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THE NEWSLETTER

...WHY THAT CRUMMY
REVOLUTIONARY RAG!
IT'S PRINTED THE
TRUTH AGAIN!



NUMBER TWO

Things Have Changed

Most of the negative comments on the last issue of the newsletter were concerned with appearance and quality. We definitely agree with the focus of these criticisms. To correct this we are changing from gestetner to offset press. This gives us a great deal more flexibility and better design. However, it also means a large increase in cost. To put it bluntly, We Need Money!

With the last issue the only significant cost was postage. With this issue the entire cost comes to approximately 35¢ per copy. As much as we would like to, the editorial board cannot afford the sum of \$100 per issue. Please help!

An Opposition Paper
Must Be Supported
By the Opposition
It's Embarassing To Tell
Strangers You Are Poor.
It's Foolish Not To Ask
Your Friends For Help.
Well Friends, We Need
Money. Our Address Is:
The Newsletter
P.O. Box 884
Waterloo, Ontario

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GK.

INTRODUCTION

ISSUE # 2, 1973

Well, here we are again. Although somewhat late, we feel that this newsletter is a good one, a genuine improvement over the last issue.

There were many problems with the first issue of the newsletter. First, in response to some queries, we can state with certainty that the production of the newsletter is not due to some type of conspiracy. That there were no names to be found on the last issue was an oversight rather than conscious policy on our part. This time names will appear where appropriate.

The layout, typing errors, stark appearance and general effect of issue # 1 were also the source of many criticisms. We have made a number of efforts to improve this by changing our method of production, adding graphics, etc.

Concerning the content of the issue, the feedback was not exactly what we had expected. To our surprise there were virtually no responses questioning the concept and direction of the newsletter. In general, the letters we did receive were short giving unqualified support. The one letter we did receive which made comment on these issues is reprinted in this issue.

On the weekend of May 26-27 there was a meeting in Windsor involving about 75 newsletter people, mostly from southern ontario. Through discussion it became clear that there were two basic conceptions of the function of the newsletter. Some people thought that the focus should be on theory while others stressed the importance of reflections on practise. In this issue, thanks largely to what people have been sending in, we have made an attempt to fill the need for both rather than orient the newsletter toward one or the other.

We think that it is significant that in this issue there are two articles dealing with work that women have done in the white collar sector. To our knowledge this is the first attempt at a systematic presentation, analysis and dicussion of organisation and strategy in this sector. With respect to theory, there are a number of articles developing and cocretising the workers autonomy perspective. From these two directions we hope to address the questions raised at the Windsor meeting and elsewhere as to what the "new tendency" actually is, and what it represents.

Editorial Committee: Randy Dryburgh - Toronto
Dave Feickert - Toronto
Gary Brunzlow - Kitchener
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WHITE COLLAR BLUES

Introduction

This paper is being written for discussion in the Newsletter. It is an attempt to begin what I hope will be an ongoing discussion of white collar workers in Canada. Some of what I say may be particular to my office or, more probably, to the government sector (I work for Unemployment Insurance Commission). However, I am beginning to see general patterns which I believe are widely applicable and hopefully others will add to what I have said, both from their own experience and from seeing in my discussion patterns and contradictions that I have missed.

I intend this paper to be the first of a series. For that reason, I have devoted considerable space here to description--of the workplace, the workforce etc. I have also attempted to develop some analysis of the contradictions which arise from the nature of our work. I hope people will not find this method overly descriptive or too simplistic. My own feeling is that this is a necessary beginning. When we talk about blue-collar industrial work situations, we tend to take much of this for granted, but my own experience was that I could not even begin to come to grips with the concrete nature of workplace contradictions in a factory until I had at least toured a number of industrial plants. This was still an outsider's view and I think that in this area as well, description is necessary for the experience to be generalized so that everyone can discuss it concretely.

Physical Surroundings, Routine, Workforce

The office is basically one large room (110' x 120') with long rows of desks broken only occasionally by semi-circular, coloured baffle boards which surround those desks where interviews take place. Until about three weeks ago, the office was divided by department--typing in one area, records in another etc. However, UIC is attempting to "humanize" its operation and has totally reorganized the office into a "modular system". This means dividing the office into 1, 2, 3 or more autonomous units, each containing all the necessary staff to process a claim. Where before calculations, say, would have been one big department, now there are two or three calculators in each unit. This change is going to have far-reaching effects on the nature of our work, but I was laid off just as these were beginning to become apparent. When I go back, I hope to gain a clearer idea of what these effects are.

The office is well lighted and air conditioned. The walls are freshly painted, though bare and few desks have anything on them but the necessary equipment for working. A few plants are scattered around the office; most of them are plastic.

The noise level is moderate to low. People can talk freely, but the work demands concentration so that long conversations are unusual. There is a great deal of movement--file clerks running around, people coming in and out etc. The background noises are typewriters, phones and the voices of the women who deal with the incoming calls from the public.

Work begins at 8:15 and ends at 4:15 with two 15 minute breaks and 1/2 hour for lunch. Punctuality is emphasized and most people are very conscientious about this. The break system is flexible; you can supposedly go when you want. In practice people tend to go at the same time with the same group every day, mainly because not everyone in any one function can be out of the office at the same time. Everyone signs in and out.

The work pace is moderate but steady. There are production quotas and people are expected to meet them. At the end of every day, each worker fills out a daily production sheet listing the various activities performed, time taken, units completed (units completed is the catch; if you spend 20 minutes on phone calls to get the necessary information to calculate a claim and still cannot complete it, you must count the time in "calculation" but you cannot count the claim as a completed unit). Examples of production quotas: women on the phones: supposed to handle 32 calls per hour. Typists: supposed to type 20 regular form letters per hour. In public service, such a production system has wide ranging ramifications which I will discuss later.

The workforce numbers around 110. About 65% are women and the split between under 35 and over is around 50/50. In the under 35 group (mostly women in their early 30's) the married/single split is around 50/50. Most of the women have husbands, fathers or boyfriends who are factory workers. University education, anywhere below very upper management, is an exception.

The hierarchy in the workforce is subtle, but rigid. I can only describe it here, but hope to discuss the many contradictions that arise from it later and in subsequent papers. I am not clear on all the classifications as I do not have access to a union contract and the number of classifications is bewildering. There are two types:

I) Everyone in the civil service has a classification by function, represented by letters, which describe the function, and a number which describes the level: stenographers are ST2's, ST3's etc. Clerical and Regulatory: CR1's etc. Public Administration: PM1's etc. Salaries vary accordingly: CR1's get around \$2.10 per hour; CR5's around \$4.50 etc. PM1's start at \$4.59 per hour. All filing, clerical etc. is performed by ST's and CR's up to about level 4 or 5 where supervisory positions in some functions begin. PM's denote those who deal directly with the administration and interpretation of the Unemployment Insurance Act: Benefit Control, Insurance Officers etc. There are other categories for Administration (AS) and Executive (EX) and so on.

II) There is also a division by category: Casual, Term Casual, and Regulars. Casuals denote all those who have less than 6 months seniority; there is no union membership to this point, no benefits (except

UI and CPP) and no paid sick days. Term casuals are union members, have some benefits and one sick day per month, but little real job security. Regulars have full benefits and almost absolute job security. One can only become a Regular by competition which involves an oral exam by supervisory staff and a written appraisal by one's immediate supervisor. Competitions are held irregularly and winning one does not necessarily mean you get that job at once. They can also be "frozen" which makes them virtually null and void. You are expected to enter competitions for classifications below the one in which you are presently employed as a term casual or a casual. More of this later.

Some Contradictions and Patterns

I. The Public Servant Syndrome:

Several contradictions arise from the particular nature of our work. We do not make cars or sell shoes: we process claims for other workers who are unemployed and this fact adds a new dimension to usual contradictions of production. In commodity production, the contradiction between the pressure to "make production" and the desire to "produce quality" (two activities which the assembly line makes almost mutually exclusive) has at least one slightly mitigating factor: by refusing to "make production" the factory worker can at least feel, that as long as he is not fired for it, it's the company that suffers. In the public service, failing to make production means that someone's cheque is going to be even later than usual. On the other hand, if you sacrifice quality to make your quota it means that you don't re-type the letter, or check all the facts or answer the question properly--and that can mean that someone's claim will get all fouled up.

Either way you lose--and so does the claimant. Since everything everyone does has to be signed, errors are almost always traceable and given that UIC is one of the most critically observed sectors of the Government, you can be sure it will be traced and that you'll hear about it. Of course if your production is down, you'll hear too. Like I said, either way.....

One of the ways that the incredible tension created by this situation is resolved is by taking out one's hostility, not on the UIC alone, but on the claimant. When I first began working for UI I was struck by the fact that attitudes toward claimants varied distinctly, not only with one's position in the hierarchy, but with the particular function performed. By and large, those involved in the purely logistical functions of typing and filing sided with the claimant and were highly critical of several aspects of the U.I. Act. Cheating was accepted as a necessary matter of course and no one talked about the "bums who don't want to work". This attitude becomes less general among the women on the phones, on the counter and in those sections where the claim is calculated for benefit rate and examined for eligibility. In all of these categories, people have direct contact with the public or at least get to read the contents of a file. Reading letters out loud, joking about spelling errors etc. is common practice and the prevailing attitude appears to be an almost arrogant belief that the general public is incredibly stupid.

(Among Insurance and Benefit Control Officers the prevailing attitude is that these people do not really want to work and cannot be expected to tell the truth on any occasion. Criticism of the Act is limited to the belief that it is "too easy". Much of what I say below may apply to some extent to these categories as well, but I also intend a wider discussion of this area in another paper).

Clearly one of the factors at work here is job security and position and the effect of these on "consciousness". The further down the scale, the closer you are to being unemployed; the higher up, the more "false consciousness" you can become. There is another, I think more noteworthy, factor operating as well. In reality everyone's job (to the level of Insurance Officer anyway) is dull, repetitive and tiring. The pay is not that great, and the category competition system hardly makes for job security; in short, there is little space for a really solid false consciousness with regard to other (unemployed) workers to develop. In fact, for file clerks and typists, the claimants do not exist anyway; they are just so many numbers and names to be counted, filed and mailed. And for the rest of the clerical staff, every error on a form, every person who does not understand or does not speak English simply represents more work, less production. People are very aware of, and discuss the fact that their jobs are built on the misery of others; people think the Act is unfair and get upset when someone "loses out" but on a day to day level, the assumption that the claimant is stupid becomes an easy and available defence mechanism against tension, alienation and a sense of futility. As one of the women on the phones put it:

Thirty-two calls an hour means one every two minutes and you can't hang up on someone unless they swear or talk dirty. So you get some old lady who tells you all her troubles or a guy who stutters or some foreigner and you know you might as well forget it because it will be 10 minutes before you even get their SIN (Social Insurance Number). And all the time you know she's (supervisor) watching you. Some days I get every pervert in Windsor. I wish they'd all drop dead.

My first reaction in these situations was to confront the attitude directly, but after making a couple of enemies when I tried to explain why they shouldn't think like that, I shut up and listened. A lot of things came out: hatred of their job, of UIC, of the union, confusion about being in the position of having to defend UIC to people which sometimes came across as hating the claimants and sometimes as hating UI for "not telling people more", and over and over again resentment at being thought stupid or bitchy when "we can't do anything about it".

But the total force of this contradiction did not hit home until I was in the position of doing this work myself. For three weeks I worked in Assessment, correcting Separation Certificates, which are the record of insured weeks, earnings etc. issued by the employer. Usually this means calling the bookkeeper or secretary, explaining the error and getting a correction. Usually I met hostility; naturally, correcting the error made more work for them; they were being made to feel stupid; and they were fed up with government paper-work. Intellectually I understood all that, but within one day on the job, I found myself

changing. I became more hostile, increasingly arrogant in my request for information; I made jokes about "stupid bookkeepers" and (if I didn't catch myself) found myself defending UI when people repeatedly criticized it. Gradually I managed to control the hostility, but the tension of the situation was almost unbearable.

In the last month before I was laid off, my desk was moved up to the front so that I could both see and talk to the women who worked on the counter. I saw in them the changes I had experienced in myself, from (relative) calm in the morning to a perfect figure of a harpy by 4:00 p.m. I have seen them cut some guy to shreds with a few rude remarks and then break down in tears when he left. It was their self-control rather than their lack of it, that amazed me, especially since they were without the protective mediation of the phone and had to keep smiling and trying to be polite (as the manual demands) while people swore, threatened and (occasionally) threw letters or cards in their faces.

Both my own experience and my observations have made me re-think my former opinion that the public attitude of smugness and arrogance was a form of "false consciousness". I have also begun to look more carefully for other expressions of a sense of superiority over blue-collar workers and have found few, perhaps because so many women have men who work in the plants.

Although its cause does not, I think, lie in any sort of "false consciousness" there is still the essential problem: how is the resentment, and sense of oppression felt individually among white collar workers generalized and developed into a sense of solidarity and a willingness to struggle against it. What prevents this from happening: It is certainly not the lack of a sense of being exploited or a widespread feeling of being "above" those sections of the workforce that take such action (recent strikes in the city are widely discussed and supported). One of the dominant factors, and one which I am not entirely clear about, is "repressive decorum" which I can only begin to discuss here.

II. Repressive Decorum:

Working for the government, in an office, is very "civilized". Your supervisor, who is often in the union, doesn't yell at you and you are on a first name basis. Management makes all kinds of attempts to let you know what's going on, through staff meetings, and when you leave or have a baby or get married, you get a present.

But the decorous surface masks a method of repression which compares quite favourably with what R.D. Laing describes as the control mechanisms of the family. For example, one week before a major policy change in UIC, CAP (Claimants' Assistance Program, employing mostly good liberal social workers, PM 2's, Regulars) was told that it was being entirely phased out, "but no one will lose their jobs" (many are now doing clerical work, however, or are pushing other people out). Then, a totally incomprehensible, but bilingual, memo was circulated to the entire staff from Cousineau the Chairman of the Commission. This was followed by a 15

minute staff meeting in which our manager told us, and I quote "I don't really know more than is in the memo. All offices are moving to a five-digital modular system with peripheral functions. We have promised the union that no one will be laid off. Because of the fine staff here, this office is the pilot project for the new modular system and I know everyone will co-operate." The next week, two men from head office arrived with diagrams which were shown and "explained" to everyone. The next day they began moving desks. The entire physical set up, work flow and individual functions were re-organized. People were laid off ("but not because of the change") and it became clear that the union had not asked one question about how the changes were going to affect the nature of our work or even foreseen (how could they) how great the effects were going to be. No one was happy; no one knew what was going on; everyone complained, but the atmosphere of politeness and "involvement" made it impossible to channel the frustration, because after all, there had been the memo and the pretty diagrams. Generally, people jotted it up to more stupidity on the government's part and took extra long coffee breaks (the only time I saw this happen). But the tension was clearly there.

Or, when I was laid off, I was told that the choice had been between another woman and myself. They picked me, because I was "more stable and wouldn't be as upset". This may be objectively true; I happen to know, however, that my work record was far superior to the other woman's. But the government doesn't like to hurt anyone's feelings.

On the surface that looks very nice: your employer really cares about you and won't lay you off if your husband, say, is unemployed. Instead, they'll lay off the woman beside you with two years seniority.

The competition system adds another twist. I know one woman who has worked at UI for about five years. She is a CR 2 Regular, but has been working for a year or two as an acting CR 4. However, when the layoffs began earlier in the year, she was demoted to her proper position of CR 2, taking the 50% salary cut that went along with it. Generally entering a competition means running the risk of moving down to a lower paid, more shitty job. But if you don't compete, you're "not ambitious" and you're still a term casual: two marks against you and the chances of keeping your job. And your union president may be a PM 2 and half the stewards may be supervisors.

Some of these things one can put down to the particular absurdities of the Government as Employer. They are not however the decisive factor, but merely contribute to an over-riding sense of hopelessness which has its roots in the more general nature of repressive decorum. The polite atmosphere allows management to operate on a set of rules which bear little or no relation to logic or to usual labour relations (i.e. layoffs not by seniority). This makes it harder to combat or even define the injustices that such a haphazard and seemingly innocuous system perpetrates. Like the family, there are rules, but you never know what they are, except for the rule that there are no unfair rules because everyone is so nice, so how can you possibly complain?

The effect is isolation and fear. This expresses itself in that appearance of "discretion" so valued in a civil servant. Everyone is careful not to complain to others (how can you really know just who you're

complaining to?) and even more afraid to complain openly or act on those complaints. You never know what the consequences may be (will they lay you off or promote you or fire you?).

Clearly, the atmosphere of "good fellowship" makes it difficult to decide whose interests are being served by what, although this blurring of class interests is not as pronounced as I had expected and even the discretion is a very thin veneer. Once someone begins to vocalize their feelings, others open up and reveal not only the desire, but often a concrete strategy for fairly militant action. The damper on these plans is generally a lack of trust in the union, and a fear, not only of losing one's job, but of turning the public (the unemployed) against us. Which, I believe, takes us back to the Public Servant Syndrome.

Upon re-reading, I am aware that this is hardly an optimistic beginning to our discussion. Suffice it to say that I do believe that there are ways to slice this rather tight circle of knots and I hope to begin to discuss them later. I want to add, in closing a few words on my own practice.

Before being laid off (and I expect to go back) I had worked at UI for six months. I was hired as an Insurance Officer, a situation which created some complications, but also allowed for some positive situations which I shall discuss next time. In general, I saw my first six months as a time for listening, observing and getting to know people on a personal basis. I avoided thrusting my political position on people, but gave an honest opinion on subjects that arose in conversation. About the only subject I did introduce, and always, I found with positive results, were issues about ourselves as women. I found I had a lot to learn, not only about white collar workers in general, but about the attitudes, hopes and feelings of other women. I made six or seven close friends and continue to see them during my lay-off. Most of my opinions about white collar workers, and about women, have been challenged and I have found the first six months a very valuable political experience. Writing this paper, discussing it, and writing others will be, I hope, a means of objectifying and generalizing this experience.

W. B.

THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

OR: EXPERIENCES ORGANIZING NURSING HOMES

Introduction

This article is an attempt by us to critically evaluate our experiences working in nursing homes and our involvement in union organizing. Although we worked in two separate nursing homes, next door to each other, our experiences were similar. Because we lived together and shared and talked about our experiences as we went through them, it follows that we should write this together.

We found writing together exciting as we saw certain threads developing that were common to both our experiences.

We felt it important as well because of the almost total lack of material written on rank and file struggles in Canada. This is especially true of women workers outside of the industrial sector.

One of the themes we tried to develop in the article was the specificity of the hospital sector. Although at first glance it appears that hospital workers are not producing a commodity, because we tend to think of commodities as things (i.e. fridges, cars, electronic equipment, etc.), in fact a commodity is "an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another." (Capital Vol. I p. 41) Hospital workers view their work differently than industrial workers because they see the direct value of the services they perform.

A serious dilemma faces socialist women, who, critical of the limitations of trade unions, see active involvement in workplace struggles as important. The majority of women workers are not organized into trade unions. Therefore the questions become: 1) Is unionization preliminary to rank and file struggles? 2) What should be our participation in unionizing campaigns?

We were very active and played leadership roles in the unionizing of both the nursing homes where we worked. We hope, through critical evaluation of our experiences, that this analysis will be useful to others faced with this dilemma.

One of the questions we were asked most often is, "Why did you work there? How could you hack it?"

Burcher- I started working at St. Raphael's because I was considering going into nursing and wanted to try it out, as a nurses' aid. I had worked previously in a hospital as a ward aide (bed-maker essentially) and so was familiar with and enjoyed (as much as is possible under capitalism) hospital work. It was the only place in Kitchener-Waterloo where I could get a job in the hospital sector. (No other job openings

and lack of training, either as an R.N. or R.N.A.) Strategically, I would not choose to be there, because it employed only 60 people and was a private nursing home, whereas predominately hospital workers work directly for the state.

Lissa- I decided to work at Sunbeam after working for a few days in an electronics factory. I thought that for my survival it was important that I did work that I found basically interesting. Because I had spent some time with a friend who was mentally handicapped and lived with her family. I wanted to experience institutional care and see how that affects children who are forced to spend their lives within the confines of an institution.

Perhaps we should begin by describing the nursing homes we worked in.

Sunbeam

"Sunbeam Home for Retarded Children, Waterloo, Inc." is the official name of the institution. It started out as a private home run by Pieter and Johanna Vos, two ex-Salvation Army missionaries. The "home" expanded rapidly because of the almost total lack of facilities for young children who are mentally handicapped and in need of a lot of personal care.

The children are given custodial care but nothing more. They are kept clean and fed; they are given zinc oxide for diaper rash, aspirin for temperatures, laxatives and anti-diarrhetics, but because the attitude of the administration is one of custodial care ("taking care of these poor children") instead of trying to get them as independent and self-sufficient as possible, little if any effort is made to get the kids to feed or dress themselves, to get them talking or sitting or moving around.

Last year with a huge government grant, the home was moved from buildings scattered around Waterloo and one in the village of Doon, to a three-storey building in Kitchener, the old site of a Catholic college and next door to St. Raphael's, where Burcher worked.

There are approximately 110 employees. Most of us were classified as nurse's aids, a title which doesn't really describe our work, since in fact the aids were the people who worked with the kids and kept the place running. There was an administrative staff of five-Mr. Vos, Mr. Smith, Mr. Wisby, the comptroller, Betty Schulz, the head nurse, and Mrs. Chambers, the nurse in charge of time. Also besides the aids were a secretary, a bookkeeper, about 10 kitchen and housekeeping staff, 12 R.N.s and 6 R.N.A.s (who usually did the same work as us, except when they were more short-staffed than usual, two of the R.N.A.s, who were actually R.N.s in their home countries would be used as R.N.s and would give out medications)

Basically, the nurse's aids are responsible for the care of the children, keeping the wards running, a lot of the housekeeping-such as dusting, sweeping, cleaning tubs, sinks and windows, and folding laundry. Because there is so much work to be done-especially on

day shift, where the only time the staff has to sit down is when they're feeding someone-and never enough staff-the extra time you need just to sit and play with the kids is not there. The pressure is always on to get the folding done, the feeding finished, the ward tidy. This was discussed among the aids, and the general feeling was that the kids were the ones who suffered because we had so much work to do.

The 126 kids are divided into 9 wards: a special care ward, for the children who need extra nursing care; a ward with about 10 kids who are in a nursery school room for part of the day; the ward where I worked-"big kids"-24 kids, 15 of whom were in a playroom during the day and 9 bed patients. The "playroom" was a big empty room with a few broken toys. During the days, most of the kids either sat around or lied around the playroom. The attention of the 2 or 3 aids down there was pretty well taken up with the kids who were being "bad".(climbing in the sink, going out the fire door, banging their heads on the furniture out of sheer frustration) In fact, since there were no creative outlets for their energy that were considered "good" the "bad" kids were the active ones, the "good" kids the quiet ones. The other wards were a mixture of kids pretty well all of whom were bed patients with a couple of kids in wheel chairs or walkers. Most of the others could have been supported in wheel chairs or special chairs but because there were so few, and because that's extra work that none of the aids have time for, the bed patients see nothing of the world beyond their crib-not a very stimulating environment.

I should make it clear that I think the institution itself is rotten. The idea of places like Sunbeam is to isolate "abnormal" kids from the rest of society instead of trying to get them as independent and self-sufficient as possible and to integrate them with the rest of the community.

For most of the kids, their surroundings consist of the 4 sides of their crib and people in white uniforms who feed and change them.

A lot of the kids are "retarded" not because of "natural" causes but because they were improperly delivered at birth(because of a forceps delivery) or they were born hydrocephalic. (A condition where cerebro-spinal fluids accumulate in the brain due to a blockage. Because the fluids remain in the head, it grows extremely large. Brain cells are destroyed and mental retardation results.) The doctors at the time decided against inserting a shunt(an operation which can prevent further destruction of brain cells and keep the head a relatively normal size, giving them the chance of leading a more normal life. If it's caught early enough, the child will not be retarded at all.) because "they'll only live a few months anyway" and now they're 11 or 12 or 13 and totally bedridden because their head is too heavy to lift. Some were born as "normal" children and their parents took out their frustrations with the horrors of their lives on the kid, and they call it a "battered baby" and blame the parents and give the kid to Children's Aid who give them to institutions like Sunbeam who give them as little as they possibly can and call it "charity".

St. Raphael's

The nursing home I worked in was a privately-owned one, one of a chain of four, owned by a lawyer from Toronto. They had bought an old seminary and had, or were rather in the process, of converting it to a nursing home. It had only been open 2 months by the time I started. The place was in chaos. They were operating without enough and proper equipment and were admitting patients faster than they were hiring staff. Management played on our concern for the patients, expecting us to "help the out" until they were "better organized". That meant after working a 7 or 8 day stretch, coming in on our day off (overtime pay was never heard of) or working a double shift (from 7 a.m. to 10 at night) as well as running twice as hard on the job.

The nursing home housed 150 patients when full. Most of the patients were on the government's new "Extendicare" plan. The plan was designed for people who don't need full nursing care—that means that they aren't sick and don't require bedside care but they need assistance in getting dressed, or their meals made, or they need the "protective institutional environment." While the plan was supposedly created to alleviate the shortage of beds in both chronic and active treatment hospitals and to aid the elderly poor, in fact it was easy money for nursing home operators who had guaranteed payments from OHIP. Previously to get partial or full government coverage you had to be sick enough to get into a hospital bed and there were too many old people taking these beds who were not seriously ill. The government set a ceiling on the amount operators could charge on the amount operators could charge for different types of coverage. As in hospitals, there are the distinctions between private, semi-private and ward coverage. (Basically meaning whether you shared a room with 2 or 3 other people and a washroom or maybe even had to walk down the hall to a washroom. If you had private coverage, a washroom came intact with your private room.) What that meant was that for ward coverage the government paid \$9.50 of the \$12.50 maximum nursing homes could charge. The remaining \$3.00 came out of their old age pension, which, on quick calculation, shows it doesn't leave a hell of a lot of spending money.

The patients were for the most part elderly and had the classic diseases and conditions of the old—diabetes, heart conditions, stroke victims, arthritis, and senility, but also included younger patients, that is, people in their 30's and 40's some with paralysis, like cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or else "mental patients", some of these alcoholics. However, most of the patients could do things for themselves and only needed assistance in dressing or getting into wheel chairs.

The patients were housed on 3 floors, the first floor being predominately private patients. Of course, this was the only floor with broadloomed carpets, a colour T.B. in the lounge and air conditioning in the summer. In contrast the third floor had the bed patients and the senile patients. Most of the senile patients spent their days either in bed sleeping or sitting in the lounge in geriatric chair. (An

awkward overgrown high-chair with casters underneath it to push it around and a table in front supposedly to eat on, but more often used as a restraint to hold them in.) Here they "watched" T.V. slept or more often sat in a drugged stupor, yelled to be let out, or talked to themselves. We were upset by their behaviour, but saw it as a reflection of the position of old people in this society, that their lives were over because they were no longer productive and their families had too many pressures to look after them, so put them away. We liked them and were so frustrated that there was never enough time to talk to them. They were lucky if they received the minimum of custodial care.

This was the hardest floor to work on. It required the most lifting - we had to lift them in and out of bed, in and out of bathtubs, in and out of wheel chairs and geriatric chairs. It had the most shit work - cleaning up "puddles" of urine and changing soiled clothes and bedding. The work also demanded patience. We felt it was wrong to take our frustrations with the way the nursing home was run out on the patients.

But despite the noise and the work many of us preferred to work on the third floor rather than the first floor where the "R.B.'s" (Rich Bitches) were. They were more demanding, expecting instant service, treating us as maids. Generally speaking (and from other hospital experiences) working-class patients were nicer to care for. They were less demanding only asking for assistance when really needed and were truly appreciative of help, whereas upper-class patients expect servitude.

The number of staff varied because of the rapid turnover but when the unionizing started number about 50-55, all women with the exception of one male housekeeper and the husband of the Director of Nurses. The figure of 50-55 staff is somewhat deceiving because a good third of them were part-time.

Hospital Hierarchy and Guerilla Activity

Although we worked in different nursing homes we found common phenomena around the problem of hierarchal job classification and people's view of their work.

One of the first things you notice when you start working in a hospital or nursing home is the hierarchal job structure. You enter the hospital with a certain job classification and you stay there. There is no mobility even though your work may be identical to that of the more trained and higher paid workers (i.e. R.N.'s and R.N.A.'s). At the bottom are the housekeeping, laundry and kitchen staff. One step above them are nurses' aids hired only by chronic and geriatric hospitals and nursing homes. Because the patients are not seriously ill and don't require constant medical care but do need assistance coping with their daily needs, trained staff is not deemed necessary. In fact many aides do develop skills supposedly restricted to "Professionals". For example one of us was giving medications and accompanying Doctors on rounds (functions legally restricted to R.N.'s). In fact, aides are a cheap source of labour, many not making more than minimum wage. We got \$1.88 and \$2.00 an hour.

R.N.A.'s are caught in the middle. Like the R.N.'s they have a professional association and government certified training program. However in hospitals

they do the menial tasks, those performed by aides in nursing homes. It is standard practice in union contracts to include R.N.A.'s but not R.N.'s in the bargaining unit.

R.N.'s in nursing homes usually do the more "skilled" tasks of pushing pills, phoning doctors and changing dressings. But more important they supervise the aides. R.N.'s prefer to work in hospitals where work is more specialized and allows them to make use of their training. Most R.N.'s come from working-class and rural families and are attracted to the professional ideology that surrounds "nurses".

We want to distinguish again the differences between nursing homes and hospitals. In hospitals job classifications are defined to the last detail (such as people in which category empty bed pans) and are strictly upheld and reinforced by the union contract. Whereas in nursing homes job classifications are not strictly adhered to for several reasons. One is because the nursing homes are smaller, usually not organized into trade unions.

In our experience the nurses aides were the only ones critical of the professional ideology of the R.N.'s because it meant that they sat on their arses while we worked ours off. Because we knew the total needs of the patients and how much work is to be done we become resentful when because of the job classifications work is not shared equally. The resentment becomes more intense when those not working are the ones making the most money. We (all the nurses' aides) differentiated between the R.N.'s who we considered lazy or incompetent and the "good nurses" who were more capable and were not surrounded by a protective aura of professionalism and did not consider working on the wards beneath them.

The issue of job classification was challenged on a daily basis. Nurses aides attempted to equalize work by articulating our feelings about the unequal work load to the R.N.'s, by coercion sometimes and even occasionally by doing their work if they were extra busy. Historically the movement to define jobs was needed because management was using cheap labour to do skilled jobs unless those jobs were strictly classified and recognized. Job classification became a standard demand in union contracts. The question faces us in a dual way which at first glance appears contradictory. On the one hand we must fight management's attempt to use cheap labour and escape hiring skilled workers who cost them more. But on the other hand, it is necessary to break down false divisions among the class.

This is a two-edged battle. We demand job classification from management as self-defence against them imposing extra work on us. Amongst ourselves we break down those divisions and help one another because our interests are the same. It is a question of control, whether they decide the organization of work or whether we do.

Because the union has institutionalized the relationship between labour and capital through the bourgeois legal structure - as represented by the contract - they oppose us breaking down job description on the floor. For example, when we complained that the R.N.'s did not help us on the floor, the response of the unions was that the home should hire

more nurses' aides. This response from the union did not deal with the question of job classification.

When new aides start, the first question that is asked about them is whether or not they are good workers. This may seem strange to those whose experience is in the industrial workplace. However, in the hospital it is extremely important because work not done by one person means that it has to be done by someone else.

Work is often organized collectively. (i.e. two people are responsible for 24 patients instead of one for 12.) Because of that if you care for only 8 patients (and do a sloppy job) the other person has to rush to finish the work.

?1 Unlike factories where you are producing commodities of questionable use value, hospital workers see the usefulness in the work they do. No matter how boring or menial the job is, or how awful the working conditions are, you still want to do your best for the patients' sake. The "service" ethic is easily exploitable by management but at the same time it is a major force for the radicalization of hospital workers. Precisely because we see the direct value of our services and daily see that poor care is the result of management's "rationalization" of resources and their attempts to save money and increase profits. We both had discussions with women at work around the fact that management was the major obstacle to improved patient care and easily made the links to that we could run the nursing homes ourselves which would simultaneously improve our working conditions and the quality of patient care.

UNIONIZING EXPERIENCES

St. Raphael's

The organizing campaign came partially out of a struggle around not being paid overtime for Christmas Day. At the same time the union organizer was trying to get names of people who might be interested in a union.

The Christmas season was particularly hectic in the nursing home and for us it was the breaking point with management. Because of the newness of the home we had gone along with "helping them out", "doing our extra bit", and "trying to understand", but after Christmas we were fed up.

Wanda
? We were all under pressure with the Christmas season. It meant extra work at home - Christmas shopping, housecleaning, Christmas baking, families coming to visit as well as excited children to contend with. At the nursing home, because Christmas time is traditionally a "family time" the relatives came to visit and to take out their long-forgotten parent and aunts and uncles. It meant extra work for us because we had to dress and prepare the patients and to sign them out. We were also incredibly short-staffed partly because some women had quit because they couldn't stand the working conditions but also

because there had been a feeble attempt by management to arrange our schedules so that we could get either a few days off around Christmas or New Year's. To piss us off even more management had asked some of us to work from 7 in the morning to 10 at night Christmas Day, meaning that there was no time at all to spend with our families. Half of us who did work Christmas Day drove 50 miles after work to spend part of the day with our families. (of course reporting in at 7 the next morning) We also wanted the patients to have a good Christmas but we realized that it was just impossible. We were just too short-staffed, our working conditions were intolerable and we were becoming collectively hostile and antagonistic to management.

When we received our first paycheck after Christmas Day we were mad because none of us were paid overtime for Christmas Day. By provincial law, employers who work one of the 7 legal statutory holidays must be paid time and a half. Independently of each other, I and another woman had phoned the Department of Labour, enquiring about that, fully expecting the home not to pay us. We had told everyone that we were entitled to it, so when we opened our checks and found that no one was paid we were angry. We told everyone to go down to the office and demand it. An hour later when the parttime staff was going home, 2 of them came and got me and said "we're going down together." It was all so quick. I was the first through the door, so I said quite strongly, but not quite hostilely, "By law we are entitled to overtime pay. Did you know that or was there some mistake in the computer making out our checks?" They made it look as if the computer had done it, but we knew that they were trying to get away without paying us. They pacified us, taking our stubs and telling us it would be fixed up on the next pay. We felt that we had won a small victory and went upstairs telling everyone to take their slips down to the office. In half an hour the Director had gone around and told everyone herself that the computer had made a mistake, that she had phoned the Dept. of Labour to enquire about the legislation, but that their personnel policy was so much better because we were entitled to a day off in lieu of overtime pay. (What a break!) But because of our anger, she had found out that someone was going to phone the Labour Board and lay a complaint. Inadvertently, I had said to someone that I was going to phone. (I couldn't remember who in the confusion of the moment) When I heard that, I decided to lay low for another month (my 3 month probation would be up by then-not that it meant anything) realizing that I had become identified to management as a shit-disturber.

The next day, Joan came up to me and said, "Betty, what do you think of a union in here?" No knowing whether to trust her or not, because I knew someone had gone to management, and not clear on what a union would do, I waffled and said, "Well, it might be a good thing. But I don't know". She then said, "Don't tell anyone, Betty, I'm really scared. I don't want Schelters (the Director and her husband) to know." I knew that she was sincere, so the next day I arranged to work with her. We talked about what a union would do. She told me that a guy in the union at Sunnyside had asked her mother-in-law, who worked there, to get names from her of people at St. Raphael's. She didn't know the name of the guy, nor of the union. Sunnyside is a large municipal nursing home, which has been organized by Service

Employees International Union (SEIU) for 9 years. It boasts one of the best nursing-home hospital contracts in Ontario and it is well-known in the K-W area as a good place to work. (Aids there start at \$2.55/hr and go up to \$2.95/hr after a year)

The Union Organizer

I presumed the guy in the union was Bill Morrison, the union organizer in the K-W area for SEIU. I had met him earlier in the summer through the Dare strike. His wife is a striker at Dare's and through her he became active with the militants in the strike. Bill Morrison is not a typical union bureaucrat. He has been in Canada 10 years, coming from England, and is a socialist trade unionist. He worked as an electrician in one of the K-W hospitals, and moved up to the position of organizer through the ranks of the union. Essentially, though, he is a trade unionist through and through. Although we agreed on some of the problems of unions, such as the lack of participation of the rank and file and the control by the American International, he saw that the unions had to change and be fighting rank and file unions like they were in the 30's. Here we disagreed. We saw that the trade union movement had played a historically useful role in improving the conditions of the working class, but that to gain control of the workplace had to develop separately from the union. Whereas he saw all rank and file activity developing through the union structure and the union movement being the vanguard of the working class. He has a profound hatred for intellectuals and analytical thought and criticism, and did not separate the two. He was hostile and snidely critical of our study group, lambasting us for hanging around "academics" (because most of the group were still students). To him activity in the trade union movement (and leadership of those unions by leftists) was the only viable activity for socialists. Anything else was bullshit and a waste of time.

I sent word to Bill through one of the Dare strikers, that I wanted to talk to him. He phoned me up the next day and I spent 3 hours talking to him, asking him about the union, what sort of things the union would push for in a contract, what was the grievance procedure like, how you started organizing, did the local have any autonomy in the International and so on and then, talked about hospital workers and how could we get anywhere with no-strike legislation. Essentially I was feeling him out and trying to distinguish between what was the reality of the union and what he would like it to be or thought possible and how he saw rank and file struggles developing in the hospital sector. I was not upfront at all about my perspective because I was not clear how to relate to a non-unionized shop. He wanted me to sign a union card, five of his names and be the "inplant person", but I refused, saying that I wouldn't until I had talked it over with the other women and we decided what to do. Unknown to him, I had phoned CUPE and asked if they organized private nursing homes, and if we wanted, would they come up and talk to several women.

Why SEIU?

The question of why SEIU and not CUPE is the question I have been asked most often and I think it important to describe how that happened because it is tied up with how I saw my role. I was very much in a quandry about should we get a union in and whether it should be CUPE or SEIU. Fortunately our study group was meeting at that point and was useful to help me clarify the questions. I decided that a union was necessary as a form of self-defense and that it would improve the working conditions. At least our wages would increase, we would have job security and spelled out working conditions.

I was perplexed about SEIU and CUPE. Previously, I had worked in a CUPE hospital and although I knew that CUPE was Canadian and at least on paper guaranteed local autonomy, the union was seen by most of the workers as Joe and Albert-(pres. and vice-pres.)-no conception that the union was all of us. In Kitchener, CUPE is in only a few shops, whereas all the organized hospitals and nursing homes are in SEIU. (One hospital which is now being organized and the two nursing homes where we worked were the largest places left unorganized.) I thought at that point that it would be easier to build links with other hospital workers if we were in the same union although I recognized that CUPE allowed more local autonomy. I wanted to talk it over with the women at work, but unfortunately we were either sick or off so Bill had signed up the first woman (Joan) before we could talk it over.

The last thing I wanted to see was a jurisdictional fight between SEIU and CUPE as I saw that only dividing us. Also, I didn't want me to make that decision for the other women by phoning CUPE and signing with them and asking them to come in.

The Organizing

Joan was the first woman signed up by Bill. I was the second. That was on the Tuesday and on the weekend I signed up my friend Bev. The following Tues. we had our first meeting and a week later the union applied for automatic certification. The whole signing up was incredible-it happened so quickly-so much faster than I expected it would. We (essentially Bev, Joan and I-we played a leadership position in the ensuing struggle) signed up people at work and we went out every night to the women's homes.

It was not difficult to sign up the women. Because of the newness of the place, management had not organized the work and did not try to integrate, nor did they teach us any nursing skills. Rather, they stayed in their offices while we on the floors organized ourselves to get the work done, figured out the nursing skills or nabbed an R.N. to show us, but essentially we taught and organized ourselves. This was important because not only did it bring us together in opposition against the management but also it gave us a sense of power so it was not difficult to take collective action. There were other reasons why signing up was so easy. On the weekend before 2 separate things

appeared in the K-W paper. One was an article stating that Sunnyside Home had just concluded their contract negotiations and that aids would now start at \$2.55/hr. The other was an ad St. Raphael's had placed in the paper advertising for patients. It was a very slick con job, stating that the nursing home employed a staff of 80 (in reality there were 50) "trained in nursing skills and especially selected for their sympathy and sensitivity to the elderly". It described the place in such glowing details, which were outright lies, that it sounded like a good place to work!

But perhaps the most important single factor in the ease of signing women up was that we did it ourselves from the inside. Bill was only there in the wings or driving us or talking to the more resistant women.

Although initially I intended to be critically supportive of the union, explaining that unions could only go so far in improving working conditions, the signing up happened so quickly and I got caught up in the momentum that I did not do as much as I intended to. Also-when you are "pushing" the union, you tend to push for it more strongly than you actually know-that it can come through it. Joan, Ben and I were identified as the "pushers". We didn't initially see ourselves as the leadership but realized through the signing that we could depend on each other to come through and to stick our necks out. But as much as we were the leadership, we consciously tried to bring in as many women as possible into signing up and talking to other women began to see our role was more of confidence-support. We were the ones who always said "yes, the union will get in if we all stick together" and "yes, we will win."

Through this we realized each other's strengths and weaknesses and supported each other. Joan was more gutsy and she often would initiate talking whereas I was more "reasonable" and so we worked well together. We also discovered that women who were nice and easy-going were not necessarily the strongest sticking it out.

It wasn't until the day the union applied for automatic certification that management even knew we were talking about a union. Because the signing up was an inside and more collective phenomenon, it meant that instead of 1 or 2 people judging what others were like we had a much more collective opinion. We could leave the ones who would tattletale to management to the end. So we approached them that day and got into heavy arguments and sure enough it got back. The next day the Director and her lackey were on the floor and as sweet as pie to us, but the following day (when they probably received notification from the Labour Board about the application) they called a staff meeting. Our hearts all went to our feet-we knew what it was about. We assembled, all looking the models of pose and dignity, but quaking on the inside.

They told us what they thought of unions, essentially that they weren't for them (of course not, it wasn't in their interests), that they were "hurt" that we had gone and done this behind their back. Wouldn't we please give them a chance to get the place more organized?" and "Why, we don't understand. Our doors are always open. Come down and air your complaints." (sure and be fired-6 people had been already.)

We all sat tight refusing to say anything. But the effect of the meeting brought out the scabs. One woman went directly to the directors, telling them who the "pushers" were.

Legally, the surest way to oppose granting of automatic certification is that a petition must be circulated by employees opposing the union. There is supposed to be no collaboration between management and those employees opposed to the union. Well, that's what the law states. However, a lawyer was called in by management who suggested to the scabs in the kitchen to start the petition.

By this time the home was divided between those supporting the union one side and management and the scabs on the other. Friendships were broken up. Scabs were being called scabs. We isolated the scabs by refusing to talk to them or staring them directly in the eye. Management started to retaliate by dividing up the "pushers." Bev and I who had always travelled to and from work together and were always on the same shift and same days were separated. I was put on nights and the rest of the time on the hardest floor. I hated the night shift. It was bad enough working because it messed up sleeping (I'd work 2 nights, then 2 days, and back on nights without a day off) but also the steady night shift as a block had refused to sign up, and were hostile to us. Joan was put under a lot of pressure. She would always get the shit for something all of us had done. Also, management were able to get a fellow-employee (but ass-licker scab) to complain about her work. Joan was under so much pressure that in the 2 months between signing up and the time the vote was finally taken that she ended up in hospital for 5 days and finally quit. Bev they tried to buy off. The Director praised her for her "good nursing care" and opened all the doors for her to enter a nursing course.

The hearing at the Labour Board took place 2 weeks after the union filed for automatic certification. The petition was a major piece of evidence, particularly as 4 people who signed union cards had also signed the petition. It's a numbers game too. Although we thought that we had over the required 65% the "neutral" labour board found that some worked less than 24 hours (and were therefore part-time) and that some had quit.

The union lawyer went for a compromise, a delaying tactic where the labour board would go into the home to investigate who was eligible for the bargaining unit. They didn't come until 3 weeks later. Another compromise happened at that point. The union agreed to go to a vote rather than back to the board. The vote was not set until the 2nd of April. (the union had filed for certification on the 30th of Jan.)

One of the difficulties we faced is that the struggle around getting the union in lost momentum. Essentially it was because of the delaying procedures of getting certification from the Labour Board. Although the trade union movement has certain legal rights around the rights of employees to belong to unions, it is only on paper couched in such legalistic jargon and practices, that most people can't understand it. We got discouraged and frustrated and lost our

collective sense of power that we could improve our conditions. However around the vote there was a fair amount of enthusiasm generated and it lasted for a while but the dealy of getting into bargaining furthered the frustration.

Sunbeam

The organizing campaign at Sunbeam began with the granting of certification ot St. Raphael's. I was the first person to sign a union card. About 3 weeks later the 2nd person signed. In the nest 5 weeks we singed another 68 people and applied for automatic certification. The labour Board hearing is next week.

Unlike St. Raphael's we didn't have people going out every evening to sing others up. I worked straight evenings (3-11p.m.) for the entire 7 months I was there, with the exception of 1 week on days, during the organizing for my "practical training" (after I'd been there 5 months, they showed me how to give a bath properly). That made it impossible for me to go out except on my evenings off- and since my usual schedule was 9 days on, 2 days off, 6 days on, 4 days off, that didn,t happen very often.

Most people were signed up at work, by people who worked with them. (i.e. 2 aids on days did most of the signing up of day staff, I was signing evening staff and one woman on nights got those she worked with.)

For most of the people the extra money we would make after unionization was the major reason they signed. We were "salaried" employees, not paid by the hour. This was their way of making our job sound "professional." Our "salary" was \$326/month, which works out to \$1,88/hr. if you work a 40 hour week. But since we often worked more than 80 hours ina 2 week period, our paychecks would work out to less than minimum wage. The aids at Sunnyside, a nusing home nearby us, were starting at \$2.55/hr, \$2.75 after 6 months and \$2.95 after 1 year. Also at Sunbeam, overtime was unheard of, as was time and a half for statutory holidays.

But for a lot of the staff, the issue of patient care was also important. A union contract would mean that we would nto have to do housekeeping work and could spen more time with the kids. It would also mean less of a staff turnover, (last year it was over 100%) because the pay would be good enough that people could afford to stay and work there. We talked a lot about what such a high turnover meant to the kids. Since staff for the most part didn't stay long, care was not consistent and they could not develop any lasting relationships.

We also talked about the role of the Voses. At the staff Christmas party and at Mrs. Vos' "farewell" party, Mr. Vos made speeches about how hard their work had been how "god has been good to us" and that "God has given us strength." To the community the Voses appear as the epitomy of charitable sacrifice. In reality. they've become millionaires off the suffering of those children.

They now have the audacity to call their work "charity".

Working there, barely making enough to live on yourself, knowing how much some extra money for equipment, toys and staff would have meant for the kids, and then finding out, that that money, instead of helping the kids, or paying you a decent wage, instead pays for the Vos' holidays in Jamaica, or their huge house in Conestoga, and hearing it all done in the name of religious sacrifice really gets people mad. We saw through their facade of "charity" and realized that more money for us would hurt only the Vos' bank account, not the kids. And since, as far as we could gather, the home is now being totally run on government money, it wasn't even clear how much it would effect the Voses.

I was not analytical at all about getting heavily involved in the organizing. Throughout the organizing campaign at St. Raphael's I was critical of Burcher's heavy involvement. I think now that I was criticizing her without understanding the pressure she was under, especially from Morrison. Because he's an "old leftie" he knew very effectively how to pressure and guilt both of us, using political language. For instance- when I told my friends at work I was leaving they said, "We'll miss you." or asked why and understood that there wasn't much to bind me to Kitchener. Whereas Morrison tried to guilt me by saying, "Why do you want to go off with all your academic friends? this is where the Real Politics are. We're going to take over this town." "Take over" meant that trade union candidates would have a majority on city council and that radical unionists would control the Labour Council.

Unlike St. Raphael's, Sunbeam management said and did nothing throughout the organizing campaign. What I concluded from that was that Vos probably hadn't caught on to what was happening, but that Smith had, and had decided to say nothing. From what we could gather, Smith did not get along with Vos and probably felt caught between trying to run things "efficiently" and carrying out Vos' latest whim. (For instance- one of the most active women was alone in the Big Kids playroom with the 15 kids, while the one other nurse's aid working with her was on break. Vos came in and told her to take the kids outside for lunch. She refused, saying she could not possible watch all the kids and get them outside, then bring their food outside, feed the kids (It's even harder outside than in, since there's all that mud to eat if you're outside) and then bring the dishes and the kids back even with the help of the other aid. She told him that there just was not enough staff. Needless to say, he got extremely uptight, called the head nurse, Betty Schulz and Smith, and she threatened to walk out if they made them take the kids out. Smith and Schulz supported her, told vos it couldn't be done and Smith sent another aid to try and convince her not to quit. She told me later that if it hadn't been for the organizing she would have left then.

But despit his liberal front Smith was a pig and we used that when talking to people. He had a habit (he did it to me twice the week I was on days) of tip-toeing up unnoticed while you were engrossed in your work, watching you for a while silently, and then saying

something like "what do you think you're doing here?" in an authoritarian voice directly over your shoulder. I was really worried that he'd do that someday while I was holding one of the kids and that out of surprise, I'd drop them.

He also fired a number of women. They just got a letter one day saying their work wasn't satisfactory. That scared us, but it also made us mad that he didn't have the guts to say it to your face. He held most of the staff in contempt. When I went in to give my resignation, he told me that he would always take me back because I was "no worse than any of the others." What a put down, not only of me, but of all the aids. One remark like that can break down all the crap they give you in a place like Sunbeam (especially from Vos) about being "one, big, happy family."

Realizing that the management really did look down on us and think themselves superior beings, got people mad enough at the place and the way it's run to join and support the union.

i found that I got very caught up in the feverish activity of organizing. I found especially that my criticisms of the limitations of trade unions could not be brought up openly or strongly during the campaign if we were to sign up as many people as possible.

General Conclusions

1. Unions

We want to make clear here, the position we have come to on the question of "unions." There seems to be an assumption, or perhaps it's just an outside definition, that the new tendency is anti-union without spelling that out. On a larger level we see unions' mediating role between labour and capital as inhibiting working class struggles (outside of contract disputes organized by the union), organization (outside of the trade union structure) and consciousness (outside of trade union consciousness). To use a concept originated by Italian militants, they act as "firemen" within working class struggles. Historically they have played a useful role in improving the conditions of the working class. However, unions have fought to determine the rate of exploitation of labour power, instead of fighting to end wage labour. Inherent in the labour contract is both economic gain, in terms of wage increases and fringe benefits, but also the provision of a stable disciplined labour force for the employer. This includes: 1) guarantee by the union not to strike or to have work stoppages only at the end of the contract. 2) a bureaucratic and hierarchical grievance procedure which removes control over grievances away from the shop floor. 3) "management's prerogatives" where the union agrees to cede to the employer the operations and organization of the workplace, the rights to hire, fire, suspend, lay off, etc.

For most workers, the trade unions remain basic organizations of defense of their immediate economic interests against the employers- but they tend to see them as collectors of insurance premiums (i.e. check off \$5.00/month) in return for services.

It is not enough to say that the problem is the American domination and control of the union movement in Canada. Certainly that is one aspect of the problem and we are not taking that lightly, but we must come to grips with the more fundamental problem- that we have outlined above. However, this is not to say that forming a union is contradictory to our perspective. Rather, what we want to see developing is autonomous, rank and file activity and organization. At different points in history and in different sectors that does and will take different forms. For instance, it may take the form of organizing a rank and file committee (perhaps to take over the union structure for a particular purpose or to work separately and independently of it). It may be workers deciding not to have anything to do with a union (e.g. 100 engineers in Vancouver disaffiliated from C.B.R.T.). It may be a breakaway from an International union to form a Canadian union. It may be a straight unionizing struggle, or it may be things like we discussed in the earlier part of the paper (activity to break down job classification). We don't see consciousness changing linearly (i.e. form a union and from that people develop trade union consciousness and then go beyond it to develop revolutionary consciousness.)

2. Leadership

The question of our leadership in both situations must be evaluated. At the outset, both of us were quite definite that we would be critical of the limitations of trade unionism. However, we both got caught up in the momentum. Our criticisms of trade unions would dissuade people from signing up and we needed as many cards as possible. Neither of us wanted to get put in the position of becoming the chair person of the unit because we were under a lot of pressure from both Bill and the other women. The women said to Burcher, "You're single; you have the time; you can talk." Bill said to us, "They need leadership by people who understand." (i.e. leftist trade-unionists).

One of the hardest things to break down is people's cynicism, their feeling that they are powerless, that they can change nothing. The hierarchical and authoritarian conditions that is so important to the functioning of capitalism makes it really difficult to break out of the conception that other people do things for you and represent your interests.

For instance- when some of the women brought up how shitty the union was in the rubber plants where their husbands worked, they said, "Thacker's no good. They need good leadership."

Having a perspective of encouraging and building towards rank and file struggles but faced with authoritarian conditioning that encourages "leadership" we have a problem. We found that we played more of a leadership role than we wanted to admit. Although we tried to emphasize that it was all of us in it together, the women looked to us for suggestions of what we should do. We spent a lot of time just trying to encourage confidence in the women, that

they individually and collectively were capable of acting.

Looking back, we are critical of the heavy leadership roles that we played because we knew we were leaving and would not be part of any continuing struggles. Things would be more likely to fall apart when we were removed. After the union was in at St. Raphael's a woman was fired and no one did anything, not even tell the union. If Joan and Burcher had still been there, they wouldn't have let that happen.

3. Women and Work

The women's movement theorizes that women have two jobs. We didn't have to tell them that. They told us about the hell of being mothers and housewives and working outside the home.

Everyone recognizes the difficulty of getting women to meetings. Some of the women managed to get out to meetings and get out to sing up other women because their husbands were sympathetic to getting the union in. But if their husbands weren't sympathetic they wouldn't risk it. We were vehement that the union was to pay for babysitting so that the women with children could come to meetings.

One of the things we found important were the neighbourhood links, not only between the women themselves, but between the women at St. Raphael's, Sunbeam, Sunnyside, St. Mary's Hospital and Dare's. We talked about the other places recognizing that we all had similar interests. It was from this that we learned that links within the community could be useful in workplace organizing.

We all learned a lot. Looking back, Joan said it for us all, "I'm not sorry about what I did. I learned about people. I learned about unions. And I learned about women's rights."

Note- We found the following articles helpful:

- 1) "Hospital workers: A case Study of the New Working Class"
Monthly Review Vol. 24 number 8
B. and J. Ehrenreich
- 2) "Trade Unionism and Workers Control"
Stanley Aronowitz
in Workers' Control
ed. Humius, Garson and Case.
- 3) Union Committeemen
Martin glaberman
(Facing Reality pamphlet)
- 4) Facing Reality
C.L.R. James
- 5) A Woman's Place
Selma James

Postscript

On June 18th, Sunbeam won automatic certification at the Labour Board hearing. Momentum amongst the women seems to have declined a lot. None of them came to the hearing. Morrison didn't go out of his way to get people to come, either. An interesting point- the lawyer who represented St. Raphael's management was also at the Sunbeam hearing. It seems he's Chairman of the Sunbeam board of Directors.

Betty Burcher
Lissa Donner

ORGANIZING NOTES

We hope to make this section a continuing feature in the newsletter. Leaflets from workplace struggles, sections from rank and file papers, etc., will be reprinted to give concrete examples of political practise within the working class. In this way we can both generalize experience and widen the boundaries of criticism and exchange concerning the methods of workplace struggle. We welcome any contributions, content or critique, for this section.

Workers Councils And The Windsor Auto Plants

Introduction:

This short piece is an attempt to provide some background information concerning the two leaflets passed out in Chrysler's Motor Plant (#2). An analysis of "why workers councils" instead of "through the union" as a political strategy will be discussed in some detail in later issues of the newsletter. Right now, it will suffice to point out some of the history and particulars of the Plant #2 struggle.

1) Three years ago a group of workers from Plant #2 and a number of "outside" militants formed an organisation called "Workers Unity". Two members of this group were elected to the positions of plant chairman and night steward. Their platform, as well as attacking the local union leadership before them also contained the idea of organizing workers councils as a means of direct participation of the rank and file. Although these workers were initially quite militant after the election the notion of workers councils lay dormant. In fact it was not raised again until the next election.

2) Paquette and Brophy, the two who started the "rank and file action committee" leaflets, are from two different backgrounds. Paquette, an original member of Workers Unity, has worked at Chrysler's for five years. Strongly supportive of the idea of workers councils, he soon became disillusioned with the practice of the two elected "Worker's Unity" members. After a period where no real effort was made to organize the councils, he broke with the group, and remained rather isolated and inactive until recent efforts.

Brophy, on the other hand, was an outside militant who had developed contacts with some of the ex-Worker's Unity people. After collectively organizing a bookstore, he went to work in Chrysler's. He has worked there for nine months. The combination of an experienced worker plus an ex-student radical has offered an interesting relationship that will be discussed in a later paper.

3) As mentioned previously, just before the recent election, the plant chairman and night steward issued a leaflet in the plant discussing worker's council. In short the two main features of their proposal were: 1) that there should be one worker's council for the whole plant with elected delegates from each department; 2) the council should be responsible to the plant union leadership. They went so far as to post sheets for nominations in each department. These went up a couple of weeks before the elections and remained there until about a month after the election. They were then taken down and nothing further was heard of them.

4) After waiting for almost two months we issued our first leaflet on May 1st. The leaflet contained our position that: 1) worker's councils were a possible alternative of the rank and file which was being left in the lurch by the union; and 2) that they should be responsible only to workers themselves. The reaction to the first leaflet was generally positive, but many felt it was not concrete enough.

Our second leaflet was issued in response to three issues: 1) intimidation by the union over our first leaflet; 2) a concrete description of the worker's councils and 3) a reaction to the plant management's new form of co-optation-Total Involvement program.

The reaction to this leaflet was very positive against the union's intimidation; mixed feedback about Total Involvement, and almost nothing about Worker's Councils.

5) We are presently trying to build a broader Rank and File Committee and will not issue further leaflet until this task is completed.

" OPEN LETTER TO PLANT 2 RANK AND FILE

May 1

OUR POSITION

We feel that as workers in Plant 2, it is important that we bring forth our ideas about what is happening in the plant and how it affects us. Past leaflets have been used as platforms for organizing opposition to the union leadership (local or plant) or as a device to attain union positions. This is not our purpose.

A rank and file movement is the beginning, and a way to work out our daily problems that we face at work. Past experience has taught us that even the "best intentioned" union leadership cannot alter our relationship with management. Speedup, boredom, exhaustion and

harassment (just to mention a few conditions) are permanent features of the life of the worker. Negotiations with the boss haven't solved this. Even though the UAW brass talks about "humanizing the workplace" and the plant management pushes "total involvement", we all know that this is bull shit. The real problems we encounter can only be resolved through the organized effort of the rank and file. Leaving our problems with elected representatives has further aggravated the situation (you can't vote your problems away)

"Because it has ^a failed to engage itself with the problems that do us during our working days and haunt our dreams at night, trade union policy has not engaged the rest of us, or at least the best in us. If people seem passive, the cause may lie less in them than in a system that evades and confuses the real issues rather than sharpening or resolving them."

We produce more commodities with less guys year after year no matter who we elect.

Workers councils are posed as a solution to the problems of the plant. We agree that this is so only if these councils are organized from and responsible to the rank and file. Labour history has continually proven that only through united action by the workers can real change be affected.

WHAT ARE WORKERS COUNCILS?

Workers councils were born from the struggle to break the tyranny of the boss; a necessary fight against the terrible conditions the worker was forced to endure. Time and time again militant workers were fired or beaten down. To protest this situation as individuals was hopelessly suicidal. The core of this struggle were workers, who through their own combined efforts built an active resistance movement right inside the shop. Because they were on the shop floor the workers councils were able to understand the conditions and clearly define the course of action that was necessary. This is the history. Today workers councils are buried, lost in a swelter of grievance committees, labour relations officials, contracts and umpires. Air conditioned, broadloomed union offices have replaced the direct involvement of the workers (1% of the membership attends monthly union meetings)

"Some people will object that the labour unions leadership has become conservative and timid only because the rank and file itself is disinterested. Union bureaucrats everywhere say that the workers would not understand or accept a more combative union policy. Experience proves them false. The truth is that the bureaucratic machines of institutionalized labour unions are afraid to lose control over the workers since the unions draw their institutional force and bargaining power from their ability to keep the producers of wealth under control. Most top union leaders are frightened by the wild uncontrollable demands and outbursts that would explode from the rank and file if the workers were free at any moment

to gather and discuss what their grudges are, what they want to do about them, and how. And this is precisely what would happen if genuine workers councils were fought for on the shop floor, i.e. if demands and actions could be decided permanently from below without control and mediation from above."

CONCLUSION

We hope that this leaflet will stimulate other rank and filers to join us in developing a movement for workers councils. If you are interested please contact us.

Thanks should be given to the men who helped distribute this leaflet. It was through their efforts that it was possible.

Gerry Paquette
9811-V8-Blocks

Jim Brophy
9824-V8-Cranks"

"LETTER FROM RANK AND FILE ACTION COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

We would like to thank all the rank and file members for their suggestions and criticisms about the leaflet on workers councils issued on May 1. Generally, we found that the vast majority of people agreed with the idea of workers councils, but felt that the leaflet was not concrete enough. The "nuts and bolts" of workers councils will be discussed in further detail later in this leaflet. But first of all, we'd likd to discuss the reaction of a member of our in-plant union leadership.

BULL TACTICS

"Beatings, gangsterism and even murders are becoming commonplace events in U.S.A. factories." This is a recent quote from our plant leadership's leaflet 'For A Canadian Contract.' In the last two years in our plant there have been a number of incidents where members of the plant leadership have "used strong arm" tactics to intimidate and silence rank and file members who have either disagreed with or refused to abide by the "leadership line." Under such harassment most of the members have remained relatively silent about such methods, fearing further reprisals.

The following is an account of one such incident that happened on May 31 on the day shift. First event, Brophy, a worker in 9824, operates the dip tank. In front of the dip tank there is a raised metal platform where the oil from the cranks drips. Not only does this metal stand cut into the boots, but the excess oil

on the platform finishes them off. In two and a half months the boots were destroyed from such wear.

The union was contacted and a meeting was arranged with Stemmler to try and get the company to provide boots as they do for certain other jobs. The meeting resulted in what you'd expect -- no new boots. Brophy told Dumouchelle, he wished to file a grievance. Leaving the meeting, he went outside to sit on the bench. about 15 minutes later, a crank foreman came outside and told Brophy that Newton, his committeeman, wanted him.

Second Event:

Showing up at the union office, Brophy is told that Newton will be back momentarily. As he waited, one of the stewards warned him to be careful about a confrontation with Newton. Before he could ask what the steward meant (he thought Newton wanted to see him about his grievance), Newton arrives. The conversation , if you can call it one, goes as follows:

Newton says: "You're Brophy."

Brophy: "yes!"

Newton: (Something to the effect) "you're nothing but a miserable cocksucker and a company stooget." (He enlarges on this topic for about a minute.)

B: "What are you trying to do, provoke me?"

N: "Yeah! Why don't you take a swing at me so I can kick your ass in."

B: "The reason you're trying to kick my ass in is because of the leaflet we put out about workers councils."

N: "ya, where did you get that leaflet?"

B: "Paquette and I wrote it. All it said was what Horn, Dumouchelle and Paquette called for two years ago when they were in Worker's Unity."

At this point, Newton asks about the boots. Brophy told him about what happened. Newton asked why hadn't Brophy come to him about the boots. Brophy said he went to Dumouchelle. Newton once again began to provoke Brophy. Brophy said he wasn't going to stand around and listen to this shit. Newton is speaking again as Brophy is walking away, "Maybe we'll be friends some day and I'll kick the shit out of you." (What a thing to look forward to.)

Physical intimidation has a long tortuous history in the workers movement. Not thirty years ago Henry Ford had goon squads beating up union organizers and sympathizers. But times change. Now when we put out leaflets it's not only the company that tries to put a job on us -- but our own union reps. It seems to us that the union leadership has switched from a role of defending the membership to a role of policing the workers and protecting the company against any rank and file dissatisfactions.

In conclusion, let it be known that sections under the UAW Constitution ("Conduct unbecoming to a union member") and sections under the Ontario Labour Relations Act (in particular Section 60) states that a union rep can be discharged from his position for such conduct.

Although we have no intention of pursuing this particular incident further, we have made contact with a labour lawyer to help any member in the plant who faces similar threats in the future. IF ANY WORKER IS CONFRONTED WITH THESE TACTICS THE RANK AND FILE ACTION COMMITTEE WILL NOT ONLY HELP TO OBTAIN ASSISTANCE THROUGH BOTH THE LOCAL UNION AND ILLEGAL CHANNELS' BUT WILL ALSO ASSIST IN INFORMING THE MEMBERSHIP OF SUCH INCIDENTS.

The rank and file action committee strongly believes that unless the rank and file shows a no-compromising attitude towards these gangster tactics, any hope of successful changes within the workplace is nil. We ask for your continuous support in a struggle that will not end soon.

WORKERS COUNCILS - THE NUTS AND BOLTS

After analyzing the reaction from our last leaflet, we see that before workers councils could be established in every department, a rank and file action committee would first be necessary. Such a committee would be composed of and organized totally by the workers in the plant without interference from management or the union leadership.

The rank and file committee believes that the workers councils should first be organized in each department and be open to anyone and everyone. There should not be one large workers council for the whole plant until the departments are organized, nor should there be elections with only a few workers involved. The committee stresses again that the councils must be organized and responsible to no one else but the workers themselves.

The first organization of the department is not for social or recreational purposes but to let the workers deal with their situation directly on an ongoing day-to-day basis.

We must break out of the idea of an individual grievance being fought (and lost) individually and assist one another to work for a more immediate and responsive method of fighting for our rights.

TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

To any sickness there are essentially two methods of treatment. One is you treat the symptoms and the other is you treat the disease. If you have a rash and you put medication on it and the rash goes away, you might assume it is a cure. If however, the rash is simply an indication of a much larger problem, say, for example, excessive tension, until the source of the problem is changed, it's very likely you will still keep suffering even if the rash is eliminated.

So it is with the company's total involvement program, and their latest effort, the carnival. Management is quite aware that most workers dislike their work. It is not easy to demand that a human being with many interests, talents and ideas, as all persons have, adjust to doing the same task hundreds of times over and over again six or seven days a week.

The company organizes production so as to receive the maximum amount of profit. The workers, on the other hand, work in order to survive. The worker does not want to live an absurd life made up of thousands of days of work with no other purpose than to eat. He is constantly trying to live a life that has real purpose, which his work won't allow. He does not want to die, as most workers do, embittered and frustrated. So there is always conflict between the ways of the company and the needs of the worker.

The company wants the highest possible production at the least possible cost. By applying this principle, management knows that the workers will be forced to work on jobs that will be repetitive, boring and in the long run deadening. To keep that production rolling faster and faster, some workers will lose hands and fingers, some will die at forty from heart attacks, some will grow old never knowing their children. The company tries to smooth over these rough edges. They try to hide the difference between us and them by indicating that we're all in this together. Somehow, between their profit and our life they expect us to believe that there is no real conflict and this is where the carnival comes in. The company treats the symptoms and not the disease.

When the company celebrates the twenty-five-millionth engine, your family will come and see this clean plant, with not noise, no production; just a big carnival with free food and entertainment. No hundred degree temperatures with you working like mad, no noisy machines so loud you can't talk, no production so no one is working so fast that they get careless and lose a limb, in fact the plant will be just the opposite. Instead of the grind it is, it will appear like a fun house.

The rank and file action committee is not opposed to the carnival per se. After all, it's your labour that pays for these free hot dogs so you might as well enjoy it. The committee believes, however, that what the company is trying to conceal from both you and your family should be discussed and known and their false picture exposed.

Three hundred years ago the Indians were given beads and trinkets, to conceal the white merchants' plan to steal their land and destroy them. These gimmicks blinded and confused them until they were defeated and left powerless and poor.

Will we make the same mistake?

Note: The above leaflets were originally printed on long coloured paper with graphics that we were unable to reproduce without excessive cost.

THE ONLY WAY TO
PURIFY THE SKY
TEM IS TO DEST
ROY IT AND START
ALL OVER AGAIN



WE MUST UNIFY
ALL RADICAL
PEOPLE FOR THE
ACCOMPLISHMENT
OF OUR OBJECTIVES



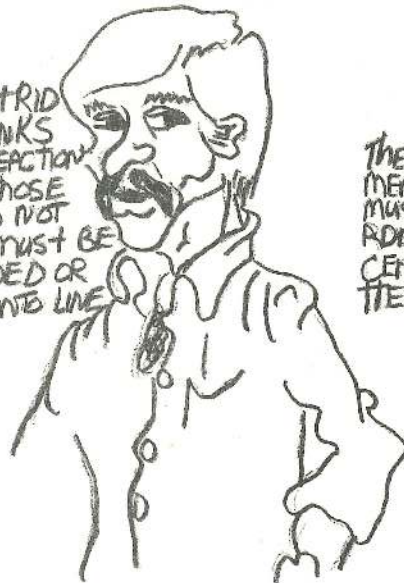
ALL PEOPLE MUST
BE HELPED TO
SEE THE NEED
FOR REVOLUTION



IDEOLOGICAL
DIFFERENCES
MUST BE SUBMER
GED AND INDIVI
DUAL PERSONALITIES
MERGED INTO THE
REVOLUTIONARY FORCE



WE MUST RID
OUR RANKS
OF ALL REACTION
ARIES. THOSE
WHO DO NOT
AGREE MUST BE
PERSUADED OR
FORCED INTO LINE



THE ENTIRE
MEMBERSHIP
MUST BE SUBO
RDINATE TO THE
CENTRAL COMMITTEE



AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL
COMMITTEE, IT IS MY DUTY TO ENFORCE
PARTY DISCIPLINE ON THE MASSES



THE REFUSAL OF WAGE LABOUR AND THE BOURGEOIS RESPONSE

That there is a whole new generation of workers less interested in working, has become painfully obvious to the bourgeoisie, all through the advanced capitalist world. They are aghast that the negative incentives to work--unemployment, firings, suspensions, etc. are no longer striking terror in young workers.

The alienation of workers, particularly the young, has become a serial subject for every business and popular magazine throughout the world. Their concern with its manifestations--massive absenteeism, costly sabotage of the product, job-hopping, slowdowns, "dogging" it on the job, wildcat strikes--is becoming an obsession. And well it might; for the refusal of wage labour has taken on international proportions. This is all particular to mass production workers, but is also becoming true of the mass white collar worker, for whom factory conditions are repeated in air-conditioned surroundings.

Having lost all loyalty to any particular job and to the idea of work in general, today's worker no longer sees him/herself as a "producer".

Recently, Italian militants have advocated a direct attack on productivity, and building a political movement around this attack. The international working class is already responding in a massive, if somewhat passive, way; and the task of a revolutionary movement is to activate this refusal--we "need the tactics of organization to actualize the strategy of refusal." ('The Struggle Against Labour', M. Tronti, Radical America, Vol. 6, No. 3)

If we are to consider building a political movement around this we must realise what kind of response the bourgeoisie will or is making, in the face of the productivity crisis. Right now, it looks as if the major response is more ameliorative than repressive. There are several types worth looking at, and although not particularly developed in Canada, are bound to be used sooner or later.

1. Restructuring the trade union movement

The orthodox approach has been to get union leaders, during negotiations, to agree to a productivity increase clause, tied to a wages-benefit increase--a recent example was the settlement between the Shopcrafts unions and the Railways, since voted down by the rank and file. It gave management the right to change work rules, cut back on the number employed, etc.

But by far the most vigorous attempt to restructure the union movement can be seen in Italy--where "Between 1968 and 1972 productivity in Italy had fallen from 100 units to 93, while it had risen from 100 to 115 in England and 118 in Germany. This meant that in the time it took to produce 100 units in Italy 152 were produced in England and 178 in Germany. The Italian workers, however, cost the company (with similar plants in all three countries) 2,235 lire an hour compared to 1,440 a man in England and 2,200 in West Germany."

The personnel manager "blamed the loss of power by the unions for the growing militancy and the general rebellion against authority and hoped for a new trade union structure. The Government in the battle to steady the economy, is waiting anxiously for this to happen as well."--see following Globe and Mail article.

The unions, naturally, are trying to oblige. This can be seen in the introduction of the "delegate" system after the hot autumn of '69. This is further outlined in "For Canadian Workers, Lessons from Italy," published by Community Resource Centre, 3210 Sandwich St., Windsor, Ontario. NB

In Canada this restructuring could begin to take place through the Canadian union movement. It seems an ideal solution for the nationalist bourgeoisie to get in behind an indigenous trade union movement, not because the International unions give them any trouble, but because they could link nationalistic feelings--"producing for the nation", "we're all one people" with rank and file demands for autonomy and democracy. The Committee for an Independent Canada is probably closest to spelling out this strategy, and it can also be seen in Liberal and Conservative Party support for Canadian trade unions. The stronger the nationalist component of the Canadian union movement is, the more likely productivity increases will be ensured. After all "we're all going to have to work pretty hard if Canada is going to have its own processing and manufacturing industry, which it needs, to become one of the Bigs." ?

2. Industrial democracy and workers' control

Examples of this response have become more frequent in recent years--one of the most notable, but a bit of an exception, being that of a "marxist" West German industrialist handing over his multi-million dollar corporation to his workers for a trial period, asking in return for a certain part of the profits. The workers have the chance of buying the company over a period of years.

In relation to the productivity crisis, though, the best contemporary example took place this year at a Kaiser Steel mill

ITALY

Are unions the key to the future?

By IAN MURRAY
Times of London

LONDON

THE HOT AUTUMN of 1969 was a watershed in Italian labor relations. The present unrest and uncertainty in industry there can be traced back to the strikes and violence that erupted at that time. The attitudes of Government, employers and workers were hardened in two short months at the end of one of the finest summers even Italy has known.

The industrial problems really date back much farther, but 1969 seems to be the year workers discovered that there was a difference between a trade union and a political party. The series of strikes and continuing militant pressure since then amount to a type of muscle flexing by someone miraculously cured from paralysis. The movements are not properly co-ordinated and as a result everyone is in danger of getting hurt.

The unions themselves are restructuring and talking of finding an acceptable form of unity. They are doing this to regain control of the movement so successfully manipulated by extremists in 1969.

The employers wait anxiously for the control to be re-established so that they can once more negotiate an agreement that will not be ignored. The Government wonders how to tackle the twin problems of inflation and unemployment when the essential trust is missing between the two sides of industry.

This deep mistrust was born in 1969 after a 25-year gestation. In the years after the war both the "social partners" worked hard to achieve the Italian economic miracle that turned a relatively backward country into the seventh strongest industrial nation in the world.

With no real natural resources that economic miracle had to be achieved by the fullest possible use of the country's plentiful raw material—manpower. Italian craftsmen churned out goods that competed with the best in the world and they did it more cheaply because wages were low.

The Italian workers continue to fight for higher wages and violence, unrest and uncertainty goes on, the direct result of the 1969 wage settlement. Industry was never allowed to recover from those years but militants press on.

Political agitation by extremist groups slowly made the workers believe they were being exploited and the situation came to a head in 1969. The trade unions were forced to adopt some extremist policies to remain credible to their members.

The employers, as they now believe, made the fundamental mistake of buying an expensive truce in the hope it would produce a lasting peace. Wages were in some cases doubled and generally caught up with the rest of Europe for comparable skills.

The workers, having achieved so much, are convinced that militancy pays, but less convinced of the need for trade union membership to co-ordinate policies. The three main unions between them claim a total membership of more than 6.5 million, which is no more than about 35 per cent of the work force.

Italian labor contracts last for three years but Confindustria, which represents 90 per cent of Italian employers, feels that the process of negotiation, breakdown and strikes has never stopped since 1969.

The unions are equally suspicious of the employers. They point to the fact that in 1969 they were conceded far more than the "final possible offer" that had been made. This to them is proof that they need never believe it when an employer says he can go no further.

Another legacy of the policy of low pay until 1969 is the high cost of social services. When earnings were low it was relatively unimportant that these added anything up to 50 per cent to the wage bill, but now that pay has risen this factor makes Italian labor costs to the employer higher than in most of the rest of Europe.

At the same time the social services are not developed to the same extent as they are in Britain or Germany, for example. The result is that the Italian

workers generally believe they pay more for housing, have worse bus services, schools and other amenities.

The extra pay has not stopped their disgruntlement, especially as the cost of living is rising at least as fast as in the rest of Europe. Productivity is dropping and absenteeism is rising.

The personnel manager of one of the largest Italian companies, with parallel operations in West Germany and England, produced a disturbing set of figures comparing output in the three countries by the same number of workers using identical equipment.

Between 1968 and 1972 productivity in Italy had fallen from 100 units to 93, while it had risen from 100 to 115 in England and to 118 in Germany. This meant that in the time it took to produce 100 units in Italy, 152 were produced in England, and 178 in Germany.

The Italian worker, however, cost the company 2,235 lire an hour compared to 1,440 a man in England and 2,200 in West Germany. The take home pay of the Italian and English workers was almost identical because of the difference in social contributions. The West German worker earned the most, yet his productivity level meant that labor costs were the lowest.

The personnel manager said that the company could understand the social reasons why the Italian worker, who cost the company the most, should be the least satisfied.

Dott Guido Randone of Confindustria, says the firm is using its influence politically to insist on improving the national social investment.

He blamed the loss of power by the unions for the growing militancy and general rebellion against authority and hoped for a new trade union structure.

The Government, in the battle to steady the economy, is waiting anxiously for this to happen as well.

at Fontana California. Because of Japanese competition, Kaiser Steel decided to close its 300 man pipe mill in Fontana. A Steelworkers' union official approached the plant management and told them "we don't believe anybody in the world can outproduce us. I hear all this bunk about how well they do it in Japan and Germany, and we told management to let us try some things." They asked for a chance to run the plant themselves. Ninety days later productivity had 32.1%. The amount of damaged pipe was reduced to a minimum--says the union official. "Before, nobody paid any attention to a guy, so he figured why in the hell should he pay any attention to the pipe. Nobody cared."

The San Francisco Examiner editorialized "Basically the issue comes down to incentive, which is what the capitalist system is all about." And it is this comment that captured the essence of what happened. It was a victory for the Steel bosses rather than for the workers, except in the narrow sense of keeping their jobs. But if workers generally were so willing to participate in their own exploitation which is what "workers' control" "participation" comes down to, and step up their own exploitation, there wouldn't be so many plant shutdowns. The control over production that the Kaiser workers (union?) "wrested" from management has merely strengthened the international competitive position of Kaiser Steel Corp. Linked with nationalist feelings of "we can outproduce anybody--the Japanese etc." it becomes a fail-safe device for the bourgeoisie. The whole concept of "workers' control", the slogan of factory committees in 1917 in Russia and workers' councils in the twenties, must be radically re-examined. (For an analysis starting in this direction see "Class composition and the theory of the Party at the origin of the Workers' Council movement", S. Bologna in Telos No. 13, Fall 1972.)

The information above about the Kaiser example comes from Vol. 70 No. 3 of the IWW's Industrial Worker, which broadly saw the events as a victory, proving that the workers have the ability to run industry.

3. Psychological and job enrichment schemes

Recently a new company of "motivational consultants" was set up in Winnipeg by a professor of Social Work, to help "businessmen adjust to the fast rates of change that are taking place in the 1970s."--Professor Don Ayre reported in the Globe and Mail May 23. "In essence, young people are rejecting the traditional company environment which forces them to conform to a life style that has been successful in the past--Twenty years ago people were tied to work so unquestioningly that the boss could impose his perspective on them--But now they will just opt out if their job provides no avenue for individual development."

Companies "if they want to motivate their employees, they pick

up a hackneyed incentive program like a holiday trip to Hawaii--But we think there should be a deeper approach than that--If you want to develop human potential, you must talk to individuals, FIND OUT ABOUT THEIR CREATIVE DRIVES AND THEN LINK THIS TO COMPANY PRODUCTIVITY." (emphasis added).

An example of "humanizing" the workplace is in some auto plants in Canada where the workers can watch colour TV, play pool, sit in lounges and even have their families take part in a festival right inside the plant.

The "Swedish experiment" best illustrates all three of the above responses, worked together as part of a wider strategy of control. On the one hand, a Swedish law has made it compulsory for companies having more than 100 workers to have at least two workers on the board of directors, while on the other, companies like Saab and Volvo are trying to move away from the assembly line, into assembly teams of 15 to 20 and towards letting workers build a whole engine etc., alone rather than fit one part in, on a line. Saab's production chief has said that "in another 10 or 20 years we won't be able to use the production line in Sweden." A 100% turnover rate at Saab, costs of up to \$3000 in lost production and training to replace a "lost" worker, and a regular 20% rate of absenteeism at Volvo, are factors behind this statement.

This international phenomenon--the refusal of wage labour and the bourgeois reaction to it--includes Canada too. Up to now, only the Left has been oblivious to it. Bourgeois sociologists are presently competing to put out the first definitive analysis of the rebellion against the work ethic." So far, little systematic work has been done, but it is being done now. One piece of research coming out of McMaster University has found that only 38% of under 35 year olds--an equal number of union members and students--are willing to take any job, as opposed to 69% in 1968.

Refuse wage labour is what the class is both saying and doing. What are we as revolutionaries going to do about it? How should we relate to it--both aspects--in our specific work situations, and how can we build a revolutionary movement around it?

Dave Feickert



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NOTES ON WORKER'S AUTONOMY

The recent visit to Canada by Marxist feminists Rosa Dalla Costa of Italy and Selma James of England has been the occasion for a new and widespread discussion among women about the nature of the women's movement in Canada. The discussion has involved in one way or another women who have not had political discussions as women since the break-up of the organized Women's Liberation Movement a few years ago. The discussion has seen a clash not only over the political direction of women's struggles (i.e. what perspective is required to develop the struggle of women who work in the home and women who work outside the home, as well as of the large and growing proportion who do both), but also over the relationship of the women's struggle to the struggles of other sectors of the working class.

While the debate on these specific questions must be internal to the women's movement, the questions themselves are at the heart of the struggle of every sector of the working class, and therefore of the working class as a whole. This is why the current debate in the women's movement should serve as a stimulus to discussion and clarification about the political direction of the working class struggle as a whole in Canada.

In this perspective, I would like to share a few thoughts that the debate in the women's movement has helped clarify for me. I'm taking up the question of the autonomy of the women's struggle, not the question of a specific political perspective for developing the women's struggle. The assumption that the women's struggle must develop autonomously of the struggles of other sectors of the working class involves different conceptions on:

(1) The process by which the struggle of different sectors of the working class develops.

(2) The process by which the political unification/ in terms of organization, political line, strategic and tactical coherence, develops.

A look at these points will help clarify and enrich our understanding of an important aspect of workers' autonomy as an approach to developing the class struggle in Canada.*

*Workers' autonomy as an approach to developing workplace struggles is outlined in the Canadian introduction to Sofri's paper, Organizing for Workers' Power. It refers both to forms of organization autonomous of the unions and to the immediate anti-capitalist content of workers' struggles.

1. Workers' Autonomy: Basis of Developing the Working Class Struggle

No other movement in English Canada raised the question of its autonomy from other sectors of struggle more sharply than the women's movement. This was because the specific ways in which capital exploits and oppresses women in the organization of society were never dealt with by left organizations of the old or new left. In fact, these organizations reflected most of the sexist attitudes and sexist division of labour characteristic of capitalist society. The women's movement thus began from the premise that autonomy from other sectors of struggle was the necessary pre-condition to the development of the women's struggle: women and only women could analyze the ways in which capitalist society exploited and oppressed them, and women themselves had to organize autonomously to struggle against their exploitation and oppression.

This recognition of the necessity of autonomy for women's struggles became obscured, at least for left women, when the organized women's movement divided into 'feminist' and 'Marxist' a few years ago, and Marxist women, together with the male left generally, began developing a 'working class orientation'. The analysis of women tended to be subsumed into a more general definition of 'class'-- not so much a male definition as a traditional left definition which, as we'll see later, doesn't really provide a concrete analysis of any sector of the working class.

What is this traditional left concept of the working class? It defines the working class exclusively in terms of the objective position of different class strata in the capitalist production process. The 'working class' is thus made up of those strata from which surplus value is directly exploited at the 'point of production'. The term 'working class' tends to evoke the image of the white male blue collar industrial worker-- born in Canada more than 30 years ago. This traditional concept of class could be stretched to include workers who received an hourly rate of pay-- preferably with blue collars. Other class strata-- from various white collar salaried workers to unwaged and unsalaried strata such as students, the permanently underemployed, or housewives, who are 'outside' the capitalist production process, were designated as 'petit bourgeois', 'lumpen', or simply ignored. More recently, the proletarianization of a wide range of salaried white collar labour led to the expansion of the traditional left concept to include these strata. This traditional left concept of the 'working class'-- held by all the old and new vanguard parties as well as by the majority of the Marxist left--is a fair re-statement of Marx's analysis of the capitalist production process in general and of the working class in general.

Thus the traditional left concept of the working class defines the relation to capital of different class strata exclusively in terms of the workplace-- which reflects its analysis that only waged or salaried labour is directly related to the capitalist production process. Furthermore, the traditional left concept tends to see even the various divisions and sectors of the working class in the workplace (e.g. women/men; unskilled/skilled; immigrant/native; black/white; Quebecois/Canadian; young/old; technician/assembly line worker, etc.) as somewhat extraneous to the 'working class itself'. The result is that these divisions within

the waged and salaried sectors of the working class tend to be dealt with by subjective appeals to the 'unity of the working class', and by in effect telling women, unskilled, immigrant, black, young workers to sublimate the specific ways in which they are exploited by capital into the "general" class struggle.

It is this traditional left concept of the working class that the women's movement has contested. As Rosa Dalla Costa puts it:

Since the concept of class in the left groups did not take into account the specific exploitation of women, their strategy could not be really radical and revolutionary. When women raise the question of their exploitation, they raise the question of an entirely new strategy (for the whole working class), and they cannot take for granted that the left groups already have a strategy in which women's struggles are more than appendages. Many women within left groups thought and still think that men should define the question of class, and women should deal with the women's question. We think the women's question must be posed in terms of class by women themselves, and women themselves have to define the stages and the instruments of their own struggle.

This demonstrates once again that only those directly affected and with a direct interest in destroying their exploited condition can really discover the necessary political analysis and the ways to organize their struggle and exercise a real power.

The women's movement is going to raise the class question-- not only the women's question, but through the women's question the question of the exploitation of the whole working class. When women begin to organize and become aware of their force and power, the whole working class discovers new strengths and new possibilities of struggle.

(From an interview with Quebecois women, published in Bulletin, Agence de presse libre du Quebec, #110, May 1973.)

Thus it seems that the traditional left concept of the 'working class in general' fails to include the specific relation of women to capital. Hence the necessity of an autonomous women's movement, for only women have a direct interest in analyzing their specific relation to capital and the ways to struggle to destroy that relation.

But do the limitations of the traditional left's concept of the working class apply only to the case of women? No! The way the women's movement has posed the necessity of its autonomy applies equally to the process by which the struggle of other sections of the working class develops. A few examples will be enough to illustrate this point. The traditional left's concept of the working class in Canada has never been able to grasp the specificity of the class struggle in Canada. A case in point is its inability to grasp the specific way in which capital has exploited and oppressed the Quebec working class. At its best, the old and new traditional left has analyzed the specific condition of the Quebec working class in terms of

language and culture. But in the serious business of the class struggle, the 'unity' of the 'whole' working class in Canada was required. That meant actively opposing the development of autonomous, Quebec-based and Quebecois-controlled working class organizations. Historically, the CCF-NDP and the CP fought against the Quebec-based Confederation of National Trade Unions and fought against Quebecois in their organizations who were trying to get them to take the specific condition of the Quebec working class seriously-- and this fight against the Quebecois working class was always in the name of the 'unity of the working class'. The analysis of the specific ways in which capital exploits and oppresses the Quebec working class and the struggle to destroy that condition has by necessity had to develop autonomously of the struggle of the working class in Canada.

The clash in the student movement in Ontario in the late 1960's over the nature of the student movement is another illustration of the limitations of the traditional left concept of the working class. Both the opposition of Worker-Student Alliance-CPL to struggles around issues of immediate concern to students, and their insistence on 'allying with the working class', as well as the romanticization of the Wobblies among some new left militants, reflected the traditional left concept of students as petit bourgeois. Other sections of the student movement argued that the majority of students had a direct relation to capital in the way the capitalist school functions to keep potential workers off the labour market, to produce specialized labour power for the production and distribution of commodities, and to reproduce the social division of labour in capitalist society. As such, it was argued, the students' struggle against the capitalist university was a struggle against capital itself, and thus an integral part of the class struggle, requiring an autonomous basis of struggle as the prerequisite to unification with other sectors of the working class.

These few examples of how the traditional left concept of the 'working class in general' fails to concretely grasp the specific way capital exploits different sectors of the working class could be multiplied to include immigrants, blacks, young workers, unwaged workers marginalized by the development of capital, and the unwaged labour of housewives. If the traditional concept of class fails to include the specific way in which capital exploits all these (and many more) sectors of the working class, then we can fairly ask: What does the 'working class in general' correspond to concretely? What is the 'general class struggle' to which all workers are supposed to be integrated?

The conclusion is inescapable: the traditional left concept of the 'working class in general', subscribed to by the entire vanguardist left and by much of the independent Marxist left, corresponds to very little or nothing in the concrete class struggle in advanced capitalist society. There is an objective basis for both the incorrectness of the traditional left concept and the necessity for a new approach to the development of the class struggle: wage labour and capital have a qualitatively new form in advanced capitalism. The traditional concept of class, with its definition of class exclusively in terms of the worker's relation to capital in the workplace, had some validity in earlier periods in the history of capital. Then workers' and capital's share of value produced (the rate of exploitation of wage labour) was determined by workers' struggles with individual capitalists, or, in a later era, in struggle with (private) monopoly capitalists. But the relation of wage labour to capital is much broader

poor use of the term 'Social Capital' services private interest groups, headed by mono. capital

in advanced capitalism than it was in earlier periods. Individual capitals (and particularly the various sectors of monopoly capital) have been subordinated to collective capital or social capital in the centralized capitalist state. This concept of social capital is quite new to us in Canada, and all its implications for analyzing advanced capitalist society can't be discussed now. But two aspects of it are quite decisive in the context of our understanding of the class struggle: (1) In the stage of social capital, capital tries to determine the workers' and capital's share of value produced not only or even mainly at the level of individual capitalists, but at the level of social capital: it does this through conditioning the labour market (creation of unemployment, importation of immigrant labour, expansion and contraction of state spending programmes, etc.) and by various forms of incomes policies (wage guidelines, wage controls, and taxes, etc.). The workers' struggle to determine the workers' share of value produced must always have social capital within its horizon of struggle. (2) The rationalization and planning of all major aspects of capitalist society (housing, transportation, health, education etc.) under the direct control of social capital in the state means that the relation of the waged worker to capital is much broader than workplace. Off the job, the waged worker has to struggle against social capital to have a livable shelter and urban environment, health services, transportation, etc. At the same time, large strata have been brought into direct relation with capital who previously had a more indirect relation: students, marginalized unwaged workers, workers and consumers of health, education and other state services in which social capital now directly organizes the reproduction of labour power. The struggle of all these sectors is a struggle against capital, and thus an integral part of the class struggle.

INFLATION!

Of course, the traditional left concept of the working class always failed to grasp the specific form of exploitation of large sectors of the working class -- women, immigrants, Quebecois, blacks in the U.S. etc. By and large, the traditional left concept of class is still alive and 'thriving' among all the old and new vanguard parties and groups, which means that they continue to see women, immigrants, blacks, unskilled etc. workers as extraneous to the "general class struggle", rather than what they have been in recent years -- the most advanced sectors of the working class struggle.*

There is another sense in which the traditional left concept of class fails. Corresponding to its abstract concept of the 'working class in general' is its abstract concept of the process by which the different sectors of the working class and thereby the whole working class defines its struggle against capital. This process is seen as

* A case in point: compare two analyses of the immigrant working class in Europe; (1) From the traditional left approach to struggle: Castles and Kosack, "The Function of Labour Immigration in Western European Capitalism", in the New Left Review, No. 73, 1972, esp. pp. 18-21, in which the task of the left is seen to be to "bring immigrants into the class struggle" (i.e. make them full and equal partners in the unions, which now 'discriminate' against them and don't always 'represent their interests'). (2) From the workers' autonomy approach: G. Viale (of Lotta Continua) "Class Struggle and European Unity", forthcoming issue of Radical America, in which the forms and content of immigrants' struggles lead the whole class.

'making workers conscious' of the real 'class interests' and their 'unity' in the struggle against capital. Once again, these 'class interests' and this 'objective unity' is that of the 'working class in general', not of the concrete struggle of different sectors of the class to determine their concrete interests and the concrete content of their unity in the struggle against capital. The class interests and unity of the working class are not given a priori, in the sense the class simply has to be made conscious of them. The working class defines itself, its interests and the basis of its unity practically and materially through the autonomous struggles of different sectors of the class, and by the process of unification built on that autonomy. The concrete content of the class interest of different sectors of the class and of the class as a whole can be determined in this way alone.

So we may well paraphrase what Rosa Dalla Costa was quoted as saying of the women's struggle earlier in this paper:

When women (add: unskilled, black, immigrant, Quebecois, unemployed, marginalized labour, students...) begin to organize and become aware of their force and power, the whole working class discovers new strengths and new possibilities of struggle.

Earlier in this paper I indicated that the traditional left's concept of the 'working class in general' was a fair re-statement of Marx's analysis of the 'working class in general'. But Marx himself never made the mistake of confusing this analysis with the concrete process through which the working class practically and materially defined itself in the struggle against capital. Perhaps nowhere is Marx more explicit about the importance of struggle in the whole revolutionary process, not only to develop a force capable of seizing state power, but even more importantly, to change the working class itself as the necessary precondition to building communism, than in the following passage:

In all former revolutions the form of activity was always left unaltered and it was only a question of redistributing this activity among different people, of introducing a new division of labour. The communist revolution, however, is directed against the former mode of activity, does away with (wage) labour, and abolishes all class rule along with the classes themselves, because it is effected by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognized as a class, and which is the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc, within contemporary society.

For the creation on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, as well as for the success of the cause itself, it is necessary for individuals themselves to be changed on a large scale, and this change can occur only in a practical struggle, in a revolution. Revolution is necessary not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because only in a revolution can the class which overthrows it rid itself of the accumulated rubbish of the past and become capable of reconstructing society.

The German Ideology, v. 1, ch.1.

2. Workers' Autonomy: Basis for the Unification of the Working Class

The perspective on the development of the class struggle outlined in the first section has obvious implications for our understanding of the problem of political unification of the whole working class. What prevents the autonomous struggles of different sectors of the class from falling into sectionalism, thus dividing the class rather than enriching it? The unification of the class (I prefer the term 'unification' to 'unity', because the term 'unity' alone rings more of simply making 'the class in general' conscious of its 'objective unity in general' rather than the struggle through which that unity is practically and materially defined) will not happen by itself. It will be the product of struggle among the mass vanguards of the various sectors of the class. There are no ready-made solutions to this problem, precisely because the perspective of workers' autonomy makes it impossible to predetermine the political line and forms of organization of the unified class. But we do have the experience of the power of the class struggle when it develops on an autonomous basis, as well as the negative experience of how the traditional vanguard organizations, both old and new, which claim to represent the 'class in general', in fact retard or are irrelevant to the development of the class struggle. We will have to deal with the problem of unification and the forms through which it can be expressed organizationally as we go along. We can also learn much from analyzing how the process of workers' autonomy and political unification develops in other countries.

For the moment, we have to be content with certain general points:
(1) The autonomous development of the struggles of different sectors of the working class is the pre-condition for any general unification of the class. Workers' autonomy-mass vanguard is still the best I know to characterize this process.

Handwritten note on left margin: "We are a class" and "We are a class"

(2) It seems clear to me that the aspect of workers' autonomy outlined in this paper, as well as the aspects discussed in the Sofri introduction, imply a definite political line on trade unions. Trade unions today are the expression not of the unity of the working class, but of its division: the division between unionized and non-unionized, between employed and unemployed, between skilled and unskilled, between men and women, between immigrant and Canadian workers. The process of autonomous struggle by different sectors of the class, often located in the same workplace and 'members' of the same union, cannot look to the union as a main instrument of struggle. There certainly may be instances when the union can be an instrument for developing autonomous struggle, but we have to make a break with the traditional left approach to the union as the main instrument of workers' struggles, as well as with the traditional left's methods of working in unions (union caucus, using the union as a 'platform' for 'socialist propaganda', etc.)

(3) This does not mean there is nothing for left militants to do to contribute to the development of autonomous struggles. There are precise and important tasks of political initiative for left militants. For example, the analysis of the specific condition of exploitation of various sectors of the class, and the development of forms of struggle against that exploitation, does not occur 'spontaneously', but should be the focus of investigation, discussion and struggle within each of the sectors.

The current debate in the women's movement to determine a political perspective for the development of an autonomous women's struggle serves as an illustration of the role of political initiative. Marxists must play within various sectors. A sharp distinction has to be made between the struggle within different sectors of the class to determine a perspective for autonomous struggle, and the struggle between militants within the movement against the intervention in the debate by the traditional vanguard parties. The latter is a struggle to defend the autonomy of the struggle against those who would subsume that struggle (and the struggle of every other sector of the class) into the interest of the 'working class in general'. Without making this distinction clear, we run the risk of confusing what we mean by sectarianism. Sectarianism is certainly possible within the various sectors of struggle (manipulation, avoidance of open debate, etc.), and must be opposed as such. But it is not sectarian to defend the autonomy of a struggle against the vanguard parties by rejecting the political basis on which they want to participate in the debate--the claim that they are able to define the correct relationship of each sector of struggle to the "general struggle". It should be clear by now that the traditional left concept of the working class 'in general', subscribed to by the vanguard parties and groups, is not the result so much of an incorrect class analysis as of an incorrect relationship to the class struggle. If the concrete content of the interests and unity of the working class can be defined only practically through the struggle of different sectors of the class and the class as a whole, then no vanguard organization in Canada today can claim to 'represent' the class or any level of its unification. *

* The defence of the autonomy of the struggles of different sections of the class from the artificial, unrooted 'unity' represented by the vanguard parties is, in fact, one the important tasks of Marxists within these struggles. Nothing has brought this home to me more vividly than reading the report of a women's conference in England ("In Defence of Feminism: A London Conference REport"). The authors write:

I ain't so sure.

"Women of the political organizations (CP, IS, IMG) were left behind by a movement which had gone beyond their ideological control. They had expected the women's movement to be subsidiary to the 'general struggle', to be confined to 'women's problems' such as contraception and abortion and in a purely ideological struggle against sexism.... For the left the issue was singular. It was not any one demand which cut to the quick, but that we should be so presumptuous as to promise demands based on the movement's autonomy from them and from the unions. For if this were permitted, then they were out of a job: there was no need for them as vanguard parties, which represent the 'generalization of the struggle' and are the 'political' counterpart of what the unions represented to the class 'economically'. p. 5.

Another example of political initiative within the workers' autonomy perspective of struggle is to develop forms of intervention in different sectors of the working class through which workers can collectively investigate the specific ways capital exploits them and discover ways to struggle against that exploitation. In this sense, I think the word 'investigation, which the Windsor militants use so much to characterize their work, has to become a key word in the practical vocabulary of the approach to struggle we are trying to develop.

(4) The problem of unification and organization is not something which can be postponed until the struggle reaches a more advanced stage. These are permanent needs of the struggle, requiring specific solutions in each stage of the struggle. We have to discover forms of intervention and organization which can enable the autonomous struggles of different sectors of the class to enrich and broaden their conception of the class struggle. This is an indispensable step to prevent the relapse of autonomous struggles into sectionalism.

The Big Flame paper on "The Question of Organization" discusses some of the possibilities and problems involved in the form of organization they are experimenting with to meet this need for a certain unification of struggles. For militants involved in workplace struggles, a rank and file newsletter or a workers' centre could help bring out the autonomous potential of certain workplace struggles as well as provide a form through which mass links could be made between some of these struggles. These are not definite suggestions, but rather illustrations of forms of intervention and organization which could directly contribute to the development of workers' autonomy. There is a lot of investigation and experimentation that will have to go on in the next few years to discover ways of organizing that will meet the needs of the struggle. But it's never too soon to begin to talk about these things, and maybe even try out some of them....

John

A WORKING PAPER FOR WOMEN IN CANADA

Preface

The last few months have been for me (as for many other women) a period of serious reconsideration of the nature of the working class and the relation of the "women's question" to the class struggle. For a long time, these were scattered and somewhat incoherent thoughts, but through the discussions generated by the visit of Selma James to Canada, many of my ideas began to crystallize. Although I did not come to any definite conclusions, I became clearer on what I thought the perspective of our investigation on the "women's question" should be. The result was the following paper, which I saw as a working paper only, not intended for publication.

When I came to Toronto for a visit, however, I had the opportunity of reading John's paper, "Notes on Workers' Autonomy". I was surprised and excited to find that other people too were considering the same questions. I was especially pleased to see in that paper the beginnings of what I consider an important process: the attempt by men to learn from the experience of the women's movement and to relate it to their analysis of the working class.

Of course, I believe that it is extremely important for women to continue to develop their analysis and define more clearly their ideas on the working class. For this reason, we decided to print my paper along with John's. My paper speaks directly to women, and attempts to outline our immediate tasks as I see them. John's begins to deal with the reconsideration of the nature of the working class which the women's experience, along with that of other groups, has made necessary.

We both expect that our experience of finding such a similarity in the ideas developed from different political contexts is not an isolated one. I am sure that other people are beginning to look in the same direction, and that these two papers will lead to discussions-- among women, I am sure, but hopefully also among men and women.

W.B.

Directions and Possibilities:
A Working Paper for Women in Canada

"Who are you?", said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.
Alice replied, rather shyly. "I-I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I knew who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then."
"What do you mean by that?", said the Caterpillar sternly.
"Explain yourself."
"I can't explain myself, I'm afraid sir", said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."
"I don't see", said the Caterpillar.
"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly", Alice replied...
"For I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."
"It isn't", said the Caterpillar.
"...well, perhaps your feelings may be different", said Alice;
"All I know is, it would feel very queer to me."
"You!", said the Caterpillar contemptuously. "Who are you?"

(from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)

In the past year, many women in the left in Canada have experienced an identity crisis somewhat similar to Alice's. For us, the questions are not only 'Who are we?' but also 'Where do we want to go?' 'Who do we work with?' 'What are our tasks as socialist women?' 'What are other women in Canada thinking and feeling?'

During Selma's trip to Canada, these questions, and the problems they raised, began to crystallize and debate around them intensified. There is still much to be done. We are at a point now to articulate the questions more clearly, but the more difficult process of developing those questions coherently is just beginning. These questions are signposts only; they mark the areas we need to explore in our experience and our activity and in that of other women. Out of that exploration, that praxis, will come the beginnings of a theoretical view-- and, hopefully, more questions and more challenges.

This paper is a personal exercise to clarify my own thoughts, but that clarification cannot be done alone. I hope that this paper can also be the basis of discussions with other women. I have no clear position, no answers. Like you, I am trying to articulate the questions.

Nor am I using this paper as an attempt to 'answer Selma James'. I must admit that I have fundamental theoretical and practical difficulties with her position, which I shall raise where relevant. That does not negate my belief, and the experience of many others, that she has raised ideas and perspectives of equally fundamental importance to women in Canada.

To begin with, a bit of history. Many of us came out of the "new left" or from the students' movements of the early 60's. Others developed our politics first through Women's Liberation. There are other histories as well, but for all of us as women, the "women's question" has been one of the fundamental bases of our political experience.

For some of us, too, an equally fundamental political experience occurred in the last two or three years as we began to become involved in working class politics. Some of us worked for a while in vanguard parties; others, in independent left groups, but the development of the class question, in either case, was an important one. Many of us took jobs, or worked with people already politically involved in workplace situations.

At first, the conflicts between these two aspects of our political development seemed minimal. We could see clearly that the limitations of Women's Liberation arose in part from its middle class base; we were eager to work with working class women -- especially in the work place. We were not prepared to have our assumptions about class politics and sexual politics challenged, but as our experience grew, the challenges increased.

For one thing, much of the discussion of working class politics centred around male, blue-collar, industrial workers. There was a tacit assumption that the contradictions operating in this section of the work-force -- and the theory and strategy that arose from these -- could be applied to the female work force as well.

Gradually our experience is showing us that this is not so, or at least not universally so. Not only do we need a wider understanding of the non-industrial work force (services, offices etc.) where women predominate, but some of us are beginning to think that even in the factory, the issues that affect women are, or may be, qualitatively different from those of their male counterparts. Today we are beginning to see the need for re-evaluation and exploration in these areas. This is very important.

As well, our concentration on the workplace led us to turn our attention away from community struggles (tenants, community groups etc.) and even from those issues which had once been key to our political development as women (abortion, daycare etc.). Although it may not have been intentional, our practice led us to see things in either/or terms. Either the community or the workplace, with the former usually getting lip-service and the latter being regarded as the "really revolutionary" place to be. The results: one was that many of these issues became dominated by vanguard groups (e.g. the Trotskyist input into the abortion fight). Secondly, and more importantly, we tended to ignore in fact the political development of many women and as a result lost the valuable contribution that their experience could add to ours.

The roots of the problem lay, in part at least, in our own theoretical narrowness. We tended to equate class unity with class homogeneity. On the one hand, we are aware that the unity of the working class is essential to its ultimate victory. On the other, we know that many

contradictions exist within that class: skilled/unskilled, employed/unemployed, black/white, male/female. These contradictions will only be totally resolved by the process of revolution, but in that process they cannot be smoothed over or brushed aside.

This is what we do when we act as if class homogeneity and class unity were one and the same thing (i.e. that the working class is one unit and the same theory will apply to all its facets and one strategy will unite it). Marx is very clear on the dialectical development of contradictions within the working class:

On the one hand all labour is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labour-power, and in its character of identical abstract human labour, it creates and forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour-power in a special form and with a definite aim, and in this, its character of concrete useful labour, it produces use-values.

(Capital, Progress Edition (paper) p. 46)

Although he is talking specifically about production here, the perspective can be extended. The working class is homogeneous only in one sense (as abstract labour producing value for capital); in another, it is diversified, various -- as various as the many commodities produced -- and contains many contradictions. Unity -- real unity -- can arise only by exploring and developing the dynamics of all facets in all possible ways.

Women, as part of the working class, are a unique and special facet, with special needs and a unique contribution to the class struggle. There are economic, historic, cultural and biological reasons for this. Our task is to explore and develop it.

And what of the countless women who do not work outside the home? What of housewives? One of the most positive theoretical contributions of the Women's Movement centred around the family and the attempt to develop a view of the family's position under capitalism, and of the work women did in the home. Many of us are familiar with the theories and realized quite concretely the importance of the role of the family and of housewives in maintaining, reproducing and socializing the working class for the needs of capital. The danger lies in a tendency to look at the family statically and to over-estimate its role in the development and maintenance of capital. In his discussion of the rise of industrial capital Marx says:

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour market, spreads the value of the man's labour-power over his whole family.

(Capital, p. 395)

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. (Capital, p. 490)

This is an important historical perspective. By making women and children the first industrial workers, Capital began by destroying the family, not just the extended family of a pre-capitalist period, but the material basis of the family as a permanent social unit. This applies equally to the nuclear family which has often been seen as the child of capitalism and one of the keys to its maintenance. At best, this applies only in certain periods and to certain classes. In the working class, the family has been a shifting and unstable unit, not only in the beginning when it was virtually destroyed, but also today because of the effects of shift work and the need for women to work outside the home in order to survive. This does not mean that Capital will not use the family, and women's role in it, when it can. It does and it will. But in one sense, housework disguised the fact that women are, in the eyes of Capital, part of a vast reserve army of the unemployed which can and will be forced to work elsewhere when the need arises.

But conscious policy maintained it for specific functions

The role of housewives under capitalism, then, is an important factor in our analysis of the conditions that affect women. Selma's discussion has re-emphasized the importance of that factor. But we must be clear that it is only one factor; there are others which must also be explored so that we can gain a broader understanding of the interconnections between all of them.

One cannot leave the discussion of housework, however, without looking briefly at two aspects of the questions which recent discussions, particularly with Selma, have raised: the nature of housework under capitalism and the question of wages. The perspective we have on these questions will in part determine the direction of our future explorations. For me, the consideration that housework is productive labour (in the Marxist sense) narrows the dimensions of that exploration, rather than widening them. In his analysis of capital, Marx is very clear in his definition of productive labour:

That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, and thus works for the self-expansion of capital. (Capital, p. 509)

One cannot fit housework into this category without shifting the category itself thereby destroying the basis of Marx's analysis. Furthermore, one has no need to fit housework into this category. Just because housework is not productive in the Marxist sense does not mean that it is not work or that it is not important to the maintenance and reproduction of the workplace and hence to the functioning of Capital. To one

degree or another, housework plays a vital role in this regard, and Marx is equally clear on the importance of the functions of maintaining and reproducing the workforce.

My reason for stating this is not a desire to concentrate on the fine points of theoretical debate, but rather to illustrate how that theory affects our perspective as a whole. Our purpose in developing an analysis of capitalism and the nature of work in it, is to enable us to smash it, to destroy it once and for all. Surely then, our perspective should be as broad as possible and should include in it as many of the effects of capitalism on the totality of human experience as we can possibly understand.

Trying to force all aspects of work under capitalism into the category of productive labour hinders this process and can limit our understanding of the real nature of certain types of work. To use an example, civil servants are certainly not productive workers in the Marxist sense, but they are certainly part of the working class and an understanding of the nature of their work and their role in defeating capitalism opens up many interesting dimensions.

It is this perspective that I apply as well to the discussion of wages for housework. I believe quite strongly that that discussion is an important one, for in the process of examining the issue, many women can come to see the nature of their work in a new way. Such a discussion can and does explore areas and aspects of women's role under capitalism which go far beyond the wage issue. We must be careful not to stifle that exploration by concentrating on wage as a demand or by seeing wages for housework as a primary weapon in smashing capital.

There are situations where such a demand would be revolutionary. That is not the issue. Wages in and by themselves, however, cannot destroy capitalism, for their increase or decrease -- or very existence -- is dependent upon the accumulation of capital by the capitalist. They can never rise to the point where they threaten that accumulation and in fact their increase "only means, in fact, that the length and weight of the golden chain the wage-worker has already forged for himself, allow a relaxation of the tension of it." (Capital, p. 618).

And we can be sure that, were wages given for housework, they would be given with the same conditions that Unemployment Insurance is given, to be withdrawn if the recipient refuses a job which the needs of Capital require. The reserve army of the unemployed is part of capital's requirements and it will not allow it to be threatened.

The other aspect of wages for housework -- that it provides a necessary prerequisite of economic independence for women must be explored carefully. Again the question must be asked: is a wage the only prerequisite? Is it the most important one? There are many women who turn their paycheques over to their husbands or who, even if they do not, remain trapped in their subservient roles, at home and on the job. And there are many other women for whom the first step towards any form of independence was involvement in a tenants strike or a community issue, where, without a wage, they were brought from the isolation of their homes into a sphere of involvement with others and into actions which opened

for them the possibilities of controlling their own destinies. Wages for housework could free a woman; they could also increase her isolation in the home. *The struggle is the key. It builds women's power.*

Rather it is the other experience -- the experience of working with others to change the nature of one's reality under capitalism that, for me, is the key to the revolutionary struggle. It will happen in as many ways and in as many areas as the effects of capitalism are felt. In other words, in all areas of our lives. For some, it will mean direct control of production; for others it will involve the struggle to control the educational process, or community planning or cultural development or recreation. Not all these struggles will necessarily be "working class struggles". Our experience in the Women's Movement has shown us that, and for all our criticisms of it, I think we cannot deny the value of that experience. We need, definitely a working class perspective on these struggles and an understanding of the primary importance of the working class in the defeat of capitalism. But we need to make that perspective a wide one; capitalism does not stop at the factory gates; it has created an entire set of social relations which involve schools, hospitals, theatres, grocery stores etc. etc. To fully understand the nature of these social relations, we need to develop a wide field of inquiry which excludes nothing that might be valuable to our understanding, not only of the nature of these relations themselves, but also of the material conditions in which they are based.

In all these areas women's contributions are and will be of primary importance. One of our failings as women of the left, perhaps, has been to isolate ourselves from the everyday experience of "the average woman" and to confine our study to abstract theoretical debate. We know, now more than ever, that the strategy that develops from an abstract situation is stillborn and powerless. We have begun to turn outwards, but we must continue and expand that process, to listen, to talk, to learn about everything and anything from every woman we meet. The whole world, with all its endless human possibilities, is ours for the effort.

"BIG FLAME" ON ORGANIZATION

Preface

This paper was circulated for discussion in the fall of 1972 among militants in Big Flame, a political group in Liverpool, England. As such, it does not necessarily represent a consensus position of the group.

A Big Flame militant describes the group as a "revolutionary interventionist organization with a working class orientation, but outside traditional Leninist and Trotskyist currents... Such groups as Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio (in Italy) have provided a rich source for us in terms of ideas and practice. But equally important are the groups with similar political orientation working in countries yet to have explosions of workers' autonomy... These groups (like Big Flame) are in a sense trying to create through their intervention some of the pre-conditions for the development of class autonomy."

Big Flame's political work is structured into three main working groups, which correspond to three main areas of intervention into the struggles of the Liverpool working class:

- (1) The Community Group, active mainly on rents in a community near the Halewood Ford plant in Liverpool.
- (2) The Car Group, active mainly now at the Halewood Ford plant, with considerable activity until recently at the Standard auto plant. The Car Group also worked to link up rank and file militants at other Ford plants in England during the autoworkers' contract struggle this spring.
- (3) The Women's Group, which recently developed as an autonomous unit in which the majority of women militants are active. It is working specifically with women around rents and social security questions.

Recently, Big Flame has begun to develop an intervention on the docks and building sites in Liverpool.

Big Flame publishes a monthly workers' newspaper to reflect the development of struggles in Liverpool and elsewhere. Available from:

Big Flame, 22 Woburn Hill, Liverpool 13, England.

THE QUESTION OF ORGANIZATION

When we talk about organization we are not talking solely about structures or forms, base groups and general meetings. These things can't be separated from the questions of:

- a) Under what conditions are we organizing? -- including what is the state of the class struggle?
- b) Who are we organizing?
- c) What is the political direction we are trying to push the struggle?

If the problem of organization is not approached in this way it becomes a purely technical or administrative question. Which means starting from the wrong angle of -- how much resources have we got? -- how can we intervene etc. In other words we would start from our own needs and difficulties and not those of the struggles. Also without the above perspective, the question of organization becomes a purely theoretical one. Maybe discussing the differences between Lenin's concept of organization and somebody else's. Or saying what kind of organization we would like Big Flame to be, how the base groups (B.G.) should work under ideal conditions.

We can't start from this perspective because we don't believe that we can decide on what organization is needed at whatever level, a priori, in those situations. That is, we believe the form of organization that BF is and will be is dependent on the conditions of all aspects of the struggle. Not on a formula we apply to the struggle, to fit in to our conception of what it should be, as the Leninists do.

Let's leave the state of the struggle till later and start from (b) and (c).

Who Are We Organizing?

When the structure and composition of the working class (wc) changes, this not only means new politics but new forms of struggle and ways of organizing, including the organization of the vanguard. For instance, we have analyzed the development of the assembly line worker, the growth of the production line, the de-skilling of jobs, the "massification" of the wc etc. This for us means profound alterations in the way we regard organization in the factory. Because on a political level, we need to bring out what has emerged, partially through these new structures, partially through other things like the changed role of the state. Like the growing rejection both active and passive of the capitalist organization of work, the rationality of production--the corresponding decline of pride in the job, the ideology of the "value of labour" that was the basis of many of the old movements for workers control and factory councils etc. We've realized the need to break down the distinction between political and economic struggle, the exclusive spheres of the party and union.

So it's logical to us that the existing organization in the factories, like the unions, are forms which do not correspond to the new structure and composition of the class, and to the struggles and political potential that follows. So following from an analysis of what the nature of the people we are trying to organize is, we come up with the need for new forms of struggle which go against the bureaucracy and lack of involvement and control of existing structures -- and new types of organization that are possible in the factory that attempt to link the internal vanguard, like we hope the B.G.'s will do.

Another aspect of the question -- who are we organizing? -- is the emergence of other sectors like women, blacks, claimants and students, to say nothing of proletarianized white collar labour. They have been challenging the political priorities of intervention and organization of the revolutionary movement. At the same time pointing to another part of the changing composition of the class. Many of these sectors have made their first collective reference point their need to organize autonomously from other sectors. Because only they can analyze the conditions of their own oppression and struggle collectively against them. Of course in BF we have not been immune from such controversy, and parts of the group have challenged priorities (the women) and normal practices of working and organizing (the community group).

The Political Direction of the Struggle

Secondly, in what political direction do we want to push the struggles? This doesn't mean the imposition onto the struggle of a specific content or programme etc. This can only be done from inside the struggle with the involvement of the people at the base in the analysis of their own conditions and controlling their own struggles.

It means rather the general political analysis we have of modern capitalism, the relations between classes etc. From this analysis (as in the shop stewards pamphlet, organization study group minutes) we have defined our main role as a revolutionary organization to be the development of working class autonomy. That is, political autonomy from the development of the capitalist system -- the separation of the needs of the working class expressed in demands, strategies, consciously understood and fought for; and organizational autonomy -- ways of fighting and organizing controlled by the participants, not as a luxury or a nice bonus to the struggle, but as a necessary condition for the development of mass revolutionary consciousness.

autonomy

This kind of analysis indicates the need for specific kinds of organization in the factories, communities and schools, which break from the old categories and limitations of struggle. We have to look at existing working class organizations in this light -- stewards' committees, tenants' organizations, union branches. We work for the qualitative growth of working class autonomy and don't see these organizations as neutral forms a revolutionary group should work in, recruit from and build its own quantitative strength.

This also means we cannot see ourselves as the party or even the embryo of the party. As an organization we can only grow inside the

development of class autonomy. At every stage our own forms of organization and intervention are or should be provisional to this. We want to be transformed by the struggle rather than plucking the best elements from it into a fixed structure that allows no mutual creation of politics and organization. You can't announce you have a party when you have x number of members or when you subjectively decide you've founded it. It can only be built by a growing capacity to give a revolutionary direction to struggles and as part of the process by which these struggles are linked, spontaneously or by the vanguard.

This is all very general. To see what it means in practice we have to look at the conditions we're organizing under.

The State of the Struggle

It is only by examining the strength and weaknesses of the class that we can decide how to organize and what is the specific content of our political line.

To cut a long story short, we'll look at the working class response to the ruling class offensive. Briefly, that offensive comes from the failure of the ruling class to use the working class struggle as a motor of its own development -- wage fights, streamlining capital etc. -- and the failure of all conciliatory and "backdoor" attempts to control the struggle by incomes policies, productivity deals, Labour governments etc. The ruling class has turned to a direct attack. It aims to restore the level of profit and its own domination by restructuring production (rationalization, MDW -- Measured Day Work, a form of time and motion study of production workers introduced into Ford plants in England after the 1971 strike, unemployment) and attacking all aspects of working class life in communities, schools, SS (Social Security) Offices and through law 'n order, Festival of Light, immigration issues etc.

They haven't had it all their own way. Let's look at the positive and negative things that have emerged -- the indications of a move to autonomy.

The most encouraging thing is the development of new forms of struggle. Sit-ins, flying pickets, the increasingly militant tactics of self defence and the seizure of machinery as at Fisher Bendix and Fakenham. A creativity has emerged that was previously missing from the struggle. But this has taken place within an overall context of a ruling class offensive the complexity of which hasn't yet been grasped. Rarely has there been much political direction in the struggle. The gap has been filled by bourgeois and labourist programmes for work and economic development. So these tactics remain only tactics and there is little conscious recognition of their meaning because of the political context in which they are used.

The beginnings of political autonomy have appeared. It first appeared in the miners' struggle. A large section of the rank and file clearly separated itself politically from the labourist leadership. They said they didn't care if the mines closed because it's a lousy job anyway. This cut away the ground under the state's attack and reformist solutions and definitely won the strike for the miners.

The most consistent revolutionary line has come from the Claimants movement whose social position necessitates an attack on the ideology of work; with their demands for a guaranteed income and with their ability to link up with the struggles of the employed -- thus clearly posing the question of class unity.

In other struggles, such as the building and docks, the basis for an autonomous political line was present in the partial understanding of many of the workers. But in the docks the dependency on the stewards, despite their hard class line and militant actions, blocked any real developments -- and the stewards themselves didn't realize the problems till it was all over, if at all. It needed a revolutionary organization to bring out the autonomous perspective from the struggle. We didn't have the influence or the national character; and all the other groups' lines couldn't be distinguished from the stewards except by their degree of militancy. Nevertheless in both strikes the beginnings of a clear understanding of the unions was there, beyond "sell-out". The opportunities are there to be seized, while others push people back into democratization and electoral strategies inside the unions; and some of the rank and file talk of breakaway or regional unions.

The production lines of the car and engineering plants have been dominated by the attempts to restructure production inside the factories, Measured Day Work, shake outs, speed-ups etc. The workers have got a high price, but the bosses have got their own way in most instances. The problems of sectionalism and economism riddles the wc movement, but it's at its worst in this sector. There have been isolated instances of fights against the plans themselves and not merely for a higher price. But such "principled" fights have gone on with a low level of political education and involvement of the rank and file and so are doomed to failure. On the whole the stewards and union leadership has proved itself at best incompetent and short sighted and at worst conciliatory and collaborationist. Often in the context of keeping the shop floor inside the bounds of the contracts. There have been excellent fights in particular sections, we can verify this in the places we work. But most remain isolated, the degree of solidarity varies and is too easily swayed by union convenors' recommendations. There is no one with the credibility capable of linking them.

In the working class as a whole, the fight against the offensive has been mainly sectional. Links have been made but primarily as a means of defence, when backs are to the wall, e.g. over the jailing of the five dockers, Upper Clyde etc. The thing about it being defensive is important as it shows the dominant political tendencies in the struggles. Those who fight each attack as an "issue" -- the rents "issue", the housing "issue", the wages "struggle" etc. Those whose political programmes (like the right to work strategy) split the class and are thus incapable of generating class unity for an autonomous offensive. They are left only with calls for sectional militancy.

The British working class is very militant, it has shown this by its refusal to lie down quietly in front of the offensive. On occasions it has clearly fought for its own particular needs and it is beginning to see the need for link-ups. But militancy is not enough. A political

strategy that isolates the rents struggle to one against this particular measure, however militant, doesn't grasp what the state's plans are for the long term in the w/c communities. The rents struggle is the clearest indication of these things. People want to fight, are sick of the Tories and the bosses, sceptical of the Labour party. But that militancy can easily disappear if the fights remain isolated and the political perspective remains at the level of, "The Tories want more rent for the bosses profits," i.e. at the level of sectional response.

The final thing we can say about the w/c response is that it's been traditionally narrow. Because of all the above factors and the historical development of class consciousness, for instance, the legacy of imperialism, there has been an ignoring of the struggles in Ireland, the cultural offensive, immigration etc.

At best, some militants regard them as a diversion, at worst some w/c people have sided with the ruling class on all three things. To combat these tendencies we have to fight factory-ism and the opportunism that is an inevitable result of the separation of politics and economics. We have to consistently propagandize on these things, support the autonomous organizations in these areas and those that are fighting against capital, and attempt to involve people in these struggles as propaganda alone is not enough.

The Role and Development of Big Flame

This leads us to some conclusions about the role of an organization like Big Flame, even though we are for the moment a primarily Merseyside group. For our problems and tasks are the same even if on a smaller scale. When we originally formed base groups and decided to intervene collectively in struggle, we had to break with the libertarian ideas of anti-intervention and organization, disdain of strategy and "recruitment" as manipulation, the hang ups about leadership... and begin to formulate our own ideas about what these things meant.

This was a painful and slow process as reference back to internal documents would show. Confusion remained and remains today about what precisely our relationship is to militants, to the struggles that we are involved in. We will return to those later. But when we started with the Base Groups we envisaged a certain line of development, even if we all knew we were being a little optimistic. That is, we saw the B.G.'s as autonomous units linked by general meetings, political lines and activities. They were the means by which the eventual workers' control of Big Flame could be achieved. By workers becoming active in the base group which they controlled and deciding the politics, then seeing the need to link with other base groups and becoming active in the group as a whole. We knew of course that not every worker would feel this need, but thought it might happen in sufficient numbers so as to radically transform the group. But this hasn't happened. Some workers have become active at various levels of the group activities and organization, especially at the base group level where, at their peak, in Fords and Standards considerable numbers of workers have attended meetings. But this process has never effected the change we wanted. BF is still too much "internals" and "externals", a centre and a periphery. Despite the undoubted influence we have in parts of the places we work in.

Why Is This?

We can't approach the problem one-sidedly -- that is, it's not only a problem of the way the Base Group organized and its policies, since we did this in a specific context of struggle or the lack of it. We have definitely been hampered by the political conditions, the lack of generalized struggles in Fords, Standards etc. But we can't comfort ourselves by simply saying...well, there hasn't been an explosion of autonomy so it's not surprising that we haven't grown...The point is that despite adverse conditions we have entered the situation with particular ways of organizing and particular politics that must be judged in the light of those situations. So we have to look at the development of the Base Groups. We can't do this in depth here -- it is essential that people consult the Standards, Fords and much undervalued Plesseys documents. The community B.G. is young and developing in its own direction as we said before; it's too early to make an examination, although even at this stage the community comrades can teach us a lot.

In the past when we've looked at the B.G.'s we've regarded the problem of the development of the B.G.'s, tending to separate the organization and the political line. That is, the B.G.'s were regarded as some fixed thing which soldiered on no matter what kinds of things we were saying, a perfect receptacle of any growth of autonomy. It's clear that the ways we've tried to organize has been inseparable from our political line in the factory. This involves mainly the question of Unions and Stewards. Without our line on the stewards the B.G.'s, especially at Fords, would have been very different things in composition and orientation. Of course this line is linked with our ideas on self activity and autonomous struggles, so the question cannot be posed separately.

But too often we have regarded the relationship between our politics and our intervention as simply a problem of transmission of analysis, in the most readable and agitational form.

There is no doubt that through our intervention our analysis of unions and stewards has been validated. But have we been perceptive enough about the level of struggles and consciousness inside the factory, which determines how we strategically get over our analysis? We obviously haven't as events at Fords and Standards have shown, where on occasions we have learnt too late that our position was shallow, uninformed or too advanced. Some of the things in the Fords national leaflet are an example. We are not trying to determine a new political line on stewards or whatever, but to point to the intimate connections between analysis, strategy and organization here. If we stick to a fundamental organizational point mentioned earlier, that our growth, our character as an organization must develop inside the growth of class autonomy: that means INSIDE -- not as miles ahead. It means that our strategies have to be conditioned by the present and potential levels of consciousness, struggle, and organization.

To reiterate a point made by many people at a previous meeting on B.G.'s. To be in a position to do this necessitates us making a conscious effort to take organization to the struggle, not the struggle to the organization. To see more people, to talk collectively about our problems.

To be clear about our desire and capability of making Big Flame the means of politically and organizationally linking up the struggles. Not the B.F. that exists at the weekly general meetings, but the B.F. that people themselves create. Organization is not an a priori thing nor is it necessarily a spontaneous growth. We are not existing as a group ready to facilitate the growth of self dependent but isolated groups of people. That is precisely the weakness of the British working class. It has a history of renewed self-organization, but as a look at the past year has shown, that is not enough to combat a coordinated and comprehensive ruling class attack. Only organizations of conscious revolutionaries can break through and structure the complexity of the many struggles, social groups, historical experiences, and ideas that go to make up the working class. I.e. organizations who put the general interest of the working class first and provide the means by which militants can have a continuous relationship between revolutionary ideas and organization and their own situations.

People worry when we talked of linkages, but they think of Big Flame as a static thing. Our aim is not for us to link things. But for our preliminary forms of organization to become the means of linking for militants, so the us becomes transformed in the process. The ups and downs in the organization of the B.G.'s are a product of both the real unevenness of the situation and our own lack of clarity about our role. To hold to the old libertarian notions of organization that form a residue in our ideas is to perpetuate the situation of externals and internals, to perpetuate the unevenness and sectionalism in the working class movement. We have made rapid advances in the development of our political ideas, not only in the things we mentioned before but about Ireland, about the whole process of working class struggle, about the current strategies of the Left and our alternatives. And most of this is precisely because of our intervention and what we've learnt from it, something that groups like Solidarity can never understand.

We have to be clearer about organization. That doesn't mean being clear about the specific content of particular ways of organizing in the future, in every different type of situation. It means understanding what is appropriate now, given:

- The state of the class struggle
- Our analysis of modern capitalism
- The social and class relations it throws up
- Our present resources
- Levels of activity and intervention on Merseyside

It is difficult to talk of practical steps we can take, when it is a question of the whole political processes of the group, but..... let's talk.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Newsletter,

I would first like to say that I welcome the development of the newsletter and I see it as a hopeful and healthy sign. I am impressed with the obvious seriousness of approach and the attempt to clarify content and direction by involving people in different areas.

I can best describe my political position in terms of the Winnipeg submission: "an unaffiliated and groping individual", my position will become clearer in the following paragraphs. Rather than address the differences between the submissions which will no doubt be done adequately by others I will limit myself to the difference which I believe exists between myself and all the articles in the first issue of the newsletter -- excluding Windsor's contribution.

The position similar to all the articles is most evident in the Winnipeg submission. This position seems to be as follows " We are anti-Leninist by our experience and practise, we need theoretical development to be able to debate with the Leninists and to proceed with the consolidation of the new formation. A newsletter would be helpful in developing this theory. To directly debate with the vanguardists would be a waste of time. We must stop the movement of formerly independent leftists to vanguardist positions." I would refer to this as an already more or less (less in Waterloo's view) constituted position.

I do not have enough contact with other people in the left to know whether there is indeed a development which could be even termed 'nacent tendency'. I do not think this could be applied to me; my own position is as follows.

In our practise and experience there exists an implicit and explicit questioning concerning form (eg. party), strategy (eg. role of unions, nationalism), and content (economic, political-economic or 'critique of everyday life') of a socialist revolution for which traditional revolutionary politics does not seem adequate. Further investigation is needed in order to clarify and solve these questions. A newsletter would help the progress of those who doubt the adequacy of trad. rev. politics.

This position I would refer to as not being an already constituted one and herein lies the difference between myself and the articles in the newsletter. My position also implies that the newsletter could not directly engage in the debate with the vanguardists (since they have no doubts concerning trad. rev. politics) but it would not imply that the newsletter never prints or deals with their positions and/or critiques of the newsletter.

So I would like to see a newsletter which addresses itself to a systematic elaboration of the Canadian political economy, a critical look at the history and present state of proletarian struggles, and which discusses contemporary experiences but does not, before further investigation define itself as anti-Leninist.

Yours,

Mike Begley,
Edmonton, Alta.

Dear Newsletter,

Enclosed is a copy of the Bewick/Ed publications list. These documents were originally produced by members of the Facing Reality group in the United States. They are presently available from:
Community Resource Centre
3210 Sandwich St.
Windsor, Ont.
Attention: Mailorders

We are trying to establish the C.R.C. as a focal point for various American and European publications that relate to current political questions in Canada. We hope to publish an updated list of material that we have assembled in each newsletter.

If newsletter subscribers have suggestions for literature- we will try to obtain it. We also hope to begin to co-ordinate the translation and printing of various documents from the French and Italian left movements.

Further, we are willing to provide a mailorder book service to those comrades who live in areas with limited access to left books.

Solidarity,
Ron Baxter

Facing Reality by C.L.R. James, Grace Lee & P. Chalieu, 174 pp.

The new society--a statement for our time. A state capitalist view of the industrial world and the role of Marxists stemming from the experience of the Hungarian Revolution. \$1.50

State Capitalism & World Revolution by James. 107pp.

Theoretical analysis of the present stage of capitalism in form of a polemic against Trotsky's views, documented with quotations from Marx and Lenin. \$2.50

Every Cook Can Govern by James, 35pp. mimeo

The title phrase is from Lenin and it argues for participatory democracy based on the experience of ancient Greece.

C.L.R. James Anthology, Radical America 120pp.

A Special issue of RA with ample selections from James in areas of philosophy, economics, national question, literature, art and sports, Marxist theory, etc. \$1.00

Education, Propaganda, Agitation by James 35 pp. mimeo

First published in 1943, proposals and analyses on needs and nature of a Marxist party in U.S. \$.75

The American Worker by Phil romano and Ria stone, 70 pp.

Originally published in 1946. An article by a young auto worker describing life in a GM plant and a philosophical article incorporating that experience into the body of Marxist theory.

"Be His Payment high or Low": The American Working Class in the Sixties
by Martin Glaberman, 21pp.

On the American working class and decline of the union movement.
(Limited copies but will be reprinted soon.) \$.35

Union Committeemen and Wilcat Strikes by Glaberman, 1955, 23pp.

Two articles: the story of the 1955 wildcats in auto and a
discussion of the radical union committeeman. \$.50

Theory and Practice by Glaberman, 18pp., 1969

The role of the Marxist group in relation to the mass move-
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