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# RADICAL AMERICA

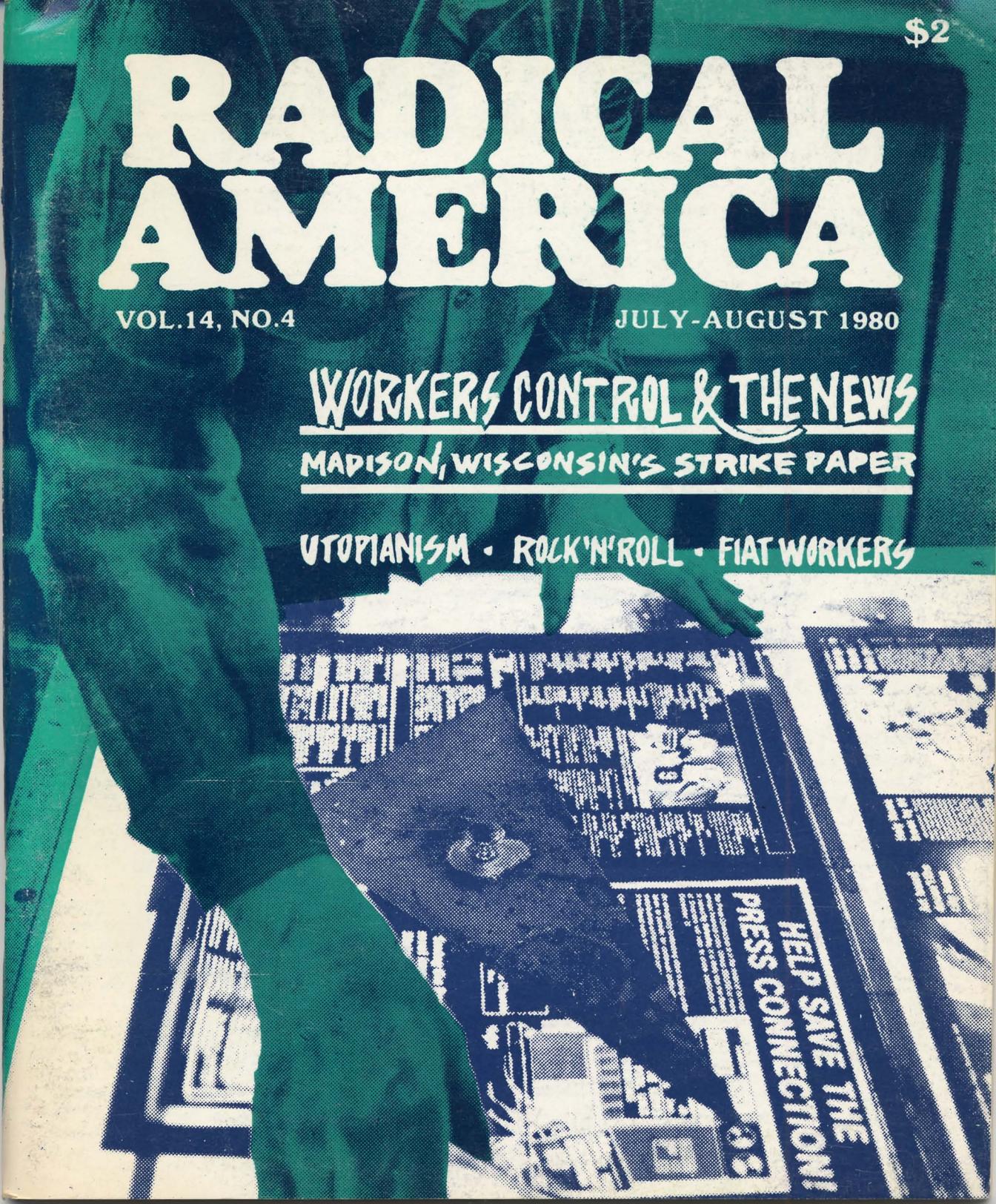
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JULY-AUGUST 1980

WORKERS CONTROL & THE NEWS

MADISON, WISCONSIN'S STRIKE PAPER

UTOPIANISM • ROCK'N'ROLL • FIAT WORKERS



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Volume 14, Number 4

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# INTRODUCTION

For generations of socialists, the final word on Robert Owen and other visionaries of his era has been Friedrich Engels's judgement in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. The pre-Marxian socialists, Engels said, had images of an ideal society but no way of bringing it about. Their thought reflected the birth pangs of industrial capitalism, in an age before the proletariat had emerged as the agent for achieving a classless society. The writings of Karl Marx, according to Engels, transcended the utopian schemes by giving the movement from capitalism to socialism a scientific basis.

Engels was on target in criticizing the Utopian aspects of early socialist theory, but the passage to socialism that he and Marx offered in its place looks a great deal less certain today than it appears in their writings of a century ago. This fact alone may be reason enough for socialists to return periodically to the pre-Marxian thinkers, to look at their visions afresh and see what they have to offer.

The article in this issue by Barbara Taylor makes a concise argument against the assumption that all legitimate socialist thought began with Marx. Reassessing the attitudes of "Utopian" and Marxist socialists toward feminism, Taylor argues that there is much of value in the early socialist tradition, and that Marxism represented in some ways a narrowing of former concerns. The Owenites, Britain's first socialists, were interested not only in winning limited legal rights for women but in transcending the nuclear family and changing the sexual division of labor within the home. Issues such as these are still of central importance to today's feminists and should be just as important to all socialists.

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If we could assume that “socialist” automatically implied “feminist,” we might be relieved of the awkward term “socialist-feminist.” Unfortunately, both main tendencies on the present-day Left, social democracy and Leninism, generally evade the issues raised by feminism. The social-democratic perspective of marginal reforms is one in which demands for change become endlessly “refined” until they are bereft of any threat to the structure of existing social relationships. There is no excitement in the program that emerges from such a process — nothing to sustain a flesh-and-blood social movement. On the Leninist Left, on the other hand, there is a stated commitment to the wholesale dismantling of capitalist society, but the depth of this project is often compromised by a restricted view of women’s issues, placed under the stifling framework of the “Woman Question.” Questions of sexuality or of domestic labor have too often been dismissed as personal rather than political concerns. Barbara Taylor’s article is a useful reminder that there is historical precedent for joining feminism much more closely to socialism than has recently been the case.

Another British figure who should enjoy a firm place in the socialist tradition is Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), and we are printing here Sheila Rowbotham’s essay about this socialist and champion of homosexual rights. Carpenter opposed the stultifying restrictions of Victorian bourgeois morality, posing as an alternative a future society where people would throw off the repressive restrictions of civilization and restore sex and the body to their natural importance. Carpenter sought in his own life to realize some of his dreams. He set up a household at Millthorpe, where he worked at a simplified life which included gardening, sandal-making, and active participation in the local socialist movement.

In 1895 Carpenter published his most famous

work, *Love’s Coming of Age*, in which he took up such issues as homosexuality and the separation of sexuality from procreation. A homosexual himself, Carpenter made of his home at Millthorpe a gathering-ground for a wide range of rebels — dress reformers, vegetarians, anarchists, socialists and homosexuals. Although he fudged on the issue of advocating physical love, Carpenter served as a model for many of his contemporaries who were rebelling against a society dominated by capitalism and Christian heterosexual morality.

Our interest in these articles comes from more than antiquarian curiosity. We are printing them to show that present-day concerns with sexuality, domestic life, and the sterile cultures of advanced capitalism have a long history in our socialist past. Too often have socialists dismissed new movements such as the ecology or anti-nuclear movements in their infancies as visionary or as of secondary importance. Too often have the issues raised by the current women’s movement been whittled down to the “Woman Question” or dismissed as not political. It is not for a moment a question of socialists forgetting about class struggle. But it is a question of remembering other concerns, as did the Utopian socialists and Edward Carpenter.

This issue also includes an interview with David Wagner, one of the newspaper strikers in Madison, Wisconsin who started a cooperatively run daily newspaper in that city. Wagner examines in depth the problems and potential revealed in this experience with workers’ control.

The launching of this worker-run enterprise was a specific response to union-busting. In a strategy often seen in the newspaper business, the out-of-state corporation that owned both local dailies (one editorially conservative, the other liberal) provoked a strike by demanding

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drastic cutbacks of worker prerogatives. The resulting strike had little hope of success against a well-heeled and well-prepared management. Through the alternative *Press Connection*, however, the strikers were at least able to weaken their adversary by cutting into the circulation of the two scab dailies. The paper, published at first weekly and then daily, got out 576 issues from the fall of 1977 until ailing finances forced it to close down in January 1980. Run on the twin principles of equal pay and an elected management responsible to the workers, the *Press Connection* was one of the largest-scale recent instances of workers' control in the United States. Wagner's analysis does not glorify the paper's achievements; rather, it seeks to draw lessons from both the achievements and the failures.

Wagner shows us the day-to-day pressures of putting out a newspaper by cooperative effort. It was made possible by the remarkable degree of unity that the editorial and production unions had forged in preparing for the strike. As the *Press Connection* established itself, this unity deepened into a mutual appreciation of the diverse skills that go into publishing a newspaper. It is exactly this kind of sharing and cooperative respect that is normally stifled under the ever more elaborate division of labor that characterizes capitalist production.

The *Press Connection* was also unusually successful in breaking down familiar divisions between strikers and the community. Although Madison may be exceptional in its political ferment, the support achieved by this worker-controlled paper is an example of how community and workplace issues can be addressed in the same struggle.

It has been little more than a decade ago since Italy's "Hot Autumn" of 1969 helped to transform the European New Left and change the balance of power in Italy. In the dramatic

labor-union contract struggles of that year there emerged a militant movement of young workers, more radical than the Italian Communist Party and determined that the annual round of wage talks would go beyond "business as usual." As in the French student revolt of the previous year, students and young intellectuals in Italy joined the workers' struggles, attempting to explain them as part of a new stage in the development of class struggle, and in turn being themselves transformed by the dramatic and innovative tactics of the workers.

The heartland of Italy's "Hot Autumn" was the industrial North, particularly in the city of Turin, home of the giant Fiat automobile manufacturing empire. It was here that young workers, often recently arrived from rural and backward areas of Italy, revolted against the conditions of work with an intensity that would not be incorporated into the traditional bargain: a small wage increase in exchange for a period of social peace superintended by the trade unions.

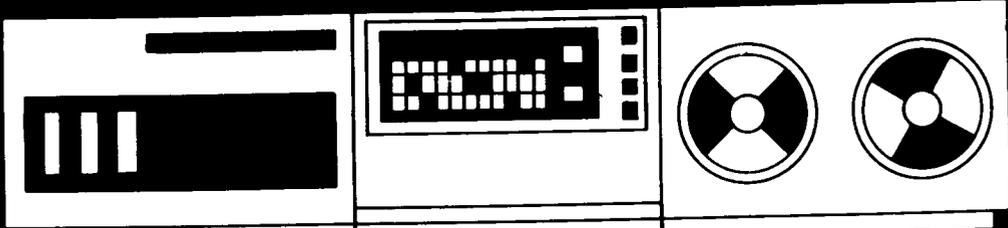
Though the wave of worker militancy receded by the early 1970s, it took several more years for the industrial managers, including those of Fiat, to recover the initiative and shop-floor power that had temporarily passed to the workers. And during this period of worker initiative the organizations of the Italian New Left maintained a foothold in advanced industry, established a viable political presence to the left of the Community Party, helped to radicalize the unions, and used this experience to sustain a high level of theoretical creativity.

What has been the experience of the industrial working class — and particularly the workers at Fiat — in the last half decade? What has happened to the militants of the "Hot Autumn" period, and the older workers of the earlier generations of struggle? And how have the newer members of the working class —

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former students now in the auto factories, women entering the plants in large numbers for the first time, or migrant workers returning because they are no longer wanted in Germany or Switzerland — been integrated into Italy's industrial proletariat? These are the questions addressed by Joanne Barkan in her sensitive and thought-provoking interviews with five workers at Fiat. We think that these interviews are an important aid to understanding the contemporary experiences of Italy's working class; but we are also struck by how vividly the interviews elucidate the personal dimensions of life in the factory. We see a class divided by age and experience, though united by its struggles with the Fiat management. Finally, as the workers are only too aware, the Fiat plant is one of the most modern in the world, on the frontier of both manufacturing and management techniques; and their struggles have ramifications for the auto workers in Japan, America, and everywhere else.

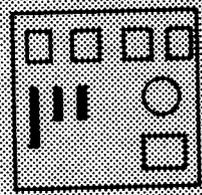
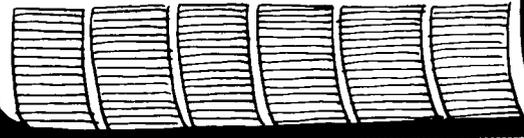
The Italian left is currently in crisis. It has been nearly immobilized by the climate of terrorism, state repression, and political doubt which has followed the assassination of Aldo Moro. Its traditionally leading party, the Italian Communist Party, is caught at the doorway of power — condemned to share responsibility for the unravelling of Italian capitalism, less and less able to mobilize its working class base, either for social reform or for socialist revolution. And Italy's young people, locked out of schools by the government, out of jobs by the economy, and out of the political process by the immobilism of the official Left, have increasingly demonstrated a new kind of "apolitical" politics whose meaning is still very uncertain. This is the context which makes it so important to understand the thinking and initiatives of the Italian working class today. Despite great differences among countries, it is likely that in Italy we can find some mirrors in which to read our possible future.



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# **WORKERS' CONTROL & THE NEWS**

## **The Madison, Wisconsin Press Connection**

**Dave Wagner & Paul Buhle**

*The Madison, Wisconsin Press Connection (1977-1980) was a worker-run newspaper started by striking employees of Madison's two dailies. Published at first as a weekly strike paper, in which editorial and production workers pooled their skills, the Press Connection evolved into a cooperatively owned daily which long outlived the strike. Shares were held by unions, other organizations, and individual supporters. Its peak circulation was 13,600, reached early in 1979. Always short on advertising and cash, the PC became an early victim of the current recession as it suspended publication in January 1980.*

*Dave Wagner, a former editor of Radical America, was an active Newspaper Guild member who became production coordinator on the original weekly Press Connection and was an elected member of the board of directors once the paper became a daily. The following interview was conducted (by mail) by Paul Buhle.*

*You've said that the people who ran Madison before the late '60s/early '70s "revolution" are running it again. How do you relate the saga of the Press Connection to this development?*

First of all, it must be clear that "the people who ran Madison" before the New Left was aborning never relinquished control — they just went into strategic hibernation. Now they are on the offensive again, that's all. The defensive period, when Paul Soglin was in the mayor's office and (toward the end) when the *Press Connection* was around to raise hell

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once a day, was only a matter of marking time for the real-estate people, developers, bankers, union-busters, and utility executives. They may have been overly nervous at times and we may have been overconfident at others, but they never really lost control. If I ever said to you that "those people are running Madison again," I must have meant that they were once more *indisputably* in charge.

Needless to say, the only "revolution" here (both our sets of quotation marks are necessary) was in the abstract. Certainly we challenged the agenda of the real estate speculators — at our best on a day-to-day basis. We discovered, for example, that a local development corporation had not paid its taxes for six or seven years, that it was using the county as a kind of bank because the county penalties for non-payment were half that of the commercial interest rates; we also found out that one of the corporation's hotshots was a member of the school board, which in turn was shutting down schools outside the corporation's development areas. We couldn't get the school board member voted out, but eventually the developers paid off their taxes under a rather hard rain of articles and editorials.

In short, the *PC* helped keep some of the parvenu real estate interests at bay, but we never seriously threatened them. We simply did what the liberal press used to do in this country before the New Corporationists took over the newspaper business. It would have taken several more years of work, both analytical and organizational, for the *PC* and the Madison Left generally to carry this kind of struggle to another level — even to the level of the old muck-raking and Progressive journalism, let alone anything beyond that.

Now the city government is firmly in the hands of the business interests again, though most of the real estate speculators and others who got a little hungry during the Soglin years

complain that the new mayor, Joel Skornicka, is not playing ball with them as much as they'd like.

Skornicka, formerly a University of Wisconsin administration bureaucrat with no color or imagination, defeated Soglin's aide Jim Rowen in the mayoral campaign of April of '79. The newspaper strike was one of the key issues in the election. Rowen refused on principle to take out an inch of advertising in the struck papers, the *Capital Times* and *Wisconsin State Journal*; Skornicka, who was favored by the anti-left, anti-labor wing of the Democrats and all of the Republicans, curried favor with those papers and they both endorsed him. It was the first time in anyone's memory that both papers made a common endorsement.

The campaign was not as vicious as it could have been. Neither side used all the knives it had sharpened. (In our case it was in part because democracy in the newsroom made it very difficult for the more ruthless of us in the editor's chairs to impose assignments on younger, more conservative reporters.) But it was a good battle. Most of us who fought to keep the *PC* going after the loss of a payroll in December of '78 did so because we badly wanted Rowen to win — and he almost did, against incredible odds. He lost by only 1,000 votes out of about 62,000 cast. Skornicka won by one percent. It was probably the high water mark of left influence in the city, despite the loss. Soglin's three victories were all against opponents much weaker than Skornicka.

I still dream of what a Rowen administration could have done. According to the "Milwaukee principle," socialists simply run cities better than anyone else, as reflected not only in regard to human services but in the bond ratings. Playing ball with the speculators costs cities a fortune.

Now the fate of the Left in Madison is in the hands of a newer generation. There are no

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papers left except *Free for All*, which is written anonymously with rather pro forma coverage, and *No Limits*, an occasional anarchist tabloid of higher quality but with no local agenda. *Take Over*, once a well-known underground paper with a flair for gossip and journalistic drama, keeled over last fall with an editorial explaining that the editors were tired of being the only real revolutionaries in town. (Top editor Michael Fellner is now writing for the scab *Capital Times* after declaring, "As far as I'm concerned, it's as though the strike never happened." After years of attacking working people for their inaction and the *PC* for its pretensions, Fellner found his natural home.)

*How did the PC's origins and development relate to the student struggles of the '60s on the one hand, the community attitude in Madison and the labor struggles of the '70s on the other?*

Leaving aside the phrase "community attitude" for the moment, the answer is fairly straightforward. The leadership of the *PC* in its origins was provided by two groups. There were the leaders of the production unions under whose banner the newspaper strike (which led to the founding of the *PC* as a strike paper) was called; they were, for the most part, printers, pressmen and mailers, men, white, mostly in their forties and fifties, union members from way back who were going through their first big strike. There were also the leaders of the editorial unions (one a local of the Newspaper Guild, the other an independent) who had come to union activism from a background in other struggles, notably from the gay rights, feminist, and anti-war movements. Some of this group had been Vietnam veterans with anti-war sentiments (that was also true, by the way, of some of the leaders of the production unions) and others were just plain pissed off at the bosses'

provocations.

Needless to say, there was tension between these two groups, at least on a few key issues. For the most part, however, for reasons I'll get into later, there was a remarkably strong feeling and practice of solidarity throughout the strike.

As for "community attitude," it is precisely the kind of phrase indulged in by the *PC* overmuch; we never defined the "community," though we wanted to use the phrase to our advantage — usually it meant "the otherwise unspoken for" and referred to people in the inner city. It's a worthless euphemism, much like the use of the term "progressive" to mean "socialist." We used it despite the constant awareness that within the Madison "community" there were many thousands who supported former mayor Bill Dyke, who later became Lester Maddox' vice-presidential running mate. Madison is a bit schizoid.

Our practical reasons for trying to "organize the community" were, first, that many of us knew that our chances of stopping production at the struck plant were next to nil; and second, that we faced a tremendously difficult, always uphill battle to convince many people who abhor racism, sexism, and imperial adventures that working people *as workers* have an equally universal cause. It's remarkable how some liberals can go into a St. Vitus dance of anxiety on this point when "liberal" union busters appear on the scene.

(It's also true that women and minorities, sometimes with the ready sneer that "unions never did anything for me," were among the first to cross the picket lines. We tried, sometimes with great difficulty, to explain to our own members that the long years of racial and sexual discrimination in the union were coming home to our roost. Not everyone understood. But we had to hammer away, even at one point printing in the strike paper a statement that the union leaders would not tolerate anti-Semitic,

racial, or sexist epithets on the picket line. Some of the production craft people had enormous difficulty understanding why scabs could not be called by any epithet at hand. But they tried. One incident I will never forget occurred late one night when a particularly good-hearted but outraged pressman, who had been struggling for days to bit his tongue when a black security guard sailed through the line, finally could take it no longer. He stepped in front of the guard's car, leaned toward the windshield and yelled, "You... Polak!" It was our turn to be bewildered. I hope someday to be able to write a short piece on "picket line culture," the stage on which workers put on masks to become themselves.)

As for labor struggles of the '70s, ours was the first definitive one in Madison with the exception of a brief but important teachers' strike in 1976; our main job, through the *PC*, was to explain our own story and to give as much support as we could to the many other unions that began to hit the pavement soon after we did. Because we had defined ourselves, fitfully at first but with more and more clarity, as a feminist paper, we were able to play a rather more active role than usual in supporting nurses in a threatened city-wide strike. When the cab companies conspired to boot out their union (for the third time in a decade), we were in a unique position to support the unions, expose the often illegal finagling of their former bosses, and encourage their trying to found a worker-run cab company of their own. We were able, in our opinion columns and in our news pages, to give unique coverage to the teachers' contract battles; they not only trusted us, their locals bought a great many shares in our cooperative, and of all the unions were most sympathetic to our insistence that labor struggles were part and parcel of sexual, racial, and political issues. Our biggest failure was with the meatcutters' strike. Well over 2,000

workers at a local meatpacking plant walked out for the first time in Madison history (they too were provoked by lay-offs), but their leadership was dominated by the members of the old guard at the central labor council with whom the *PC* regularly crossed swords. Though we gave the meatcutters as much supportive coverage as we could, we had a sense that it was not entirely welcome. More than anything except the dramatic mayoral election — which found the new and old guards bitterly split — this strike showed the extent to which our political notions about unionism were not universally shared by Madison unionists.

THE MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

KEMO RACKI



The editors begin another day of service dedicated to the principle of a free and open press.

*The first anniversary of the newspaper strike. MNI's plant has become a citadel for the paranoid.*

*How do you evaluate the political thrust of the Press Connection, its "People's Paper" approach?*

Like many other folks around the country in the '70s, we cast about to find whatever *local* history and tradition of resistance might be useful. In Madison that tradition was the Progressivism of Old Bob La Follette. One of the papers we had struck (my old employer, the *Capital Times*) had once been the organ of the Progressive Party; our line was that the paper had drifted far away from its founding principles and that our own paper would try to refresh that honored Wisconsin tradition.

We were certainly not unaware of the contradictions within the history of the Progressive movement, and indeed they were pointed out to us often by our socialist readers. (Madison has, judging from certain election returns and subscription lists, about 6,000 socialists.) But it was the only foundation at hand; in Milwaukee, we could have conceivably plugged into the old Socialist Party tradition, but there was no history of that — no ethnic base, for that matter — in Madison. Since our strike was fundamentally a strike against a larger corporate newspaper chain, namely Lee Enterprises out of Iowa, it made sense to fight along anti-corporate lines. For one thing, like all newspapers we had to rely on display advertising, and the old Progressive inclusion of small businesses within the anti-corporate struggle made sense for us financially. We never denied the *PC's* self-interest here, but by the end it became evident that the line we had established at the beginning for economic reasons was politically justified. We became acutely aware of the difficulties small businesses have in finding credit, competing with the huge cash reserves of corporations, and otherwise finding a niche in an economy dominated by only 500 corporations. Those small businesspersons who under-



'Business is booming, boss. After this we've got three neighborhoods to bury!'

stood our position gave us extraordinary support — in part, of course, because our rates were extraordinarily low. The larger businesses boycotted us consistently; since the 1940s, newspapers have been unable to survive on the small-business trade alone.

We tried, then, to forge together labor activists, feminists, small businesspeople, community organizers (the latter on issues such as school closings and property speculation), the poor, the Left (from the electoral to the cultural activists), students, and blacks (though the last two were most indifferent to our efforts) into a broad-based front against the reactionaries who were putting their own quiet agenda back on the table in Madison. While the *PC* was fresh and kept its quality up, the coalition held. Later, because of certain mistakes on our part, including the occasionally necessary abrupt criticism of elements in one's own coalition,

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and because of a decline in quality derived from staff attrition and economic realities — not to mention a string of serious political defeats for the Left in general — the coalition wavered.

It is a vastly different undertaking to attempt to build a “counter-economy” in a city rather than a “counter-culture” on a campus. In printing defenses of the small businesses’ struggle on the one hand and occasional teeth-gritting screeds from left sectarians on the other, we tried to open up our pages as a wide-open forum. At the same time, we tried to encourage the notion that, as the economy continued to decline, a broad national coalition (based in local struggles) would have to emerge at some point, and that activists would eventually have to accept economic, job-oriented analyses as a common starting point for everyone.

It was this kind of thinking that led us to embrace with such enthusiasm the founding of the Progressive Alliance in Detroit, to which we gave extensive on-the-spot coverage. In retrospect, it seems clear that the cautions given in *Radical America* about that organization (which, by the way, were useful in our editorial meetings) were correct. But at the time it was the only game in town — and one we desperately needed in our constant search for national tendencies we could plug our readers into. (I’m convinced, by the way, that at some point there will be a wave of leftish dailies in the U.S. — but not until there is movement that will provide the core of the news; a newspaper, especially a daily with its constant need for copy, becomes shrill in isolation, tries to create as much as interpret the news, and runs the risk of simply becoming a “better” liberal paper than the liberals put out. We were a few years too early.)

In the meantime we found that cooperative ownership of a newspaper can create unusual pressures both editorially and politically. We

were self-managed to a remarkable degree, but we had owners as well. Each single-issue group had its own idea of what the *PC* should become and which issues it should feature; many of them bought memberships in the coop, not only to demonstrate support but to have a say in our policies. So the editors were often called on the carpet in an office meeting when the paper deviated a jot or a tittle from the established line. It was not like a traditional newspaper where the editors condescend to deal with a small group the paper doesn’t really need; these were most often comrades as anxious to keep *their* paper from embarrassing itself as they were determined to keep it pointed resolutely in the right direction.

If we tried to keep the labor orientation as editorial ballast, we were still pulled in many different directions by the coalition members who were also owners. For that matter, political divisions emerged within the staff toward the end. Two incidents occurred in the fall of 1979 that seemed to sum up the experience of the *PC* at its best and worst, things we continue to chew on in this strangely reflective time that follows several years of manic activity.

The first was our decision to publish a letter, banned elsewhere by the Justice Department, purporting to describe the “secrets” of the H-bomb. The day after we published the letter the government dropped its case against the *Progressive* magazine. It was a big moment for the *PC* as a newspaper, and there was a sense of victory. It was the vindication of coop ownership and workers’ control in the sense that all the privately-owned papers had refused to defy the government even in the name of First Amendment rights — rights which we of course harped on at symphonic length, and rights which for once were deposited in the hands of editors unhampered by a corporate board. (We were sometimes criticized by Leninists and



others for thumping for the First Amendment, which they felt was a bourgeois civil liberty; our attitude was that bourgeois civil liberties were only the beginnings of what will someday be demanded. . . )

The second incident, which occurred only two weeks later, was grimmer. It began when a Milwaukee-based anti-abortion group plastered Madison with billboards that carried a photo of a three month-old baby and the bizarre slogan, "Kill her now, its murder; six months ago, abortion." It was, to say the least, provocative. A reporter and a photographer were assigned to do a story. The reporter was thorough enough to find and write that defacements of the billboards were covered by the owners' insurance. Within days a spontaneous, systematic defacement began.

Then came a key move from the anti-abortion group. "If you're so high and mighty on the First Amendment," they said to the *PC*, "you will print a full-page ad of ours that

reproduces the billboard and argues for our right not to have them defaced." The ad read, "Their bomb and our baby."

Question: should we print a full-page ad which we found nauseating? If we did, the pro-abortion groups in our coalition would, they told us, be upset enough to picket the *PC*. The ad would be an insult to women, in particular those women who had had abortions (by implication they were being called murderers) and we would be putting an opportunist interpretation on the First Amendment by claiming that anyone had the right to buy space in the paper. That's the way the straight press does it, they pointed out, but the *PC* shouldn't be like the straight press.

If we refused to run the ad, it would kick out from under the paper one of its editorial pillars; once we set ourselves up as arbiters of free speech (by denying access to the public prints) we would more or less be conceding to the Justice department's case that "in some cases" these rights should be abridged. We had exposed ourselves to \$10,000 in fines and 10 years in prison each to deny that. If we backed down when the issue was reversed we would, some staff members felt, be victims of "ideological blackmail."

The dilemma, as it turned out, was resolved, or rather unresolved, in the worst and most destructive way possible. The decision to run the ad was in the jurisdiction of the general manager, who was determined to run it. Meanwhile, the editor and editorial board (whose authority was then in doubt because of a missed election) decided to run a same-day editorial attacking the ad. The general manager opposed the editorial on the grounds that same-day opinionating was "unprofessional" and reported the matter to the board of directors on the evening of publication. The board decided in favor of simultaneous publication of the ad and the editorial, but when that decision was

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reported to the general manager he refused to go along with it. As a result the ad ran alone, pickets appeared in front of the PC offices, and the editorial belatedly ran, the following day.

It was a stalemate. Something cracked inside the paper at that moment. The board could not fire the general manager without inviting serious turmoil inside the staff, where he had the strategic support of some people who felt that the paper was failing economically because it was "too far to the left." The issue was never resolved to anyone's satisfaction, the lines of authority were never re-established, and the tension between self-management and cooperative ownership intensified without there being time to make it a productive conflict. By the time the annual shareholder's meeting rolled around, at which 500 people were present and voting, the only serious issue that remained was the financial crisis that made it necessary to close down the paper.

The "political thrust," as you put it, of the PC was formed by the new and sometimes strange combinations of forces at work on it. I think it will be some time before we draw the right lessons from the mistakes or from the victories.

*How did workers' ownership (or management) work out as political strategy? As economic policy?*

There is absolutely no doubt that without the twin principles of workers' control and pay parity the PC would never have lasted the 27 months from October '77 to January '80.

But first let me give you a picture of how it worked. When we began as a strike weekly, the presidents of the five unions appointed workers in each of their ranks who had the widest respect as skilled and diligent crafts-people (as opposed to political officers in the leadership who were often better talkers than workers).

These production leaders were pulled together into a Production Council which I was asked to chair (because of experience in the '60s in production problems when I worked in the underground press). Once a week, sometimes twice, we met and hammered out logistical problems. For the most part no one in the council had the slightest idea of the mysteries of the other drafts, and so democratic decision-making was absolutely unavoidable — it was the only process that could possibly have worked under the circumstances. These weekly meetings, for me, were the most exciting part of the strike. The mutual respect, the rounds of congratulation to individual workers and crafts for difficult jobs well done under impossible circumstances, the unquestioning trust in each other as skilled workers — here was the culmination of years of dreams and theories. Hell yes, it worked, and it continued to work all through the paper's history. Over the months the walls of mystery were gradually battered down until workers in each department had fairly clear ideas of the problems and work tempos of adjacent departments; this was invaluable for the larger meetings involving all the workers, where political discussions were not allowed to become abstracted too much from the practical limitations of production.

Pay parity was the complement to workers' control. All through the paper's history the weekly paycheck (except, later on, those of the advertising reps who worked on commission) remained the same for each worker. It avoided the resentments that could have torn the paper apart within six months. (Of course, the size of the paycheck was so small that it more or less guaranteed equality in self-exploitation. As the old strikers left us one by one, we became more familiar with the *external demands of the labor market* on the pay scales. I doubt that the principle could have held forever. Yet without it, we never could have lasted 27 months).

## Rowen rips McMillin 'smear'

—See story, Page 2



Volume 2, Number 27 Friday, March 9, 1979 Madison, Wis. 53706

## 'No veils for Iran'

By Bill Dees  
The Madison Press Connection is pleased to announce that it will be publishing a special issue on the Middle East conflict. This issue will be published on Friday, March 16, 1979, and will feature a special double-page spread on the Middle East conflict. The issue will be published in the Madison Press Connection, and will be available to all subscribers. The issue will be published in the Madison Press Connection, and will be available to all subscribers. The issue will be published in the Madison Press Connection, and will be available to all subscribers.



Women march against the Ayatollah's dress code in Tehran.

## Women march against Dreyfus policies

By Bill Dees  
A group of women marched in Madison on Saturday, March 10, 1979, to protest against the policies of the Dreyfus administration. The women carried signs and banners, and their march was a demonstration of their opposition to the administration's policies. The women marched in Madison on Saturday, March 10, 1979, to protest against the policies of the Dreyfus administration. The women carried signs and banners, and their march was a demonstration of their opposition to the administration's policies.



Madison marchers support the United States' Women's Day.

3/9/79: PC observes International Women's Day.

## Who is Howard Morland?

—See story on Page 2



Volume 2, Number 28 Saturday, March 10, 1979 Madison, Wis. 53706

# U.S. blocks bomb story

By Bill Dees  
The Madison Press Connection is pleased to announce that it will be publishing a special issue on the Middle East conflict. This issue will be published on Friday, March 16, 1979, and will feature a special double-page spread on the Middle East conflict. The issue will be published in the Madison Press Connection, and will be available to all subscribers. The issue will be published in the Madison Press Connection, and will be available to all subscribers.



U.S. withheld news of a restraining order on Progressive Editor Erwin Ernst Friday.

By Bill Dees  
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3/10/79: A historic censorship case begins.

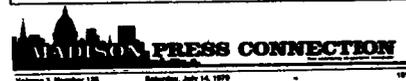
## Who reads The Press Connection?



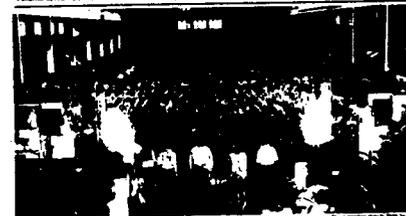
5/19/79: Citywide subscription drive mobilizes hundreds.

## UAW fights the '7% solution'

See Progressive, Page 6



Volume 2, Number 128 Saturday, July 14, 1979 Madison, Wis. 53706



Eight Morning Star fans of NUAW march before a capacity crowd Friday night.

## 'A movement reborn'

By Bill Dees  
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## DC-10 rattles nerves and windows here

By Bill Dees  
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7/14/79: PC co-sponsors national rally on nukes and the Progressive.

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So, yes, these two principles worked soundly for the internal politics of the paper. The only alternative would have been massive infusions of money at the very start — enough showing up in our paychecks that we should forgo participation, i.e. business as usual. But there were two unresolved problems.

Toward the end we found that the pay was too low to hold skilled workers, despite the fact that the majority held on as long as they could. They were replaced, at first, by people with little experience but with a strong political commitment to the experiment. But some people also showed up who were completely unskilled — had little work experience of any sort, no understanding of union rules (which were the cornerstone of workers' control from the beginning), and little experience in large organizations. They worked in the circulation and advertising departments, and what we had was a kind of lumpenization of the workforce on those departments. Never has that class distinction been made clearer to me, or with more pain. These new people lacked discipline, performed erratically, refused to analyze financial information, and would not respect collective decision-making. The youth culture of the '60s (ah, roots!) has become, no doubt because of its classless and utopian spirit, a nostalgic refuge for those who not only will not but cannot hold a job, or rather, cannot *do* work. The Black Panthers' paper in the '60s and Madison's *Take Over* in the '70s glorified the "lumpen" consciously, with arguable points. No one but the sectarians has bothered to dispute these points, because discretion has become the better part of politics.

The other problem was that neither the financial leaders (including me) nor the other workers made an effort to democratize financial skills. Workers' control will, I am convinced, be impossible until schools carry mandatory courses on the basic categories of

the balance sheet. Workers simply must be able to distinguish between balance sheets, financial statements, pro forma budgets, and cash budgets and be able to interpret them. For me the process of decipherment was difficult enough (I spent two years on the *PC* board of directors); we never should have democratized that process without spending many long hours of catch-up at the expense of production (which, in a daily paper, has its own fierce schedules).

Finally, while workers' control and pay parity worked for a long time, the losses in the business end forced the paper over time to tie itself more and more dependently to credit institutions and contractors, until the space for financial maneuvering shrank to a narrow corridor indeed. In that situation workers sometimes had difficulty understanding the priorities assigned to incoming revenues.

Our effort to build a "counter-economy" in Madison got nowhere (except for in our help to the worker-owned cab company); many more building blocks will have to be in place for that to appear on the scale we imagined. Even then we will all have to be particularly careful that we are not simply creating an economy of the poor and for the poor, relieving in the process a considerable social burden from the corporations and the government.

As for the actual work and the production schedules, I am satisfied that the actual work and the production schedules remained firmly in the hands of workers in each department, though the direction of that work was usually in the hands of the Production Council. That body, after the paper was sold by the unions to the workers and then to cooperative shareholders, (eventually about 800 of them), came to be made up of the elected heads of each department. They in turn were supervised by three assistant managers, who were elected by the workforce at large. The only member of

management who was not elected was the General Manager, who was appointed by the board of directors (they, of course, were elected by the coop members, or shareholders). It was a balance between workers' control and community control; some of the ideas of Gar Alperovitz went into the board's discussions about achieving that balance.

In an essay, historian David Montgomery refers to a PC worker who said, with regard to a seminar he attended on workers' sharing in decision-making, that he found the seminar irrelevant because people at the PC saw no need for "management participation". That remark came comparatively early in the experience. At that point "management" referred to the old bosses at the struck plant. Eventually we did develop a management of our own. By the end only one of the three elected managers remained; they were replaced by "acting"

managers who, under the pressure of business, were clearly perceived as the only persons with the required specialized skills — particularly in the business office. We folded the paper shortly before the next round of elections, so the problem of succession was never met in practice.

Some workers felt that workers' control had become something of a charade. That feeling ranged from a few disciplined workers who saw no need for department heads, elected or not, to the group of marginal workers that continually lost political struggles because of naivete or lack of organizing experience.

Similarly, among the old guard of original strikers, particularly in the production crafts, workers' control was felt to be too "ideological" and unnecessary; the printers (International Typographical Union) clung to their union control of production to the end.



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Each department had a Workers' Council for matters of discipline, hiring and firing. In the craft departments they remained largely unused because union committees had identical functions; some departments were too small to need them. Only the editorial department really made use of it, and it proved to be particularly valuable; we found that elected workers took their tasks very seriously and had a moral authority, particularly in matters of discipline, that often allowed them to be more stringent in their decisions than the elected management could afford to be.

It's true that workers' control is not always efficient, at least in the short run. Internal political questions seemed to erupt from time to time into a crisis in which the various elected bodies and leaders would redefine their roles and authority to achieve every imaginable parliamentary advantage. Periodically resentments and latent struggles, often around a symbolic issue, would come to a real boil. For days production efficiency would be compromised by caucuses, organizing, and lobbying as the lines of the various splits formed. But once the issue was resolved there was a general feeling that the unspoken had been uttered and that deep-seated wounds which in other work circumstances would have been allowed to fester had been revealed in what some of us came to call "labor theater" — and production would then return to a higher level of efficiency than before. In the long run, I am convinced, these political passion plays — in which everyone had lines to deliver, poses to strike, and quite often sound arguments to make — are inextricable parts of the way workers' control will look in the future. Once these rain storms passed, the air in the office was usually remarkably invigorating. I only wish we had had many more years to see how the process developed. If the form was theatrical, the content, until the end, remained rational; I was

never disappointed by it, anxieties of the moment aside.

*What was the PC's relationship to internal labor struggles in Madison, the attacks upon the building trades' control of the central trades council. Did the PC accelerate or retard the challenge? And how do you judge the ongoing conflict?*

When our strike hit the city in October 1977, the Madison Federation of Labor was a moribund organization, dominated by the building trades and run by an out-and-out business unionist. The first electoral challenge to his leadership, organized by the public employees two years earlier, had been crushed outright. A month after the *PC* went down the tubes the same man was re-elected, after a challenge by the same group, by a margin of only about 55 to 45 per cent. The failure of the building trades and the business unionists to support *any* strike effort in the preceding two years, along with steady hammering by the *PC*, changed the atmosphere. I have no doubt that the old guard will be thrown out next year. Unfortunately, the Federation has precious little power in any case; it will be largely a symbolic victory, I think.

But this same strain between business-unionist insurgent tendencies seems to exist all around the country. Clearly something will have to give within the next decade. The signs of change are tattooed on the muscle of the challengers.

I fully expect that, once the insurgents consolidate their gains by the middle '80s, the building trades hereabouts will withdraw, either formally or informally, from the Federation. I also expect to see new kinds of associative bodies spring up in which the CIO-oriented unions from the AFL-CIO will sit down with insurgent Teamsters and UAW members.

Who knows what may lie beyond that?

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Getting that far will be the fruit of 15 years of struggle. But I do know from my experience at the *PC* that there are many, many articulate and committed veterans of the '60s and '70s who are only awaiting an opening. It could all happen very rapidly, depending on how the issues develop and at what tempo. Time is on the side of the insurgents.

*There are other places where the strike papers have held on (Wilkes-Barre) or turned into shoppers (San Vallejo). Why did they succeed and the PC fail? Why do most strike papers fail?*

The experience of strike papers in the wave begun by the *PC* has been both triumphant and disastrous. Most have folded or, as in San Vallejo, have chosen a sounder financial base than a daily (to *begin* with). The one in Pontiac, Michigan, has been sold. Only the *Wilkes-Barre Citizens Voice* holds on — now paying its workers nearly a living wage, hanging on for the long haul, still a strike paper (not a coop), though its politics are not particularly leftist by any standard. It's the only strike paper that might actually force its target — a paper controlled from New York with many millions in assets — to capitulate. It's a classic battle, the place where the Newspaper Guild has chosen to take its stand.

To be frank, the unions from the beginning thought of the Madison strike as a lost cause. We were written off. The international unions were astounded that we hung on so long with so little support from them. There was some bitterness because of that attitude, particularly because the unions steadfastly refused to support the strike paper as a strategy. The Guild, among others, had a strict policy against it, but at the last Guild convention it was changed. We take that as a victory.

The other, larger victory, is that the pace of union-busting in the newspaper industry has slowed to a crawl. Management had all the cards — knew we could not stop production — and yet we cost them millions by hanging on out of mean-spirited doggedness; I like to think that we saved thousands of jobs and many locals by putting up resistance where none was expected.

The reason why strike papers, or for that matter almost all new dailies, fail, is that the newspaper business is labor-intensive, requires an enormous amount of capital or credit, and is too dependent on the print advertising market — which in most areas is already monopolized.

Before 1941 advertising was not all that important to the industry because newsprint was nearly as cheap as water. Publishers could meet operating expenses *and* a payroll from the cover price alone; circulation was therefore important in a vastly different way. A working class readership was much more important then because of their sheer numbers. Even the moss-back curmudgeons of the '20s and '30s had to strike a populist tone in their papers — to build numbers. Today it's the demographics of the readership — the "up-scale" demographics as the marketing types intone — that count.

The only reason the latest wave of strike papers was possible is that the new technology which many publishers are using to bust unions is making newspaper production *almost* cheap enough for smaller papers to start. But we are not there yet. The underground press was made possible by photo-offset technology; the new wave of dailies which may appear in the 1990s will be made possible by the new typesetting and computer technology (which affects everything from circulation to billing). But the technology is still too expensive, still beyond the reach of most of us.

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My notion is that there will emerge eventually two daily presses in this country: the vast, regional monopoly papers and the localized papers that will be supported by the business advertisers who cannot afford monopoly rates. But that's anywhere from 10 to 15 years away, and will depend in large part on what happens to the commercial possibilities of cable TV and the availability of cheap artificial newsprint. All of these things are in a mighty flux.

*From your experience, how do you assess prospects for the Left in mainstream journalism and in unionism?*

I am pessimistic about the former, unsure about the latter. "Mainstream" will remain by definition non-left, anti-left, and worse and worse and worse. Depending, of course, on some of the technological developments I just described, there is a chance of having a localized progressive press, small but widespread, before the turn of the century.

As for unionism, let me tell you an anecdote which goes beyond the question of controlling local labor federations and other instruments of that kind to the question of resistance at the workplace.

When our five unions were faced with one stroke of the sword after the other, leaving no doubt that management intended to provoke a strike (in a new strike-proof plant), there were those who realized that once the unions walked

out they would never get back in. A few workers took counsel, realizing that the only chance for a victory was to stage a sit-down strike in the presence of the expensive new equipment that was being used as the wedge against the unions. Management wanted the workers on the picket lines, not next to that expensive computer, that new press, that shiny new typesetting equipment. . .

But it was quickly discovered, not only that such a strike was illegal (no surprise there), but that the international unions whose members participated in such an effort could be held liable for millions of dollars in fines.

Face it: the structure of collective bargaining, labor activism, picket line conduct, and the laboriously intricate legal remedies available are so tightly controlled by the statute and precedent that there is precious little room in which to move. The more we play by rules, the deeper the hole we dig for ourselves. If we ignore the rules we deal ourselves out of the action on a day-to-day basis. The only way the issue will be forced will be through a massive, spontaneous movement that defies the rules and calls into question the flow of production from top to bottom. That's all the rules are concerned with, and they will bend quickly enough if production is compromised. The conditions for all of this are, however, rather remote at the moment, I think. If it comes soon, I will be surprised.



KONOPACK

MADISON PRESS CONNECTION



# **EIGHT HOURS A DAY AT FIAT**

## **Conversations With Italian Auto Workers**

**Joanne Barkan**

It was 1957. Nazareno was twenty years old and, as he often said, “the poorest of the poor.” His family worked the land — or at least tried to — around Rovigo, about sixty kilometers from Venice. They had never recovered from the great flood of '51, when the Po River swelled and submerged the region under mud and water. There seemed to be no way of making a living, no hope for the future. Thousands were already leaving that poor northeast region of Italy for the West, for Turin, and for the factories. Nazareno packed his bags.

In those years, the real goal, the dream, was always Fiat. Getting a job at Fiat was like going to America. But it was not easy to fulfill the dream. Many workers had to prove themselves first in small plants or in the construction industry around Turin. That's where Fiat often went to look for its new laborers, selecting those who had shown the greatest capacity and willingness to work. Others were able to enter Fiat only with letters of recommendation from the local priests, who vouched for the workers' solid backgrounds and their non-communist political leanings.

“It wasn't until 1962 that I finally got a job at Fiat, and when it happened, I felt like I, Nazareno, had touched heaven with my fingers. It was security and health. You were privileged if you were at Fiat. You were even treated better by the shopkeepers. But after the first euphoria, then I realized it wasn't what I had expected. Then came the trauma.

“Why? The work rhythms, the environmental conditions, the impact of the assembly line. After seven or eight months, you realized you were being destroyed. You saw that 'heaven' was an illusion. It was like a military state inside the factory. I liked to read as a kid. When I

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was twelve or thirteen, I read about Fiat and thought it was democratic and that the relations between management and the workers were good. Once I was there, I saw that I had no liberty.

“I worked for the first four years in the paint department. When you painted a car, you had to sand the first layer of paint so that the second would adhere. We did this with a machine run with water. Your hands were always in water; you stood in water. It was 125° in the summer and humid; freezing in the winter. From the time the bell rang at 6:00 a.m. until it rang again at noon, you couldn’t stop; you couldn’t sit down. The pace was killing.

“The relationship between workers in those years was zero. Zero discussions, no talking at all with that police-like structure. It was worse than school! If the supervisor said you had to make 300 pieces, you made 300 whether or not there were absent workers. Fiat used a lot of overtime in those years. Most workers did twelve hours overtime a week, sixty hours altogether. That was general.

“You came from a region where there was no work. You came to Fiat, and you had a job. So you’d work like crazy, like a glutton. Someone who’s starving always overeats.

“I saw a worker beg his supervisor to go to the bathroom once. First the super told him to wait twenty minutes, and then he claimed the worker didn’t really have to go. So the worker left his place and risked getting fired. He went to the bathroom and brought the ‘product’ out for the super to see. The worker was suspended for three days.

“I got two fines for reading a newspaper during my break. They had a system of vigilantes in the johns making sure no one read newspapers there either. ‘Alla Fiat si viene per lavorare’ (At Fiat, you come to work), that was the slogan. The supervisors were like *carabinieri*, the military police. If they caught

you with *l’Unita*, the Communist newspaper, you were fired or sent to the ‘exile’ department. Goons would beat up union activists, slash their tires, set their cars on fire.

“One day my super told me I wasn’t using my tool right. I said to him, ‘I thought this was a better way of doing it.’ He answered me, ‘You’re here to work, not to think!’ You know, that’s the kind of thing you remember for years. You carry it around with you, and then one day you explode.”

\* \* \*

Fiat has long been the touchstone of the industrial workers’ movement in Italy — from the occupation of the factories in 1919-1920 through the long years of repression both under fascism and during the post-war reconstruction to the workers’ movement that began in the late 1960s. Over the years, the great factories of Turin have seen the high moments of collective strength and heard the desperate silences of defeat and oppression. Since the late 1960s, Fiat workers have acquired an international reputation for militancy, a high level of self-organization in the factories, and radical political consciousness. To a great extent, this reputation rests on the accomplishments of the “Generation of ’68,” those workers who led an offensive movement for several years to win control over the process of production. They dominated the work force at Fiat both organizationally and ideologically until the late 1970s, and during that time, it was possible to speak of a relatively unified work force at Fiat.

The situation has changed. A new generation of workers has recently come into the plants. They are a varied group — some very young; many women — with divergent backgrounds and experiences. Many of them are quite unlike the well-known Fiat veterans. Now it no longer

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makes sense to speak about the “typical Fiat worker.” The labor force is more heterogeneous and, at times, even divided.

Let’s take a closer look at the generations at Fiat. In the first decade and a half after the War, Fiat drew many of its workers from off the land in the Piedmont region around Turin. They or their relatives continued to work the land, and the dairy products and fresh fruits and vegetables rounded out the factory workers’ wage. These workers were called *barachin*, named after the metal soup pails they carried to work each day for lunch.

As industry expanded in the North, it absorbed much of the available “native” labor and attracted the jobless of other regions. So began the mass migrations from Italy’s “Third World” — the South, Sardinia, Sicily, and the Veneto. The population shift eventually moved millions to the industrial cities of northern Italy and northern Europe.

By the early and mid-1960s, the automobile was king of the economy, and Fiat was hiring by the tens of thousands. At the high point, the two-year period of 1968 and 1969, some 33,000 new workers entered the Fiat plants! An essential part of the company’s expansion program was the Fiat 500 model — the famous mini-car of the masses. According to the plan, the new workers would produce the cars and then buy them. The national government helped the industry’s development by providing cheap steel from state-run plants and by building one of the most extensive superhighway systems in the world.

Hundreds of “immigrants” like Nazareno arrived in Turin every day, stepping off the trains with their cardboard suitcases. The baroque city under the Alps was foreign territory to them. They spoke only their native dialects and couldn’t understand the language they heard around them. The taxi drivers took them to rooming houses where they rented beds

by the hour and to shanty towns near the factories where there were no toilets or hot water. Turin’s natives reacted with hostility and even racism toward the newcomers, who were ghettoized and treated like second-class citizens at best. Turin became a city divided between antagonistic cultures. The social customs, style of dress, speech, and even physical types of the two groups were different. In the factories, the immigrants confronted the repression described by Nazareno. They worked sixty hours a week but could barely cover their expenses. Then, as Nazareno said, they exploded.

There were spontaneous and organized actions: work stoppages, slow-downs, sabotage of machines, marches through the plants, walk-outs, mass demonstrations, all-workers’ assemblies, discussions with student movement groups. The struggles quickly developed into a movement which continued to gather momentum and draw in large numbers of workers. There were moments of violence — fist fights, cars burned — which were often the result of pent-up hostilities toward autocratic supervisors. Overall, the workers maintained a high level of solidarity. There were negotiations with management throughout this period, and by the early 1970s the movement had transformed — at least temporarily — traditional capitalist relations of production in the factory. The workers won control over work rhythms and scheduling on the assembly lines, control over hiring and firing policies; they won a more egalitarian salary structure, better benefits, and the right to study on company time; they organized factory councils of workers’ delegates and revitalized the metalworkers’ union; they greatly reduced the overt political repression and the near dictatorial powers of the supervisors on the shop floor.

By 1975, Fiat was a very different place. In fact, conditions in terms of work rhythms, environment, and safety measures were in some

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cases better at Fiat than at most American or French automobile plants. But the situation was not static. The workers had to struggle continuously to make sure the provisions of the contracts they had won were implemented. Sometimes they did not succeed. (One significant victory, for example, was workers' input into investment decisions. Won in the mid-1970s, it still exists only on paper.)

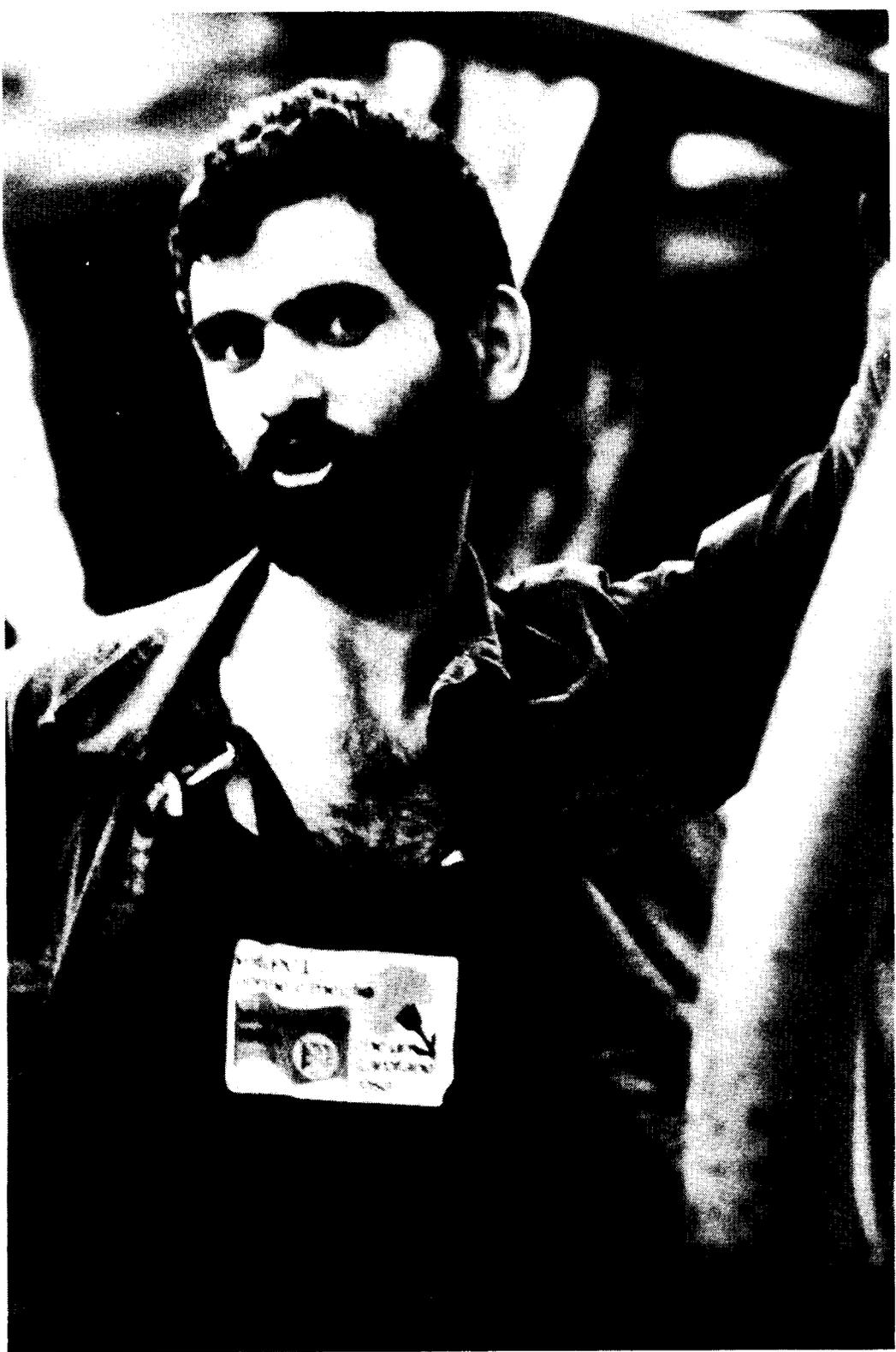
As a result of the workers' victories and the international economic crisis of the mid-1970s which hit Italy particularly hard, Fiat went into a period of retrenchment and restructuring. There was a freeze on hiring from 1974 to 1978. During that time, the company completely reorganized its financial and administrative structure and began to decentralize production, getting part of the work process out of the large plants where there were "labor problems" and into small shops where the unions were weaker or nonexistent. Fiat expanded its manufacturing operations abroad (Brazil, Argentina, Poland, Spain) and began preparing an offensive to increase its share of the European market. Finally, the company began to install new technology — robots in the welding and paint departments; the *digitron*, a computerized body assembly system; the *transfertizzazione*, to position and stamp large pieces; and, most recently, the *LAM*, a highly automated system for putting together the motor which does away with the old assembly line. Fiat has aimed much of the new technology at the "hot spots" in the factory — those places where the work conditions were the most dangerous or unpleasant and the workers traditionally strike-prone and combative.

By 1978, the worst of the crisis seemed to be over for the automotive sector, and Fiat began hiring new workers once again. In the meantime, however, the national government passed legislation giving young people specific consideration on the official lists of the

unemployed, and giving women equal status as job seekers for the first time. The changes in the law obliged Fiat to interview and hire willing and able workers from the government rolls. Management could not screen and then select only the workers it found to be politically and socially acceptable, as it had during the 1950s. Some 9,000 new workers entered the various Fiat plants in Turin in 1978 and several thousand more in 1979. A large number of them were young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, children of immigrant workers; over half were women, many entering the labor force after years at home as housewives and mothers.

Unlike Nazareno and his generation, most of the new young workers have gone through high school; many have technical and professional diplomas. More important, they have spent five years in the *mondo dei giovani*, the world of young people — which means music, discos, drugs, and just hanging out. This world didn't exist in Italy a decade ago when peasants and the children of workers went into the factories at thirteen or fourteen years of age.

For much of the new generation, the factory is no longer the center of the universe. The young workers hope to leave and find something else as soon as possible. When asked, they often don't define themselves as workers. Instead it's "I'm a student," "I play the guitar," or "I like jazz." Most of them have a greater sense of their individual worth and a deeper streak of antiauthoritarianism than any previous group. They have higher ambitions and less tolerance for the monotonous. They go out on strike without hesitation, but most are less interested than the previous generation in putting all their energies into changing the factory and into the gradual and careful process of taking control. They want satisfying work and some security at a time when Italy's economy is generating very few



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full-time jobs of any kind. Some of the young workers are interested in politics; many are not. Some are particularly hostile toward the Italian Communist party (PCI) and the unions, which they believe have sold out the workers' movement.

There is a serious division between the generations at Fiat. The older workers often accuse the younger ones of being lazy and arrogant or unwilling to learn from the history of the 1960s. For their part, the younger workers see the '68 generation as sermonizing, narrow, or even self-satisfied.

It is too soon to say how the younger workers will develop or how the generational conflict within Fiat will resolve itself. During the long contract struggle in 1979, many Italian observers emphasized the young workers' antagonism or indifference to the union. Yet in February 1980, some young workers ran for factory council positions in various Fiat plants and were elected. Many of the "old cadre" of the '68 generation now admit to being tired. After twelve years of activism in the factory, after eight or ten years as factory council delegates, they would like others to take over the leadership roles. These older workers are fiercely proud of what they have accomplished, and yet many of them also claim that the future of the movement they have built now lies with the new generation.

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One of my recent projects in Italy has been to get a more concrete and more personal sense of who these Fiat workers I'd always heard so much about are. I did my first interviews during a trip to Turin in October 1978, and then returned to the city for a month in May 1979 when I did some twenty interviews, five of which are transcribed here.

The month I spent in Turin was a particularly

tense time. Terrorists had singled out the city as a prime site for their activities, and the frequency of shootings and bombings had greatly increased. There had been twelve terrorism-related deaths since spring of the previous year. The national government had fallen in January, and the election campaign, which no one felt could resolve the political crisis, was just then getting under way. Since February, the more the 100,000 Fiat workers in and around Turin had been at the center of a bitter struggle over the national metalworkers' contract. There were strike actions at the various Fiat plants almost every day.

I made contact with most of the workers I interviewed through Italian unionists, political activists, or party functionaries who are friends of mine, acquaintances, or friends of friends. In most cases, the workers spoke openly and at length to me when a formal interview had been set up by a contact. The interviewees then felt confident that I was a legitimate journalist (not an agent of some kind) and sympathetic to them. Most of the interviews lasted from one to two hours; a few were shorter. All were held in Italian. I took extensive notes during the interviews and then filled in and corrected the texts immediately after each meeting.

My goal was to speak to as many "types" of Fiat workers as possible: the dedicated and highly politicized factory council delegate; the less involved "fellow-traveler" of the '68 generation; the recent high-school graduate whose primary objective was to get out of Fiat; the newly-hired, middle-aged woman; and so on. The most difficult type to track down was the older, politically conservative worker. At this time, they are few in number and less willing to talk. In the end, I felt satisfied that my sample was representative and that I hadn't overlooked any significant group.

I am very grateful to my friends at *Il Manifesto* and in PdUP, to the local officials of

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the PCI, and to the unionists who arranged interviews for me, drove me to the plants and the outlying dormitory towns, made lunches and dinners for me, and spent hours explaining their views.

My deepest thanks go, of course, to the Fiat workers who shared their personal histories, experiences, hopes, and fears. Many of them also shared their food, their coffee, their *grappa*. They took me into their homes, introduced me to their relatives, showed me around their neighborhoods. Many of them became interested, even enthusiastic about my project. By my third trip to the town of Orbassano, near Fiat's Rivalta plant, the women of the local PCI section had devised a plan (never consummated) to dress me in a work uniform and sneak me into the factory to see *their* department. I think back often to those women sitting in a circle of folding chairs inside the party headquarters, to the factory council delegate whose living room looked like a bookstore, to the young worker who recalled the oxen drawing plows near what would always be home in Sardinia, and to all the others in and around Fiat I learned from and enjoyed.

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## NAZARENO

*I met Nazareno early in my stay in Turin. I had gone to the Quinta Lega, the headquarters of the metalworkers' union for the Mirafiori plant, hoping to find one of the unionists. When I arrived, the building was just about deserted — all the unionists were off at a conference on terrorism, and most of the factory council delegates were across the streets at the plant getting ready for a two-hour strike. Nazareno, who was on leave from the factory because of an injury, had just stopped by. (I later asked if his accident had been work-related. He looked a little embarrassed and*

*explained that he had fallen off his bicycle. Nazareno had been out of work for two months, but his compensation was close to 100 percent of his wage.)*

*Some Fiat workers will not talk at all to journalists unless a trustworthy intermediary has set up the interview. Nazareno was unusual. I simply explained why I was in Turin, asked if he would be willing to do an interview, and he sat down and talked for two hours without reserve.*

*Nazareno was an intense person whose language was sprinkled with metaphors. He was forty-two years old, of medium height, with a slightly receding hairline. He wore a sports jacket and a tie. When Nazareno described the *anni duri* — the hard years at Fiat that have become almost a legend in Italy, his hands would unconsciously pass quivering over his forehead and across his green-yellow eyes.*

One thing that scared me in the early years was the continual coming and going of workers. It was like a ship's port. People quit, new workers. After three or four years, people left because they couldn't take it any more. When you saw you were dying, you left. They found jobs in the service sector, the government, or became small merchants. Some workers were able to save money to do this.

I saw this constant turnover and asked myself what happens when people demand to stay at Fiat for twenty years. Things will change. This has happened. Now Fiat can't fire you if you're hurt on the job. They have to find some work for you to do. There are 6,000 "sick" workers at Fiat now.

What happened in 1969 didn't come as a surprise to me. You had normal people working on the assembly lines. You would work next to the same people for six or seven years. You'd never talk because you were afraid, but you knew they were good people. Then all of a sudden, you see them rebel, throw things, and

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break the machines. It means that for years, they had bottled up their anger.

After years of repression, is it surprising that some supervisors were beaten up and a few cars burned? In Iran, the Shah put people in jail and tortured them. Then there was a revolution. The revolution at Fiat had to come. You couldn't win it with carnations the way they did in Portugal. You have to struggle for change. The bosses don't give you gifts. Liberty isn't a gift.

But we had to go beyond an explosion of anger. We had to use diplomacy too. I didn't act out of anger. I was always considered a moderate in immediate actions.

The Veneto where I grew up was a poor agricultural area, but the quality of life was much better. We'd go to the bars where we knew everyone. When I came to Turin, the Fiat workers got up at five in the morning, worked until two-thirty, did overtime, went home to sleep, and got up for work the next day. I lived like that for years.

I got married six months after I went to Fiat. I married a woman from the Veneto. You know, *moglie e buca al paese tuo* (wife and ox from your own town). Oh well, I guess it's not quite like that any more. My wife worked as a seamstress. Our daughter was born in 1964. The only social life was in the house with the T.V. on. On Sunday, it was soccer or you bought a Fiat 500 and took the family for a ride.

Even now it's like this. It hasn't changed much. Turin is still a dormitory city. There are two shifts, so half the city is always asleep while the other half works. I live in Anchilino. It's a town of 50,000, and they're building the first movie theater just now! There's also still this mentality that if your car is two centimeters larger than your brother's, then you're better. You get married, rents are high, you think you have to buy a T.V. and a washing machine, and

a car. So you work like crazy. But I think among the very young, this is changing. They refuse this kind of work, and that's positive.

I don't know what will happen ten years from now. The new generation of workers is mute; they're reserved. The factory council isn't being renewed. The same people have been doing the work for ten years. Now our union is becoming like the old union before '68, with political divisions and political labels. There's not enough democracy in the union.

Several months ago, there was a spontaneous strike in the paint department. I think spontaneous struggles are a good thing. The union should accept them. I took three young workers with me to the negotiations with management. One was studying philosophy part time at the university. Another had a degree in electrical engineering. They weren't involved in the union, but they ended up leading the negotiations. They had a tremendous capacity and understanding of power relations in the factory.

These are the people who should be in the factory council. The union has to involve these young people. One of them is already lost. The bosses gave him a desk job and bought him off. If we don't involve the young people, either they will become self-interested and model citizens or they will explode. Fiat's a pot that's boiling.

#### ANTONELLA

*I had an appointment with one of the factory council delegates, Gianni, outside gate #30 of the Fiat Mirafiori\* plant just as the first shift was ending. He had made arrangements for me to interview two workers, first Antonella and then Marisa. The only place to sit was a patch of grass on a traffic island in the middle of the boulevard that circles the Mirafiori complex. So with the cars and motor scooters whizzing by on all sides, we talked.*

*Mirafiori, Fiat's largest plant, is an awesome sight. The encircling concrete walls stretch on for miles, broken only by iron gates and by the looming administrative palazzo built in the suprahuman style of the Mussolini years. Fiat inaugurated the original plant (one million square meters in area) in 1939 and then opened the southern addition in 1955 (another 330,000 square meters). Many people argue that the titanic proportions of the plant were a serious mistake on the part of Fiat's management. The concentration of so many workers in one place (about 46,000 now, although over 55,000 have worked at the plant at other times) has facilitated the building and coordination of a workers' movement and has made Fiat more vulnerable to actions undertaken by the workers. The process of decentralization begun by management in the mid-1970s is a response in part to this problem.*

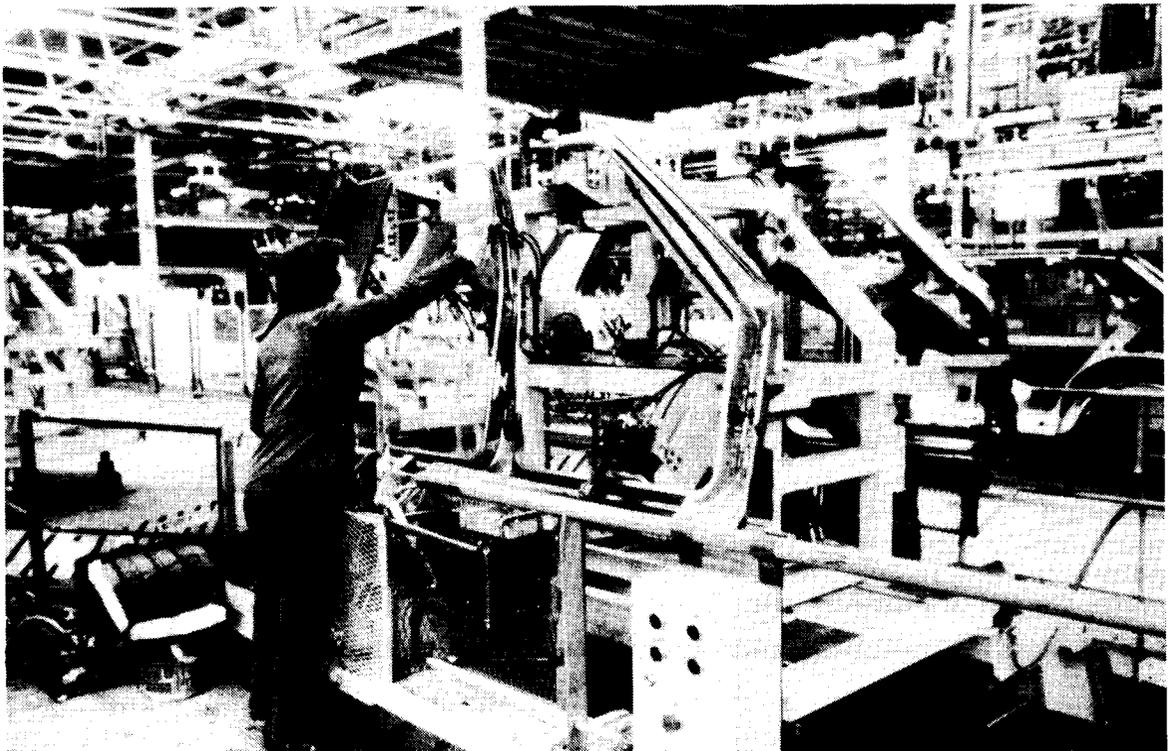
*Antonella, the first worker I interviewed at gate #30, was pretty, with long straight hair and dark eyes. She wore fashionably tailored jeans*

*and a shirt and tended to stare down at the ground through her large-framed glasses. She considered each question seriously and answered without reserve. Most of her responses were relatively brief and matter-of-fact. As soon as we finished talking, she rushed off to meet friends.*

I'm nineteen years old, the youngest of five children. My parents and brothers and sisters were all born in Sardinia. I was born here in Turin. My father immigrated in 1959. He worked as a plumber. He's retired now, with heart trouble.

I grew up here in Mirafiori near the factory. I finished junior high school and then studied for a year to be an administrative secretary. I quit school when I was sixteen. Then I spent two years unemployed or working different jobs for short periods of time. I worked as a saleswoman and as a secretary.

I always said I'd rather starve than work at Fiat. But finally, it was the only way I could make a little money and get papers. On all my



other jobs, I didn't have work papers.\* I didn't come to Fiat because I wanted to.

I've been in the factory for five months. My job is to finish one of the parts from the gears of a grinder. The work isn't hard, but it's monotonous. I'm on my feet for eight hours. The machine uses oil and water, so I breathe fumes all day. The machines are old and dangerous. You can get your hands caught. They're always saying that they'll adjust the machines. They talk and talk, but as far as doing anything goes — nothing.

I really hope to find something else to do. I always say I'm just passing through. I plan to study some more to get a diploma. I'd like to find a job as a secretary. Going to work every day here is ugly. It's this way for all the young people. It's the environment; it's dark and smelly. I can't wait to get out every day.

There aren't any other young women in my department. So when I came in, I was something new. The men tried to flirt with me and pestered me. Now they're used to me.

There's been an invasion of young people in the factory, and there's a gap between the old and young, different ideas. It's the same way in other places too. I don't talk with the other workers. There's no possibility of a dialogue. The only person I've made friends with is Gianni. He's more my age. At first I felt very isolated in the factory. It's a little better now.

The other women are all older. They've been at Fiat for about ten years. With the women, there's a little more to say, but they've been at Fiat so long that they've become like the men, a little vulgar. I don't want that to happen to me.

I joined the union my first week. It's a useful thing. When you need something, you can go

\*Not having work papers (called a *libretto*) is equivalent to being "off the books." Workers without papers are unprotected by national labor law and most often receive lower wages and few, if any, benefits. (See note on *lavoro nero*, page 00.)

ask the delegate. They can help you. When I first came in, I didn't know anything.

I go out on strike. The struggles are right and just. You have to improve conditions. I went on

I don't understand anything about politics. I'm not interested. I've always stayed outside. Perhaps it's a mistake. The way things are now, you have to try to understand something. The struggles of the past helped those who work now, and my struggles will help those who come later. The struggles here at Fiat are politics that touch me directly, much more than party politics. The contract negotiations interest me because I'm here. They wouldn't otherwise.

Terrorism is wrong. To get to the point of killing each other, that's wrong. People are afraid now because of the terrorism. It's become an everyday thing.

During my free time, I go around with my friends. I have a boyfriend. There's dancing and movies. There are enough things to do. There are a lot of drugs and people dying from drugs. It doesn't serve any purpose. They do it because they're dissatisfied. First of all, there's this problem of work. They need something to do. For me, I just hope that Fiat will be a short experience.



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## MARISA

*Marissa, a tall, slim woman with unusually dark hair, eyes, and skin, looked a little older than her thirty-two years. She was frank, laughed easily, and never stopped exchanging quips with the factory council delegate.*

I immigrated from the Veneto region ten years ago. Before I came to Turin, I worked as a maid for a family. I did that from the time I was fifteen until I was nineteen. Then I did *lavoro nero*\* knitting sweaters for three years. There were no factories in the Veneto then. My mother had already moved here, then my sisters. So finally I left too.

I've been at Fiat for nine and a half years. I spent two years on the assembly line, and since then I've been doing individual work, and I'm good at it. But working at Fiat is bad — the monotony, repetition, alienation after a while. And it's not safe. There're no guards on some of the machines. Some of them are from the Marshall Plan. They still have the plaques that say *Dono dagli Americani agli Italiani per ricostruire l'Europa* (gift from the Americans to the Italians to rebuild Europe).

There's no way out but working at Fiat. One salary isn't enough to support a family. I'm married and have an eight-year-old son. We live in north Turin, about forty minutes from here. I have to pay for a private school for my son. It's a Catholic school. They keep him from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. The bosses talk about the absenteeism of women in the factory, but who can take care of

\**Lavoro nero* is illegal manufacturing work that is off the books and unprotected by the national labor laws. It is often put-out work from larger firms done in very small shops or in the home. The wages are extremely low and no benefits are paid. The chronic scarcity of full-time jobs forces millions of Italians — especially women and young people — into *lavoro nero*.

your kids if they get sick?

Many things have changed in the factory. There was much more repression before. Now the union is more effective. The factory is better now because of the young people. They woke up the old people a little. The workers who come into the factory now have things better. Some people say they have privileges, but I think that's wrong. I like these young people. The older ones, the ones who have been here twenty years, are set in their ways. When they got a little liberty, they were scared.

The young people feel lost, out of place in the factory. They have always lived with their families, and they've gone to school for years. The factory is a completely different thing for them.

There's not much *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers' Autonomy)\* at Mirafiori, or at least not in my department. But there're many of them at the Rivalta plant. What they say is crazy. They're not terrorists. They don't know what they want. They say crazy things like "Let's break the machines so that the bosses will have less to eat."

Before, there were very few women in the factory. But even now, the women aren't really organized. There are a few small groups; not much yet. The older women live in their own little worlds. The younger women struggle. We have the same rights as men, but it's all on paper. The men pass from one category into a higher one more easily than the women. I like my work, but there isn't any place for me to go.

\**Autonomia Operaia* is an "area" of the political spectrum that took shape in the late 1970s in Italy. It is made up in large part of young people — workers, students, the unemployed — who consider themselves revolutionaries and reject or are very critical of the organized political parties and the unions. They sometimes form collectives in factories, neighborhoods, or schools. Some of those affiliated advocate mass armed struggle (but not terrorism) in Italy in this period.

I'm at the third level of five after ten years! Any man who had done my work the way I have would be in a higher category. If a woman gets ahead, the men go around saying she winked at the supervisor. I'm very much in agreement with feminism — a reasonable feminism, not bra burning.

Now I participate in the marches and rallies. I don't just go home when there's a strike. A lot of workers strike because they're embarrassed to be the only ones working, or they're afraid of the reaction of the other workers if they don't go out. Right now, I'm not in the union. I argued with one of the unionists last year and didn't renew my card. But next year, I'll probably renew. I'm not in a political party either. But I'm a leftist, without a doubt.

I came from a patriarchal family. We were landowners in Veneto. We came out of the Fascist era. This had an influence on our ideas. But there's been a gradual shift to the left for me. It just took me a little longer. I saw injustices, and I began to change. Now if anyone tries to get away with something, I protest.

I'm Catholic. There's no contradiction between religion and left politics. The farther you are to the left, the more you are Christian. The Church is a bigger contradiction than left Catholics. I haven't been to communion for ten years, but I base my ideas on the Gospel. If being Christian means being a Christian Democrat\*, then we're lost! The Christian Democratic Party kills people, marginalizes people, steals.

I believe in an afterlife. If I thought that this

\*The Christian Democratic Party (DC) is Italy's largest party (with about thirty-eight percent of the vote). It has dominated every national government since 1948. The DC comprises many factions, but its primary political orientation is center-right. The party has built up an elaborate patronage system since the war, and reigns over much of Italy's state-controlled industry.

life on earth was the only life we had, I'd shoot myself tomorrow or I'd become a terrorist!

### AN OLDER WORKER

*At the end of my interview with Marisa, the two of us and the factory council delegate drove about a half-mile around the Mirafiori complex to gate #28, where an argument had broken out between an independent trucker and some Fiat workers. The trucker was furious — shouting and gesturing — because he wanted to unload his truck and get going. Groups of workers had been blocking the gate all day, allowing no vehicles or materials to enter or leave the factory.*

*This type of factory "occupation" was one of the union's tactics for disrupting production during the contract negotiations with Fiat. The company counterattacked by taking the union to court for violent and unacceptable practices.*

*Shortly after we arrived at #28, the disgruntled trucker — who claimed he supported the workers' strike but just didn't see why he had to suffer from the situation — drove off, and I interviewed one of the workers blocking the gate. He was a grey-haired man in his early fifties. We talked until his shift of "occupiers" had to return to the factory. He was extremely cordial and willing to talk but preferred not to give his name.*

I was born in the city of Treviso, in the Veneto, but I immigrated to Biella near Turin before the war in 1940. I worked in the textile industry for fourteen years and then I got a job at Fiat. I've been at Fiat for twenty years.

I don't belong to a political party. I've been in the union, though, since 1945, in the CGIL\*. I've always collaborated with the union. When

\*The *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* is the largest of Italy's three trade union confederations. The CGIL has traditionally been close to the Italian Communist party.

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they call a strike, I always go along. I've never challenged union policies. The struggles are for the workers, not for the bosses. The union is for us. Perhaps the union makes mistakes, but I personally haven't seen any.

The struggles have changed conditions in the factory, but too much has changed. The positive part is that conditions are better. What is worse is that productivity has gone down; there's less satisfaction in work. I used to be satisfied with my work, but now there's an atmosphere of violence and an I-don't-give-a-damn attitude about work. I'm retiring next year, but as far as I'm concerned, unless something really changes, the factory can't go on like this.

There's violence even inside the factory — between the workers, between the supervisors and the workers. Before, the supervisor commanded, and the workers followed. Now the supervisors aren't in control. They're afraid. You can't work when it's like this. Before, the worker was oppressed too much. The supervisors were dictators. Now it's switched around completely. It's gone too far. The workers got a little freedom, and they've exploited it.

It will be difficult to get back to normal times. There has to be a political solution. The bosses have to understand that people don't have enough money. You can't stop workers from striking until they get more. Now, if your wife doesn't work, you can't live.

The younger people don't want to work. They've been unemployed too long. The system is wrong. Young people should go to work right away. Instead they want an easy life. We older workers accept orders; we obey. These young people don't. There's no communication between us.

It's up to the political system to change things around. If I could, I would vote for the party in power, the Christian Democrats. I

would vote for them if they would begin to change the direction of the country. But they won't. Only the Left parties will change things.

SANDRA

*Of all the people I interviewed that month in Turin, I probably think back most often to Sandra, a twenty-three-year old worker at the Rivalta plant. We spoke one Saturday morning at the Communist party headquarters in Orbassano, a dormitory town just five minutes from the factory.*

*Driving toward Orbassano, past the outskirts of Turin and then across fields, the Alps come into view. They rise abruptly at the distant edge of the plain. The sweep of that panorama is striking, unbroken. Then you pass under an unexpected highway bridge bearing a gargantuan version of Fiat's deep blue and white logo. The sign seems to look down over and claim the entire territory.*

*Before the Rivalta plant was built in 1967, Orbassano was a tiny village of cobble-stone streets. Once the plant opened, the town's population swelled four-fold. Yet aside from the new apartment buildings, parking lots, and a huge supermarket, not much has come to Orbassano. The local PCI headquarters just behind a modern pizza restaurant is one of the very few social gathering places. Inside, there is usually a group of people running off a leaflet on the old mimeograph machine or sitting in a circle of chairs talking politics. Just about everyone I met at the headquarters worked at Fiat.*

*One of the two party functionaries at Orbassano had arranged the interview with Sandra. She came with her seventeen-month-old son, Marcello, who toddled around the office while we spoke. Sandra was separated from her husband, and according to the PCI functionary, she had recently been coming to*

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*the headquarters with a young man who belonged to the party. He was there that day, quiet but friendly, playing with Marcello and waiting for the interview to end.*

*Sandra had long, light brown hair which she kept pushing away from her eyes with a slow gesture. Her profile was classically elegant. She wore a dress and stockings. At first, Sandra's voice shook, and she had difficulty finding words. Then gradually she lost her self-consciousness and spoke easily, her eyes often filling with tears.*

*It was not common at that moment in Italy to meet someone like Sandra, who was coming to political awareness with such apparently unconflicted optimism. There was none of the bitterness or anger of so many of the young people who had grown up in the 1970s. Even her joining the Italian Communist party, although not anomalous for someone her age, was less qualified or ambivalent. Something about Sandra — the freshness of her political commitment, her earnestness perhaps — made her particularly engaging. She seemed determined, strong, and yet also fragile.*

I've been at Fiat for four and a half months. It's really a new thing for me. Before I worked as a saleswoman. That work gave me more responsibility, and it was more interesting. But I felt excluded from another type of social life. When you do that kind of work, you aren't part of a class. My father, for example, worked in a factory, and he passed his experiences as a worker on to me. We were a proletarian family.

I wanted to study, but I only went through junior high school. Now I feel as though I don't have the words I need. It's hard for me to express myself. But my parents couldn't afford to let me study. So I went to work, one job after another. I couldn't find anything that gave me satisfaction.

I worked in an interior design store. Perhaps

if I could have been in a bigger place, it would have been O.K. But this store was a small, isolated world. I felt terrible whenever I would see a political march pass by the store. I knew there were problems and injustices in my job, but I had no one to ally with. I felt impotent. No one could help me because I was alone.

I was exploited on my job. I was only a "little girl" who helped. I did some decorating work, but mostly I sold things and just helped around the store. When there were design exhibitions, I had to work until eleven at night without taking a break to eat, and I wasn't even paid for it.

After a while, I began to argue with my boss. One day, there was a national storeworkers' strike, and I called to say I was going out on strike. My boss said, "What are you talking about?" So I just answered, "It's my work category." Then I began to refuse to do extra things. When I got married, they tried to fire me. I read over my contract and showed them that I couldn't be fired. I stayed on, but no one would talk to me, and they isolated me. They sent me to their other store and didn't turn on the heat. It was in the middle of winter, and I had to wear an overcoat and gloves. That kind of thing went on for seven months. Finally I quit. I was pregnant at that time.

After the baby was born, I was on the government placement list for the unemployed. I wanted a job, and Fiat was hiring. The idea of working at Fiat didn't displease me, but it all happened just by chance. Fiat called me and a friend of mine at the same time. We had our interviews and physical examinations, and when they said we were hired, we started hugging each other! I don't even know why. We were euphoric.

I work in the shop where they assemble the car doors. My job is to put a support bar inside the door. The handles are attached to this bar, and then it's welded. It's heavy work; I'm getting muscles in my arms! It's the heaviest

work on the line, and we're all women who do it. At the end of the assembly line, there are some men who check over all the work. They say that's a skilled job, but it's not.

We've asked for a system of job rotation for everyone. That way we'd all have experience on different jobs. This would increase our skills and raise our job category. We'd also be able to share the lighter work. But the department supervisor didn't want this. It was even hard to get the women to go along with the idea. They want to stay where they are. They say it's O.K. with them. A few of us decided to talk to the supervisor. He accepted our idea in part. So now there's job rotation except for the final checking. There's absolutely nothing difficult about the work at Fiat. You could learn any job in a couple of hours except the machine maintenance and repair.

Women are oppressed in many ways, even in the family. But a lot of the women at Fiat never rebel; some of them don't even realize things

are bad. Women are still inferior in the factory. There's good will on the part of some of the men workers, the comrades, but with the bosses, it's different. The woman/boss relationship is the one that's existed for centuries. The bosses have power, and they make you feel inferior. They almost make fun of you. One of them always comes up to me and says, "Signora, how *are* you?"

When there's a strike, some women don't know what to do because there's this "intimate" relationship between them and management. Women have to feel free of this, and then we will be able to work together. If Fiat has hired a lot of women lately, there's a reason for it. They think it's easier to control us.

The assembly line is supposed to do 2,250 doors each day, seven every minute. We never do that much. It's impossible. About 1,800 is the most we can do in one day. The pace is so fast that if you have a cold, you don't even have



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time to blow your nose.

Our shop is new, and it's separated from the others. We work on the Fiat 138, the *Ritmo*. People in other parts of the factory don't know how fast we have to work. The machines are new and very complicated. Fiat's technicians are still learning about the machines. The worker still puts the door piece on the machine, and it's very heavy. But then the machine does the rest. There are mechanical arms that move everything around. Up to a month ago, the machines kept breaking down so we were working less. Now the pace is really bad.

Our factory council delegate has been at Fiat for ten years. He lives very far out, and so he's isolated. He does what he can, but he has sixty people in his work team. That's a lot. We want to elect a woman. I talk a lot with the other women, and they're beginning to feel a little stronger and more willing to strike.

They've asked me to run for delegate. I'd love to do it! But I have personal problems. I have to find an apartment and take care of the baby. So it will be hard for me. It's not easy to find an apartment; there're no vacancies in the buildings near Rivalta. I also need a day-care center. Then there's the problem of the shifts. How can I get up at five in the morning and leave for work with the baby? I asked for the special shift that starts later, but they told me the only job I could have then was cleaning. That would just kill me because I wouldn't be in the shop anymore. I'd be isolated, and the important thing is being with the other workers.

I'm separated from my husband now. He works as an electrical technician for a private company. Things changed after the baby was born. He became distant. When we were first together, he was everything to me. I suppose that wasn't good. Then things changed between us. I need to be loved. I need tenderness. It was difficult, but I feel stronger now.

Fiat is an experience. It's something you have

to do all your life, and that's hard, but you find out about so many problems. You get a class consciousness. One day my supervisor said to me, "Look, I feel the same way you do about things." I said, "What in the world are you talking about? You're in the armchair, and I'm in the shop! You give orders, and I carry them out. If you thought the way I do, you'd be in my place!" Do you know what he answered? "You're too profound. You think too much." I'm not saying you don't have to learn things in the factory. You have to be taught, but it doesn't have to be a power relationship.

In the next ten years, what I would like to see is real equality, with women really active and politically conscious in society. That would be a great step forward. Women have to be side by side. If not, men won't go forward. I'd like to see better working conditions and the possibility of working more serenely.

But ten years aren't very much. We'll need much longer. After thirty years, I hope there won't be this kind of government. We're in chaos. It's crazy, especially in the government. There are elections all the time. The Christian Democrats haven't done much since the War. Things won't change with them.

I joined the Italian Communist party in January. I've always been a sympathizer. My father's in the PCI. He has some old ideas, but he's a committed comrade. I don't think the USSR is communist. It's something different. Italy has a different history. We're more democratic. The PCI has shown that it doesn't want a head-on political clash.

I would have joined the PCI even if I hadn't gone to work at Fiat. I'd been thinking about it for a long time. I ended up sharing my father's ideas, but just by chance. I left my family, and I didn't want to adopt his ideas. I rebelled. I used to clash with him all the time. The political choices are *my* choices. My father's influence has been moral, and I thank him for that. My

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mother isn't at all political. That's my mother's mistake — a woman who stayed home!

Whoever has a class consciousness feels the weight of terrorism now. You feel it as an oppression. In the factory, we have to work with people we don't know. You wonder who's next to you on the line. You don't work well like that. There have been threats against some of the delegates. It's as though the terrorists want to stop your political work. No one really understands what's behind it all.

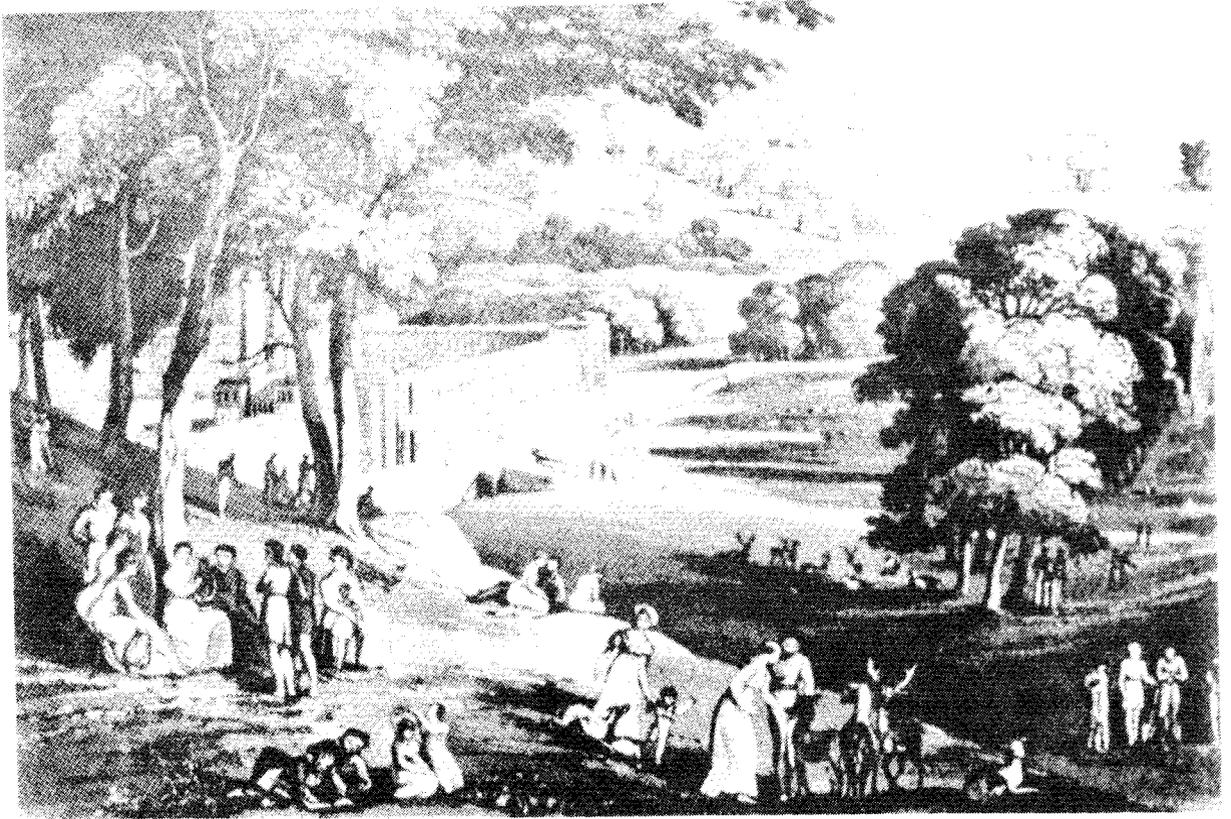
The young people at Fiat aren't bad; they're respectable. But they have another way of seeing life and problems. Some of them rebel because they don't have a class consciousness. These young people have problems and can't

insert themselves into any class. They turn to drugs. They aren't happy with anything. They're in the factory because they need jobs. But I think they hope to change things even if they won't admit it. They participate in the struggles even if they feel excluded and different. We have to give these young people confidence because things can change. It will take time for the workers to control the factory and be autonomous in running it. But someday it will be possible.

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*A model industrial community set in a pastoral landscape, designed by Robert Owen in 1834.*

# LORDS OF CREATION

## Marxism, Feminism and "Utopian" Socialism

Barbara Taylor

Exactly a century ago Engels consigned the ideas and hopes of the first British socialists, the Owenites, to a utopian prehistory of scientific socialism, a period of "crude theories" and "grand fantasies" which had to be superseded by historical materialism before the communist struggle could be waged on a sound, scientific basis. Here I want to suggest that it is time this evaluation was reassessed, and that an important beginning point for this reassessment is one aspect of Owenite policy on which they sharply differed from their Marxist successors: the issue of women's emancipation.

The Owenites' commitment to feminism was part of the general humanist outlook which Engels later identified as a key feature of all utopian thought: the "claim to emancipate... all humanity at once" rather than "a particular class to begin with." The goals were spelled out in detail: with the establishment of a world-wide network of Communities of Mutual Association, all institutional and ideological impediments to sexual equality would disappear, including oppressive marriage laws, privatised households, and private ownership of wealth. The nuclear family (which was held to be responsible not only for the direct subordination of women to men but also for the inculcation of "competitive" ideology) would be abolished and replaced by communal homes and collective child-rearing. This transformation in living conditions would allow a new sexual division of labor to be introduced: housework ("domestic drudgery") would be performed on a rotational basis (either by women or by children of both sexes) with "the most scientific methods available," leaving women time to participate in all other aspects of community

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life, from manufacturing and agricultural labor to government, office, and educational and cultural activities. With childcare collectivized and all economic pressures removed, marriage would become a matter of "romantic affection" only, to be entered into by mutual agreement and dissolved by mutual choice. Or as one leading socialist feminist told an Owenite congress in 1841, "when all should labor for each, and each be expected to labor for the whole, then would woman be placed in a position in which she would not sell her liberties and her finest feelings. . . ."

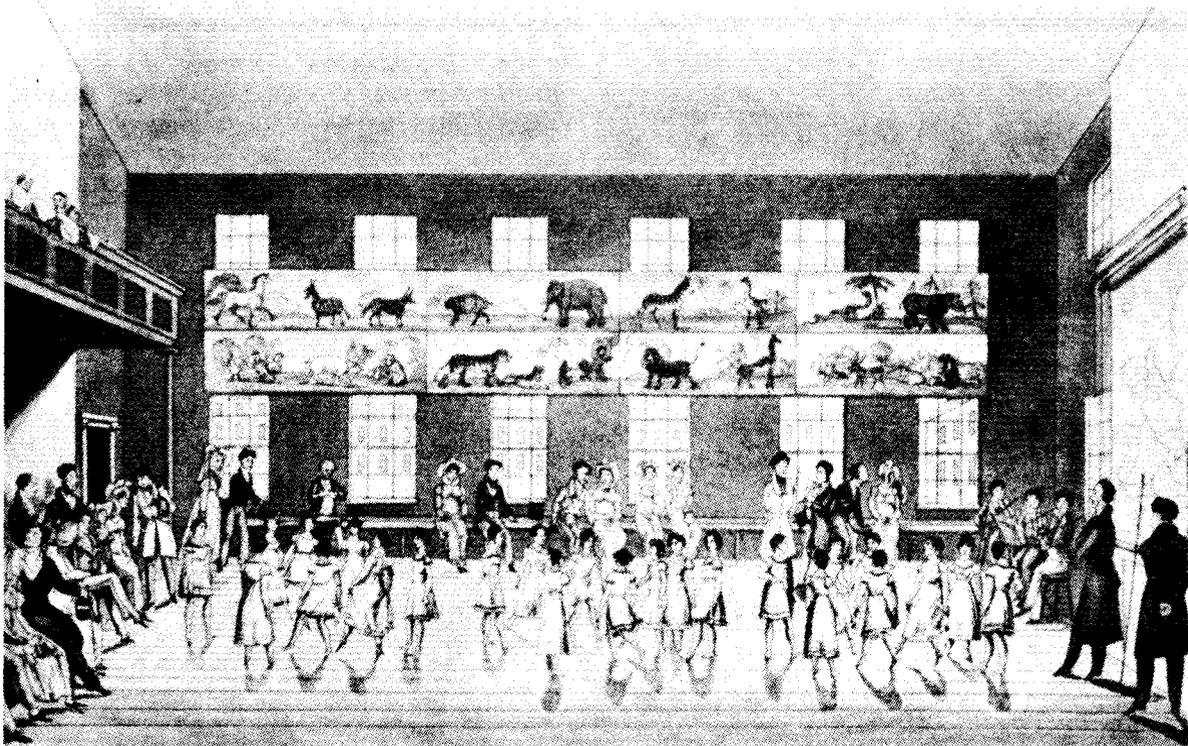
Alongside these revolutionary hopes went a whole series of lesser reform proposals, including demands for immediate changes in the marriage laws to allow civil marriage and divorce, support for the female franchise (the Owenites frequently criticized the Chartists for excluding women from their suffrage demands), and campaigns to extend education for women and girls. Many of the women who agitated for these reforms were lower-middle class, but as the popular base of the movement expanded they were joined by a small number of working-class feminists, particularly during the general union phase of Owenism in 1833-34, when a number of women's trade unions were formed.

These unions sometimes became centers of lively feminist discussion, encouraged by the Owenite newspaper, *The Pioneer*, which opened a "Woman's Page" to carry letters from female trade unionists on subjects like equal pay and the right to equal employment. The problem of sex prejudice within the radical working class itself was a common theme. "The working men complain that the masters exercise authority over them; and they maintain their right to associate, and prescribe laws for their own protection," ran one "Woman's Page" editorial at the height of the trade union agitation, "but speak of any project which will

diminish the authority of the male, or give him an equal, where once he found an inferior, and then the spirit of Toryism awakes. . . ." When it comes to women, another woman wrote, all men are aristocrats, whatever their class. "Can it be right, can it be just. . . that woman should be thus trampled on and despised by those who style themselves the lords of creation?" she demanded, going on to add that in her view:

nothing short of a total revolution in all present modes of acting and thinking among all mankind, will be productive of the great change so loudly called for by [women's] miserable state; and there is certainly no system so. . . likely. . . as that proposed by the benevolent Owen, of community property and equality of persons, in which all are *free and equal*. . . Indeed, I am confident that if women really understood the principles and practice of Socialism, there would not be one who would not become a devoted Socialist.

These were indeed, as Engels later said of the utopian outlook as a whole, "stupendously grand thoughts"; but were they only that? Before going on to consider this question in greater detail, it is worth reminding ourselves that what he and later Marxists offered instead was a wholly different account of gender/class relations, one in which sexism was reduced to a bourgeois property relation, and thereby evacuated from the working-class struggle. The Owenite emphasis on the universal, trans-class character of "male supremacy" (their own term) disappeared, to be replaced with dogmatic assertions of sexual equality within the proletariat, calls for sex unity in the face of the common class enemy, and a repudiation of organized feminism as bourgeois liberal deviationism. The vision of a reorganized sexual and family existence which had been so central to Owenite thinking was increasingly pushed to the far side of a socialist agenda whose major focus became an economic revolution which would automatically liberate the whole of the working class. This is something of a



*The school at New Lanark, Owen's model Scottish mill town which lasted from 1815 to 1825. Owen encouraged dancing and singing, and believed that small children should not "be annoyed with books."*

caricature, since so many staunch sexual egalitarians were to be found in the ranks of later Marxist organizations, but even the bravest of them rarely flouted an orthodoxy in which the Woman Question was subsumed under the Class Question. "It is not women's petty interests of the moment that we should put in the foreground," Clara Zetkin told a cheering audience of fellow Social Democrats in 1896, "our task must be to enroll the modern proletarian woman in the class struggle."

There was more separating these two ways of thinking about women's oppression than merely the alleged gap between an immature, voluntarist utopianism and a mature, scientific socialism. The movement from Owenism to Marxism meant the repudiation of an independent feminist platform within socialist politics. Why was the struggle against sexual

oppression an integral part of the early socialist strategy?

For the Owenites, unlike later Marxist theorists, capitalism was not simply an economic order dominated by a single, class-based division, but an arena of multiple antagonisms and contradictions, each of them living in the hearts and minds of women and men as well as in their material circumstances. The very term which they used to describe this society — "the competitive system" — indicated the style of their critique, which moved freely between an economic analysis of workers' exploitation, a moral condemnation of selfish individualism, and a psychological account of the "dissocial impulses" which were being bred not only in factories and workshops, but in schools, churches, and — above all — in the home where, in the words of William Thompson,



*A parade of trade unionists six miles long culminated in this demonstration of 400,000 people in London in 1834.*

“the uniform injustice... practiced by man towards woman, confounds all notions of right and wrong...”

Every family is a center of absolute despotism where of course intelligence and persuasion are quite superfluous to him who has only to command to be obeyed: from these centers, in the midst of which all mankind are now trained, spreads the contagion of selfishness and the love of domination through all human transactions...

The psychological underpinnings of the competitive system, in other words, were habits of dominance and subordination formed within the most intimate areas of human life. The

enslavement of women by men deformed human character and strangled human potential to the point where social hierarchy became generally accepted as both natural and inevitable. Having been trained to mastery within the family, men took this self-seeking mode into public life as well: *Homo Economicus*, atomized, competitive individual at the center of bourgeois culture, was the product of a patriarchal system of psycho-sexual relations.

Building an alternative to this crippling style of social existence would involve not merely the transfer of economic power from one class to another, but a wholesale transformation of per-

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sonal life in which all "artificial" divisions of wealth and power would be supplanted by the organic bonds of communal fellowship. Within each cooperative community women and men would learn new ways of living and loving together. This project, which seemed so "phantastical" to later Marxists, was absolutely central to the early socialist strategy. For how could "social sentiment" defeat the "competitive spirit" unless competition was uprooted from the most intimate areas of life? "Where does freedom begin, unless in the heart?" For the Owenites, like the earlier Puritan reformers and all the Romantics of the period, it was the establishment of a correct order in sexual relations which was the key to general moral reorganization. Communism found its first and foremost expression in the liberated male-female relation. Feminism was therefore not merely an ancillary feature of the socialist project, but one of its key motivating impulses.

Why did Owenism develop in this way? If, as I have suggested, later Marxist thinkers took a different view of the Woman Question, how and why did this difference arise?

Owenism developed in a period of rapid social transition, when both class and gender relations were being sharply transformed by new patterns of work and family life. Most early socialists were craftworkers or small tradespeople for whom the 1830s and 1840s represented a period of extended economic and social crisis: the crisis which produced a modern working class. At the most general level, early socialism represented a systematic struggle against these critical developments, and an attempt to reroute them in a new, progressive direction. Unlike later socialist movements, in which working people organized as proletarians, the Owenites were organizing against the process of proletarianization, believing that through economic cooperation and the remolding of human character they

could effectively short-circuit capitalist social relations.

But if in the 1830s plans to establish a new world outside the range of capitalist control still seemed a viable option, by the 1880s, when the second phase of British socialism began, there was far less "outside" to go to, and working class organizations which developed within the boundaries of their proletarian status had their ability to see past those boundaries correspondingly reduced. The experience of living within capitalism wore down the socialist imagination, and the effects of this erosion were felt at the theoretical level as well. "At any point after 1850," Edward Thompson has written, "Scientific Socialism had no more need for Utopias (and doctrinal authority for suspecting them). Speculation as to the society of the future was repressed, and displaced by attention to strategy." (Postscript to *William Morris*, 1976, p. 787.) The result for British revolutionary Marxists was a systematic denial of the necessary visionary element within socialist consciousness, ending all too often in what William Morris described as a "sham, Utilitarian Socialism" divested of any genuine libertarian aims, or what his twentieth century disciple, Thompson, has characterized as:

the whole problem of the subordination of the imaginative utopian faculties within the later Marxist tradition: its lack of a moral self-consciousness or even a vocabulary of desire, its inability to project any images of the future or even its tendency to fall back in lieu of these upon the utilitarian's earthly paradise — the maximization of economic growth. (Ibid, p. 792)

The decline of a genuine feminist vision within British revolutionary movements was one measure of this loss. As the older dream of emancipating "all humanity at once" was displaced by the economic struggle of a single class, so women and women's interests were pushed to one side. This occurred in two ways.

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First, the strategic shift away from the struggle against proletarianization to the proletarian struggle meant the political marginalization of all those who were not, scientifically speaking, proletarians. If the Owenites had cast their net too wide in hoping to attract "all classes of all nations" to the cooperative cause, Marxism, with its insistence that there was only one route to communism and only one group who would walk it — organized productive workers — tightened the net to the point where only a minority of women were drawn into it, even on a class basis. When combined with a low level of female employment in the most highly-organized industrial sectors, this made the fight for socialism seem pretty much a masculine affair. Women Marxists who challenged this situation did so not on the grounds that there was a separate women's cause to be fought alongside and within the class movement, but that women (at least working women) had a right to stand alongside their menfolk in the common cause. The Woman Question which displaced earlier socialist-feminism within late nineteenth century Marxism was concerned not with the question of how to make a revolution which would free women as a sex, but how to shape women for the class revolution. "... What do women have to do?" Eleanor Marx demanded in 1892, "we will organize — not as 'women' but as *proletarians*... for us there is nothing but the working-class movement."

Second, this contraction of the socialist struggle pushed a whole range of issues beyond the boundaries of revolutionary politics. Since it was no longer the total reformation of women and men which was at stake, but simply the reorganization of productive relations, all questions connected to reproduction, marriage, or personal existence became converted from central problems of strategy to merely private matters. "I have been told that at the meetings arranged for reading and discussing with

working women, sex and marriage problems come first." Lenin scolded Clara Zetkin in their famous dialogue. "I could not believe my ears when I heard that. The first state of proletarian dictatorship is battling with the counterrevolutionaries of the whole world... and active communist women are busy discussing sex problems." Not all British revolutionaries, even Leninist ones, shared this attitude, but those who held out against it tended to be a beleaguered minority, particularly in this century. It is thus not surprising to find that when socialist-feminists began to organize again in the 1970s, it was with the slogan "the personal is political" that they mounted their first challenge to the male-dominated Left. The issues had never disappeared; it was just that the voices which could raise them had been long suppressed.

The present must always condescend to the past, and from our vantage point there is indeed a great deal in the thinking of the pre-Marxian socialists which seems theoretically naive and strategically implausible. It is not necessary to deny this, however, in order to suggest that the wholesale dismissal of utopian socialism by later Marxist socialists revealed certain limitations in their own thinking as well: a narrowing of both means and ends which has had serious consequences for the libertarian cause in general and for the liberation of women in particular. Socialist-feminists look back to the Owenites, then, not out of nostalgia for a transition long past, but as a way of tracing the beginnings of a democratic-communist project which is still very much our own, and with which we are still struggling to redefine the ends of modern Marxist movements. For, after all, what count as utopian answers depends on who is raising the questions.

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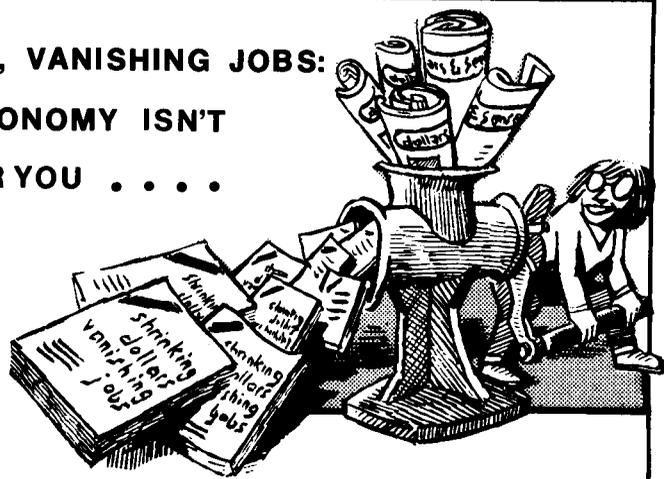
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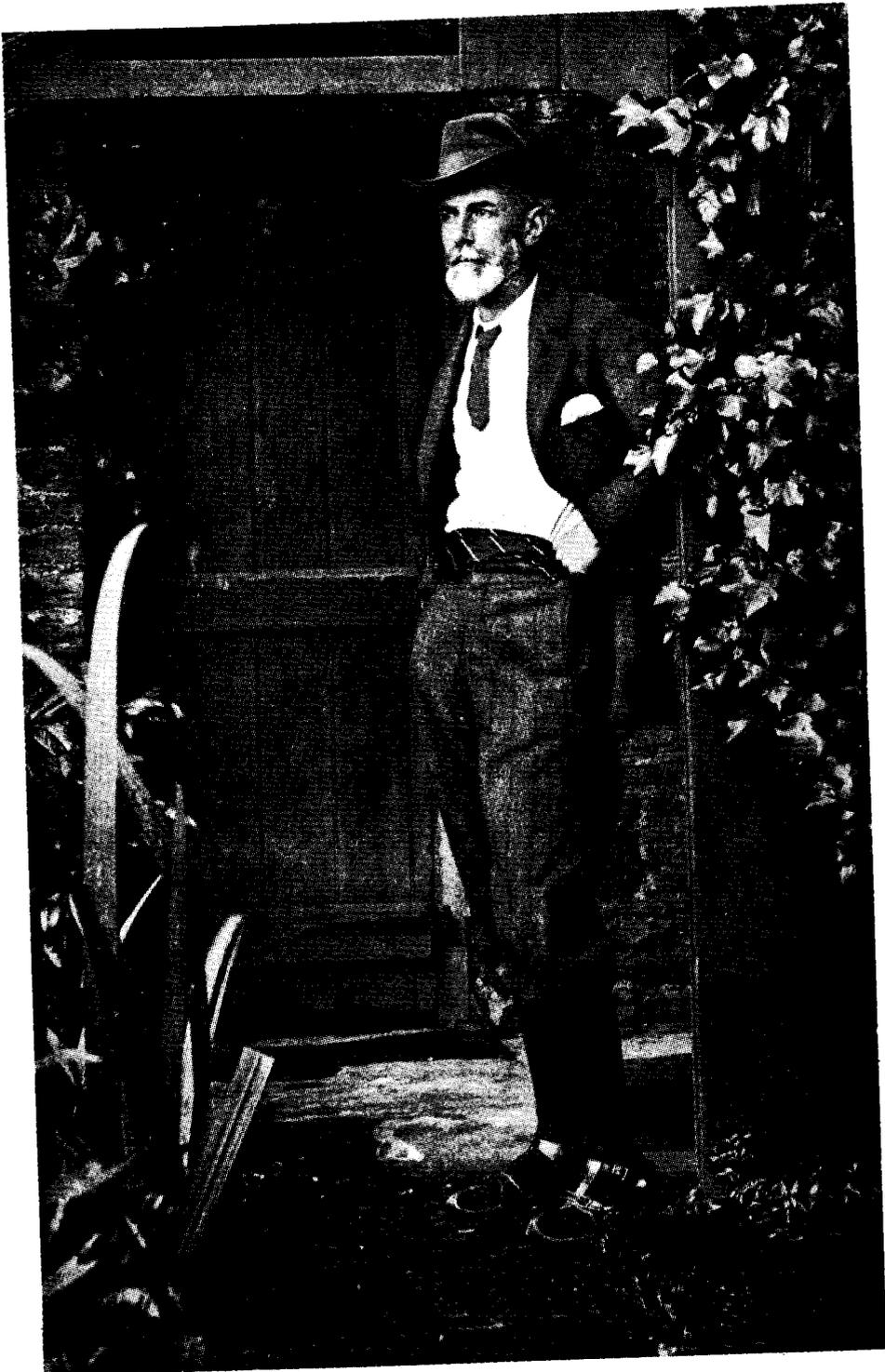
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*Edward Carpenter in 1905.*

# IN SEARCH OF EDWARD CARPENTER

Sheila Rowbotham

The pub at Millthorpe, near Sheffield, was deserted with a “For Sale” notice outside when I went there with friends on a grey March day in 1976. Just down the road there was “Carpenter House,” where Edward Carpenter had lived from the early 1880s until he moved to Guildford in 1922.

Visiting Millthorpe, Dronfield, and Totley was a geographical locating of a group of radicals, socialists, and feminists who had lived in the area or visited while Carpenter was there. I have been and still am struggling with the more complicated social, political, and personal placing of this group. They have had a curiously persistent fascination for me ever since I read a review of a biography of Havelock Ellis by Arthur Calder-Marshall when I was in my teens in the late 1950s. Carpenter, socialist and writer on sexual liberation, feminism and homosexuality; Ellis, pioneer sex psychologist; and Olive Schreiner, the South African feminist author of *Story of an African Farm*, have all become important to me at different times — rather like the kind of closeness you have with old friends. There is the waxing and waning of intimacy with the security of knowing they are always around. The friendship is getting on for being a twenty-year relationship, which is longer than with any of my real friends. I’ve slowly introduced myself to more and more of their circle until it has become like having an address book of the past. So as I walked on that foggy March day down the road to Millthorpe I had to pinch myself to remember that I wasn’t going to find them sitting there. It is one of the sadnesses of history for me — this loving intimacy with ghosts.

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... It was the book review which had started the whole process. I was certainly interested in sex as I was in ecstasy and history, though unsure quite what it was. Perhaps this book would explain. So I pursued Ellis and the business of getting the book about him with great resolve. My mother, already accustomed to strange requests, bought me the biography for my sixteenth birthday. She did not know who Havelock Ellis was, but a friend of hers did, and the friend let out a squeal of horror at my mother's innocence in buying me such a dirty book. My mother was a stubborn and thwarted lover of freedom and gave me Calder-Marshall's *Havelock Ellis* nonetheless. I read it, as I read everything then, searching for a total explanation of myself, life, death, and the universe.

In retrospect it is not a very good biography of Ellis, but at the time it was revelatory. There were funny things in it about the relations between mothers and sons, the connections between urination and sexual pleasure, about infant sexuality, and about lesbianism. It was the first time I realized that there was a psychological view of the world. Perhaps it seems remarkable that so many years after Freud it was possible to grow up in the English small-business northern middle class innocent of Oedipus. But it was so. Later I found a paperback edition of Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* and laboriously toiled through it in some bewilderment.

The picture of Olive Schreiner when she met Ellis was recognizable. There was a mixture of physical defiance and submission. You could feel her body pressing against her formal Victorian clothes, with no choice but to accept this outer confinement. When I read about her I felt close to her. Perhaps it was her loneliness and spiritual travail, or her masochism or her idealism, or her vulnerability, or her will — I wonder. When I read *Story of an African Farm*

I remember feeling floods of adolescent identification. Out there long ago and far away someone had felt like me and escaped. There must be others. Somewhere over the rainbow I might meet them...

You are fickle at that age, and I deserted Ellis and Schreiner for Kerouac, Ginsberg, and the Beats. I suppose I was rebelling by then rather than escaping because sixteen to seventeen is an eternity of a year, and the whole world changed when I left school. From seventeen to nineteen I was too busy to remember Ellis and Schreiner, and by the last year at university I was apparently matter of fact, settling the world as a Marxist, shedding the romantic chrysalis of ecstasy, but tending also toward dialectical loops of passion in the midst of order.

Edward Carpenter I had yet to meet, really. He hadn't registered at all. But I was beginning to read about the history of the socialist movement. Initially this was the way I could understand marxism: as a relationship between me and people in the past. I wanted to know how all these people came to their ideas and what happened to them when they acted upon them. It's a terrible way to think; it means you are never satisfied.

From reading about Carpenter I know there had once been a strange kind of socialism which had been different from that of the Bolsheviks. But that was as far as it went. I drew back from the more personal part of Edward Carpenter's life out of a kind of shyness — a restraint I've come to recognize, on my desire to communicate immediately and directly all at once. It is partly a puritan suspicion of whatever most delights me; a fear of my own fascinations. It is also some knowingness about experiences I cannot stretch toward. Whatever the reason, I felt I had no business to be there peeping and prying...

Carpenter came from an upper-middle class family in Brighton. His father was radical in

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politics and Edward Carpenter was brought up with the tolerant tenants of Broad Church Anglicanism. Instead of consenting to a conventional future he left a safe position as a curate in Cambridge to go and teach in University Extension in the early 1870's. Carpenter had already questioned some aspects of Victorian society while he was still at university. He moved in radical and feminist circles, was influenced by republicanism, and was troubled by class conflict, by the Commune, and by the First International. Undoubtedly aware of the pressure for women's colleges at Cambridge, he was a believer in higher education for women on a wider scale. Like other radicals of his day, Carpenter was interested in land nationalization. But most immediately, Carpenter was unhappy about the social relations of people of his class. As a homosexual he was forced by the restraints of Victorian society to conceal his feelings. In the writing of Walt Whitman he felt a recognition of open, loving friendships. Carpenter wanted not just a political democracy but a personal democracy of feeling.

He did not find either in the University Extension Movement. The railway wanderings of the extension lecturer were exhausting, the landladies' cooking was indigestible, and all too often the structure of the Extension Movement reflected the class hierarchies of the northern towns. By the late 1870's Carpenter was in urgent need of a calmer rhythm to this life. Through two of his students, a scythe-maker called Albert Fearnhough and Charles Fox, a small farmer, he went to live in the countryside at Bradway. He stayed for a time at Totley, at St. George's Farm, formerly a communal farming venture backed by John Ruskin. A friend of Carpenter's, George Pearson, had taken the lease after the communitarian group disintegrated, and worked the farm with a Christian socialist, John Furniss. In 1882

Carpenter moved to Millthorpe. Originally a rural retreat, the house was to become a center for dissidents of all varieties.

Carpenter finished with lecturing and wrote a long Whitmanesque poem called "Towards Democracy." In the early 1880's he moved toward socialism — influenced particularly by Hyndman's *England for All* — and it was he who provided the money to launch the Social Democratic Federation paper, *Justice*. He also became involved with the Fellowship of the New Life, a group concerned with inner spiritual change as well as with external social relationships. Through the Fellowship Carpenter met Havelock Ellis, who was still under the influence of James Hinton and was beginning his empirical studies of sexual behavior. He also met Olive Schreiner, then involved in a long emotional love for Ellis, whose sexual inhibition meant that the love could never be physically fulfilled. When Ellis eventually married another member of the Fellowship, Edith Lees, they lived apart and did not have sexual intercourse, because Edith Lees was physically attracted to women. Ellis, Schreiner, and Lees, along with the Henry and Kate Salts and G.B. Shaw, Charles G. Ashbee, Lowes Dickenson, and later E.M. Forster, were frequent visitors to Millthorpe. As the socialist movement took roots in the North, working-class visitors came too. Alf Mattison and Tom Maguire came from Leeds, others came from the Midlands and of course from Sheffield.

Carpenter had helped form the socialist club in Sheffield. In the 1880's he spoke at meetings, bicycling to the smaller towns nearby. It was a very sociable politics. He used to play the harmonium at socialist meetings, and he collected socialist songs in a book called *Chants of Labour*. This was a period when the socialist movement created a whole network of cultural forms. There were cafes, meals for school-children, rambles in the countryside. During

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the 1890's the Clarion cycling club and the Clarion choir continued this tradition.

There were close personal as well as political connections: for example, Carpenter's love for George Hukin, a razor-grinder who tried to unionize the scattered workshops, and the love between Bob Muirhead and James Brown, two members of the Glasgow Socialist League who had settled near Millthorpe.

Carpenter met George Merrill, who was to be his companion for the rest of his life, in the early 1890's. Merrill came from a poor working class family in the slums of Sheffield. He had led a wandering life and had done a variety of jobs. Carpenter's manuscript account of Merrill's life gives a rare and fascinating glimpse into the experiences of a working-class homosexual in the nineteenth century.

Early in 1891 the Socialist club had split and an anarchist-communist grouping appeared. Some of the Sheffield anarchists became involved in the Walsall bomb "plot." A police spy named Coulon came to Sheffield and befriended Fred Charles, an idealistic young anarchist who was attracted to Coulon's desperate enthusiasm for terrorism. Charles was later to be among those imprisoned for designing a bomb for Russian revolutionaries.

Carpenter was friendly with Charles but critical of his politics. He had become increasingly estranged from the Socialist club and the fights within it, partly because of ascendancy of the anarchist group, and partly because a visit to Ceylon and India in 1890-91 had given him a growing interest in Eastern religious experience. This, combined with his writing and his relationship with George Merrill, meant that he was no longer so active in local politics. He did continue to speak for socialist groups all over the country, and after the Independent Labour Party was formed he went again on propaganda outings, particularly to mining communities. In the 1900's he sup-

ported the Syndicalists, read the Guild socialists' *The New Age*, and welcomed the suffrage movement. He continued to wear his sandals, take his sun baths, and work in a shed by the brook in the garden.

Carpenter's advocacy of reducing needs by "simplification of life" was undoubtedly serious and practically worked out. He outlined his ideas in an 1886 essay published in *England's Ideal* the following year. The essay carefully explained how much it cost to maintain a person and how having varnished floors upstairs and stone on the ground floor could save housework. In the context of the late-Victorian paraphernalia of large households with elaborate rituals and a complete chasm between life upstairs and life downstairs, this streamlining of living was startling. "Simplification of life" was at once a moral pursuit, aiming at a better life, and a practical one — it was the means of ensuring some independence from the domestic labor of others. Carpenter's attempt to practice his own message startled his contemporaries. It was, after all, unusual in the 1880's and 1890's to find a middle-class man who wandered the streets in sandals and broad hats copied from the American poet Walt Whitman, who tried to live intimately with people of a lower social station, and who combined intellectual and manual work.

He was unusual too in the variety of intellectual strands which combined in his person. Among those who influenced him were Shelley, Whitman, Thoreau, Ruskin, Lewis Morgan, Olive Schreiner, William Morris, Hyndman, Buddha, Havelock Ellis, J.H. Noyes, Karl Heinrich, Ulrichs, Richard von Kraft Ebing, and Albert Moll. It was a motley crew, some of whom would have been disconcerted to find themselves in the same company. Carpenter not only responded to socialism in the 1880's, he went on to challenge other aspects of Victorian orthodoxy as well. He

questioned the mechanical basis of scientific thinking and Darwinism. If his conclusions were vague and mystical he was at least conscious of a real problem: how to connect the social control of the external world with the needs of human biology. He was aware that much of what his culture saw as "natural" was not natural in other cultures. He pointed out that the same behavior was regarded as criminal in some cultures but not in others.

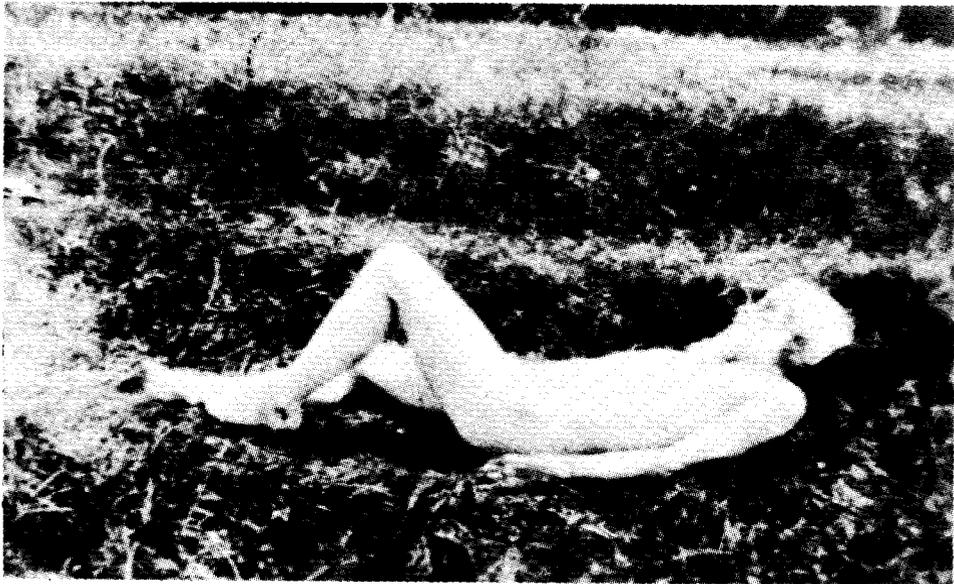
His writings on sexuality which began to appear in the 1890s were consistent with these concerns and with his belief in the virtue of released natural emotion. As in his earlier writings, his main preoccupation was with the theme of separation. Sin is described as "the sundering of one's being" in *Love's Coming of Age*.<sup>1</sup> His writings on the position of women were regarded as shocking in the 1890s but he went even further towards unrespectability when he touched the subject of homosexuality. The contract for *Love's Coming of Age* was abruptly cancelled by Fisher Unwin because of the publisher's fear that a pamphlet on

"Homogenic Love," Carpenter's term for homosexuality, would be included. Carpenter describes the fortunes of this pamphlet in his autobiography *My Days and Dreams*:

I... had only a comparatively small number of copies struck off which were not sold but sent round pretty freely to those who I thought would be interested in the subject or able to contribute views of information upon it. My object in fact was to get in touch with others and to obtain material for future study or publication. Even in this quiet way the pamphlet created some alarm... but it is quite possible the matter would have ended there, if it had not been for the Oscar Wilde troubles. Wilde was arrested in April 1895 and from that moment a sheer panic prevailed over *all* questions of sex and especially of course questions of the "intermediate sex."<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the 1906 edition that *Love's Coming of Age* could include a plea for a freer homosexual as well as heterosexual love.

Carpenter believed that the liberation of women required both economic freedom and a change of women's consciousness. "Too long have women acted the part of mere appendages



*Havelock Ellis sun bathing.*

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to the male, suppressing their own individuality and fostering their self-conceit." It also necessitated "her complete freedom as to the disposal of her sex." The liberation of women was thus economic, social, and sexual. He distinguished between the varied predicaments of the middle-class woman brought up to devote and sacrifice herself to a man, or the working class women who faced exploitation at work and relentless drudgery in the home, and of the prostitute who had to sell her body. His descriptions of their situations still ring true. Undoubtedly his influence at the time came partly from his being such a passionate describer.

Few men again realise or trouble themselves to realise, what a life this of the working housewife is. They are accustomed to look upon their own employment, whatever it may be, as "work" (perhaps because it brings with it "wages"); the woman's they regard as a kind of pastime. They forget what monotonous drudgery it really means, and yet what incessant forethought and care; they forget that the woman has no eight hours a day, that her work is always staring her in the face, and waiting for her, even on into the night; that the body is wearied, and the mind narrowed down "scratched to death by rats and mice" in a perpetual round of petty cares. For not only does civilisation and multifarious invention (including smoke) make the burden of domestic life immensely complex but the point is that each housewife has to sustain this burden to herself in lonely effort.

He calls upon women to declare themselves free, "to insist on her right to speak, dress, think, act, and above all to use her sex as she deems best," and upon "every man who really would respect his counterpart" to encourage women to be free. "Let him never by word or deed tempt her to grant as a bargain what can only be precious as a gift; let him see her with pleasure stand a little aloof, let him help her gain her feet." Carpenter pointed out that the

existing dual standard of morality meant hypocrisy at on side and devastation and degradation at the other.

It was consistent with Carpenter's idealism that he appealed to lofty sentiments rather than to self-interest. He expected people to have the strength to will themselves into freedom. Conservative contemporaries saw the kind of freedom he wanted as synonymous with sexual and social chaos. But he was so confident that the new morality would not be destructive. His idea of sexuality was not synonymous with freedom for sensuality. His note on "Preventative Checks to Population" in *Love's Coming of Age* indicates that he saw physical sexuality dwindling as love became more diffused in society. He retained the Christian division of higher and lower love, spiritual and physical. He also saw masculine and feminine characteristics as fixed, and his views of the women who became feminists reflected this prejudice. In his opinion, among the feminists there were many women whose sexual and maternal "instincts" were not strong. He called them "mannish" in temperament. Some were "homogenic", that is "inclined to attachments to their own, rather than the opposite sex; some are ultra-rationalizing and brain-cultured; to many, children are more of less a bore; to others man's sex-passion is a mere impertinence, which they do not understand, and whose place they consequently misjudge."

These stereotypes of feminism are similar to the fixed ideas he had about women generally. He tended to classify and idealize, presenting the free woman as a kind of Spartan goddess striding athletically and asexually to liberation. These rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity affected his theories not only about women but also about homosexuals. He was influenced by Whitman's poetic assertions of homosexual comradeship as well as by the German writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who

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defined a male homosexual as a person with a female soul enclosed in a male body and a lesbian as someone with a male soul in a female body. Just as he challenged capitalism and civilization, he was also critical of male-dominated culture. So by a peculiar combination of skepticism about dominant cultural values and a theory of fixed gender characteristics, he arrived at a theory of "the intermediate sex" as a superior elite combining the best of both sexes and with a less sensual and more emotional nature than heterosexuals. Here again there were higher and lower types of homosexuals, the lower inclining towards sentimentality.<sup>4</sup> This tendency to stereotype and generalize impressionistically is in direct contrast to his recognition that sexuality takes diverse forms in different societies and that there is an immense potential for individual variation in human sexual activity. Nonetheless, it was while pursuing this schema of higher and lower beings that he stumbled upon the significance of separating sexual pleasure and sex for procreation. While he criticized existing forms of contraception as inconvenient for women, he advocated sustained intercourse without male orgasm as a "preventative check." He followed here not only Eastern religious ideas but a strand of American sexual radicalism which sought new forms of sexuality rather than contraception. In the 1870 J.H. Noyes, the leader of a utopian community in the United States, had advocated "male continence" by the diversion of sperm through the urethra. Similar techniques were suggested in Alice B. Stockham's book *Karezza* in the early 1900s.

Edward Carpenter's courage in asserting the rights of the "intermediate sex" in the 1890s and early 1900s and his interest in sex and society led him into the relatively new fields of anthropology and psychology. In 1911 he published two anthropological studies of

homosexuality. His own homosexuality served as an anonymous case history for Havelock Ellis's studies and was frankly acknowledged in Carpenter's autobiography in 1916. He drew on the ideas of Lewis Morgan and Bebel, characteristically giving the evolutionary anthropological account of the connection between property and power a psychological slant. His theories of psychology based on Ellis, Ulrichs, Kraft Ebing, and Moll, were peppered with his own observations and poetic license. He retained from his Broad Church Anglicanism a rejection of materialism and an Arminian conviction that truth can be attained by many routes. Eastern religious thought seemed to provide an alternative which avoided materialism and the Christian hierarchical dualism of spirit and matter. In the East there seemed to be a place for pleasure without shame and a more easy relationship between mystical ecstasy and physical eroticism than in the West.

Carpenter's eclectic quest made his thought something of a lucky-dip. It is easier to pull bits out than to understand the connections. But his struggle to make these connections was not merely theoretical; it was his whole life. The way he lived was a demonstration of what he thought, and the two are inseparable. It was his cultural stance, rather than his logic that accounted for the considerable influence he enjoyed in his day. In the radical and socialist milieu that he represented, people were unhappy in capitalist society not only because things were unequal but because people were cut off from one another and from their own physical natures. His influence was at its height in the period before the First World War. It was international, going far beyond Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the Midlands. He was still read and discussed in the 1920s; but already in the 1930s, when his friends produced a collection of essays in his memory, his writing and ideas

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appeared a little dated. In the socialist movement he was remembered certainly until the Second World War, and the hymn-like strains of "England Arise" wafted around labor halls and pubs for some years after. I have not heard it since the mid-1960s, when the Young Communist League used to meet in the Dolphin pub at Kings Cross and "England Arise" could be heard along with the "Internationale" and folk songs.

I have become more and more curious about the diversity of Carpenter's influence, and also about the process by which it was dissipated. Finding out about Carpenter — and what became of his attempt to connect personal and sexual relationships and feelings to the struggle to change the external world — is part of a much wider search for a broken revolutionary tradition. I keep finding ways in which the old tradition is relevant to the feminist movement, to sexual politics, and to the evident weaknesses in our understanding of socialism. For instance, I've come across him and Ellis in reading about birth control and feminism; in the early twentieth century Carpenter helped found the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology and a determined young feminist member called Stella Browne gave a talk in 1915 on women's sexuality. Stella Browne, a friend of the American Margaret Sanger, was a campaigner for birth control and abortion in Britain who tried to connect women's sexual self-determination with ideas of workers' control. Both Ellis and Carpenter were read by other young radicals in Greenwich Village who were trying to live by a new morality. In the early twentieth century there was — however implicit — a connection between sexual and personal life and socialism. This connection became more remote after the First World War. Carpenter's links with both D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster provide some clues about how this has happened.

The striking similarities between Carpenter's ideas and Lawrence's have been described by Emile Delavenay in his *D.H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition*.<sup>5</sup> Both men had a horror of capitalism and of its distortion of all human social relationships. The places where they part company are interesting. Most importantly, the ambiguities in Carpenter's thought between mystical experience and social action, between the loss of individuality and the creation of a new elite of "uranians", the intermediate sex



*Edward Carpenter in 1910.*

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which he thought would combine the best of “femininity” and “masculinity,” are resolved by Lawrence in his rejection of the Left, of feminism and of politics. Although there is no evidence that the two men ever met, there was a small group of advanced thinkers in Eastwood in the 1900s, some of whom knew Carpenter, or had read his books or heard him speak, and Lawrence was friendly with some of them.

E.M. Forster did meet Carpenter and acknowledged his influence. In his “Terminal Note” to *Maurice*, Forster wrote that the book “was a direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe. Carpenter had a prestige that cannot easily be understood today.” Forster was drawn to him because “he was a believer in the love of Comrades, whom he sometimes called Uranians. It was this last aspect of him that attracted me in my loneliness.”

He met Carpenter through Lowes Dickenson and saw him briefly as a savior.

It must have been on my second or third visit to the shrine that the spark was kindled and he and his comrade George Merrill combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring. George Merrill also touched my backside — gently and just above the buttocks. I believe he touched most people’s. The sensation was unusual and I still remember it, as I remember the position of a long vanished tooth. It was as much psychological as physical. It seemed to go straight through the small of my back, into my ideas without involving my thoughts. If it really did this it would have acted in strict accordance with Carpenter’s yogified mysticism, and would prove that at that precise moment I had conceived.<sup>5</sup>

There are echoes of Carpenter in Forster’s other works, particularly in *The Longest Journey*.

It has not been an affair of chance, this slow reappearance of Edward Carpenter, Havelock

Ellis, and Olive Schreiner in my life, nor is my fascination with the socialists and anarchists of Sheffield just nostalgia. The women’s movement led me to realize the significance of Carpenter’s writings on feminism and to feel that other people would be interested in *Love’s Coming of Age*. Since then I have found more and more people trying to track down Carpenter, his immediate circle, and the ramifications of his influence. Gloden Dallas became interested in Maguire, Mattison, and Isabella Ford and began finding and listening to people who could remember the early socialist and feminist movements in Leeds. Slowly the interconnections have emerged for me as I’ve listened to her talking. Ann Scott and Ruth First are working on Olive Schreiner, looking both at her feminism and at her role in South African radical politics. Over in America, Linda Gordon has written about Margaret Sanger and sent me copies of letters Sanger wrote to Stella Browne. Jane Lewis, far away in Western Ontario, Canada, has written about the “new feminism.” Keith Nield has written about Carpenter in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. The echoes continue. I learn that Havelock Ellis was being read by South Wales members of the Plebs League, by Glasgow workers in the 1920s, and by a Communist Party branch in the 1930s. Carpenter is remembered by a woman in the Labour Party in Glasgow as one of those “poetic socialists” whose songs she recited at Socialist Sunday School. When you mention Carpenter to people in Sheffield, the all say you should go to talk with Rony Robinson. He seems to have been haunted by the same ghost, for he wrote a play called *Edward Carpenter Lives*.

But I wouldn’t have tried to write about him myself if it had not been for friends I met through the Gay Culture Society at the London School of Economics. They printed a short duplicated pamphlet by Graeme Woolaston,

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now out of print, which discussed his views on homosexuality. He criticized Carpenter's stereotyping of masculine and feminine, and his elitist idealization of the "Intermediate Sex," but showed his significance as a pioneer theorist of homosexuality. So I started a few years ago to write a small pamphlet on Edward Carpenter. The small pamphlet grew and grew. There appears to be no end to it. As I learn more and think more, people begin to show me things I hadn't noticed. Friends in men's groups, for instance, have made me think about Carpenter's rebellion against the notion of what a man of his time was allowed to be, his love for a man called Beck in Cambridge for example, and the influence of Whitman. And talking to people about radical therapy I am beginning to wonder too if all those electric currents and the sensations about the buttocks may not be so odd after all. Carpenter makes sense because of sexual politics — not simply because he wrote about feminism and homosexuality but because he sought a new way of life in which there would no longer be:

the starving of human hearts, the denial of the human body and its needs, the huddling concealment of the body in clothes, the "impure hush" on matters of sex, class-division, contempt of manual labour, and the cruel barring of women from every natural and useful expression of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

I want to find out what it was like to be a socialist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, before the Bolsheviks and before the Labour Party. I want to know what became of the desire to transform all aspects of relationships, and the preoccupation with living the new life in the present as well as the future. I want to learn about the emphasis on a revolutionary culture, that lost practice of socialism which still carried a connection between personal life and external change.

I can see that it was an idealist socialism,

often denying the material reality of class and sex and obscuring conflict. It was a romantic socialism, nurturing the dream but having no strategy for its implementation. It was a gullible socialism, too ready to believe that the capitalist state was neutral and that if you waited long enough the Labour Party would bring you socialism. Where from indeed? It grew complacent in old age and took office, or it was forced into bizarre nooks and communes making socialism in one parish. It was fearful of power, so accepted it on the terms of the governors; or it fled. When anything nasty came along like fascism or Stalinism it did not know how to fight them or what to do. So it died a forgotten archaism, merely the occasion for an easy joke. All those voices raised in

"The long long night is over . . .

Arise O England for the day is here"<sup>8</sup>

But the day wasn't and isn't, Carpenter would still be complaining we're being a long time about it. He and his friends may have become a little odd as the years went by. When political hopes splinter and part company the fragments appear distorted.

The rediscovery of Carpenter's socialism is nonetheless a reminder that many of our present concerns have a past. The old socialists sought not just redistribution of wealth, or a change in the ownership of production, not even just workers' control of production, but a transformation of all human relationships. Though forced into the cash nexus by capitalism, they realized that not all of what they wanted could be reduced to economics. They were against not only exploitation but the waste of human creative capacity which is the result of exploitation. So they did not dismiss artistic endeavour: they wanted not only justice but beauty too. Socialism was to release the creativity and artistry in everyone. It was to heal the breach between the heart, the body, and the mind.

So they did not think that economics or politics had a priority over art and culture. They were without a strategy, which makes them utopian; and the absence of a strategy made it easier for them to be absorbed into the gradualist politics of the Labour Party. However, it also meant they developed a practice which has an increasing relevance today as modern capitalism invades more and more the personal, domestic domain. They understood that political commitment is not just a matter of education or even of experience through agitation. They saw socialism as an inner transformation which meant change in the here and now. They sought this new life in the everyday; in their stress on the warmth of fellowship and comradeship, in their clothes and furnishings, and in a network of associations from cycling clubs to Socialist Sunday Schools which could sustain them through isolation, hardship, and despair.

Carpenter was not alone in his desire to be more open with others and to live more simply and directly, closer to the natural rhythms that were being destroyed by industry and the city. Others shared his hope that

People should endeavour (more than they do) to express and liberate their *own* real and deep-rooted needs and feelings. Then in doing so they will probably liberate and aid the expression of the lives of thousands of others; and so will have the pleasure of helping without the unpleasant sense of laying anyone under an obligation.<sup>9</sup>

We are rediscovering in a faltering way some of the understandings of this broken socialist tradition. We are doing it not from nostalgia for a cosy past, nor from an archaism which would lift their politics intact, but because the present movement of capitalist society is

pressing hard on our private consciousness, forcing intimacy into politics. Slowly and laboriously I can open my eyes and peer into that intense world of long ago with recognition. Those feelings in the small of the back seem no longer exclusive and private but part of a continuing opposition to capitalism. Even though it remains unclear quite how they fit into the agenda.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age* (12th edition, 1923), p. 22. The first edition of the book appeared in 1896.
2. Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London, 3rd edition, February 1918), pp. 195-96.
3. Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*, pp. 69-85.
4. I owe these comments on Carpenter's view of homosexuality to Graeme Woolaston, "Edward Carpenter on Homosexuality" (Gay Culture Society, London School of Economics, duplicated paper).
5. London, 1971.
6. E.M. Forster, *Maurice*, (London, Penguin ed., 1975), p. 217.
7. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 321.
8. "England Arise," in Carpenter, *Chants of Labour, A Song Book of the People*, (6th edition, 1922), pp. 18-19. The first edition of the book appeared in 1888.
9. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 322.

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*Chuck Berry*

# THE PRE-HISTORY OF ROCK & ROLL

Reebee Garofalo & Steve Chapple

Rock 'n' roll, as everyone must know by now, did not simply spring full blown from the spit curl of Bill Haley. The evolution which yielded this new music was first and foremost a process whereby grassroots writers and performers, a great many of whom were black, were brought to the attention of a mass audience. Or, as described by long-time editor of *Billboard* magazine Paul Ackerman, "a process by which the root music of America entered the mainstream."<sup>1</sup>

It is a very complex process, dating back to the late thirties, which involved initially a challenge to the music publishing establishment of the time as well as changes within the performance hierarchy. It is a David and Goliath story which pitted the fledgling independent record companies like Atlantic, Modern, and Chess against corporate giants like RCA and CBS. It is a tale of changing priorities in broadcasting which strengthened the role of local radio and turned the independent deejay into the central figure in the recording industry. Finally, it is a process involving such diverse variables as population migrations, material shortages, and technological advances. The emergence of rock 'n' roll can only be fully understood in terms of the convergence of the results of this myriad of forces in the early fifties. The purpose of this paper is, thus, to provide a brief historical overview of the preconditions of rock music.

Most historians are quick to point out that rock 'n' roll cannot be understood simply as a music; that it must be understood as a social phenomenon. The better known rock histories — Belz<sup>2</sup>, Gillett<sup>3</sup>, Guralnick<sup>4</sup>, Lydon<sup>5</sup>, and Cohn<sup>6</sup> — trace the music not

not only artistically, but socio-culturally as well. Belz introduces a discussion of the difference between folk art and fine art. Gillett's groundbreaking analysis of major vs. independent record companies adds a structural dimension to the discussion. And, any number of works on black culture — notably *Blues People* by Leroi Jones (Imamu Baraka)<sup>7</sup> — offer an understanding of the dynamics of racism. In all of these pioneering works there is the hint that there is more to music than meets the ear. Yet, the actual functioning of the businesses which mediate the artist and the audience remains something of a mystery.

More recently such books as *Apple to the Core*, by McCabe and Shonfeld<sup>8</sup>, Denisoff's *Solid Gold*<sup>9</sup>, Gillett's *Making Tracks*<sup>10</sup>, *Star Making Machinery* by Stokes<sup>11</sup>, and our own *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay*<sup>12</sup>, have attempted to locate the music firmly within the context of the huge culture industry which produces it. These more recent works provide a sophisticated understanding of the music industry as it currently operates, but in relatively few cases deal with the broader context of rock's pre-history. *Making Tracks* is a history of Atlantic Records which, of course, predates rock 'n' roll. And *Here to Pay* brings together a number of sources in an introductory chapter dealing with the corporate history surrounding the beginnings of the modern music industry.

Another book which touches on the subject of rock's pre-history is the somewhat exaggerated, witty and currently (it seems) out of print *After the Ball* by Ian ("You Turn Me On", 1965) Whitcomb.<sup>13</sup> In one paragraph, he encapsulates the history of the forties as follows:

Here are the changes: the BMI-ASCAP war, the renaissance of the record, the appearance of independent record companies, the fall of the big band, the rise of the solo singer, the start of the teen frenzy, the spread of hillbilly music. The end of the old Tin Pan Alley."<sup>14</sup>

Whitcomb's list is not exhaustive, but he mentions a number of issues which clearly paved the way for rock 'n' roll. We will begin our analysis with the war between ASCAP and BMI.

### **BMI Takes on the Music Publishing Establishment**

ASCAP (The American Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers) and BMI are known as performing rights organizations. They are the organizations which recover royalty payments from the performance of copyrighted music. This is usually accomplished through the issuance of blanket licenses allowing the user unlimited access to any selection in the catalogue for a set fee. Royalty revenues are then distributed to the membership according to a complex system of credits. The war between ASCAP and BMI, an extended controversy which ultimately precipitated the payola hearings of 1959 and went on well into the sixties, had its beginning in 1939, the year BMI was founded.

Earlier in the century, after a hard-fought battle, ASCAP had established the practice of the legal principle articulated in the 1909 Copyright Law — that writers are entitled to compensation when their work is performed in public for profit. At first, revenues came from the sale of sheet music, recordings, and live performances in hotels, nightclubs, and ballrooms. It wasn't until the legal principle was extended to include radio broadcasts, another hard-fought battle, that ASCAP began to realize its full economic potential. Whereas in 1931, ASCAP received a total of one million dollars in royalty payments from all sources, the society recovered more than four times that amount from radio alone in 1939.

To understand fully the importance of this situation, one must first understand something about the character of music publishing at the time. Until 1939 ASCAP was a closed society with a virtual monopoly on all copyrighted

music. Membership in the organization was limited to the most "literate" writers of the Broadway-Hollywood axis of popular music — Rodgers and Hart, Cole Porter, George Gerschwin, Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, etc. Since there did not yet exist any regulatory guidelines, the organization was free to set any fee for a license. As proprietor of the compositions of its members, ASCAP could prohibit any medium from using its catalogue. Aside from being able to exercise considerable power in the shaping of public taste, the financial possibilities of the organization seemed limitless.

By the 1940s, ASCAP's 1250 or so composers, authors, and publishers had become very greedy, so greedy in fact that after more than a year of rocky negotiations with radio, they announced their intention of doubling the fee for a license when the existing agreement expired on December 31, 1940. For the broadcasters, who had always considered ASCAP's demands excessive, this was the last straw. The National Association of Broadcasters, representing some 600 radio stations, decided to boycott the entire ASCAP catalogue, which, as we have noted, was virtually all copyrighted music. For almost the whole of 1941, no ASCAP music was heard on the radio. The publishers finally came to terms, but only after a federally-initiated criminal anti-trust action forced ASCAP into a "consent decree" regulating its dealings with its clients.

Negotiations had actually broken down back in the fall of 1939. Expecting ASCAP to exploit its recent victory over radio to the fullest, and dissatisfied with their own weak position at the bargaining table, the broadcasters had decided to form their own performing rights organization. Broadcast Music Incorporated was born on October 14, 1939.

Taking advantage of ASCAP's stringent member-

ship requirements, as well as its relative indifference to the popular and folk music being produced outside of New York and Hollywood, BMI sought out and acquired its support from the "have not" publishers and writers in the grass-roots areas.<sup>15</sup>

By the time the 1941 boycott rolled around, BMI was ready with a catalogue of its own. For the next ten months the United States was treated to its first earful of its own root music. Authentic regional styles were broadcast to a mass public intact — not yet flattened in the national pop melting pot. Though, in its initial stages, BMI came up with few songs of lasting significance, the Broadway-Hollywood monopoly on public taste was publicly challenged for the first time. Without this challenge, we might never have heard from writers like Huddie Ledbetter, Hank Snow, Roy Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, Johnny Otis, Fats Domino, Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, and Wynonie Harris, whose songs began to reach the top of the charts at the end of the decade.

### **Population Migrations Open New Markets**

The creation of a national audience for these regional musics was aided significantly by the population migrations associated with World War II. Large numbers of southern blacks and poor whites moved north and west to find work in defense plants, and they brought their music with them. At the same time many midwesterners and easterners were stationed in southern military bases where they were bombarded by some 600 country music radio stations. These new audiences must have liked what they heard. Detroit juke box operators reported that "hill-billy" records were the most popular, and in Europe, the American Armed Forces Radio Network voted Roy Acuff more popular than Frank Sinatra.

Black music was limited by a separate and unequal marketing structure, but, in the forties, it too showed potential for national expansion.

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The "race" market was first discovered when Mamie Smith's 1920 recording of "Crazy Blues" shocked the Okeh Recording Company executives by selling 7500 copies a week. The advent of radio in 1922, however, temporarily decimated the record business; sales dropped off steadily from a high of \$106 million in 1921 to a low of just \$6 million in 1933, at the height of the Depression. With the exception of "classic blues" records by women artists like Victoria Spivey, Ida Cox, and Bessie Smith which continued to sell, black music developed primarily in live performances. And although radio broadcasts utilized only live performances, the medium was specifically limited to white musicians. Even as developing black music ushered in the "big band" era, it was still only white orchestras that could be heard playing it on the radio.

The black exodus from the south during World War II contributed to the loosening of radio's restrictive programming. In the forties, more than one million blacks left the South, three times as many as the decade before. Newly immigrated blacks had enough money from wartime prosperity to establish themselves as an identifiable consumer group. Particularly in areas which received a high concentration of black immigrants, it was in the interest of radio to introduce some programming that would cater to this new audience. Gradually, some black-oriented programs (usually slotted late at night) began to appear on a few stations. It was this kind of "specialty" programming during the early fifties which would finally tear down the walls of the "race" market.

### **The Big Bands Become a Casualty of the War**

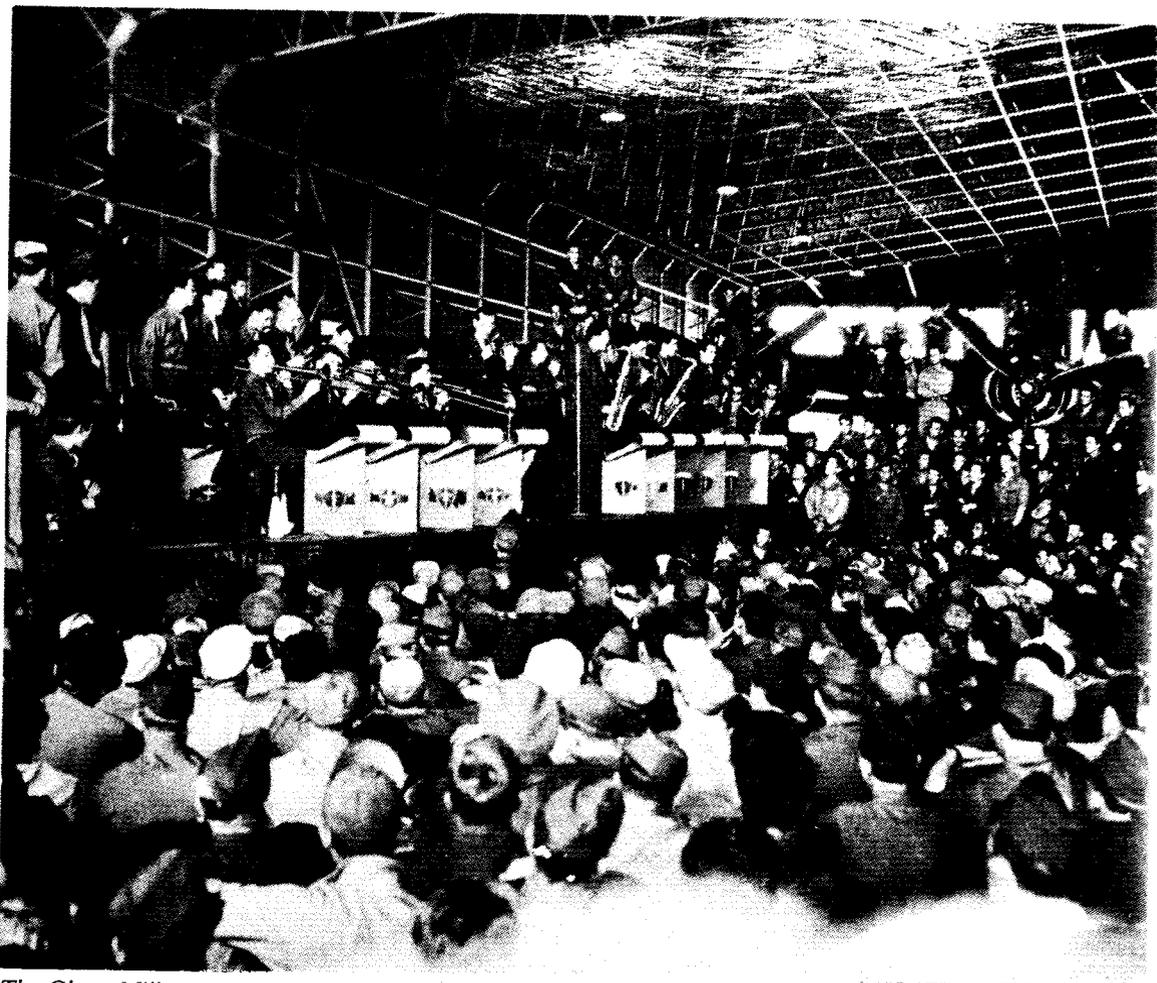
Having already alienated the music publishing establishment of the day, the broadcasters — which is to say, radio — managed to arouse the anger of established musicians as well. It was around the early forties that radio began to program recorded music — records. This was

also the era of big bands, fancy ballrooms, and most important for the musicians, live music only on the radio. Radio was their own electronic ballroom; it provided very steady work. They would not give it up to records without a fight. In 1942, the American Federation of Musicians went on strike. Nobody recorded. Nobody but the singers, that is.

Vocalists are covered by a different union — currently called the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists — and AFTRA didn't join the strike. The AFM itself thus aided the rise of solo vocalists — who were becoming the main attraction of the big bands anyway — by giving them free reign of the recording studios. After months of striking the musicians returned to the studio only to find the vocalists in charge. Somebody like Frank Sinatra no longer simply "fronted" the Tommy Dorsey Band. The vocalists were now the headliners. According to Gillett: "Records by the bands dominated the best selling lists in 1937 to 1941. During this period band recordings accounted for twenty-nine of the forty-three records that sold over a million copies each."<sup>16</sup> With the rise of the vocalists, the pop charts were gradually taken over by the like of Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Dinah Shore, Vaughn Monroe, Frankie Laine, Doris Day, and Jo Stafford.

If the rise of the solo vocalist was a psychological blow to the big bands, it was the post-war economy which dealt the death blow. In the return to normalcy it was no longer feasible to support the elaborate production of 20 piece orchestras as a regular diet. Ballrooms disappeared. Unable to find steady work, the big bands gradually disbanded. As told by Whitcomb:

Miller died in a wartime plane crash, but Herman, James, and Dorsey had folded their original bands in late 1946, together with Benny Goodman and many others. The straighter, less jazzy bands like Lawrence Welk's and Guy Lombardo's

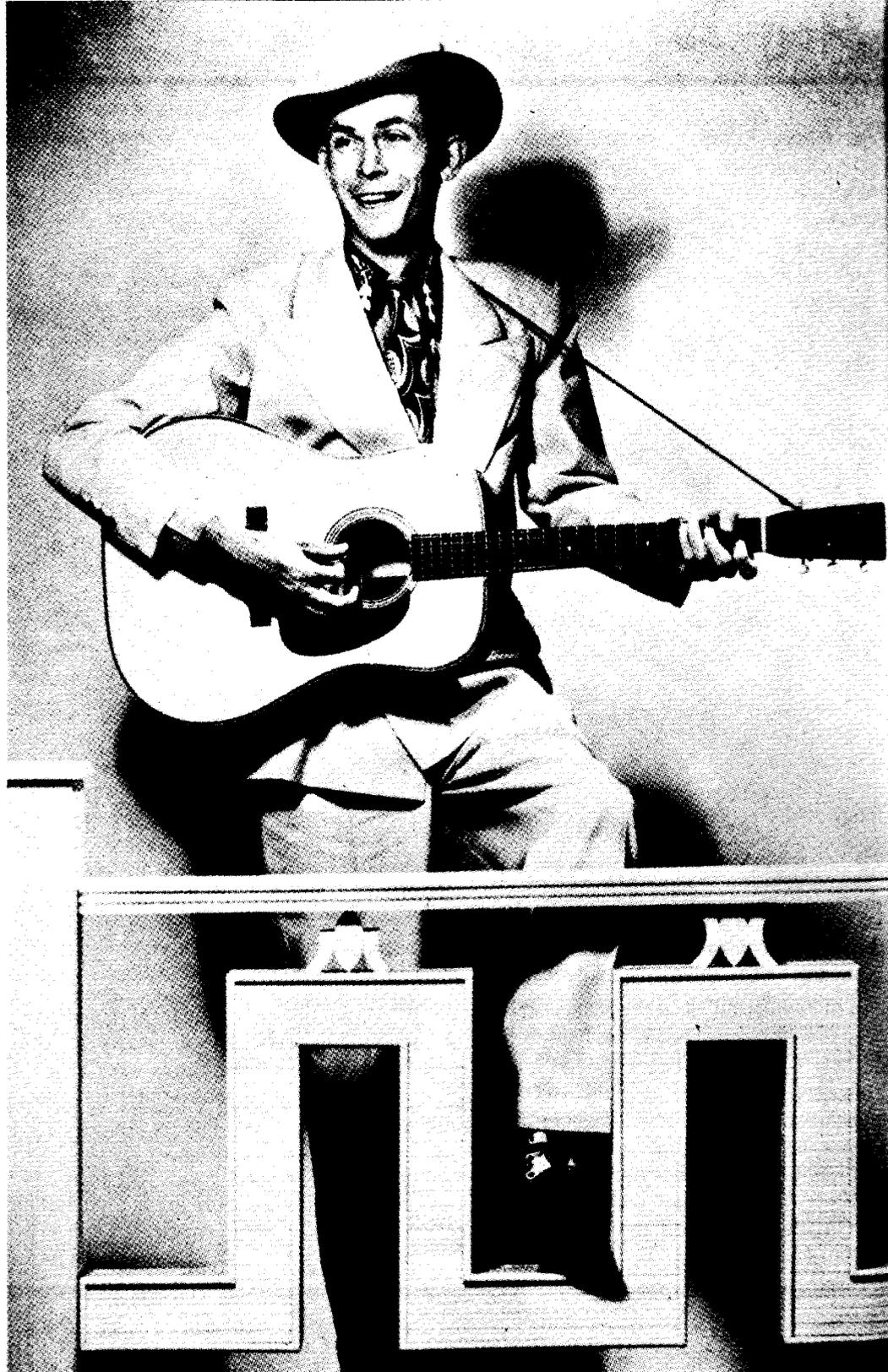


*The Glenn Miller Band playing for the troops in England, January, 1945.*

survived (for a specialist and aging public) but the Big Band Era, just over a decade, was finished.”<sup>17</sup>

The black big bands, who had provided much of the impetus for the big band sound and who are conspicuous in Whitcomb’s account by their absence, limped along for a while on one-nighters in the decaying dance hall circuit. The better known black bands like Basie and Ellington could also count on an occasional hit record to fall back on such as Basie’s recording

of “Open the Door, Richard” for Victor which made the year-end pop charts in 1947. Although some of the bands were able to make something of a comeback later via television, it was clear by 1947 that a musical era in the United States had come to an end and it was reflected in record sales. Between 1947 and 1949 sales dropped off more than \$50 million, which at the time represented more than 20 percent of the dollar volume of the industry.



*Hank Williams*

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## Rhythm and Blues Rushes Into the Breach

Gearing up for Korea, the economy was fueled once again and, like other industries, the music business was destined to expand. With the big bands no longer recording, however, there was something of a void in popular music. As always, the industry was looking for a new trend. A less cumbersome music was needed, and much to the dismay of the major record companies, "rhythm and blues" filled the bill. The major companies — Columbia, Victor, and Decca — had gained a firm control of the "race" market during the Depression with the failure of independent labels like Paramount and Black Swan. The independents either had their catalogues bought out by the majors or disappeared completely. As the "race" market came to be dominated by big bands in the late thirties, the most famous like Basie and Ellington were simply signed by the majors. For all practical purposes, independent record companies had ceased to exist.

The population migrations mentioned above had opened up the possibility of a nationwide market for black music, which prior to World War II did not exist. The "race" records of the twenties and thirties sold well, but primarily in regional markets. The majors never exploited this new market during the war because a shellac shortage caused significant cutbacks in the number of records which could be manufactured. Shellac is the principle ingredient that was used in making the old 78 rpm records. During the war it became almost impossible to obtain the material from India where it is secreted by a tree-crawling scale insect. At the height of the shortage, in order to buy a new

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\*The term "rhythm and blues" represents both an authentic development within black music and a marketing category adopted by the music industry in 1949 as a catch all phrase for all black music. As such, it replaced the former designation, "race music."

record it was often necessary to turn in an old one so that it could be recycled.\* Since the pop market alone was capable of absorbing virtually all the records that could be produced, the major labels concentrated their efforts there. The specialty fields, especially blues, jazz and gospel, bore the brunt of the cutbacks and were essentially abandoned by the major labels.

Whereas the shellac shortage had seriously limited the supply of specialty music, the war had, if anything, increased the demand. Thus, after the war ended, the majors tried to regain control of the specialty markets. In the country and western field this proved to be relatively simple. According to Gillett,

...the companies responded by heavily promoting various songs performed in versions of country and western styles. One tactic was to promote the strong southern accent of most country and western singers as a "novelty", as Capital did successfully with Tex Williams' "Smoke that Cigarette" in 1947, and as Columbia did for several years with various Gene Autrey songs, including "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer"(1950.)

Alternatively, the country and western songs that were the closest to the melodramatic or sentimental modes of conventional popular songs were promoted as popular songs — or, more frequently, recorded by popular singers in a style that was halfway between country and pop.<sup>14</sup>

Performers such as Frankie Laine, Guy Mitchell, and the more authentic Hank Williams often fit this latter category. Through these various manipulations, the country field was soon firmly back in the hands of the majors,

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\*It is interesting to note that it is also possible to recycle vinyl, the main ingredient used in the manufacture of 33 rpm record. Yet no such program was initiated in the early seventies when the industry claimed a severe vinyl shortage. As the quality of 33's declined and suggested list prices rose to \$6.98, whole warehouses of cutouts were simply being destroyed, a practice which continues to this day.

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where it remains today.

The black market proved much more difficult. Having ignored black music for a number of years, the majors had lost touch with recent developments in the rich and constantly evolving black culture. While the majors contented themselves with connections to the most prominent black innovators of the big band sound, other black musicians based in the Southwest were developing styles that were much closer to the blues. As the era of big bands declined one music that was brought to the fore is described by Baraka as "huge rhythm units smashing away behind screaming blues singers."<sup>19</sup> This was rhythm and blues. Since it did not lend itself readily to the production styles of the major labels, they decided to ignore the relatively smaller black market.

This situation made it possible for a large number of independent labels to enter the business. It is estimated that by 1949 over 400 new labels came into existence. Most important among these were: Atlantic in New York, Savoy in Newark, King in Cincinnati, Chess in Chicago, Peacock in Houston, and Modern, Imperial, and Specialty in Los Angeles. These R & B independents were generally hampered by a shortage of materials, lack of funds, and inadequate distribution, yet, with a hit, profits could be substantial. Modern was able to sell its blues singles for \$1.05 in the late forties while the majors were only getting 78 cents for pop singles. Particularly with the increased affluence provided by the war, black people were willing to spend more for their music. The relatively small number of independents that survived the forties gained a foothold in the industry that would not be dislodged.

### **Technology Makes It All Possible**

A number of technological advancements set the stage for the growth and further expansion of rhythm and blues music and its eventual

takeover of the pop market as rock 'n' roll evolved. The first of these was the introduction of magnetic tape, stolen from the Nazis during WW II. Prior to this innovation, quality recording was tied to elaborate studios and cumbersome equipment not to mention a substantial capital investment. Recording facilities were located in relatively few city centers and were firmly under the control of established corporate powers. Magnetic tape and its more versatile hardware changed all that. Aside from bringing the obvious technical advantages of editing and better sound reproduction, magnetic tape made it possible for anyone to record anywhere. It was now possible for a Buddy Holly to be recorded in Clovis, New Mexico. Operating out of a small studio in Memphis, an enterprising young engineer named Sam Phillips could record B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Junior Parker, and Rufus Thomas, on the way to discovering Elvis Presley. The new technology clearly encouraged independent production and the formation of independent labels.

In 1948, Columbia's Dr. Peter Goldmark invented high fidelity. In what was to become known as the "battle of the speeds" — a contest which pitted Columbia's 33 against RCA's 45 — competition between the two giant firms yielded discs of excellent quality, and more important for our purposes here, maximum durability. The introduction of the unbreakable record was particularly important for the development of rock 'n' roll because, as Carl Belz has pointed out,

...rock has existed primarily on records. In this, the music is rather different from jazz and from the traditional folk music to which it is related. Although jazz and other types of music exist on records, they did not originate in that medium. For the most part, they originated and developed through live performances. Rock, it seems to me, has generally done the opposite.



*B.B. King*

Records were the music's initial medium."<sup>20</sup>

Most audio and visual media — television, film, and to a lesser extent, radio — are capital intensive industries. They require huge sums of money for production. Records, on the other hand, do not depend on an elaborate transmission system as does television, and they are not affected by government decisions concerning, say, the assignment of frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum. Particularly in the

late forties, records emerged as a relatively inexpensive medium.\* In part for this reason, it was not as easy for a few giant electronics firms to monopolize the business. Records soon became the staple of the music industry, sur-

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\*Since the sixties, when the music industry became much more centralized, the production of records has become more and more tied to sophisticated electronic equipment, lavish multi-track studios, and enormous promotional budgets.

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passing sheet music as the major source of revenue in 1952 at around the same time that radio overtook juke boxes as the number one hit maker.

A final technological development strengthened local radio as the main vehicle for the popularization of rock 'n' roll. It involved a major media policy decision which had been made earlier in the century but which came to fruition in the early fifties. As early as 1935, RCA had announced plans to commit its research capabilities to a then unheard of broadcast medium — television. In the late forties TV became accessible as a consumer item, and by 1951 RCA had already recovered from its years of research and development and the initial period of programming television stations at a loss. By 1957 there were 39 million TV sets in use in the United States, filling 80 percent of the homes. Television very quickly attracted most of the national advertising and network radio fell off, but local radio grew as an effective medium for local advertisers.

In this way the emphasis that RCA and CBS placed on television provided the context in which independent record companies and rock 'n' roll could develop. RCA's preoccupation with TV, for instance, made it pay less attention to its relatively less important record division. The lack of top executive emphasis given to network radio in comparison to network TV allowed independent radio stations to experiment successfully with new music, new programming, and new personalities. These independent stations eventually pushed aside the more staid network stations and in the process helped to revitalize the then smaller record industry.

### **Local Radio Brings it Home**

Local Radio in the early fifties was a very loosely structured scene. The independent deejays — “personality jocks”, as they were called — were in control. There were no music

directors and nothing approaching the tightly structured programming and restrictive playlists that we see today. In the search for cheaper forms of programming, records provided the obvious answer. Record programming soon became the rule for radio and the disc jockey replaced the live entertainment personalities who had dominated radio in the thirties and forties. Until the 1959 payola hearings curtailed their power and Top 40 programming rationalized the AM format, the independent deejays were the central figures in the record industry. They could and did make hits. Relying on their own inventiveness for popularity, the independent deejays often experimented with “specialty” musics as an antidote for the trivial pop fare of network radio. Rhythm and blues music proved to be quite popular with white as well as black audiences. As early as 1952, Dolphin's Hollywood Record Shop, a black retail outlet, reported that its business was all of a sudden 40 percent white. They attributed it to independent deejays playing R & B records.

As the market for black music expanded, so did the number of stations playing it. At first, the deep south was the center for R & B radio. On white owned “negro stations” black deejays like “Professor Bop” in Shreveport, “Jocky” Jack Gibson in Atlanta, and “Sugar Daddy” in Birmingham were important in popularizing R & B music. Blues performers like Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King, and Rufus Thomas, all had shows in Memphis.

Gradually, white music stations began programming some R & B shows to accommodate the potential audience for black music in northern cities. As record sales indicated the growing popularity of rhythm and blues among white teenagers, white stations made a growing commitment to the music and black deejays were soon followed by white R & B jocks. Among many others there was “Poppa Stoppa” Clarence in New Orleans, Phil McKernan of

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Berkeley (who sired the late Pigpen of Greatful Dead fame), George "Hound Dog" Lorenz in Buffalo, and, of course, the now famous Bob "Wolfman Jack" Smith of Shreveport.

The most famous of the white R & B deejays at the time was a classical trombonist from Salem, Ohio, named Alan Freed. He is often remembered as the father of rock 'n' roll and even claimed to have invented the term. Based in Cleveland, his show, "Moon Dog's Rock 'n' Roll Party", became so popular that he was soon hired by WINS in New York which he made the number one popular music station in the city. Typical of those who saw the R & B surge and its evolution into rock 'n' roll firsthand, Freed once said: "Anyone who says rock 'n' roll is a passing fad or a flash-in-the-pan trend along the music road had rocks in his head, Dad!" He knew whereof he spoke. A *Billboard* headline reported: "1955 — THE YEAR R & B TOOK OVER POP FIELD", and the rest is history.

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*REEBEE GAROFALO and STEVE CHAPPLE are the co-authors of Rock 'N' Roll Is Here To Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry (Nelson-Hall, 1977). Steve Chapple is also the author of a novel, Don't Mind Dying; and Reebee Garofalo has produced several Movement benefit concerts. This article is reprinted from the 1978 issue of Music and Popular Culture.*



Dick Cluster, Ed., *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: 7 Radicals Remember the 60s* (South End Press, 1979), 268 pp. paper, \$5.50

People who were political activists during "the '60s" must be alternatively angered or bewildered by what has been done to this decade by the mass media. As a younger generation becomes active in radical politics, however, an accurate picture of the New Left becomes important for more than historical reasons. In the anti-draft work I have been doing in Boston for the last year, for example, I generally find two conflicting views on the '60s, often held by the same people: that things were great, and that now people are much more apathetic; or that the New Left was a failure, unable to stop the Vietnam war, or to understand the need to create permanent organizations. My participation in discussions about the '60s today usually begins with something like, "Well, it wasn't quite so simple as that..."

Dick Cluster's collection of essays, *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee*, is the most useful and readable account of the New Left to appear so far. The title refers to the incident that Cluster sees as the New Left's starting point, the sit-in by four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina in

February 1960. All of the essays are by participants: several are intimate accounts of political struggle and personal change; and all of them convey the atmosphere of "the Movement," the elusive and invisible community of struggle that so many of us experienced as a second family.

The collection opens with a section on the Civil Rights movement, which Bernice Reagon rightly calls "the burning struggle," the foundation of what was to come. There follows an essay on the Black Panther Party by Reggie Schell, a leader of the Philadelphia branch in 1969 and 1970, and a fascinating account of the rise and fall of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers by Ernie Allen, who was for a time the League's director of political education. The book then returns to the early '60s, picking up the threads of the largely white student and anti-war movements in the two essays by Dick Cluster. Steve Rees writes about what it was like doing GI work in the early '70s, and Ann Popkin adds a valuable essay on the early years of the women's movement, focusing in part on the Boston organization Bread and Roses. The final essay is an autobiographical account by Leslie Cagan, a "red diaper baby" whose participation in the civil rights, anti-war, women's and gay liberation movements knits together many of the themes raised elsewhere in the book.

A collection such as this defines a period in part by the selection of topics. In my own view I wish there were essays on the student movement of the early '60s, on the counterculture, and on the forces which pushed many New Leftists into Weatherman or orthodox Marxism-Leninism. In effect, this collection is a portrait of one strand of "the Movement," emphasizing mass movement more than formal organization, and the personally transforming quality of struggles more than their victories and defeats. My guess is that part of the battle to shape the political movements of the 1980s will involve a debate over the interpretation of the New Left and the '60s. If *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee* is widely read by the newer generation of activists they will save a few steps on the road to re-inventing the wheel.

Frank Brodhead

"The Wobblies," a play by Steward Bird and Peter Robilotta, Smyrna Press, New York, 60 pp., 1980, \$3.95

This two-act play was originally performed at the Labor Theater in New York in 1976. The research that went into this production served as the groundwork for the feature-length documentary, *The Wobblies*, that Bird and Deborah Shaffer completed last year (see RA Vol. 14 #1, Jan.-Feb. 1980). It's a good companion piece to the film — and a quite enjoyable theatrical evocation of the Wobblies' spirit and history.

For all the seriousness of the historical direction of the documentary, it was the humor and vitality of the octogenarian interviewees that propelled it. In this play, with the benefit of a dramatic license that doesn't stray far from the 11 page historical introduction provided by Joyce Kornbluh, Bird and Robilotta have portrayed the core of Wobbly activity in a vivid, quick-moving and often humorous setting. Set against the 1918 trial in which Big Bill Haywood and 100 other Wobblies were tried for advocating resistance to the Selective Service Act, the authors have produced a timely primer for today as well as an accurate period piece. It's a play that should prove quite accessible to labor, anti-draft and progressive community theater audiences.

With the trial as backdrop, the play winds through a number of key events in the I.W.W.'s militant period (1903-1918) fading in and out of the courtroom without jarring the play's continuity. Camella Teoli's testimony before a House committee investigating the conditions in the New England Mills, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's exhortation to striking mill workers, and scenes of Western mineworkers debating strategy against their bosses are some of the historical ingredients of the play. To transport us through these scenes and provide the satiric commentary that manages to merge sports, politics and humor is the "Narrator" — an amalgam of Heywood Brown, John Reed and Carl Sandburg. It's a merger that's perfectly set and fuels the play's irony and pathos equally.

For a play of this length to be able to portray well the guts of this historical period and present human characters, on the level of Flynn and Haywood, with such finely hewn frailty and strength is not easy. In doing so, "The Wobblies" brings to mind the cultural work of the I.W.W. itself and the collection of plays, songs, posters and art that were able to celebrate and instruct at the same time.

John Demeter

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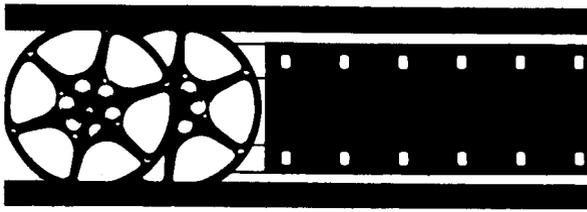
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# FILM SHORTS



*The War At Home*, directed and produced by Barry Brown and Glenn Silber, 100 min., color and black and white, 1979. Distributed by Catalyst Films.

In November 1979, *The War At Home* arrived at an interesting historical intersection. It was the end (we can hope) of Hollywood's "Vietnam era" — a period that began with the blurred, romanticized visions of student protest (*Getting Straight* and *The Strawberry Statement* among others) and recently finished with a blurred, romanticized portrayal of war as hell (*The Deerhunter*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Coming Home*, et al.). It was also, coincidentally, the beginning of Cold War II as Iran and Afghanistan became the "grounds" for a reinstatement of the draft.

While some reviewers touted this feature-length documentary as "only growing in importance with the passage of time," *The War At Home* has taken on a frightening relevance under the press of current events. Initially attractive to anti-"last war" activists and historians, the film has increasingly drawn current anti-draft and anti-nuclear organizers and many others searching to examine the history of Vietnam-era activism for precedents and lessons. Due particularly to the painstaking research of John Aleckson and numerous others, this documentary is an intelligent, gripping and persuasive work. The editing of some amazing archival footage around present-day interviews with a number of veterans of the anti-war struggle transforms what could have been a glut of talking heads into a vivid portrait of the decade. By focusing on Madison, Wisconsin and the

anti-war struggle as it took place in and around the campus of the University of Wisconsin, the producers did not lose, but rather enhanced, their portrait of a country at war, in Vietnam as well as in its own streets. As a former resident of Madison explained, "The film makes the era plausible for those who experienced it and intelligible for those who didn't."

There were a number of reasons to select Madison. For one, Brown, Silber and the locally-based Catalyst Films had direct access to people and primary documents. Most importantly, the producers discovered that a veritable treasure of archival footage of most of the events remained in the vaults of local television stations. Fundraising and scraping money together from sympathetic sources, Silber and Brown were able to produce the \$130,000 (compared to *Apocalypse's* \$40 million) needed to finish the film.

Much of *War At Home's* strength comes from its ability to portray the development of the anti-war movement in a chronological framework. Contrasting the reality of the war, via news footage, with the rationalizations and "explanations" of officialdom works to recreate quite vividly the emotion of the era. Thus, the frenzied actions of students in response to police repression are completely comprehensible. Covering the period from 1963 to 1973 is no easy task. The film does it well but with some obvious trade-offs.

Most significantly, the documentary in its press to compact the era into a feature-length package did so at the expense of flattening out the ideology of the anti-war movement. In its portrayal of the circumstances and examples of the militancy — from confrontations with police to the bombing of the Army Math Research Center, the film avoids the "Give peace a chance" liberalism of other works. But in the selection of interview subjects, and coverage of the forces within the movement, the producers opt for broader, non-analytical strokes. The anti-war movement's growth from the oppositional forces in the civil rights movement is lightly touched. The concurrent rise of the black liberation and women's movement within the Vietnam era activism is slighted. Surely the film's subjects reflected the white male hegemony in movement leadership accurately. But to



provide the insights of women and third world participants of that struggle would have supplied some sorely needed critical reflections. It certainly would not have detracted from the film's narrative power. Similarly, a clearer delineation of the forces — and their tactical and political differences — would have benefitted present day activists.

Another problem arises interestingly from the focus on Madison — and specifically the campus of the University of Wisconsin. While this focus serves as a sufficient encapsulation of the broader national movement, the relationship to the campus's immediate community is neglected. We certainly get some sense from the interviews with Mayor Paul Soglin, a former anti-war activist, that there were repercussions in local government. The film also documents police crackdowns in a largely student neighborhood in the city. But the growing sentiment of opposition to the war is a story that spread beyond the bounds of the nation's campuses. *War At Home* projects a fleeting sense of that growth but locates itself mainly on the campus. The most moving parts of the film were the interviews with Karl Armstrong (then completing a prison sentence for the Research Center bombing) and his father Donald. Their recollections greatly contribute to the film's emotional immediacy.

That *Variety* would admit to the superiority of its immediacy and emotional impact over that of *Apocalypse*, *Coming Home* and *Deerhunter* is one small touchstone of *The War At Home's* force. Let us hope that the film will stimulate critical reflections for its audiences during this current renewal of American militarism and Cold War rhetoric over Iran, Afghanistan and Cuba.

**John Demeter**

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*The War At Home* is distributed by Catalyst Films, P.O. Box 1485, Madison, WI 53701, (608) 251-6987 or (212) 255-8349.

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*We Are The Guinea Pigs*, Distributed by Parallel Films, directed by Joan Harvey, 16 mm., 90 min., color, 1980.

There's a particularly striking exchange early in this recently completed anti-nuke documentary in which Dr. Judith Johnsrud speaks of the biases of her scientific profession as leading her to discredit the physical complaints of residents of the Three Mile Island area in Pennsylvania. Johnsrud, however, "experienced those same symptoms myself" and with a number of other witnesses to the continuing accident at TMI speaks now of its direct and long-range danger. Contrasted with the official doublespeak of "experts" from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and local government, this first person report of the largest nuclear disaster in U.S. history results in an explosive and horrifying statement on nuclear technology and its role as a "support system" for the American military.

The power and drama of the interviews with those directly affected — parents, children, farmers, teachers and students — will evoke tears and anger. This strength of the film, however, is seriously undercut by the documentary's editing (or lack of it). While the film documents the reality and "hidden" effects of TMI and works towards demystifying the glut of numbers, half-lives and rems that frustrate even the most sympathetic layperson, there is still too much data and scientific jargon presented.

Numerous times information or experiences are unnecessarily repeated. Clips that elicit sympathy or horror at first glance are used again with diminishing effect.

This problem in the film reflects the general difficulty of grappling with the complex scientific nature of nuclear power in an understandable way for most people. It also reflects the influence of the anti-nuke movement's most visible constituency — scientists, professionals and young, mostly middle-class activists. The filmmakers don't seem to trust their main protagonists — the residents of the TMI area — to convey the fear, horror and anger of previously accepting citizens towards the "accident" at Harrisburg and the catastrophe of nuclear power in general. This they do — and convincingly.

Whether it's a young mother claiming she "doesn't want to live near the plant, even if it's in perfect working condition" or Liz Hrenda, a steelworker, saying we can't "trust the government not to drop bombs any more than we can't trust them not to blow up power plants," the "guinea pigs" are better narrators than the Helen Caldicotts or John Goffmans who seemingly serve to "explain" the victims' experiences.

*We Are The Guinea Pigs* clearly documents the attempts by EPA and NRC officials to minimize the meltdown — either by the mumble-jumble of "acceptable limits" and "allowable limits of radiation" or by charges that the victims are suffering psychosomatically from "radiation fear syndrome." The best example of the latter tactic is recounted in conversations with area parents whose children show higher than normal radiation levels after screening by an out of state testing service. The results are attributed to the families' brick homes which, they are told, magnify the normal atmospheric radiation. As a sympathetic pediatrician summed it up, "It's become simply human experimentation without informed consent."

Starting out with eyewitness accounts and a technical explanation of the accident, the film moves on to connect the nuclear industry, big oil and the military in its second half. But while clearly delineating corporate and military collusion, the film fails to portray any organizing or opposition movement beyond the local residents who have spoken



out. What is particularly frustrating is that a number of anti-nuke experts are shown speaking at public demonstrations in the wake of Three Mile Island. No mention is made of the background activity or any other organizing.

*Guinea Pigs* is Director Joan Harvey's first film and includes contributions from photographer Tom Hurwitz (*Harlan County, Allambrista*) and John Amato and the 4th Wall Repertory Musicians. It is a film that could serve as a useful outreach and informational resource for the anti-nuke movement — at half its length. At 90 minutes, however, an emotionally drained audience could hardly be expected to sit through any additional presentation. With TMI still in public consciousness, the film's timeliness and first-person accounts could prove helpful in reaching uncommitted audiences or those on the periphery of the debate over nuclear power.

There is a level at which the portrayal of this country's suicidal rush to "nuclear madness" can easily push the concerned to despair. Alternative media is then presented with the difficult task of informing and agitating while providing hope and channeling anger. While *We Are The Guinea Pigs* documents well the personal effects of a very public disaster, the quantity and structure of its insights and information numb more than shock.

**John Demeter**

Distributed by Parallel Films, 314 W. 91st St., New York, NY 10024 — (212) 787-4808 or 877-1573.

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# LETTERS

Dear RADICAL AMERICA

In his article on "The 1956 Generation," Maurice Isserman condemns what he calls a "pick and choose approach" to the history of American Communism. See p. 45, and n. 4 on p. 50.

A picker and chooser, like myself, apparently commits the sin of believing that some periods of the Party's political practice were more valuable and more deserving of detailed historical inquiry, than others. I do believe that.

Isserman argues that one who makes such a judgment about the relative value of the Party's orientation in different periods, must also believe that Party members were malleable objects, "passive agents of a politics imposed on them from above and without."

I have no desire to criticize Isserman's thoughtful article, nor do I wish to defend "my position" in the usual scholarly way.

But I believe Isserman's logic contains a colossal *non sequitur* which gets in the way of the very "historical imagination" he advocates.

One can make value judgments about different episodes in one's own life and in the life of others without ceasing to believe that the historical actor under examination voluntarily found his or her own way from one episode to the next.

Presumably we all think we have some modicum of control over our own lives. Yet do we not, also, appraise what we did at different points in our personal histories with a sense that some times were more fruitful, dense, worthy of remembrance, and in a word, better, than others?

Of course we do. Consider our attitude toward a political decade which (unlike the 1930s) all of us lived through, the 1960s. When we look back on the 1960s its political practice falls into certain well-defined periods, just as does that of the Party in the 1930s. Most of us have opinions as to whether, in our work now and in the future, we wish to build more on the experiences of SNCC and early SDS, or on the work of the late 60s and early 70s, or on specified aspects of each. To have these feelings does not

require us to believe that in moving from one political line or style to another we were manipulated from the outside, any more than we need feel this when we make similar judgments about the 1930s.

Would we not deserve to be condemned if we did *not* engage in such self-criticism, and did *not* seek to learn from what we have done so as to do better next time?

And if so, why is it any different in looking back on the 1930s? There is no lack of imagination or compassion in making such judgments. Indeed, the Communists and former Communists with whom I like Maurice Isserman have spent countless hours seeking to understand their legacy from within, are the first to initiate such evaluation.

Thinking of these older men and women, I think also of my own father. In his late thirties he became, on the strength of *Middletown*, a tenured professor at Columbia for the rest of his life. Before he and my mother made the Middletown study he was a student at Union Theological Seminary, and, while there, spent a summer as a minister in a Rockefeller oil camp in Elk Basin, Wyoming. He worked with a pick and shovel six twelve-hour days a week, and preached on Sundays. He learned about the IWW, about the loneliness of women on the frontier, about the arrogance of self-proclaimed Christian capitalists like the Rockefellers. He learned songs he sang the rest of his life. It was a special summer for him, and for me, because as a child and adolescent I saw in that experience my father at his best, my father as he could have been in a different kind of society, the father whose work I am honored to try to carry on.

So it is, I suggest, with the political "fathers" and "mothers" many of whose names we do not know, but who influence us nonetheless, just as our biological parents do, and among whose influences we *must* pick and choose, just as do children.

No doubt the critical issue is whether a historian should seek to put behind him/her as a childish thing this natural human tendency to orient to exemplary moments of past experience.

I can't see why. The historian should respect the need for exemplary experience, cherish the experiences thus selected, and then painstakingly try to tell the whole truth about them. He/she will have more energy to do this if personally drawn to the

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patch of history under security.

For instance, I think a task ahead of us in the 1980s is to create local labor parties, or some functional equivalent. Believing this I have a particular interest in efforts during the period 1934-1936 to start such parties, and together with my friend Eric Davin, have just finished an essay about one such effort in Berlin, New Hampshire. Is there something amiss in thus being an advocate historian in the sense of picking (and choosing) subjects understanding of which seems likely to contribute to current tasks?

To deny in ourselves and others the desire to turn to the past for models is needlessly to sacrifice ourselves and the writing of history to a false objectivity, a kind of Ranke-ism of the Left. I trust it is clear that I am not proposing the distortion of truth. I am urging an emotional honesty that will permit us to get closer to people and moments of history we care about, and precisely for that reason, describe them more fully, more truthfully. (After all, Isserman would appear to value those who broke with the Party in 1956 more than those who did not. He, too, is a picker and chooser.)

What it may all come down to is that some people think the way to be a real historian is to concern oneself with *causation*. Maurice Isserman, and I, and I feel sure every one who has looked into it, has sensed that the politics of the period after 1935 provided an opportunity for the Party and its members from immigrant families to Americanize themselves. What should one make of this? Was it a cause of those new politics? Not to recognize this dynamic would be insensitive. To overemphasize it would demean the people involved: would be a version of considering them malleable objects. It seems to me that one just doesn't know what weight to give this "factor," and that, in general, the study of causes, far from being the most scientific element of history, is the least so.

Which is to say, one is left with the challenge of faithfully exploring and reporting moments of the past which excite, which inspire, which seem useful in current decisionmaking: one picks and chooses.

Staughton Lynd

#### REPLY TO STAUGHTON LYND:

I don't think Lynd's comparison of history and

memory works. When we remember personal experiences we supply our own historical context. We may indeed find some periods "more fruitful, dense, worthy of remembrance" than others, but we don't view them in isolation. Without needing to spell it out, we *know* how we grew to be the people who went through those experiences, and why — even in the most fruitful times — there were some things we could not see which a decade later seem glaringly obvious. This spring I taught a class on the history of the New Left to students who were about six years old at the time of the Chicago Democratic convention. I continually had to remind myself that my assumptions about the world and theirs were very different. They found it hard to understand how people in SDS could move from Henry David Thoreau to Lin Piao in the space of a few years and — at least at the time — consider it a logical progression. And so I had to dig back into my own experiences and those of people I knew in the 1960s to uncover and try to explain the limits, the contradictions, and the potential of our vision as a generation emerging on the political stage. The book which got the best response from the class was Sara Evans's *Personal Politics*, because it helped them see New Leftists as real, fallible, growing human beings (and not as a heroic legend, or a model, or a cautionary example). What Evans makes clear is that while a feminist analysis would have made as much sense in 1961 as in 1969, it took years of common political experience in the civil rights movement, in ERAP, and in the anti-war movement before women in the New Left could learn the lessons which laid the basis for the emergence of feminist politics.

Lynd accuses me of advocating a "false objectivity, a kind of Ranke-ism of the Left" (or, to paraphrase Jack Webb in *Dragnet*, "Just the causation, ma'am.") And he suggests I harbor a secret sympathy for those who led the upheaval in the CP in 1956. I plead innocent to the first charge, guilty to the second. I do feel an emotional link to the 1956 dissidents, and I agree with Lynd that such links can "permit us to get closer to people and moments of history we care about..." But what's more important? Should I restrict myself to a lyrical evocation of those few brief moments in 1956 when everything in the American Communist movement seemed up for

grabs? Or should I try to explain why the Communists were unable to undertake such a fundamental re-examination 20 years earlier (when it was just as badly needed, and may well have had more significant consequences). The latter may not be a useable

past in Lynd's definition ("moments which excite, which inspire," etc.), but it is a past which the Left today would do well to understand.

Maurice Isserman

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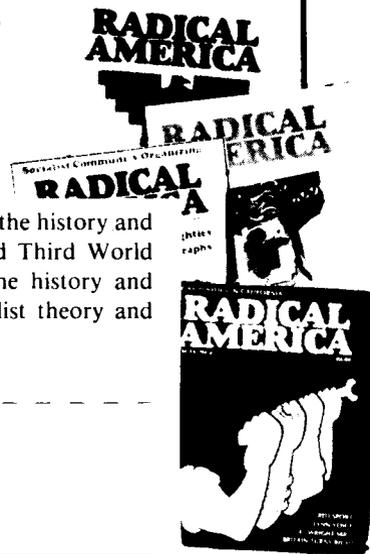
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### East High twins: Minor, Richards score

Two boys from East High School, the East High twins, scored 30 and 31 points in a game against the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### 13 years of abuse... and she's on trial

A woman who was abused for 13 years is now on trial for the murder of her husband.

### Pesticide poisons homestead

A family of five is suffering from pesticide poisoning after a leak in their home.

### Wings weekend cleanup

A cleanup crew worked on the wings of the Madison Convention Center over the weekend.

### Cash bundle found; owner still missing

A large bundle of cash was found in a car, but the owner has not been identified.

### Soviets push dissidents' trial forward

The Soviet government is pushing forward the trial of dissidents who were arrested in the West.

### Peale gives real 'spiritual' pep talk

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. gave a powerful spiritual message to his congregation.

### Oregon Panthers are No. 1

The Oregon State football team has been ranked as the number one team in the nation.

### Long, lacquered look is the latest

A new fashion trend for hair is a long, lacquered look that is very shiny.

### Soglin unveils 'Plan B' for Avenue work

Mayor Paul Soglin has unveiled a new plan for the renovation of Avenue work.

### Wisconsin bucks trend to the right

Wisconsin is bucking the national trend towards conservatism.

# The Year In Review

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 26 Saturday, December 30, 1978

### Two who knew? Informers guard pre-bombing story

Two informers are guarding a story about a pre-bombing operation.

### Mr. Dillbeough

Portrait of a man who has been involved in various activities.

### Mr. Duch

Portrait of a man who has been involved in various activities.

### Mr. Dreyfus

Portrait of a man who has been involved in various activities.

### Suit charges misconduct in state correctional school

A suit has been filed charging misconduct at a state correctional school.

### PC faces hard choice

The Progressive Cause faces a hard choice regarding a recent decision.

### PC rallies

The Progressive Cause is holding a rally to support its cause.

# Rosen rips McMillin 'smear'

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 27 Friday, March 9, 1979

### 'No veils for Iran'

A report on the situation in Iran and the role of the media.

### Women march against Dreyfus policies

A group of women marched to protest against Dreyfus's policies.

### Women march against the Ayatollah's dress code in Tehran

Women in Tehran marched against the strict dress code imposed by the Ayatollah.

### International Women's Day

A celebration of International Women's Day with a parade and speeches.

# UAW fights the '7% solution'

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 126 Saturday, July 14, 1979

### 'A movement reborn'

A new movement is being reborn, focusing on social and economic issues.

### DC-10 rattles nerves and windows here

The arrival of a DC-10 jet at the airport caused a stir among the public.

# H-bomb papers obtained by PC

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 106 Saturday, September 15, 1979

The Progressive Cause has obtained documents related to the hydrogen bomb program.

# Equinox special inside today

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 191 Tuesday, September 18, 1979

### Progressive case dropped by U.S.

The U.S. government has dropped the case against the Progressive Cause.

### Magazine vows to print H-bomb article

The magazine has vowed to print an article about the hydrogen bomb.

# Parole for Armstrong

## MADISON PRESS CONNECTION

Volume 2, Number 201 Wednesday, January 2, 1980

### A thunder rocked the nation

A major event has occurred, shaking the nation.