

THE NEWSLETTER NO. 5



summer 74

INTRODUCTION

This is not to announce the appearance of Newsletter #5; the front page already did that. Rather, we would like to use this space to draw your attention to a couple of points in the body of this issue.

First point: As you will soon discover, if you haven't already, this issue contains a readership survey. We think it is important that people respond to this. To date the producers of the Newsletter have been operating in the dark regarding the uses to which their product is put, the purposes it serves and the interest it has for its readers. If everyone responds to this survey then, as generations of market research have indubitably established, a better, more appealing product will result. Seriously, we hope you will respond.

Second point: Of the articles dealing with practical workplace struggles, only one deals with the white collar sector. While this is an improvement over the last issue, we feel that industrial organizing is being heavily over-represented in these pages. We strongly urge those people who have experience of white collar work or organizing to submit articles dealing with that experience. The above point applies with equal force to other sectors of struggle, particularly the community.

An encouraging sign: We already have most of the articles submitted for Newsletter #6, which is slated to go out in late Fall. Articles include "What We've Done at Chrysler", by a member of the Windsor Auto Workers Group, and two articles developing an ongoing debate and differentiation within the "new tendency" in Ontario: the "workers' autonomy" perspective and the perspective of the Windsor group which wrote Out of the Driver's Seat.

And now, we turn you over to what we hope is a stimulating, challenging Newsletter, and one which is just chock full of information! Happy reading.

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Cover photo: Demonstrators overturn scab-run street car on "Bloody Saturday" during Winnipeg General Strike, June, 1919. Photo from Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers' Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike, ed. N. Penner, Toronto, James Lewis & Samuel, 1973.

A SURVEY (TO FIND OUT WHERE WE ARE AT)

The Newsletter has been in existence now for about a year. During this time we have tried to relate primarily to people who are attempting to develop a revolutionary political practice within the working class in Canada. We have hoped to make the Newsletter useful, in a practical sense, to political militants. This is not to say, however, that we have neglected theory. Rather we have insisted that theory be developed through reflection on the experience of contemporary class struggle. Thus, as we see it, the function of the Newsletter should be to generalize (and promote discussion of) the experience of active political militants and to generate theory which clarifies the dynamics of the class struggle from the strategic standpoint of the working class.

At this point we are interested in finding out just how close we have come to fulfilling the tasks we have set ourselves. We would like to know how important (relevant?) the Newsletter is to those who receive it. We also have been forced to consider subscriptions to maintain the Newsletter. Donations have been the financial basis of the Newsletter up to this point but with costs escalating the way they are it is doubtful that we will be able to continue in this fashion. But if you wish to prove us wrong please feel free to send us you "cash designed for political purposes" at any time.

Lastly, by this survey method, we are hoping to update our list of people who receive the Newsletter. If you wish to continue to receive the Newsletter (or to start to receive it) you must send in your name and address in the area designated below.

Randy Dryburgh, Toronto,
for the Editorial Committee.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SURVEY TO HELP US AND TO INSURE THAT YOU RECEIVE THE NEWSLETTER IN THE FUTURE

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
TYPE OF WORK _____

Which of the following types of articles do you find most interesting and useful?

- Practical (e.g., Intervention At Ford Oakville, #4) _____
- Theoretical (e.g., Notes on Workers Autonomy, #2) _____
- From Abroad (e.g., Big Flame, on Organization, #2) _____
- Why? _____

Which of the above did you find least useful and/or interesting? _____

Why? _____

What other types of articles do you think should be included in the Newsletter? _____

Would you be interested in writing an article or a response to an article for the Newsletter? _____

What are your feelings about the form of the Newsletter? _____

What is the greatest fault or shortcoming of the Newsletter? _____

What is its greatest strength? _____

Would you be willing to subscribe to the Newsletter if the need arises to use this form of financial support? _____

Do you have any other suggestions to help solve our financial problem? _____

Has reading the Newsletter altered any of your political views? _____

Has it reinforced or confirmed any of your political views? _____

Please write any other comments or criticisms you have concerning the Newsletter, the Canadian left, the present political situation, the rotten state of capital, etc. _____

TEAR OUT THIS PAGE AND
MAIL IMMEDIATELY TO:

The Newsletter
P.O. Box 38
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STRUGGLE IN THE BOONDOCKS

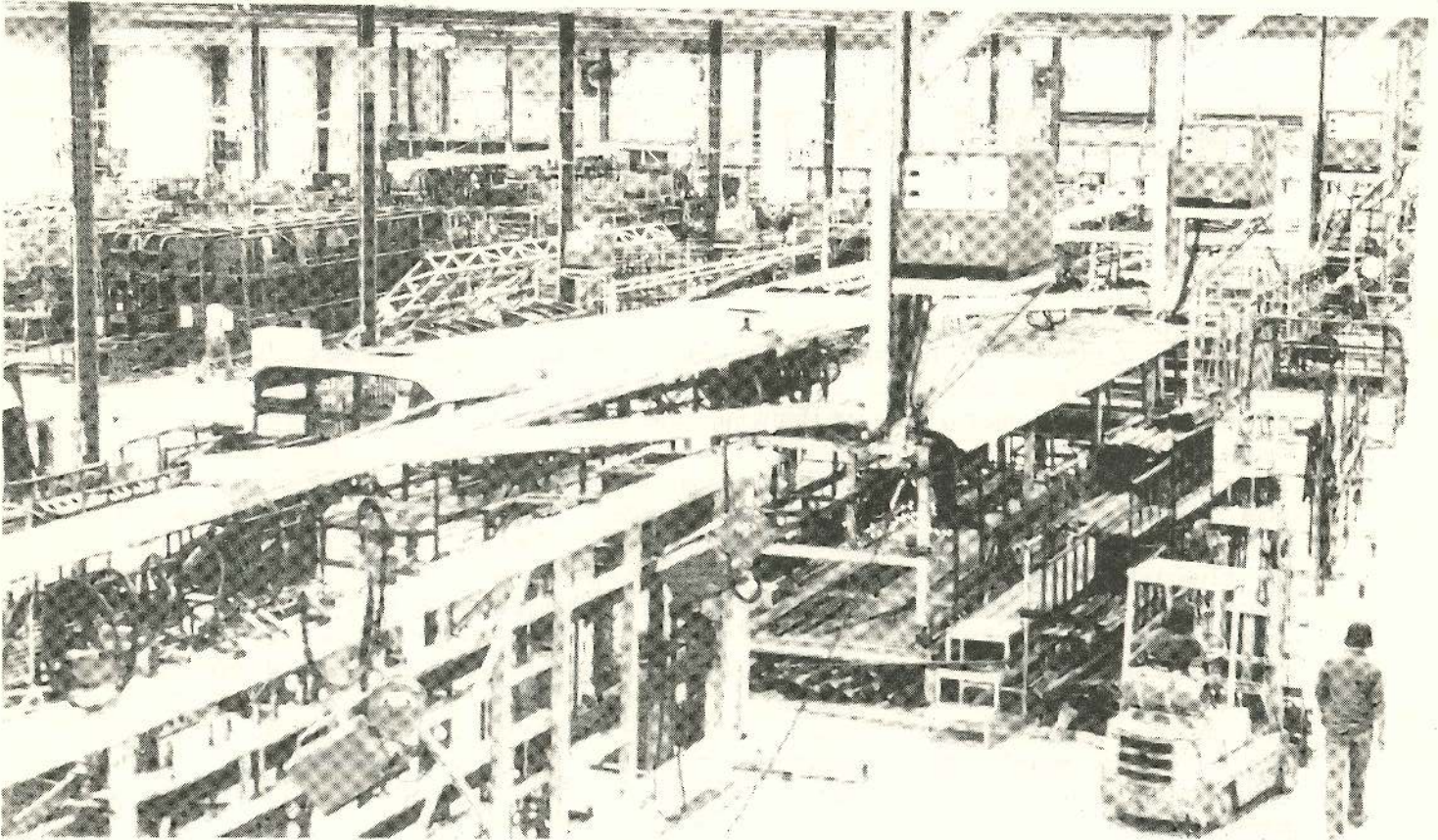
1 BACKGROUND

The City: When one looks at Winnipeg, especially when one is looking from central Canada, the most noticeable difference is the role of manufacturing in the economy. Manufacturing in Winnipeg accounts for only 25% of the work force. Plant size is also much below that of Canada and Ontario. In 1967, in Canada 90.4% of the plants employed under 100 workers. In Ontario 80% of the plants employed under 100 workers. In Manitoba 92% of the plants employ under 100 workers. Two of the biggest sectors in the manufacturing area in Winnipeg are food and beverage, and the clothing sector, both of which are fairly labour intensive. But one of the fastest growing sectors in Winnipeg is the transportation equipment sector. The value of factory shipments increased in this sector 91% from 1961 to 1969, second only to the machinery industries sector. The transportation equipment sector is composed mainly of bus and farm machinery production.

The major bus producer in Winnipeg is Motor Coach Industries (MCI) which produces inter-city buses. It was locally owned until the 1960's but then Greyhound bought it out. It is also Manitoba's major manufacturer employing about 1,000 people. The union here is the International Association of Machinists (IAM). There were two long strikes at this plant recently. One from October 30, 1970 to January 11, 1971 and again from October 1973 to January 1974. The other bus company in Winnipeg is Flyer Industries which manufactures diesel and trolley buses for urban transportation systems.

Flyer Industries started out in the 1930's as Western Flyer Coach, a small locally owned manufacturer of inter-city buses. In the late 1960's it switched to production of urban buses. After many years of financial losses and defaulting on government loans the NDP government through the Manitoba Development Corporation (MDC) acquired 74% equity in the firm. Today it is totally owned by the MDC.

In January 1973, Flyer employed about 200 people. About 80 working in the component plant in Fort Garry, a suburb of Winnipeg, and 120 working in the assembly plant in Morris, a rural town 40 miles south of Winnipeg (this plant was built with the assistance of government grants in order to carry out the NDP's plan to decentralize manufacturing in Manitoba and bolster the sagging rural economy). But prior to this an agreement was signed between Flyer and American Motors whereby Flyer would build bus shells for completion by American Motors in South Bend, Indiana, for the American market (American Motors also has a similar agreement with a plant in Mexico.) Canadian buses would be built



and marketed by Flyer. The bus was a new model designed by American Motors and is apparently much superior to the old Flyer model.

This has necessitated several changes. The old assembly plant in Morris was sold to the Sheller Globe Corporation along with Flyer's school bus division (40 employees still work there). A new assembly plant was built in Transcona (another suburb of Winnipeg) employing nearly 300 people, including many women. The Fort Garry plant was expanded and now employs about 150. Future plans call for consolidation of the company's facilities in Transcona and a work force of about 600. The union - The Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers (CAIMAW, affiliated to the Confederation of Canadian Unions) was formed here in Winnipeg in 1964 by disgruntled elements of the International Moulders Union at Griffen Steel. It replaced the International Association of Machinists at Flyer in 1970. Some of the grievances of the workers at that time were a lack of a strong grievance procedure, undemocratic procedures, e.g., you had to work in the shop for five years before you could become a steward and poor wages and working conditions due to non-aggressive bargaining. In 1970 CAIMAW merged with the Canadian Electrical Workers in B.C. Today it has about 6,000 members in 3 locals in B.C., one in Alberta and 5 in Manitoba.

The five locals in Manitoba are: Local 1, a composite local composed of about 11 shops including Griffen Steel; Local 3,

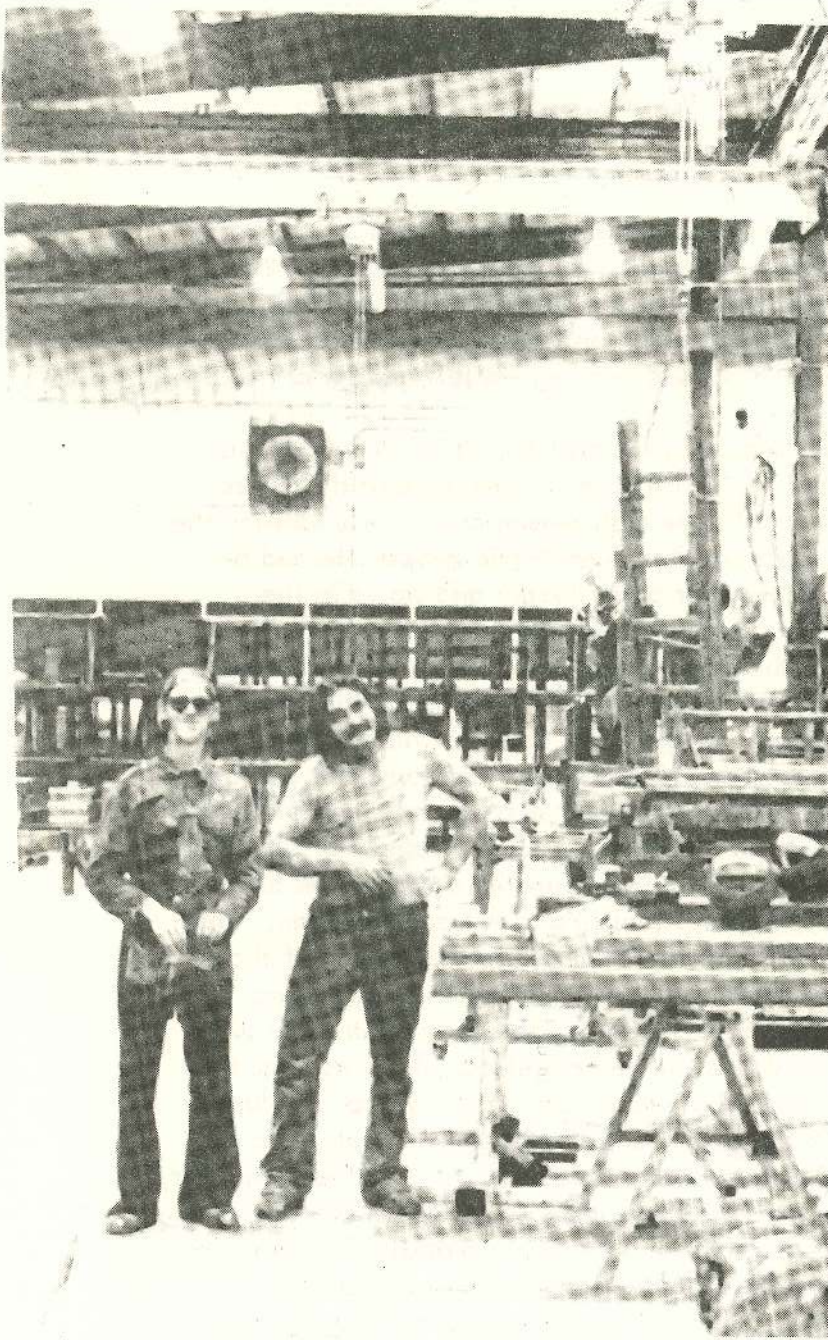
another composite local composed of 14 shops including Flyer; Local 5, composed of about 500 people working at Bristol Aerospace Ltd.; Local 7, based in Morris, and Local 9, composed of 500 service workers at the University of Manitoba. There are three full-time staff reps and one person on staff on a time-loss basis—he is paid the wages he would receive if he was working while working for the union.

The good points of the union are tied up in the fact that it is fairly new and not that large. Bureaucratization has not had that much time to solidify, there is a great deal of local autonomy, no full-time staff person can have a vote on the National Executive Board which is made up of rank-and-file people elected by the locals, the national president is a member of my local, and works in the Canada Metal plant here in Winnipeg, there is direct recall of all union officials, and there are other democratic procedures contained in the union's constitution. This all means that the structure of the union allows you to mobilize the rank-and-file to control the union if you so desire. I have tried to avoid this strategy.

The nationalism of CAIMAW is an extremely dangerous ideology that pervades throughout the union. It fails to make the distinction between militant and democratic unions and Canadian unions. It puts forward a strategy based on "Canadian unions for Canadian workers" without taking into account the complexities of capitalist society and the legal and structural limitations of trade unionism. They don't see that the very laws that mould them force them into the pattern of the International unions they denounce. By the very negotiations and bargaining with the capitalist class they accept capitalist ownership, control and mode of production. A very good example of this is the Flyer contract which accepts the principle of "a fair day's work for a fair day's wage" and has a typical residual rights clause and a clause giving the power of control over the work place to management. The strategy I saw in this situation was to base it on the shop floor, to challenge nationalism by counter-posing class solidarity (at one local meeting me donated \$100 to striking MCI workers, members of IAM) and mobilize the struggle in such a way that it went beyond the legalities which the union accepted so that the union would have to make a choice of supporting us or opposing us.

2. EARLY EXPERIENCES

The place that I worked in the plant was in the material handling section. This involved moving material around the shop, getting material from the warehouse into the shop, and shipping parts from our plant to the assembly plant. In the component plant there is an assembly process consisting of many unconnected machines. As the part is finished at one machine, it is moved to another machine for another operation. Metal is brought from the warehouse to the shears or the saw and cut there. The pieces are then moved down to the punches or power brakes, spot welded together in



the welding area or assembled on the bus as it moves down the line. There are 43 work stations and each have a certain section of the bus that must be assembled there. The significance of the whole process is that the speed is not controlled automatically and to increase production foremen can't just push a button or turn a few switches. Rather production increases involve harassment and struggle between supervisory personnel and workers.

The influx of new people means that the older workers are now in a minority. Also many of the younger workers are from rural areas forced off the farm into the cities because of the squeeze on the small family farm. This necessitates a change in how they view work for on the farm because you were working for the family's good and welfare hard work is accepted as a part of life. It is a good thing, something to be proud of. In the factory you soon realize that hard work is

detrimental to you and only helps the boss. Also you are so hurried you are forced to sacrifice the principle of doing good quality work. But the realization takes place with profound results for the boss. The absentee rate at Flyer is about 10%, the turnover rate has climbed to 40% and accidents are quite frequent (Workmen's Compensation paid out \$48,000 to Flyer employees in the first four months of 1974).

In October of 1973 shift workers at the Fort Garry plant circulated a petition calling for four, ten-hour days while working on the afternoon shift so they wouldn't have to work on Friday evenings. The old shop committee argued strongly against

this, citing the labour movement's struggle for the eight hour day. The union office stepped in after some of the shift workers complained to them and called a shop meeting at which the old committee resigned and a new group of shop stewards was elected. I was one of the new stewards elected.

3. SHOP STEWARDS

The basis on which I accepted this position was that I was willing to fight with the people in my department but that I wouldn't fight for them, that their participation in dealing with their problems had to be active and not the passive action of me taking their grievances to the foremen and arguing for them. Also I was fairly critical of the contract and tried to point out how the limitations of traditional trade unionism did not give us the power to deal with the essential problem - management's control over production and over us. When angered about our foremen's remarks about our output we collectively organized to refuse any overtime. When angered by the foreman's interference and harassment in our work area, our lead hand resigned his position and we went on a work to rule that effectively reduced the volume of material being shipped out to the point that a higher level of management stepped in and asked the lead hand to return to his position and promised to deal with this particular foreman. We were lucky in our department in that we worked as a crew and because of the collective nature of this form of work it was easier for us to struggle collectively.

At the end of November the company asked the new shop steward's committee if we would work a Saturday instead of the day before Christmas. Coupled with the Christmas holidays and the shutdown for stock-taking this would give most of us ten days off. We refused to commit ourselves saying we would take this proposal to the people on the floor and let them discuss it and vote on it. But the company used the stewards at the assembly plant to take a petition around asking for the Saturday work and our plant was outvoted before we got a chance to hold a meeting and vote. We still did hold a meeting at lunch time and discuss the entire situation with the workers, and we did manage to set a precedent that decisions of this nature would be decided by a vote of the workers and not the steward's committee.

In February the national union held a seminar for shop stewards at Flyer. For the first hour it was a review of the grievance procedure, labour history a la Lipton and your traditional business union procedure. But the people there were really interested in talking about their problems and discussing ways and means of dealing with management, the idea of worker's control was brought up and seriously discussed. We decided to hold monthly shop meetings and to make more of an attempt to mobilize the rank and file as that was where our power lay.

I feel my role as a shop steward was not a wrong move on my part as it allowed me to point out things like the futility of the grievance procedure and the limitations of the contract and also allowed me access to information that I was able to pass on to the people on the floor that they might not otherwise have gotten. However as the struggle progressed it would have

soon reached the point where I would have had to quit my position. I think that it is important to understand the nature and role of shop stewards but one must also realize that if the struggle is at a fairly low level it may be tactically advantageous to take a shop stewards position.

4. ENTER FOCUS

At the beginning of January, 1974, a group of people were selected by the union to take an educational course. The course was run by Cy Gonick and a group of radical intellectuals to do educational work amongst workers, particularly in the mining communities of Flin Flon and Thompson. It was set up by the provincial government (NDP), under the auspices of the Dept. of Education. Flack and pressure on the government, brought to bear by the bureaucrats of the Manitoba Federation of Labour (not at all pleased with it being run in a CAIMAW local), soon brought about the firing of Cy Gonick and may bring the cancellation of Focus altogether. This would be a bad break for a lot of workers.

The material used in Focus was really incredible. It had a basic Marxist analysis but in language that was readable, understandable and free from jargon. Written material dealt with such subjects as power relations in Canadian society, class structure, the family, and a host of other relevant topics. They also used video taped interviews and programs, one program was done by Stanley Aronowitz about the auto plant in Lordstown, Ohio and some of the interviews were conducted with militant rank and file workers in other sectors such as rail. It really gave a good insight into what types of materials could be used that working people could relate to.

The methodology used was also good. After a tape or lecture the class was broken down into small discussion groups. This enabled people to talk more freely and learn from one another's experiences. From discussions I had with people taking the course, they enjoyed the small group discussions because they met people from other workplaces and saw that their problems were general and not specific in nature.

The effect on people taking the course was quite phenomenal. Management became capitalists. We talked more about oppression off the job. We talked about ways and means to really screw Flyer as well as reform it. Focus really had a positive effect on those people taking it and really showed the powerful effect of education on the class. I feel that the entire question of education and revolutionary politics is open to a really serious discussion centering especially, on the ways and means of using it in one's workplace organizing.

At the end of March, Focus held a seminar on Workers' Control. About 30-40 militant workers attended, mainly CAIMAW people taking the course (10 people attended from Flyer). The discussion did not deal so much with the mechanics of workers' control but rather with the nature of capitalist society and how it oppresses workers. People dealt with alienation both inside and outside the workplace, the use of consumption as a social control mechanism, the role of the educational system etc. Another good thing was that there was a group of radical

civil servants working for the provincial government at the seminar. One result of this was that plant and office workers by discussing together really started seeing the commonality in their work situations. The major problem with Focus at Flyer was that it was confined to a small group of militants in the plant and we never had a chance of massifying it by opening it up to larger groups of rank and file workers.

5. MY FIRING

At the beginning of April, Flyer was to hold the official opening of the Transcona plant. Transcona workers were to be given time off with pay to clear the premises for the gala event. Workers at the Fort Garry plant were to go on working as usual although the shop stewards were given time off and invited to attend (we all refused, telling the company that if the rank and file can't go, we won't go). Disgruntlement on other issues such as people doing a higher classification of work while getting a lower classification of pay, lack of a lunch room, harassment that only small groups of people felt was generalised on this issue. We met on the day before the opening at lunch hour and decided this was just another insult thrown at us by the company. We also decided if they didn't give us the time off that Transcona was getting we would walk out and take it anyway. A fellow worker and myself were delegated to take this decision to management. We told the vice president that we were acting as representatives of the employees and not as shop stewards for the union. He refused to listen to anything we had to say and told us he dealt with his employees through the union. Towards the end of the day the entire shop committee of the stewards was called into a meeting with the president of the company. At first he said that anyone who walked out would be fired and blamed this action on the union. We said this was a spontaneous uprising on the part of the rank and file. He told us as stewards it was our responsibility to keep the rank and file in line and at work. We said as shop stewards our responsibility was to the people who elected us and to abide by their wishes. The company called in the union reps to tell us about the legal ramifications of this action. The company in other words refused to move.

The next day the company pulled off 'operation isolation'. Myself and two other militants in my department were sent over to a small warehouse the company has in that area and told us to stay there. Other militants were confined to their work areas, one in the stock room and the other in the tool room. This had a demoralizing effect on us. Also the night before the afternoon shift had voted not to go out. At the lunch meeting there wasn't the same note of optimism there was the previous day. The union rep also explained that this action wasn't sanctioned by the union and also explained the legal ramifications that individual workers could be sued by the company. The vote was taken and although a majority of those voting still wanted to go out, the large number of abstentions showed that there wasn't enough support to pull it off.

The company reacted swiftly. They declassified my lead hand down to storeman, a drop of 52¢ an hour because after 5 years he wasn't competent to do the job. They later reclassified

him up again because no one in the department would take his job. And after a waiting period of two weeks and on the day before a long weekend, the company fired myself and the other worker who first presented the employee's demands to management.

There was a shop meeting to be held that day for the afternoon shift, and I went there after receiving my dismissal and explained to the people that were at this meeting what was happening. We then discussed possible actions we could take in retaliation. The union reps present at the meeting decided to leave as the actions we were discussing were 'illegal' and it was best that they not be party to such discussions. They also refused to come down when the day shift after work to hold their meeting. Six people did book off sick on the afternoon shift and another militant was fired. The Flyer Three had been created.

6. SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

A group of us met that weekend and drew up a leaflet explaining what had happened and demanding the reinstatement of the three people fired. The union printed it for us and we distributed it to both plants. We also wrote a letter to the government, more in an effort to embarrass them in their role as owners of this plant than as an appeal for positive change. The union also adopted this as their strategy and tried to get this matter cleared up through government intervention as well as going through the grievance procedure. Two months have passed and we are still waiting for an arbitration board to be set up. Because of our weaknesses at this time there is really not too much we can organize on the shop floor.

But the struggle is bound to intensify as the contract at Flyer comes up at the end of September. At a large meeting of all the workers at Flyer held by the union, the following proposals for the next contract were adopted: a 35 hour week for 40 hours pay, election of lead hands by the people they supervise rather than appointment by the company, 1 day a month sick leave accumulative to 60 days, increased vacations and more statutory holidays, a shorter grievance procedure, and a return of the three fired employees as a bargaining issue. Also at this meeting there was quite a bit of enthusiasm and people discussed the necessity of fighting for these demands as the company won't hand them to us. People are also talking about forms of struggle outside the typical walk out and picket line strike. So there is a good possibility that Flyer will face somewhat of a 'Hot Autumn'.

7. CONCLUSIONS

a) Trade Unions- because of the struggle the workers had to go through to get CAIMAW into the plant, and also because of its structure and rhetoric, the union was legitimized in the minds of many of the militants. I think this is a problem that we are going to face with CCU unions. People have to realize that these unions accept the same set of rules that the international unions accept because they are trade unions governed by the same

trade union legislation. Although their leaders will make rousing radical speeches, there is really not that much they can do as labour legislation places a limit on their actions. Quebec has shown that rank and file radicalization and action is the best and probably the only way of moving trade union leaders beyond the traditional limits of trade unionism. This is not because these people are bad or a sold out union leadership because this is not true. I have a lot of respect for the leaders in CAIMAW and of the CCU. So the problem of trade unions isn't simply to get in good leadership rather it is to organize the rank-and-file into a form that the government and bosses can't deal with. Set off actions they can't control and develop a method by which the old forms of a hierarchical leadership is broken down. I think we also have to recognize, and I think this is particularly true out west, that when workers become disgruntled one of the first things they seem to consider and act on is a change to another union, a better union. Canadian unions are going to be a growing phenomena that we are going to run into more and more.

b) Shop floor actions - it is vital that any information we get on workers initiating shop floor actions be circulated in the work place as I found in Flyer workers really got off on hearing how other workers are screwing the boss. Also I think more discussion is needed on the refusal of work, its potentials, ways it can be organized, etc, and try using this more as a means of struggle in an organized way.

c) Education - in Flyer we were really screwed because a small minority of us became conscious of capitalism and the need to fight it but the rank-and-file was untouched by the educational experience we went through. We should begin a discussion in the New Tendency dealing with the whole question of education. What type of educational material, how to get it to the workers in the plant, the whole nuts and bolts of education in the workplace. Out here I am going to try and push at shop meetings for more education of a radical, anti-capitalist nature. Also if we do go out on strike this would be a good time to try and organize an educational program as people would have lots of time to read and also could draw direct lessons from their own struggle. I think the whole question of education and relating it to action is an important one. I was really able to see the impact of that at Flyer.

The class in Winnipeg is in a state of action. Manitoba is recording more strikes in its history at anytime outside of 1919. Wildcats are starting to be considered as a legitimate form of struggle by the workers. Also this movement by the class is not confined to the industrial sector. There was a major struggle on the part of provincial civil servants last January. Telephone operators are on strike. Workers at Winnipeg's major hospital were stopped from striking by an eleventh hour settlement favourable to them and their own union. Community groups such as food and housing co-ops are growing and challenging the governmental authorities. The thing for the left to do at this time is catch up and try to get on top of these things.

Postscript: Or, The
Struggle Continues

"He who is fired last, laughs the least" is a paraphrase of an old cliché and for myself and Flyer it is quite appropriate. I've heard there were shouts of joy and chuckles of mirth when Flyer announced the resignation of its two vice-presidents, including Werner Martin who was probably responsible for my firing. Also the president and personnel director have resigned. The reason given and the one that is probably closest to the truth is the high turnover rate (80% in Fort Garry and 60% in Transcona since January according to a reliable source). Who organized this insidious plot? Who are the terrible people on whose shoulders we can heap abuse for this devastating act? Surely not myself as much as my ego would like to take credit. Try the rank and file on the shop floor.

As for my arbitration hearing, I have learned that these spectacles are for: a) lawyers, b) the

company, and c) union reps. For those of us involved, we have jobs and have great difficulty in attending. Even when we do, we just sit back and let our lawyers do the talking for us (what a right on term mouthpiece is). So from all of this I've learned the arbitration procedure is a bureaucratic farce, designed to take the struggle off the shop floor where the workers can win and put it into a bureaucratic, legal den where they lose.

As for myself one lesson that is very concrete I've learned is not to mystify the work place. The work place is a place I go in order to earn the money I need to survive in capitalist society, just like everyone else there. Just because I'm a revolutionary doesn't mean it is my mission in life to organize it (I have a hard enough time organizing my own life). Rather I participate in the struggles that happen there according to my own conscience and viewpoint and push them where I think we (the workers) can win, because winning is what it's all about.

ALL POWER TO THE CLASS

Dave Maidman

A TYPEWRITER

IS NOT A PUNCH PRESS

BUT...

(The following article was written some time ago as a working report for the Windsor Labour Center. Since it's writing the Labour Center has split into three separate formations. In the process the author has altered some of her positions presented in this paper, although she was kind enough to let us print it. If you are interested in a clearer statement of the position of this writer and the group she works with, they have recently completed a pamphlet, "Out of the Driver's Seat- Marxism in North America Today". For further information refer to the correspondence section of this edition of the Newsletter.)

This report is divided into three parts. The first part is a general description of my job, the people I work with, and the direct effects of that job on me. Second, I have attempted a critical analysis of the current attitude toward white collar work with-in The Labour Center (TLC) as I have experienced it. From there, I have moved to an attempt to pose certain general questions which i think are becoming important in terms of the collective perspective with regard to work place organizing.

1 The Job

For the past 2½ months I have been working as a secretary at a university. I was first hired as a temporary replacement for the full-time secretary and on her return was kept on to replace the part-time secretary.

Both the part-time and full-time secretarial duties included the following: typing of all correspondence (departmental, for profs, personal), memos etc., reproduction of all papers, books, assignments etc requested by profs or department (either typing, xerox, ditto, thermofax, etc. as well as collating such material), answering the phone and taking messages and making appointments, maintaining the files, ordering all necessary office supplies and making sure all equipment was in perfect condition, watering the plants, buying coffee and related supplies, handling the mail. Besides these, the full time secretary is also responsible for finances, books, minutes of all meetings (in shorthand), class lists, marks, etc.

The hours are 8:30 - 4:30 with 2 - 15 minute coffee breaks and 1 hour for lunch. The pay was 3.25 per hour for the full time (I received the rate of the woman I was replacing, which is a salaried position and one in which she has been working for 9 years). The part time pay was about 2.93. There is no union. I understand from the other women, however, that benefits for permanent, full-time staff are quite good. (For the article describing the author's U.I.C. experience, see Newsletter #2).

In general I found the work more tiring and monotonous than that at UIC. It was also more demanding although not in the same way. There was none of the political or emotional contradictions that I felt as an IO, but there was far more pressure in terms of the one to one relationship I had, not only with my boss, but with each of 15 profs. In this situation, there is no way of getting out of work or of doing it poorly. Deadlines have to be met and you alone are responsible for meeting them.

On the other hand, the atmosphere was liberal to the point of indulgence. There was no supervision and we were governed in the length of our breaks, how we worked, etc., solely by our work load. There is a lot of joking around with profs, a great deal of superficial friendliness. Some of this is undoubtedly peculiar to this department which is headed and staffed by good liberals. Some is due to the university atmosphere in general. It is not a usual characteristic of all white collar work.

The atmosphere was another example of the Repressive Decorum (see Newsletter #2) I described in my UIC paper. There was one somewhat new twist: on the secretary's part, her jokes and friendliness are, to some extent, necessary for survival on the job. Both the lack of a union and the isolation that individual secretaries experience in their work places leads to a situation where the level of your oppression is directly related to your charm, to your personal relations with your boss. On a day to day basis, a few extra smiles and the right perfume can mean longer breaks and fewer letters. So why not?

The other side of repressive decorum, of course, is repression and this comes in unexpected ways. You are first of all a woman in a servile relationship to a man (men) and in a situation which demands that you take responsibility for the organizational details of his daily life. In short, you are a surrogate wife - and you can expect the same treatment if you should make a mistake. The rebuke is generally more polite than a real wife might receive, but it is just as vicious and - and this seems to me significant - just as personal (it is a man cutting up a woman rather than a boss reprimanding an employee). Another function of a wife is tension management and the surrogate fills this role as well. If the boss has a bad day, if he misses an assignment or doesn't make an appointment - we are the targets, regardless of whether we are at fault or not.

Because of the short duration of my job and the greater difficulties presented by the isolated work situation, I got to know only a few fellow-workers at the university. However, the women I did meet gave me some insights into certain patterns and attitudes which I have outlined below, although I stress again that they are the observations of a too brief period of work experience and a very limited contact with fellow workers:

1. A very noticeable openness towards the women's movement and a great many of its ideas vis a vis marriage, equal pay, abortion, divorce, etc. 'Male chauvinist pig' is a common seriously used phrase.

2. Related to this, a certain awareness that one's female role is a conscious strategy against the boss to improve working conditions. This fact is used as an argument for (so we won't

have to do it) and against (we can gain more this way) a union. The latter attitude can be seen as individualistic; it also contains a certain shrewd assessment of what unions can do (and can't do). The other argument against unions is the very realistic observation that, since many of the women employed are single parents, they could not afford the risk of a strike and therefore they vote against the union. This is seen as the fault of the union, for not doing anything to insure against this situation.

3. The 'good secretary' who does a little extra on her own time to please her boss is rarer than I expected, especially among younger women, where stealing time and a religious adherence to working hours is the rule (the women I have lunch with, one of whom takes calls for the President, will not answer the office phone if it rings at one minute to one, even though they are sitting at the desk).

4. The attitude toward the public, noticed at UIC is here developed to an art - the superior telephone voice, the evasive manner, and the polite put-down. Some of the reasons are the same as those at UIC, but added to this, and probably more of a determining factor is the reality of the way secretaries are treated by the general public, especially men, regardless of age or class. The general assumption is that secretaries are stupid, ~~that~~ that they willingly protect their bosses from unwanted calls and that they purposely and wantonly withhold vital information. It is hard to be polite to someone who does not make any attempt to separate you from your boss.

II ATTITUDES

The other side of my work experience is my relation to political comrades and here I found that many prejudices exist vis a vis white collar work. I attempted first to resolve the problems created by these through personal struggles with individuals until I realized that they reflect certain ideological and theoretical patterns which need to be dealt with more thoroughly. First, then, I will outline certain ideas I consider to be myths and then attempt to follow these with the theoretical weaknesses I think they reflect.

Myth #1: White collar work is easy or "Boy, it must be nice to have such a soft job". This is the most common attitude, and is shared by the public at large (which is probably why secretaries are so bitchy in return (at least one of the reasons)). It is also not true. A typewriter is not a punch press - granted. It is still a mentally and physically fatiguing to sit at one 7 hours a day during which time you have to get up to perform all the other details mentioned above.

However, given that it is not as physically demanding as factory work, the ideological or theoretical tenets which seem to lie behind this attitude are somewhat disturbing. Are we saying that only hard, physical labour is work? Are we saying that those who do not do visibly hard work are not part of the working class? Certainly, the attitude indicates a collective ignorance of the effect of different types of work on workers - both mentally and physically, an effect which will in turn, affect

consciousness. It may also indicate (though I wouldn't stress it) a certain theoretical sexism: work done by men is work; work done by women is not.

Myth #2: The consciousness of white collar workers is affected by the fact that they wear nice clothes, have air conditioning etc., to the point where they are 'anti-working-class, or have little class-consciousness and for those reasons are hard to organize.

This is a particularly disturbing myth, for a number of reasons, but mainly because it indicates a general theoretical tendency to separate office workers from their material conditions in a way that we do not use with other sectors of the class. Let me try to explain.

1. Air conditioning is one thing, makeup and clothes are another. The first is a direct material condition of office workers and a reflection of the ruling ideology vis a vis the difference between white and blue collar workers. It does have an effect on consciousness. Makeup and clothes, on the other hand, are factors of material necessity for the white collar worker and should not be regarded with any more significance than a factory worker's boots. We are generally theoretically weak on the relation between material conditions and consciousness, what affects what, what reflects what, etc.

2. Female office workers tend, on one level, to consider themselves superior to female (note) factory workers because they see the latter as mannish, loud and vulgar. This is a fact and arises directly from the conditions of female factory workers. The reaction of white collar workers to this is part of the general ideology vis a vis the female role, etc. Are we not then sometimes faulting one sector of the class for expressing a general social attitude? We have a tendency to do this with regard to white collar workers. Much of what is part of the white collar attitude is a direct reflection of predominant ideology of what is important work, the value of skills etc., etc. We are quite aware that the male industrial proletariat is sexist, racist, aggressive, individualistic, etc., etc. These traits arise directly from the material conditions of factory work, and while we deplore them, we never see them as blocks to the revolutionary potential of that sector. Why is our attitude different with regard to white collar work? Why are such attitudes as female role playing, attention to appearance, sucking up to the boss which arise directly out of the material conditions of office work, seen as blocks to that sector's revolutionary potential? If there is a qualitative difference, what is it? Clearly, all sectors of white collar work do not have an equal potential for militancy at this point. The problem is that we don't know where the potential lies because we have tended to lump all sectors of white collar work together and have not explored any of them.

One more thing. The office worker's prejudice against blue collar work is, in my opinion, no more an indication of lack of consciousness than the factory worker's rudeness to a telephone operator. Both are a result of the fact that the material conditions for the unification of various sectors have not

been explored or developed. We are very weak theoretically if we lament - and we tend to - the lack of an abstract solidarity among various sectors of the class.

Generally, our theory is weak when it comes to understanding the nature of work done under capitalism, the patterns and threads which are developing in Canadian society. This weakness is integrally connected with our somewhat narrow political perspective. This is an objective fact, not a criticism since our concentration on industrial labour has, given the material conditions of Windsor, been a natural one to this point. What I am arguing here is the necessity of our beginning to consciously change this process. This has led me to pose some general questions which I hope the collective as a whole will explore:

1. Given that TLC is the place where our experience in various sectors is brought together, how can we begin a process whereby these interconnections are made more coherently and more profoundly than they are now?

2. In other words, do we need to take more seriously the task of developing an integrated view of the class? How do we do it?

3. The Auto-group seems to be adopting a fairly 'in-plant' orientation, and practice. Is this the result of a particular ideological position or is it a temporary strategy? What are its strengths? Weaknesses? How does the collective operate here both theoretically and practically in the development of a wider orientation for that group?

4. How does the student group see itself in relation to the auto group and vice versa? The women's groups? New Tendency group?

5. How about community struggles? The Women's Place and its connection here?

6. Do we have a tacit policy of 'laissez-faire' for various sectors with some vague notion that some day it will all come together? Is this dangerous? Mechanistic? Do we think it important to understand the relation of various sectors to capital? When and how do we begin to explore this? How do we understand the conditions that will bring various sectors of the class together? Is it a future goal or a necessary condition for revolutionary organization?

7. What is the place of TLC theoretically/practically in all this?

8. Do we have to develop more critically our ideas about relations between inside and 'outside' people in various groups?

9. Should there be some research done about the history of and potential for militancy in various sectors? Should this be a criteria, where possible, for choosing a work place? Should there be some collective direction and discussion for members seeking work? Are too many people seeking plant work? What about small plants? C.N.? Civil Service? Retail? Truck driving? Construction? We don't have a perspective on all this. Do we need one?

These questions cannot all be answered at once. They are not the only questions to ask. I am not the only one asking. I do ~~hope~~ ~~that~~ ~~these~~ ~~be~~ ~~dealt~~ ~~with~~ ~~seriously~~ ~~and~~ ~~soon~~.

W.D.

THE APRIL POSTAL STRIKE: WORKERS, UNION, and the STATE



I N T R O D U C T I O N

This article reflects the collective effort of four political militants in Toronto to analyze the April postal strike and their involvement in it. Prior to the strike, three of us had been employed as inside postal workers at the main terminal for periods ranging from a few months to a few years. We shared a common political perspective-- which we call "workers' autonomy"-- which had developed through political discussions, based in large part on documents on workers' struggles in Europe, and through our own involvement in workers' struggles in southern Ontario, specifically at the Post Office and, to a lesser extent, in the auto industry.

When the national and local leadership of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) called for a sit-down in Toronto in April, ostensibly to show support for the Montreal postal workers who had just been fired and suspended, we were astonished and caught off guard along with our fellow workers. The UNION, which had just recently sabotaged a fairly large rank and file struggle in Toronto, using arguments about following legal procedures and holding membership votes before sanctioning work stoppages, was now calling for an illegal work stoppage without a vote-- a SIT-DOWN even!

When we recovered from the shock, we set about, as did other left-wing militants who work in the main terminal, to "build the struggle", so that it could change from a union-controlled struggle to a worker-controlled one. The union's resistance to "building the struggle" came as no surprise. It was the workers' resistance to "building the struggle"-- passive resistance in the case of most young workers, active resistance by most workers with family responsibilities-- which baffled and frustrated us, and finally left us and the other left-wingers out on a limb, easy prey for the red-baiting of the local union leadership, which needed a scapegoat for an unpopular strike they had nonetheless called, controlled and ended.

In trying to understand the strike afterwards, the dominant fact in our minds was this workers' disinterest in the issues and conduct of the strike. The Montreal workers were the only clear exception to this fact, so that our effort to analyze why postal workers in the rest of the country were not into the strike was the other side of the coin of analyzing why the Montreal workers were into it. For a while we resorted, very uncomfortably, to such explanations as "the level of struggle", "battle fatigue from recent unsuccessful struggles", "workers' lack of understanding of the strike issues", and so forth-- explanations which reflected the view that somehow the workers were the problem. But this type of explanation ran totally counter to our daily experience with our fellow workers, whose struggle, when they feel their own interests are at stake, is constant and takes on a rich variety of forms. So we began to think that the problem in the April strike was not with the workers, but with the strike itself--

why were the workers not into it? Our question then became: What was the workers' own perspective on the strike-- that is, what was the workers' own interest in the strike, and how did they talk about this interest?

We recalled that our fellow workers, both during and after the strike, thought that what was good about the strike was the time off work and what was bad about it was the loss of pay. Now we began to assume the workers had interests of their own in the strike, which were not the same as the issues defined by the union. The workers related to their own interests at the level of the amount of power they had in that specific situation to advance them, which was very little (except in Montreal), given the suddenness and unprecedented circumstances of the strike, its immediate definition by the union in terms of the classification issue, and the country-wide scale of the strike. The workers' definition of their own interests in the strike as time off work/loss of pay led us to make a crucial link between the general understanding we had of workers' struggles before the strike and the concrete struggle workers are already engaged in every day in their own interest: the struggle against work.

It might be useful to briefly outline the framework within which we have finally ended up trying to define the workers' perspective on the April strike: the struggle against work. The struggle against work-- to work the least, or not at all, for the most pay-- is what workers are into today. This struggle is what we call the autonomous working class content of workers' struggles in the present stage of capitalist development. The struggle against work is autonomous of, and antagonistic to, capital, whose fundamental class interest is more work for less pay. It is also autonomous of the union, whose function, embodied in the contract and backed by the force of capital's laws, is to guarantee a disciplined work force (i.e. workers who will work as the boss directs) in exchange for an agreed upon rate of pay. Even when unions do not directly co-operate with capital to enforce how much work workers have to do (as the steelworkers' union in the U.S. does), they still have to leave the struggle over how little or how much work is to be done to the workers and the bosses-- as long as the workers don't "break the contract" by which the union guarantees the employer there will be no work stoppages or organized reductions of work (e.g. slow-downs, sick-ins, etc.).

The struggle against work is already expressed in many forms: for example, the trend since the 1960's for wage increases to outstrip productivity increases, particularly in the mass production industries; the high rate of absenteeism and turnover; the increasing proportion of young workers who alternate periods of work with periods off work on unemployment insurance; and not least, the daily shop floor struggle to work as little as possible.

The struggle against work is not restricted to the workplace, nor embraces the spreading revolt against the capitalist organization of daily life outside of work, all of which is directly oriented to preparing people for work. One example is the growing insubordination of students, sharpest in working class schools, which reflects a struggle against the schools function to subjugate youth to the discipline and routine of work. Another example is the "street culture" of youth who refuse to hold steady jobs: their music, games and ways of surviving without work frequently reflect a whole culture of insubordination to work. A final example

is single mothers organizing to force the state to pay them for their housework (raising kids and running the household) so they will not be forced to work outside the home as well, which for the majority of working class women means low-paying shit jobs in factories, offices and services.

At a country-wide level, the cumulative effect of the struggle against work is a growing crisis for capital, which capital sees as the result of two factors: declining productivity and workers' insubordination to work, which are one and the same thing. In the Post Office, the mechanization and automation plans are capital's response to the struggle against work by postal workers. At the level of individual workplaces, the struggle against work is the basis for the power workers develop in the daily shop floor struggle against the boss. And it is around this autonomous interest and autonomous basis of power (autonomous of both capital and the union) that workers determine their relation to the union--whether they are powerful enough to force it to mediate their own interest to work less and get paid more, or whether the union uses the workers to advance its own interest within the framework of enforcing the capitalist organization of work.

The struggle against work is not a programmatic slogan, such as "30 hours work for 40 hours pay" or "automation under workers' control", nor is it a mere tactical weapon in workers' struggles against capital. It is the precise working class content of workers' struggles today on which "programmatic" demands and tactics must be based if they are to contribute to the strategic organization of the present struggle of workers against capital into a generalized struggle against the entire capitalist organization of work and daily life by the whole working class.

This framework within which we have tried to define the workers' perspective in the April strike is the basis for how we have organized our analysis in this article:

- I Background of the April Strike
- II At Centre Stage: The Autonomous Power of the Montreal Workers
- III How the State Handled the Strike
- IV The Union Perspective on the Strike
- V The Workers' Perspective on the Strike
- VI The Involvement of the Left in Toronto
- VII The Results of the Strike for the State, the Union and the Workers
- VIII What We Learned

I BACKGROUND OF THE APRIL STRIKE

During the month of April, one issue totally dominated the news-- workers' struggles. The newspapers gave over their front pages and the broadcast media their lead stories to a strike wave that crippled Canada's transportation and communication system on land, sea and air. At its peak, 32,000 workers under federal government jurisdiction were on strike, halting or severely disrupting the mail, seaway traffic and air traffic. And about 7,000 other public sector workers (air traffic controllers and Toronto hospital workers) were threatening to strike.

wave

As the Financial Post reported, this strike/was significant in that two of the major strikes-- by postal workers and airport firemen-- were illegal. Capital has constructed elaborate machinery to regulate the class struggle, but in April the "normal channels" broke down. The strike wave in April was also significant because it demonstrated the power federal workers have to disrupt the smooth running of the economy. In Canada, as in most capitalist countries, a number of key economic functions are run by the state. While capital has found this necessary to ensure the most profitable operation of society, this in turn has given enormous power to workers in this sector. As the Financial Post said: "It has not gone unnoticed that only 136 river pilots and 1,400 airport firemen can bring much of the nation's transportation grinding to a halt." (FP, April 27, 1974)

But even beyond these two factors, the spring strike wave can be seen as part of a larger working class response to capital's attack on their standard of living. As of April, inflation had pushed the cost of living up by about 11% in the previous 12 months, the largest increase in more than 20 years. In the first three months of 1974, work stoppages were already 13% higher than last year's record high of 712, and 1974 is not a heavy bargaining year. Contracts are being re-opened as individual employers attempt to blunt the effect of inflation on workers' militancy. The most publicized example in Canada occurred in March, when the Steel Company of Canada agreed to a special mid-contract cost-of-living bonus for its 12,000 workers in Hamilton. In Quebec, the Common Front (Quebec Federation of Labour, Confederation of National Trade Unions, Quebec Teachers' Federation) began a campaign in the spring for mid-contract cost-of-living allowances for workers in both the public and private sectors. During the April postal strike, Vancouver CUPW and LCUC (Letter Carriers' Union), Hamilton CUPW and Montreal LCUC all demanded the re-opening of the contract for interim wage increases to offset inflation.

As well as the rampant inflation, several other factors form the background to the spring strike wave. The first of these is growing crisis for capital caused by the workers' struggle against work. Over the past several years, this struggle has become the number one problem

for capital. While much of capital's discussion of the problem so far has focussed on worker "alienation" and "dissatisfaction", it is clear that capital is concerned because this struggle is costing a lot of money: "Absenteeism costs business as much as 14% of the annual payroll. And employee turnover, which runs as high as 30% in some assembly line industries, adds millions of dollars more to the cost. Only an estimated one per cent of the North American population use their full abilities and knowhow in their day-to-day work." (Remarks by management consultant, Globe & Mail Report on Business, Oct. 12, 1973). At a recent seminar for management consultants in Toronto, it was remarked: "These deeper dissatisfactions (with work) are gaining momentum in the labour force, and they cannot be relieved by money alone. An indication of this trend is the increasing incidence of technically illegal strikes. These wildcats often involve the workers with the least job satisfaction-- garbage collectors, postal workers and hospital labourers-- and are sometimes directed against the union leadership as much as against the employers." (Globe & Mail Report on Business, June 5, 1974)

In this connection, it is interesting to note that capital is trying to use inflation not only to attack workers' standard of living, but also to increase productivity. An explicit part of the Stelco-Steelworkers' Union agreement which provided for the special cost-of-living allowance was a clause which stated that the company expected less absenteeism and more work discipline.

The second factor in situating the spring strike wave, and particularly certain characteristics of the postal strike, is the regional character of the class struggle in Canada. To take just Quebec, B.C. and Ontario as examples, several important differences can be seen.

In Quebec, the main feature which characterizes the widespread militancy in workplace struggles is the clear trend for workers to by-pass the trade union structures to fight for their own autonomous demands with their own organizations. This trend is in clear distinction to the period up to and including the April 1972 strike by 200,000 workers in the public sector and the subsequent mass strike by workers in many different sectors. During that whole period, the union structures either totally controlled the struggle (e.g. the Common Front during the April strike) or were used by workers locally to spread the struggle (as during the May mass strike). The degeneration of the Common Front into bitter jurisdictional rivalry in the construction sector and the retreat of the unions from aggressive confrontations with the state and individual employers has brought out the class-divisiveness of the unions as well as their function to contain the class struggle within the limits imposed by capital.

A whole wave of struggles since 1973, initiated by the ten-month strike by 300 Firestone workers, has been marked by the beginning of autonomous, anti-capitalist demands and mass linkages with other workers in struggle in which workers have begun to develop their own organizations autonomously of the unions. In this context, Quebec workers have also been experimenting with new tactics-- including the occupation tactic, not only in workplace struggles (e.g. Regent Knitting), but also in struggles against the state (occupation of government offices by women demanding day care) and against the capitalist media (occupation of radio stations to broadcast the news from the workers' perspective).

In B.C., rank and file activity in the workplace has been much more focussed on democratizing trade union structures; at the same time, workers have frequently imposed unified forms of organizations in struggles in which workers are formally divided by being organized into different unions. The widespread impact of new Canadian unions in many sectors on the one hand, and the mass meetings of rail workers from 17 different unions during the August-September 1973 rail strike on the other hand, give expression to these two characteristics of workers' struggles in B.C. in recent years.

In Ontario, where the working class is much more divided by capital, rank and file activity in the workplace has yet to develop clear-cut, unifying characteristics. The divisions in the working class in Ontario, based both in the large immigrant component and the more highly developed division of labour related to Ontario's position as the centre of heavy industry and the financial/commercial centre of Canada, are reflected in a very uneven development of the struggle in different sectors of the class. Thus, for example, workers in the auto industry are experimenting with forms of organization outside the unions, while teachers and hospital workers are developing their struggles through the unions.

The spring strike wave showed very clearly this regional character of the class struggle in Canada. The strike by airport firemen began in B.C. and was built around the B.C. workers' defiance of court injunctions and an "outside" union, the Ottawa-based Public Service Alliance, over which they had little possibility of direct control. During the postal strike, the only centre in the country where all categories of postal workers, irrespective of union affiliation, organized together was in Vancouver. And the postal strike itself started when rank and file workers in Montreal occupied the main terminal.

But after noting these regional differences, one cannot ignore the national dynamic. The Federal state in Canada, by virtue of the fact it is the boss for workers in every region of the country, is thereby a material link between workers in the different regions, and hence provides, organizationally, the potential that struggles in one region can spread to workers in other regions. This use of the state's organization of workers by the workers themselves to spread their struggles will continue and should be acknowledged if we are to understand how a "few musclemen in Montreal" could provoke a country-wide strike.

Workers' Struggles and Automation at the Post Office

Within the spring strike wave itself, the work stoppage by 30,000 postal workers was undoubtedly the most important. This is not only because it was the one which involved the most workers or because it directly affected everyone in Canada, but also because of the importance for capital of the postal system. The power which this importance gives to postal workers is suggested by the following: "The postal strike has added to credit demands and upward pressure on short-term interest rates because of the disruption of payments, a Bank of Canada spokesman said. It has pushed short-term interest rates to as high as 11.13% this week." (Globe & Mail, April 16). There is nothing like a work stoppage to demonstrate the importance of work to capital and the power which the refusal to work gives to workers!

The importance of postal workers' work for capital is underlined by the fact that about 90% of all mail is directly related to business. The cost and reliability of the postal system to capital are thus of great concern. Before we proceed to analyze the postal strike itself, some comments about the ongoing struggle between workers and capital at the Post Office are in order.

Over the past ten years, and especially since the three-week wildcat strike in 1965 which resulted in the formation of CUPW, the struggle at the Post Office has heated up. First is the fact that wages, spurred on by three country-wide strikes between 1965 and 1970, have increased to the point where they now account for 70% of the total Post Office budget, compared to 50% in 1950. This wage bill is within a Post Office budget whose deficit has increased from \$34 million in 1965 to \$100 million in 1971.

In an attempt to recover these losses to the workers in wages, management attempted to get more work from workers. But this approach ran up against the power which the centrality of skill in the manual sortation system gave to workers in fighting against speed-ups and other changes in work methods aimed at increasing productivity. So management began to introduce an unskilled, though still manual, system of sortation, and hired on new workers in the hopes that they could be made to submit to more work discipline. But both methods failed. The mail service deteriorated-- the speed and reliability of the manual sortation system is directly tied to the skill of the workers. And the new workers hired by the Post Office in the large cities-- particularly the large number of young workers-- brought with them an insubordination to work which in turn has "infected" a very significant proportion of the older skilled workers. Between 1965 and 1972, production per worker fell by 12.5%. In short, the bosses were faced with workers who were getting more pay and working less. Management was forced to hire more workers and this in turn increased the wage bill. By 1969, with the workers' struggle against work increasing, capital was ready to admit it needed a new plan.

"It is surprising to note", said the Postmaster General in a speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade in 1972, "that since our employees have been provided with better working conditions and higher salaries, since 1965 to be exact, the productivity index at the Post Office has fallen by 12.5%.... To compensate for this drop in productivity, we had to hire more people; this represents an additional expenditure of nearly \$17 million. Obviously this state of affairs cannot continue. It would be totally illogical to think that the Post Office will continue to absorb the cost of this loss of productivity, inflating its deficit by taking on employees who, under normal circumstances, would not be needed."

Capital's new plan is automation. Not just "machines", but mainly a weapon to fight against the workers' struggle against work. A weapon which will get more work for less pay from postal workers. By de-skilling the sortation process entirely and replacing skilled workers with unskilled workers and machines, capital hopes to revise downwards the present wage levels and institute a much more effective work discipline. The introduction of machines allows management to break up the old classification system based on the skilled sorter, to which wage levels were tied, and also to totally revise work procedures.

(For a more detailed analysis of this struggle at the Post Office, see "Workers' Struggles in Advanced Capitalism: The Post Office" in Newsletter #3, Fall, 1973, pp. 40-55.

But, as the April postal strike shows, the bosses' plan is far from settled. The exact nature of the plan (job classifications, wage levels, etc.) is still undetermined. Meanwhile, the struggle against work continues. The contract negotiations in 1971-72 left most of these questions completely unresolved. As more postal centres are mechanized (Toronto in 1975-76; Montreal in 1977), the situation becomes more explosive. There is no doubt that capital and postal workers are locked in a tense confrontation. It took only a minor, though militant, shopfloor action in Montreal to spark a 12-day, country-wide wildcat strike in April.

I I

AT CENTRE STAGE:

THE AUTONOMOUS POWER OF THE MONTREAL WORKERS

The entire national postal strike began from, revolved around, and was settled on the basis of, the autonomous interests and power of rank and file postal workers in Montreal. Montreal postal workers are in the vanguard of the struggle against work: we have the word of Postmaster General Ouellet, who accused them at one point of being the least productive postal centre in the whole country. In other words, they work less than postal workers elsewhere in the country. They work less on the job, and they stay away from work more often-- absenteeism is high, and with 15 paid sick days a year, that costs the bosses a lot. One particular form of the struggle against work is quite developed in Montreal. Under the collective agreement, a worker can punch out "sick" two hours before the end of shift and get paid for the whole shift without it "costing" him any of the 15 days paid sick time. Montreal postal workers used this device to the tune of costing the Post Office a half million dollars in 1973-- for no work at all.

The level of the struggle against work in Montreal has served as the lever for other struggles. For example, during the past year, postal workers in the main terminal fought against price increases in the cafeteria by setting up canteens on different floors and selling food at lower prices-- all on company time.

The occupation of the main postal terminal in Montreal from April 10-16 occurred in this context of the ongoing struggle against work. The occupation was the workers' response to two incidents of management counter-attacks against the shop floor struggle against work. The immediate incident which touched off the occupation was the refusal of a group of workers on one floor to work until a supervisor who had been harassing them was removed. A number of workers were suspended on the spot, and when a steward spoke to them in a nearby lunchroom shortly afterwards, he was fired on the spot. The workers involved then



decided to go from floor to floor in the main terminal to stop work and start an occupation, with the workers' demand being the immediate unconditional lifting of all the disciplinary actions. As the occupation spread, management continued to suspend workers, until more than 300 had been suspended. Throughout the entire April struggle, the essential objective of the Montreal workers was to counter management's attack on the shop floor struggle against work by getting all the disciplinary actions lifted.

According to the Montreal workers who are the source of our information on the occupation, this incident, not the wearing of the "Boycott the Postal Code" T-shirts, touched off the occupation. As part of the Montreal CUPW's and QFL's campaign to boycott the new postal code, which is part of the mechanization of mail sortation, T-shirts urging the boycott were made up by the local and worn on the job. Some rank and file workers also had T-shirts made up, with a design which they felt made the workers' point more clearly than the union T-shirts. The rank and file T-shirts carried the slogan, "The Postal Code-- Stick It!", which was shown over a Q (=ass in French) whose bar formed an arrow pointing up a bare ass. Interestingly, the Q with the bar in the form of an arrow is also the symbol of the Parti Quebecois; it seems the workers also wanted to make their point about the PQ and perhaps also about the Montreal local leadership's open support for the PQ. Apparently management threatened to suspend workers who were selling the latter T-shirts on the job, and possibly some suspensions (without specifying the date) were given out the same week the occupation began. These suspensions, as well as the disciplinary actions which touched off the occupation, should be seen primarily in the context of the struggle against work on the shop floor, not in the context of the union's campaign against the postal code, although obviously in the case of the T-shirts, there is a connection between the two.

This description of the circumstances which led to the occupation is important if we are to grasp the workers' own interest in the struggle. The way the demand on automation was introduced to the struggle is also important to describe. According to the Montreal workers, the demand to negotiate the wage rates of postal coders (newly hired workers using mechanized sortation equipment) was introduced by the Montreal local leadership and subsequently taken up by the CUPW national leadership. It was not introduced under any pressure from the workers occupying the main terminal. The Montreal local's demand was simply that there be direct negotiations with the employer on this question, not consultation as prescribed in the contract. The precise demand of raising the coders' pay to the level of manual sorters was mentioned once or twice in CUPW national bulletins, but was never the demand of the Montreal local leadership, and still less of the Montreal workers.

The six days of the occupation of the main terminal were marked by an extraordinary degree of organization by the workers of their own struggle. The occupation became the focus of the struggle for the workers, many of whom came in daily to find out and discuss what was happening. About 200 workers maintained the occupation at all times, most on a rotating basis and a smaller number throughout the whole occupation. The workers secured complete control of the entire building in the first few hours, literally chasing the bosses off the floors; throughout the occupation,

it was necessary to maintain this control actively and to guard against provocative acts by postal investigators which would have been the pretext for police intervention. The workers controlled the house phones for communications within the terminal and the Telex machine for communications outside, mainly with the local and national union officers who supported their action. A "flying occupation squad" to spread the occupation to other postal installations in the city was active, particularly the morning after the occupation of the main terminal was ended. When a court injunction ordering the workers to vacate the building was obtained April 12, the workers defied it. The occupation ended only after the intervention of the Montreal riot squad about 4 a.m. April 16.

With the end of the occupation, the direct, active role of the workers also came to an end. But the autonomous power demonstrated by the workers during the occupation was the central factor in both the state's and the union's minds as they tried to reach a settlement for the next ten days of the strike, which was spread to the rest of the country in subsequent days by the national CUPW leadership. Although there were no picket lines in Montreal, mass meetings of about 2,000 workers, one the day the occupation ended, the other to ratify the settlement, and overflow crowds of workers at two injunction hearings in the Montreal court house-- all followed by spirited marches to the main terminal-- served as a constant reminder of the Montreal workers' power and non-negotiable demands.

III

HOW THE STATE HANDLED THE STRIKE

The origins and timing of the April postal strike were very problematic for the federal state. When the occupation of the main terminal began in Montreal on April 10, federal airport firemen had already been on a wildcat strike since the previous week in B.C., tying up air traffic to the west coast. St. Lawrence river pilots had just begun a strike which was tying up seaway traffic. The most immediate objective of the state was to get all these workers back on the job and re-assert the authority of the "normal channels" of the state-regulated collective bargaining system in order to cut short the danger that the illegal strikes would spread to other workers, particularly in the federal public sector.

As for the postal strike itself, the state had two objectives:

- (1) The autonomous power of the Montreal workers had to be attacked and undermined. From the very beginning of the Montreal occupation right up to the final settlement 17 days later, government negotiators took a hard line on trying to make at least some of the firings and suspensions stick.
- (2) Once the national CUPW decided to use the considerable negotiating strength the Montreal occupation and country-wide work stoppage gave them, the state must have recognized it would have to make some concessions on wage rates for new jobs in the mechanized post offices. The state's

objective in this respect was therefore to keep these concessions to a minimum, without putting into question the long-term objectives of the bosses' plan at the Post Office: mechanize in order to get more work for less pay from postal workers.

The April postal strike also found capital unprepared. In anticipated strike situations, most businesses opt for independent mail courier services to minimize the damaging effects of a protracted strike. But the suddenness of the April strike made this impossible, so business mail was completely tied up. The government was also under fire from different sections of capital-- including the Canadian Manufacturers Association and the Canadian Federation of Independent Businessmen-- for its inability to keep these workers' struggles within normal bargaining channels, and subsequently for its failure to crack down on the illegal strikes through back-to-work legislation.

There were several factors which prevented the state from coming down hard on the various groups of striking public sector workers. Demands for back-to-work legislation were politically unfeasible. The existence of the minority Liberal government, which was dependent on the trade union-backed New Democratic Party for a parliamentary majority, was one restraining factor. As well, the obvious political repercussions of any federal government ordering any group of Quebec workers back to work were something to avoid. Probably more significant was that since some of the public sector strikes were legal, any back-to-work law would necessarily have been so broad as to threaten the trade union movement as a whole. Perhaps the most important political restraint was the real fear of widespread disobedience to any back-to-work law. This fear had a basis in reality since both the Montreal postal workers and the B.C. airport firemen at that time were defying provincial court injunctions ordering them to return to work, and the firemen had publicly vowed to go to jail rather than return to work.

The initial tactic of the state was to try to isolate the Montreal struggle from the rest of the country. In public, Postmaster General Ouellet tried to appeal to racist stereotypes about the "wild Frenchmen in Quebec" by labelling the Montreal workers as "goons" and "musclemen" who were keeping the majority of workers off the job. In private, he negotiated a secret deal with CUPW President McCall which maintained a number of suspensions intact. When the majority of the CUPW national executive board, under strong pressure from the Quebec officers of the union, rejected this deal, McCall resigned. Then Ouellet blamed "internal dissension" in the leadership for the strike, and publicly stated that postal workers in the rest of the country would not support the Montreal workers. But by this time the new majority in the national leadership of the union had decided to use their negotiating strength, and sent out the unofficial call to friendly locals across the country to begin work stoppages. That was April 16, and by April 19 most of the large post offices in the country were shut down.

Now the state's tactic became to try to obtain a return to work before the negotiation of any strike issues. Meanwhile, perhaps sensing that there was little positive support for the work stoppage outside of Quebec, the state mounted a major propaganda campaign designed to intimidate postal workers and sway other workers against the strike.

Soon full-page ads appeared in Canada's 20 largest daily newspapers, stating the state's viewpoint on why the strike was unnecessary, illegal, and caused by unnamed "elements" in the CUPW who had reasons of their own.... Ouellet threatened to sue the postal unions for lost revenue-- \$500,000 a day. One particularly divisive device was the political use the state made of the fact that federal checks for pensioners, veterans and unemployed were tied up in the mail stream: these sections of the working class who normally are either abused or ignored suddenly became the object of much concern on the part of government spokesmen and editorialists. The Unemployment Insurance Commission forced the unemployed to pick up their checks at special distribution centres. After the strike, thousands of unemployed who had not shown up to pick up their checks were investigated and cut off.

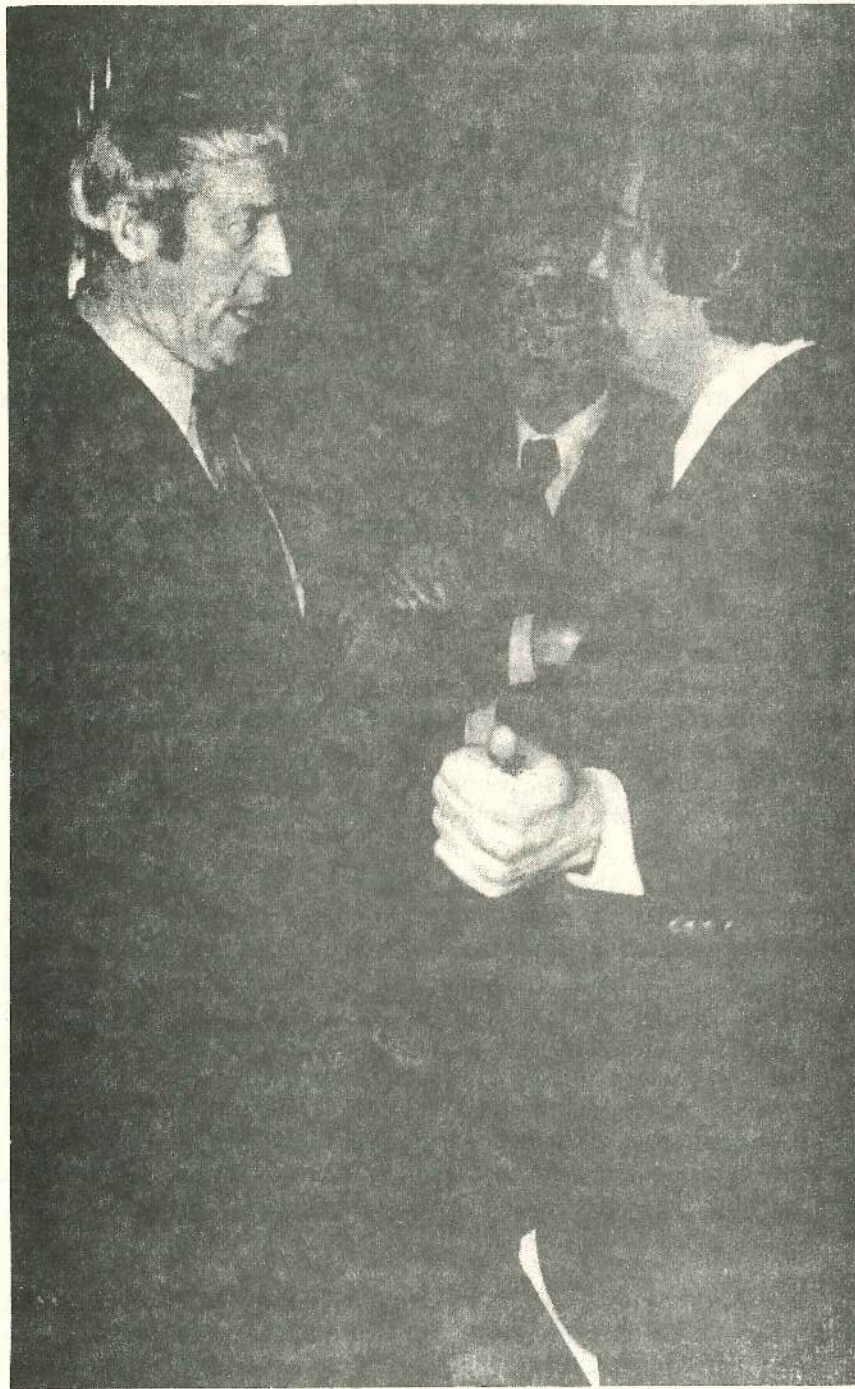
By April 22, with the postal system effectively shut down, the state was forced to concede there would have to be some settlement before any return to work would be agreed to by the union. The appointment of a special mediator that day signalled the beginning of negotiations, whose results were announced five days later.

I V

THE UNION PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRIKE

The union perspective on the strike has to be situated in the context of the struggle of workers and the bosses at the Post Office. Postal workers' struggle against work has forced management to come up with a new plan-- automation-- which is essentially a weapon to get more work for less pay from postal workers. As we pointed out earlier, the plan is to revise wage levels downwards and institute more effective work discipline by de-skilling the sortation process entirely and replacing skilled workers with unskilled workers and machines. The introduction of machines allows management to break the old classification system, based on the skilled sorter, to which wage levels have been tied. The plan is then to introduce a new classification system, presumably to reflect more "accurately" the new organization of work. In fact, the essential difference between the old classification system and the new one will be that the latter will no longer reflect any real differences in the skill level of work performed; rather, its function will be purely to create divisions among postal workers, thereby hindering a unified struggle by all postal workers on the basis of their common interest as unskilled workers.

The union's initial response to the bosses' attack when the manual sortation system was largely de-skilled was to try to preserve the old classification system and the privileged wage position of skilled sorters in it. While this approach made some sense as long as skill provided a basis of power for wage bargaining and in control over work procedures, it is divisive and ineffective when the work is de-skilled and the majority of postal workers are unskilled. The union seems to have recognized this in the last few years, and it is gradually changing its



—CP wirephoto

Union's Joe Davidson (left) chats with Postmaster-General Ouellet before Friday meeting ended in strike call

approach to the bosses' plan by focussing the struggle around the precise shape and wage levels of the new classification system. Its approach is still to negotiate around the different "values" of the various jobs in the new post offices, and its bargaining strategy since the 1971-72 contract negotiations has been to try to break down the Post Office's resistance to any negotiation on the new classification system. While bargaining pressure from the union, including strikes, can certainly result in higher wage levels in the new classification system than would be the case if management had a free hand to impose its own wage rates, it is essential to note that the union perspective functions entirely within the framework imposed by the bosses: a job classification system with corresponding wage differences which are supposedly related to differences in the "value" of work performed, but whose real function is to create divisions among postal workers and to foster the capitalist idea that wage levels are tied to the quantity and quality of work.

Needless to say, our analysis of the union perspective here is precisely that: an analysis of the union perspective, not merely of the present lot of CUPW officers. Unions, both by their own historical origins and particularly by the force of capital's laws, have always been part of the capitalist organization of work. There is no need to repeat here the usual criticism of the limitations of unions (e.g. unions negotiate the price of labour power; they are not organizations whose function is to destroy the capitalist organization of work). But it is necessary to stress that these are the limitations of unions, not of workers' struggles themselves, whose basic thrust, even at their present level of organization, expresses a struggle against work.

The strategy of the national CUPW leadership during the strike was governed by two facts: one the one hand, the Montreal workers had their own non-negotiable demand to lift all disciplinary actions. The power they had demonstrated through their occupation and the support they had won from the Montreal CUPW local made their demand difficult to ignore, except at the risk of splitting the union beyond the point of no return. This pressure from Montreal eventually led the national leadership to take up the Montreal workers' demand as well as the Montreal local's demand for immediate negotiations on higher wage rates for postal coders. On the other hand, to postal workers in the rest of the country, the strike was a totally union-dominated strike in which they had no say and in whose issues they felt no stake.

The union thus saw the strike as a passive work stoppage which would create the power they needed at the bargaining table. The national CUPW office was interested in maintaining strict control over the strike--deviancy by locals or by rank and file workers would not be tolerated.

In English Canada, Vancouver was the only centre where some independence from the national office developed. A number of militant stewards had sufficient strength to use the union structures to advance demands that expressed the workers' interests-- principally the demand that the state re-open the contract for interim wage increases to meet inflation. This broadening of the scope of the strike in Vancouver was the basis for a common front of the two postal unions in Vancouver, who held joint meetings and shared a common strike organization. Some officials of the Vancouver local of the Letter Carriers' Union attempted

unsuccessfully to gather support in other centres across Canada for broadening the strike by introducing the cost-of-living demand.

In Toronto, the local union developed the dynamic between the different groups of workers to ensure the success of the national CUPW strike strategy. Workers on the day staffs at the main terminal and on the staffs of the suburban and city postal stations-- a majority Toronto postal workers-- were never into the work stoppage, refusing to follow their stewards during the sit-down. These workers, most with family responsibilities and with the experience of being used by the union in previous strikes, didn't see how anything they could get out of the strike, even the time off work, could outweigh the loss of pay. On the other hand, workers from the afternoon and night staffs at the main terminal-- probably a majority are young workers with no intention to stay permanently-- did stop work during the sit-down and later provided most of the pickets. This group was much more into taking the time off work, and in some cases, was into exhibiting defiance of the bosses.

The Toronto local depended on the afternoon and night staffs to get the work stoppage going during the sit-down, and later to be on the picket lines, while it tried to neutralize the opposition of the majority. The local also relied on the opposition of the majority to prevent the development of any new demands or tactics from the young workers, as well as for support for an immediate return to work as soon as a settlement was reached in Ottawa. This balancing act explains why the Toronto local, and for that matter the national CUPW, did not even attempt to mobilize active support or to seriously explain the strike issues. The union had turned the strike on and wanted to be able to turn it off when necessary.

The union's strategy came out clearest at the one point during the work stoppage in Toronto when there was a possibility the workers might have become more actively involved. Generally, the sit-down in the main terminal (followed only by the afternoon and night staffs) expressed a tacit agreement between management and the union. Except for the first hours, when the Metro police entered the building to investigate and then left, there was no harassment from the bosses as long as everyone remained passive in their own staff lunchrooms. On the second night of the sit-down, a number of left-wing stewards arranged a mass meeting of workers from all staffs participating in the sit-down, to be held in a large cafeteria. Toronto CUPW local president Murphy was called in by some other nervous stewards to ~~make~~ make sure nothing more active did develop. Murphy's presence required the authorization of management, as earlier he had been barred from the building by security guards. Murphy's role at the meeting is instructive-- due to the necessity from the union's viewpoint of maintaining control of the strike-- he told the meeting not to get "too organized" and to stop using loudhailers. Failure to do so, he warned, would result in management breaking up the meeting. Murphy's intervention was successful. He effectively squashed the voicings of a number of stewards and workers who had been criticizing the conduct of the work stoppage.

When the Toronto local found that a majority of workers were refusing to follow their directive to sit-down, it was decided by the local to end the partial sit-down and set up picket lines. Demobilization at this point became almost total.

When the national CUPW leadership announced at 5 a.m. April 26 that a settlement had been reached (the terms of settlement were not spelled out), most postal workers decided to go back to work without waiting to find out the terms of settlement. To our knowledge, meetings to vote on the terms of settlement were held only in Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto. In Toronto, the local leadership appeared surprised at the stampede back to work before a ratification meeting could be called. The settlement was announced on Friday, but the local had scheduled the meeting for Sunday. Small groups of workers from the afternoon and night staffs continued to picket, but most workers crossed their lines. The local used this situation to launch an attack on the "Marxists" who were threatening to hold up a settlement; indirectly, the local was trying to focus the workers' hostility to the whole strike-- which had been called, controlled and ended by the union leadership-- on the young militants and handful of left-wingers who the union had used to start the sit-down and to do a large part of the picketing.

V

THE WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRIKE

We have already sketched out the essentials of the workers' perspective: the autonomous struggle of postal workers is the struggle against work-- to work less and get paid more-- and that struggle has led the Post Office to mechanize the postal system as a weapon to get more work for less pay from posties. The workers' perspective in the April strike can be seen in Montreal, where the workers had their own autonomous interests and autonomous basis of power in the April struggle. The workers' perspective can also be seen among postal workers outside of Montreal, which we will outline in this section. Our analysis is based on our experience in Toronto, but the workers' relation to the strike elsewhere seems to have been much the same, with the exception of Vancouver.

Postal workers outside of Montreal had autonomous interests in relation to the strike but no autonomous basis of power to fight for those interests. Those interests were not the strike issues defined by the union, but their interests were expressed in terms of the time off work/loss of pay conflict. The fact was that the majority did not see the strike as their strike (comments such as "the union called it, the union can call it off" were made frequently). It is around the conflict between time off work/loss of pay that the various responses from workers can be understood. Young workers and those with fewer family responsibilities saw the strike as an opportunity to take time off work, often commenting later how nice it had been to have a holiday.



"What d'you mean, when will things be back to normal? This is normal!"

Workers with heavier family responsibilities, although certainly not hostile to the idea of some time off work, were more concerned about the loss of pay. But the overwhelming majority of both groups showed no interest at all in the coder issue, which was the union's main interest in the strike.

This disinterest and passivity of the workers in relation to the April strike contrasts sharply with their attitude when they feel their own interests are at stake. In January and February of this year, there had been a departmental walkout, a one-day wildcat which disrupted the main terminal, and a week-long slowdown. This struggle involved a large number of workers on the afternoon and night staffs, and was carried entirely by rank and file workers. The incidents which touched off this struggle-- the suspension of a worker for a few hours following a hassle with a postal investigator-- and the subsequent firing of a steward and 52 disciplinary actions against workers for walking out to protest the first suspension has to be seen in the context of the ongoing shop floor struggle against work. But when the workers tried to spread their struggle to other departments, the union sabotaged their efforts and played strongly on divisions between day staff and night staff workers. Many of the militants involved in that struggle felt isolated; their refusal to participate in the sit-down was a refusal of the union.

In a parallel manner, rank and file letter carriers and mail truck drivers (members of the Letter Carriers' Union) refused to support their leadership's call for a strike. In Toronto, a mass meeting of the LCUC local reversed the local and national LCUC leadership's decision to strike in support of the CUPW demands. Unfortunately, some of the militancy of young workers on the afternoon and night staffs was misdirected into some bitter picket-line confrontations with letter carriers who wanted to report for work and collect a day's pay for sitting around their postal station. The divisions between inside and outside postal workers are rooted in the job classification system and corresponding differences in wage levels and working conditions. For example, a frequent comment by letter carriers was that they had no interest in supporting demands that newly-employed inside workers (the coders) should be placed in a higher wage level than outside workers who might have several years' seniority.

The workers' disinterest in the strike itself was nowhere more clearly expressed than in the stampede back to work the Friday morning it was announced a settlement had been reached in Ottawa. At the "ratification" meeting in Toronto, the vast majority of workers present (which significantly did not include most of the young militants who had been active on the picket lines) did not want to even hear the terms of settlement; they simply wanted to formally end the strike and start getting paid again.

Since the workers had not seen the strike as their own, the announcement a few days after the return to work that the federal government was granting a 25 cents an hour cost of living allowance to all federal employees was not seen as being at least in part the result of the strike wave by federal workers, including the postal strike.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LEFT IN TORONTO

On Saturday April 27-- the day after the final settlement of the strike was announced in Ottawa and at a time when postal workers in the rest of the country were back on the job, the Globe and Mail ran a banner headline on page one which read, "Marxists block postal strike end". The article quoted Toronto local President Murphy to this effect: "The local has been infiltrated by a certain element, and that element will attempt to bring issues other than automation, which sparked the strike, before the meeting. If we get a reasonably good turnout of the 4,000-5,000-member local, then I don't think they'll be any problem. If not, the leftists, who are sure to be at the meeting, will have a better chance to influence the final vote."

While this was a calculated overstatement, it is true that in Toronto at least, the left did play an active role. Like the rest of the workers, the left was caught off guard by the union's call for a sit-down April 16. But where the workers either refused to be mobilized, as was the case with the majority, or responded very cautiously, as was the case with the afternoon and night staffs, the left jumped right in with an enthusiasm that more than matched even that of the union officials. Even though very little information was available from Montreal or the other centres where actions had begun to take place, not only did we immediately endorse the union's definition of the issues, but we supported their tactics as well.

Thus in the early stages the left-wing militants placed themselves in "opposition" to the day staffs. With respect to the other staffs, we became organizers for the union-- by encouraging workers to participate in the sit-down and to stay in the lunchrooms rather than go home-- and when the picket lines were set up, by organizing picket shifts. The union was able to rely on left-wing militants to do much of the leg work. As long as ^{we}were not able to organize the workers' power on an autonomous basis, the union officials were glad to see us clash on the picket lines with workers on the day staffs and letter carriers, and thereby distance ourselves from other workers. Then when the time came for the union to send everyone back to work, they were able to ally themselves with the day staffs and the left found itself almost completely isolated.

At only one point did the left's activity create a situation which threatened to get out of the union's control. On the second night of the sit-down, a number of left-wing stewards and ourselves organized a mass meeting of all staffs participating in the sit-down to decide how it could be better organized. Just as it started, however, Murphy was called in by both some stewards and by management. Faced with a situation where the workers, independent of the union, might have made some decisions about the course of the sit-down, the union joined with management to break up the meeting. At that point the left-wing militants, precisely because of their identification with the union in the eyes of most workers, were unable to successfully challenge Murphy's position. Objectively, the left, by actively organizing around the union's action and demands, had placed itself on the union's side.

For the three of us who shared the workers' autonomy perspective, it was clear that right from the beginning it was a union strike. Not only did many workers refer to/as^{it} the union's strike, but by their actions most workers established their distance from the strike. For example, during the sit-down, a large number of workers went to the hotel or home. For us this was the major problem to developing the struggle-- how to reduce this distance, to involve the workers more in the strike, to transform it from a union strike to a workers' strike.

It was to this end that we directed much of our activity. On the staff where two of us work, we organized meetings of the staff to try to generate discussion of the strike issues and to talk about how to get 100% support for the sit-down. We helped organize a slide show on the effects of automation in the new post offices, hoping to increase awareness of the process, particularly as it will affect day-to-day work. We were able to get a few workers to make banners to put up around the lunchrooms. Along the same lines, we discussed doing a leaflet on the automation process which would have stressed not only its immediate impact but also the reasons which had led management to its automation plans-- they wanted more work for less pay. We never put this leaflet out, partly because of the poor reception accorded the almost daily leaflets from two other left-wing groups, and partly because we could never quite reconcile ourselves to doing what we expected the union to be doing. (In fact, later the union did issue some very weak material on automation which got almost no response from the workers.)

We also arranged for three rank and file workers from the Montreal Post Office to come to Toronto after the picket lines went up. Even though the effect of this action was limited due to the small number of workers on the picket lines, nonetheless it was quite successful. A couple of meetings with workers were held during which the Montreal workers gave excellent accounts of the events leading up to the occupation and of the occupation itself. The Montreal workers were well received, and it is clear that face-to-face meetings provide an excellent opportunity to establish direct links between struggles in different places. Certainly it seemed to have a much better impact than the cursory bulletins put out by the union or the RMG leaflets, which while they contained useful information on developments in Vancouver, were overloaded with detailed directives telling the workers what they should be doing in Toronto.

Throughout the sit-down and strike, we saw the need for the rank and file to begin to exercise some control over the direction of the strike. Although we were unable to come up with many concrete proposals, we did help push a few things. Besides the mass meeting in the cafeteria mentioned earlier, we considered it important to have a motion passed at the only mass meeting of the Toronto local during the strike which stated there would be no return to work until the terms of settlement had been voted on by the workers.

From the above it should be clear that we saw the increased involvement of the rank and file as a pre-requisite for any other developments. This increased involvement would be the basis on which the workers could not only begin to exercise some control over the course of the strike, but would also develop the power to resist a union settlement which did not win the strike demands. In short, while we appreciated the need for the workers to have organizational autonomy from the union, we failed to see that this autonomy could not be built around the union demands.

Throughout the strike, we assumed that there was an identity between the union's demands and the workers' interests. In retrospect, we see now that for most workers the strike was seen as a saw-off between time off work and loss of pay. It is difficult to know what we would have done differently if we had this perspective during the strike. Certainly we would have emphasized the Montreal workers' autonomous demand in the context of the struggle against work, and try to relate it to the struggle against work in the Toronto post office, instead of emphasizing the union's demand on the coder issue. It might also have been possible to start discussions about the possibility of organizing to get strike pay, which many workers were complaining about. Where such initiatives might have gone is impossible to say, but the important point here is not that they might have caught on, but that we never seriously considered them. In a very telling comment afterwards, one of us remarked that he had dismissed any comments by workers about the lack of strike pay as being "divisive" during the strike.

Where we saw the workers' lack of involvement in the strike as the major problem, two traditional left groups which were active during the strike-- Canadian Party of Labor (CPL), affiliated with Progressive Labor Party in the USA, and Revolutionary Marxist Group, connected with the Fourth International-- saw the leadership of the strike as the major problem. As RMG said in its first leaflet: "Given the clear willingness of the rank and file across the country to fight, the biggest obstacle to a victory is the present national leadership." Most of the RMG leaflets attempted to expose the inadequacies of the union leadership and to demonstrate in great detail what "real" leadership would consist of. RMG put much of the resources and energy of their organization into the postal strike. Since there was no RMG-led rank and file group at the Toronto Post Office, and also in an attempt to work with other left-wing militants, RMG at first tried to involve other left-wing militants and a few rank and file workers in a "rank and file" meeting, which turned out to be a meeting to discuss the RMG analysis of the strike and to win support for their proposals. Throughout the strike, RMG put out their own leaflets with detailed proposals for how to build the strike, while RMGers working in the Post Office tried to win support for them, mainly at stewards' meetings and union local meetings. Most of the RMG activity was oriented around influencing union meetings rather than around what rank and file workers might have done themselves to build the strike. On the whole, by assuming that the workers were solidly behind the demands of the strike, RMG failed to address the workers' own perceptions. In this difficulty they were not helped by their desire to "wave their own flag". In fact, it can be said that, despite obvious differences in power, they established much the same relationship to the workers as the union: both stood at a distance from the workers, issuing calls for action.

CPL operated through a small group called the Postal Action Committee, made up rank and file workers from the afternoon staff of one department plus the inevitable CPL leader. The CPLer has pulled together the PAC over the last year through the circulation of a "30 for 40" petition to get the demand for 30 hours work for 40 hours pay on the list of union bargaining demands and through running a slate in his departmental steward elections. CPL sectarianism came through loud and strong during the strike. While the rank and file workers in PAC seemed open to working together with other rank and file workers and left-wingers, the CPLer refused to have

anything to do with other left-wingers, and effectively prevented common work together. Thus the PAC remained much on its own during the strike, almost entirely with its own staff, while the CPLer busily tried to recruit new people from other staffs. PAC issued regular leaflets with much more down-to-earth proposals for building the strike than RMG. But at no point did PAC make any serious attempt to organize workers around its proposals or even seriously argue for them at union meetings or on the picket lines. PAC leaflets seemed to be aimed at putting forward militant "positions" which would establish its presence as a group and prove, in hindsight, the "correctness" of its leadership over against the union leadership and other left-wingers. In short, PAC seemed more interested in building PAC than in building the struggle. Leaving "minor" discrepancies aside, it can be said that anxious as both traditional left groups were to demonstrate their leadership capabilities, neither group was able to see the strike from the workers' perspective.

In summing up the role of the left in Toronto, it can be said we all functioned in practice as militant trade unionists. We accepted the definition of the strike put forward by the union, and within that definition, saw our task to be the building of a strike which could win the union demands.

VII

THE RESULTS OF THE STRIKE FOR THE STATE, UNION AND WORKERS

Our analysis throughout this article has stressed the need to clearly differentiate the interests and activities of the state, the union, and the workers. In tallying up the short-term and long-term results of the strike, we follow the same principle.

The main points of the settlement between the state and the union which ended the April strike were:

1. All disciplinary actions taken against workers since April 1 were lifted, and no further disciplinary action would be taken against any worker involved in the work stoppages during the whole period of the struggle.
2. No sanctions or legal actions, including suits for loss of business, would be undertaken against the union.
3. A special settlement committee, made up of management and union nominees and chaired by an outside mediator, would resolve the coder issue. This committee has since decided to increase the wage level of coders to a point between that of a mail handler (the lowest level) and a letter carrier, but still considerably lower than a manual sorter.

4. While not part of the terms of settlement, the 25 cents an hour cost of living allowance for all federal government employees, announced a few days after the return to work, should be considered in part a result of the postal strike.

FOR THE STATE, the results of the strike have to be regarded as a definite short-term set-back:

* The lifting of all disciplinary actions against the Montreal workers meant defeat in this particular attack against the shop floor struggle against work. This was the number one issue for state negotiators, and they opposed a complete lifting of all discipline right up to the final day of the strike. Their attitude is understandable: any concessions made to the union (e.g. the coder issue) could be won back in later negotiations, but the discipline issue relates directly to the struggle between the workers and the bosses and to the basis of power on which the entire April struggle was built. By losing on this issue, the bosses' attack failed, and the Montreal workers came out in a strengthened position in their daily struggle against work.

* The state's concession on the coder issue-- opening up the wage rates of coders to immediate negotiations-- represented a set-back rather than a defeat. While the state would like to be able to impose wage rates on new jobs in the Post Office without negotiations, the very way in which these wage rates are negotiated -- by seeking mutually acceptable "objective" criteria in the work performed on different jobs to justify wage differences-- re-inforces capital's general plan to create a new classification system which will divide postal workers, most of whom will be doing basically the/same type of unskilled work.

* While obviously any employer would prefer not to have to concede any cost-of-living allowance, the 25 cents an hour or \$500 for one year represents a very cheap settlement to head off further public service strikes. The \$500 amount can be compared with/made by the Common Front in Quebec for an across-the-board increase of \$1,000 to make up for the decline of purchasing power of Quebec government employees in the last two years.

* In a longer-term way, the state suffered a definite set-back in its failure to demonstrate to the rest of the working class that illegal strikes don't pay. The rapid increase in the cost of living in the last two years has caused workers all over the country-- particularly in the public sector-- to throw aside the elaborate state machinery regulating the class struggle over wages and to demand to have their immediate needs satisfied. Since the spring strike wave, the lesson has been taken up by thousands of other workers.

The Liberal government has acknowledged that the postal strike was a political set-back by removing Postmaster General Ouellet from his job. The fact that Bryce Mackasey, a former Labour Minister with the reputation among union officials as the most "pro-union" of the Liberals, has been named the new Postmaster General indicates that the state knows the struggle goes on at the Post Office, and it wants a better "crisis manager" in charge.

FOR THE UNION, the strike has perhaps strengthened its negotiating position with the state, but its position vis-a-vis the workers was not strengthened:

* The opening up of the coder wage rate to immediate negotiations was the essential objective of the CUPW national leadership; in this respect, the settlement was a step forward, "worth" up to nine days lost pay for postal workers across the country.

* In relation to the workers, the union's hand was not generally strengthened. In most of the country, the passivity-passive resistance of workers to the strike meant that they felt they were being used once again as pawns in a game in which their own interests and power were not an active force. If the state and the union had hoped to assert the authority of the union as the legitimate and effective representative of the workers in the eyes of the workers, particularly in the face of a considerable number of "unauthorized" rank and file work stoppages in the last few years, their hopes are in vain. If anything, the strike re-inforced and deepened the distance between workers and the union. The only exceptions to this general trend to our knowledge were in Montreal, where the local union leadership has learned to use the shop floor strength of workers to strengthen its negotiating position vis-a-vis the bosses, and Vancouver, where the more independent course of action of the local unions, reflecting the revolt of many B.C. unions against control by the Internationals and eastern-based union headquarters, may mean that workers there may look more positively on the union.

* In a longer-term way, the general weakness of both CUPW and LCUC in the negotiating strategy around automation, work and wages, while perhaps obscured by the April "show of force", has become apparent again recently by the formal break-up of the Council of Postal Unions, the common bargaining front through which the two unions have negotiated until now. This common front was never more than an uneasy alliance of the apparatus of the two unions, never reflecting a unity in struggle by the workers in the two unions. While the dispute between the leaders of the two unions certainly reflects empire-building on both sides, the more important reason is the sectionalism between inside workers and outside workers rooted in the classification system and wage differences, which the union perspective on automation brings out even more sharply.

FOR THE WORKERS, the tally-sheet of the results of the strike has to sharply distinguish between the Montreal workers and workers in the rest of the country.

* The only postal workers in the country who celebrated the settlement as a victory for the workers were in Montreal. From our analysis, the reason should be clear: only the Montreal workers had autonomous objectives in the struggle (defense of their daily struggle against work) and an autonomous basis of power to back up their objectives (the occupation). The lifting of all disciplinary actions was therefore a victory. Their actions had defeated the bosses' attack on their struggle against work. From the viewpoint of the power relations between workers and the boss on the shop floor, the Montreal workers came out greatly strengthened. From the Montreal workers' perspective, the settlement was no "mere" defensive standoff, but a victory.

* Postal workers in the rest of the country judged the strike in terms of how it affected their own autonomous interests: the strike was time off work, but unpaid. Most workers had no idea what the terms of settlement of the strike were, and didn't particularly care.

* The 25 cents an hour cost-of-living allowance was not seen by workers to be a result of the strike, which is quite understandable--since it wasn't their strike, the wage increase was not seen as a result of their power.

* In a longer-term way, workers continue to pursue their own autonomous interests to work less and get paid more. In Toronto at least, that means at this point almost entirely the daily shop floor struggle to work less overagainst the bosses' continuing attempts to get more work, as well as more "indirect" forms of refusal such as absenteeism, cooked compensation claims, etc. At the same time, the rank and file struggles in the past six months on the afternoon and night staffs of the main terminal, particularly the struggle in the department where workers were fired and suspended, has made workers much more wary of how much organized power they have to resist a strong attack from the bosses.

* The dis-interest of the workers in events which are important for the union is remarkable. The June national convention of CUPW and the break-up of the Council of Postal Unions in July were largely ignored by the workers. From the workers' perspective, the break-up of the CPU is not particularly significant, because the CPU was never a common front of workers, fighting for their own autonomous interests. If anything, the CPU perpetuated the sectional divisions between inside and outside postal workers. Their unity will not be built on the basis of a merger of the apparatus of two unions, but on the basis of their common interest and common struggle to work less and get paid more. When the needs of the workers' struggle demand a common front, the workers will impose one off the unions, as Vancouver-area rail workers, who are divided into 17 different unions, did during the 1973 rail strike.

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VIII

WHAT WE LEARNED

As a collective of political militants, our involvement in and analysis of the April postal strike represents a major step forward in developing a political understanding of workers' struggles in Canada. Prior to the April strike, a crucial link was missing in our organizational work-- the link between workers' autonomy as a general perspective on industrial struggles and the actual daily struggle of workers in the workplace. While we did frequently talk about the struggle against work as a significant aspect of the ongoing shop floor struggle, we had not come to terms with the fact that the struggle against work is the autonomous working class content of workers' struggles. It is around this autonomous class interest that workers determine their relation to both the union and capital. And it is around this autonomous interest and basis of power that the organization of workers' struggles begins and develops. Because we had not made that crucial link, we sought to develop only the autonomous form of the April strike (rank and file control of the strike) without grasping the workers' autonomous interest in the strike. This led us in practice to try to build the strike from the union's perspective (expressed in the coder demand) rather than from the workers' perspective.

This practical clarification of the struggle against work as the autonomous working class content of postal workers' struggles is both the perspective from which the workers' attitude to the April strike can best be understood and the starting point for the organization of the struggle in which the workers are already engaged. At the same time, having identified the main content of workers' struggles, we are aware that we are not as clear on how that struggle can be developed or what specific needs of that struggle are within our capacity to meet at present. It might be useful to briefly mention some of the problems we have been discussing that seem to require clarification as the basis of future organizational work.

1. The analysis of the struggle against work as the autonomous working class content of the struggle at the Post Office points us more strongly than ever to the shop floor as the focus of organizational work. It is on the basis of the shop floor struggle against work that the workers' autonomous interests can be collectively identified and developed. In fact, the whole process of collectivizing and acknowledging the struggle against work in more explicit ways is a priority for organizing on the shop floor. Workers are already making the struggle against work their main interest, and they are also organizing that struggle collectively to a certain extent: dogging it on the job always is collective; cooked compensation claims for "injuries" on the job need witnesses, etc. At the same time, we find that most workers do not acknowledge that they are engaged in a collective struggle which is having major effects on the bosses' interests, to the point where the boss has been forced to re-organize completely the postal system through automation.

The need to make the struggle against work more collective and conscious is particularly clear when the bosses attack that struggle, whether on the shop floor or in larger ways as through the re-organization of the work process. On the shop floor, the struggle between workers and the bosses over how much work is to be done regularly explodes into direct confrontation-- which often takes the form of disciplinary action against a few workers-- in which workers are faced with the necessity of organizing against the bosses' attack. In Toronto, we have found that workers have tended to expect the union to defend them against these attacks. When the union fails to do so, the tendency has been to become cynical, not just about the union, but about the possibilities of collective struggle, and to retreat into more individualized resistance in the daily struggle against work. And when the boss attacks the workers' struggle against work at the level of re-organizing the work process through automation, the inability of the union to defend the workers' struggle is even more dramatic. At the current level of organization of the struggle against work, we feel the priority is to stress more explicitly that workers need their own shop floor organization to defend their own autonomous interests-- and to force the union to back its immediate demands at this level, as has happened in Montreal. The focus for this approach would be around the immediate needs of the workers' struggle against work and the periodic confrontations between workers and the bosses on the shop floor. It is only on the basis of the organization of the workers' own power on the shop floor that eventually the workers, because of their own organization, can be powerful enough to force the union to defend its immediate interests.

It is also on the basis of the present shop floor struggle against work and its organization that we would see trying to contribute to the collective identification by workers of their autonomous interests in relation to the bosses' automation plan. A first point would be to demystify the bosses' and union's line that automation is somehow connected with "progress", rather than being an attack on the workers' struggle against work. The common interest of all postal workers to work less and get paid more has to be developed over against all the bosses' and union's attempts to tie wage levels to the type and quantity of work performed.

2. The priority on rank and file organization is not only the result of our political analysis of workers' struggles in general, but also the result of the concrete needs which postal workers' struggles in Toronto in the last three years have clearly highlighted. There has been a series of rank and file-initiated struggles (including a three-day strike, opposed by the local and national CUPW, in January, 1973) in which the power of the rank and file has been limited mainly by its own lack of organization. There is an obvious need for the most active militants to take the initiative to give more organization and direction to the power of the rank and file. But at the present time, most of these militants do not clearly recognize this need, perhaps in large part because they don't see the specific ways for a rank and file group to function and develop.

For us, the major unresolved practical problem is how we can contribute to have this need acknowledged by militants and help to develop this essential step to further develop the workers' struggle. In the last two years, there have been a number of attempts to develop rank and file groups in the main terminal, some of which we were directly involved in; the others we have been able to experience first hand. In

all of them, left-wing militants have been the initiators and the most influential participants and, to put it bluntly, have dominated the few rank and file workers who have become involved. As more left-wing people from different groups hire on at the Post Office, the sectarianism has escalated, with each group trying to organize "their" group of workers. We have always rejected the idea that a rank and file group be controlled in any way by the self-appointed vanguard groups. Our approach has been to try to identify the needs of the struggle workers are already engaged in at the Post Office and try to organize around those needs.

Another big problem with the "rank and file" groups in the main terminal is that other left-wing militants basically see rank and file groups as a base for influencing or taking over the union apparatus. While in certain circumstances it can be tactically important to control certain union positions, it is essential that this be on the basis of the power of the rank and file struggle and its organization. In this we have a basic difference with the traditional left groups, whose theory and practice is that it is important to hold union positions in order to build the power of the rank and file. And where we could envisage situations where the rank and file might want to use the union to develop its own autonomous struggle, the traditional left, making no distinction between the workers' autonomous struggle and the unions, simply wants to bring the workers' struggle into the union framework so the union will be strong enough to win union demands.

At the same time, we are aware that most workers will discover the ways to organize their struggle through a long process of struggle experiences. The need for autonomous organization for autonomous interests will for a long time be mixed in with the hope that the union can become the organization through which their struggle can develop.

These concluding comments are meant to acknowledge that what we learned through our involvement and analysis of the April strike has not been a new set of answers to the problems of organizational work. But we think we have learned that the answers to these problems have to be sought from the workers' perspective in the sense we've defined; and that's not such a bad place to start.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

Dear Newsletter:

I would like to speak more directly to the role of the Newsletter and the need to share more regularly and in a more organized fashion the experiences and theories of "new tendency" male workplace interventionists. If we look at the different political organizations in our respective centres, it appears that major changes are beginning. In Windsor, there has been an important split in the Labour Centre. Toronto has held numerous meetings to resolve internal contradictions. Linked to this has been a major development among quite a few women formerly identified with the broader "new tendency" in Toronto: these women have left the "mixed group" to form an autonomous women's group. As for the political situation in Winnipeg, I have very little information. So given the present situation of either splitting or re-grouping, our rather fragile unity emanating from the August/73 Windsor conference seems both tenuous and unclear.

On the other side of this problem exists a situation where many of the "new tendency" men have been involved in workplaces for going on two years. Almost all have been involved in or witnessed rank and file struggle. Many are involved in some way with a workplace group and have, generally speaking, different problems and experiences than we had a year ago.

I personally feel the need to share more concretely and regularly on questions such as:

1. The role of an interventionist group.
2. The role of leaflets-- is something more needed, and what forms might it take?
3. A more concrete analysis of unions, their differences, etc.
4. A better understanding of different sectors of the class: our unity-differences.
5. The present economic situation and the role of the international working class in developing the present crisis. Also, should we be involved with such issues as inflation, etc.
6. How do we relate to the social struggle outside our workplace?
7. The effects of the male role on both class consciousness and our work style.
8. The effects of our own class backgrounds and its relationship to the struggle.
9. The exchange of views on different theoretical documents with the intention of grasping them within our own experiences.
10. Our relationship (as we would like to see it) to an autonomous women's group.
11. To what extent do we need to build a firmer organized link?

I am sure with a little more discussion we could all add another dozen topics to that list.

So in response to my own individual needs, I would like to make the following proposals:

1. That a male workplace interventionist conference be held sometime this fall, preferably before the middle of December. Such a conference, in my view, should:

* bring us up-to-date on the past experiences in our political-personal workplace development, our priorities for the next year, etc.

* be organized with the intention of examining as concretely as possible where to go from here in the workplace and in our political groups.

* discuss a much better organized method to share leaflets, experiences.

* discuss our views on the Newsletter and other publications.

* clarify our unity and pinpoint differences that need to be clarified.

This would be a skeleton of such a gathering, with militants from Lotta Continua, Quebec and USA as possible participants.

As I said in the beginning, I personally feel it is an important priority for me, and I would like to see such an exchange organized. As a first step I'm organizing a questionnaire which will be mailed out as soon as this issue of the Newsletter reaches Windsor. If other militants feel positively about such a meeting, then a co-ordinating committee could be organized and we would be off to the races.

In Struggle,

Jim Brophy
Windsor.

CORRESPONDENCE

July 9, 1974

Dear Newsletter:

We are writing to tell you about the Falling Wall Book Review, which we think will be useful to people round the New Tendency. Falling Wall Press are political publishers, and we have a similar political perspective to that of the New Tendency. We have recently set up the Book Review (and a Book Service to back up the Review - we stock all the books and pamphlets reviewed) in which books and pamphlets which we feel are important are reviewed. Both the selection of books and pamphlets and the Book Review itself express - broadly - our politics, and we would like the Book Review to be available to people in Canada.

Books and pamphlets reviewed in the first two issues include George Rawick 'Sundown to Sunup', C.L.R. James 'Modern Politics', and 'State Capitalism and World Revolution', Altbach 'From Feminism to Liberation', Big Flame 'Five Months of Struggle at (Ford) Halewood', Pompeii 'Wages For Housework', 'Irish Women Speak', Watson 'Counter Planning on the Shop Floor', Rodney 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' and also your Newsletter. The reviewers include Priscilla Allen, Huw Beynon, Darcus Howe, C.L.R. James, Selma James, George Rawick.

A number of the books and pamphlets reviewed are from the US and Canada, and will probably be available in Canada; but we have found in Britain that many people are dependent on mail order for buying literature, and that the reviews are useful to them - it's difficult to judge what to buy simply from titles.

A subscription to the Book Review costs three dollars a year, for five issues (or five dollars for airmail). Individual copies are 75 cents post free (one dollar airmail). We can also supply people with the literature reviewed if it's not available in Canada. Please send cash with any orders for the Book Review.

Address: 79 Richmond Road,
Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5EP,
England.

In Struggle,
Suzie Fleming,
for Falling Wall Press.

August 5, 1974

Dear Newsletter,

Mile One Publications has recently completed production of a pamphlet entitled Out of the Driver's Seat, Marxism in North America Today. We originally decided to do some sort of printed answer to various questions which were directed our way from comrades in the New Tendency last April; we expected to have it done in a few weeks. What happened was that the more we wrote, the more we realized we had to write if we were going to say something about where we were going.

What resulted is a 76 page book complete with graphics and pictures. The first part of the book deals with what we have been doing in the various areas in which we are working. This includes students, women, gays and white and blue collar workplaces. The attempt in these sections is not to define the necessary path of development in these various sectors, but merely to write down our own experiences and development, and to describe the point where it has left us.

The second part of the book deals with our theory (What We Think). In particular it explains the concepts of the invading socialist society, state capitalism and the question of what the role of consciousness is. It is followed by a section called Where We're Going, in which an attempt is made to define the tasks and role of a Marxist organization in light of the invading socialist society. Also included are descriptions of two efforts in Windsor (The Pole and Tower News, and Z-Minus) which we feel exhibit characteristics of the role of a Marxist organization.

Out of the Driver's Seat is available from Mile One Publications, at the cost of 75¢, which includes postage. Write to Mile One Publications, 2180 Wyandotte West, Windsor, Ontario. Mile One is the Canadian distributor for Bewick/Ed Publications material, some of which was listed in the last newsletter. We will send a publications list upon request.

Solidarity,
Stephen Shirreffs for
Mile One Publications.
P.O. Box 274,
Windsor, Ontario, Canada.