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ORGANIZING "THE POOR" - AGAINST THE WORKING CLASS

by Marjaleena Repo

Poverty, always present in the capitalist society, is periodically "rediscovered" in North America. The 60's were such a decade of discovery of the "other America" - the name of Michael Harrington's book, which began a flow of countless similar exposures in both U.S. and Canada. This time it was because the class realities, so adamantly denied in the 50's by the ideologues of capitalism - the social scientists, the journalists and other media people - accumulated their impact as a result of growing contradictions in the capitalist economy, and then eventually had to be "dealt with". They are dealt with in non-class terms, however. A new category is created: "the poor" (the underprivileged, the culturally deprived) and these become the subjects of intense study, as if in their "culture of poverty", their behaviour, their life style, their "expectations" and "motivations" would lie an explanation to a major flaw of capitalism.

Universities, always the headquarters of the dominant ideology, and dead set against teaching scientific class analysis and scientific economics, now undertake course after course on "the poor". Most, if not all of these courses are purely descriptive, with vague, occasional references to "the system". Students are immersed in an "experience of poverty", with the hope that if only they could be made to understand what it feels like to be poor, all would be well. In reality these courses at their best create sentimental guilt in the student and, more prevalently, fixate the notion that "the poor" are different by nature, that they lack initiative, motivation, and are morally inferior. (A tutor in one of these courses told me recently that she was shocked to discover, after two years in such a course, that

students maintain all their prejudices after these courses, and have not learned one iota about the nature of capitalism and the nature of the working class. They will describe "the poor" in purely moralistic and bourgeois psychological terms, and end up with such profound conclusions as "the poor will always be with us" and "it's all because of human nature". The course leaders had all the while congratulated themselves for teaching the students "in a personal way" - and without using class concepts - all about capitalism and class society!). Most significantly, however, social change, in these courses, is seen as a threat to "indigenous culture" of the so-called poor, as an unwarranted intrusion of "middle class values", a notion which seriously hampers discussions on what effective social change consists of.

The "rediscovery" of poverty extends into all fields of life, from education where special programs are set up for "the poor", to library schools where students prepare projects on "literature for the poor". In Canada its official celebration took place in the Senate Committee on Poverty, a remarkable and, at the same time, through-the-ages-familiar performance of the representatives of the capitalist order peering at its victims. Members of Toronto's Just Society Movement pointed this out when they stated to the Committee, quite simply: "Study wealth, not the poor."

Not surprisingly, then, the newly found "poor" became a focus for middle class activists as well. Having learned in the schools and universities that the working class either did not exist or that if it existed, it was co-opted and apathetic and could not possibly act as the agent for social change, they found it "refreshing" to locate this new constituency.

(The method by which the universities indoctrinate their students to think that the working class does not exist, and distort the general nature of the working class, is examined by Gary Teeple, in "Sociology Misconstrues the Working Class", in the May-June issue of TRANSFORMATION.)

Not having been trained in a scientific method, the Canadian and U.S. activists never involved themselves in a thorough analysis of the actual nature of the working class (including blue and white collar, working and non-working people), of the meaning of its so-called apathy, and likewise offered no explanation as to why it was thought that the most downtrodden element of the working class had the most revolutionary potential. More often than not this reasoning has been extraordinarily simplistic:

"It is argued, in fact obvious, that the way of most likely success [in organizing] is to pursue a path of gathering the forces of the poor. This is obvious merely from the large numbers of the poor and since it would seem that they would be easier to motivate than others who have something to gain in retaining the present system." (From a position paper, written for the Just Society Movement, Summer 1970. Emphasis supplied.)

The alliance with "the poor" was thus based on pure sentiment, guesswork and wishful thinking, all thinly coated with rhetoric. The underlying and all pervasive physical distance and alienation of the middle class students and professionals from the working class was never considered a problem in itself, but on the contrary became a further justification for rejecting the working class as an agent of social change.

Denial of social classes

The question of why the middle class elements who are active in various social change efforts, do not recognize the existence of the working class, and vehemently deny all class realities (although they sometimes pay, rhetorically, some lipservice to the concept of social classes), is an important one. It is not enough to refer to "bourgeois ideology" here, since ideology itself must reflect certain concrete realities.

Much is explained by the fact that the middle class - the educated, professional element in society - as its name indicates, is in the middle, squeezed between the ruling class - the bourgeoisie - and the working class. The middle class is physically removed from both, and consequently does not understand the nature of power or the nature of wage slavery. Just mentioning the terms "ruling class" and "working class", makes the middle class liberal cringe. Neither to him exists, and he will spend much time and energy "proving" it. The arguments are always the same, "We are all people, aren't we", "I hate categories - they are so restrictive", "Really, there only is one class - the middle class - and we are all part of it", "It's all in your head - you are what you think you are", "The power-structure is so diffuse - it's hard to pinpoint it", "Everybody works - we are all working class." And so on and on.

Since the concept of social classes has been derived from reality, as an attempt to explain history and the present capitalist order, and since the concept is firmly based on economic and social realities - the ownership of the means of production combined with the relative power and privileges in one's social position - the denial of social

classes constitutes a denial of objective reality. Consequently, it does not take very long during a discussion on just about anything before the middle class liberal denies all physical reality. My recent experience of this type of reasoning might illustrate the point.

A middle class liberal, involved in "community development" through a state agency, drove me to a conference we were both attending. We soon came to the point in discussion where he vehemently denied the existence of social classes. "It's all in your head. You are what you think you are, etc., etc." Since he had to deny the existence of that objective reality, he quite soon had to deny the existence of the car he was driving and to state, solemnly, that it was quite possible that the car was made of velvet! (If somebody thought it was made of velvet, it was made of velvet - that is what you learn in the universities!)

It usually takes no longer than five minutes to get an ideologically indoctrinated liberal to this point, and while he is at it he denies his own physical existence, too. At this point a hard pinch on the buttock is what is needed to get him temporarily back to his senses, since he emits a most physical "Ouch", and gets quite angry if you state that the pain is really all in his head! Thus reality always collides most forcefully with fantasies and closed ideologies.

Academics and professionals, although working directly under the nose of the power structure and carefully watched by it, never actually come in contact with the ruling elements and are never present when top level decisions are made. The operation of the power structure therefore remains obscure to these middle class liberals, and is revealed only if some of them directly or indirectly challenge this (to them) "invisible hand". There are two ways this challenge can take place. A university professor or high-school teacher might insist on dealing with objective reality by describing it accurately - whether it be an episode in history, a question of the nature of poverty, or the cause of pollution. Since accurate description of reality always involves the analysis of the power structure and its modes of operating, and the conditions of the oppressed groups in the society, the educator is immediately led into a discussion of what has to be done to change things. If the students are not totally subdued and intimidated, they themselves will raise the question of what should be done. From the moment the teacher seriously attempts to discuss the necessity of social change and what it takes to effect social changes and how people have broken the chains of oppression elsewhere in the world, he is in serious trouble. He will be accused of being "too political", and "biased" and of attempting to "brainwash" the students (whereas he was trying to give them their brains back again). The universities and highschools have ways of dealing with such people: teachers can be transferred or fired, university lecturers see their contracts expire and find it impossible to get other work.

The other way of becoming aware of the power structure is for the professional to start to act as a professional towards the people he/she comes in contact with. A planner only has to insist that the planned for be included in decision making about the plans for them; a doctor or a nurse only have to insist that health-care be provided to everybody and it be done humanely; social workers only have to draw attention to and attempt to deal with social conditions that produced their "clients". Ordinary professional careers come to an end this way. Being fired and then not being able to find employment are the rewards for real professionalism.

The middle class liberal is also physically removed from the average working man and woman in this society, and that then is the basis of the denial of the existence of the working class. You can see the educated middle class engaged in intense arguments about how the "concept of the working class is obsolete", while their tables are waited upon, quietly and unobtrusively, by an underpaid waitress whose feet are swollen from the work, and the university halls echo with similar arguments, while the immigrant worker pushes the broom in the halls and gets his meagre paycheck at the end of the week*. Reality has once again negated the abstract argument - but the debates in the universities will continue, because the debaters have in fact become blind to reality.

The ruling class and working class on the other hand are fully aware of each other's existence, as well as of

* The "visible" workers are mainly service workers, whom the middle class encounters as individuals. They do not come in contact with production workers and office workers as a group.

the existence of the middle class. No worker has ever failed to recognize who the "boss" is, and how he behaves. No owner and manager will deny the existence of the working class. That is why Fortune Magazine is such refreshing reading, since this organ of the ruling class, unlike the liberal middle class and its publications, deals accurately - from its own class perspective - with class realities. (An article, "Blue Collar Blues on the Assembly Line", by Judson Goodings, Fortune, July 1970, is a most extraordinary documentation of the alienation of labour, and should be obligatory reading for everybody who habitually denies the existence of classes or propagates the view that "everybody is middle class".)

The intellectuals and professionals, i.e. the middle class, although surrounded by workers of all sorts, are not in contact with them; consequently the struggles of the working class, particularly as they take place, daily, every minute, on the workplace, are unknown to the middle class. Only some more dramatic instances, like spectacular strikes and plant shutdowns, enable the middle class to get a glimpse of the magnitude of the class, its struggles and its

Note on the lumpenproletariat

Every era has its own lumpenproletariat, different in external features, but similar in the role it plays in the struggles of the working class. Marx and Engels used the term "Lumpen" to indicate even the looks - "dressed in rags" - of the most downtrodden, victimized elements in their time. In the Communist Manifesto they write:

"The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution. Its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue."

Another section, from The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850, clarifies the role of the lumpenproletariat in France:

"The February Revolution had cast the army out of Paris. The National Guard, that is, the bourgeoisie in its different gradations, constituted the sole power. Alone, however, it did not feel itself a match for the proletariat. Moreover, it was forced gradually and piecemeal to open its ranks and admit armed proletarians, albeit after the most tenacious resistance and after setting up a hundred different obstacles. There consequently remained but one way out: to play off one part of the proletariat against the other. (Emphasis in the original).

For this purpose the Provisional Government formed 24 battalions of Mobile Guards, each a thousand strong, composed of young men from 15 to 20 years. They belonged for the most part to the lumpenproletariat, which in all big towns forms a mass sharply differentiated from the industrial proletariat, a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, gens sans feu et sans aveu,¹ varying according to the degrees of civilization of the nation to which they belong, but never renouncing their lazzaroni² character; at the youthful age at which

the Provisional Government recruited them, thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption. The Provisional Government paid them 1 franc 50 centimes a day, that is, it bought them. It gave them their own uniform, that is, it made them outwardly distinct from the blouse-wearing workers. In part it had assigned them officers from the standing army as leaders; in part they themselves elected young sons of the bourgeoisie whose rodomontades about death for the fatherland and devotion to the republic captivated them.

And so the Paris proletariat was confronted with an army, drawn from its own midst, of 24,000 young, strong, foolhardy men."

Mao Tse Tung describes the Chinese lumpenproletariat in the following terms:

"China's status as a colony and semi-colony has given rise to a multitude of rural and urban unemployed. Denied proper means of making a living, many of them are forced to resort to illegitimate ones, hence the robbers, gangsters, beggars, and prostitutes and the numerous people who live on superstitious practices. This social stratum is unstable; while some are apt to be bought over by the reactionary forces, others may join the revolution. These people lack constructive qualities and are given to destruction rather than construction; after joining the revolution, they become a source of roving-rebel, and anarchist ideology in the revolutionary ranks. Therefore we should know how to remold them and guard against their destructiveness." (Selected Works II, p325-326.

Franz Fanon, in The Wretched of the Earth, presents this picture of the Algerian lumpenproletariat:

"Colonialism will also find in the lumpenproletariat a considerable space for maneuvering. For this reason any movement for freedom ought to give its fullest attention to this lumpenproletariat.

potential powers. Otherwise, the alienation of the middle class from the working class is just about complete.

"The poor" are close to the middle class

No similar alienation exists between "the poor", the often lumpenized sector of the working class (See "Note on the Lumpenproletariat", on page 6), and the middle class, since both are in fact removed from the working class. Concretely, the point of contact between the middle class activists and the most downtrodden elements in the capitalist society, is a very clear one. First the professionals; the most troubled elements of the working class, the long term chronic welfare recipients and other victims of the system are just about the only members of the working class that the middle class comes into contact with, with any regularity. They are the "clients", the "patients", the "cases" of various state and private social agencies. They are the ones who are being "caseworked" and "rehabilitated" and "treated" in all those useless efforts that keep the social workers as a profession alive. Many "recipients" become, as any social worker can

testify, excellent manipulators of the only things they have left to manipulate: the agencies and the social workers. The chronic long-term recipients themselves are removed from any working class context by the very fact that they do not work; thus they have often not experienced even the rudiments of a typical working class collective experience, which frequently contains elements of loyalty and solidarity with fellow workers. In typical working class situations one learns some basic lessons about the nature of capitalism as it presses on one and one's fellow workers as well as about the nature of the class conflict. The long term welfare recipient, on the other hand, like the typical middle class person, is the supreme individualist, fighting the system all by himself.

Students, who undertook community organizing projects in Canada as well as in the U.S. found the same element most accessible in the neighbourhoods. In various SUPA (Student Union for Peace Action) and Company of Young Canadians projects the organizers and volunteers invariably centered around "welfare mothers", whose ability to survive under immensely oppressive conditions and to "bitch" about these conditions so eloquently, left the middle

The peasant masses will always answer the call to rebellion, but if the rebellion's leaders think it will be able to develop without taking the masses into consideration, the lumpenproletariat will throw itself into the battle and will take part in the conflict - but this time on the side of the oppressor. And the oppressor, who never loses a chance of setting the niggers against each other, will be extremely skillful in using that ignorance and incomprehension which are the weaknesses of the lumpenproletariat. If this available reserve of human effort is not immediately organized by the forces of rebellion, it will find itself fighting as hired soldiers side by side with the colonial troops. In Algeria, it is the lumpenproletariat which furnished the harkis and the messalists [Algerians enlisted in the French army]; in Angola, it supplied the road openers who nowadays precede the Portuguese armed columns; in the Congo we find once more the lumpenproletariat in regional manifestations in Kasai and Katanga, while at Leopoldville the Congo's enemies made use of it to organize 'spontaneous' mass meetings against Lumumba." (p. 136-7, Grove Press, Black Cat Edition).

It can be seen, through brief quotations from different times and places, that the lumpenproletariat is always used against the working class itself. In North America today, the lumpen element can be found amongst the criminal elements, the bootleggers, the pimps and prostitutes, the hustlers and the conmen on the one hand, and the chronic welfare elements on the other hand - although frequently these categories are overlapping. The chronic welfare element, who through its life circumstances becomes dependent on state agencies and bureaucracies, as well as individual charity, and is removed from the activities of the working class, becomes the element that is then organized against the working class. It, having dropped out of the working class, identifies with the oppressor whom it attempts to please for minor personal gains and

privileges.

There is a difference between the lumpenized elements of the white working class, and the substantial numbers of Black people and Indians, who are forced to live under lumpenizing conditions *en masse*, i.e. who are recipients of welfare benefits and are deprived of real participation in the society they live in (the Blacks) or are denied self-determination (Indians). The Blacks and the Indians have their own lumpen elements, of course, which behave in a manner consistent with the role of the lumpen through the ages. The definition of who the lumpen element is among the Blacks and Indians, is, however, a task for the conscious elements in these groups, as is the task of finding ways of controlling their lumpenproletariat.

Under certain favourable conditions, i.e. in the presence of a dynamic movement, individual members of the lumpenproletariat can change and become once again oriented to their class. The Autobiography of Malcolm X is an important document of the fact that a lumpenized black man - Malcolm was a hoodlum, a thief, a drug pusher and a pimp - was able to overcome his personal demoralization, and eventually become a revolutionary leader. He changes through the teachings of religious black nationalism, but was able to transform himself into a revolutionary nationalist/internationalist, before he was assassinated.

Presently, similar developments are taking place among Indians and Quebecois, in whose midst the national question creates the favourable conditions necessary for the lumpenproletariat to become de-lumpenized. With the lumpenized white working class nothing similar is taking place, since both in Canada and U.S. we are a long way from building a dynamic working class movement.

1. Folk without hearth and home.

2. Lazzaroni; Name applied in Italy to the declassed, lumpenproletarian elements of the population repeatedly used by the absolute governments for counter-revolutionary purposes.

class activists in awe. One can, indeed, in these projects find a certain type of woman who became elevated into a leader. These were women with numerous children, separated or deserted, who had spent long stretches of their lives on "assistance". They were bright and volatile and were always willing to "tell it like it is" to anybody who cared to listen. The willingness to "bitch" and to "mouth off" to anyone who is willing to lend an ear, is quite typical of the underclass, since it has no experience of collective action or co-operation, and feels, like the angry young men and women of the middle class, that anger by itself, loudly and clearly expressed, can change society.

"The poor" are different from the rest of the working class

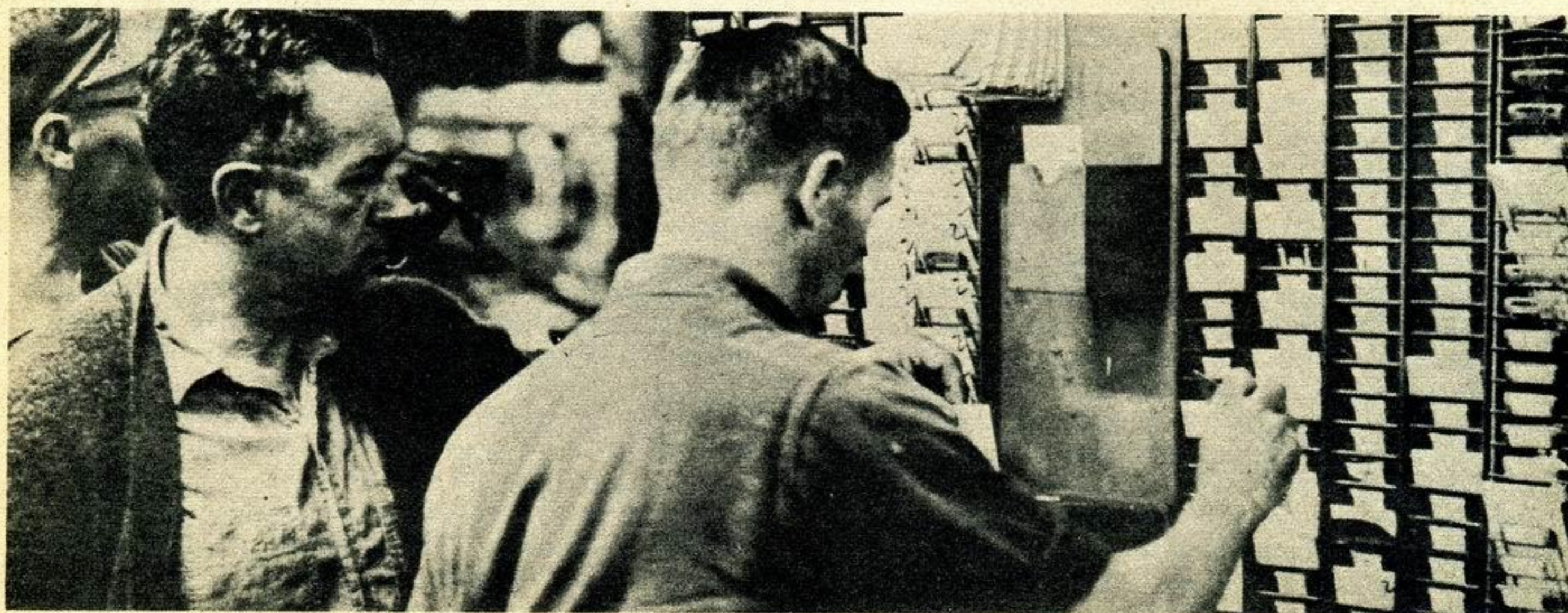
One finds that the average working class person is altogether different. He or she can give you an accurate description of working and living conditions, and a pretty good statement as to why things are the way they are, but will not get involved in endless bitch sessions with middle class people, for the very simple reason that they know that words alone will not change anything. In my own experience as an organizer in a working class district and in my consequent contacts with workers of all kinds, I found that these two elements, the "lumpenized" poor and the working class were almost the polar opposites from each other. The chronic welfare element was gregarious and talkative, individuals of this group would rapidly tell you everything about their personal lives and about their neighbours lives (since their lives centered around "personal politics") they would expose themselves willingly and would attempt to manipulate you for favours, small "loans" of money, etc. The actual working class people, on the other hand, although quite friendly, were much more guarded about their lives (until they got to know you well) and were more practical about the reasons you came to see them, i.e. more sparing of your time and theirs. Also, the latter were always more reliable; if they promised to come to meetings or to undertake tasks, they invariably did what they had promised, whereas the de-classed element, strong in words and loud in their criticism of "the establishment" seldom lived up to their promises of action. It was interesting to note that the middle class organizers, lacking a class perspective and a real understanding of the behaviour

of the different layers of the working class, always, in all the projects I personally know of in English Canada during the last half-a-dozen years, ended up spending most their time with the volatile "poor", and were unable to relate at all to the rest of the working class.

There is another significant difference between the long term welfare recipients and the average member of the working class, a difference which creates a division within the class and which is reflected in the politics of the "poor people's" groups. People on welfare tend to see themselves in a unique position, of being kept down, humiliated, controlled by the whole state bureaucracy. They soon lose sight of the fact that a working neighbour can be in an even worse position with less net income, with none of the "fringe benefits" that a welfare recipient obtains (medical bills, drugs, dental care, emergency funds for clothing and furniture, etc.), minor things - and often difficult to obtain, no doubt - but nevertheless completely unavailable to the working poor. The welfare recipients who have not worked for a long time, forget (if they ever knew) the "normal" conditions of work: tremendous pressure to produce, rigid supervision and humiliating regulations, poor wages and constant fear of being laid off or actually fired.

From the assumption - supported by their establishment and middle class friends - that they are the worst off in society, welfare recipients in their organizations start making demands that do not show the slightest consideration for the rest of the working class. They want more money per child, more benefits, special allowances, etc. - all demands which create real resentment among the working poor. The working poor have a valid reason for this resentment, since they live next door to the long-term recipients, and see things that middle class activists fail to see: that some of the people who are supposed to be worst off in society are the same ones who take taxicabs to beer stores, who send their children to restaurants to buy meals for the whole family, and who dress better than most working people. They also watch with disbelief how these same people get up in public meetings (I have seen this happen frequently) and talk about how horrible it is to be on welfare. And the disbelief turns into cynicism after reading yet another sob story about people on welfare.

The basis for the relative "affluence" of some welfare



The daily experience of the working class is unknown to the middle class activists and the so-called poor.

recipients is that welfare constitutes their guaranteed income and they are able to supplement it in various ways: by renting rooms out, by having a steady boyfriend, bootlegging, odd jobs, etc. - all activities which I have observed in the district where I worked.

The establishment organizes "the poor"

While the middle class activists became enamoured with "the poor", they ended up competing for their attention with the traditional "friends of the poor", the agents of the ruling class: the social agencies and the ladies of charity. The case of Trefann Neighbours and Tenants (TNT), an organization of the underclass, set up consciously and deliberately by the representatives of the establishment, will illustrate this clearly, as well as revealing the dynamics to be found in many so-called poor people's groups.

Initially, in the fall of 1966, I had helped to organize the Trefann Court Residents' Association (TCRA) as an overall area organization, to represent the interests of all working class elements in the area, be they homeowners or tenants. Although it was clear from the beginning that the homeowners were the ones who were under the gun, certain demands regarding compensation and relocation were raised for the tenants as well. At the initial stages of the organizing there were many long term tenants in the area who in no way saw themselves as different from or as an "opposition" to the homeowners for the simple reason that property owning was not a meaningful classification of people, whereas life style, i.e. normal working class life, was. People were simply neighbours.

The deterioration of the absentee owned properties, however, prevented a long term coalition between the working class homeowners and tenants, since the latter, unable to get the slum landlords to keep their houses in repair, were forced to move elsewhere. (This process had started long before I began to work in the area, and speeded up rapidly under the threat of urban renewal.) Another element started gradually to move in. These were the long-term, chronic welfare recipients, often troubled and demoralized people (also bootleggers, prostitutes, drunks, petty criminals and so on), and "problem families" who had been expelled from public housing. This element was highly transient and personally unstable and could not through its own efforts have become an organized opposition to the working class homeowners. They had to be consciously and deliberately organized into such an opposition. (The working class homeowners needed help in getting organized, but they were on the move before any organizer came into the area. They had definite interests in common with each other, whereas the lumpenized element were just so many individuals with different points of view.)

In order to organize the lumpenized element, the establishment needed to have friends inside the area, and friends with certain characteristics. In the Trefann area the crucial link existed in the person of a woman, Mrs. Pat Rice, mother of eight, who had been on the receiving end of social assistance as well as individual and church charity for the most part of her life. (This must not be regarded as a criticism of the woman, but only as an explanation as to why establishment representatives had access to her. The conditions of the woman's life were not of her own making: the capitalist system crushes members of the working class in different ways). She was intelligent and extremely articulate, and could under favourable circumstances have become a working class leader,

but her particular circumstances had made her into the tool of the establishment to be used against the members of her own class.

Initially she was elected as one of the tenant representatives on the executive of the Trefann Court Residents' Association. This is where her experience as an individual long term recipient came into direct conflict with the rest of the working class members: she simply had no experience of collective functioning, and particularly of group discipline and accountability to others. Ordinary democratic procedures (which were not bureaucratic, stifling procedures), like waiting for your turn to speak, or having one's proposal defeated in a vote, were unknown to her, since she had lived most of her adult life in a "doing one's own thing" atmosphere. She was used to picking up the phone and "giving heck" to this or that social worker, bureaucrat or politician, and calling the press to deal with some dramatic situations, but was not used to developing strategy with other people and sticking to collective decisions. This then was the personal, "subjective" factor which made her vulnerable to manipulation from outside.

The crucial factor was that she had over the years become personally friendly with a woman, Mrs. June Rowlands, wife of a business executive, who was herself a prominent member of the Association of Women Electors (an organization of middle class women, wives of business executives and professionals), and through it a member of the Social Planning Council and its various committees, notably the one concerned with housing and urban renewal. (Presently she is also a member of the National Welfare Council, appointed on it by the Minister of Health and Welfare, John Munro.) Over their long years of association Mrs. Rowlands had often helped Mrs. Rice when she was in trouble with bill collectors and agencies, and had at one point become the godmother of one of Mrs. Rice's children.

Mrs. Rowlands' involvement in the Trefann organizing was possible through her personal relationship with Mrs. Rice and through the fact that she was on the urban renewal and housing committee of the Social Planning Council. She was set up by the latter organization as an official "observer" in Trefann. In this latter capacity she continued associating directly with Mrs. Rice but seldom if ever approached the TCRA.

The pressure from Mrs. Rowlands on Mrs. Rice started to manifest itself in many ways. Mrs. Rice first told me that "somebody close to City Hall" (eventually revealing this to be Mrs. Rowlands) had warned her that the TCRA "was getting too political for its own good", and too close to the NDP (an NDP member of the provincial parliament was actively involved in the initial stages of the fight against urban renewal), and should steer an "independent" course. Then Mrs. Rice started to complain about the executive, not because of its achievements or lack of achievements or in terms of anything concrete, but vaguely in terms of the homeowners "not caring for the tenants". (This latter "criticism" was later repeated to me by Mrs. June Rowlands and also the then president of the Association of Women Electors, Mrs. Frances Burger.) The constant pressure from Mrs. Rowlands resulted eventually in a most significant event, which itself illuminates the difference, the actual conflict between the establishment working with the least conscious element, and the working class itself.

While the absentee owners intensified the exploitation of their tenants by not keeping the properties up to even the minimum standards of health and safety, continuous crisis occurred in the lives of the tenants (it has to be remember-



Toronto Daily Star

Commissioner of Development, Graham Emslie, and Mrs. Rowlands visiting "the poor" in Trefann. Note the presence of the press photographer.

ed that many long term tenants were forced to move out of the area, and a new element, largely welfare, moved in). Plaster was falling from the ceiling, plumbing was falling apart, heating systems deteriorated. Many of the welfare tenants definitely lived in grossly substandard housing - meanwhile paying exorbitant rents - and always with the full knowledge of the welfare department. The TCRA was aware of the rapidly deteriorating conditions and insisted on the only logical solution: that the absentee owners be forced to maintain minimum standards and that this be done immediately. (This demand has always been the cornerstone of the TCRA program for the simple reason that absentee owned properties are the ones that turn an area into a slum.)

The approach of the TCRA was to deal with the problem in its totality, i.e. effect changes that would benefit the whole area and people in similar circumstances elsewhere in the city. The approach of Mrs. Rowlands was to expose the particular crisis to draw attention to the wretched housing conditions - and to demand not the enforcement of housing standards but the implementation of the urban renewal program with its emphasis on public housing - those very things that the TCRA was totally opposed to.

The cases that were to be exposed by Mrs. Rice and Mrs. Rowlands had, ironically, not so much to do with inadequate housing (although the houses were also inadequate),

as with the fact that the people involved - all on assistance - had had their gas cut off because of unpaid bills ranging from \$100 - \$400. Nevertheless, they served their purposes well. Mrs. Rice prepared a brief to the city - without consulting any of the rest of the executive - and was driven to the city hall by Mrs. Rowlands (over my strong objections, I might add, with Mrs. Rowlands arguing vehemently that "these people [the Residents' Association] are not really interested in the tenants" - a fiction that was largely created and perpetuated by her and other members of the Social Planning Council. I argued in vain, of course, that Mrs. Rowlands had no business encouraging Mrs. Rice to be totally undemocratic, and that Mrs. Rice had to learn to work with other people in the community, and not see herself as the "boss woman" who can do whatever she pleases.)

The newspapers got hold of the brief and wrote front page stories about slum children suffering chill blains and sleeping in snow suits. Photographers, cameramen, newsmen, city officials and politicians roamed around the area for days, looking for further exposures. The thrust of the write-ups in the newspapers was a familiar one: that the "slums had to be taken down" - which had been the intent of this particular effort all along. Mrs. Rice and the handful of largely welfare tenants were mere tools in an overall struggle against the working class residents whose argument had been: "Slums are made by absentee owners. Therefore they can also be unmade without destroying working class homes."

The immediate improvements in the lives of the tenants in the area were nil, despite all the publicity and hullabaloo. Those directly involved had their gas restored - which a forceful call to the welfare department could have achieved. Soft-hearted newspaper readers started coming down to the area with food, clothes and heating equipment, which they would take to the ones whose names and faces they recognized from the newspapers. Other welfare tenants in the area resented the fact that although they lived in similar conditions, no attention was paid to them. Some friendship groups broke up temporarily because of fights around the "loot". It should be noted that while the chronic welfare elements loved the publicity and seldom turned down a request for a photograph or an interview, the working people and pensioners of the area, often worse off financially than many of the welfare recipients, hid in their houses during the media invasion. They resented the fact that through the life style of a few, the whole district was labelled a "slum" and all its residents referred to as "slum dwellers" and "the poor". (See also, "Photography and the Powerless", in this issue).

Through her action Mrs. Rice was now established as a "community leader", with newspaper articles and interviews upholding this mantle. Mrs. Rowlands reported about the developments in a newsletter of the Association of Women Electors (January 16, 1968):

"I should like to comment on the situation in Trefann Court. Late last fall it became apparent that the climate in Trefann Court was changing. The tenants in the area were becoming very dissatisfied and wanted some action on bad housing conditions. This came to a head last Wednesday when a group of tenants, led by Mrs. Pat Rice laid their problems of most inadequate housing before the Board of Control. The only solution for many tenants is relocation into fit housing [no reference here to the fact that at the time over 10,000 families were on the waiting list for public

housing.] Much of the accomodation in Trefann Court occupied by tenants is far beyond the point where it could be repaired satisfactorily. [This ignores deliberately the fact that many of the homeowners in the area had bought their houses in similar unlivable conditions, and had fixed them up over the years.] Don Mount public housing will be completed this spring and could provide accomodation for many of these families. [Many of the welfare tenants, including Mrs. Rice and two of her closest associates, did not want to live in public housing. Thus the "demands" that they ended up raising were not even in their own interest!]"

And further on, most significantly:

"The tenants appearing before the Board of Control asked me to accompany them when they met with Mr. George Cook [chief of housing inspection department] and later controllers Lamport and Beavis. Both controllers met the group of women most cordially and appeared most willing and anxious to help in any way possible. Controller Marks was contacted by telephone and indicated her willingness to assist. Unfortunately Controller Campbell has been ill, however her letter to Mrs. Rice was much appreciated. This morning at 8:30, Mayor Dennison met the Trefann group and myself. It is our policy to support and help groups of citizens who are acting to upgrade housing through by-law enforcement, repair and renewal."

It is significant that these meetings were held with politicians who for the most part were openly hostile to the TCRA and who were reluctant to meet with the representatives of the Association. All these appointments were made within a few days, which by itself is a record. Eventually a group of TNT tenants were driven to Ottawa by Mrs. Rowlands and an employee of a social agency, to meet with appropriate ministers and officials and to urge that the urban renewal program go ahead. Everywhere they were equally welcome, since they were, in contrast to the militantly resisting TCRA, extremely "reasonable".

"The poor" — against the working class

Under these circumstances the Trefann Neighbours and Tenants was born, and from its beginning to the present day it has existed only by the most concrete support from Mrs. Rowlands and representatives of social agencies. It has never had more than a dozen or so active members amongst the tenants in Trefann, but has had plenty of other friends. Mrs. Rowlands has been a member from the beginning and functioned briefly as the secretary of the TNT (her name was also on the stationery). Other names mentioned by Mrs. Rice on August 13, 1968, in a presentation to the city were: Fathers Cambray and McCarthy from St. Paul's Church, Mrs. Olive David from the Social Planning Council, Mr. and Mrs. Connelly from the Catholic Family Service, Mrs. Val Bell from Family Court, Professor Ted Mann from the Sociology Department of York University, and people from the police and health departments. One can well say that these people were the real constituency of the TNT, with the handful of area residents being used as mere puppets.

The TNT's main function has been from the very beginning to demand that the urban renewal program go ahead and to oppose the enforcement of housing standards. (It would have been in the real interest of the welfare tenants

to insist on the housing standards as well as on rent control.) In their demands the TNT was strongly supported by the slum landlords who wanted to be expropriated, since many of them had bought their properties after the announcement of the urban renewal program, for the specific reason to make money on the transaction. During a delegation to the City Hall on January 17, 1968, Mr. Harry Solomon, the largest single landlord in the area, backed up the demands made by Mrs. Rice and her group. Also, TNT meetings were initially held on the premises owned by the Solomon family.

The TNT has also consistently demanded more "social services" in an area already flooded with social "caretakers" of all sorts. (A most recent development: twenty-seven agencies have expressed an interest in planning for Trefann - a five block area! - and a social worker has been hired to "co-ordinate" this interest.) It can be stated quite simply that nowhere, at no time, has it been in the interest of the working class to have its daily life "administered" and "organized" by a multitude of social agencies, all of whom act (despite the subjective wishes of individual social workers and agency employers) on behalf of the ruling class of that society. On the contrary, the working class, when it struggles to improve its conditions, has everywhere strived for conditions which would make social workers unnecessary, not to increase them!

It is important to recognize that the agents of the establishment, like Mrs. Rowlands and the agency representatives have at all times acted completely openly. (Thus Mrs. Rowlands, acted as the secretary of the TNT and attended the Poor People's Conference in Toronto in January of this year, as a delegate with voting powers from that organization.) There is a definite reason why she was able to function in this manner, in total opposition to the working class in the area. The prime reason was that the middle class organizers in the area (one a lawyer, John Sewell, now an alderman, one a social worker, Wolfe Erlichman, who is still active in the area, and a third one, a student) were themselves intrigued by and impressed with Mrs. Rice and what could be described as the lumpenized element, the underclass, and did not forcefully put a stop to the maneuverings of the TNT. Instead of defining the Rowlands-Rice team and their activities in class terms and exposing them, they defined them in personality terms - Mrs. Rice was "confused" and Mrs. Rowlands "interfering" - and took a completely conciliatory attitude towards them both. All three organizers had in fact wanted to organize "the poor" - of whom Mrs. Rice was a prime example - and they, too, expressed the sentiment that the working class homeowners (who were the only ones who could set a definite stop to urban renewal) were the "elite", and that they were better off than most of the welfare tenants. Therefore their ambivalent attitude towards the lumpenized element led them into defending and supporting the TNT from time to time. Any attempt to thoroughly expose the establishment and its agents in the district was either discouraged or sabotaged by them. To them it simply wasn't "nice" to talk about the operation of the power structure, by naming names, and they particularly didn't want to "hurt the feelings" of Mrs. Rice. Thus it can be said that the middle class in its totality, including its radical and conservative wing, act consistently against the working class and in the interest of the ruling elements. (Today the TNT sits as an equal with the TCRA on an urban renewal working committee set up by the city, and can out-vote the TCRA on every critical issue. This is called

Feiffer

IN ORDER TO RADICALIZE THE WORKING CLASS I TOOK A JOB IN A FACTORY.



BUT I COULDN'T IDENTIFY WITH ALL THOSE FASCISTS.



AND BESIDES 60% OF THE WORK FORCE GOT LAID OFF.



SO I DECIDED TO RADICALIZE THE PROFESSIONS AND TOOK A JOB IN PUBLISHING.



BUT I COULDN'T IDENTIFY WITH ALL THOSE RUNNING DOGS OF IMPERIALISM.



AND BESIDES EVERY ONE IN MY OFFICE GOT FIRED.



SO NOW I'M GOING TO RADICALIZE THE POOR.



I CAN IDENTIFY WITH THE POOR.



I'M POOR.



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"citizens' participation"!)

The middle class organizes "the poor"

The Trefann Neighbours and Tenants is only one of the many "poor people's" groups in Canada, set up with a definite purpose by the representatives of the establishment (the politicians, social agencies, the leisured wives of businessmen and professionals) to counteract definite working class demands and to pacify and control discontented elements of the working class. These "poor people's" groups invariably work with social agencies and churches. In addition to these establishment controlled and oriented groups, there is another type which, although not so blatantly and consciously, is nevertheless anti-working class in its theory (never thoroughly spelled out) and in its practice. In these groups, the often unwitting agents of the ruling class are the various "radical" social workers, researchers, students and organizers.

In many of these groups one can find that the founders have usually been working class people, almost always women: capable, intelligent and articulate, but lacking any significant working class experience (i.e. long term work experience in either an office or factory, and contact with union activities, including a strike), and therefore lacking consciousness of themselves as members of a class. The impetus to forming these groups has often come from two-three "welfare mothers" getting together "to do something", and the groups usually start operating under agency auspices, on their premises and under their "supervision", which more often than not turns them into "projects" for social workers. Some, distrustful of agencies, move outside them, and through various concrete processes, step by step, end up working with the liberal radicals.

The question of where working class people (working or not) can go when they are looking for help in getting organized around some grievances, is a practical one. Since

the miniscule, alienated left is conspicuous only in its absence from the lives of ordinary people, and since the so-called social democratic party and the labour unions are totally removed from the grass roots, those people who feel that they want to "do something" end up going to the social agencies and churches for advice. The "advice" usually is quite clear: one founder of a "poor people's" group told me that she was "advised" to keep away from "those people in Trefann", because they were too militant; another one, praising the "help" from social workers said that she was advised to keep the group non-political. (When her particular group became active and vocal she resigned because it had then become "too political".)

The "poor people" who eventually reject the agency "help" are those with some critical intelligence and ability to see through the rhetoric of these agencies: they are perhaps the true rebels amongst the so-called poor. They now start attracting middle class "rebels", who are looking for a cause. Progressive social workers and clergymen and students flock to these groups as "friends", "associates" and "resource" people, and the real politics of the "poor people's" groups begin to emerge. The essence of these politics is that here you have the blind leading the blind.

Middle class politics take over

The middle class professionals and students bring into these groups various elements that combine to create anti-working class politics. There is rampant anti-intellectualism which denies the relevance of having theory and analysis, and results in a consistent put-down of political education. The educated middle class, having been turned off by bourgeois, fragmented knowledge in the highschools and universities, now systematically denies the working class access to relevant knowledge. The anti-intellectualism is transmitted to the working class members of these groups who learn to refer to any learning as "book knowledge" and

therefore reject it.

Then there is a lack of class analysis. The very fact that the people in the groups are referred to as "the poor" - and end up accepting this label - indicates that the concept of class has been rejected. The term "working class" in the speech of the liberal/radical middle class people and the so-called poor, appears to refer to reactionary hard-hats and to conservative union leaders, both of whom exist, but do not constitute the totality of the working class.

Then there is "participatory democracy" which permanently incapacitates these fledgling groups, since anybody off the street - establishment tools, police agents and fools alike - can participate on equal terms with long term, active and committed members of these groups. The ideology of "participatory democracy" is not created by the working class members, but is always introduced and justified and defended by the middle class. Concepts like "leadership" and "structure" then become purely negative terms; and "elitism" the most prevalent accusation against decisiveness and initiative. Never is any effort spent in defining good and bad leadership, good and bad structure, democratic and non-democratic organization, thus leaving the working class members helpless and without any direction, and profoundly unable to deal with middle class misleadership. As always, when the organizational structures are thoroughly fragmented, the actual decisions are being made by a mere handful of people, those who can involve themselves night and day in movement affairs. Since they are hidden decisionmakers ("we don't have any leaders around here"), it is extremely difficult to challenge their powers and methods of operating.

The official ideology of these groups is - and they never fail to state it, although they do not spell out what their underlying theory is - that everybody is "doing their thing". This is seen as a positive thing as opposed to "being told what to do" as if these two were the only alternatives. The middle class radicals spend much time providing the rationale for this ideology. In a typical passage, George Ford and Steven Langdon describe sympathetically the organizational structure of one such group, the Just Society Movement,

"The structure of the Movement has been based on clear principles of organization. As the JSM states: 'We have been anxious to avoid developing an elitist, hierarchical structure, or growing inflexibly bureaucratic like the institutions we are trying to change! The problem has been in developing an alternative structure.'

The present structure involves several action and work committees dealing with welfare rights, workmen's compensation, the newspaper . . . general office details, finances, babysitting and daycare, and community control. Each group sends a person to the co-ordinating committee - which is also open to participation and voting by any other JSM member [establishment tools, police agents and fools alike!]. This structure is open, potentially involving, and vital element in developing leadership among the membership . . .

. . . But it cannot prevent leaders from emerging, and only a clear commitment to decentralization and maximum participation by all - including a willingness to challenge oppressive leadership prevents centralization from recurring." (Canadian Dimension, Vol. 7, no. 1 & 2, June-July, 1970)

It goes without saying that the indigenous "poor people" lacking class perspective and political education, have no way of really challenging their radical middle class friends. If there is a challenge it is purely on personality terms, not on the basis of class orientation, i.e. not by raising questions whether the "decentralization" proposed by the middle class actually works in the interest of the working class. On the contrary, those authentic "poor" people - usually a very small number - who remain in these groups along with the middle class activists, turn gradually into middle class radicals themselves, in life style and rhetoric. By that time these prime movers have, of course, become permanently alienated from their original constituency, the most impoverished members of the working class. (This alienation was related to me with pride by one of the active members of a "poor people's" group, who said that after having been vocal in the group and appearing on the media frequently, her "name was mud" on the street where she lived. That statement was made as a criticism of her working class neighbours, and not of herself and the politics of her group. It reminded me of the glee by which "radical" students always put down their not-so-radical fellow students. The woman, by putting down other working class people, had successfully adopted the thinking of her middle class movement friends.)

By this time the practical consequences of the anti-working class orientation of these groups can be seen clearly. First of all, the original constituency amongst the oppressed members (working and non-working poor) of society fails to materialize, although initially a number of people would attend meetings. Those who attend briefly, cannot comprehend the chaos, the lack of clarity in the overall orientation, the long windedness of the meetings, the fact that no effective division of labour takes place and that tasks that are proposed and agreed upon are not performed. Since everybody is "responsible", nobody is, and any fundamental criticism an individual attempts to offer about the functioning of the group, is sloughed off with an incomprehensible: "Don't criticize, do something." Instead of the criticism being dealt with, the questioner is made to feel guilty for even raising the question, and is accused of "obstructing" and "interfering". The critics become silent and then return back to the anonymous masses from which they briefly emerged.

Disorganization prevents the reaching out to the constituency, since all energies are spent on endless vague talk about "the group", "the organization", "the movement" (without any clear suggestions about the structures that are necessary to build a democratic mass organization). The active participants realize that they are not attracting members, but they do not know why. Some suggest - and this is a typical "analysis" - "We talk too much and act too little - that's why people are turned off." They do indeed talk too much, but analyze too little and do no study at all about the nature of capitalism and the nature of themselves and their constituency in the working class.

Alienation from the constituency leads to frantic action

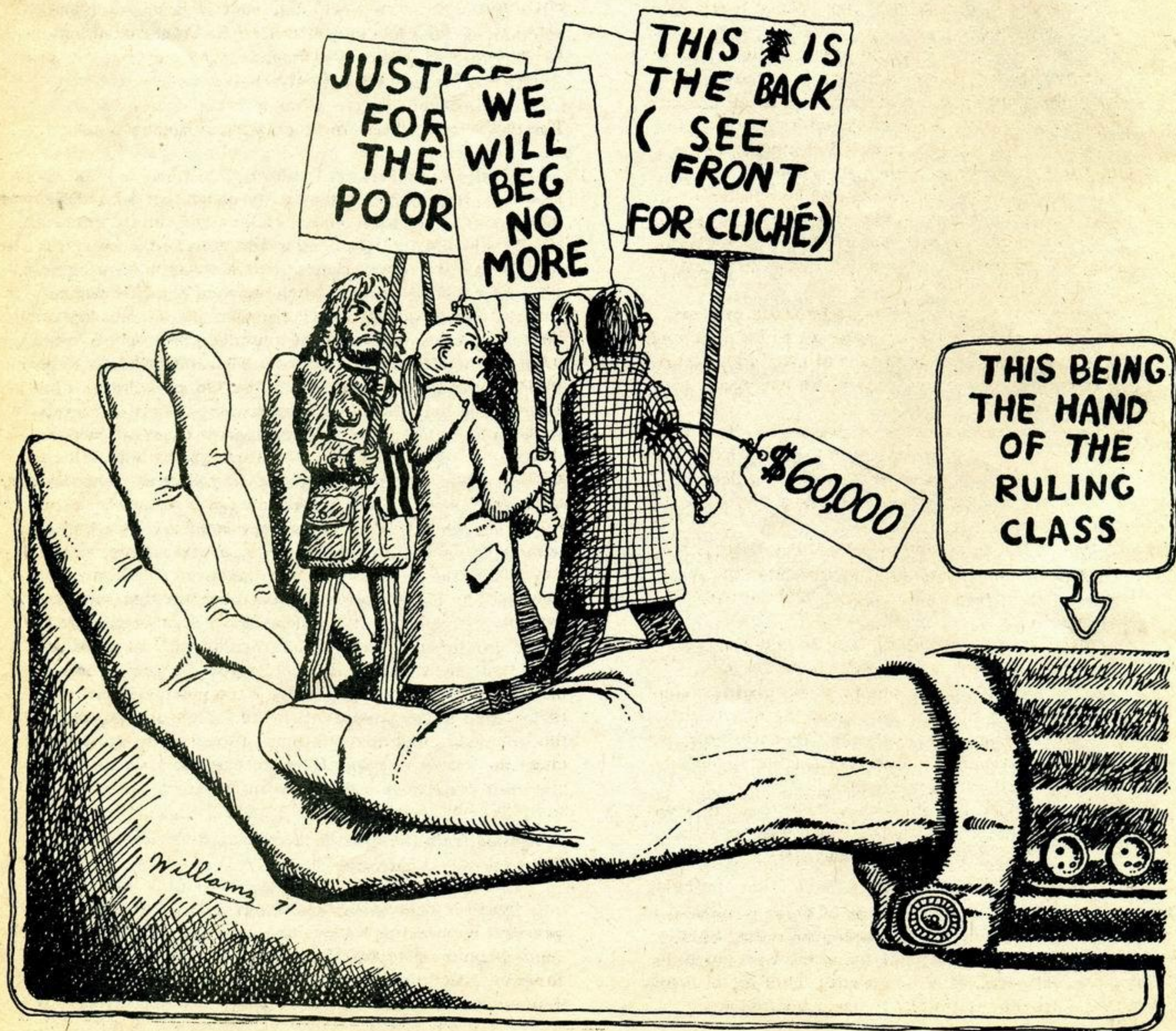
The next phase of these organizations is then to plunge into "action" at the slightest opportunity. Now finally there is a real excuse for not thinking and analyzing at all. The "poor people" demonstrate and occupy buildings with the same ease and lack of support as student radicals do on the campuses - and no wonder, since many student radicals and ex-student power advocates, having failed miserably

on the campuses, find their way to the poor people's groups, now a little more bearded and ragged. In Toronto the Just Society Movement has made its reputation (and lost its potential constituency) through phenomenal actions, one more ill conceived than the other, and without fail desperate and pathetic attempts to overcome their alienation from their constituency.

One such instance was the occupation of a public housing unit on behalf of a woman evicted from her apartment. All that was needed was to locate an empty unit and to move the woman in. The purpose was to demonstrate - exactly what, is still unclear, since there were then on the waiting lists for public housing over 15,000 families. The Just Society ended up pitting "their" woman against another one, a woman who was to move into the empty unit and whose circumstances they did not have the slightest idea about. It was not difficult for the Ontario Housing Corporation to

prove that the other woman, also poor and with many children, was the loser. The woman was quoted as saying that she had waited for a long time and played by the rules and she did not think it fair that somebody would just come and grab her apartment Typically, since there had been great eagerness to jump into the action, the Just Society had done no organizing around the issue, either in the project or with the house-hungry population. A few apologetic leaflets were afterwards passed around in the project, trying to get support from people already in the project. Little or no such support was forthcoming, however.

This story therefore has a typical ending: the Just Society was defeated, its members arrested and fined, and the woman they had tried to help was removed from the premises. Meanwhile they had failed to make any point about why they had acted in such a useless manner. If they, a mere few dozen people, had wanted to demonstrate that



there was a "housing crisis", they were preaching to the converted, since the vast majority of working class people live with the housing crisis every day. If they were doing what I think they were doing, i.e. trying to shock the "middle class"* into some kind of recognition of problems, that only reveals the extremely low level of theory (and theory it is, although incorrect), that if only this hypothetical "middle class" knew, things would change. . . . This "theory" leads to shock tactics towards the "middle class" and towards bureaucracies and social agencies, tactics which only further alienate the original constituency from these groups.

Another consequence of these actions is that a more adventurist element is now attracted to the movement, thus increasing the propensity for similar actions. One such group recently attempted to sit in at the Argus Corporation (E. P. Taylor) office in Toronto, and presented the corporation with an ultimatum, which was just so much empty talk since there were no forces to back up any of the demands in the ultimatum. The leaflet passed around at the demonstration and unsuccessful sit-in, contained, among other things, the following grandiose message:

"The people of this country have begun to identify their real enemy.

That enemy - the corporate power structure - is responsible for cycles of inflation, large-scale unemployment, and continuing, expanding poverty. The corporations, have exploited both people and resources for the sole purpose of making large profits without regard for human needs.

In response to this threat against human lives, we have singled out one individual whose enterprises - vast in number - are sheltered under the name Argus Corporation. The individual is Edward Plunkett Taylor.

In the weeks to come, other individuals and corporations will be chosen to answer to the community. In the past, we have passively allowed them to exploit us for far too long. Now, we are ready to fight back.

We wish to emphasize the seriousness with which we view our challenge to Argus Corporation. That challenge is in the form of the following demands:

1. that the full text of this statement be forwarded to Mr. Taylor.

2. that Mr. Taylor and representatives from his many companies meet with representatives of community groups [which ones?] from across the country.

3. that this meeting be the first of many to discuss the contribution Argus Corporation must make by allowing a percentage of its profits to be used by community groups across the city to implement 24-hour, co-operative day-care centres, free community controlled health clinics, and alternative methods of education.

4. that a positive reply be available to us by February 10, 1971, or militant actions will be instituted against Mr. Taylor's holdings."

* The "middle class" in the language of these groups appears to refer to a whole lot of people: the ruling class, the intellectuals and professionals, and the vast numbers of "conservative" working class people. This is, of course, totally inaccurate and leads to great confusion.

Naturally, by February 10, nothing was done, and the only avenue logically left open to the authors of this leaflet - since they have no forces - would involve individual acts of terrorism. Thus this type of terrorism - or threats thereof - reveals itself to be an extension of anti-working class politics, politics which have led to a heightened frustration about not "getting anywhere" and to profound alienation from the working class.

Another target of the "poor people's" groups has been the social agencies, the United Appeal, the Welfare Councils, the Social Planning Councils, etc., which are confronted for representing the interests of the power structure and for not "involving the poor in decision making". The "poor" now demand representation on various boards of directors - and invariably, with real ease, get token representation, since individual members of the working class, lacking class consciousness and class perspective, are no challenge at all to the powers-that-be. This particular phase of the "poor people's" groups should actually be seen as nothing else than an effort by the progressive social workers to challenge their employers and to humanize their jobs, using the so-called poor as a buffer. For most certainly there is no particular benefit for the working class to have itself represented by its least class conscious element on the boards of various either oppressive or useless agencies and institutions.

The media creates the "poor people's movement"

This focusing on the "middle class" has tied the "poor people's" groups to the media, so much that in a real sense one can argue that the whole "movement" is a creation of the media, and without it, it would not exist a day. The attention of the media has become a substitute for organizing. This becomes clear when one realizes that during the last few years the popular press, the TV and the radio, have been filled with reports and interviews of "the poor", while the National Film Board has made a number of films on the same phenomenon (e.g. The Things I Cannot Change, Up Against the System). These reports, films and interviews are always identical: first the "exposure" of the conditions of being on welfare; then the "giving hell to the establishment" and mild threats of "if you don't do something, there'll be trouble". The only concrete achievement of these "exposures", as far as I can see have been that they keep a number of people, writers, broadcasters, filmmakers etc., alive. Certainly these programs, films, etc., are not meant for and do not reach the working poor themselves. At the same time, it is highly significant that while, for instance, in the CBC archives there is an overabundance of programs about "the poor" ("organizing the poor", "the poor fighting back", "the poor telling it like it is", etc., etc.) you search in vain for documentaries on the lives and working conditions of the rest of the working class in Canada. (One such rare program, a taped interview with a hard rock miner from Sudbury, is transcribed and published in this issue of TRANSFORMATION.)

Poor People's Conference

Much of what is fundamentally wrong with the "poor people's movements" came to splendid light in the crowning achievement of the movement, the Poor People's Conference, held in Toronto in January of this year. In that conference everything was revealed: the relationship of

continued on page 42

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a story...



once upon a time, there was a bunch of people who were stuck in a hole.

attempts were made by
various individuals to
get out of the hole...



such as desperate
arm flapping...



... jumping ...



...meditation and
levitation...

This went on for hundreds of years, until they had tried everything except helping each other out...



so they helped each other out.

Cabbagetown

a working class district:

Hugh Garner's novel revisited

by Kathryn Keate

Editor's note: Contemporary working class literature, that is, literature on the working class for the working class simply cannot be found in North America. Literature, like the rest of the arts, and the media in its totality, is for the middle class, by the middle class. There used to be a time on this continent when realistic and sensitive books were written on the majority experience, by writers such as Jack London and Upton Sinclair. The whole genre of working class literature stagnated and died somewhere in the late 30's and was never restored. (There were real reasons for the strangulation of working class oriented literature, which will be dealt with in a separate article, "Literature and the Working Class", in a future issue of TRANSFORMATION.) Against this background, Hugh Garner's Cabbagetown, first published in 1950, is practically unique in North America, since by that time working class literature had all but vanished, and it is particularly unique in Canada, since it is one of the extremely rare Canadian novels dealing with the working class life experience. As such it is a "classic", largely unknown to the educated middle class and presently, due to its price, not available to anyone else. It is a book that deserves very special attention.

Hugh Garner's CABBAGETOWN can be described as a book about the struggle of the working class, and how the people in one working class district lose that struggle. What makes the book so important is that it explains why the working class does not and cannot win - as long as the leadership on the Left is so bad.

The most depressing aspect of Garner's book, written twenty years ago, is that the leadership is still as bad, and is making the same mistakes. It is still rigid, sectarian and rhetorical, rather than flexible, humane, or realistic. The Left is still into empty sloganeering, focusing on political struggles outside Canada, not appreciating the fact that you can best support struggles elsewhere by building a

solid base in the place where you are.

The book itself is an excellent (if perhaps unconscious) critique of the failure of the Left, and, coming from a man who was there, it has an authenticity that no "literature" of the Left can hope to equal. The story is simply and precisely told. Garner describes Cabbagetown, a working class district in Toronto, during the Depression through the eyes of Ken Tilling, showing us Ken's development as a humanitarian socialist. In a paragraph or two, in sentences packed with meaning, Garner reveals the misery of life in Cabbagetown under capitalism. He gives vivid personal examples of Ken's own experiences of racism, contempt for women, sexual repression, and poverty.

The book is divided into three parts: Genesis March 1929 - June 1932, in which Ken becomes an adult; Transition June 1932 - October 1933, in which Ken has the experiences which culminate in his becoming a socialist; and Exodus October 1933 - February 1937, in which Ken becomes a "Red" and leaves Canada to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Garner develops continuity by contrasting and comparing the fate of each of Ken's friends throughout the novel. The contrast and description gives us a microcosm of the society at large - which is not very pleasant.

The book begins with 16-year-old Ken (who, unlike the usual old Left representation of the working class, is not a mass of muscle and brawn - he weighs 109 pounds) leaving school in 1929, because "columns of help-wanted ads beckoned to anyone able and willing to work".¹ Principals are apparently still giving the same line now as they were then; Ken tells a friend that his principal "gave me a speech about how I was going into the business world, and crap like that."

Prosperity does not last, however. The Wall Street Crash comes. Ken, who manages to get a job working in a

1. All quotes in this article are from the 1968 Ryerson Press edition of Cabbagetown.

grocery store, is safe, but only temporarily.

"The fun and horseplay around McDonald's Wholesale Grocers had gone, replaced by a frightened quietness and an almost servile application to their jobs by those remaining on the payroll. Wages had been slashed, almost gleefully it seemed to the employees, by McDonald, who had also laid off many of his other workers."

Ken is fired, ostensibly for stealing stock, but actually for being "rude" to McDonald (he defends himself from the accusation of stealing). Some of Garner's best irony is in the passage describing the scene in McDonald's office when Ken is fired.

"But why hadn't McDonald had him arrested! It was suddenly obvious that even McDonald didn't believe the charge. He had forced Carding [another employee of the store] to make the statement that he had stolen the goods just to get even with Ken for answering back, and to gratify his small mean urge for revenge.

The boy's head cleared and he glanced at the photographs on the wall behind McDonald's head. One showed the small fleet of trucks lined up at the loading platforms and the second one showed the employees at the firm's annual picnic. Seated in the front row of the picknickers was the heavy benevolent form of James McDonald, framed by the coterie of loyal employees.

Ken could hold himself no longer. 'You dirty big bastard!' he shouted, reaching for the heavy onyx inkwell on his desk."

Ken is thrown out of the building by McDonald's flunkies, kicking and screaming, and the loss of his job at McDonald's is the beginning of a long stretch of unemployment for him.

Garner shows the acute sufferings of women under this system, particularly Ken's mother, Mabel, an alcoholic, deserted by her husband after the war, and Myrla Patson, the girl Ken loves. Of Ken's mother Garner says:

"After the short time with her husband came the long years in which she had supported herself and her child by various jobs, each a little worse than the one before. Her efforts to remain genteel had been eroded under the onslaught of a thousand little denigrating waves, each one mild but their multiplication deadly over the years. Gradually she had given up, not even knowing it herself, so that she had become careless and slovenly, forgetting the earlier promises she had made to herself."

She loses herself in drink, but, despite Ken's shame and hatred of their poverty-stricken life, he still loves her.

Myrla Patson is an attractive woman. From the start she has to battle against being sexually abused, and her life throughout the novel is one of continuous physical and mental assault by men. Myrla goes out with Herb, who is the answer to her mother's prayers for a son-in-law. Herb takes Myrla out for a drive in the country, to propose marriage to her, but she refuses, saying, "I don't want to get married to nobody. Jeez, I'm only seventeen years old, you know!" Herb refuses to take that for an answer, but Myrla persists. Not being able to convince her to marry him, Herb tries to rape her. The scene goes like this:

"Now his maleness was at stake; having failed to get her consent to his marriage proposal another failure would be unendurable . . . They fought each other now, using all their strength, in a silence punctuated only by their loud breathing and

the squeaking of the car springs.

Myrla cried out at the top of her voice, 'Oh, God, can't anybody help me!'

One of her garters broke as she kicked out at his legs . . . she slapped his face, feeling the crack against his cheek . . . He grabbed her by the hair and slapped her twice, hard, across the mouth. One of her teeth tore her lower lip, and she covered her head with her arms and lowered it to her lap.

Herb sat back in the seat, his anger and frustration washing over him. 'Tease me would you, you dirty little Cabbagetown whore!'

Such is romance in Myrla's life.

Sexual repression causes great suffering and brutality in this society. Ken cannot afford to go out with Myrla, so he gets his sexual fulfillment through reading dirty books and from picking up women in Riverdale Park. Even in the park he is not free; it is full of "spotters", elderly voyeurs who sneak up on couples, supposedly trying to break up the pair in the name of morality, but actually more into getting their jollies by watching somebody else do what they are too repressed to do. And, quite often, such spotters scare off the boy and later attack the girl.

When Ken, led by a buddy, Bob McIsaacs, gets into trouble with police for stealing, he visits Clarence Gurney, a part-time social worker for the Friendly Uncles Society, a group that is supposed to provide guidance for young wayward boys. In the book Garner obviously displays the conventional attitudes towards homosexuals, but his hatred of them is made stronger by the hypocrisy of the Friendly Uncles, an organization which is the classic case of phony liberalism: it concentrates on the victims only and does not deal with the victimizer.

Ken gets a job in a soap factory, and starts going out with Myrla Patson, who, unknown to him, is pregnant. Having been seduced by Mr. Leroy, the husband of the woman whom she works for as a live-in maid, Myrla becomes his mistress, and also sleeps with the bellhop at the hotel where she and Mr. Leroy meet.

Ken still believes that she is a virgin, and refuses to make love to her, fearing to dishonour her. Myrla finally breaks down and tells him that she is pregnant. He is stunned and flees her. It is the end of their love.

In Transition, Ken and his friends are on the downward path. All of them suffer and change as a result of their experiences in the Depression, and everybody is in some way changed for the worse. After Myrla tells him about her pregnancy, Ken quits his job at the soap factory, but, he does it in typical Tilling fuck-the-bosses fashion. The packing machines at the plant are working full speed, when Ken finds that he cannot catch up to them. Slowly they pile up, then come faster and faster, and the foreman, annoyed with Ken, again because of some impertinence, ignores his cries for help.

"The boxes of Flako were rushing into a pile that overflowed the table, piled on top of another on the table and the floor, and came together in a high volcanic peak before they spilled like lava, crushed and broken, into a mountainous snowdrift of broken boxes and spilled soap flakes. . . .

"When the machinery was halted half the packing room was hidden under grotesque piles of broken boxes and spilled soap flakes, and Ken was standing against the wall, his face-mask in his hand, gazing on it with a look of incredulous

satisfaction."

He hops a freight train, and travels across the country. He learns a lot from his experiences. When he and his friend call Poles "fucking hunkies", a fellow Pole tells them that they shouldn't call them names like that because "that's the trouble in this goddamn country, nobody sticks together. The Englishman hates the Frenchman, an' the two of them hate the Jew, and the Jew hates everybody, and everybody hates the hunkies. The only guy that benefits is the capitalist. He loves to see us all hating each other 'cause it stops us hating him."

In Winnipeg he is beaten by a Mountie with a riding-crop for hopping freights. The Mountie seems convinced that all the men who ride the rods are bums who don't want to work, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Ken meets a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, who declares that he has no use for legal parties, and that's why he's not a Communist Party member. "I'm a worker that's all," he tells Ken, showing him the card he's had since he joined the Wobblies in 1909.

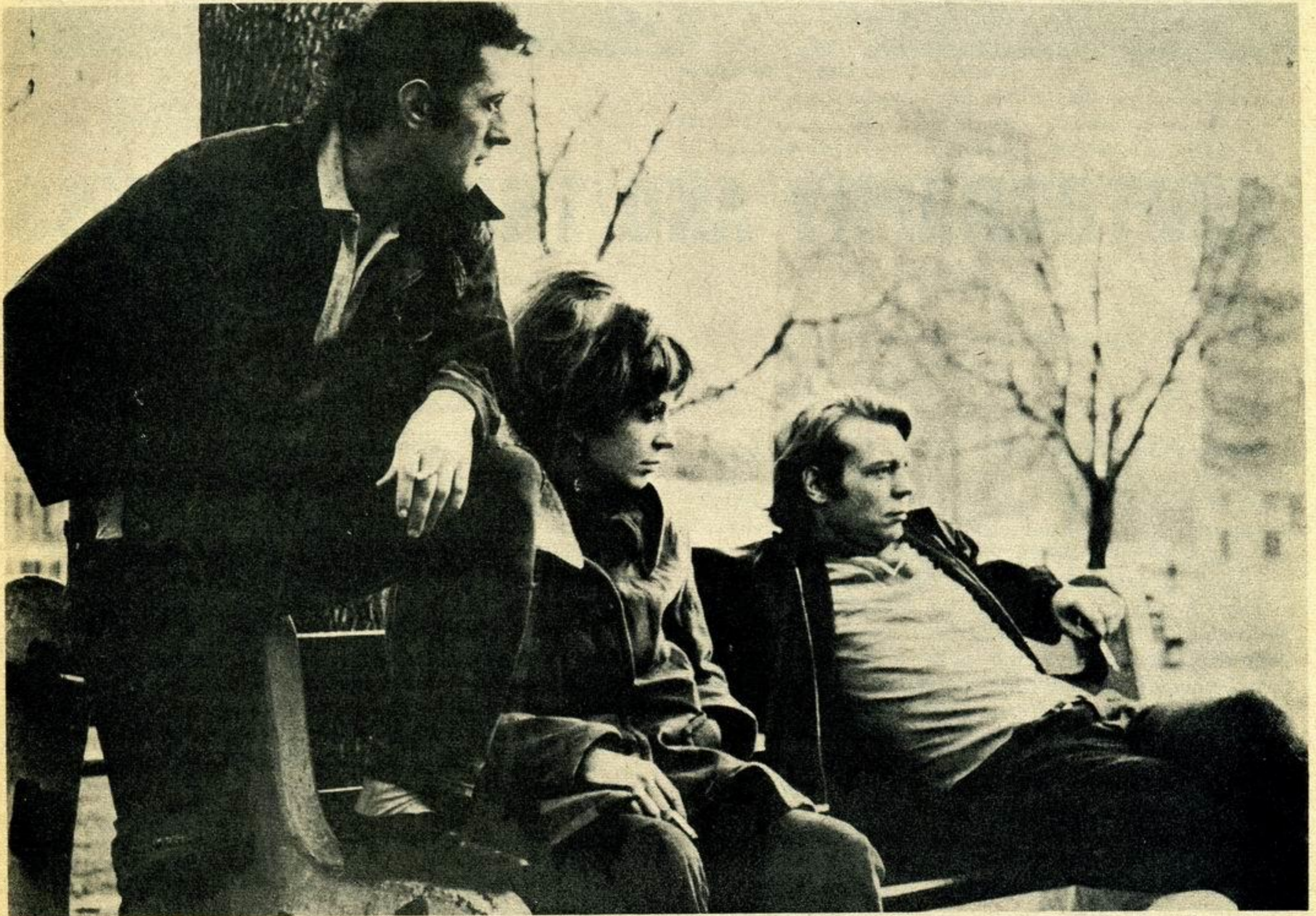
Meanwhile Myrla works as a maid for Mrs. Plummer, after having a baby boy, which luckily her mother decides to look after. She then works in a café, and becomes the mistress of the café's middle-aged proprietor, Mike.

Billy Addington finds a steady job, the one that kills him, making penny candies. Bob McIsaacs is sent to Kingston Penitentiary for five years. Ted East joins the Canadian Youth Club, which has such cheery social activities as beating up Jews in Kew Gardens when they go there for Sunday picnics. Mabel Tilling, with no Ken to look after, is drunk most of the time, and wretched.

Although Ken is still against Communists, he is becoming more sympathetic to socialist ideas. Theodore East, who hopes to rise in status through his associations made in the Canadian Youth Club, can't understand Ken, and accuses him of being a Red. Ken replies: "No, I'm not. I believe a lot in what they believe in, but unlike most Reds I've talked to I don't put the working stiff up at the top of the noble pile. I'm a working stiff myself, and like you I was brought up among them, and I believe that some of the worst sons of bitches in the world are other working stiffs. And they're that way because they're both scared and because they know they're inferior."

Communism moves out of the university and down into the streets of Cabbagetown as a result of the Depression, but, as Garner notes, it is the poor who take care of the poor. Many become Communists, some socialists of

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Working class life of the thirties, as depicted by Hugh Garner, remains unchanged. (Photograph from a Canadian film, Going Down the Road, made in 1970 in the same working class district.)



PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE POWERLESS

by Marjaleena Repo

When I was working as an organizer in a working class district in Toronto, one of the regular nuisances experienced by the residents of the area was the continuous presence of assorted photographers. They came from the local newspapers, the national magazines, and they came as eager free lancers "doing their thing". In addition to them, there were the filmmakers from the National Film Board and the TV producers and cameramen. They all came uninvited, they never asked for permission to take photographs and film, and they used their products any way they pleased, without the slightest concern for how the exposure might affect the people whose pictures were being taken.

The residents (classed as "the poor" by the visitors) found photographs of themselves and their families spread over the front pages of newspapers; they found them accompanying magazine articles; they found them in photography collections and exhibits; and they watched themselves on the TV screen - and they never had any say in what texts were attached to their pictures (usually the text referred to them as "slumdwellers" regardless

of what their situation was and what the condition of their home was). People sitting on their front steps, children playing on the street, in the backyards and in the lanes, people looking out of their windows, women hanging laundry in their backyards - all were easy prey to the ambitions of the photographers. It seemed that the existence of the area residents was a public one, that in terms of their persons, their faces, their identities, they had no rights at all and photographers literally walked all over the people, children, youth and adults alike.

It wasn't at all that the photographers and filmmakers were interested in the situation of the residents and the content of their long fought battle against the injustices inherent in current urban renewal practices; no, the photographers were only on the look-out for good, expressive materials for their own purposes. Of special interest were little children found playing in the lanes or found resting on some steps or sidewalks - especially if they had dirt on their faces and looked somewhat sad. Likewise, rundown houses and boarded up properties

were a favourite target, as were piles of garbage (prior to the day's pickup), back lanes and junk on the yards of vacant buildings. The photographers simply never had enough of these things - they loved any signs of what to them was general gloom, despair, decay, deprivation, child neglect etc. - those very features which the area residents were organizing to fight against.

Since I was a community worker in the area, many media people would initially contact me for good "subjects". One particular filmmaker wanted to meet "somebody very poor" and assured me he did not intend to do anything exploitative. By that time I knew differently, and made sure that his initial contact would be with an alert, intelligent member of the working class. The woman in question was poor, no doubt, but she was not defenseless, and she proceeded to grill the filmmaker about the reasons why he wanted to make a film about the poor, and challenged consistently his conception that the end product would somehow be "quite helpful" to the poor themselves. The filmmaker, after an hour's intense conversation, was acutely uncomfortable and never returned for his second interview, as planned. Instead, he went on to make a film of the most demoralized, sick and alcoholic people, he could locate, and exposed their lives to the nation for no other visible reason than the cold cash the film brought its maker. (A cameraman working for the film later told me that he had to film a sequence in a men's hostel, with the men eating, getting ready to bed etc., while the keepers of the hostel warned those men who tried to hide from the cameras, that if they did not co-operate with the filmcrew, they would be out on the street!).

While these were the things that attracted the photographers, there were others that you could never make them stop to look at. Like people fixing up their houses, families doing things together, mothers walking their children to school, fathers talking to their sons, neighbours conversing in a friendly manner - anything that might indicate that health, happiness, cleanliness, friendliness and family life existed in the area. These were the features which did not fit into the conceptualization of the middle class photographers and which lacked sufficient drama to sell and to make headlines. For who wants to see a picture of a carpenter fixing up his basement into a recreation room for his children, or a photograph of a family involved in fixing up their backyard, when you can show a picture of an overflowing garbage can, and of children playing in a broken-down car or of boarded up windows of a house on the verge of demolition or of an old wino standing on a street corner or a homeless man sleeping on a park bench.

It became quite evident to me that the photographers did not come to the area seeking to understand the reality of the people there; they came to exploit the people in one way or another. As a rule they were both outrageously sentimental and arrogant, drawing vast conclusions from individual shots and not having an iota of respect for the dignity and privacy of the area residents.

The residents detested the photographers and spent long hours in discussing the problems created by these people. "My children were sitting on the steps, eating ice cream and rubbing it and mud all over their faces and having a good time - and the next thing you know their picture appears in the evening paper with something about 'poor slumchildren' and the rest of it. How do you think it makes our family feel - with relatives

and acquaintances calling and with everybody thinking that all of us here neglect our children. . . . Nobody bothers to find out that our kids get washed and cleaned up many times a day and that we love and care for them as much as parents anywhere in the city." Others were making jokes about being the "slumdweller of the week" and still others remarked that the photographers without fail found the junkiest places in the area - places which the residents themselves found difficult to locate. There were discussions about whether people could sue newspapers and individual photographers and when such legal protection was found not to exist, people would talk about the possibility of confiscating the film whenever they caught a photographer in action, of telling him to get out of the area and warning him from ever coming back.

Perhaps if they would have acted upon this often proposed suggestion, Cathy Wismer's photography book Come See My Garden (Martlet Press, 1969) would never have seen the daylight and at no particular loss to anyone. Cathy Wismer, from all appearances a typical, well-brought up middle class girl from a good middle class family, has taken one of these inevitably sentimental journeys to Toronto's Cabbagetown, snapping pictures of children, back lanes, rubble, garbage, broken down fences, car wrecks, boarded-up houses etc. The children are invariably sad - I counted only six smiling faces amongst twenty-four - their little faces are sometimes dirty, they look pensive and so on, and to underline Wismer's own interpretation of her journey the pictures are filled in by supremely sentimental texts about rats and crying mothers and sisters who don't have fancy clothes but have boyfriends and about scary lanes and so on. To top it all there is an epilogue that sums it all up in a way that could only delight the United Appeal campaign but which to me is a very feeble attempt to justify the existence of the book.

Epilogue

Too soon the walls and fences that
were a playground
Are a prison.
The rubbish is rubbish.
The clammy atmosphere of reality has
predictably polluted
All things that grow in the garden.
And the noble naivete
Gives way to hopelessness and hostility.
We who peer patronizingly
over the fence
Say, "What can you expect from people
who live like that!"
Then turn away, snugly secure
in the knowledge
That poverty will be with us always,
That we give at work.
That nothing really can be done
to change the inexorable cycle
of the Garden.
Or can it?

The best criticism that one could make of the above "poem" and of the book itself is that while Wismer was sentimentalizing about poverty, the area residents were fighting to change their neighbourhood for the better.

Wisner's book - like others of this nature - brings three main questions into focus:

- 1) The ethics of photographers
- 2) The meaning of individual shots
- 3) The question of what pictures were not taken

The ethics of photographers

Ethics has to do with whether people with cameras have the right to go around stealing other people's faces. Photography by its very nature is not an abstract form of expression, but is directly connected with reality (once you move beyond "experimental" photography and beyond nature studies) and has immediate consequences on the lives of the "subjects". Wisner's book brought this fact back to me with a real force, particularly since I knew some of the children in the pictures and know for a fact that they and their parents do not deserve this exposure and the false sentimentality pouring out all over the pages. It is not a coincidence that photographers who wouldn't consider taking embarrassing shots of people in their own middle class neighbourhoods, drop their ethics when they enter a working class district. Downtown every person is fair game.

The meaning of individual shots

The second question is a most crucial one and here I think that most photographers on the poverty kick commit serious errors. They assume that what they see is real

and true and represents the totality of the experiences of the people of that neighbourhood. The question which should be asked about each individual picture in Wisner's book is: yes, the picture is excellent, but what does it mean? What does it mean to see a pensive child leaning against a fence, with scratches on his legs? Or a child standing next to neatly piled garbage, sucking her thumb? Or piles of junk spread on the ground. Or children swinging amidst broken cars, or children staring suspiciously at the photographer (they know!), or to see a busted up garage and so on. To many photographers these sights indicate one thing: POVERTY, and they are SHOCKED and they want to transmit their CONCERN and to make other people CARE.

To me these pictures are pictures of individual children in a working class neighbourhood, some of them momentarily sad, others laughing at the moment, some pensive, perhaps tired, others active, many suspicious. Surely similar photographs could be taken in any city neighbourhood, including Cathy Wisner's own. Photography at this level is in my opinion totally meaningless: it attempts to create a simplistic and sociologically false impression of the people in working class areas; it propagandizes in favour of a position rather than depicts the real and far more varied and complex circumstances of the residents of these areas.

The question of what pictures were NOT taken

This leads to the final point: what is it that is not

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Cathy Vismer



Cathy Vismer

CHILDRENS LIBERATION

BY KIM BARBER



Most people have heard about Women's Liberation. Right? But now there's something new, Children's Liberation. We think that adults should treat kids like equals. I just want to write about some of my experiences of kids getting pushed around by adults and stuff.

Well, there's this store down the street where this Yugoslavian guy works. Every time I go there, he pinches my cheeks and pulls off my hair and stuff. And he says, "Are you Chinese? You look Chinese", and "Are you buying that for your boyfriend?" Of course he never would do that to an adult.

At the store across the street from that, there's this really, really mean guy. Once I went there to bring back some bottles for money for a party we were having. So I put the bottles on the counter and said, "Could I have the change for these?" And he said, "We won't take them back unless you buy candy with the money you get from them." Then I got really mad and went home and told my dad that the store wouldn't take the bottles unless I bought candy with my money. So when my dad came back with me and asked why he wouldn't take the bottles, the man said he must not have heard me right and that he always gave children the money back from bottles, and that I was lying.

Another time, me and some of my girl friends were at Woolworth's near Christmas, looking at things to buy. Then this sales-lady came up and asked, "Can I help you?", and I said, "No, we're just looking around at presents." Then she looked funny at us and asked sternly, "Is your mother here?" When we said she wasn't she said, "Get out of the store then!"

Still another time, Point Blank was on a school trip and we were waiting for a bus at the bus stop

and two ladies were standing there too. They were talking about how they didn't understand kids these days and stuff. Since the bus wasn't coming yet, we thought we'd play tag. We were running around and one of the ladies said, "Stop that running! You'll hurt someone!" So we said we weren't hurting anyone and kept on running. Then one lady said, "Children never listen to a word you say!"

When the bus came, we were waiting for the ladies to get on before us, and they didn't, so we started to get on. Then one lady glared at us and said, "Have respect for your elders!" and the other said, "Never-mind! Let the MONSTERS get on first!"

A little while ago at a Valentine Dance at St. Enoch's church, there was this guy who was playing records. He announced that there was going to be spot dancing. We did one spot dance and a man and a lady won. Then my girlfriend Ava said, "I wonder why they won?" She didn't understand the rules of spot dancing. So she went up and asked what the rules of spot dancing were. He said, "You can do it (spot dancing), but the prizes are just for adults." Then my girlfriend Sylvia said, "Why? the sign said it was for everyone." He said, "But the prizes are for adults. This party is meant for adults not kids."

I'm pretty sure lots of other kids have had similar experiences to these and most probably feel the same way as me. I feel that adults shouldn't tease and push us around and stuff but still think of us as kids. At Point Blank we fool around and have a secret handshake and everything, but some-day I think kids should stand for their rights and be serious about it.

Kim Barber is 11-years old. She goes to Point Blank free school in Toronto.

TWO MINERS



Information

Introduction

Fundamentally, there is very little difference between the two workers, one a hardrock miner in Sudbury, Canada, working for a large and wealthy, privately owned company, Inco (International Nickel), and the other one a miner in Sweden, working for a nationalized company, LKAB, in Kiruna, taken over by the government in 1957, but run "according to sound business principles". Both do the dirty, hard labour in their respective societies, under conditions that create constant health hazards. Loss of hearing due to incredible noise (100-130 decibel), lung diseases (silicosis, lung cancer and TB) due to diesel fumes and gases, and the permanent dust in the air they breathe, arthritis due to the dampness of the mines, broken backs due to the nature of the work, and mutilations and deaths in industrial accidents, are the "ordinary" risks taken by these workers and their fellow miners. Both men are struggling to survive as persons under these conditions.

They are fighting the company at every point, its tyranny, its petty regulations and its blatant exploitation of their labour through time study methods, increased demands for overtime and through its hard-core policy of keeping the wages down. They have to, however, deal with another obstacle as well: the union. The Canadian miner is active in the U.S. dominated Steelworkers Union, where he is fighting to make it relevant to rank and filers, and is trying to wrest some of the control back to the men themselves from the hands of the long distance appointed and controlled, well-paid and secure union officials. He has had bitter experiences, which he recounts in detail in the interview, but he has not given up that particular struggle. The Swedish miner, on the other hand, looks at "his" union from the distance of the "ordinary joe", who has, quietly, drawn his conclusions: "The company is better off with the union than without. Through the union the company can keep a check on the workers. It's gone so far that when we have a problem, the company is the first one to say, 'Get in touch with your local!'" He does not participate in the union, but like most workers cultivates a "passive resistance" to the system that oppresses him.

The interviews verify what we already know: that the

labour unions by and large are but another dimension of the present capitalist rule, and are therefore a serious obstacle to social change. It has simply become more efficient and effective to have the leaders of the trade union movement socially responsible for maintaining discipline over the workers, to control them and to subdue them. Professional trade unionists do the job of enforcing the existing class relations with less overt violence than the company or the local capitalists.

Both men, although class conscious (aware of themselves as members of the working class) lack political consciousness (awareness of the historical role and the potential power of the working class). This lack of political perspective is a typical fate of working men and women in societies where the working class lacks a movement of its own and where political education of the working class has been virtually non-existent for decades, for the best of trade unionism can only foster trade union militancy among the workers. The Canadian miner, lacking political alternatives, buries himself in union activities within a union he is highly critical of, and a union which has successfully resisted any grass roots challenge. During the interview there are glimpses of him moving beyond trade unionism, pure and simple: the exploitation of labour and the exploitation of resources are so intertwined in mining and other industrial sectors of the economy, that Canadian independence and national survival can easily become class issues for this miner. The ownership of Canadian resources, Inco's profiteering and the exploitation of the community, are no abstractions for him: they are political problems occurring in his daily existence as a worker.

The Swedish worker, lacking political direction, leads a private life and hopes, vaguely, for "changes", although he thinks he is part of the "lost generation" of middle aged workers.

The first interview is by Daniel Drache and was originally prepared as a radio documentary. The second interview is by a Swedish writer, Sara Lidman, who compiled forty interviews with Swedish miners into a book, The Mine, which is to be translated and published by TRANSFORMA-

TION. The book created an extraordinary controversy in Sweden when it was first published in 1968, simply because it documented, through the words of the workers themselves, the continuous, bottomless alienation of the worker from "his" society. Worker after worker testified - and this in that social-democratic dreamland, Sweden - that they were outsiders, whose life forces and health were perpetually eroded by their role in the class society they lived in. Workers, who as a rule are neither to be seen nor heard, surfaced in this book and demanded attention.

Much of the response to the book on the part of the educated middle class was of the "Gee, I didn't know they are just like us - they have feelings, too!" -variety, but the book's greatest impact was to make the workers aware

of themselves and of each other. As one worker said, in a letter to Sara Lidman: "I read the book as an exchange of letters between me and my fellow workers. We can never talk to each other, because of the noise and because some of us are deaf. It was some very true and beautiful letters, I think. . . ."

Similar "letters" between all kinds of workers can easily be compiled and published in Canada and U.S., a correspondence which the intellectuals on this continent have to take upon themselves to facilitate.

The interview with the Swedish miner is translated by Rose-Marie Larsson. The photographs are from the original Swedish edition and are by Odd Uhrbom.

How can you have solidarity?

I get up at six o'clock. I leave for work at ten to seven, and we take our cage underground at 7:29. We walk about a half-mile to the lunchroom when we get off at 2800 feet. Some of the boys usually have an orange, a cup of coffee. Some don't have anything. Then the shift boss lines the men up and they start moving out. You put your tag on the end board and you go to work at your respective working places and you do whatever the job is.

Right now I'm a timberman on the level. I put up drift sets, repair timber and build shutes. Then you have people who are stope feeders and they are in charge of the stopes, where the muck is splashed and processed. You have drillers. And, of course, the stopes and the drillers combine to load up the blast and to ignite it and to blast it. Then you have tramming crews, who tram the muck, switchmen and motormen. And you have tramming bosses and shoot blasters and you have pipe fitters and tool fitters and steel sharpeners and shovellers and knippers. There's a great polyglot of different trades and classifications.

At 11:30 you have half an hour for lunch. 3:00 and 3:05, for our shift and the day shift, is quitting time. You go to the lunch room and take your tag and change it to the 'out'. And you wait in the lunch room until the shift boss says, "O.K., fellas, let's go!" and you parade out to the station, wait for the cage to come down and get on the cage. It's something to see - the way the men are packed in. Thirty men in each cage! And you go to the surface, punch your card out, put your light away and you go in, change your clothes, have a shower and go home.

Take our mine today. You're walking in water most of the time up over your ankles. You hardly see an ankle boot anymore. They're now knee rubber boots. The water's pouring down on the men there. I think this has a lot to do with the severity of the back injuries (1) and the sickness, of course. It could be made better. There's no doubt about it. Today men are being rushed much too fast. There

1. This appears to refer to the fact that back injuries, obtained from hard physical labour, have a hard time healing in the damp mines.



Odd Uhrbom

was almost six to nine months before I was allowed to touch a machine. Now they're in the mine a week or two weeks, and they're drilling and handling powder. This is asking too much of anyone - particularly young people. When I was hired on I was thirty-five, and I had worked around where there was explosives. So I was familiar with them. The young fellows coming down there - they're not. If you look back at '68 and '69, I think there were six people that were killed in Inco operations that didn't have three months seniority. I think that this bears out my argument that they're pushing the young men too fast. They're not giving them enough time to get familiar, and to become safety conscious.

I found out one way to keep the foreman off your back.

For a year and a half I was isolated in a dead end drift in the 2800 foot level. No one was allowed to come in to work with me. If anyone was caught in there - even talking with me - they were chased out. For as much as two and three weeks I sat on my backside doing nothing. They knew it - but I wasn't allowed out because of the Safety and Health stuff. I was told that if I quit sending letters to government officials and so forth, and if I think of my family and my health, then I can have a pretty good job. When the strike was settled and the word got around that I had resigned as the steward and as chairman of the Safety and Health, I suddenly was allowed the freedom of the level. Now I can go anywhere and I'm getting paid my rate. I'm gonna be quite frank - I'm rather enjoying it, because at last I'm being treated like a man again. I can associate with the men.

We have many people who refuse to work because they consider it an unsafe area or the conditions so deplorable. They get sent home, and when they come back they get penalties.

You'd be surprised how little work you really have to do if you work safe according to their rules and regulations. This used to be a very formidable weapon, particularly when it came to bargaining time. It used to shock me to hear the president of the union get up and say, "now remember, fellows, work safely". But this would be only two or three months previous to our contract expiring. They should be pounding this at the men in every meeting, in their newspapers and everything!

I believe that overtime is defeating our union, and probably most unions, because people allow things to go rather than put a grievance in. They are afraid they might not get called out for overtime. (2)

In many cases we have three and four levels in the mine that have no stewards at all, because most of the old stewards have given up (3) - you know management has ways of embarrassing you if you become too active and too forceful. So some guys quit rather than put up with this. Some were stewards for years. But there's not enough protection for them and they get a dirty deal. And I guess as you get older you figure, "what the hell, what's the use?" How can you have militancy if your men have all kinds of shackles put on them - you can't say this and you can't do that.

Let's take an example. All the people who went through our picket lines this summer under the pretext that if we stopped any one or restricted it to a certain number, the provincial police would come in and there'd be trouble, and for the public image this would be bad.

2. Overtime was originally introduced as a penalty to the companies, so they couldn't afford it. Consequently they would have had to hire more labour and would have been forced to pay higher wages, rather than to demand extra hours from the men. Business unionism has changed the situation in that overtime ceases to be a penalty to the company and becomes instead an incentive to workers. This is possible when overtime pay is made attractive enough, i.e. low enough for the company.

3. An important point here is, what happened when the "old stewards" gave up. Wasn't there anybody to continue? Had the union - both Mine Mill and Steelworkers - failed to train secondary leadership? Or had both of them turned off the younger generation of workers?

But the public doesn't know that when those men were in there, they were doing blasting and drilling. They were telling us that no production was going on. Well how the hell did the ore passes all get full and the shutes filled? No ore was coming out of the mines, grant you. But this is why the company was able to say that their production had stepped way past their expectations within three weeks after the strike was over, because, instead of having to wait and get everything going, the ore was in the passes and the shutes - and my god, all we did was just as if we had never been on strike! It was just like a normal work day - we went back and we went to work.

Do they exploit us? Those resources actually belong to the Canadian people. They're our resources, and we're fortunate enough to live in a country where they are. Now you take Sudbury. Think of the hundreds of millions, yes, billions of dollars that have come out of here, and then take a look at the city. It's only a few years ago that we got rid of night soil collection. Many places have no side walks, many places have no paved roads. Now my god, to me there's something wrong when a company can come in and take these resources out of our country and return nothing - except ravage the community and the district. I agree with the NDP more here than on a lot of things on their platform. I think that the company should be nationalized (4), that Canadians - just like I'm talking about the union, the working people should be starting to take control over the union - should have some say of where these resources go and of how much comes back into Canada, to build it up to the country it so rightly deserves to be.

The membership here feels so damn frustrated. Here we are working for a company that is making vast profits - there's no use of kidding ourselves, vast profits - and we have to work fourteen years to get an extra week's holiday. We get two weeks a year, but we don't get an extra week until after working fifteen years.

Not being able to get pension at sixty regardless of seniority is creating a tremendous hardship on the men - forcing them to work until sixty-five, because they lose six per cent of their pension for each year that they quit early. My partner is going on sixty-two, and this poor old fellow has only twenty-eight years seniority. So he has to work until he is sixty-five. He was already to take his pension if there was no reduction. But who can afford to take a twenty-four per cent reduction? My good god, he can't live on the full pension - so what's him and his wife gonna live on?

It's easy for someone sitting up in a plush office to say, "well, this man's worked twenty-eight years for this company. He should have money in the bank and be financially fixed. He can enjoy these years and take his pension even though he takes his reduction." Believe me, this is not so. Many of these men do not live to get a pension, because they die before.

I believe that you're going to see compulsory arbitration in Canada. The labour movement (5) would really

4. The miner is wrong here. The NDP does not call for the nationalization of the large companies already in existence. Also, for a comparison, the Swedish miner interviewed works for a nationalized company, and experiences the same alienation. Nationalization alone is not a solution - it has to be combined integrally with workers' control.

5. The worker refers here to labour brass.

enjoy this inspite of all their screams and hollers, because this would let them off the hook. They would say, "well, what could we do? You can't go off on strike because the government's passed the compulsory arbitration." The men would just have to sit there and accept what was handed down. I believe that some of these strikes are being called with that thought in mind - to eventually force the government to come up with compulsory arbitration.

Conciliation proceedings used to be so damnable slow. You'd go five and six months past the contract, and you'd be working. And there'd be this complete intense feeling within the men that the pot was boiling. Eventually somebody would say, "the hell with this - let's walk out!" They used to get away with it, but then the law was changed. If a steward or anyone was involved, the company could fire him. Now the men are very, very careful. Here again, another weapon is being eroded from the men.

A good indication of what is happening to the union was in December. I was on afternoon shift, so I went in on Thursday morning to attend the membership meeting, because - I think that I had one of the best attendance records, pretty near - I was informed that they couldn't get sixty people out Wednesday night, so they couldn't conduct the meeting. (6)

I'm quite disturbed, because I think that if the workers don't do something, then they are going to lose complete control of their union, and they are not going to have no say in nothing. Under Mine Mill - and I'm not the least bit hesitant about saying this - the stewards were more respected by the management and the men than they are today. They had more support from the men. Unity. The men really backed their stewards up, and the shift bosses were very careful about violating the contract, because they knew that there was a real unity and a good bunch of stewards. The Mine Mill stewards were very militant - there's no doubt about this. (7) But slowly it's deteriorated to the most sophisticated approach now. And I believe that this is eventually going to hurt the working men.

A good example of this was when we were told down in Toronto this summer: "we don't care whether you sign this or not, because we are going to sign an agreement with Inco whether you like it or not." Here you have a bunch of people elected by the membership to go down and do a bargain for them, and you are told by people appointed by someone to a job (8) - and I consider it a damn good job, well paid, a pretty cosy job - "we don't care what you do,

6. Sixty people constitute a quorum for a membership meeting of Local 6500. This local has a membership of more than 16,000 members.

7. The question to be raised here is: how did Mine Mill then lose to the Steelworkers if it was so militant and in touch with the workers? How did it lose its membership support sufficiently for the Steel to be succesful in its raid? It is not enough to talk about the omnipotence of Steel and its underhanded methods (including red-baiting), which no doubt also existed; there must have been serious flaws in Mine Mill as well, in order for Steel to make inroads. This question cannot be answered in a footnote; a separate study is needed to provide the answer.

8. The "jobs" in question are those held by full-time union officials of the United Steelworkers. Starting salary for an "international representative" is in the range of \$11,000. These professionals virtually control all aspects of union life.

BOSS MAN

Boss man, boss man, what do you say?
Gonna get you alone in the mine some day.
Boss man, boss man, turn it around
If you don't look away how can I sit down?

Look at this load upon my back,
Gotta get this wheel back on the track.
Can't hold on but I can't let go
And I can't say "yes" and I can't say "no".

Holes in my pockets and holes in my shoes
If you're ready for me, I'm ready for you.
The company plan takes all my pay,
Got a child in July and another last May.

Boss man, boss man, what do you say?
Gonna get you alone in the mine some day,
Push your face down in the coal,
'cause you got no heart, you got no soul.

Country life's the life for me
In ten more years I'll a pensioner be.
The young lad knows when the girl's around,
why, you might say he's a rural sprout.

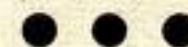
Boss man, boss man, what do you say?
Gonna get you alone in the mine some day.
Boss man, boss man, clear the track,
You're gonna tear the skin right off my back.

Boss man, boss man, what do you say?
If you can't lend a hand, then get out of my way.
It'll be murder in the first degree
If you ever lay your hands on me.

Boss man, boss man, pay my rent,
'cause a dollar I've earned is a dollar I've spent
The company plan takes all my cheque
For breakin my back and riskin my neck.

Boss man, boss man, what do you say?
Gonna get you alone in the mine someday.
I can't hold on but I can't let go,
And I can't say "yes" and I can't say "no".

From Gordon Lightfoot's album Did She Mention My Name, United Artists Recording.



because when we want to sign this we're gonna sign it whether you like it or not."

I have heard this argued at conventions - about autonomy. I think this is hurting the NDP party, because I've heard men say, "what the hell's going on? The NDP wants to nationalize the industry, but the international unions don't want to become nationalized." (9) So I think that this has a backlash there.

9. Another study is needed on the influence on the NDP by the three large "international" unions, the Steelworkers, Canadian Food and Allied Workers and the Autoworkers.



Odd Uhrbom

And you know about trusteeship. (10) If you go too deep they can just come in and put your local under trusteeship. Then you have no damn say at all - of what goes on in your union.

Somehow we have been - I don't know what you could say - led up the garden path. We have become more sophisticated - no more of the old hammerin' at the table and really getting down to where you talk to the working men and meet them on their own level. The establishment of your union is management oriented. There's no damn doubt about it - take a look at the set-up! These people, as they brag, are not amateurs - they're pros.

And I believe you have to go back into this.

The members got a real beating in '58 and this hurt. Then in '63, the first time the Steel union bargained for a contract, it's a matter of record that the men took another beating because of the check-off. (11) But the men were quite willing to accept this kind of stuff. They said, "well, we gotta have the check-off, but we'll get them in '66." Well, '66 came, and I suppose that maybe we would have got something, but we didn't. Unfortunately (12) we had a wildcat and it's a matter of history that the company threatened to sue the union for god knows how many millions of dollars if the contract wasn't signed by such and such a date. There was a whole bunch of men left sitting out in left field that could have been fired because of their activities. Again the membership gave in, appeased the establishment, and we didn't get what we rightfully deserved.

As a result, when we came to '69 we were trying to catch up. This might have made our demands look bloated to a person on the outside, but they're really not bloated at all. The members were so determined that this time they were going to get something. They knew the shortage of nickel. They knew the problems that were facing the governments and the management.

But the union officials had picked their people on the bargaining committee. (13) There's no doubt about it. When we were down in Toronto at the Canadian Labour Congress convention in 1968, I was invited into a room where there were several people from this locality. They had a list and they were picking the guys who they knew were going to make the bargaining committee. Now I believe that this was done so that they would know their people pretty well. This time they got crossed up with Marcel, a buddy of mine, and myself. They figured they had us in their hip pocket.

For the last eight or ten days of the contract negotiations we just sat down in the basement. Once and a while they came to tell us what they wanted to tell us. We were hearing from the staff men about people being kicked out in the streets, children with no shoes to go to school. Holy Christ, pretty near had to get the fire department and pump out the King Cole Room for all the tears being shed. Then we find out that everything, outside of a few cases, was fine up in Sudbury - they were absolutely marvellous up there, the women and everybody. This is the type of thing

10. The head office of a union can impose trusteeship on a local for a variety of reasons, from serious financial mismanagement to too much militancy.

11. Business unionism had introduced the checkoffs, i.e. the automatic deduction from the miner's paycheck through the company. Although winning the checkoff right was considered by the union as a recognition of the strength of the union, the automatic checkoff also tends to make the union removed from the rank and file, since money keeps coming whether the workers are satisfied with the union or not.

12. The 1966 Wildcat had dire effects on the Union's bargaining position with the company. Steel was not strong enough nor were its officials willing to protect the leaders of the wildcat. Without union protection its leaders were fired. Because Inco was able to take disciplinary action against the wildcat, it put Local 6500 on the defensive in the ensuing negotiations. Strategically the wildcat backfired and in that sense the miner in the interview meant it was "unfortunate".

13. The Bargaining Committee is elected by the rank and file. In theory it represents the men directly in negotiations and is designed to involve the workers through their representatives in bargaining with the company. Present at negotiations along with the Committee are the permanent staff members and other officers of the union. In practice, the Bargaining Committee plays a minimal role in contract talks. The bulk of the negotiating is carried on between the "international" reps, company officials and the Government appointed arbiter, a supposedly "neutral" representative of the bourgeois state. Despite this, the Bargaining Committee remains the symbol of democratic control by the rank and file. Those who serve on it as this militant did, find the experience frustrating.

that they use. (14)

And they say that because of the size of the bargaining committee and because of our intelligence, that they are more capable of bargaining than we are.

They openly admitted that they had already agreed to the contracting out clause before they ever came back to us. Right after this, Mr. Sefton (15) and Mr. Griffin from Pittsburgh (16) read off a bunch of figures and the proposed agreement. We objected to this very strongly and said that we wanted it down on paper where we could see it and assess it, because it was very important to us and all of the families in Sudbury. We came back from lunch and they had it down on paper. The first condition was that the committee had to be in unanimous agreement before the company would accept the proposals. (17) Number two, was that the committee also had to have a majority to accept this cursed contracting out clause. (18) It ended up in a vote that was eleven to seven against. So then Mr. Sefton proposed that the elected members of the committee go into a room by themselves with no staff people and try to thrash it out. And another thing that's quite amusing - I guess maybe that's not the word, it's quite astounding - is that everyone of those eighteen men, when we were all by ourselves with no establishment people there, had some fault to find with it. Some of them were quite vehement in this. They poun-

14. The staff wanted to create the impression that the strike was causing tremendous hardships for the workers, and they therefore better settle the strike.

15. Larry Sefton is the Canadian director of District 6 of the United Steelworkers. He has held this position for more than twenty years. The director is elected to the post; however it is not a rank and file office. It is held by a permanent staff member of the "international" union.

16. Despite the claim of autonomy, Canadian Steelworkers do not negotiate their own contracts. The American union sends its official representative to oversee the bargaining for its Canadian local.

17. Normal negotiating procedure consists of the Bargaining Committee approving any proposals before they are submitted to Inco. In the instance referred to the procedure was reversed. Sefton and Griffin wanted to end the strike. Having reached agreement with Inco, they submitted their compromise to the men to rubberstamp their decision. They knew that the majority of the men on the Bargaining Committee opposed a settlement on the terms proposed. A majority of the Committee were prepared to keep the strike going for another three or four weeks in order to win the battle over benefits and contracting out. In effect Sefton et al settled with the company and then presented it to the men as a foregone conclusion. This process is a commonplace one in many unions.

18. In recent years Inco has hired construction firms to build new shafts and do maintenance work at its installations. The contracting out clause allows Inco to hire construction firms to do work in the mines either with non-union labour or with labour not covered by the Steel contract. Some 3,000 jobs within Inco are being let out under the contracting out clause. The men are particularly embittered because it allows Dravco, one of the major firms involved, to introduce non-union working conditions which include longer hours, higher bonuses and poor safety conditions. The men believe that the contracting out clause is an attack on the principle of industrial unionism. Under the protection of this clause Inco now contracts out to work in the area of production.

ded the table saying they just couldn't take this thing back to the people after four months. The staff men came down and split the committees and took us upstairs and left Port Colborne down. (19) They called the vote upstairs and, of course, it was tied six to six. I don't know what took place between them and the company, but they signed and we came home.

The way the vote ratifying the contract was conducted: Only one side was allowed to project their story on the news media. The people who were opposed to signing the damn contract were only given five minutes to talk to the members. I defy any of them to try to explain what took place in four months in five minutes!

We didn't get our raises on the 10th of July like we should have. This was real niggardly on the part of the company and real gutless on the part of the union (20) not to insist upon this. We're not getting our life insurance and our sickness insurance paid in the first year. You'd probably find out each man was losing somewhere around \$1,000 that was rightfully his.

If we really held firm this time, we could have made a breakthrough and had joint bargaining with Port Colborne here in the Sudbury District once and for all.

I've always heard how tough Inco was. I don't know how tough they are because I didn't have a chance to find out. I found that some of our labour people were the ones that I had my trouble with and I think that a lot of the other people did.

Take a look at it. They're appointed to a job and they tell the members what to do! Two of them sat here at my table, my wife was a witness to them - and Tony Sullivan was president at that time - and said Sullivan was gonna go. "We make presidents and we break 'em." I mean, when you get this kind of stuff, can you have solidarity? I get all sick to my stomach when I hear them singing this song anymore, "Solidarity Forever". Where does it come from? Who is solid?

People aren't stupid anymore - they're beginning to smarten up. You're getting some smart young boys coming to work - grade eleven, grade twelve education. If somebody wants to get them involved, I think they'd give those guys a rough time. But I think that the workers haven't got much time.

I don't think there's any place in the union for people like Marcel and me any more. This may sound like a little bit of boasting your ego, but I don't think so, because we're more or less the old type where you argue and argue and when you start getting called names and getting brow beaten with words by people who are very capable of doing this, then we revert to the only thing we know - we revert to our fists. That's the only way to put it. There's no place for us anymore. That may be unfortunate, but this is how sophisticated it's become.

19. 1969 marked the first time that the Port Colbourne and Sudbury locals under Steel overcame their differences and entered into joint negotiations with Inco. The splitting of the Committee destroyed the work that went into building a new basis of unity between the two locals. The Port Colbourne committee opposed Sefton's compromise. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the staff men can only wield their influence as long as the rank and file members are themselves politically uneducated and divided. A politically conscious group of workers would have resisted the attempt to split them.

20. Again, this refers to the labour brass.

We would be so proud

There was a show on television recently about what it sounds like when people who have had their hearing damaged, listen to music. The whole musical scale turned into one big blurr. You couldn't hear the high notes, and the base notes sounded even worse. The music was sort of squashed together - the finest parts could not be heard at all.

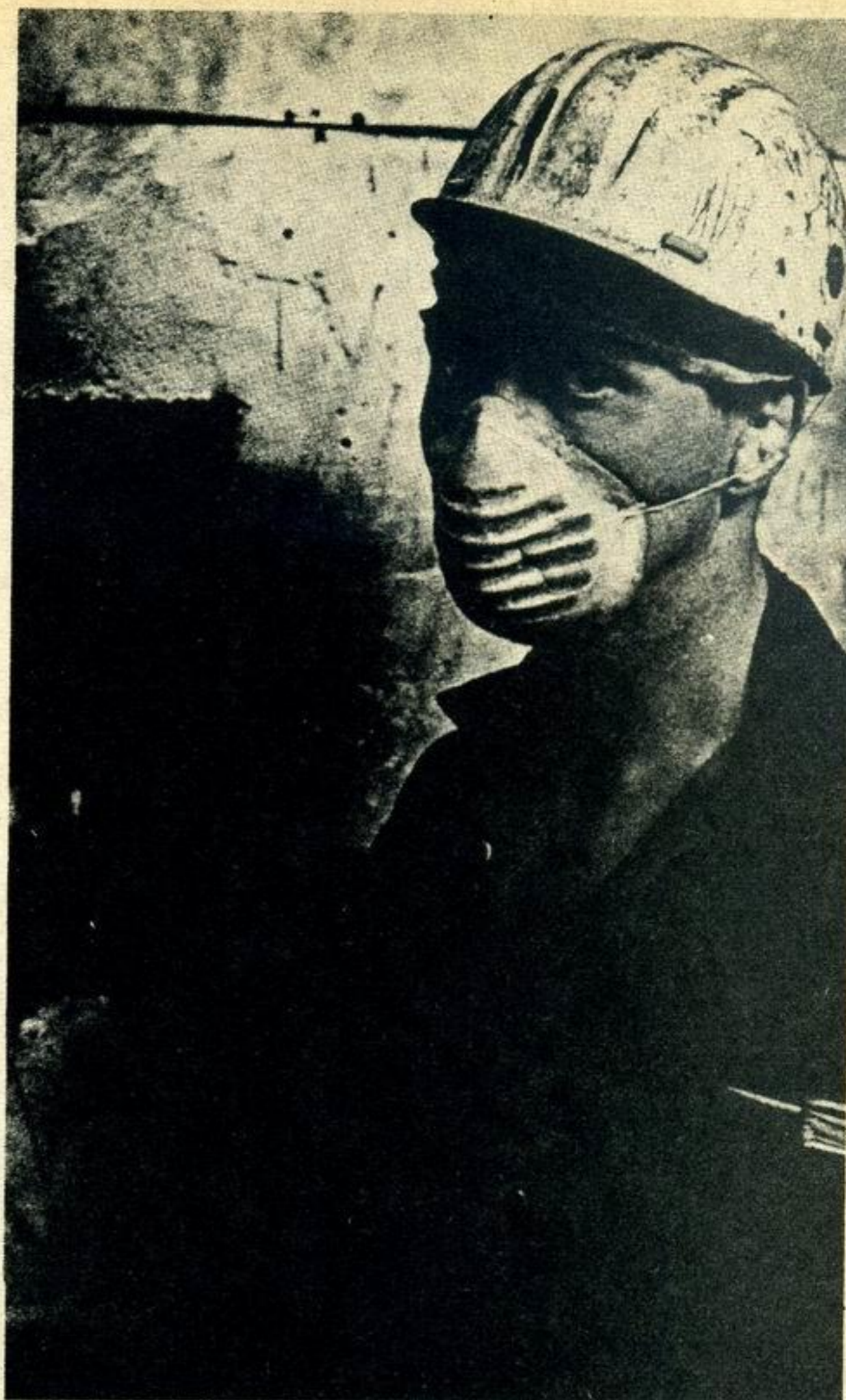
That frightens me, so I buy rubber ear plugs at the drug store, even though it's quite expensive in the long run. . . . I don't trust the fibre glass ones that the company supplies. And it has only been in the last few years that I have had access to classical music. It might look rather funny to see a stereo set in one of these houses, but when I put some Mozart on and close my eyes. . . it's . . . well, I feel happy. It's like being welcomed into a different world. And I know that there is so much more just waiting to be discovered there. So that's why I don't care what it costs as long as I can keep my hearing.

There was a time when I used to read a lot more, but my little girl gets so jealous of the books. She scratches me and carries on. And often when I'm just about to start reading a book, she says, "No, play Mota (Mozart)". Well, and then I put on a symphony, and she dances. I guess I'll be able to get back to the books when she starts going to school in a couple of years.

I suppose work in the mine used to be more physically exhausting. But the worker today is still at the bottom of society. He hasn't got any more say now than he had before. Workers have come up with suggestions for improvements so many times, but regardless whether they are about production or about working conditions, we're never listened to (1). That's why we think it's so ridiculous that the company has been paying a whole lot of money to this American consultant for working out a "management theory" which has already been in use for as long as anyone can remember. "A superior shall exercise his leadership in such a manner that a non-superior only has to follow orders", is one of the thesis. Well, that means quite simply that the worker should keep his mouth shut - and it doesn't make it any better if you call that "rules of the game", "role division", "co-operative decisionmaking" or what have you.

We'll take an example, like soundproofing. What do we get for an answer if we complain? "Science has not found an answer yet. Science is working day and night. You have to be patient. Just use your fibre glass ear plugs and you'll come to no harm." And then you read in the papers how they can fly to the moon and keep the guys in the rocket ship totally soundproofed, and you watch television and see how they have managed to insulate prison walls so that the in-

1. This worker's position all through the interview is one of asking to be listened to, to be allowed to participate in the management of the production. He does not even once raise the issue of the ownership of means of production and worker's control, which indicates a lack of working class political consciousness. The worker is not to be blamed for the shortcoming of the Swedish left.



Odd Uhrbom

mates can't even tap messages to each other. There's one place where science has been successful! Right?

I know a couple of guys who have figured out that it would cost something like \$5,000 to soundproof the mill - just like in a shooting gallery, you see. Four-inch fibre-glass rugs against the concrete walls with chicken wire on top of it - it's not really complicated at all. We could even do it ourselves if they gave us the material, and that would lower the noise level considerably. But the company can't afford that. A worker's eardrums don't cost them a red cent, of course.

I'm a mill man right now. I work on the pump level and the dorr level, regulating the water. The dorr, the magnetite dorr - that's a large tank that picks up the ore if there's a stoppage in the filters somewhere. There are two pumps in the dorr that are supposed to pump the sludge back into the process, but these pumps are too small for the amount of sludge that keeps coming in, and in order to keep the dorr from overflowing we have to put in a pipe to the waste. One of the filter tenders brought this up at an information meeting, that there is always so much sludge in the magnetite dorr. And I was going to add my report about the dorr, but before we had a chance to go on, one of the engineers jumped up and said that it doesn't matter since there are two pumps in the dorr which feed the



Odd Uhrbom

sludge into the process again. And then it was tabled and another item came up so fast that it was impossible to get through to them that the pumps are too small, they don't have the power to keep the pace.

We have been after the shift bosses about this many times and we know that they have probably tried to get something done about it. Somebody higher up is stalling and it's just impossible for a worker to find out why something can't be done about it.

What I mean is, we stand there year in and year out knowing that something like 20 tons of perfectly good sludge is being flushed out in the waste every working shift. It probably costs something like \$12.00 a ton and that works out to something like \$720.00 in twenty-four hours.

Sure, you could say that this is peanuts compared to the total company turnover. Only they are so anxious to scrimp and save in other ways. All that waste costs us several men's wages, and at the same time they're always complaining about the high cost of labour and ask for "understanding" every time they "find themselves forced to lay off some of their labour force."

I was only a couple of months old when she died of TB, my mother, that is. They already had seven older children. My parents were only seventeen when they got married and then they had one child every year. And it became impossible for my father to keep us, so we were sent out to different foster homes. I ended up with an elderly childless couple in a village outside Gallivare.

They belonged to a fundamentalist sect and were very strict. For instance, on Sundays at the village prayer meeting the kids were usually let out after the regular text was read from the prayer book - they didn't have to listen to the interpretations, which could take up to four hours altogether. I used to sit with my dad on the men's side, but then my foster mother would take my mittens and my hat and keep them with her on the women's side to prevent me from going outside. And I can remember how I used to be able to hear the other kids playing and carrying on out there in the snow.

Actually, I think that they would have liked to be kind to me if they only had had the courage - particularly my dad. But that's their religion, you know - this spirit of intolerance. Human nature was thought of as some kind of dirt that you had to keep on scrubbing off.

Sometimes I think that the employers' view of the workers comes straight out of those old prayer books.

We lived right by a small lake and when the ice was clear in the winter you could skate and ride a sleigh out there. Well, I wasn't allowed to go out and play - especially not on Sundays, when I was absolutely forbidden to. I remember one Sunday afternoon I was standing at the window looking at how the other kids were running around out there on the ice. Then my foster mother came up and hit me across the face so my nose started bleeding. And she said, "You've got no business standing around staring at those sinful goings on." And then she ordered me out to get some snow to clean the blood off the floor - I guess I might have been seven or eight years old then.

I have another memory from those times. I was taking home firewood on my sled, and I was freezing because I had holes in my boots and I didn't have any warm clothes. Then a man and woman came up to me and asked me if I was cold. I became terrified because I thought these people must have come to take me away. And I couldn't think of anything worse - to have to move. I'd much rather stay where I was even though it was bad, than have to go into something completely unknown. So I let go of the sled and went up on the porch and started brushing off the snow. Then the lady from the Children's Aid said, "for Heaven's sake, dear, it's not that important, just go inside!" And I thought that if my foster mother starts making a big fuss now about me tracking the snow in, then maybe they will take me away. But she didn't - she was real nice to me and gave me a big piece of bread and butter. And I kept myself real close to her and watched those other two carefully until they left.

They used to beat children a lot in those days. But I know that my foster father only beat me when the old woman egged him on and drove him to it. Because when we were by ourselves, the old man and me, he was always real nice to me. If I came up with an idea, at work for instance - even if it was a crazy one - he always used to say, "sure, let's try it out." Secretely he was a good pal.

But one time he almost killed me. They used to hold a great big meeting every fall, those fundamentalists. First they all went to the meetings and afterwards they went out to eat. So the old people didn't have time to keep an eye on the children and the young people the way they usually did. And I was over at the other end of the village with a friend. But when it started to get late I got worried and told Harry, my buddy, that we'd better get on home. On our way we rode past my foster father on our bicycles.

It was so dark he couldn't see me, but I could hear from the way he was breathing that he was furious. And when I got home my foster mother said, "just you wait until your dad gets home, because now you've really got him going." But I knew of course exactly what had been going on before I got home. She was the one that would keep egging him on and say: "You must go and get that foster son of yours, where he wallows in sin." And the old man would say, "Oh, I don't think he's doing anything bad, he's probably all right." And so on. But when he came home this time he was completely wild and I did get a real bad beating. But I couldn't hate him for it, since I knew what lay behind it all.

I've got a pretty violent temper myself, but I've made up my mind not to let my little girl go through the same things I did. (The little two year old is doing everything to interrupt the interview and get all of her father's attention. His patience and respect for her is real.)

It was pretty tough in school too for an outsider like myself. You always got to hear that you didn't have a real dad. But luckily I grew to be pretty big, so they didn't dare jump me too often. But it was tough anyway, always being called "foster child", "orphan" and things like that.

One time when I was around fourteen I went to a fair in Malmberget. I had made some money at a forest job, so I could pay for the bus ticket. Our village was about 50 miles outside of town.

I ran into some of my relatives at the fair who said, "your dad is here. He's working in Harspranget and he's got a room here in Malmberget."

And they called me on the loud-speaker, "Samuel, Samuel. Come to the information stand. Your father is waiting."

So I went there and my heart was pounding. And there were a lot of people there. But he was the one who recognized me - he told me he knew me right away from the way I looked - so he stepped out of the crowd and came up to me and said, "Hi . . . I'm your dad . . ."

After that we didn't stay long at the fair ground - we went to his place. And he said, "Would it be all right if you stayed here until tomorrow?"

So we were together all that day.

But we didn't get much talking done. We were kind of fascinated with each other - and shy - perhaps we wanted to comfort each other . . . He had been condemned by everyone in his home town for sending his children away, but what else could he have done? An unskilled worker with eight small children! All my sisters and brothers and myself have always defended him, but it doesn't help. He's still very awkward with us.

I've met all my sisters and brothers, except two, they live in different parts of the country now. I have the same quiet feelings for them as I had when I met my father. There seems to be a special kind of feeling between us, a feeling of belonging. But is it kinship or imagination that makes you feel that way?

When I was around seventeen or eighteen, the constant nagging and quarreling around the house got to be too much for me, so I left home. If I hadn't run away, my foster mother would have made a total wreck out of me - I don't think I could have survived. She always said that I was no good and that I would never amount to anything. So I thought I'd rather starve than sit around waiting for more of her abuse.

And it was a good thing that I had made that decision, because that's what I had to do for some time - starve.

I had all kinds of odd jobs the first few years - in a saw mill that went bankrupt, a month or so at LKAB, a couple of weeks in a dairy and so on. And the times I was out of work were horrible. Those were the times when you had to go begging for a meal on credit, every day, and you had to keep on telling them that, sure, you would get a job soon and pay what you owed them. And the same routine with the landlady; just one more night, then another. And it was like you owed them more than just money for bed and board. Everything seemed like one big creditor. And when you finally did get a job you were always made to feel that they gave it to you only out of the kindness of their hearts - only because you were in such a bad shape and they were such good people . . . Right?

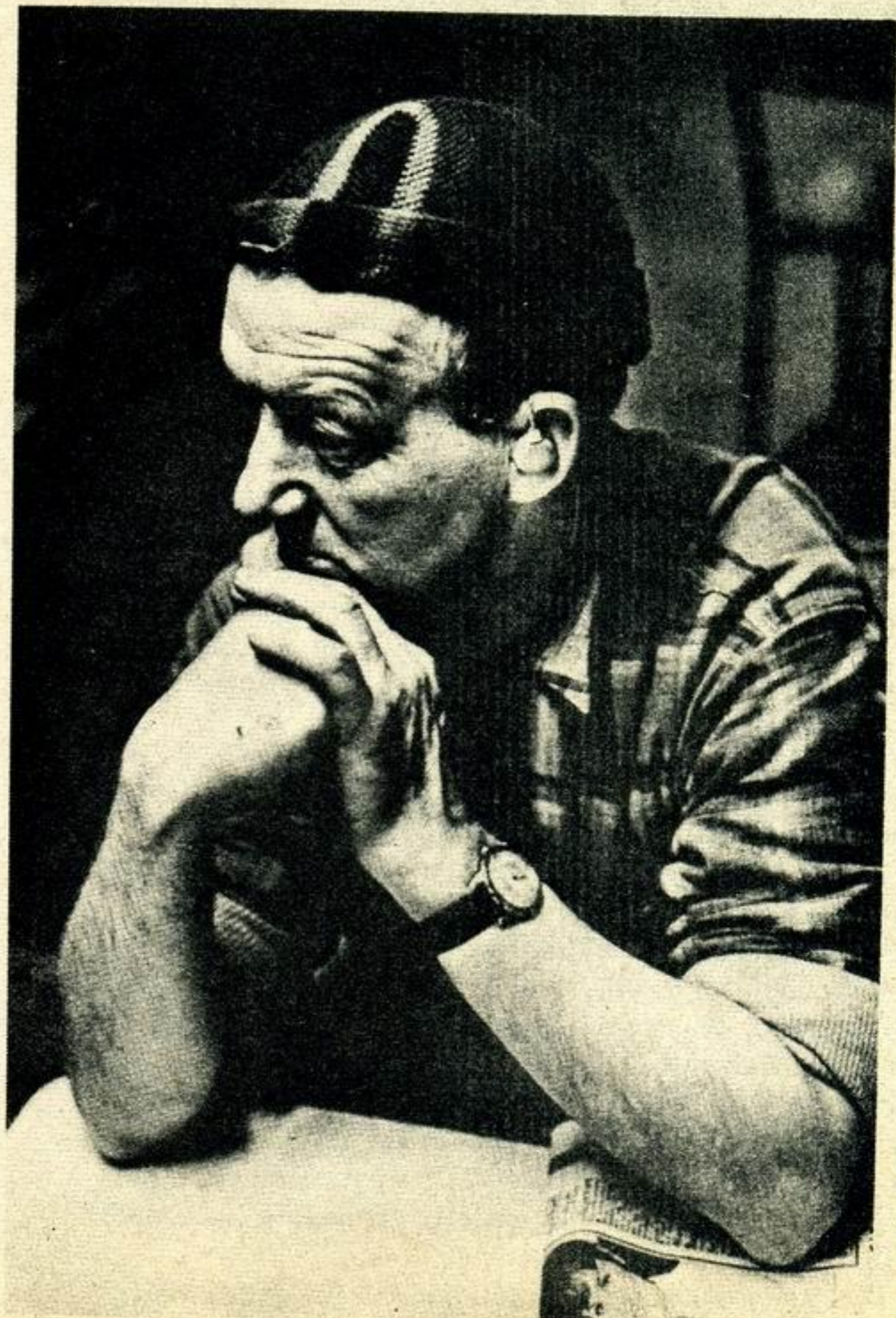
Finally I got steady employment at the LKAB.

My first job was to start driving a raise.

That's when you stand in a small cave, 6.5 by 6.5 feet, and drill straight up with a jackleg with the leg off. And it gets so goddamn dirty in there, and the water keeps pouring down on you all the time. The first day you have to hold - as well as aim - the machine by hand. The water runs down your arms and neck and you get totally black.

And you have to finish drilling that round and blast. If you don't, the whole day's pay is gone (2), and you

2. The miner will receive his "basic wage", but will not be entitled to the "incentive pay", which under these circumstances makes up most of his pay.



Odd Uhrbom



Odd Uhrbom

just can't do it at a normal work speed.

My arms became hard as rocks for a while before the cramps let go - that is my underarms, because I had to hold the drill like that. This job usually lasted a couple of weeks before we had to start driving a raise somewhere else. And when we got more space we could put the leg on the machine so we didn't have to hold it in our hands, and that was easier. But it was still tough going and it was cramped in there all the time.

While you are driving a raise you always work by yourself. It got to be like a house in there after a while. We got around with pinholes and ladders.

I only lasted a couple of years in that outfit and after that was all over, I worked at different things. There are many dangerous jobs in the mine. I came close to getting killed a couple of times. The working places are mostly lonely places. When I was working in the hauling they ran over a guy with the ore cars. The next day when we came back to the place where he'd been run over, there was blood and brain matter left lying in the ditch. And that was a guy we used to know, we used to work together. I was familiar with his voice and his way of kidding . . . and so on.

One year seven men were killed in the mine where I was working. Whenever we got a message that someone

had been killed we always got up and left the job, we just left. Of course the management didn't like that, but they couldn't order us to stay on a day like that.

The closest I myself have been to a fatal accident was one time when we were working in a series of small stopes that were one next to the other. And then there is a slusher in each stope. And when you've got hardbreaking rock, then you have to drill and blast over and over again. So we used to drill a hole, put in some powder, and walk out into the main stope and listen to it blow and then go back again. And we never thought of the risk. We'd only be real goddamn mad because we had hit hardbreaking rock and it was hard to break enough tons of it to keep up the day's pay.

Well, I had just drilled a hole as usual - right close to the opening of the stope - and I put in some powder and dragged my feet out into the main stope, and then I heard something blow. And for once in my life I was careful. I stepped up on the mucking floor, about half a yard above ground and looked inside and then I saw that the hole was still there and that there was smoke coming out of it. So I just threw myself backwards, and at the same moment it blew up in there, and stones and gravel came flying out. Half a second after I had got out of the way. It was my friend's powder that had gone off and I had thought it was mine.

After that I went out into the main stope and felt a bit shaky for a while. But then I thought, "hell, I'm all right, whatever happened", and went back to work.

But later that night the real fear came. I broke out in a cold sweat thinking about how goddamn close it had been.

But this friend of mine I just mentioned was crushed to death by a train one year later.

I did mucking for three or four years. The men were always transferred without them asking for it. From working outside to the mucking was a change for the worse, but from the drilling to the mill was a change for the better. Now I work three shifts and I've got one Sunday off a month.

During the week when you're on night shift you walk around like a zombie. You sit around yawning in the daytime, thinking that you ought to get some sleep. But if you go to bed, you can't sleep anyway. And at night you'd better not sit down anywhere, because the work gets heavier if you relax and doze off. Besides, it isn't allowed. And the shift bosses run around checking that we aren't sleeping. Before they didn't use to care that much. We used to be able to watch the floors for each other and to take turns so that people could get a couple of hours sleep. But they discovered that. And they economized so that now one man gets two floors to watch. "It has become evident during the night shift that one man can easily handle two floors", is what they said.

Sure, it works out all right if the machines don't get too clogged up. But if they do, it takes longer to straighten things out. And then of course the cleaning up areas are twice as big.

That's another thing; to keep us awake they have put the clean-up crew on the night shift.

If things were arranged according to a human being's natural rhythm, then it would be better to do the clean-up during the morning or afternoon shift. And the night shift could concentrate on watching the machines, and watch for each other an hour or two.

On the other hand, it's almost better if you're up and around the whole time. Cause if you do sit down in some

warm corner, then you don't dare to relax, because the temptation to fall asleep gets so damned big you think you'd rather die than get up and start shovelling sludge or flush the floor.

We don't earn extra money for the graveyard shift (3). But the shift bosses do. And I don't think that's fair. The night shift is just as miserable for a guy that shovels sludge as it is for the boss.

We are always told how the shift bosses have to carry all the responsibility and that's why they get such privileges. But if there's any trouble anywhere then we're the ones that have to get up and fix it. The shift bosses don't do a damn thing except check on us and write their reports. If a shifter isn't working on a shift, everything always goes well anyway. But if a worker is absent then they've got to have a replacement for him. So who's more important for the production?

We wait for each other at the punch clock - that is, we're not supposed to, we're supposed to stay on the job until we're replaced. But we wait at the punch clock. If the guy who's to replace you doesn't show up for some reason you can't go home. You have to report to the office that there is no replacement, and if they don't have anybody there to put in his place, you have to do overtime.

I have made up my mind not to do any overtime (4). During the last three years I have done one shift overtime and that's all. They ask me all the time and they have even threatened to give me a warning, so I guess I'll be laid off one day because of it. You see, it's a break of discipline to refuse to do overtime, so the company "has the right" to fire people for that.

First you slug night and day. And then you're supposed to do overtime! Only to exist. If they take away our free time, too, then you might as well pack up.

Besides, when you know how many unemployed men live here in Norrbotten - why can't they let them get a job instead of squeezing every last drop out of us workers?

I make roughly \$400 a month if I do all the regular shifts. Then there's tax, union dues and support for an older child I have. Last month I cleared \$136. That's supposed to be enough for food and clothes for my fiancée - we live together - and our little girl and myself.

My fiancée used to work in an office before we had the baby. After that she hasn't been able to find a job. She is away right now, looking for work. She's been trying for about a year, but it's hopeless. Manpower has advised her to move south, and sure, she's probably got more of a chance there - but then what would I do?

The company is better off with the union than without. Through the union the company can keep a check on the workers. It's gone so far that when we have a problem, the company is the first to say "get in touch with your local".

If there's a conflict between the company and the workers the union will of course step in. And sure, it has happened that they have been able to keep someone from being fired - at least for a couple of months. But if the company really wants to fire a guy they will watch every move he makes. As soon as he does anything wrong, he'll get one warning after another and one day he's gone.

The rules in general are very difficult to follow to

3. In Canada, miners get paid extra for unpopular shifts.
4. The question of overtime is the same in Sweden as it is in Canada. The social-democratic trade union movement has permitted the companies to make overtime demands on the workers, instead of making overtime prohibitively expensive for the industry.

the letter and nobody asks you to, either - on a regular day. But if they want to get rid of a guy - in the name of "normal procedure" - well, all they have to do is pick a rule. The list of reasons for disciplinary actions is endless.

I have constant stomach pains. And sometimes I take a day off because of them. And sometimes I skip a day out of pure boredom. I haven't been blacklisted yet, as far as I know. There are guys who have taken fewer days off than I have who have been fired. But I have been threatened with warnings many times. I was called up to the doctor because of this absence. And he was very understanding, I must admit. But then he said that probably you are in the wrong place. That could have been because I mentioned this thing about classical music when he asked me what I did in my spare time. The intellectuals are always so "pleasantly surprised" if a worker wants to listen to anything else than country and western. So the doctor told me that I ought to be doing different kind of work. And that was of course a nice thing to say to me, on a personal basis. But it was nevertheless an idiotic way of putting it. I am no better than anybody else. If I could escape from these machines, then somebody else would have to take my place. And what other person is the "right man" for that? I don't know any such inferior being.

We can't keep running away one by one and say, "I am too sensitive . . . I was meant for something better". We have to stay and see to it that the inhuman work is made human. We must be allowed more freedom at work. And left to work more independently. Now we are treated like they used to treat children in the old days. They break us down.

Just think how we could work together! Everybody would feel and share responsibility. And we would be very proud of ourselves - in a good way.

The big problem today is that the worker doesn't want to admit that he is a worker, he doesn't want to become a part of the working class of the world. Instead he usually dreams one of two dreams. One is to win the sweepstakes. The other is to become established as one of those who are oppressing the workers; to make it as an individual - that is the goal. What a mistake!

I've read everything I could get my hands on about Vietnam. And once you've understood what's going on there, you can see the pattern - about what's going on in Gabora Bassa as well (5).

Before you would hear all kinds of horrible things in the mine. For example, people would say, quite seriously, that it's just fine that the Americans are dropping a few bombs here and there. The world's getting too overpopulated anyway. Let the bastards starve. There are too many of them. And they aren't like us.

I happen to think that Swedish workers wouldn't say things like that if the newspapers didn't present things the way they do. But when there is a great big tear-jerking story at least once a week about overpopulation as the greatest threat to the world, what do you expect people to think?

But lately I've started to get tough. I've begun to shoot my mouth off. You can make a comparison, I say, that if we as northerners and miners complain that we are worse off than the rest of Sweden, then the other parts of the country might just as well say, "let those

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5. Gabora Bassa refers to a location in Portuguese dominated Mozambique.

the ruling class to the "movement", the anti-working class nature of the various organizations attending, the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the liberal radicals participating in the "poor people's" groups; and the betrayal of the sincere working class people who had been drawn into these groups for lack of any other alternative.

First of all, the Department of Health and Welfare funded a report by Mario Carota (The Citizen Group Movement Among the Low Income Citizens of Urban Canada, 1970), that compiled intelligence on all so-called "poor people's groups" in Canada. The term "working class" never appeared in the report, which listed the "low-income citizens' groups" as being "not very mature, not political, not revolutionary, not united, not full of power, not changing the bureaucracies, not bitter, not polarized and not violent", - all of which made these groups qualify for a \$60,000 grant from the same department, to sponsor the Poor People's Conference. It was an attempt, successful in its own terms, to crystallize and institutionalize the anti-working class politics of these groups. (It is probably superfluous to remind the reader that no militant union has ever received and never will, a substantial grant from the state in order to organize against the capitalist class.)

The conference was attended by about 300 groups ranging from single parents' groups, tenants' groups, to welfare rights groups, disabled groups and unemployed groups. Many, like the Trefann Neighbours and Tenants were similar establishment created and supported groups, some were purely therapeutic little grouplets working through some agency, and a number were those defining themselves as "poor people's groups", unattached to any agencies, but involving "radical" social workers and students. Since the whole conference was an artificial one, organized by the state, based on information compiled by the state, groups had not been in contact with each other and had very little actually in common. The single issue organizations particularly were often out of their depths as soon as other issues were discussed than the ones they were directly concerned about.

In the workshops the low level of understanding of larger issues, and the tie-up with the establishment agencies and organizations became evident. In one session alone which I attended the following statements were made: "The rich and poor should get together and solve their (sic!) problems;" "The farmers are always complaining -really they have no problems at all" (a delegate from Saskatchewan); "Our group has no problems with money at all - our rent is paid by company X"; "All the six million poor in Canada should get together and give one dollar for which amount their problems should be advertised on the TV so that everybody (!) would know"; and so on. Many of these people had been working with their group for several years and had had "help" and "advice" from agency social workers.

In many ways the conference was the fruit of years and years of "participatory democracy". It was, one was repeatedly told, organized "by the poor themselves" with highly educated professionals (from the Praxis Corporation, a research agency in Toronto) hiding in the background. A planning committee was set up from representatives of different groups and this committee met a few times in Toronto. Some meetings were also held with an advisory committee, which consisted of a handful of people from Toronto's "low income" organizations. The burden

of organizing a major conference was firmly put on the shoulders of the "poor", those oppressed and colonized individuals in our society who lack the necessary knowledge and experience to organize such an effort effectively. The game was played as follows: "It's up to you people to decide what to do. It's your conference, you know. Now, how do you want to organize it?" The professionals then proceeded to "take down suggestions". Example: the conference advertised the following workshops: Does giving more money solve poverty?; Where is all the wealth?; The big push to buy; Politics, politicians and the poor; Prison, police and the poor; The poor and the law; How do we solve inflation by having more unemployment than we have now? Recent federal responses to poverty; Do we want professionals in our group?; Women; Indian workshops. Since I was invited to be a resource person (less than two weeks prior to the conference) and was expected to function in a workshop, I raised the question that these workshops were absurd and meaningless, since they did not deal logically and coherently with the problems at hand, only to receive the now familiar response, "But the poor made those categories themselves." Because of the ideology of "participatory democracy" the intellectuals had totally abdicated their responsibility of creating workshops that could in fact be helpful to those participants - and there were many of them - who were receptive to real information, real learning. Consequently the workshops were counterproductive by the very fact that they were vague, overlapping, poorly conceived, etc. Most of them, to my knowledge, turned into the familiar beefing sessions, where people exchanged experiences of how badly things were in their respective parts of the country. There was nothing in the conference to take them beyond complaining.

The failure of the intellectuals

Another consequence of the failure of intellectuals and professionals to act as such was that the conference was totally lacking of information and educational materials. You can go to any conference organized by the middle class for its own benefit (as was a conference organized by Praxis Corporation a few months earlier) and you will find the literature tables filled to the brim with books, magazines, pamphlets, leaflets etc. Not so in the Poor People's Conference. There was simply nothing available, beyond the inevitable Trotskyist and Maoist newspapers sold at the door. There wasn't even systematic information on who the groups were, what they were doing, what they had achieved, where their failures lay, for the benefit of those people who came looking for such information and who were looking for contacts. No, since the "poor didn't ask for it" and, perhaps even better, "since they haven't written any books", the conference continued from beginning to end without any real enlightenment being provided. Thus "participatory democracy" makes certain that oppressed groups remain not only disorganized but also uneducated.

That there were working class people present starving for real information and education, was quite clear to me. These people are the ones who have been drawn into these groups because of a lack of a visible alternative. Despite their participation they had remained critical of these organizations and often raised fundamental questions: "I know we aren't getting anywhere. Nobody seems to know what to do . . . where to go."

It shouldn't have been difficult for intellectuals and professionals who are seriously interested in effecting

social changes, to help organize a very successful conference which would have provided learning experiences to all those people who were ready for them, and who were not just interested in spending a weekend away from home, as it turned out to be for the most part. Serious intellectuals would have presented the planning committee of "poor people" with several alternative models of how to organize a conference in the best interest of the working class, and would have explained the effect of different formats; and then would have asked the planning committee to choose the model they found most helpful. The workshops should have been created not on the basis of vague suggestions from "the poor" participants, but on the basis of what the working class needs to know in order to struggle effectively against an exploitative social order. Had the intellectuals been serious about their task they would have proposed something like the following:

DAY ONE

1. Who are we? The nature of the working class. A popular lecture on the nature and history of the class. Definition of terms (white collar, blue collar, middle class). Statistics on the numbers of working class people. Explanation on unemployment and surplus labour. Explanation as to why the poorest people in capitalist society are women and racial and national minorities.
2. The nature of the capitalist system. A popular lecture on how capitalism works. Dealing concretely with the nature of the ruling class. Naming names, showing films and photographs of these people and their life style.

The first day would be organized in an assembly fashion, with all attending lectures and films. There would be plenty of written materials, pamphlets and paperbacks for people to take away with them.

DAY TWO

How things are and how they can be.

1. Health
2. Education
3. Housing
4. Work
5. Family life

Workshops on the above topics are duplicated in the morning and afternoon so that each can attend at least two complete workshops. There are relevant films and plenty of written materials to take home for further study. Around the workshops there is a lot of free discussion.

DAY THREE

How to organize?

First an assembly meeting for all on some basic principles of working class organizing: How to create democratic mass organizations with maximum participation of members? How to train the maximum numbers in leadership? What has been done elsewhere? In this country? (Positive examples, negative examples). How to recognize misleaders. In the afternoon specific workshops on organizing in the neighbourhoods and the workplace. Discussion of methods of organizing and skills required. Instruction on how to learn skills back home and how to train others.

Although the above is a practical suggestion, it is of course made tongue-in-cheek since the state would have dropped its sponsorship at the slightest indication of pro-working class content. It could be suggested that the Praxis Corporation self-censored itself in organizing the

conference as to avoid the funds from being withdrawn and perhaps hoped to sneak some benefits to the participants in some quiet, unobtrusive way. I reject this "explanation", however, since what the organizers were doing here was identical with what the middle class liberal radicals have been doing across the continent for the last ten years (see "The Fallacy of 'Community Control'" in the previous issue of TRANSFORMATION), irregardless who is financing their efforts, that is, creating organizational structures and methods which are totally dysfunctional to the working class. Praxis Corporation recently reiterated the ideology which this article has criticized, in a memo to all delegates in the Poor People's Conference:

"Because of the amount of space devoted to Praxis in the press comments on the Conference, we feel it is necessary for us to give some comment. Praxis was hired to do the staff work for the Planning Committee and all policy decisions were made by the Planning Committee. The many struggles, arguments and discussions which took place at the conference clearly reflected that people were free to fight for their point of view rather than be subjected to control. [The dichotomy is always presented as one between "freedom" and "control" - not a word of the necessity of good working class leadership.] There are two primary reasons for this form of attack in the press. The first is that some media people were angered by not being allowed free access to the conference and its planning process. The second is that it is simpler for them to explain the development of power among poor people if they can say that it is being controlled by "outside agitators". Perhaps they do not feel that it is possible for poor people to manage and control their own lives much less their organizations. [Here we go again! The "poor" are allowed the freedom to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps!] In spite of the opposition of the press, the movement will continue to grow and poor people will continue to run their own organizations. As for ourselves, we will be involved whenever poor people think that we are useful and the opinion of the press will not affect this one way or the other."

Anti-working class development

In conclusion, no matter how one twists and turns the facts, looking for evidence of the contrary, it becomes evident that the "poor people's movement" is a thoroughly anti-working class development. It makes no difference who is organizing "the poor", whether it be the agents of the ruling class or the "well meaning" liberal radicals, the results are the same. There simply is no other way to "organize the poor" - except against the working class - since the very term "the poor" is based on the negation of the working class as a living reality in the capitalist society. While the discontent in the Canadian working class grows largely on the account of rapidly developing contradictions between Canada and the U.S., a great effort is going to be spent by the ruling class in Canada, to "organize the poor" into various "self-help" projects, funded by the state directly or indirectly, in order to 1) perform what the capitalist class always needs, a public relations role ("see, we care!"), and 2) to create dissension amongst the different elements in the working class. While the members of various "poor

people's groups volunteer to testify how good the government has been, and attend state financed conferences, the Prime Minister tells the Lapalme drivers in Montreal, those unsung heroes of the working class, fighting for justice for the whole class, "Mangez de la merde! (Eat shit!)."

Thus, if "organizing the poor" is by its very nature an anti-working class activity, what can be said about organizing the most downtrodden and demoralized elements of the working class, including the chronic welfare element?

There is only one answer: working class people should be organized into working class organizations which include working and non-working people of all shades of collar, colour and language. The basis of the organization is the neighbourhood, since on the work place no more than 30% of the working population are unionized and since unions (with extremely rare exceptions) have long since ceased to be political organizations functioning in the interest of the whole class (they sometimes benefit their own members). A neighbourhood organization should attempt to diminish the class differences existing within the working class, and particularly work to obliterate feelings of guilt and inferiority on the part of welfare recipients, and the feeling of contempt towards people on assistance, on the part of those working class people who themselves, up to now, have avoided that fate. For this very reason, because one must obliterate the distinction between working and non-working people, neither should be organized into separate groups. People who are on welfare and who by necessity have to struggle with various bureaucracies, can easily form a separate committee within the overall organization, but should in every other respect, when dealing with issues like health, education, housing, family life, youth problems, and neighbourhood issues, work with other members of the class.

One word of caution remains: the most lumpenized element will continue to exist and from its midst some individuals can be drawn into working class organizations. They will become oriented towards the working class, while others will remain captive to the ruling class, and will continue to be used against the working class, for which they will receive certain personal benefits.

It is now up to the middle class organizers and activists to come to grips with the anti-working class politics of the "poor people's" groups. They have to get to know the working class and they have to get to know their own class.

The same applies to the working class members of these groups: they have to find out who they are and they have to know what the middle class is. Both should study the following literature and relate what they learn to their present practice by observing and critically examining the class characteristics and dynamics of the situations they find themselves in.

Jurgen Kuczynski: The Rise of the Working Class. World University Library. 1967. \$2.95. An outstanding, clear and visually effective book.

Frederick Engels: The Condition of the Working Class in England. Panther Books. \$1.25.

Frederick Engels: Utopian and Scientific Socialism. (Will teach, most effectively, what the difference is between wanting social changes and actually achieving them.)

Also, for a portrait of the middle class liberals:
Fritz Pappenheim: Alienation of Modern Man. (Deals with various attempts to overcome structural alienation, created by capitalism.)
Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1959.

Cristopher Caudwell "Pacifism and Violence, a Study in Bourgeois Ethics." Available from TRANSFORMATION as a reprint. Free to subscribers on request. 50 cents to everybody else.

In addition, the working class members should raise the following questions:

- 1) Is ours an anti-working class movement?
- 2) Are we being taken for a ride by the ruling class and the middle class activists?
- 3) Would it be better to dissolve ourselves and start advocating and organizing for neighbourhood organizations, with a definite working class perspective and uniting different elements of the working class?

The middle class activists, on the other hand, should make the above literature available to the members of these groups, who will either welcome the literature and the ensuing discussion, or run to the nearest agency or government official to complain about "communists". In either case, that would mean the end of the "poor people's" groups as we know them, and the beginning of serious working class organizing.

Photography and the powerless contn'd from page 28

being shown in the pictures. No photographs are taken of the other circumstances existing in the area, the far more "normal" conditions which I discussed earlier, i.e. people having neat homes, of people looking after their backyards and relating well to their children and neighbours.

Secondly, what material decay and neglect exists in the downtown areas (and I am well aware that it exists) in the form of run down houses, unkempt yards, overflowing garbage, etc., exists for the very concrete reasons that it is allowed to exist, not because of a generalized "people don't care", but because somebody benefits from the decay and disorder. The properties shown in Cathy Wismer's book, for instance, are invariably owned by absentee landlords - who get exorbitantly high rents for their "investment properties" from large families who cannot find accommodation elsewhere. These landlords live in the better parts of the city, they are real people with real names and addresses, and what is more interesting, real faces. What about taking a few pictures of them and their families, just in order to introduce some balance to the presentation? Furthermore, City Hall has systematically neglected the downtown and working class areas, by not doing ordinary maintenance repairs on the streets and sidewalks and by not enforcing housing standards on absentee owned properties. What about taking a picture of the head of the housing inspection department in the act of trying to explain why nothing has been done? What about a photograph of his neighbourhood?

There are endless possibilities if a photographer seriously wants to investigate the problems encountered by working class people in this society. Comparison is the best method at arriving at a balanced presentation: comparison between the tenants and their landlords, between absentee owned rundown properties and resident owned well-kept ones, between the condition of the streets and sidewalks in the working class areas and those in the affluent parts of the city. In the process of these comparisons the photographer would get educated herself/himself and might have an altogether different story to tell than the one presented in Cathy Wismer's Come See My Garden.

various gradations, and opportunists and social climbers such as East become fascists.

Ken himself, at the end of Transition, calls himself a cynic, but he is really more of an anarchist, interested in the politics of the Wobblies. "As a natural loner he sympathized with the friendless and helpless, but he refused to join any group. He had transferred his cynical distrust and hatred of the bureaucrat, the YMCA secretary, the Bible-thumper, and all their middleclass minions, into a distrust of politicians of all political hues and aims."

In Exodus, the final part of the book, the lives of the characters are set. Each person enters into the pattern of life that she or he will continue forever, or else meets their death in a way that was foreshadowed and foredoomed earlier in the novel.

Myrla Patson, her body emaciated and her hair dyed blonde, is now a professional prostitute.

"On good weeks she made as high as fifty-six dollars, and seldom averaged less than forty. She had a closet full of cheap clothes, a perennial morning hangover, and had aborted herself twice during the past six months. In a savings bank in the Bay Street financial district was a nest egg of several hundred dollars, and she now believed that a girl with any kind of looks at all was crazy to work for ten to twelve dollars a week."

Bob McIsaacs escapes from prison and gets himself involved in a series of robberies, each more bloody and violent than the last, which finally result in murder. Hunted down like an animal, he is shot as he tries to climb a fence in an attempt to flee the police. He dies "looking like a boneless golliwog against the light-stabbed darkness." The last robbery which led to his death netted only a few dollars.

Mabel Tilling dies. Her body is found, rainsoaked and sodden after lying in a lane all night, her wedding ring, which she never took off, still on her finger. In a trunk at home Ken finds the engagement ring that his father had given her.

"He stared unseeing through the curtains covering the window, thinking of how the cheap engagement ring had remained to his mother a symbol of her young womanhood, and of the love she had carried for his father. As he turned his father's snapshots over in his hands he realized that this man had not deserved the love his mother had felt for him."

Billy Addington dies, boiled to death in a vat of chocolate which he toppled into during a fainting-spell caused by malnutrition. In the months before his death, Billy "had grown so thin . . . that he was ashamed now to wear his bathing suit. The smell of chocolate or something has spoiled his appetite, and he could no longer eat as he used to. . . . He believed his job, and the constant smell of chocolate, brought on his fainting spells, though the clinic doctors down at St. Mike's didn't think so." Billy is the classic case of the exploited worker. In his suffering he cannot even get help from the medical profession, and so he dies.

Theodore East finally makes it into the middle class world, marrying a girl from a well-to-do family, and leaves the Canadian Youth Party, his mission accomplished. "So Theodore had made it! Out of the small group of youths and girls who often hung around together in Cabbagetown and up in Riverdale Park, the only one to end up a real

winner was the confessed opportunist."

Ken Tilling finally becomes a socialist. He also encounters the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of the Left's leaders, but still keeps his faith, and goes to fight for the Spanish people.

In these last passages of the book, Garner makes some pungent criticisms of the Left, seen through the eyes of Ken and Ken's real friendly uncle, Noah Masterson. Ken himself sees little wrong with the dogma of Communism or the way the party is run, but at the end of the book it is made quite clear that all is not well in the state of the party. Garner also makes it clear that Ken's youthful passion and his rage at the sufferings of the world destroy his objectivity. Noah Masterson can be objective. He has been through the radical movement before the first World War, and has a wealth of experience and reading on which to base his opinions. He is observant enough to see that Ken will never be a practising socialist, because he is a rebel, and "real rebels never make good revolutionaries". Ken will never really fit in, because he is a critic, and the basis of his socialism is humanitarian, and is not fixed. But, if this is so, it is the failure of certain brands of socialism rather than of Ken Tilling. Real socialism, on the contrary, needs its critics and real rebels.

The Left fails in many ways to reach such people as Ken. He is first turned off by the rhetoric, the more-revolutionary-than-thou attitudes, and the inability of the Communists to deal with problems close to home. He tells Jimmy Cluff, a recent convert to Communism, that he disagrees with the U.S. Communists he had heard speak in New York because they "were more interested in Russia and Germany than they seemed to be about the working stiff in the United States. 'The problems of all the workers in the world are indivisible', Jimmy would quote pontifically and by rote."

Ken goes on to say:

"Do you think that because you carry a membership card in the Communist Party of Canada that you're the only person who knows anything about the workers' problems? . . . You don't even have to go anywhere outside this town to see that the system is rotten and has broken down. Right here in good old Tory British Toronto you have the same problems they have anywhere else. Just because I don't use Commie words like 'labour power', petit-bourgeois, or 'surplus value' doesn't mean that I can't see what's wrong. . . ."

Ken becomes committed to the movement not by rhetoric, but but by the simple statement of a friend of his, a professional safecracker, who tells him: "Maybe it's different for you an' me, Ken, but for the ordinary working stiff Communism seems his only hope." All the lectures of Jimmy Cluff are nothing to Ken beside these few words.

The Left is seen as hypocritical, despite Ken's firm faith in it. Its main representative is Steve Rogers, the campus Communist and parlour pink, who, as Theodore East notices, "was dressed in very poor clothes, as if for effect. Theodore had seen too many poor people to be fooled as to how they looked." Like most of the middle class commies, he is "a damn fool", and seems to be in the revolutionary game for the power rather than for the people.

Garner's account of the "mass demonstration" in front of Queen's Park is all too nauseatingly familiar, with the stereotyped sloganeering, the usual violent rhetoric, the

same fatuous idealism, the same gathering of plainclothes cops, and the same call to the crowd to "organize a spontaneous demonstration". And of course, the crowd is exhorted to "Remember your Russian comrades' attack on the Petrograd Winter Palace." - something that everybody in Cabbagetown can identify with as being deeply relevant to their personal experience!

Noah Masterson describes the sectarianism of the Left, which has made it impossible for him to work in it actively, although he is still a socialist in belief and analysis. He warns Ken against the dogmatism of the Left, and accurately foretells Stalin's rise to power.

Ken finally fulfills his wish to go and fight in Spain. He tells Noah: "I don't care what you think of the Communists, or how you dislike their theories. . . . Maybe they are opportunists and dupes of the Russian government. But right now, when every member of every working class should be behind the Spanish people, they're the only ones who are doing anything concrete to help them."

But when Ken gets to Spain, he finds that his comrades in the International Brigade are being killed in great numbers. "It's murder, Comrade", an Englishman back from the front tells them. He has just been in a battle in which his group, using rifles and grenades, had to fight tanks and cavalry. There isn't enough equipment or supplies. Men are poorly trained and are sent out to the front almost immediately.

As the novel ends, Ken and his comrades are doomed to defeat, "not by Spanish fascism, or Hitler, but by the machinators in Whitehall, the Quai d'Orsay and on Washington's Capitol Hill".

Garner's best asset is the quiet understatement of his writing. He does not hammer away at you; he does not need to. The facts of Cabbagetown life are enough to convince of the wrongness of the system. The most depressing idea that comes from the book is that the Left has not progressed. It is still giving bad leadership because it is still isolated and cut-off from the people it needs to help most, and who can benefit most from socialism. The Left still uses rhetoric as a means to "power" rather than using creative language as a means to the people. The Left still has campus commies like Steve Rogers, dressed in their workboots, lumberjack shirt and army fatigues, trying desperately to be in among the revolutionary crowd. The Left is still middle class predominantly, and sometimes, damn fools too. The Left still focuses on political struggles outside our country, ignoring the problems of their own area or city, and the advice of the groups they emulate (such as the Black Panthers) who say the best way to express support for their movement is to build a base in the working class of your own city. The Left is still into power games, and being more revolutionary-than-thou - in other words, carrying over the bourgeois social relations of capitalism into the struggle for socialism.

What Garner has to say in Cabbagetown should no longer be ignored, because on a number of accounts he has written an outstanding book. First, he is honest. He does not hesitate to point out the wrongs, whether they be done by socialists or capitalists. Secondly, he is not religious. Socialism is not the Way, the Light, the Truth - it is a way of organizing society economically and socially so that life will be better for all. Thirdly, he is a Canadian, and deals with Canadian realities, the Canadian working class, something most educated Canadians are removed from. (Not surprisingly, Cabbagetown is practically unknown to generations of Canadians - and cannot be found in

literature courses in highschools and universities.) Fourth, and most important of all, Garner is a humanitarian, caring more about what happens to people rather than to alienated movements. The rhetoric means little to him; it is the reality of socialism that appeals.

I see in Garner's book a tragic account of not only the destruction of a generation of Cabbagetowners through the wrongs of the system, but an account of a worse destruction, the betrayal of the hopes of a young man who believed in the socialist ideal. It is a destruction that still continues, and sadly, for much the same reason.

Kathryn Keate is a graduate student in English. She is active in Women's Liberation, and writes for publications on the Left.

We would be so proud contn'd from page 41

goddamn laps starve to death . . . it doesn't change a thing no matter what we do for them . . . they're just a load on our backs."

You see what I mean? If we are indifferent to other people then we can't expect to be treated as people either.

This move towards socialism has come to some kind of halt. Now there were groups in the thirties that were quite active, but now that we have reached a certain level of affluence, everybody is going after their own personal interest. That's what we often talk about on the job. Is it merely hunger, starvation, that brings us together? And then after we have satisfied the need for food, we don't give a damn for each other but start running after personal status. It is depressing that workers can think along these lines.

I think there will be a change soon.

But we who are middle-aged today are a lost generation, wouldn't you say?

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Does a man three decades dead walk and make facial expressions
Among us? When we're shaving do our eyes stray from the mirror
And suddenly, in vision's discarded corner
Do we see his face? Surely there's a reasonable explanation . . .

A strong old man gets on the elevator. He
Even has a red sweatshirt --- tam tilted at that old angle.
If I could see his eyes I'd know:
But his eyes are screwed shut
as if in anguish:

Like many eyes --- opening, closing --- record anguish . . .
One sees him again; in many sizes; at many ages;
Suddenly I realize there are many Bethunes.
From many candidates, fate chooses
Both its victims and its heroes
Often one and the same . . .
Another necessity, another Canuck, and there could have been
another Bethune.

So many of us live in anguish
Because we were spared his anguish . . .

Bullies with tommyguns walk our streets. Does it matter
If one of them doesn't run in front of the house?
Children kidnapped --- forced abroad
To earn their bread; as others are forced to earn bread;
Are conscripted for the bandit armies.

And we supply them. Our leaders supply
The arms to conquer a world which includes us.
Any wonder --- though he lives in us.
His grave is our living bodies;
There is no rest?

18-12-1970

Author's note: Norman Bethune, a Canadian surgeon to match with the best, after a life marked by amazing accomplishments, alternatively ferociously and cheerfully won from a hostile environment, died in China in 1939. The Scalpel, the Sword; a biographical novel by Ted Allan and Sydney Green, was a best seller when it first appeared in 1953, but is now practically unknown and unobtainable. (Some clever publisher should consider bringing it out once again, for mass consumption.) Another book, The Watch That Ends the Night, by Hugh MacLellan, tries to make Bethune out as tired at death as MacLellan apparently was at birth. Actually a deathbed letter exists, made into a poem by John Robert Colombo. (Also, there is an outstanding National Film Board film on the man, titled Bethune.)