"Our steward in Department 75 on the third shift was a man named Frank McKinnon. I got to know him when I was in workman's comp because McKinnon was a witness in a case involving a fight. Chrysler had a policy of firing the aggressor, so the question of who started the fight was im-

portant. McKinnon gave me a statement that the worker had started the fight. I found out later he lied to me. That was the kind of steward he was. When I got to be a worker, he refused to write up my safety grievances. A number of us also had grievances relating to pay raises due us because of promotions. We were supposed to get a 5¢-an-hour raise within a week, and it took me six weeks to get mine because the foreman wouldn't do the paperwork. He was trying to save on his own budget, and McKinnon wouldn't write up the grievance about it. That's how things worked at Eldon.

"My safety grievance typifies the problems in that factory. I worked on what they call a modern grinder. We used to laugh about it because there was nothing modern about it at all. It was ancient. We had to burn off the rough edges of rangers which looked like donuts with metal teeth. This part went into the differential. There was a lot of fine dust generated by this grinding. The company put vents on the machines to hold this down, but every shift the filters would get clogged. The supervision would never give us the little time needed for someone to come and do some maintenance on them. I requested a mask. I got this thing that didn't look right and asked for the box it came in. It turned out to be for paint and gas fumes and was no help against dust. I ran all this down to McKinnon, but he refused to deal with it. So I called for a department meeting. I organized around him. The union President wouldn't schedule the meeting for more than two weeks because he said we had one word wrong in our petition. Richardson (the President) was just pissed because he had just taken office, and now, less than two months later, there was dissatisfaction with one of his stewards. Richardson told me straight off he wanted people to cool off because he didn't want angry people in the union hall. That's another indication of the union's attitude. They do not want to deal with angry workers.

"I started seeing Sims in the cafeteria every morning. This was in early 1969, and he suggested I get on the union bylaws committee. I worked on that for a year with Sims and a guy named J. C. Thomas. We drew up some bylaws that would have made that union as honest and democratic

as unions can be in this period. Needless to say, those by-laws were never presented to the membership.

"By 1970, we had gotten to a situation where Chrysler was making most of its money off small cars, the Valiant and the Dart. One reason things got so bad at Dodge Main was that is where they made those cars. Behind the need for increased production and because they wanted to harass the union, Chrysler did a lot of firing, disciplinary actions, and all sorts of bullshit. There was attempted speed-up in my department at Eldon. One foreman arbitrarily raised the quota on the grinder machine, which was totally against the contract. What we did was lower to 400 instead of the usual 700 gears, and that cooled his ass about a speed-up.

"On April 16th, 1970, things built up to what we call the Scott-Ashlock incident. There was a black worker named John Scott who was a physically small man. His foreman was a fairly large guy from Mississippi named Irwin Ashlock. They got into an argument, and Ashlock picked up a pinion gear and said he was going to smash Scott's brains out. Scott complained to his steward, and the union took it up with the company. Well, Chrysler came up with the claim that Scott had taken a knife from his pocket — you know, like all blacks carry knives. They claimed Ashlock had a right to protect himself, and rather than discipline Ashlock, they were going to fire Scott. This sparked a wildcat strike which shut the place down for the whole weekend. That was a beautifully successful strike. It had an old-fashioned unity — young and old, black and white, men and women. Everyone was militant. The skilled tradesmen went out too. At a union meeting a white worker named John Felicia, who had seen the whole thing, spoke from the stage at the hall. There were maybe a thousand people there. Felicia said there were white workers at Eldon and black workers at Eldon, but the main thing was that they were all workers and that he had seen the whole thing and that John Scott was telling the absolute truth and was totally in the right. The company needed our gears for those Valiants, so they backed down.

"Everyone thought we had won, but then, after a couple of weeks, the company started acting up. They threatened to

discipline the second-shift stewards who had led the walk-out. They began to have foremen follow these guys around, and then, on May 1st, they were told toward the end of the shift that they were all going to be suspended for an unauthorized work stoppage in violation of the no-strike clause of the contract. They were shown the door leading to the street. What happened was that a guy named Clarence Thornton shoved the plant guards out of the way and led everyone back into the plant. This was shift time. I remember meeting a steward, and he said, "We're shutting her down. Go home." By midnight, the factory was shut down. Chrysler went for an injunction and got it. The union lawyer from Solidarity House refused to defend Local 961 on the grounds it might bring legal action against the whole union. They sold out the strike. They advised us to go back to work without our stewards. We worked most of that summer without any stewards. Both Jordan Sims and Frank McKinnon were fired in this action.

"In response to those firings, a grouping called the Eldon Safety Committee was formed which included myself, some members of ELRUM, and the fired stewards led by Jordan Sims. Our program was to research and document the issue of safety in the plant. We got advised by lawyers Ron Glotta and Mike Adleman that we had the right to refuse to work under abnormally dangerous conditions. That would not constitute a strike, and the company could not get an injunction. We saw that we had an umbrella for closing down Eldon. We were so naive we thought words meant what they said. When you look at our leaflets of that period, you will see that we quote the law and all that stuff. We put out a few leaflets, but events overtook us. The plant was indeed abnormally dangerous. On May 26th, 1970, this was proven when a man named Gary Thompson was buried under five tons of steel when his faulty jitney tipped over. Thompson was a black Vietnam veteran about twenty-two years old. The jitney he was running was full of safety flaws.

"On May 27th, we set up picket lines. By 'we,' I mean the Eldon Safety Committee and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. This was not as successful as the first

strike, but it cost them 2174 axles over two days. We're proud of each and every one of them. The three wildcats within a month and a half cost them 2200 axles during a period when they desperately needed them for their Valiants. Chrysler immediately fired me and three members of the League: James Edwards, Alonzo Chandler, and Rob McKee.

"I need to backtrack here to tell something about ELRUM. Like I said before, they had started on November 10, 1968. My first awareness of them was when they began to put out leaflets. There was an immediate response, about 50% positive and 50% negative. The negative response came from the older black workers and of course from white workers, mainly because the ELRUM language was harsh. They called people "Toms," "Molly-Toms," "honkie dogs," "pigs," etc. No one seemed to have trouble with calling the supervision those names, but this was something different. The older people definitely had a lot of trouble with their whole tone. In early 1970, there was an election for convention delegates. That was just before the Scott-Ashlock Incident. Given their numerical superiority in that plant, black workers could have elected an all-black slate. There were like 33 separate black candidates, and ELRUM put out a leaflet calling them Molly-Toms and all that. That divided the black vote.

"ELRUM was already in bad shape by that time. In January of 1969, there was a lot of complaining about the coldness in the plant and about union discrimination against blacks. Chrysler disciplined some ELRUM people who had lost time from their jobs to do an action against the union. A wildcat followed, and after that 22 ELRUM people were fired. I think that broke the back of ELRUM right there. I think those actions were premature. There was no way to logistically support that strike. They had no outside mobilization. It was just premature. Still, everything we ever did at the plant was premature. Maybe it was vanguard activity, and they just didn't have any choice. Anyway, through 1969, the INNER CITY VOICE, the League paper, was sold at the plant. I had no personal contact until early 1970, about the time of the convention.

"At that time, I was still mainly involved in the bylaws struggle and troubles in my own department. Still, I used to see their leaflets and groups of us would discuss them, blacks and whites. I would say that we might not be able to relate to the rhetoric, but what they were saying was true. That was the position Jordan Sims took, too. A lot of his enemies said he was the secret leader of ELRUM, in an attempt to erode his base among black and white workers. Sims said their language was crude but they were telling the truth. He would defend them as aggressively as he would any militant. That was a position of principle. I should say that I wasn't all that aware of all they were doing. I can say that the young white workers didn't like them. They could relate to what I said, but they had a hard time with ELRUM.

"What really turned people off was this one leaflet they put out on the union secretaries. There was an old retiree named Butch and several white secretaries in the office. ELRUM put out a leaflet running that these white women were prostitutes for Elroy Richardson, the black President of the local. They ran all kinds of vicious stuff that people could not relate to. We knew these women and did not perceive them in that fashion. People were really put off by that issue. Another thing is that some of those young black workers who were enthusiastic about the leaflets never joined ELRUM, and some of them crossed the Safety Committee picket line. So there was this mixed response to ELRUM as we went into 1970.

"Things were very complicated by 1970. Local 961 had its first black President. This was before the Scott-Ashlock Incident. ELRUM had supported the black slate in 1969, but now it had become critical and was calling Elroy a Tom, a fat-belly faggot, etc. When the wildcat came, ELRUM dropped that and supported him again. You can say that Richardson had a united plant behind him, but he was too incompetent and inept to be a leader. He had it all in his hands at the time of the wildcat following the Scott-Ashlock thing, but he blew it.

"After the wildcat, the ELRUM cadre and myself worked on the Safety Committee. I did most of the research and

writing because that was an area I had expertise in. They did most of the organizing for the strike. We met at League headquarters on Cortland Street. People ask if I felt any nationalism or reverse racism, and I can say I did not. I had a lot of basic respect for what they were trying to do. When they said, "Come on over; it's all right," I did and it was. I also had a nodding acquaintance with Ken Cockrel from law school. That may have helped, but our main contact with the League was General Baker. We had a lot of contact with him and also with Chuck Wooten. They both came on the picket line with us, even though they didn't work at the plant. I would say the performance of the ELRUM people around the safety strike was exemplary.

"I need to backtrack again. By early 1970, I had come to realize that I had to get beyond Department 74 and 75. I knew you had to have an organ of some kind, a mimeoed sheet. I think that came from seeing the ELRUM example. I thought it was correct when they said whites should work with whites, which was what I was trying to do, even though I was doing it on my own from what I see now (in 1972) as correct instincts. A little earlier, a paper called WILDCAT had been given out. People in my department had picked it up and read it. Then, early in 1970, they began to put out the ELDON WILDCAT, a mimeoed plant newsletter. At that point, I was ready to leap out. I waited until they were at the gate, and I told them I worked in the factory and wanted to do some articles for them. We set up a meeting. Those people were experts at plant newsletters. I became identified with them immediately because people spotted my writing style.

"The WILDCAT people were Old Left. They were so secretive they had crossed over to paranoia. They used false names and all that stuff. They didn't want to expose their shit to open struggle. My opinion, then and now, is that that is an incorrect way to work. They strongly advised me not to distribute WILDCAT. It was their policy that outsiders distributed. My opinion was that the paper had to get into the plant. We were only covering one gate. One morning I went out and took some papers and gave them out at

another gate. It soon got around the plant that I was the publisher of WILDCAT, which was a mistruth. I was only a junior member of that circle. They would edit the shit out of my articles. They would change the content and the style. Sometimes we did this together, but sometimes they said there wasn't time. I usually didn't mind, but they would put in bad stuff sometimes without consulting me, which put me into a trick as I was identified with the paper. Other workers held me responsible. I found out later that two people in the group took the position that I was only a contact and had brought my troubles upon myself by identifying with the paper in an overt way. You must remember that ELRUM was open with their thing. I thought that was correct, and I was open with mine. That made it easier to trust each other.

"What we did during that period was have ELRUM put something out one day, WILDCAT the next, and the Safety Committee the third. Then we would start the cycle going again so that there was a steady stream of information and agitation. It was like a united front. People knew I was associated with the Safety Committee, and stewards would take me off on the side to show me violations. Management tried to keep me from going out of my department on my break. They got a guy to pick a fight with me so we both could get fired. They tried all that shit.

"ELRUM did not participate as fully as it could have in gathering information, and on the day of the strike they tried to stop distribution of the WILDCAT. My brother was giving them out, and they said this was basically a black action and he should get out. Anyway, he didn't move. I don't think that was correct, but overall ELRUM was very good. The trouble was that after Rob, Alonzo, and James were fired, they had no one else to carry on. That was after the other 22 had been fired. Their thing was just ripped. Then they made a bad mistake, which may have been unavoidable given problems within the wider context of the League. That summer and fall they only put out one leaflet. They lost their visibility. They could have had workers from other plants distribute. They could have gone to union meetings, which was something I did. They went sometimes, but they



were into a program of disruption. I didn't think that was correct, and I couldn't work with them on that. I thought it was insulting to those workers who had come to the hall in good faith to take care of whatever business they thought important. I thought it was disrespectful.

"I think it would be fair to say that they were not good at dealing with people within the class who did not agree with them but who were not enemies either. I don't know what internal education the League was giving them on this. I don't know what kind of instructions they were getting. If there is not structure by which people's actions can be criticized and reviewed, you get into this kind of situation.

"ELRUM still had a few people inside, but they were essentially not doing much. Now, in 1971, union officials came up for election. ELRUM ran a candidate named Eric Edwards, a guy who I have a lot of respect for. He ran a strong third as a straight ELRUM candidate, getting 342 out of about 1000 votes. That indicated a residue of support. The company and the union were running a heavy organized barrage against Jordan Sims, who was running against Frank McKinnon for President. Sims could have won with the solid help of older workers, but they were turned off by his association with ELRUM. Jordan and I went over to the Cortland offices and talked with Baker, Wooten, and a whole bunch of them. They had always seen Sims as a sellout and right-wing opportunist. I don't think that was correct. Anyway, he told them he didn't want their endorsement, which would be a kiss of death. The first day of the election, ELRUM did not come out in favor of Sims, and Jordan was ahead. The second day they endorsed him, and the vote turned away. I believe that was an indication of how negative older folks had become to ELRUM. That was one factor in his defeat. It would be interesting to know who made the decision to endorse him.

"The union ran its usual shit on us. They challenged 284 ballots because of dues default, which is strange because you have checkoffs at Chrysler so if someone is behind, it is not their fault but the union's and the company's. I analyzed those ballots, and 90% of them were in black pro-

duction units, and I think they would have gone to Sims. They would have put him over as President of the local.

"The administration, the international, and the company had sold this program that we were all violent individuals. They even said I was a member of ELRUM! They said I was a violent motherfucker. We got into a situation in the hall the night we were tabulating. We were there as challengers, and they brought in armed guards with shotguns, carbines, and pistols. They were provocative as hell, trying to get us into a fight. I'm convinced they wanted to gun us down. We took our time real easy. I even took my shirt off so people couldn't claim I was strapped (carrying a gun). There was one argument which was really hot where James Edwards raised his voice, and the whole table got surrounded by those guards. These black guards were hired under the instructions of George Merrelli, the Regional Director. I got into a hot dispute with Russell Thompson, who was solid with the administration. Some ELRUM people came over, and Thompson reached into his shirt for a piece. I saw the guards starting over, so we just split, me and the guys from ELRUM. We were not prepared to handle that shit. What is interesting is that most of the people counting the ballots were older black women, and they were physically afraid of ELRUM people. They thought ELRUM people had guns and were going to go berserk. I knew right there that there had been a tremendous failure of ELRUM. You can't have people in the plant afraid of you in that way. Also, the same women who were afraid of ELRUM were not afraid of me. Several of them went out of their way to say this.

"A similar incident occurred around the safety strike. It happened at the East Gate, which is a principal gate for the second shift coming in. The second shift is basically black and young, with little seniority. This is the 2:30-10:30 shift. James Edwards was on the gate, and at one point, James grabbed a white worker and slapped him around. Now, we had agreed there would be no violence, on advice of our attorneys, so that we could preserve the strike's legality. James violated our organizational decision. That

hurt us. When people heard about that, they turned against us. They even cut a hole in the parking-lot fence so they could get in easier.

"I almost did a similar thing myself. I grabbed this one dude I had a thing on. He had caught me outside on the street one day and slugged me on my blind side. I had this plan for getting him that day, but I didn't. Maybe a policy of violence would have been better. Slapping some of those fuckers around might have made a difference. I don't know; we had decided not to, and I stuck to that decision. We sure as hell moved too fast. We hadn't organized our base correctly. We weren't ready for that strike hit. We should have agitated more around the issue of Gary Thompson and on safety in general. We could really have made it hot, but as a result we had a not totally successful strike for which we got fired. You must understand we were genuinely angry at the death of Thompson. It verified everything we had been saying. We got self-righteous. In our arrogance, we failed to note that Memorial Day was on Friday. The people were getting triple pay for working. We couldn't have picked a worse day for a strike. It's just incredible that we didn't consider that factor. We were wrong and stupid.

"These events took place in May 1970. On July 15th, James Johnson entered the factory and blew away two foremen and a job setter. He was looking for his shop steward, Clarence Thompson. That was the same guy who had led the fired stewards back into the plant by shoving the guards aside. That was exemplary because Clarence was an older dude, about 46 years old with 23 years' seniority. He was considered a good steward. Clarence was one of those sold out by the union. They left the stewards in the street for a time, and when Clarence came back he had to sign a statement that if there was any further trouble he would get permanently fired. When Johnson first approached Clarence about his grievances, Clarence told him, "I can't do much for you because I just got back myself." Clarence had been intimidated and sold out to the point where it was no longer safe for him to fight for his membership. Johnson saw his union could not function for him and decided to deal with it

himself. Those connections are important. The whole preceding set of events was to break down the stewards so they wouldn't defend their people. The company refused to deal with safety and other legitimate grievances. That's why we say Chrysler pulled the trigger. Chrysler caused those deaths. Yes, indeed, James Johnson was just an instrumentality.

"It's important to note how ELRUM related to white people. The first thing is around the distribution of their leaflets. They would always refuse to give those leaflets to white workers. It wasn't until around March of 1970 that they would respect my practice enough to give them to me. Then James Edwards would go through changes about that. He would wad them up in his hand and sort of pass them to me surreptitiously, so none of the black workers would see him giving a leaflet to a white. When ELRUM had its wildcat in January 1969, there was no attempt to relate to white workers about their demands. Consequently, many white workers crossed their lines, and many black workers who had close friends in the white force took the same position. They could not relate to the strike because they perceived ELRUM as having taken a racist position. One of the interesting aspects of the safety strike was that the Eldon Safety Committee was a coalition of trade unionists, ELRUM black revolutionaries, and white revolutionaries, mainly myself.

"What happened to the Safety Committee is instructive. There was a steady process of attrition among the trade unionists, one of whom was a white named George Bauer, another of whom was Frank McKinnon. Some dropped out early. Some stuck right up to the strike. At the end, we had only Jordan Sims, J. C. Thomas, and a couple of others. During the strike, the trade unionists stayed for the first-shift picketing and then, except for Jordan Sims, were never seen again. The revolutionaries stayed with it to the bitter end because they had more than trade-union reform to fight about. That may be a clumsy formulation, but the point is they were going to fight as long as they could. George Bauer, a skilled trades steward whom I have a lot of respect for, was fired with the other second-shift stewards.

He participated actively in giving us safety information, but he never took part in picketing or in various confrontations with the union. George Bauer was not and is not a racist, and he has encountered a lot of opposition with his own skilled tradesmen. They call him a nigger-lover. George had a quick temper. He used to be a professional boxer. He got into an argument outside the plant with an individual who had scabbed during the wildcat, and George decked him. This was outside the plant. Management moved to fire him, and the union wouldn't write a discharge grievance for weeks. Eventually, George got back in there, but he understood that he had better be careful.

"Our first confrontations with the union brought a reduction in the ranks of the Safety Committee. Reuther had been killed, and the international was using that as an excuse to keep the hall closed. We insisted on the right to use our own hall. We were using the conference room to get information, write leaflets, discuss strategy, etc. Elroy Richardson came in and told us to leave. We stood up and confronted him, saying he would have to throw us out. He said he'd call the police. We said, "Fine, Elroy, you want to call the police, call the police." He went away and left us alone. The next day, when we came back, the conference room was locked. Some of the unionists felt uneasy and talked about going to lunch. James Edwards and I went over to the door. I tried to pick the door with my knife, and we put our shoulders to it. Then we went outside and found a window. We got screwdrivers and got the conference-room window open. We had to actually break into our own hall. We got in and opened the conference-room door. As soon as they saw this, some of them went to lunch and never came back. We started having the meeting, and another of the stewards got more and more agitated. He got on the verge of physically attacking me because I had broken into the hall. He had a very heavy thing on how Walter Reuther had been the black man's friend and ally. He was very insulted that I, a white man, had desecrated the memory of Reuther's death. He went into this thing with me and left and never came back. That was another contradiction in our ranks.

"The reaction of the people in my own department to the strike bothered me. I was on the West Gate, where most of my department comes in. I'll never forget this. Almost unanimously, the people in my department and people I knew did not go in when they saw me picketing. They talked to me, and some of them even gave out leaflets. What a lot did, though, was go to another gate. I couldn't understand that for a long time. What it meant was that they could relate to me as a person, but not the politics of the situation. There was the additional problem of how they related to the ELRUM people who were on the gate with me. This reinforced my assessment that we moved too fast. We had to do more agitation. We cost Chrysler 2174 axles, but we could have done more. We also succeeded in exposing the Chrysler-union cooperation to the workers in the plant. That is, we produced the documentation on all the safety violations the union wouldn't deal with. This was dramatized by the death of Gary Thompson. Even the UAW couldn't ignore that. Our strike lifted the consciousness of everybody. It used to be that workers wouldn't take the leaflets or would throw them away. Now, people at the plant almost always take the leaflet, put it in their pocket, and read it inside. That is very positive and indicates a level of consciousness, higher than in most plants and higher than it had been in their plant.

"How workers relate to material given at the gate isn't understood by most people in the movement. When WILDCAT first appeared, ELRUM tried to front them off by physical threats. The WILDCAT people came back, and ELRUM backed off. ELRUM remained extremely hostile to the WILDCAT, even after it became known I was associated with it. ELRUM had the opinion that the WILDCAT was from the Communist Party, and they had minimal respect for the CP. They thought the WILDCAT was racist and an outsider sheet.

"I would like to say something about other radical groups which made interventions from 1970 onwards. Up front, let me say that I am presently a member of the Motor City Labor League, a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group.

Now, Progressive Labor came out to the plant in the summer of 1970 and started selling their paper, CHALLENGE. I approached them at the gate one day. This was after I was fired. I looked like an ordinary worker. I was working at Budd Wheel at that time. They assumed I worked at Eldon, and I was shocked at how they related to a person whom they perceived as a typical worker. They were condescending. I ran a little bit about my involvement in the safety strike, and they were very critical of that. They said their policy was to ignore the unions. They assured me that they would be there every week and were not fly-by-night leftists. What happened was that they managed to antagonize a lot of folks, as is their fashion. This was done to the extent that one day some white workers came out and beat the shit out of them. That indicated a failure of sorts. They told me the same thing had happened at Cadillac. That physical assault was the end of their presence, and they haven't been seen since.

"The reaction of the Socialist Workers Party is interesting because I'm not aware they had any reaction at all to what was going on at Eldon. They never contacted Sims, myself, or anyone in ELRUM to speak at a forum or do any internal education for them. I want to say something about their Detroit activities in the late sixties. At that time I was working for the Better Business Bureau, and I used to go to their Friday-night socialist forums at the Debs Hall. I went pretty regularly for almost a year. Not once did anyone ever approach me politically or be even minimally friendly. I was like a fixture for a year, but they just ignored me. Maybe they thought I was an agent or something, but that has always struck me as a totally ripped practice. You have to be blind or myopic to ignore what was happening at Eldon, and I have never seen them relate in any way out there. If they have worker cadre, they sure as hell aren't at Eldon, Budd Wheel, or Dodge Main.

"The only other groups to do any work are the Motor City Labor League, Revolutionary Union, and International Socialists. Revolutionary Union has mainly tried to get on with some stewards at Eldon, but they haven't distributed

leaflets or done any public work. International Socialists have been extremely interested in Jordan Sims. They wanted to do a national campaign around his discharge in pretty much the way the Angela Davis thing worked for the CP. The Motor City Labor League has had a public presence in the form of leaflets, and we have been working with the various people and with Jordan Sims.

"It's a truism that struggle creates strength. It is also true that you have to find issues that affect people's lives and that you agitate and organize around those issues with the point of view of making some gains and of exposing the concrete contradictions. The aftermath of our strike was that Jordan Sims ran for President of that Local (Local 961). He maintained his membership, and was narrowly defeated by Frank McKinnon, the white steward. The election was literally stolen from Jordan. Now, there is a scandal about the embezzlement of funds by McKinnon and other officials. Very large sums have disappeared for over 10 years, and apparently George Merrelli, the Regional Director, knew about it. That would make it reach right into Solidarity House. People in the plant have gotten a pretty high consciousness about this whole set-up. We managed to get the Department of Labor into the process. We showed we were correct on the statutes and the contract. They had to expose their hand in a situation affecting the health and lives of those workers. We have developed a hard core of people at Eldon who go to union meetings. There's 60-70 people who know how to function. The company and union could just give up, but they can't do that because of the key nature of Eldon. The stakes are too high. But the company, union, and Labor Department continue to shit on people, which creates more strength for us. Eventually, they'll have to move the factory out of Detroit or let us have it.

*In the stamping plant, which we know is a hazardous area anyway, I got my fingertip severed off in a press. They sewed it back on . . . . But that isn't as serious as some of the other things that have happened in the Rouge area in the past. Six*



*men in a basic-oxygen plant were killed, and there wasn't enough left of those men to put in a decent shopping bag.*

Wesley Johns, in a statement to a People's Court convened by the Motor City Labor League, April 3, 1973.

John Taylor's recounting of the struggle at Eldon points up some of the problems facing the militants who wanted to carry out the Revolutionary Union Movement (RUM) strategy. Many nationalist-minded blacks were attracted to the RUMs. Although very militant and vocal, the RUMs often held back the development of class consciousness among other workers attracted to the wider League program. This gap between secondary and primary leadership grew wider after the strike of January 1969. All the members of the League executive would have curbed some of the more counterproductive language in ELRUM leaflets, but there were occasions when Baker and Wooten sanctioned approaches some of the other League leaders would not have approved of. Excessive emphasis on the contradictions between workers not only alienated whites who might have been neutral or sympathetic, it turned away many blacks. Older workers, who had a large stake in improving working conditions, especially disliked the wholesale attacks on "honkies" and "Toms," considering them incorrect ways to get sustained and positive action. ELRUM's attitude toward individuals such as Jordan Sims and supporters of WILD-CAT posed another kind of problem. ELRUM was somewhat sectarian toward them and judged that Sims, at best, was an honest reformist stuck in trade-union attitudes, and at worst could turn out to be another of those "traitors from within" the League warned about. The consequence of ELRUM's attitude was that the organization drew too rigid a line of demarcation between itself and other forces in the plant. Ken Cockrel voiced the additional criticism that the ELRUM workers fired in January had failed to build a defense committee in the plant and in the neighborhoods. He believed that the hostile ELRUM attitude toward white participation and working with non-revolutionary blacks was retarding rather than building their struggle.

ELRUM clearly failed to rally women to its ranks. Two of the workers killed at the plant during this period were women, and their deaths were an indication of the harassment and poor working conditions women faced. It was an open secret that dating foremen had its rewards, just as refusing them had its punishments. One young black woman who suffered from drowsiness caused by excessive noise got a job classification which would take her away from moving machinery, but she could not get it acted on because of union indifference and the hostility of her foremen. Several other women, in well-known incidents on the shop floor, were forced to tell off supervisors and union representatives after they became tired of fending off constant sexual advances. ELRUM bulletins spoke of the special problems facing the "sisters" in the plant, but ELRUM never developed a concrete program for dealing with such problems.

ELRUM activists generally bypassed the UAW altogether once they were out of the plant. This caused a gradual breakdown of ties with some of the more militant workers in the factory. Jordan Sims, even after being fired in 1970, went to union meetings regularly and organized his forces as he might have had he been still working inside the plant. Sims continued to contend for power in the union, and on May 23, 1973, after several highly questionable elections, he defeated Frank McKinnon 1599 to 735 and became president of Local 961. As an elected union official and still co-chairman of the United National Caucus, Sims was now able to carry on his own fight from within the UAW hierarchy. He demonstrated an honest and aggressive unionist stance during his first year in office.

Citing shortcomings in the ELRUM performance in no way diminishes the importance of the work carried out over a two-year period. A handful of revolutionary-minded production-line workers had set themselves against the company and the union, and against the timidity and weariness of many workers. Taylor, a white Appalachian, called them exemplary; and their nationalism notwithstanding, he considered them the best leadership to have emerged in the plant.



## FINALLY GOT THE NEWS

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE  
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*DAN GEORGAKAS grew up in Detroit and worked with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. He now writes fiction, prose and poetry about contemporary problems and is a contributing editor to CINEASTE, a radical film quarterly.*

*MARVIN SURKIN teaches at Brooklyn College in New York and is doing a series of case studies about insurgents among groups of people such as the elderly and miners that will be collected into a book on THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE.*

# Freeway Series/1

Comin' home from work.  
It's late. I'm tired.

Get that radio on man!  
LOUD !!!

Take the left hand  
overpass turn,  
and bury my foot.

(damn, I gotta get  
a valve job done  
on this piece of shit.  
if I don't,  
it's just gonna die.

pull out  
onto the freeway.

If I hustle home,  
maybe I can catch  
the third base hot shot  
11 o'clock news show.

. . . shit, this roadway, the free way,  
is gray, gray overpass paint jobs.  
gray sand that the concrete  
is made of.  
even the sky, the nighttime sky,  
is gray. once the black night.  
but foundry factories vomit  
sooty smoke into the blackness.  
and it becomes gray/black.  
a dirty gray canvas. (like this poem)  
gray :

the neutral color  
no longer neutral, because it represents  
what we produce. for them.  
I'm passing a diesel tractor trailer  
on the outside lane.  
It's carrying 12 brand new fords.  
Probably the ones I made last night.

They're lashed down at precarious angles.  
Looking like tuna just pulled aboard/  
still half alive and flapping desperately.  
Trying to jump free.

... the grayness and the grit, the dirty,  
funky, hardheavy city, home of  
grease cake hands and the baddest  
right hook you've ever seen.

detroit.

Wonder why they call it the free way?

Regardless of where it takes us,

It's never free.

b. p. Flanigan



*b. p. FLANIGAN was in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, has worked in auto plants in Detroit, and has been associated with the Motor City Labor League and From the Ground Up in Detroit. He capitalizes only his last name to emphasize the collective clan name over the individual first name. Presently he works as a writer/reporter for the MICHIGAN CHRONICLE, Detroit's black weekly. His writings reprinted here are from THREE RED STARS, available from Smyrna Press, Box 841, New York, NY 10009.*

# The Ceremony

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

. . . detroit, michigan : home of the "motown sound"/gm/ford/  
chrysler/rats in the kitchen and roaches in the bathroom/no heat  
in winter & nothing cool when the summer comes/pistons pounding  
out a DRUM beat . . . "do you take" . . . "to love and cherish"

. . . woodward avenue/junkies, whores & little kids on the way up  
to take their places/a dime bag to get the day over with

. . . "and do you take" . . . "to have and to hold" . . . the day shift,  
afternoons, midnights - at least 8 hrs. with the devil in hell/  
rouge, chevy, fisherbody (makes dead bodies), budd, eldon gear  
& axle, dodge main, jefferson, iron foundries & specialty forge  
foundries/monsters that eat alive & spit out bloody hands/feet  
pieces of skin and bone/& with regularity - A DEAD BODY !!!

. . . friday nite . . . get that check/carry it on home to the crib  
(with wife & kids), then get out on the street : get fucked up/  
(reefer, jones, coke, ups & downs, johnnie walker black & red)  
try to freeze your head/can't think about the shit starting  
all over again on monday./ . . . "and now a message from our sponsor"  
watch tv/listen to the radio/read papers/they all say : "buy this,  
get that & YOU TWO can be a success."/damn, brother, sister,  
a success in this motorized, computerized, iron & steel jungle is  
just staying alive!!!

"in sickness and in health"  
"for better or for worse"

detroit, michigan/any city  
my/our home

"until DEATH

do us part."

b. p. Flanigan

## TEN YEARS OF PROHIBITION IN OKLAHOMA

Not by any means. We have a better class of people in a temperance town than in a license town. I have tried both."

**YUKON, H. B. Bass, Mayor:** (1) "In my estimation, the statewide Prohibition policy of Oklahoma is absolutely producing the best all round results." (2) "It does promote the growth and prosperity of a community in a permanent way." (3) "I would not advise a change to the license policy."

**WESTVILLE, M. R. Little, Mayor:** (1) "Yes." (3) "No. Prohibition is the only thing for a city, county or state; yes, I might say, for the world. God speed the day when we will have national Prohibition."

**WETUMKA, H. H. Holman, Mayor:** (1) "Emphatically yes." (2) "It proomtes a good, substantial growth." (3) "Emphatically, NO. I have had experience in living in communities about such as this where the saloon existed and I speak from personal knowledge that the Prohibition community is far more prosperous, its people are far more honorable, more certain of their obligations and have happier homes."

**WIRT, Frank McPhail, Mayor:** (2) "Promotes." (3) "Absolute Prohibition."

### FIVE LONE WETS HAVE THEIR SAY

**HASKELL, J. C. Scully, Mayor:** (1) "No. I would be in favor of local option as Prohibition prohibits as far as I can see in eastern Oklahoma." (3) "Yes. I would think that any local community would be in better shape to know what they want. As it is now, the bootleggers are getting double prices for inferior goods."

**LEHIGH, Fred Westerman, Mayor:** (1) "I am heartily in favor of local option and high license." (2) "I would rather think it would promote the growth of a community and do away with the lawless element of the so-called bootleggers in eastern Oklahoma."

**MIAMI:** (1) "No." (2) "Retards." (3) "Yes. It is the incubator for crime and disregard for law."

**OKEENE, P. M. Rupert, Mayor:** "This vicinity would rather have license."

**POND CREEK, M. L. Thomas, Mayor:** (1) "No." (2) "It does not promote." (3) "Yes."

Curious to probe a little deeper into Pond Creek, I sent a copy of the Mayor's return to a responsible citizen of the town and received the following information in reply:

"Relative to the Mayor of our town taking a stand against Prohibition, I will say that I am not surprised in the least. Unfortunately, our town is one that does not pay its officers. The only pay the Mayor receives is advice and criticism. The best citizens have served their turn and have received their pay. It is next to impossible to get a decent man to act in the capacity of Mayor in this town. Last fall, when the office was made vacant, the present Mayor, Mr. M. L. Thomas, was the only candidate for the place. All our efforts to induce a good man to run were unavailing, so Mr. Thomas was elected without opposition. In some respects, he is a good citizen, but the man's disposition is so warped and twisted that he is constitutionally against anything that anyone else favors. His attitude does not express the sentiment of the town and community in any respect."

hyped-up production machine came to a lame halt, and a lot of people got "freed." The dream, now realized, was nightmare.

## QUIT A JOB — GET A JOB

While white folks downtown were trying to save their Detroit by building monuments to house last century's leftover culture and businessmen's conventions (putting up Cobo Hall and Ford Auditorium, expanding the Art Institute, etc.), dozens of one- and two-man operated record companies were spinning up. They started to record and market a music that RCA, Columbia, Atlantic, etc. had been virtually deaf to. According to one report, "on nearly every block in some neighborhoods there seems to be at least one small record firm, sign over the door, Cadillac in the driveway." Until shortly before he started Motown in 1959 (the one black record company to really make it), Berry Gordy was working in a Ford body shop for \$85 a week. While working he used to write songs in his head: "It helped me knock the day-to-day drag." Right after he quit his job at Ford, Gordy opened up the 3D Record Shop, which specialized in jazz. Detroit has produced some of the best jazz musicians, men like Yusef Lateef, Lee Morgan, Curtis Fuller and Joe Henderson. Like the blues singers, these jazz musicians also played in many of the bars and clubs on Hastings and later on 12th Street. All of these musicians have long since split for other parts, and jazz in Detroit has fallen on hard times.

Gordy, who had been writing songs with Bill "Smokey" Robinson, sold the 3D, borrowed \$700 from his father, or so legend has it, and started Motown. Smokey got together The Miracles, the first Motown group. "Shop Around," their first big hit, brought in the capital to really get the company moving. About the same time Gordy wrote the song "Money," which the Beatles recorded on their second album. The lyrics of that song express a sensibility shared by both the writer and the Beatles, before either of them had made it safely out of the working class:



Your lovin' gives me a thrill  
but your lovin' don't pay my bills  
Money don't get everything it's true  
but what it can't get I can't use  
Now give me money — that's what I want

It is no accident that the Beatles publicly acknowledged a heritage to the Motown sound. Both Detroit and Liverpool are solidly working-class cities, giving Motown and Liverpool groups certain common experiences. Though the Motown sound comes out of the distinct social-musical history of the black working class, both Gordy and the Beatles were able to produce songs that articulated where kids' heads were at, particularly the people they grew up with. The lyrics of "Get a Job," recorded by Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, at the tail end of the recession, is that kind of articulation:

It was hard for me to get a job  
Well I finally did and my boss was a slob  
He's on my back all day long.  
He says to me, Get the boxes take 'em to the basement  
Do the job right or I'll get a replacement.  
Well this man about to drive me stone insane  
One of these days I am going to have a fit.  
Though the thought keeps running through my brain  
I'm never going to quit my brand new job.

## FROM BLUES TO ROCK

Just as the lyrics of Motown songs come out of a people's common experience, the music comes out of something just as real and is not simply the pure immediate creation of some writer's head. Detroit blues had always had a more complicated instrumentation than most urban blues: the harmonica working tightly with the guitar and a boogie piano adding as much to the rhythm as the drums, with a saxophone often weaving in and out. As the city and factory ceased being a completely alien scene for people, the urban blues became more and more sophisticated. As people found

ways of fighting back and of defining their sensibilities, not just in response to oppression but on their own terms, Detroit blues went through some more changes, rearranged its face and gave itself another name. That name is Motown.

The Miracles were, from the start, beyond the earlier rock-rhythm and blues of Chuck Berry, who used all the instruments as part of the rhythm section. The Miracles would use super-tight arrangement of instruments, but with real orchestration, and with Smokey's voice skimming above the group, and the bass punctuating or repeating key words and phrases.

Shortly after Motown started, Gordy hired the writing team of Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier and Brian Holland. The three, who were still in high school when they started with Motown, have written almost all the material for the Four Tops and the Supremes. Though Holland, Dozier and Holland are an organic team, Motown has organized all its writers and producers into committees. Songs are not written for a particular group or singer but for the "sound," and then the group that can best put the song over is chosen. While there are complaints that the committee method is stifling to individuality, the collective sensibility that comes through has turned out more single hits for Motown than any other company.

A former Motown studio musician told me that he attributed the success of the company to the studio musicians, who are some of the best around, and to committee system, which can't help but incorporate the wide range of musical elements that are part of a people's culture. Listen to the piano intro on the Temptations song "I'll be in Trouble." That piano is little more than an up-temp version of the boogie piano on Big Maceo's "Bit City Blues" that he used to play in the days of Brown's Bar.

## THE STABLE

The Four Tops, Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder and the Temptations are some of the groups and singers that are in what company execs call

the "stable" and who bring in about \$30 million a year. The Temptations, who are one of the best groups to come out of Motown or rock and pop music in general, sum up in their sound the last 20 years of Detroit jazz, blues, spiritual and rock. They are at their best when they stay away from Gordy's desire to sneak strings into every other song. There are exceptions like "My Girl" in which the strings are just adjunct to the message the group is trying to put over, and it all works. The instrumental break on their song "Run Away Child" is one of the most sophisticated arrangements in rock history, without that sophistication destroying the song's roots. After the break, the Temptations pick it up and they are so together and flying so high, that they put the best strings in the world to shame.

There is a lot of talk about the Supremes' sound turning "white" and "commercial," and that the Beatles sound has turned "artsy," as both groups move away from their roots. Maybe so, but what's more important is that there will always be new groups coming along whose heads will still be down in the streets and who will be articulating new values that bourgeois society has no use for, as in the Temptations' song "Beauty Is Only Skin Deep."

The cultural renaissance that was supposed to develop with the building of Cobo Hall, Ford Auditorium, and the addition to the Detroit Art Institute never materialized — or rather it did — but not from the sources that liberal intellectuals were looking to. And all those buildings turned into testaments to the lameness of official culture. Cobo Hall came alive for the first time when, about a year ago, Aretha Franklin gave a homecoming concert, which filled almost every one of the 22,000 seats. Before the concert was over kids were dancing in the aisles. (Aretha's father, Reverend C. L. Franklin, is pastor of the New Bethel Church, scene of the recent shoot-out, where two pigs hit the dust.) On an evening in July, 1965, the Motown Revue gave its first homecoming concert after a tour of Europe. The concert, planned for Belle Isle, was going to raise money for the Southern movement. Twelve thousand people turned out. The Belle Isle Bridge (starting place of the 1943 riot) was

jammed with cars and city officials claimed that "exuberant spirits threatened to get out of hand." They called out the brand-new shiny Tactical Mobile Unit for the first time. The concert was cancelled.

"Now at midnight all the agents and the super-human crew, come out and round up everyone that knows more than they do. Then they bring them to the factory, where the heart attack machine is strapped across their shoulders and then the kerosene...."

(Bob Dylan)

WOVOKA is a poet presently living in Detroit. He is concerned with developing cultural analysis as part of Marxism. This article originally appeared in 1969 in SPEAK OUT, a socialist periodical published in Detroit.

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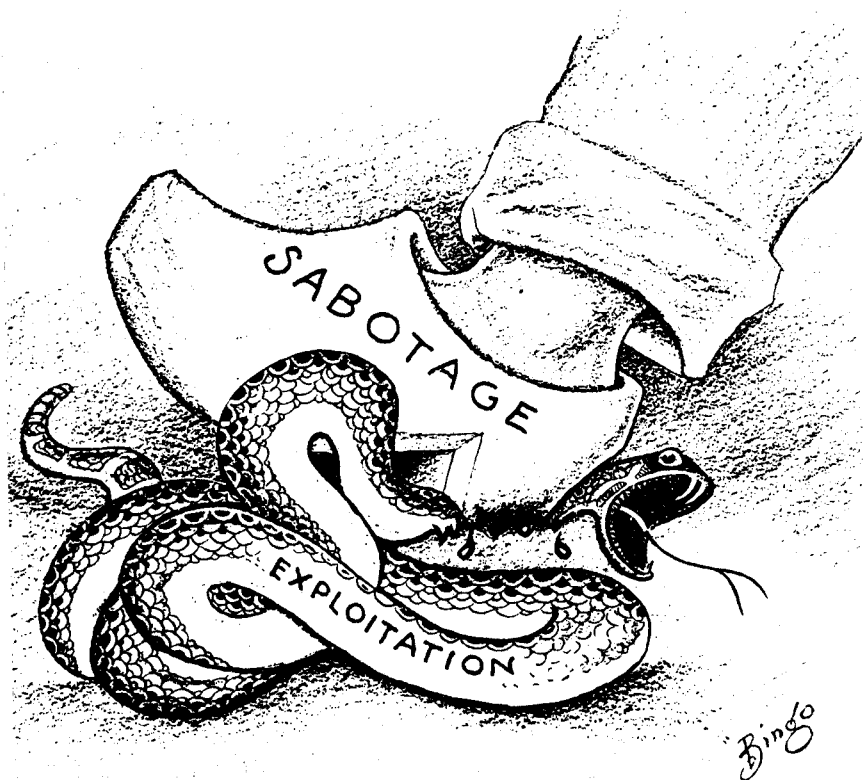
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*Solidarity*, April 7, 1917.

# **The Stop Watch and The Wooden Shoe:**

## **Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World**

*Mike Davis*

### TAYLOR AND THE "ART OF SWEATING" (1)

According to the founding father of modern industrial management, the "conscious restriction of output" or "soldiering" has always been the original sin of the working class. "The natural laziness of men is serious," Frederick W. Taylor wrote, "but by far the greatest evil from which both workmen and employers are suffering is the systematic soldiering which is almost universal." (1) Taylor's lifelong crusade against the "autonomous and inefficient" worker was the crystallization of his personal experiences as a foreman at the Midvale Steel Company in Philadelphia. For three years he waged a relentless campaign against the machinists and laborers whom he accused of collectively restricting plant output. He was finally able to break up the group cohesion of the workers and reduce "soldiering" only after a ruthless dose of fines and dismissals. This pyrrhic victory took "three years of the hardest, meanest, most contemptible work of any man's life...in trying to drive my friends to do a decent day's work." It convinced Taylor that repression alone was an inadequate foundation for

management control over the conditions of production. (2)

After further years of experimentation in the steel industry and in tool-and-die shops, and with the occasional backing of key corporate leaders from Bethlehem Steel and other large companies, Taylor systematized his theories in a series of books. Of his several works, however, his bluntly written **PRINCIPLES OF SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT** popularized his ideas most effectively. Eventually, after being translated into a dozen languages, this book became a bible to "efficiency men" all over the world. Here Taylor proposed effective solutions to the problems of reduced output and "soldiering."

The traditional basis of soldiering, he explained, was the degree of job control exercised by skilled workers through their mastery of the production process. Craft exclusivism, maintained by control over entry into workforce and the monopolization of skills almost as an artisanal form of property, blocked the operation of free-market forces upon both the wage scale and employment. (3)

Taylor, moreover, recognized that the submission of the work force to the new discipline of the assembly line would not automatically resolve these problems as long as even a minority of the personnel preserved the right to define a "fair day's work." He emphasized that the crucial precondition of complete management power was the appropriation from the skilled workers of the totality of their craft secrets and traditions. The techniques of time and motion study developed by Taylor (and later perfected by others) were precise methods for analyzing the content of craft skills involved in the production process. These "scientific" studies conducted by the new-fangled production engineers and acolytes of Taylorism became the basis for undermining the autonomy of craft labor. Knowledge of the production process would be monopolized by management, while craft skills were simultaneously decomposed into simpler, constituent activities.

Skilled workers immediately perceived the twin menace of scientific management: the loss of craft control and the radical polarization of mental and manual labor. In 1916 a



leader of the Molders' Union incisively analyzed the deteriorating position of American craftsmen as a whole :

The one great asset of the wage worker has been his craftsmanship.... The greatest blow that could be delivered against unionism and the organized workers would be the separation of craft knowledge from craft skill. Of late this separation of craft knowledge and craft skill has actually taken place in an ever widening area and with an ever increasing acceleration. Its process is shown in the introduction of machinery and the standardization of tools, materials, products, and processes, which makes production possible on a large scale .... THE SECOND FORM, MORE INSIDIOUS AND MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE FIRST, is the gathering up of all this scattered craft knowledge, systematizing and concentrating it in the hands of the employer and then doling it out again only in the form of minute instructions, giving to each worker only the knowledge needed for the mechanical performance of a particular relatively minute task. This process, it is evident, separates skill and knowledge even in their narrow relationship. When it is completed, the worker is no longer a craftsman in any sense, but is an animated tool of the management. (My emphasis) (4)

While scientific management demanded the progressive "dequalification" of labor's craft aristocracy, it also signaled a new slavery for unskilled workers. As Taylor recognized, even gangs of common laborers, unorganized and lacking a property right in a craft, frequently were able to convert the solidarity of their work group into an effective brake on increased output. Management, he argued, had to aim at destroying the solidarity of all functional work groups, skilled or unskilled.

Managers have always known that even in the absence of trade-union recognition the primary work group (defined by

common tasks, skills, or departments) is a natural counter-pole to management authority and the basis for collective counter-action. The daily work group constitutes a social unit for the individual worker almost as intimate and primal as the family. It is the atom of class organization and the seed from which great co-operative actions of the working class have always developed. (5) Before Taylor, however, there was no practical strategy for preventing the crystallization of primary workgroups in which wage earners grew to depend on each other and to co-operate in resisting management authority. In order to prevent the work groups from evolving into "counter-organizations," Taylor proposed a judicious combination of the carrot and the stick. First the most militant workers — the organic leadership — were fired or severely fined for the slightest infraction of the new rules. Then jobs were diluted, redesigned and "individualized" (that is, fragmented and serialized) to the greatest extent technically feasible. Finally, differential piece or time rates were introduced to promote competition and to sponsor the emergence of a new pseudo-aristocracy of "first-rate men" working from 200% to 400% above the new norms. (6) And so, out of the old mixture of skilled and unskilled labor, Taylorism helped precipitate the archetypal worker of the future: the machine tender, the semi-skilled operative with the discipline of a robot. Taylor loved to argue that workers should be selected on the same "sensible" basis on which draft animals were discriminatingly chosen for separate tasks. The working class were divided by nature into groups of weak mules, ordinary drays, and super-strong work horses. (7)

Co-operation, Taylor explained, meant that future workers "do what they are told to do promptly and without asking questions or making any suggestions." (8) The interdependency of workers — previously expressed through their teamwork of conscious co-operation — would be replaced by a set of detailed task instructions prepared by management to orchestrate the workforce without requiring any initiative from the bottom up. Taylor also advised bosses to reduce the on-the-job socializing of workers through

vigilant supervision and frequent rotation. In principle, the only tolerable relationships within a Taylorized plant would be the chains of command subordinating the workers to the will of the management.

The real message of scientific management, therefore, is not about efficiency; it is about power. Like many other aspects of the Progressive Era, it was a counter-revolutionary blow at the potential power of the working class to organize itself and transform society. The fundamentals of scientific management had been introduced into the basic manufacturing core of U.S. industry by the eve of American entry into World War I. Corporate capitalists were determined to install the reign of the "iron heel" within their plants, mills, and mines. Taylorism offered coherent principles and an ideological framework to corporate managers searching for a strategy to deal with labor relations at a time when higher and higher targets of productivity were being demanded by the capitalists. Scientific management gave U.S. industry an inestimable advantage in the world market. American production was generally recognized as the most intense in the world, with speed-up and working conditions which frequently scandalized observers from the European labor movement. (9) As Antonio Gramsci reflected in one of his PRISON NOTEBOOKS, scientific management in the U.S. represented "the biggest collective effort to date to create with unprecedented speed and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history a new type of worker and man.... Taylor is in fact expressing with brutal cynicism the purpose of American society." (10)

## REVOLUTION IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

A good deal has been written about the American Federation of Labor's response to scientific management, from its initial strong opposition to its eventual conciliation (or capitulation). (11) However, the response to Taylorism among unskilled or immigrant workers has been explored only recently. And very little is known about the reaction

of the radical Industrial Workers of the World. Although the Wobblies have received much attention in the last decade, they have not been taken as seriously as they should. In contrast to the A.F.L.'s narrow defense of endangered craft privileges, the Wobblies attempted to develop a rank-and-file rebellion against the rationality of Taylor and the speed-up. In fact, they were virtually unique among American labor organizations, in their time or any other, in their advocacy of a concrete plan for workers' control.

Nothing illustrates the specificity of I.W.W. industrial unionism better than the I.W.W.'s role in the wave of mass strikes initiated by Eastern industrial workers from the first detonation at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania in 1909 through the Detroit auto strikes of 1913. Historians have yet to put these strikes in their proper perspective. Even Jeremy Brecher, searching in his recent *STRIKE!* for the central role of mass spontaneity in American labor history, virtually ignores this whole period of class conflict which included major strikes at McKees Rocks, East Hammond, New Castle, Lawrence, Passaic, Paterson, Akron, and Detroit. In all these strikes the I.W.W. played a crucial role. Together with the concurrent mobilization of socialist-led garment workers in New York and elsewhere, these struggles marked the entry of the "submerged" majority of industrial workers into open class conflict. "Common labor" had long been considered unorganizable because of the ethnic divisions and racism, the hostility of skilled native labor, the inexhaustible reserve army of new immigrants, and corporate management's unprecedented apparatus of spies, cops and finks. Therefore, the sudden and dramatic awakening of semi-skilled factory workers, despised and ignored by the craft unions, constituted, in the words of William English Walling, "nothing less than a revolution in the labor movement." (12)

It is particularly significant that the storm centers of these strikes were located in the industries being rationalized by scientific management and the introduction of new mass-assembly technologies. A survey of conditions and complaints in the struck plants vividly reveals how the tac-

tics of scientific management (time study, task setting, efficiency payments, etc.) had invariably resulted in extreme job dilution, speed-up, and a lowering of wages.

At McKees Rocks, for instance, where nearly a worker a day was killed in an industrial accident, the steel trust's Pressed Car Company had pioneered the techniques of work rationalization and ruthless efficiency :

Before he reduced wage rates in 1907, President Frank Hoffstot had also introduced a new assembly line production method which accelerated the pace of work through a piece-rate system. At the same time he devised a technique for pooling wages which penalized all members of a labor pool for time and production lost by any single slow worker. This new production system also penalized workers for delays caused by company failure to repair machinery, and for breakdowns caused by vague instructions issued by plant superintendents. Although compelled to work at a feverish pace in order to satisfy the pool's production target, the men on the assembly line never knew what their actual piece rates would be and, in fact, usually found their weekly earnings well below expectation. (13)

Summarizing the conditions which led to the great strike of 1909, John Ingham's study of McKees Rocks concludes that "it was this rigorous but logical extension of the ideas of scientific management which led directly to the McKees Rocks Strike of 1909." (14)

Similarly, the Lawrence strike was precipitated by a premium system that enforced speed-up and by a wage cut-back following the passage of the 54-hour work week for women and children. At Paterson, the silkworkers were driven to desperate rebellion by the introduction of the multiple-loom system, an especially fatiguing variety of speed-up which made weavers responsible for twice as many looms as before. In the Akron rubber industry, Philip

Foner's analysis of the 1913 uprising shows that "the conditions the workers found made an eventual outburst inevitable. The speed-up system prevailed throughout the industry. A Taylor-trained man with a stop watch selected the speediest workers in a department for tests, and thereafter wages for the whole department were determined by the production of the fastest workers." Later in testimony before the Senate committee investigating the strike, "strikers told of the inhuman Taylor speed-up system in the plants, and even the employers, in their testimony, boasted that as a result of the speed-up system 'we got 40% more production with the same number of men.'" (15)

As for the auto industry, by 1913 it was becoming the last word in industrial efficiency; firms operating on a craft basis (one car completely assembled at a time) were rapidly being driven out of business; and Henry Ford was busy integrating Taylor's ideas into an even more ambitious model of the scientific exploitation of labor. At his plants and those of Studebaker, pioneering I.W.W. organizers confronted "the Brave New World" being created by the most advanced capitalist manufacturers. As Foner notes:

The steady mechanization of the industry reduced the skilled workers to a small fraction of the total number in the industry. The majority of the auto workers became mere machine operators with a job that could be picked up in a few hours. In no other industry was the process of production more subdivided and specialized or speed-up more prevalent. Pace setters under the direction of 'speed kings,' as they were called by the workers, with stop watches in hand, timed the men on every operation. A standard was thus obtained by which every job was to be done. If a worker failed to meet the standard, he was discharged. (16)

Two years before the I.W.W. became involved in the auto strikes, the INDUSTRIAL WORKER printed a representa-

tive plea for help from "Only a Muff" working in a plant of 7,500 where time-and-motion men had just increased the mandatory output from 150 to 225 units a day. This unknown auto worker told the I.W. readership how the men in his department were planning to restrict output and to refuse to compete against one another for efficiency payments. He added, however: "Of course we can't fight alone. If they insist upon this new system, it will be a case of either eat crow or quit. Let some of those free speech fighters come here and get on the job!" (17)

Scientific management did not — as Taylor liked to claim — ensure that workers "look upon their employers as the best friends they have in the world (!)" (18) Rather, it sowed class conflict on an epic scale. In the particular circumstances of 1909-1914, moreover, when the Depression of 1907 led to a quickening in the economy's rhythm of explosive growth and sudden slump, scientific management posed an especially clear threat to the working class. Upon the basis of sharp economic fluctuations and chaotic disruptions in the labor market, Taylorization helped ensure that rising productivity could be realized without restoring wages to pre-1907 levels. It also retarded the recovery of employment from depression levels. (19)

A.F.L. craft unions of course suffered a stunning debacle during this period in their remaining strongholds (especially steel) within basic industry. But for the mass of semi-skilled workers, whom the A.F.L. did not represent in any sense, the craft unions' fate was largely irrelevant. Undetected by A.F.L. leaders and other observers, who were misled by chauvinist stereotypes of the "new immigrants," a rank-and-file leadership was shaping up among the semi-skilled workers.

The immigrant factory proletariat could be united as well as divided by the diversity of its component cultures. Native traditions of revolution and struggle were brought to American soil along with the restricting consciousnesses of the shtetchl or ancestral village. The high rates of immigration and internal job turnover made organization difficult (20), but these trends also produced an unprecedented

circulation of ideas and experiences in the American labor movement. The unique degree of back-and-forth movement of foreign workers in the immediate pre-war period, at a time of world-wide labor upheaval, temporarily opened America to the diffusion of diverse ideas and experiences drawn from the breadth of European revolutionary movements. There were not many immigrant workers with the activist background of a Singer employee named James Connolly, recently arrived from Ireland, or the unnamed steel worker whom William Trautman talks about who had led in the Moscow uprising during the 1905 Revolution, but they were not unique.

The I.W.W. had a particular attraction for the most advanced immigrant workers, and their combined experiences constituted an important reservoir of ideas and tactics for the organization. The I.W.W.'s very slow growth before late 1909 disguises the fact that the Wobblies already had semi-organized groups at Lawrence and Paterson which were helping to build a foundation of militancy. At Paterson there was an eight-year history of Wobbly agitation before the great strike of 1913. The Lawrence I.W.W. local had initiated a series of slowdowns and wildcat walkouts against speed-up in the summer of 1911. (21)

At McKees Rocks the existence of a revolutionary nucleus among the car builders was revealed by the formation of the "Unknown Committee" of immigrants, including three Wobblies, which took over the leadership of the 1909 strike from the "Big Six", who were exclusively native skilled workers. This "committee from the base" contained veteran fighters with backgrounds in the struggles of at least nine countries, including the 1905 Russian Revolution. According to Foner :

This committee quietly took charge of the strike, planned the tactics of the battle, and put into operation methods of strike strategy which, though used often in Europe, were new to the American labor movement and were to influence the conduct of strikes among the foreign-born workers for many



years to come. Among the McKees Rocks strikers, the committee was known as the "Kerntruppen," a term derived from the military system of Germany where it referred to a "choice group of fearless and trained men who may be trusted on any occasion." (22)

The I.W.W. supported these small industrial cadres with the skills of experienced, full-time organizers, including Italians like Arturo Giovannitti and Joseph Ettor, the young Irish Republican James Connolly, as well as noted Americans like "Big Bill" Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Well-versed in U.S. labor history, but unafraid to borrow from the international repertoire of the syndicalists and other militants, the Wobblies were particularly adept at turning the weaknesses of immigrant strikers into sources of strength. Ethnic cohesiveness, traditionally so divisive, became a wellspring of unity when strikes were organized on a radically democratic basis with strictly representative committees that could be recalled. Leaflets, speeches, and songs were presented in every language, while in each strike every conceivable parallel was found with the historic struggles of various European nationalities.

While the solidarity and internationalism which the Wobblies strove to create within each strike was very important, the I.W.W. members also functioned as a transmission belt between strike movements. The big uprisings in steel and textiles seemed particularly important in providing a basis for organizing mass industrial unions. McKees Rocks, for instance, catalyzed strikes throughout the entire railroad-car construction industry, and the I.W.W. was able to establish short-lived locals in every major center of the industry (Hammond, Woods Run, Pullman, Hegewisch, and Lyndera). A little later the Lawrence and Paterson strikes transformed the I.W.W.'s affiliate Industrial Union of Textile Workers into a movement of many thousand workers. (23)

The shock waves of these big struggles reverberated throughout Eastern industry and found resonance in the

dozens of smaller strikes influenced by the I.W.W. in the same period. "Fishing in troubled waters" during his 1913 organizing tour of Pennsylvania and Ohio, General Organizer George Speed found the electricity of class struggle everywhere. In a few whirlwind months during the Akron rubber strike, he chartered new locals or contacted strikers across the entire spectrum of the working class: steel workers, railroaders, electrical equipment makers, barbers, construction laborers, department-store employees, sugar refiners, safe makers, shoemakers, tailors, furniture makers, wire workers, match workers, and railroad car repairers. (24) The I.W.W. membership statistics presented at the 1911 and 1913 conventions provide a dramatic measure of the organization's growing implementation in the major Eastern industrial centers. (25)

As is well known, the IWW failed to consolidate large numbers of Eastern industrial workers into its ranks. Between April and August of 1911, for example, even as 70 new locals were being organized, the disbanding of 48 old locals for reasons such as "lack of interest" was registered. But it has to be remembered that the AFL was also in deep crisis. It endured the crushing of the Amalgamated by the steel trust and did little or nothing to aid the epic two-year struggle of railroad shopmen who organized on industrial lines to resist the introduction of scientific management on the Harriman lines. Given the troubles of the labor movement in general, it is wrong to view the period as one in which the IWW demonstrated an inherent inability to build durable union organizations. The insurgency of 1909-1913 shaped a rank-and-file vanguard for the next, even more intense period of struggle in 1916-1922.

IWW members recognized that the industrial working class would not be organized in one single leap forward. Instead, the Wobblies saw the need for the forging of a "culture" of struggle among immigrant workers and the creation of a laboratory to test the tactics of class struggle. These years saw a vigorous debate on industrial strategy both within the I.W.W. and between its partisans and the rest of the American left. Having traced some of the

origins of the pre-war strike wave to the impact of scientific management, it is time to consider the famous, somewhat enigmatic controversy over "sabotage" and its relationship to I.W.W. practice in the Taylorized mills and plants.

## THE I.W.W. TURNS TO GUERRILLA WARFARE

In his exhaustive 1904 investigation of the REGULATION AND RESTRICTION OF OUTPUT for the Secretary of Labor, John Commons observed that "nowhere does restriction of output as a substitute strike policy exist in the United States." (26) Eight years later, however, the INDUSTRIAL WORKER weekly regaled its readers with examples of successful "sabotage," and the Socialist Party recalled IWW leader Big Bill Haywood from its Executive Committee for advocating sabotage.

Haywood's 'cause celebre' arose from a speech he gave before a huge crowd at New York's Cooper Union in 1911, where he declared, "I don't know of anything that can be applied that will bring as much satisfaction to you, as much anger to the boss as a little sabotage in the right place at the right time. Find out what it means. It won't hurt you and it will cripple the boss." (27) His unrestrained oratory prompted the adoption of an anti-sabotage clause in the party constitution, the famous Article II, Section 6 which forced the exodus of Haywood and several thousand left-wing socialists from the party and completed the polarization of the radical labor movement into bitterly hostile right and left wings.

The sabotage controversy, therefore, demarcated a real turning point in the history of both the socialist and labor movements. The actual political content of the dispute remains elusive. Historians have tended to agree that "sabotage" was an indelible mark of IWW infatuation with European syndicalism. Philip Foner, an "old left" historian whose volume on the I.W.W. remains the most carefully crafted account of the Wobblies' "heroic period," is firmly convinced that sabotage is the "one doctrine which the

I.W.W. borrowed directly from the French syndicalists." (28) Melvyn Dubofsky also traces its Parisian origin and argues that it acquired a special appeal for American workers enmired in what he calls (apropos Oscar Lewis) "the culture of poverty." (29) Even Fred Thompson, the crusty "house historian" of the I.W.W., discounts the application of sabotage in Wobbly struggles, arguing instead that it was only an exotic oratorical device employed on skid-row or Union Square soapboxes:

Soapboxers found that talk of sabotage gave their audiences a thrill, and since the dispensers of the above publications (the Cleveland I.W.W. Publishing Bureau) were happy to send them for sale on commission to all who would handle them, there was nothing to stop spielers, whether they were I.W.W. members or not, from procuring these booklets, mounting a box, talking about the I.W.W., taking up a collection, and selling the literature. (30)

The problem with the traditional explanation of I.W.W. advocacy of sabotage is that it does not explain why the sabotage debate split the Socialist Party or why the Wobblies persisted in making sabotage a central slogan in the period from the end of the McKees Rocks strike through the auto walkouts in 1913. ("Sabotage" made its first published appearance in a 1910 article in the INDUSTRIAL WORKER and appeared with increasing frequency until it became the theme of a serialized weekly discussion.) Unless the I.W.W. spokesmen are dismissed as irresponsible and flippant rabble rousers, it remains to be shown why this organization, temporarily inserted into the leadership of a massive upheaval of unorganized workers, gave such priority to its "flirtation" with a foreign-made notion which it supposedly never implemented on any serious scale.

Much of the confusion about what the Wobblies really meant by "sabotage" stems from the fact that revolutionaries, especially in the pre-Leninist period, were forced

to borrow old concepts or to employ only vaguely approximate analogies of practice in order to express the very different connotations of a new or transformed arena of struggle. A careful reading of the I.W.W. literature concerning sabotage in this period reveals the striking mixture of old ideas and new which can be analytically reduced in each case to three fundamental and differing meanings of "sabotage." These three dimensions of "sabotage," in turn, correspond to different, historically specific tactics of the labor movement.

First, there is the meaning frequently assigned by Bill Haywood that sabotage was only the frank, open advocacy of the same "universal soldiering" practiced by most workers. In this sense, "the conscious withdrawal of the workers' industrial efficiency" boils down to the familiar and inherently conservative tactic which had been one of the main bases of craft unionism. Moreover, it was precisely this traditional form of job control through conscious self-regulation of the pace which, as we have seen, Taylorism and speed-up were dissolving through the transfer of total control over working conditions to management. It was in Europe, where industry was less rationalized, that the old conservative application of soldiering was still a ubiquitous safeguard of traditional worker prerogatives.

Second, "sabotage" sometimes carried that inflammatory connotation which so terrified right-wing socialists like Victor Berger — who thought he saw the ghost of anarchist bomber Johann Most in the I.W.W. The retaliatory destruction of capitalist property (and occasionally persons) was an unspoken but familiar tactic in American labor struggles. Undoubtedly the I.W.W. had some first-hand knowledge of the efficacy of the match or fuse in Western labor struggles involving brutally terrorized miners, agricultural laborers, or lumberjacks. Workers in these industries had a long international tradition — "Captain Swing," "Molly Maguires," Asturian and Bolivian "Dynameteros," etc. — of using "sabotage" as a last resort against the daily experience of employer violence. In contrast, the Wobblies, while far from being pacifists, channeled the rebellion of

Western workers into industrial unionism and new, essentially non-violent forms of struggle like the free-speech campaigns. These tactics helped break down the isolation of the casual laborer from workers in the towns and turned the migrant into a sophisticated and self-sufficient political agitator.

In urban, industrial strikes, moreover, the I.W.W. used violence or property destruction far less often than the A.F.L. because of its greater reliance on passive resistance and mass action. It is truly a remarkable fact that the Commission on Industrial Relations could attribute only \$25 property damage to the Paterson I.W.W. strikers during the whole course of that bitter struggle. (31) In fact, the principal reason for continued agitation around the idea of the workers' right to employ retaliatory property destruction as a tactic, whether actually used or not, was to demystify the sanctity of property and teach workers the methods of protracted struggle. There are many examples where the mere threat of sabotage (in this sense) taught an invaluable lesson in political economy and actually strengthened the strikers' position. For example:

In Lawrence one of the reasons for the settlement of the strike on terms favorable to the strikers was the fact that the employers feared that the cloth might not be produced in the best of conditions by workers who were entirely dissatisfied. This knowledge, shared by the strikers, gave to the toilers the feeling that they were a necessary portion of the social mechanism and brought them that much nearer the time when the workers as a class shall feel capable of managing industry in their own interests. (32)

During the important I.W.W.-led New York Waiters Strike of 1913, Joe Ettor electrified the hotel and restaurant owners with his straightforward advice to beleaguered strikers: "If you are compelled to go back to work under conditions that are

not satisfactory, go back with the determination to stick together and with your minds made up that it is the unsafest proposition in the world for the capitalists to eat food prepared by members of your union." (!) (33)

It appears that the Wobblies rarely went ahead and actually brought the "fire next time," in the form of retaliatory destruction, down upon the heads of the bosses. Their typical emphasis in discussing sabotage was on a third meaning of the word, as a mass tactic requiring some form of continuing, although clandestine, mass organization in the plant or mill. Sabotage is clearly defined as a flexible family of different tactics which effectively reduce output and efficiency. Old-fashioned soldiering or the retaliatory destruction of capitalist property are merely potential applications, under specific conditions, of a much more diverse strategy which also included the "open mouth strike" (purposeful disruption by observing every rule to the letter) and (above all) the hit-and-run slowdown. The essence of the Wobbly advocacy of sabotage was to encourage the creativity of the workers in the discovery of different tactics. When moulded to the particularities of specific industries, these tactics could be applied directly on the job with maximum effect (whether or not union organization was recognized) and with a minimum danger of company retaliation against individual workers. Although little is really known about the history of unofficial job actions, there is good reason to believe that the I.W.W. focused especially on systematic sabotage through repeated slowdowns and short, sporadic strikes. The relationship of these tactics to the overall Wobbly strategy is forcefully summed up by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: "Sabotage is to the class struggle what guerrilla warfare is to the battle. The strike is the open battle of the class struggle, sabotage is the guerrilla warfare, the day-to-day warfare between two opposing classes." (34)

Furthermore, the I.W.W. press offers abundant proof that this industrial "guerrilla warfare" was a direct re-

sponse to scientific management and that sabotage in fact provided the only soundly based alternative to workers in the most rationalized industries. In addition to regular articles about scientific management, the INDUSTRIAL WORKER repeatedly editorialized the need to counteract the stop watch with prudent use of the wooden shoe :

Many who condemn sabotage will be found to be unconscious advocates of it. Think of the absurd position of the "Craft Union Socialists" who decry sabotage and in almost the same breath condemn the various efficiency systems of the employers. By opposing "scientific management" they are doing to potential profits what the saboteurs are doing to actual profits. The one prevents efficiency, the other withdraws it. Incidentally, it might be said that sabotage is the only effective method of warding off the deterioration of the worker that is sure to follow the performance of the same monotonous task minute after minute, day in and day out.... Sabotage also offers the best method to combat the evil known as "speeding up." None but the workers know how great this evil is. (35)

The INDUSTRIAL WORKER also unhesitatingly advised direct action to deal with the problem of the worker, bribed by efficiency payments or promised promotion, who broke group solidarity and became a "speeder." After comparing the function of the "speeder" to the "favorite" steer trained to lead his fellow creatures into the killing pen, it was suggested that "...in the steel mills this speeding up process has become so distressing to the average worker that still greater steps are taken for self-protection. In fact in speaking of these class traitors, it is often remarked that it is something dropped on their feet that often affects their brain." (36)

The close correlation between the introduction of scientific management and the appearance of the famous black cat of sabotage was widely appreciated by contemporary observers, whether friend or foe of the I.W.W. For instance



there is the testimony of P. J. Conlon, international vice-president of the International Association of Machinists, before the Commission on Industrial Relations :

... we believe that it (scientific management) builds up in the industrial world the principle of sabotage, syndicalism, passive resistance, based on economic determinism. We did not hear of any of these things until we heard of scientific management and new methods of production.... we find that when men can not help themselves, nor can they get any redress of grievances, and are forced to accept that which is thrust upon them, that they are going to find within themselves a means of redress that can find expression in no other way than passive resistance or in syndicalism. (37)

Conlon's perception is amplified by William English Walling in his widely read PROGRESSIVISM AND AFTER. Walling, in this period a leading spokesman of the Socialist left, possessed a rich understanding of the I.W.W.'s actual practice and the trajectory of its strategic thought. After discussing the false identification of sabotage with violence Walling explains :

But many representatives of the labouring masses, including well-known I.W.W. members, either attach little importance to such extreme methods or positively oppose them. To withdraw the "efficiency from the work," that is, to do either slower or poorer work than one is capable of doing, is also a mere continuation and systematization of a world-wide practice which has long been a fixed policy of the unions of the aristocracy of labor. But its object in their hands was merely to enable the workers to take things easy, to increase the number of employed, and so to strengthen the monopoly of skilled craftsmen. (38)

Having carefully distinguished these two traditional forms of sabotage, Walling goes on to classify methods of "poor and slow" work which, because of their specificity to Taylorized production, carry an entirely new and different meaning :

The laboring masses have now completely revolutionized the motive as well as the method. In order to influence employers the output can no longer be restricted on all occasions. The work must be good and fast when the employer does what labor wants. It is a pity, then, that there is for this practice not some middle expression between the old term, ca' canny, which means intermittent restriction of output, and the new term, sabotage, which often means almost any kind of attack on the employer or his business.

But what I want to emphasize at this point is that, in proportion as the scientific methods of increasing efficiency are applied in industry, one of the laborers' best and most natural weapons is the scientific development of methods of interfering with efficiency, which methods, it seems, are likely to be lumped together with entirely different and often contradictory practices under the common name of sabotage. (39)

Walling also analyzed the strategy he saw emerging from the mass strike movement and described a system of "provisional agreements," unbound by legal contracts, and enforced by intermittent strikes. Despite the fact that the Wobblies would almost certainly have rejected his introduction about sometimes encouraging workers to do their jobs "good and fast," PROGRESSIVISM AND AFTER captures a deeper aspect of I.W.W. tactics, particularly the degree to which a bold and coherent action strategy was emerging on premises radically different from the liberal goal of "institutionalized collective bargaining."

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER

Despite the occasional rhetorical extravagances of a few I.W.W. spokesmen like Arturo Giovannitti — who loved to talk about sabotage as the “secret weapon” of the working class — it was never seen as an isolated panacea. The Wobblies were less fetishistic about their methods than any other labor organization in American history. “Tactics are revolutionary only as they are in accord with revolutionary ends,” said the I.W.W. paper. No exact formula can be set down as the proper tactics to pursue, for precisely the same action may be revolutionary in one case and reactionary in another.” (40) In a 1912 INDUSTRIAL WORKER article, Louis Levine pointed to the real essence of the Wobblies’ direct-action tactics: “Sabotage is not considered by the apostles of direct action as the only efficacious or even the most appropriate means of struggle. IT IS THE SOLIDARITY OF THE WORKERS THAT IS OF DECISIVE IMPORTANCE.” (41)

The larger conception of revolutionary industrial unionism in which sabotage appeared as a tactic was vigorously discussed and debated in the pages of the INDUSTRIAL WORKER during the 1909-1914 period. Fellow Worker Will Fisher provided a succinct definition:

- First..... Avoid labor contracts.
- Second..... Don't give long notices to the employer what you intend to do.
- Third..... Avoid premature moves and moves at the wrong time.
- Fourth..... Avoid as far as possible the use of violence.
- Fifth..... Use force of public education and agitation; the union is an agitational and educational force for the workers.
- Sixth..... Boycott.
- Seventh.... Passive strikes and sabotage, irritant strikes.
- Eighth..... Political strikes.

Ninth..... General strikes.

Tenth..... Where possible seizure of warehouses and stores to supply strikers or locked out men. (42)

It is important to remember that at this time the formal labor contract and time agreement was one of the methods by which craft unions had preserved their control over the work place. The Wobblies pointed out that "...the time agreement under which the workers of each craft union are given a closed shop is often as bad for the workers as a whole as an open shop, because, under its terms, contracting craftsmen are bound to scab on the other workers." (43) At McKees Rocks, New Castle, Akron and Paterson, the immigrant workers had seen their struggles broken by the native, skilled workers who signed independent agreements with the bosses and used them as legal cover to break strikes. (44)

In contrast to the maintenance of the closed shop by legal agreement and external compulsion, the I.W.W. proposed an entirely different concept of shop control based on voluntary self-organization and shop-floor direct action (sabotage) to resolve grievances and preserve conditions won in previous strikes. During the Brooklyn Shoe Strike of 1911 the Wobblies introduced the "shop committee." "The I.W.W. shop organization developed technical knowledge in the working class and prepared it to take over technical management." (45) Furthermore, the I.W.W. local union, borrowing and extending the European precedent of the MAISON DU PEUPLE, functioned as a high-energy agitational and educational force: "not only a union hall but an educational and social center." (46) Finally, by building entirely upon a basis of voluntary membership and rank-and-file activism, with a minimal full-time staff, the Wobblies told astonished questioners that they were "...doing away with the professional labor leader." (47)

This model of shop organization pivoted around sabotage, intermittent slowdowns, one-day wildcats, and walkouts was, in turn, a prototype of industrial unionism as a "culture of struggle":

...we have the partial strike, the passive strike, the irritant strike, and the general strike — one continual series of skirmishes with the enemy, while in the meantime we are collecting and drilling our forces and learning how to fight the bosses. (48)

The short strike is not only to pester the employer; it is like army drill, to become the school of practice in preparation for the coming general or universal strike. (49)

Sabotage was thus conceived as both a means of achieving some degree of shop control in scientifically managed factories, and also as an integral part of the "greviculture" (strike culture) preparing the American working class for the Social Revolution. Unfortunately we know very little about the actual development of job-action tactics and sabotage within the concrete context of individual factories. The daily building of collective organization on a plant level and the ceaseless guerrilla warfare against management's despotism constitute a "terra incognita" for historians. Staughton Lynd's ground-breaking interviews with rank-and-file steel workers, which challenge so many accepted theories of the C.I.O., demonstrate how vital this dimension of labor history is for a real understanding of the struggle to build industrial unionism. (50)

Judging the importance or "marginality" of the I.W.W. in the Progressive Era by the Wobblies' failure to actually construct the One Big Union or to found permanent locals ignores the fact that the mass strikes of 1909-1913 transmitted a valuable arsenal of new tactics and organizational weapons to the industrial working class. Though the I.W.W. failed to reach many workers struggling against scientific management within the A.F.L., the Wobblies' dual unionism allowed them to take a new course in developing direct-action strategies that would be used in later industrial struggles. Without romanticizing the I.W.W., we should take it seriously as the only major labor organization in the

U.S. which seriously and consistently challenged the capitalist organization of production. In our own time, when "virtually all manufacturing operations in the industrial world are based on an application of scientific management rules" (51) and when workers from Lordstown to Lip are actually struggling to break those rules and to challenge the managers who make them, the old confrontation between the stop watch and the wooden shoe still has living significance.



PUNCHIN' TH' CLOCK  
by Woody Guthrie

FOOTNOTES

The author thanks Paul Worthman and James Green for their help on this article.

1. Frederick W. Taylor, *PRINCIPLES OF SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT* (New York, 1911), p. 13.

2. Taylor before the Commission on Industrial Relations, April 13, 1914. REPORT AND TESTIMONY, Vol. 1 (Washington, 1916), p. 782. For a description of Taylor's aberrant personality, including his habit of chaining himself at night to "a harness of straps and wooden points," see Samuel Haber, EFFICIENCY AND UPLIFT: SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA, 1890-1920, Chicago, 1964.
3. For a provocative description of the degree of job control exercised by skilled workers before the advent of rationalization, see Katherine Stone, "Origin of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," RADICAL AMERICA, Nov.-Dec. 1973.
4. John P. Frey, "Modern Industry and Craft Skills," AMERICAN FEDERATIONIST (May 1916), pp. 365-66. Cf. Andre Gorz's summary: As a whole, the history of capitalist technology can be read as the history of the dequalification of the direct procedures." Andre Gorz, "The Tyranny of the Factory," TELOS (Summer 1973), pp. 61-68.
5. For a sample of contemporary analysis of the primary work group by industrial psychologists see Leonard Sayles and George Strauss, HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN ORGANIZATIONS, New York, 1966. For another view see M. Guttman, "Primary Work Groups," RADICAL AMERICA May-June 1972.
6. At Bethlehem Steel output was almost doubled after adoption of a variation of the bonus payment, but the "shop employed 700 men and paid on the 'bonus' plan only 80 workers out of the 700." Louis Fraina, "The Call of the Steel Worker," INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW (July 1913), p. 83.
7. Taylor, op. cit., pp. 765-810.
8. Taylor, "Why Manufacturers Dislike College Graduates," quoted in Haber, op. cit., p. 24.
9. See Paul Devinat, SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT IN EUROPE (Geneva, 1927).
10. Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in PRISON NOTEBOOKS (London, 1971), p. 302.
11. Haber, op. cit.; Milton Nadworny, SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND THE UNIONS (Cambridge, 1955); and Jean McKelvey, AFL ATTITUDES TOWARD PRODUCTION (Ithaca, 1952).
12. William English Walling, "Industrialism or Revolutionary Unionism?", THE NEW REVIEW (Jan. 18, 1913), p. 88.
13. Melvyn Dubofsky, WE SHALL BE ALL: A HISTORY OF THE I.W.W. (Chicago, 1969), pp. 200-201.
14. John N. Ingham, "A Strike in the Progressive Period," THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY (July 1966), p. 356.
15. Philip Foner, THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD 1905-1917 (New York, 1965), pp. 374, 382.
16. Ibid., pp. 383-84.
17. Letter from "Only a Muff," INDUSTRIAL WORKER, Dec. 22, 1911.

18. Commission on Industrial Relations, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 772.
19. Ibid., pp. 132, 141-43. Unemployment was 11.6% in 1910, 13% in 1911, 9% in 1912, 8.2% in 1913, and 14.7% in 1914. See Stanley Lebergott, *MANPOWER IN ECONOMIC GROWTH* (New York, 1964), p. 512.
20. "The immigrant laborer, furthermore, had one standard remedy for disgust with his job: he quit.... Annual turnover rates ranging from 100-250% of the original labor force were found to be commonplace. Ford Motor Company hired 54,000 men between October 1912 and October 1913 to maintain an average workforce of 13,000." David Montgomery, "Immigrant Workers and Scientific Management," unpublished paper, 1973.
21. Foner, op. cit., p. 353, and Dubofsky, op. cit., p. 234.
22. Foner, op. cit., pp. 287-88. Also see Ingham, op. cit., pp. 363-77.
23. See Report of General Organizer George Speed in the *STENOGRAPHIC REPORT OF THE EIGHTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE I.W.W.*, 1913.
24. Ibid., p. 28.
25. At the 1911 convention there were 21 voting locals plus the national textile union, and 14 of these were either western or based in mining districts. By the 1913 convention the number of voting locals had grown to 89 plus the textile union, and 38 of the locals (including four of the five largest according to the number of proxy votes) were Eastern. Report of General Secretary-Treasurer Vincent St. John, *STENOGRAPHIC REPORT OF THE SIXTH CONVENTION OF THE I.W.W.*, 1911, and the *EIGHTH CONVENTION*, 1913.
26. *REGULATION AND RESTRICTION OF OUTPUT*, Eleventh Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor (John Commons, ed., Washington, 1904), p. 28. The enduring complaint by manufacturers about employee soldiering and sabotage is reflected in Stanley Mathewson, *RESTRICTION OF OUTPUT AMONG UNORGANIZED WORKERS*, New York, 1931, and "Blue Collar Blues," *FORTUNE*, July 1970.
27. "Haywood's Cooper Union Speech," *INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW* (February 1912), pp. 469-70.
- "Sabotage", by the way, was probably first adopted as an appropriate French translation of *Ca' Canny* in an 1897 report by Pouget and Delassle to the C.G.T. convention at Toulouse. It is derived from "coup de sabots," an idiomatic expression from clumsiness, and not, as often believed, from the mythic act of throwing the sabot (wooden shoe) into the gears.
28. Foner, op. cit., p. 160.
29. Dubofsky, op. cit., p. 163.
30. Fred Thompson, *THE I.W.W.: ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS* (Chicago., 1955), p. 86.
31. Commission on Industrial Relations, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 55.
32. *INDUSTRIAL WORKER*, May 16, 1912.
33. Melvyn Dubofsky, *WHEN WORKERS ORGANIZE: NEW YORK CITY IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA* (Amherst, 1968), p. 124.



34. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, SABOTAGE (Chicago, n.d.), p. 4.
35. INDUSTRIAL WORKER, Feb. 6, 1913. See also Editorial, Dec. 28, 1911, and the articles by Covington Hall, Nov. 16, 1911, and B. E. Nilsson, April 24, 1913.
36. Editorial in INDUSTRIAL WORKER, Feb. 6, 1913.
37. Commission on Industrial Relations, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 874-77.
38. William English Walling, PROGRESSIVISM AND AFTER (New York, 1914), pp. 301-302.
39. Ibid.
40. INDUSTRIAL WORKER, May 12, 1912.
41. Louis Levine, "Direct Action," INDUSTRIAL WORKER, June 20, 1912.
42. Will Fisher, "Industrial Unionism, Tactics and Principles," INDUSTRIAL WORKER, March 12, 1910.
43. Fisher in INDUSTRIAL WORKER, March 19, 1910.
44. "The more I see of the old unions the more I am convinced that we must fight them as bitterly as we fight the bosses; in fact, I believe they are a worse enemy of the One Big Union than the bosses, because they are able to fight us with weapons not possessed by the bosses." E. F. Doree, "Shop Control and the Contract: How They Affect the I. W. W.," reported in the STENOGRAPHIC MINUTES OF THE TENTH CONVENTION, 1916.
- Doree's sectarianism must be seen in the light of the innumerable instances of strikebreaking by AFL unions; the second walkout at McKees Rocks, for instance, was broken by armed native workers affiliated to the Amalgamated. (See Ingham, op. cit.) In other steel mills AFL men gave the bosses the names of suspected Wobbly sympathizers. (INDUSTRIAL WORKER, Feb. 19, 1912.)
45. Justus Ebert, THE I.W.W. IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, 5th Revised Edition (Chicago, 1937), pp. 126-27.
46. Fisher, op. cit., March 12, 1910.
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# Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: The Early Years

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(EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: This sketch of the early years of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was originally the first half of an introduction to a collection of her writings on women and feminism. Flynn's papers, including many unpublished speeches, articles, letters and poems, are owned by the American Institute for Marxist Studies (AIMS) in New York City, an organization identified with the views of the Communist Party. Rosalyn Baxandall edited a collection of Flynn's writings on women, and wrote a biographical introduction for it, but AIMS then decided against publishing it. It is likely that disapproval of some of Flynn's personal and political attitudes and actions was the AIMS motive in cancelling publication. Whatever the reason, we hope that the AIMS directors will revert to their earlier plan and publish soon the full collection of Flynn's writings, which will be of value to all of us trying to build the socialist movement in the U.S.

This sketch is based on material in Flynn's unpublished writings and contains new evidence about her personal and political development. Two autobiographical works by Flynn are in print: *THE REBEL GIRL*, which discusses her work

before 1926, and THE ALDERSON STORY, which deals with her years in prison in the 1950's, both published in paperback by International Publishers.)

"I feel very proud of my life  
yet humble in the living of it."

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1)

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1890-1964) started her amazing career as a defender of women and an orator; she won a gold medal in her grammar school debate society for urging that women should have the vote. By the age of fifteen, she was insisting in public speeches that full freedom for women was impossible under capitalism and the government should undertake financial support of all children, so that women might bear them without becoming dependent on men. A daily press headline in response to her first public address, "What Socialism Will Do For Women," read: MERE CHILD TALKS BITTERLY OF LIFE. (2) Theodore Dreiser, much impressed after hearing her first speech, described her as an East Side Joan of Arc. (She actually lived in the Bronx.)

First arrested at age sixteen along with her father for blocking traffic and speaking without a permit, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn never let the fear of jail prevent her from addressing a crowd; ten times in all she was arrested. A newspaper described the first occasion in 1906: "The crowd listened to the talks of the men, but when the pretty girl began they whooped and cheered so much that ten policemen were sent from the West 30th Street Station." (3) During the trial — which ended with Flynn's pardon — her lawyer proclaimed her the "coming Socialist woman orator of America." She continued to make public speeches all throughout her life, "one a day, two a day, and during the big Passaic textile strike in 1927, ten a day"; the NEW YORKER critic likened her to the brasslunged giants. (4)

Gurley, as she was called at the time, was a class-conscious feminist child prodigy. Her parents' militance and family poverty contributed to this development. The mother — Annie Gurley, "Mama" as the children always called her — was a modest but cultured and accomplished woman. She read aloud a great deal to the family from Irish history and poetry, from Swift, Yeats, Burns, Byron, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Greek mythology. Annie Gurley was a member of the Irish Feminist Club, had heard Susan B. Anthony and other early suffragists speak, and was a strong advocate of equal rights for women. All four of her children were delivered by female doctors, much to the consternation of the Flynn in-laws and the neighbors. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was named after Elizabeth Kent, one of these doctors.

Thomas Flynn, the father, was a quarry worker in New Hampshire, where Elizabeth was born. He attended Dartmouth College and later worked as a civil engineer. Thomas Flynn was a political activist who belonged to the Socialist Labor Party and the I.W.W. at various times, and ran for the New York State Assembly on the Socialist Party ticket, winning more votes than the Republican candidate. Elizabeth was his favorite — the apple of his eye — and Thomas often took her along to socialist meetings, where he spoke himself. Most writers credit him with Elizabeth's political development. Yet as Elizabeth's younger sister Kathie said, "It burns me up how people talk about Pop as if we never had a mother. He was belligerent and vociferous, while Mama was quiet and composed. In plain English, Pop talked loud and long while Mama got things done. The notion that we got all our progressive views from him is erroneous." (5)

All her life Elizabeth maintained close family ties. Much of the time she lived with her parents. When her mother died, she lived with her younger sister Kathie, who was a school teacher and lifelong friend. If New York City was her frequent residence, this was primarily owing to her family, for she loved the West and would have preferred to make her home there. "If it were not for my mother, I doubt

if I'd ever go near New York City. It is a nerve wracking place for me and too Jewish for me." (6)

If her family, her poverty, and the encounters with anarchists and socialists influenced Flynn's thought, so too did the long hours spent with books. In high school she read Friedrich Engels' ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, Mary Wollstonecraft's VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, and August Bebel's WOMEN AND SOCIALISM, among works which she said "helped to catapult me into socialist activities. (7)

The founding of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago in 1905, and the revolutionary upsurge that same year in Russia, profoundly affected Flynn's development. "Gurley" joined the "One Big Union" in 1906 as a member of the mixed local No. 179 in New York City. As a woman and a minor, she was exempt from the otherwise strictly enforced requirement that membership was for wage laborers only. By 1907 Flynn was elected as a delegate to the I.W.W. convention. On the way back from Chicago she made a speaking tour on behalf of the Wobblies, and was surprised at its end when she was paid two weeks' salary. (8) "I remember it quite vividly because they gave me a \$20 gold piece after paying my railroad fare and lodging, and I was so thrilled at such a big amount of money. But when I got home the family rent of \$18 was due, so I rapidly returned to normalcy of purse and pride." (9)

Most of the Wobbly membership in the East consisted of single, foreign-born males, but "Gurley" felt safe among them "as if in God's pocket." The I.W.W. attitude towards women was somewhat stereotyped: women like their mothers, and bad women who fleeced them on pay day.... An I.W.W. song sung with great sentiment reflects this attitude: "One little girl, fair as a pearl,/ Who worked every day in a laundry," but who was lured into the red light district. The refrain is: "Who is to blame, you know his name,/ It's the boss who pays starvation wages." (10) At the same time, male Wobblies referred to their wives as the "ball and chain." (11)

Flynn did not accept all the Wobbly attitudes and practices towards women and tried to change them, but she did

accept their basic tenet that the problems of women could not be separated from the problems of the working class. "The queen of the parlor' has no interest in common with 'the maid of the kitchen,' the wife of the department store owner shows no sisterly concern for the 17-year-old girl who finds prostitution the only door to avoid becoming a \$5 a week clerk. The sisterhood of women, like the brotherhood of man, is a hollow sham to labor. Behind all its smug hypocrisy and sickly sentimentality loom the sinister outlines of the class war." (12) Therefore, she concluded, "women should not organize separately." In that context, she wrote and spoke passionately on how members of the One Big Union should become more sensitive to women's needs, make political demands based on these needs, recruit more females into the organization, and eradicate the male chauvinism which prevented women from active participation. As she explained, the I.W.W. must "adapt our propaganda to the special needs of women. Some of our male members are prone to underestimate this vital need and assert that the principles of the I.W.W. are alike for all, which we grant with certain reservations. They must be translated for foreigners, simplified for illiterates and rendered in technical phrases for various industrial groups .... The Western locals feel the need of a paper written in the style peculiar to their district, and thus the general education progresses from the Atlantic to the Pacific. I have heard revolutionists present a large indictment against women, which, if true, constitutes a mine of reasons for a special appeal based on their peculiar mental attitudes and adapted to their environment and the problems it creates." (13)

Unlike other labor organizations of its time and most of them today, the I.W.W. successfully undertook to organize such groups as telephone operators in Portland, Indiana, Chicago, and Seattle, and domestics in Denver. The Wobblies also organized thousands of textile workers in the mills of Bridgeport, Connecticut; Minersville, Pennsylvania; Lawrence, Massachusetts; and Paterson, New Jersey. (14) Unlike other unions the Wobblies welcomed all wage workers regardless of sex color, creed, nationality

or politics. Much of the literature and propaganda was addressed to "Working Men and Women."

The life of a "jawsmith," as the I.W.W. speakers and agitators were called, had a powerful appeal for Flynn, who had spent most of her previous life in the dreary slums of the South Bronx. School seemed meaningless after a taste of travel and the romance of meeting new people and learning through action. At seventeen "Gurley," who had been an A student, quit high school to follow what turned out to be a lifetime of travel and organizing. "I fell in love with my country — its rivers, prairies, forests, mountains, cities and people . . . I had a sensation of excitement, which I never lost no matter how many trips I take over the spacious bosom of my country." (15)

Having put school behind her she first tried her wings as an organizer in Paterson, New Jersey, then went on a speaking tour to the Mesabi Iron Range in Minnesota. Here she fell immediately in love and married Jack Archibald Jones, a Wobbly organizer from Bovey, Minnesota, who had spent ten years in prison on arson charges. As the noted I.W.W. leader Vincent St. John remarked (and Flynn concurred), "Elizabeth fell in love with the West and the miners and she married the first one she met." (16)

Their life together was hectic and brief: two years and three months. Most of the time they saw little of each other. Flynn was busy with organizing and was arrested several times while agitating for free speech in Missoula, Montana and Spokane, Washington. Jack Jones in this period was employed to dig on a railroad tunnel near Duluth and later shovelled coal in Chicago. He too was in jail for part of the marriage — the first time just ten days after the ceremony, on charges of attempting to dynamite the residence of a mine official. "Gurley" and Jones shared the Wobblies' advocacy of sabotage against the owning class.

"Gurley" and Jones had two children. The first was born prematurely and died within a few hours; probably the strenuous life and harsh conditions Flynn endured while pregnant were responsible (jail, inadequate housing and nutrition, little sleep). When she again became pregnant, Jones demanded that she settle down to domesticity. Al-



though this was a normal enough expectation for the time, it seemed odd coming from Jack Jones, who had not shown enough marital concern previously to visit his wife in jail or attend her two trials in this period. Fellow Wobs guessed that Jones worried she might be drifting away from him in affairs with other men. (17) By the time the child was born "the love had died" and Flynn was impatient and bored with Jones; as she said, "I was high-spirited and headstrong and not ready to attempt to adjust to another person." (18) She kept her own name throughout.

Other accounts of Jack Jones indicate that he was a rather erratic and difficult person to live with. He remained a Wobbly until 1911 when he joined William E. Foster's Syndicalist League, becoming a member of the A. F. of L. painters' union in Chicago. In 1920 he gave notice of divorce from Flynn on grounds of desertion and then remarried. For this honeymoon he built a boat, but a terrible storm came up on Lake Michigan and the bride was drowned. (19) In later years Jones became the proprietor of the Dill Pickle, a radicals' nightclub and "the center of corn belt bohemia" on the North Side of Chicago. (20)

Much against the advice of most of her I.W.W. friends, but with her mother's support, "Gurley" returned to the Bronx. Her mother helped with the infant when it was born, so that after Fred Flynn (or "Buster" as Elizabeth called the baby) was weaned Elizabeth Gurley Flynn resumed her work as a Wobbly jawsmith. She also began to work in labor defense, an activity which she would continue all her life. Flynn now took part in the organizing campaigns with women and girls on strike at the Coombe Garment Company of Minersville, Pennsylvania; with the 25,000 textile workers of Lawrence, who victoriously resisted a pay cut of 30¢ a week (the cost of five loaves of bread); with the Paterson silk weavers and ribbon makers, who endured five months of police brutality, arrests and near starvation; with the New York City hotel and restaurant workers; with numerous unemployed marches; with the miners of the Mesabi Iron Range; with the Passaic textile workers, who for 17 months withstood gassing and clubs, ice-cold drenchings

and injunctions, the jailing of the leaders and of hundreds of workers.

The workers in such places as Lawrence, Paterson and Passaic were mainly low-paid women and children, and their working conditions were terrible. Their jobs were tedious and exhausting; they worked ten or more hours daily, six days a week; the mills were dirty, noisy, unventilated and unsafe. In Lawrence, "A considerable number of boys and girls die within the first two or three years after beginning work...36 out of every hundred of all men and women who work in the mill die before or by the time they are 25 years of age." (21) Most of the strikers were immigrants. At least twenty-five nationalities speaking forty-five different languages took part in the Lawrence strike. In Paterson, several wage scales would be applied for the same work in the same shop: one girl might receive a weekly wage of \$1.42 after 42 weeks of work while another might receive a weekly wage of \$1.85 after 32 weeks. Often girls aged 14 to 17 received only half their weekly wage after fines; the remainder was withheld until the end of the year, when it would be paid out if the girl was still employed. (22)

Not only did the women constitute more than one-half the work force out on strike in these epical confrontations, but they often also provided the mass-picketing leadership. Police in Lawrence had orders to strike women on the arms and breasts and men on the heads. Ann La Pizza was killed by the police of Lawrence. The I.W.W. understood that the women were key to the winning of strikes, and special efforts were made to help them with their problems. Women's meetings were held in Lawrence and Paterson, and here Elizabeth Gurley Flynn often spoke about the unique oppression facing women workers and working men's wives: "The women worked in the mills for lower pay and in addition had all the housework and care of the children. The old-world attitude of man as 'lord and master' was strong. At the end of the day's work — or, now, of strike duty — the man went home and sat at ease while his wife did all the work preparing the meal, cleaning the house, etc. There was considerable male opposition to women go-

ing to meetings and marching on the picket line. We resolutely set out to combat these notions. The women wanted to picket. They were strikers as well as wives and were valiant fighters. We knew that to leave them at home alone, isolated from the strike activity, a prey to worry affected by the complaints of trades people, landlords, priests and ministers, was dangerous to the strike. We brought several Socialist women in as speakers and a girl organizer, Pearl McGill, who helped organize the button workers of Muscatine, Iowa. The A. F. of L. revoked her credentials for coming to Lawrence.... We talked especially to the women about the high cost of living here — how they had been fooled when they first came here, when they figured the dollars in their home money. They thought they were rich till they had to pay rent, buy groceries, clothes and shoes. Then they knew they were poor. We pointed out that the mill owners did not live in Lawrence, they did not spend their money in the local stores." (23)

Many of the women who participated in the Lawrence and other I.W.W. strikes — both working class and intellectuals — were radicalized through the experience. Women had the vote in all strike decisions, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn came to symbolize the leadership women could exercise. "When Elizabeth Gurley Flynn spoke, the excitement of the crowd became a visible thing. She stood there, young, with her Irish blue eyes, her face magnolia white and her cloud of black hair, the picture of a youthful revolutionary girl leader. She stirred them, lifted them up in her appeal for solidarity. Then at the end of the meeting, they sang. It was as though a spurt of flame had gone through the audience, something stirring and powerful, a feeling which has made the liberation of people possible, something beautiful and strong had swept through the people and welded them together, singing." (24) Labor reporter Mary Heaton Vorse recalled her first meeting with Flynn during this Lawrence confrontation: "I walked with Bill Haywood into a quick lunch restaurant. 'There's Gurley,' he said. She was sitting at a lunch counter on a mushroom stool, and it was as if she were the spirit of this strike that had so much hope and so much beauty.... There was ceaseless work for her that

winter. Speaking, sitting with the strike committee, going to visit the prisoners in jail and endlessly raising money. Speaking, speaking, speaking, taking trains only to run back to the town that was ramparted by prison-like mills before which soldiers with fixed bayonets paced all day long.... Every strike meeting was memorable — the morning meetings, in a building quite a way from the center of things, owned by someone sympathetic to the strikers, the only place they were permitted to assemble. The soup kitchen was out here and here groceries were also distributed and the striking women came from far and near. They would wait around for a word with Gurley or with Big Bill. In the midst of this excitement Elizabeth moved calm and tranquil. For off the platform she is a very quiet person. It was as though she reserved her tremendous energy for speaking." (25)

There was a song often sung in Lawrence that alluded to Gurley's role in the strike:

"In the good old picket line,  
In the good old picket line,  
We'll put Mr. Lowe in overalls  
And swear off drinking wine.  
Then Gurley Flynn will be the boss,  
O Gee, won't that be fine,  
The strikers will wear diamonds  
In the good old picket line."

(Arthur Lowe was manager of the Lancaster Mills Corporation and one of its largest stockholders.)

Children are a central consideration in any strike. Many of the Lawrence children worked in the mills, others attended public or Catholic schools. Flynn and Haywood organized special schools for children during the strike to resist the instruction they were getting in school, which was "directed at driving a wedge between the school children and the striking parents. Often children in such towns became ashamed of their foreign-born, foreign-speaking parents, their old-country ways, their accents, their foreign newspapers, and now it was their strike and mass

picketing....Some teachers called the strikers lazy, said they should go back to work or 'back where they came from.' We attempted to counteract all this at our children's meetings....The parents were pathetically grateful to us as their children began to show real respect for them and their struggles." (26)

The parents suffered to see their children hungry, in danger of assault by the police, or left at home unsupervised. The Italians in Lawrence proposed that the strikers' children be sent to the homes of sympathizers in nearby towns, as was the custom during earlier strikes in Italy, France and Belgium. The majority of strikers wanted to have their children looked after and voted for the exodus. Flynn took charge of what came to be called the Lawrence Children's Crusade. She arranged the transportation; she placed children from 4 to 14 in suitable (i.e., leftwing) homes; and "publicity seekers" such as the wealthy Mrs. O.H. P. Belmont were turned down as not having the interests of the strikers' children at heart. (27)

The exodus of the children eased the relief burden while it also drew enormous sympathy for the strikers' cause. On one occasion, as the children were assembling at the Lawrence railroad station, the police sought to block them from boarding the cars which would carry them to Philadelphia. A member of the Philadelphia Women's Committee testified under oath that policemen "closed in on us with their clubs, beating right and left with no thought of the children who then were in desperate danger of being trampled to death. The mothers and the children were thus hurled in a mass and bodily dragged to a military truck and even clubbed, irrespective of the cries of the panic-stricken mothers and children." (28) Police brutality became the winning issue in the strike. Supportive newspaper editorials and funds for the strikers came from every corner of the country. Liberal and establishment spokesmen and spokeswomen focused national attention on Lawrence, and a Congressional investigation was asked. The American Woolen Company was compelled to accede to every point of the strike demands, and wages were raised throughout the New England textile industry.

Strike organizing activity blended seamlessly into labor-movement defense work. Indeed the two are interdependent as long as labor defense is not conceived in purely legalistic terms, but also and primarily in mass terms, and this was the IWW's conception of the work. Flynn thought that a labor defense should mean a renewed labor offensive. In the field of labor defense particularly, she was a pioneer. She put together the first 'united front' defense group in 1914; it included liberals alongside such radicals as Emma Goldman, Lincoln Steffens and Mary Heaton Vorse. Flynn worked in defense of the Western Federation of Miners leadership, indicted in 1907; on behalf of Joe Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti, Lawrence Strike leaders; for Joe Hill, the I.W.W. songwriter who composed "The Rebel Girl" about Gurley; on behalf of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings; and in the Sacco and Vanzetti case for seven years, having been the first non-Italian to understand the injustice of their case and to bring it before the English-speaking public.

Much of her defense work was undertaken on behalf of unknown radicals, through the Workers Defense Union during 1918-24, the International Labor Defense League during 1925-29, and the Garland Fund during 1925-34. Many of those she defended were women: Lotta Burke, Dr. Eva Harding, Louise Oliverneau, Jeannette Rankin, Myra Danton, Margaret Davies, Dr. Elizabeth Baer, Flora Foreman, Elizabeth Ford, Dr. Marie Equi, Anita Whitney, Kate Richards O'Hara, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger and Rose Pastor Stokes. Flynn worked long hours under dreary conditions raising funds for the prisoners' families, visiting prisoners, writing publicity, lining up lawyers and speakers in several languages, gaining union and liberal support. She said she felt as imprisoned as those she defended. "It is hard to recreate a picture of the long years of intense brutal reaction which lasted from 1917 to 1927.... It seemed then like a hideous nightmare amidst the hurry and horror of it all, working day and night in a defense office.... I lived in the Bronx, came down early to our office (on 14th Street), and stayed late or spoke at night. I saw little of my family, my child or husband. I recall Christmas Eve 1919;

walking through Union Square, white with snow, with Isaac Shorr, the attorney who represented the Russian deportees, and realizing suddenly that I should be home, filling my child's stocking instead of attending a meeting." (29)

A typical case in Flynn's defense work was that of Mollie Steimer. (30) A 20-year-old Russian-born waistmaker, in 1918 Mollie Steimer was sentenced to 15 years for violation of the Espionage Act: she had merely distributed leaflets protesting the United States military intervention in Bolshevik-governed Russia, but this was the era of the Palmer Raids and the "red scare." Flynn worked hard and obtained a review of the Steimer case by the U.S. Supreme Court, which however upheld the conviction. The Steimer family needed relief money as the only brother had died of influenza and the father of shock shortly after Mollie's conviction, leaving her mother and four younger children penniless. Flynn organized petitions and letters to President Woodrow Wilson and Attorney General Palmer asking the young woman's pardon; many speakers eventually made the Mollie Steimer case a public concern; Flynn, with others whose conscience was stirred, visited the Jefferson City penitentiary in Missouri. The convicted woman maintained high spirits and directed attention to the plight of her fellow prisoners. She declared she should not be lionized or pitied as an especially appealing or youthful prisoner. "I want justice, but not pity," Flynn's client-militant wrote; "either work for the release of all or none." (31) Amnesty was finally granted by the federal authorities in 1921, with the provision that Steimer leave the country.

During these years of militant I.W.W. activity and then of labor defense work, Flynn maintained a love affair with Carlo Tresca. She met this flamboyant Italian anarchist in 1912 while involved in the Lawrence defense work. She worked and lived with Tresca for thirteen years; he was the love of her life. Brought up in Italy in a well-to-do family, Tresca worked in the Italian anarchist movement in America. He was a rousing speaker and an effective organizer, and he edited the anarchist papers *IL PROLETARIO* and *IL MARTELLO*. Tresca cared little about improving his rough English, but in Italian he was eloquent,

bold and fearless. In July 1916 he was jailed for organizing Italian miners in the Mesabi Range. In 1925 he served time in the Atlanta federal penitentiary for carrying birth-control advertising in his newspaper.

Tresca was petulant, individualistic, strong-willed and difficult, and he made many enemies, both personal and political. Tall, dark and handsome, Tresca usually wore a broadbrimmed Stetson hat and a flowing tie. He was a womanizer and his commitment to unfaithfulness caused Flynn much pain and turmoil. As she states in her poems and later in her autobiography, "Carlo had a roving eye that had roved in my direction in Lawrence and now, some ten years later, was roving elsewhere." (32) Although Tresca was a revolutionary he was not as single-mindedly committed as Flynn, and he resented her total immersion in political activities, often trying to get her to spend more time in his company. "Carlo," Flynn writes, "was shocked and amazed that I would even consider leaving him after he had been in jail since July. 'But you are out now,' I protested, 'and all these men are in jail!' I felt I was right, hard as it was to go.... Carlo was so angry that he did not write to me for six weeks after I arrived in Seattle.... I suffered a great deal from loneliness and worry." (33)

Tresca lived with the Flynn family in the Bronx, and while Elizabeth was away organizing, had a love affair and a son with Bina, the youngest of Elizabeth's sisters. (34) This incident caused the Flynn family great strain. Elizabeth continued to love Tresca, although they quarreled constantly over political and personal matters. He was an anarcho-syndicalist and she was in the process of becoming a Leninist with a strong belief in democratic centralism. They broke up in 1925. Probably the split would have come sooner, were it not for their common work on the Sacco and Vanzetti defense.

Upset about Tresca's unfaithfulness, worried that she found so little time to spend with her son Buster, overworked by the continual pressure of speaking and organizing and depressed about the state of the movement, (35) under these cumulative difficulties Flynn suffered a physical collapse at age 36. The immediate diagnosis was an en-



larged heart condition and severe infection of the teeth. She had to spend most of the next ten years recuperating slowly — mentally and physically. She lived at the Portland, Oregon, home of the well-to-do Dr. Marie Equi, an avowed lesbian, who was a friend from I.W.W. days. Flynn made occasional trips East to visit her family and to speak, but most of the time she was in Portland. At first it was primarily a matter of her own recovery; after 1930 she also cared for Dr. Equi, who herself became ill with a heart attack and pneumonia. In writing about Marie Equi and her life in Portland, Flynn said: "She was not the easiest person in the world to get along with, she had a high temper from her Irish-Italian origin, but she had a brilliant mind, a progressive spirit, had been in prison for her opposition to World War I, and I admired her a great deal. I knew I needed to rest, to get well, to stay quietly in one place, slow down, think things out as to my future direction. The cleaning, laundry and other household chores were done for us. Much of our food she ordered from fancy groceries and restaurants. I read a great deal — history, science, the classics, medical books, even the Bible." (36) For Flynn these were years of self-education and personal growth. "I learned in Oregon," she also reminisced many years later, that "one can have economic security, leisure, rest and yet be frightfully unhappy." (37) On the other hand, the time of collapse and renewal provided "a tonic lesson that no one is indispensable." (38) While imprisoned in 1955, Flynn wrote to her sister Kathie: "It seems amazing now that I could have been sick so long then — there were so much fewer medicines than there are now — nature had to take her course. It was a much more painful period than even the present, for you and for me. You had the load of the family and the depression and I did not know if I would ever be really well again." (39)

At last in 1937, against the advice of Dr. Equi, who said that Flynn couldn't live more than two years, she returned to the East. Flynn believed she now had the sense of purpose to begin over again. Yet she felt trepidation at a return to public speaking, at speaking on the radio (which she

had never previously done), at becoming acclimated in general to a political situation which had greatly changed during ten years. She conveyed this anxiety in a previously unpublished poem : (40)

### Thoughts on Autumn

How to accept the autumn of one's life ?  
When Spring all wild and wayward rushed so heedless by in  
ecstatic dreams ?  
Spring that was yesterday, had no yesterdays and no  
tomorrows,  
And still sings in my blood.  
Came splendor of Summer, high noon of work beyond  
measure,  
The thunder and lightning of great struggles, — ending in  
blinding crash.  
Bruised and spent like a frightened child, I lay inert, then  
slowly rose again,  
The call of those great battles quenchless in my blood,  
Lighting the present, fortifying the future,  
I came alive again.  
How does this Autumn creep upon us unawares,  
Suddenly the yesterdays stretch out a long road back,  
The tomorrows are the shorter road ahead.  
A chance wind chills us with a blast of Winter on a Summer  
day.  
How can the yet unconscious young know the gay lightness  
of our fighting hearts,  
How know his lips felt warm and tender to mine, when he  
said goodbye ?

Upon her return to the East from Oregon in 1936, Flynn applied for membership in the Communist Party. The "Rebel Girl" seemed a perfect candidate to join the organization with which she had closely worked in the defense of the Communists arrested at Bridgeman, Michigan, in 1922, in connection with the American Fund for Public Service, during the great Passaic silk strike of 1926, and on many other occasions. Actually, she had applied once before, in

the fall of 1926; but as she was to put it later, "it didn't take the first time." Charles Ruthenburg had spoken to her about joining in 1926. In Flynn's own words: "I knew I had reservations, but I felt maybe they would disappear in struggle, work and discussion. My reservations were not on basic principles but rather related to tactics and some personalities. But I decided favorably and filled out the application card he (Ruthenburg) gave me. He was accompanied by Jay Lovestone, then his assistant, and later an informer and stoolpigeon against the CPUSA (maybe he was then — who knows?). But the odd thing was I never heard of my application until ten years later.... I thought maybe they dropped me because I became sick and decided to wait for my return East to find out what had happened." (41) William Z. Foster, a former I.W.W. member himself, and Mother Bloor, whom she had known since 1910 in defense work, encouraged Flynn in joining — and becoming at the same time a salaried functionary of — the Communist Party of the United States.

At about the same time — 1937 — Flynn relinquished her I.W.W. membership, writing in her diary: "I ceased to be a Wobbly the first time I voted for Mayor LaGuardia." (42)

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Flynn, letter to her sister Kathie, written August 6, 1955, while in Alderson Prison. In Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Papers at the American Institute for Marxist Studies, New York, New York; hereafter referred to as EGF Papers, AIMS.

2. Throughout her life Elizabeth Gurley Flynn saved mementos and clipped news items both favorable and unfavorable to her. This material is in notebooks among the EGF Papers, AIMS; much of the earlier selection is undated and in deteriorated condition. Many of my unfootnoted references to background aspects of Flynn's life are drawn from this source; as here.

3. NEW YORK WORLD, August 23, 1906.

4. Hoarse, THE NEW YORKER, October 26, 1946, p. 25. An interview with EGF.

5. E. G. Flynn, "Sister Kathie Says: 'Our Mother was a Born Rebel'," THE DAILY WORKER, May 13, 1945.

6. E. G. Flynn, Letter to Mary Heaton Vorse, May 16, 1930. In Mary Heaton Vorse Papers, Wayne State University Library.
7. E. G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE 'REBEL GIRL,'* Masses and Mainstream, New York, 1955, pp. 41-42.
8. E. G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, p. 74.
9. E. G. Flynn, "A Better World" (her column), *THE DAILY WORKER*, January 29, 1952. In this account, contrary to that in *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, she recalls it was the Socialist Labor Party that paid her. Both recollections may be accurate, as the SLP was affiliated with the I.W.W. at the time.
10. E.G. Flynn, untitled manuscript, E.G.F. Papers, AIMS; this is an article or speech about the I.W.W. first written in 1930, revised in 1941 and 1943.
11. E. G. Flynn, "I Have No Regrets: A Chapter From American Labor History," *WOMEN TODAY*, April 1937.
12. From "I.W.W. Call to Women," *SOLIDARITY*, July 31, 1915.
13. "Problems Organizing Women" by EGF from *SOLIDARITY*, July 15, 1916.
14. For accounts of these organizing drives see *SOLIDARITY*, April 19, 1910; January 2, 1913; May 6, 1914; and December 9, 1916.
15. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, pp. 87-88.
16. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, p. 76.
17. George A. Venn, "The Wobblies and Montana's Garden City," *MONTANA: THE MAGAZINE OF WESTERN HISTORY*, October 1971.
18. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, p. 104.
19. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, pp. 322-323.
20. Undated news clipping, E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS.
21. Dr. Elizabeth Shapleigh, "Occupational Diseases in the Textile Industry," *NEW YORK CALL*, December 29, 1912.
22. E.G. Flynn, "Figures and Facts and Contract Slavery in the Paterson Silk Mills," *THE PAGEANT OF THE PATERSON STRIKE*, Success Press, New York, 1913. Also see William D. Haywood, "The Rip In the Silk Industry," *INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW*, May 1913.
23. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, p. 122.
24. Mary Heaton Vorse, *FOOTNOTE TO FOLLY*, Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1935, pp. 13-14.
25. Mary Heaton Vorse, "Elizabeth Gurley Flynn," *THE NATION*, February 17, 1926, pp. 175-176.
26. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, pp. 125-126.
27. *THE INDUSTRIAL WORKER* (Spokane), February 22, 1912.
28. Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *REBEL VOICES*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1964, p. 162.
29. E.G. Flynn, *I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE*, p. 256.
30. For this case, and the files on the above-named and many other labor defendants, see the Workers Defense Union Papers, Wisconsin

Historical Society, Madison. E.G. Flynn gave this collection to the Society in 1958.

31. Ibid., File Folder No. 20; letter from Mollie Steimer to Agnes Smedley published in THE NEW YORK CALL, May 9, 1920.

32. E.G. Flynn, I SPEAK MY OWN PIECE, p. 324.

33. Ibid., p. 208.

34. Information supplied to me by Peter Martin of New York City, who is the son of Bina and Tresca.

35. As she was to put this in a letter to her good friend Mary Heaton Vorse of May 16, 1930: "The movement is a mess — torn by factionalism and scandal and led by self seekers with one or two exceptions." Mary Heaton Vorse Papers, Wayne State University Library.

36. "It Didn't Take the First Time: How I Joined the CPUSA," E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS. This manuscript probably dates from 1963 as a draft chapter for the second volume of her autobiography, which was never completed.

37. E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS: letter to Anna K. ("Kathie") Flynn of August 6, 1955.

38. E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS: jotted on a piece of paper and in one of her scrapbooks for these years.

39. E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS: letter to Anna K. Flynn of January 29, 1955.

40. E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS: from a scrapbook of poems; dated June 1939, West Virginia.

41. "It Didn't Take the First Time: How I Joined the CPUSA." See Footnote 36.

42. E.G. Flynn Papers, AIMS. There had been rumors that she was kicked out of the I.W.W. much earlier, but these were untrue; see Flynn's letter printed in SOLIDARITY, August 25, 1917.

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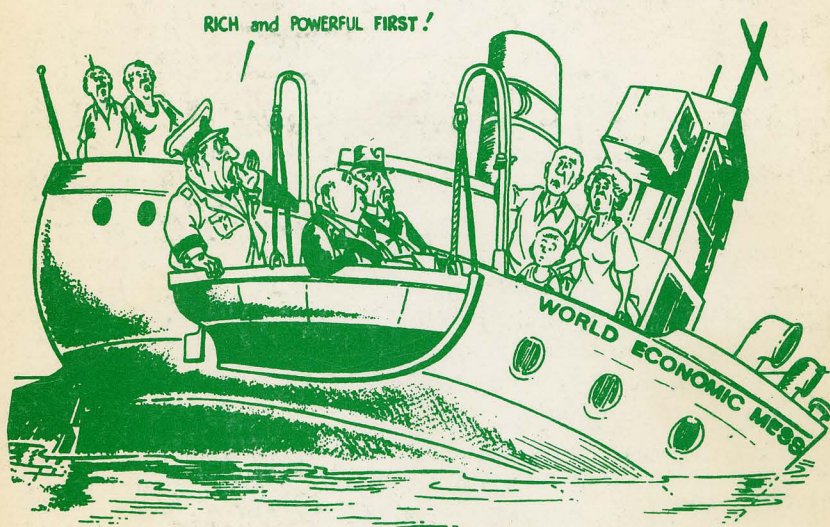
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