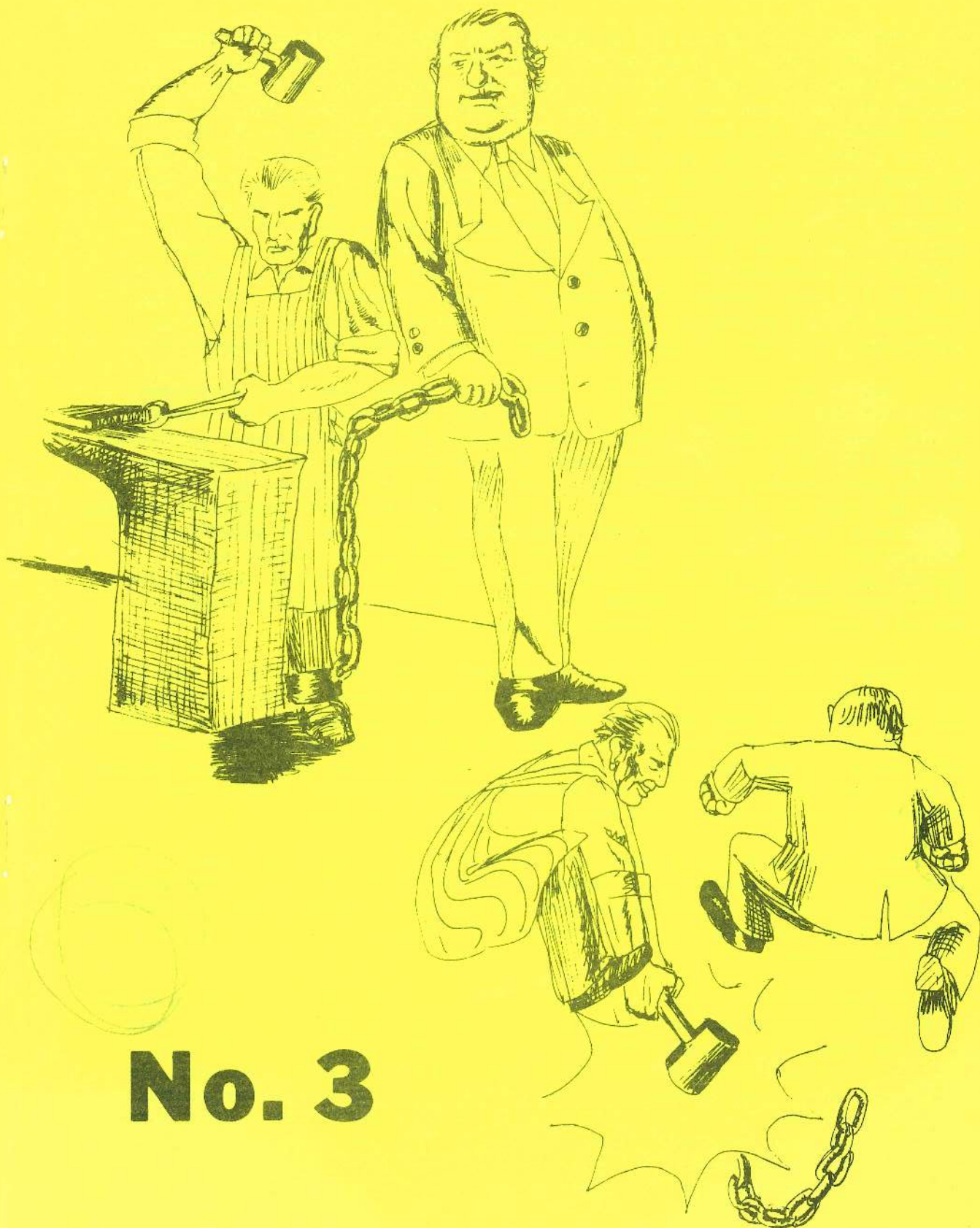


# THE NEWSLETTER



**No. 3**



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

The availability of the newsletter and certain other publications ( Italy:New Tactics & Organization; Organizing for Workers' Power ) have caused Canadian leftists to raise questions concerning the history and source of these publications. Other concerns include the nature of the "new tendency", the meaning of the workers' autonomy perspective, etc. All of these questions are important and through the newsletter we hope in some degree to provide answers. In certain cases, however, what seems to be demanded is a worked out political 'line', a clear orientation towards a political organization (read party ) and a specific form of political practise. For militants who are attempting to work out and clarify the perspective of the new tendency such a response is impossible. This is the case because the elements of such a response are either anti-theoretical to our conception of political struggle or are problems to be investigated as part of the development of a revolutionary perspective.

That is not to say, however, that these issues cannot be addressed. The first two articles in this issue attempt to outline the development of the newsletter and to suggest the elements of a revolutionary political perspective. Both, in different ways, also situate some of the problems of the new tendency in theory and practise. Similarly, other articles such as those on the post office, on schools and on women industrial workers illustrate the workers' autonomy perspective as a method of analytical reflection. It is in this way, through intensive investigation and a direct relationship to the working class, that the political perspective of the new tendency will become clarified. The newsletter will promote and be a part of such developments whenever they occur.

Many of the articles in this issue were developed for, or in response to, a conference held in Windsor, Aug. 4-6. The purpose of the conference was to involve as many southern ontario militants as possible in a process of political clarification based on and in close relation to practical experience. In many ways this process was uncessful but the lessons learned from it have been beneficial and the problems of building a political movement in the working class have been greatly clarified.

Where possible, the papers for discussion at Windsor have been re-produced in this issue. Also, papers which developed out of the conference including a summary of the discussion concerning the newsletter are included. Any- response to these ideas and issues (clarification or contestation ) would be welcome.

Letters following the last issue were very favourable, and we seem to have reached people all across Canada and certain areas of the U.S. Many of these people are interested in the ideas presented but are not sure if they should respond or how this could take place. In answer to this, we would very much like to hear from people who find the newsletter useful or interesting. The newsletter is not, nor does it hope to be, a left glossy ( Ramparts ) or a theoretical journal ( Telos ). Rather we hope to produce communication link between militants who are attempting to build a mass revolutionary movement which is antagonistic to capital. It is crucial,





# ELEMENTS FOR A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

## Introduction

The following themes were elaborated in response to the situation in Toronto immediately preceding the conference held in Windsor. The meetings held to prepare for this conference were characterized by a difficulty in addressing politically the problems of organizing the conference. This difficulty could be traced to the existence of both areas of agreement between people as well as areas of disagreement. The areas of agreement, which were implicit, had taken the form of a common interest in, and appreciation of, certain articles (e.g. "Vanguard, Vanguard, Who's Got the Vanguard?" by M. Schneider in Liberation, June & August, 1972), certain personalities (e.g. Selma James) and certain political formations (e.g. Lotta Continua). Negatively the forms of agreement had been the rejection of the (Bolshevik) party-trade union model for revolutionary organization and a marked distrust of nationalism as a progressive force in Canada. The areas of disagreement were many, ranging from the nature of the lessons to be learned from the above positive political developments to the area of society which could be most fruitfully investigated in order to develop struggle. What became necessary, therefore, was to begin a process of clarifying a common political framework within which political discussions could be carried on.

We felt this could best be done by elaborating certain themes which we felt were contained however vaguely within the existing area of common agreement. (For example, while Schneider does not use the words "social factory" in "Vanguard, Vanguard..." he is certainly describing its existence and attempting to assess its significance for the revolutionary movement in the advanced capitalist countries). These themes were seen not only as theoretical concepts which had been helpful in advancing the



struggle elsewhere (e.g. Italy) but also as the embryo of a political perspective which militants here will need in order to distinguish significant developments from insignificant ones, to identify progressive social forces and to initiate actions which will advance the revolutionary movement.

The response to these themes has been mixed. On the one hand, some people saw them as a helpful though very concise elaboration of some basic concepts useful for their developing understanding of advanced capitalism. On the other hand, some people found them rather abstract and felt the points contained within the themes were not developed in sufficient detail to be of much use (e.g. the analysis of the state, which under advanced capitalism has become the mechanism for the exercise of power by collective capital -- e.g. direct mediation between individual capitals and labour through the incorporation of labour (recognition of unions, arbitration, etc.), through the development of manpower policies, etc.; direct control over the reproduction of labour power through the development of educational programs and institutions; direct control over the distribution of social wealth, initially through welfare and social security benefits and more recently through the use of wage and price guidelines/controls) -- obviously remains to be developed in much further detail.

The sources of these difficulties occur on several levels. First the concepts, and in some cases even the terms used to express them, are not generally used by the North American left. While we have suggested a number of articles which attempt to develop some of these concepts, they are not sufficient in themselves. Much more practical and theoretical work conducted with a view to testing and developing these themes will be necessary if the degree of clarity needed is to be achieved.

On another level the difficulty reflects the fact that these themes express an alternate view of the development of the capitalist system. The significant developments which characterize advanced capitalism (e.g. the changed role of the state; the changed nature of the productive process, etc.) are seen to be the direct result of the class struggle. Thus the recomposition of capital as "collective capital" is the response by capital to the challenge of the class as a political force which reached a high point in the Russian and European revolutions of 1917-1920; the second industrial revolution is a direct attack at the material basis (i.e. the control over the productive process exercised by the skilled worker) of the power which the working class had developed. This amounts to simply an affirmation of the class struggle as the determining element in the development of capitalism -- a point which the official left has lost sight of.

Finally the difficulty can be traced to the lack of theoretical work done during the period when the official Communist movement gave the defense of Russia first priority. This has resulted in an over-reliance on certain Marxist classics with the resulting acceptance of models which were developed to understand a reality which is no longer present. (This is not to deny the importance of these works but simply



to demand that they be seen as the products of people living a specific historical situation). One result of the lack of Marxist analysis has been the absence of the theoretical framework necessary for an adequate understanding of advanced capitalism. (For a discussion of the need for such a framework as it affects our understanding of the role of the capitalist state see the introduction to Working Papers on the Kapital-istate #1, c/o Jim O'Caner, Dept. of Economics, California State University, San Jose California, 95114; for a discussion of the same need with respect to the role of women in advanced capitalism see "Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life: Part 1" by Eli Zaretsky, Socialist Revolution, #13-14.) The New Left in North America, while correctly rejecting the hegemony of Stalinist "objectivism", failed to develop a coherent theory of advanced capitalism which would both situate itself and indicate the direction forward. The resulting theoretical confusion, while reflecting the level of class struggle here, was a significant contribution to the collapse of the New Left after 1970.

The following themes, which we hope will contribute to the development of such a theory, obviously require enormous development. But this development will only occur as a part of the developing class struggle and this is not meant in any academic sense. As the class struggle sharpens not only will certain developments become clearer (e.g. the exact nature and the extent of the struggle against labour) but also new questions will be posed. In addressing these questions (both practically and theoretically) the usefulness of these themes will not only be tested but both their significance and their implications will become clearer.

It is no accident that where the struggle is most demanding the theoretical expression is most clear. The sharpening of the Italian class struggle over the last 15 years has forced militants there to clarify their analysis of advanced capitalism. The articles listed below, which develop various points contained within the themes, are products of this situation. Hopefully they will also contribute to the ongoing process of political clarification here.

Baldi, G., "Theses on Mass Worker and Social Capital", Radical America, Vol. 6, No. 1, May-June 1972.

Bologna, S., "Class Composition and Theory of the Party", Telos, #13, Fall 1972.

Dalla Costa, M & James, S., "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community", Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Rd., Monpelier, Bristol, BS6 5EP, England.

Potere Operaio, "Italy, 1973: Workers' Struggles in the Capitalist Crisis", Radical America, Vol. 7 No. 2, March-April 1973.

Ramirez, B., Review of Operai e Stato (Workers and the State), eds. S. Bologna & A. Negri, Telos, #13, Fall 1972.

Tronti, M., "Workers and Capital", Telos, #14.



## Theory and Practice

Revolutionary theory always develops as part of the class struggle itself: its only function is to provide a proletarian view of bourgeois society that will allow the proletariat to understand the development of capital in order to locate the areas of struggle that will in the end turn the class into an intolerable contradiction within the system. Revolutionary theory, therefore, is not a set of "positions" on a variety of subjects but a political perspective for struggle which develops as an integral part of the struggle. Theory is therefore a material force, a necessary element in the developing antagonism between capital and the class.

## Class Composition

In analyzing the development of modern advanced capitalism in terms of the changes in the structure of production and the total organization of society, revolutionary theory today provides the key to understanding the present composition of the class, understood not as the "working class" in the narrow sense but as the proletariat in general. The level of class struggle has always determined the nature and extent of such changes and for this reason the composition of the class at any given point determines the possibilities for struggle and the relations of power between capital and the class.

We can see, for example, how the reorganization of production brought about by the second industrial revolution -- the introduction of assembly line production which decomposed each work process into a number of discrete motions -- gave birth to a new kind of worker who was merely an appendage, a human appendage, to the machine. The strength which he had previously had vis a vis capital, based on the organization of production which gave him responsibility for the production process and, as a result, a sense of identification with his role as "producer", was severely eroded. The metamorphosis of the skilled worker into the collective "massified" worker was a moment of capitalist response to the strength of the class, but, at the same time, it provided the material base for a generalized (mass) struggle precisely against the identification of the class as a mere component of capitalist development. By making the worker more conscious of being mere labour power for capitalist consumption, it made possible the unprecedented attack on the entire role of the class within capital.

In this sense, the changes in the composition of the class function as the point of confrontation between capital and the class. As an arena for struggle it is precisely here that the class discovers itself as a political force within capital but antagonistic to it. As such, it can turn capital's maneuvers into class weapons against it, modifying the relations of power and moving closer to its ultimate defeat.



## The Social Factory

The changes advanced capitalism has undergone are related to its own internal dynamic of expansion and the function which the class struggle has had within it. For capital, the class is always mere labour power or a factor of production and as such its aim has been to integrate it more and more into capitalist development and growth. For the class to struggle as class means precisely to resist such integration. In its counterattacks, capital responds by changing the form of its domination, and to meet the challenge of the class as a political force, capital reconstituted itself into "collective capital", extending its domination beyond the factory into society, via the State. Capitalist production has been increasingly socialized, that is, it has invaded areas of social life which were virtually free from its direct control, ie. the family, school, social services, leisure, etc. This process is ultimately a shift towards productivity at the social level, that is, the capitalist relation of production dominating more and more aspects of human activity, integrating them into the process of value creation. This means an increasingly more organic relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between factory and society -- hence the term "social factory".

Within this framework the significance of the shifting composition of the class is evident. It is no longer possible to think in terms of the "industrial" working class when the entire society is being increasingly organized productively, that is, in function of the overall goals of collective social capital. Again, this means that the terrain in which a struggle against capital can be made is greatly expanded -- the student movement, the women's movement, the revolt among teachers and white collar workers are all struggles against the capitalist organization of daily life as work. The socialization of production lays the material base for the socialization of the class struggle: within the social factory it is possible for the class to attack capital from many different ways, and each of these attacks strengthens the class as a whole.

## The Struggle Against Labour

The mass worker in industry as well as different sectors of the proletariat in the social factory all have in common the fact that the basic capitalist social relation reduces them to mere labour power and makes them increasingly a function of value creation, albeit in a variety of different ways. This provides the material base for discovering an overriding class interest: the struggle from within capital against capital. As part of capital, the class is a productive entity (labour power) inextricably tied to the process of capital accumulation, therefore, to the extent that it struggles against capital as class it struggles against the productive role which capital has assigned it. For the class to struggle against capital means precisely to struggle against itself as labour power. Within capital but against it can only mean as class against labour.



As we have seen, the material base for this struggle lies in the structure of social production under advanced capitalism which has destroyed any basis for the identification of the worker with the product or goal of his labour -- a fact most starkly evident in industry but increasingly evident in both waged and unwaged labour in the entire social factory. Students, teachers, white collar workers, housewives etc. have undergone a process of proletarianization which links them objectively with the working class and makes possible an unprecedented level of struggle against the very function of the class within capital. It makes possible precisely the full emergence of the class as class, a political entity capable of positing its own autonomous needs over and against those of capital. When the class becomes an intolerable contradiction within the capitalist system it will realize its full autonomy by destroying it.

### Workers' Autonomy

As the composition of the class is increasingly extended to include more and more forms of human activity and the material base is therefore laid for the consolidation of the class as a unified political force, the decisive factor is the liberation of the class from its identification with capitalist production. It ceases to be what capital has always made it, namely, an economic category, and becomes instead a self-conscious self-activating political entity.

This has important strategic implications for class struggle. The collapsing of "economic" and "political" makes it relatively meaningless to think in terms of "economic" struggles tied to a specific organizational form (unions) and a "wider political" struggle tied to the organizational form of the party. The material base on which this distinction rests historically ("aristocracy of labour" vs. the mass of unskilled workers or industrial proletariat vs. peasantry) was totally destroyed with the massive reorganization of production in the 1920's which made the overwhelming majority of workers mere appendages to the machine, totally interchangeable one with the other. And the extension of this process of "massification" to other forms of activity, as collective capital increasingly socializes production, extends the material composition of the class and further undermines the "economic-political" dichotomy upon which the traditional left organizations are based.

Workers' autonomy therefore is a perspective for struggle based on the dissolution of the vanguard-mass dichotomy and the accompanying strategic distinction between "economic" and "political". The class today stands as a materially structured political entity within capital, capable of launching direct attacks on capital without the mediation of "working class" institutions which have, at best, outlived their historical (class) function. Workers' autonomy, then, refers to autonomy from capital and from organizational forms of struggle that would tie it to the mechanisms of capitalist development rather than help overthrow it.



As a conception of struggle, the focus of workers' autonomy is on each sector of the class organizing its own offensive against capital -- workers, students, women, white-collar workers, teachers, etc. -- based on the specific form of their exploitation. That which objectively unites the various sectors of the class is their common enemy, capital, and to mature politically as a class means precisely to discover the material inter-connections between the various forms of exploitation in order to make a unified attack that will directly challenge the power of capital as a system.

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We emphasize, in conclusion, that the contents of the above themes are not in anyway a "platform" to which militants in the "New Tendency" adhere, but rather areas of common investigation which need more study and clarification.

Judy, Peter.  
(Toronto)



# LEADERSHIP,

## COLLECTIVE PRACTISE

### & THE NEW TENDENCY

#### Introduction

This paper will be an attempt to point to a methodology by which the New Tendency can develop on a national basis. At the same time, it will include a criticism of how it has been developing to date, particularly a criticism of the Windsor Conference, and lessons to be learned from it. Initially, however, we will devote a section to a brief history of the Newsletter and the New Tendency, so that comrades who have not been involved in the process of the development, but whose sole contact has been the Newsletter itself, will have some basis for understanding the issues in question.

#### History

In December, individuals met in Toronto to discuss the formation of the Newsletter. At that time, most people at the meeting were members of particular groups in various centers, mainly groups located in Windsor, Waterloo, Winnipeg, and Toronto. Although the basis of agreement was not great, in general most people and in some instances groups were attempting to come to grips with and to a critique of the dichotomy that has been emphasized in the orthodox communist movement between party and class. It must be emphasized that there was little homogeneity in this development. Some people leaned heavily on the eruptions of the class struggle in France and Italy and the theoretical



developments that have occurred in those countries. Others were strongly influenced by the theoretical work of C.L.R. James who criticized the role of the classical vanguard party on the basis of capitalist development, mainly the development of state capitalism. There were other directions but these seem to be the major ones. The first issue of the Newsletter clearly reflects the looseness of agreement. On the other hand, it also reflects an extremely positive development in Canada, namely that enough militants have developed a critique of orthodox communist and social democratic politics to undertake such an endeavour. The response to it has indicated other militants were addressing the same questions in other parts of Canada.

In May, Facing Reality\* held a conference in Detroit at which time C.L.R. James was to address the session. Many militants who had made contact directly or indirectly with Facing Reality were invited to attend. Windsor comrades decided at that time to attempt to call for a one day discussion to be held in Windsor of Newsletter people to discuss the paper. This was possible because the Facing Reality conference was scheduled for one day of a long weekend.\*\*

The Windsor discussion attracted militants from Waterloo, Toronto, Windsor, Winnipeg and Montreal. The major conclusions and decisions reached at the discussion were: 1) it was necessary for Newsletter people to view themselves as and work towards a cohesive movement; 2) people should make a commitment to write articles for the Newsletter to ensure its success; 3) another conference would occur in August on the long weekend to clarify our politics; 4) a steering committee composed of three people from Windsor and three people from Toronto was elected to organize the conference.

The period from May to August was characterized by two events. The second Newsletter was published. As indicated by the size of the second issue the call for articles was taken seriously, indeed several

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\* Facing Reality no longer operates as a group although they have maintained informal contact with one another. Some of the people previously involved in the group continue to publish some of their documents. Literature available from them is listed in Newsletter #2.

\*\* Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa had been in the southern Ontario area previous to the Windsor discussion addressing many audiences. They had a tremendous impact, sparking many discussions on the role of women in the class struggle (two articles address this perspective in Newsletter #2). Selma James appeared at the Facing Reality conference which played a role in the attendance of several militants from Southern Ontario to the Windsor discussion.



were omitted because of space limitations. The other event was preparation for the conference.

A major issue that arose during this period concerned what criteria should be used to "invite" people to the conference. The steering committee realized that the criteria of who to invite was a political question and the committee itself did not feel it had a mandate to establish political criteria. They returned to the decision made by the people at the first conference which was that everyone who was at the May meeting would be invited and a small number of friends who were intending to come to it, but couldn't make it. The reasons for this were (1) technical reasons -- size of the meeting space in the Windsor Labour Centre and (2) political reasons -- it would be more useful to limit the people attending to those who had experience in the "collective" development of the New Tendency, thus enabling the collective process to continue towards political clarification. On the basis of this, the steering committee recommended this. A smaller grouping of people from Toronto objected to the recommendation, arguing that the New Tendency was not cohesive enough to invite militants on the basis of political criteria. Further, they argued that the New Tendency should be built on the basis of mass debate. A compromise was worked out by which people from the first discussion could invite people interested in the New Tendency.

#### The Windsor Conference

The conference was structured around workshops that would deal with specific sectors of the working class. The workshops were also divided on the basis of sex, in the initial sessions. The breakdown was plant men, plant women, non-industrial women, education (male and female), community women, and community men. The next series of workshops were integrated on the basis of sex, i.e., plant men and women, non-industrial women and education, and community women and men had separate workshops. Then a plenary was held incorporating all the workshops in which reports on discussion and conclusions of the various workshops were presented. Following the plenary all men and all women held separate sessions. There was also a special session of all comrades on the immigrant working class. Finally, workshops on the Newsletter and on other publications (like the Sofri pamphlet) were held, followed by a summation and criticism session.

#### Critique

The Windsor conference was called to clarify the political perspective of the New Tendency. If any point was driven home over the weekend in general and the final summation session in particular, it was that this did not occur. We think that a far more important point is that this could not have occurred at this particular stage and if consolidation had occurred it would have been extremely artificial and in the long run harmful.



The first point to be made is that the conference was largely composed of people from Toronto and Windsor, with smaller numbers of people from Waterloo, Winnipeg, Montreal, Ottawa and Kingston. In Toronto a clear ideological perspective (at this stage it has no organizational presence) has been developed around the theoretical and practical struggles that have developed in Italy during the 60's and 70's. This ideological perspective has been developed and grasped by a number of Toronto militants, particularly by those engaged in translating documents concerning the Italian struggles. Other militants in Toronto, to varying degrees, have accepted this framework but have not come to grips with the concepts theoretically or practically. This seems to us to be largely a function of the lack of organizational presence in the Toronto area. To the extent the ideas have been forwarded, militants sympathetic to the Newsletter tend to agree with them. The other side of the coin is that there has been no basis for people sympathetic to this political perspective to clarify those ideas, develop the whole of the theoretical implications and attempt to test the theoretical framework in their practical struggles.

If this was true of Toronto, the confusion in other centres was greatly magnified. Some comrades in Windsor were acquainted to some degree with the perspective, to others it was a vague notion. And beyond Windsor, we suspect (certainly in the cases of Winnipeg and Waterloo) it was essentially the first encounter with the perspective beyond scattered articles that have filtered through to these centres. That was one aspect of the problem but a far more problematic dynamic was that precisely because of the predominance of Toronto at the conference, followed closely by Windsor, this political perspective was assumed to be the theory around which the new tendency could consolidate. The conference itself pointed out at the very least this was premature.

Further problems arose. Because the Italian perspective was in general accepted as a framework without a clear understanding of it, the comrades who had developed an understanding were looked upon as the leadership. The whole conference was structured to draw theoretical conclusions from practical struggles and the informal leadership certainly supported this process. This process in fact, was viewed as the method by which the New Tendency could move forward in a "collective" development. The summation/criticism session dealt with this development quite thoroughly. The leadership was implicit in that it was informally accepted as such and instead of stating theoretical assumptions and relating that theory to practical struggles, it attempted to describe struggles and get others to draw political/theoretical conclusions. Others not having a clear theoretical understanding of the perspective but tending to accept it, could not and did not draw the conclusions. Although this process was not apparent in all the workshops, it was predominant in the plant and general sessions. This is precisely the reason that a consolidation did not occur and could not have occurred. If the leadership had been explicit a consolidation may have occurred but would have been artificial and certainly would not have been grounded on a clear understanding of the issues. This to us is the reason why either way, the way it



did develop or the way it could have developed, the conference was premature.

We would like to emphasize that the above is not to suggest that the Italian perspective is not a useful one. It may well prove to be a rallying point in the future. However, we are not prepared to equate the New Tendency with this analysis without further investigation, a great deal more debate, and a rigorous attempt to ground this theory in Canadian reality. It is our opinion that one of the most positive aspects of the conference was the realization of many comrades at the final session that it was necessary for individuals to clarify and analyze the Italian perspective in particular and their politics in general with other comrades in their local centres.\* If this process is indeed initiated, a basis could be laid for a clarification of politics that would begin the process of clarification on a broader level.

Previously the New Tendency saw the movement towards a clarification of its politics in the "collective development" of the people already interested and committed to it. The decision to open the conference on an invitational basis was not qualitatively different from the original proposal of limiting it to those who attended the first Windsor discussion. Either way, with the exception of Winnipeg, it forced it into a southern Ontario development. Further, it reinforced the centres that were already the strongest, namely Toronto and Windsor. An example to clarify this point may prove useful. Both in the case of Kitchener-Waterloo and Winnipeg, the theoretical development around the Italian struggles was hardly even known to exist. In Toronto a paper was prepared on the Italian theoretical framework as the possible basis of unity for the New Tendency. This paper included concepts like the social factory, struggle against wage labour, workers' autonomy etc. In the cases of Kitchener-Waterloo and Winnipeg, at least, it would have been very difficult to unify around concepts you have just been introduced to, and have had no time to investigate.

If the emphasis shifts to clarification at the local centres, the collective development of the New Tendency does not disappear but is introduced on another level, with the Newsletter initially being the central pivot.\*\* Some of the possible implications, positive implications, to us would be . . . .

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\*By local centres we are not necessarily equating a city with a centre. For example in a given city a centre could be one sector of the class, at one point, and the whole of the N.T. in the city at another, depending on people's needs in the particular situation.

\*\*We do not mean to imply that meetings between centres should stop. We would suggest however, that this be done when it would prove useful both theoretically and practically for the centres involved. When meetings do occur and useful analysis is developed, the Newsletter should be utilized as a media to transfer that information to other comrades. What we are arguing against is viewing such gatherings as meetings of the New Tendency as a whole, as a collective.



(1) If activity is primarily focussed in the local centres it would stimulate more organizational formations locally and would move away from seeing the New Tendency as the primary group, as the group to relate to, as practice, etc.

(2) It would force further clarification in the Newsletter. In the past, since the Newsletter was viewed as a "collective development", certain assumptions about who you were writing for were taken for granted and hence certain propositions were assumed. With an emphasis on clarification in the centres, the Newsletter could become a forum for debate where struggles could be recorded and theoretical clarification drawn from those struggles. The point is that articles would be written with more of a view towards stating theoretical assumptions and expanding that theory from practical struggles.

(3) With articles tending towards more theoretical clarification such that positions of each centre or different positions within centres are known to whoever reads the Newsletter, the possibility of people beyond southern Ontario responding, and understanding different positions becomes more plausible.

(4) After this process has gone on for some time and after clarification locally begins to take shape, then a future conference becomes feasible. Such a conference could be to a greater extent national in scope, and attended by militants with a clearer understanding thus laying the basis for the possibility of a clarification of the politics of the New Tendency.

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Suzy VanDerLoop  
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# IN STRUGGLE

## AGAINST THE CAPITALIST SCHOOL

### Introduction

The following paper is the second report of the high school working groups to the Labour Centre (Windsor). Some background may be of use.

The working group at the time of this report consisted of five militants, four of whom belonged to the Labour Centre. Of these, three had extensive/intensive experience in the organized high school left during several years of their stay in that institution; the other two had similar though less experience. Many ideas in this report come not only as a result of the work and reflection in the group at present, but also through reflecting on our prior experience in light of ideas we are developing now.

The perspective of a number of years has proven valuable. It is clear that the significant changes occurring in Ontario schools are not merely the moralistic responses of a few bleeding heart liberals scattered here and there in the school system. Ontario (and California) is leading North America in a conscious effort to alter educational perspectives to provide for significant new tendencies and needs of capitalism. The first manifestation of this change in perspective is the rise of the open concept school and the trend toward increased activity outside of the classroom (eg. field trips, community work groups). The ultimate extension of this development is de-schooling ..... in this context an important book is Education: Ontario's Preoccupation by W.G. Fleming, "a companion to the author's seven volume series, Ontario's Educative Society, written as an in depth analysis of the Ontario school system from the point of the Ontario Department (now Ministry) of Education. Fleming, no revolutionary, situates de-schooling as a central aspect of Ontario's educational future.



The process of de - schooling is completely incorrectly understood when framed as any kind of sincere liberation response (as by the free school movement) to a blatant and immistakably repressive school system of prior years.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of deschooling (originally conceived by Ivan Illich<sup>2</sup> as a revolutionary form but since realized by official society as a significant development of a new method of repression) as any student will outline from his own experience of the semestering system, credit system, wider and looser course option, etc. allows for less work and more flexibility within the pre-defined range of the system. But it also leads to an extreme fragmentation of students and reinforces social passivity and inactivity.<sup>3</sup> As organized by the bureaucracy the primary function of schools has been historically, and still is, to keep youth out of production. Secondly, and as a function of the latter is the socialization and indoctrination of bourgeois ideology and behaviour patterns. Short of literacy itself (which is only really important in certain cases - see Community Schools, June, 1972 and This Magazine, Volume 15, #4) actual learning itself has never been a priority for the educational system.<sup>4</sup> The function of deschooling is to realize more effectively the actual structure of these priorities at a reduced cost to the state.

At this point an aside on an important misconception is warranted. It is said that it is the job of schools to indoctrinate, to "teach", alienation. This is not a materialist analysis. Alienation is a function of concrete material relations. One is alienated not from a subjective base (ie. I feel alienated hence I am) but objectively (ie. the concrete relations of production cause me to be and feel alienated).... the same applies to schools and the

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1. Equally inadequate is the position which sees the deschooling ideology of government spokesman as mere verbiage which will in no way alter the school system (cf. the position of the trotskyist dominated cutbacks movement).

2. The position of Illich, Latin American, Jesuit thinker, is that schools are outmoded obstacles to learning. He believes that people should leave the schools and learn in the world. A fine concept, but a little utopian given who the bosses are these days. Less utopian and more repressive when interpreted by the same bosses.

3. Fragmentation in the sense of destroying the school's traditional system of organization as a basis for developing resistance. Much as capital gives the waged working class its basis of organization and therefore resistance in the workplace, so the school gives the students a socialized base in the classroom, school plant, etc.

4. Certain social skills which facilitate the acquiring of production skills are transmitted - but it is important to realize that very little that is learned is directly applicable to production. Workplaces train their own workers - how often has the person fresh from the classroom heard "First off, forget everything they taught you in high school."



alienated learning process. At best the schools give us some "practise" in alienation. However, if we never attended school, the same "practise" would be attained in a few months of workplace experience.

Traditional left analysis of the school has been hampered not only by swallowing the myths of the system about upward mobility et al through education, but also by believing that problems with the school is not the institution itself, but the manner in which it is conducted. Schools historically are a capitalist institution - their function is to serve capital (see P. Aries, Centuries of Childhood). Schools will disappear with capitalism. This is certainly not to say that education and learning will disappear, for they are not to be equated with schools. Schools are the capitalist form of the not exclusively capitalist category, education.

Enough of this introduction, these ideas are rough and as yet in the process of development. The newsletter will carry further reports on our progress. It is important to keep in mind that the following paper represents our position about three months ago. Things develop ceaselessly. This document, hence, is presented in its historical context as a contribution to the development of new perspectives on the high school movement.

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Student Group Report #2, July 8th, 1973

"For the second year in a row, the number of students dropping out has increased to the point where some areas of the education programs have to be reevaluated. These areas include school-student relationships, relevance of programs, and resultant economic problems."

-report of the director  
Windsor Board of Education, 1973

For almost a month now, we have been working with about a dozen grade nine students from Walkerville (2 men, 10 women). We met them for the first time at a chaotic, thoroughly unstructured meeting in which everyone spoke at once. In the six meetings since then, we have managed to achieve some degree of organization and have established a working relationship with these people.

At the second meeting we showed a film, Students and Teachers, made by the Department of Education in 1967 when the present credit system was in its experiemntal stages. The credit system developed mostly out of the Hall-Dennis report. After successfully completing the required amount of time (110 - 120 hours) for a course a credit is given; 27 credits entitle the student to graduate from high



school. No courses are compulsory and, as it is common to have courses in two or three different levels, grades are supposedly done away with. In practice, many schools do have compulsory courses, usually English and Phys. Ed., and grades are pretty well defined, at least in 9 and 10.

The credit system, having been in full operation in Onatrio for two years, is being criticised from all sides. A number of articles have appeared in the Star, giving various points of view (check the bulletin board in the students office). Parents, and many teachers, are saying that there should be compulsory courses and that the choice of courses should not be left entirely to the students. Teachers feel that the budget ceilings do not give them enough money to implement the credit system fully. A professor from Queen's University has charged that "very few schools, about 18% of our sampling, have honestly implemented the free-choice credit system ...." and that most schools have retained much of the old ways. The minister of education has recognised this and condons it, saying that schools have to adjust to local needs and conditions. The 1973-74 edition of HS 1, the circular that sets out the basic guidelines for education in Ontario, has tightened up considerable from the very liberal 1972-73 edition.

Students have been exposed to the credit system for at least a year now, and have many criticisms of the way the system really works. We hoped to hear some of those criticisms come out of the film. Instead, we heard a discussion of the semester system, the next coming phase in education, due to be implemented at Walkerville in 1975.

Semestering is basically a different way of scheduling time, so that students theoretically could work at their own pace and if ambitious enough, finish high school a year, perhaps a year and a half earlier. It cuts the number of months a course is scheduled over down to half the school year, each year now consisting of two semesters. Although the semester system doesn't scrap the existing credit system, but just builds upon it, the students see semestering as entirely new and different. One of the most basic changes is that periods will last 60 to 75 minutes, instead of the present 40, something that is very real to students and could be a reason for this view.

At our third meeting we brought in a student from Brennan, where semestering has been in effect for over a year. He talked about ways of beating the system that have developed - ways to beat the more rigid attendance system, ways of collecting needed "media centre" time without actually attending. He also said that under semestering less learning takes place, a point that was quickly taken up and questioned by some of the students and us, until Greg entirely contradicted his first statement. Meanwhile Brian, who does not get as good marks as the others and is more concerned with getting out as easily and quickly as possible, was figuring out how to use the semester system to get out in two years.



So, while the controversy rages about the credit system, students are looking ahead to the next step, semestering, and at the same time pointing out that things are the same no matter what the system is.

Since that meeting our investigation has developed somewhat. One working meeting was held in the afternoon, in which a small group discussed semestering and how it could be further studied. This resulted in a visit, tape recorder in hand, to the new director of education, Bob Field. They reported that he was very interested in semestering, but didn't tell them much more than they already knew. He beat around the bush answering whether semestering is more economical (it is, uses less teachers) and would only characterize the drop out situation as "bad" as opposed to his predecessor, Clare MacLeod, whose comments begin this paper. Nevertheless, the students kept throwing questions at him and an assistant for over two hours, taking notes as they went along. No members of the working group were present at this meeting.

While continuing to investigate semestering, plans for the next meeting include discussion of how we will begin to investigate student councils as well as a proposed trip to Point Pelee or some other beach. Several students are very enthusiastic about publishing a newspaper and want to look at the copies of THOT that we put out last year.

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#### Analysis

The last SG report contained the beginnings of a theory of alienated learning. Some of the factual data on which that theory was based was a bit sketchy. Since then our description of the present situation of high school students has been confirmed by the students, so much that it surprised even us. Not only are large numbers of junior students attending classes stoned, but grade 7 and 8 students in the primary schools are doing the same. Students at Brennan have discovered that they need not attend certain classes and yet still be marked present for them by making the proper notations on the computerized attendance cards. In response to the widespread skipping of classes some schools have instituted elaborate controls that keep them aware of each student's location at all times. There was one other student demonstration this last school year. It was at Commerce and was over the very same issue of the Hands walk-out: the dress code. We made the point last month that the students were ignoring the teachers and school administration in the political sense that they had not three years ago. It should be noted however, that harassment of the teacher in the classroom, and from time even the principal, has not been discontinued. If anything it is on the increase, based on the reports we have heard we are going to try to determine if the number of nervous breakdowns among teachers is



rising. It would appear as if it is going up.

We stated that the reaction of students to their alienation gave them a revolutionary potential. We were not putting forth the position that that is anywhere near the equal of the potential of the proletariat. Restricting ourselves just to high school students for the moment we should mention some of the limitations of the high school movement. Each student only attends school for five or six years at the most. There is a yearly turnover which brings in young grade nine students with their naive expectations and kicks out the older more experienced students. This presents a serious organizational problem. The temporary nature of school, as opposed to the much greater permanency of work, tends to kill commitment to change. Most serious is the apparent homogeneous class composition in most high schools, vocational schools being the glaring exception. Especially with the credit system there is an appearance that proletarian students and middle class students are treated the same. This is not at all the reality and most students are aware of the discrimination. But the contradiction is not anywhere nearly as sharply defined as it is in workplace situations. Finally, although it is ever weakening, family pressures do exert a conservative influence on some students.

These limitations are not insurmountable. By concentrating our work on association with grade nines and junior students part of the problem may be solved. A general heightening of the class struggle, such as now exists in Quebec and Italy is the process by which these limits will be completely overcome.

So much for the update of our first paper. this leaves us with the final argument we have to make for the day.. The questions before us are these: What is the historical nature of the school? Where is the institution of school going? What function does the school perform in capitalist society?

In the beginning, capital needed schools to perform two simple, related tasks. Children had to be gotten out of the factories and the mines. The working class in England was suffering an absolute decline in population and was being exploited heavily. At the same time the development of machinery, mechanization, was starting the trend towards ever-increasing relative unemployment, creating the industrial reserve army. To mask this development and exercise some control of the surplus population, children were given over to the first crude public schools. (And women were turned into housewives)

These first schools were supposed to supply instruction. In truth, many of the first teachers were illiterate and those that could teach were prevented from doing so by the overcrowding and miserable conditions of the schoolhouses. The origin of compulsory schooling had nothing to do with educational needs, but rather with economic ones.



As capitalism advanced however, it produced a society which did develop new educational needs. At a certain stage capitalism cannot function without a literate working class. So the schools also advanced, being given the job of insuring that this "socially necessary learning" took place. Typical of the division of labour, with its division between mental and manual or practical activity, socially necessary learning, even though it is part of the socially necessary labour in production, was considered as separate and distinct from work.

A product of capitalist society, a manifestation of the division of labour, the content of school instruction is shaped and determined by its form, the teacher-student contradiction. So the student learns not for himself but for the teacher, and through the teacher, for capital. Likewise, the teacher is not teaching for himself (in order that he is himself by the student), but is teaching for capital.

Besides making unemployment and supplying socially necessary learning the school also perpetuates the ideologies, philosophies, and mythologies of bourgeois society, as does every other institution of the bourgeoisie. This is the least important of the school's functions and increasingly, the least successful. This is for two reasons. One is that these ideas, theories, and myths, do not correspond to reality and the older and more experienced a student becomes, the more this becomes evident to him. The other is that if you are learning for someone else, you tend to forget or ignore knowledge that is not constantly being put to use (socially necessary learning.)

School, like religion, the state, wage-labour, and private property is doomed to disappear in the destruction of capitalism. The struggle of students against its alienated characteristics goes slowly and defensively at the moment. But with the increased pace of the approaching revolution students will have a decisive role in redefining the nature of learning. But what about the teachers? The answer is a bit complex as a number of different processes are involved.

The school population is declining at all levels. New methods of teaching are being developed which require fewer teachers for the same number of students. Dissatisfied with inefficient and increasingly useless education in the school, corporations are starting their own education programs to give workers the socially necessary learning that is no longer going on in the classroom. Without their job security which was the basis for their claim to professionalism, teachers are beginning to see themselves as workers, alienated wage-labourers with little real control over their working conditions.

In Ontario these conditions have given rise to a militant trade unionism amongst high school teachers in particular. Windsor is about the most advanced in this regard. But the teachers are not really critical of the role they play in the school. They want a union, not a revolution. In Quebec, where the struggle is further advanced, a socialist perspective has developed in the militant teachers' movements.



The Quebec Teacher's Corporation manifesto sees the need to investigate with students the reality of capitalism and the class struggle in which they are immersed.

The contradiction between students and teachers is an antagonistic contradiction. So are the contradictions between blacks and whites, men and woman, straights and gays. (Is the concept of a non-antagonistic contradiction valid and useful. To the best of our limited knowledge Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lenin never used the term.) They all arise out of the division of labour. They all disappear in the revolution as non-alienated forms of education, work, and sexuality emerge.

We are rather fortunate for living in Ontario when it comes to understanding the destruction of the school. Along with California, Ontario is considered to have the most advanced school system in the world. So studying Ontario's schools had the same advantage that Marx found to studying English capitalism. The contradictions of schooling are the clearest and most developed here. With that in mind we present the following tentative conclusions. Now that we are this far out we might as well crawl to the very end of the limb.

1. The amount of socially necessary learning taking place within the school is decreasing relative to the expanding filler material being taught. When this decrease began we are not sure but it is definitely present in the credit system.

2. Students are developing more and more effective ways of decreasing their participation in classroom activity. The credit system, which was introduced to pacify and co-opt student unrest, has been successful in doing this on one level, as indicated by the decrease in student demonstrations and protests, but on the other hand has led to increased drop-outs and "apathy".

- 3/ The schools role as a baby sitter is being threatened by its failure as a teacher. If corporations take over complete supervision of socially necessary learning (potentially this includes even reading and writing via such means as Sesame Street) the crap that the schools will be left attempting to teach will drive large numbers of students out of school and back on to a labour market that will have no jobs to offer them.

We see this paper not as a finished position but as a basis for further struggle.

The Windsor Student Working Group.



# WOMEN, UNIONS & WORKPLACE STRUGGLES

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reflection on the ~~the~~ most two years I have spent working in small Toronto plants with large numbers of women workers. It is divided into three sections. The first section is about Federal Pacific Electric, a factory I worked in for a year and a half. A good part of the paper is a description of the contradictions there among the workers and between the workers and capital. I spent so much time on description because first of all, I think it is important to become specific about different sectors of the working class, as I have found that one can't relate politically to all sectors in the same way. One obvious difference is between men and women. But the life experiences -- class origins, family structure and relationships etc. -- of each immigrant group and between immigrants and native-born Canadians are so different that it may necessitate a different approach to struggle with each group. For example with immigrant men, community struggles based in their own national group may be of more immediate significance than workplace struggles, whereas Canadian men may be more prepared for struggle in the workplace. The second reason for so much description is that the struggles that did develop at Federal, as well as the ones that didn't must be related in part to the type of workforce.

The second part of the section on Federal will deal with the process of my being elected steward and my evaluation of that means of developing struggle. I wrote it because I had so many questions about becoming a steward as a tactic for developing autonomous struggle before I became one; by going through the experience I have been able to answer some of them. It's a problem that everyone will face who is attempting to organize in the workplace, and a very important one. We must have many discussions about relating to Unions, if only to spare militants from becoming a steward "just to see what potential is in it."

I don't want people to generalize from my experience at Federal that there is "no potential" in small plants. The second section, on Collins Radio, is an attempt to be specific about different national groups and their different consciousness in the workplace and other areas.

It isn't sufficient to base an evaluation of potential for struggle simply on my observations of the workforce. More important I think is an evaluation of my assumptions and approach -- to see how these affected struggle. This is what I have tried to do in the last section. Because I have only begun to relate the workers' autonomy perspective to my experiences and how I think it relates generally to women who work outside the home, the "conclusion" is one in name only. In fact it should really be



called the Beginning. It is the product of my thinking and discussing with many women and men, but is only tentative. Certainly it is incomplete as a perspective without developing a great deal more what we mean by "community" struggles and how struggles in the community and workplace are linked. In order to solidify what workers' autonomy means for women (and as a central part of that I include the wages for housework perspective) we must have many more discussions and a much broader practical experience with women's struggles both in the workplace and in the community.

#### FEDERAL PACIFIC ELECTRIC

##### The Company

Federal is one part of the U.S. Steel conglomerate, with production facilities in five provinces in Canada, and factories in the United States, Jamaica, Italy, Australia and Mexico. The Toronto plant produces electrical equipment such as heaters, circuit breakers and fuses.

##### The Workforce

Its a plant not untypical of many in Toronto. Relatively small -- 200 men and 100 women, with about 80% of the workforce immigrant, predominantly Greek-Cypriot and Guyanese. The major reason for the disproportionate numbers of these national groups was the personnel policy of posting all vacancies, with the result that friends informed friends who informed their friends etc.

For many of the Cypriots, Federal was their first job in Canada. Most of them had high school education or more but couldn't get 'better' jobs for lack of "Canadian experience" or language difficulties. Few of them had worked in factories in Cyprus. The women had worked in offices or as sales clerks, and the men had worked in the civil service and several of them had been policemen. Because most of them don't have a chance of ever getting out of a factory in Canada, they seem to have accepted their "fate".

The West Indians at FPE, on the other hand, were very into upward mobility. Many of them came from rural areas and their jobs in Canada represented their first collectivized proletarian experiences. Most of them hadn't graduated from high school at home and were doing retraining courses in Toronto. Anything to them was better than working in a factory. Some of the women were



doing secretarial courses and RNA courses; the men were into trades. Almost all of them believed that anybody who tried hard enough could "make" it. They operated in a very individualistic manner for the most part, and when challenged on that expressed distrust of the other workers, black and white. In the year and a half I was there I saw some development of black consciousness, but generally they felt little solidarity with American blacks.

There were almost no young Anglo-Canadian women, and only a few young Anglo men. There was a large core of "stable" workers (2/3 had worked there for more than three years); and most were in their 30's and up, with a significant number younger. None of the workers that I knew of were involved in any kind of struggle, national or class, in their native countries or in Canada.

### Racism

The racism among the various ethnic groups overwhelmed me at first. After numerous fruitless discussions with workers about government immigration policies and "preaching" constantly the necessity for workers' unity, I came to the conclusion that racism will continue as a major contradiction until class struggle forces its practical resolution. Just as it isn't an "ideological" problem, it can't be resolved ideologically. One of the major arguments the English-speaking workers (mostly Canadian and often West Indians) used against other ethnic groups (especially Greeks, Italians, Portuguese whom they would usually lump together) was that they acted as "scabs" by keeping wages down and working conditions bad. At the more subjective level, English-speaking workers reacted strongly, sometimes almost violently, to anybody speaking another language. In part it reflected people's paranoia that if you don't know what they're talking about, they must be talking about you; and in part the reality that when you're tired and tense, listening to half a dozen women chatting in Greek can be rather annoying. There was also racism between whites and blacks, which came out mostly in the whites' patronizing attitudes towards the blacks. This was being broken down significantly by the social interaction between the two groups over an extended period of time, and also by the "united front" against non-English speaking workers. I talked to several of the blacks (who were all West Indian and Guyanese immigrants) about racism; a few wouldn't admit to me that it existed, and others said that blacks objecting to racism in Canada should return to the West Indies.

### Fear of Authority

The deference to authority is another major obstacle to struggle. It's more understandable that women would be afraid of the bosses because of the subservient role they're forced to play



everywhere in society. (One instance of this was at Christmas time when the women in my department insisted on buying a gift for our foreman). But only in one department of men did I ever see any signs of struggle. Even the very close bonds of nationality didn't hold when individual workers were being given shit by the foreman. One example was the question of overtime. Although the contract states that overtime is strictly voluntary, and in most departments it really is in practice, in one department of mostly Greek-Cypriots, men were working 64 hours a week regularly. If a Cypriot refused to do overtime when the foreman went around asking men at their stations on the floor, he would subsequently be called into the office (with the Cypriot steward acting as translator if necessary) and "asked" again. Invariably he accepted. Seldom were non-Cypriots subjected to this harrassment. The Cypriots were forced to eat so much shit at work, that I wondered how they could maintain any self-dignity. I came to the conclusion that one way must be by maintaining their authority in the family. And perhaps the overwhelming "machismo" of southern European male immigrants in Toronto is not only a part of their culture, but a necessity for their self-esteem after their 8 to 12 hours a day of humiliating wage labour (given that work is supposed to provide esteem for the male in our culture). It strikes me that women's struggles for equality will be even harder until their men gain more self-respect-- through struggle--at work.

I have a few tentative hypotheses as to why the men were so unprepared to struggle. The first is, of course, the racism that separated each ethnic group and that management did its best to foster (I heard stories about foremen responding to complaints from English-speaking workers by telling others to shut up or speak English). The fact that so many couldn't speak English and had to rely on their steward to translate put them at a disadvantage in any dealings with the bosses (especially when their steward was a comprador of the highest order). Being immigrants too, they were afraid of losing their jobs and being deported. During the height of the "crisis" of illegal immigration last year the RCMP came and checked through all the personnel files and went away with several of them for further investigation. I'm sure that struck fears in the hearts of many.

I think the production process itself had an effect on struggle as well. Almost all the production takes place in the one plant, but there are only a couple of short assembly lines (of 4 to 8 women) doing the final assembly. The rest of the work is done individually on machines in different departments (there is no bonus-- workers are paid on straight time), so the collective tension that is always present on an assembly line doesn't exist at Federal. In the paint shop the process is a little different, however, with different results. The men there have to work as a team, and that, combined with the intense heat, resulted in a couple of walk-outs



last summer, which never spread to other departments. (About 10 men were involved in this, half of whom were Canadian and most young. They were demanding extra breaks during hot weather, but the union succeeded in getting them back to work before the company came up with any concrete proposals. The next day when nothing was done, several of the Canadians walked out again (the union president having frightened the others -- immigrants -- into staying on the job) and were fired on the spot.

#### The Women

The majority of women at Federal were married with children. There were a significant number who had had broken marriages and were single parents. Every woman I met there was working because she needed the money. Most of them had worked since the age of 15 or 16, with time out for babies. Few if any saw their primary role as workers outside the home -- their "duty" as wives and mothers kept them too busy for that. The women's movement had certainly had its impact on everyone however. For some it meant challenging their relationships to their husbands and boyfriends; and for those who believed the division of labour in the home to be "sacred" (and there were a lot), it allowed them to at least challenge the inequalities between men and women at work.

#### The Young Immigrant Women

The women whom I found the hardest to work with politically were the young single immigrant women. They had little interest in work, seldom discussed politics in any sense, and were concerned mostly with "getting a man". In other situations I've found chatting about boyfriends, etc. can lead into fantastic discussions, but the intense loneliness and disorientation these immigrant women were experiencing in Canada led to dynamics I found hard to deal with. The most extreme was an on-going fantasy several of them engaged in about non-existent boyfriends, babies, etc. Conversations in the wash-room would go like this: "I saw your boyfriend. He's so handsome. When are you getting married?" (the boyfriend exists only in their imaginations). "Oh, very soon. July I think. How is your baby?" (One West Indian woman pretended to be pregnant. She was "expecting" during the Christmas holidays, and when one of her friends asked when we got back to work if she'd had her baby she lamented that it had been stillborn. A logical way to resolve this segment of the fantasy). As any of these women found a boyfriend or husband in reality she was of course out of the circle and would become the object of much discussion, often vicious. (I found out just recently that one of the women who did a lot of this fantasizing, a Cypriot in her mid-30's, is going to be married next month. She had gone out with her fiance for two weeks before becoming engaged to him.)



## The Union

The plant was unionized about 15 years ago by the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE). There apparently had been a lock-out and strike for recognition, but I never found anyone who knew much about it. The IUE was a product of the Cold War in the United States. The CIO financed its initiation in the late 40's to smash the Communist-led United Electrical Workers (UE). (See Appendix I.) The Canadian Congress of Labour, composed mostly of American unions affiliated to the CIO., did likewise, using blatantly unconstitutional procedures to rid itself of the "red menace" and affiliate the IUE. (For further information see Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, pp. 154-163, and Richard Boyer and Herbert Morais, Labour's Untold Story, pp. 350-365.) Over the years the IUE has become less rabidly anti-Communist and has taken a number of "progressive" stands, such as support for the NDP, and Canadian exemption in the Hartke-Burke bill. Recently it and UE have undertaken joint consultation before negotiations with companies with whom they both have contracts (General Electric, Westinghouse). The IUE also pushed for UE's reaffiliation with the CLC this year.

For many of the immigrants it was the first time they had worked in a unionized plant. They said the only difference they noticed was the monthly deduction from their paycheques. And that was about the size of it. Many unions attempt to defend the workers' interests at least; this one acted consistently to defend the bosses'. The people who took office were, with the exception of two Guyanese and one Cypriot, all Canadians. Most took office as a means of gaining personal prestige. I sometimes wondered if some weren't being paid off by the company, but that may not be the only explanation for their blatant class collaboration. Because the union was so isolated from the workers, the union's strength boiled down to the gutsiness of the President, Chief Steward, etc. as individuals. And they were completely gutless.

There was seldom any interest in union elections. Most positions were won by acclamation, and eight people held something like 14 "elected" positions. Occasionally one of them would express fear of a trusteeship being slapped on the local because of lack of membership support, but I'm sure head office is quite content with a no-trouble local.

### Process of Becoming a Steward

I was one of about 30 people (mostly women) hired in two departments to start up a new afternoon shift. Starting together as new workers was the basis for the equality and unity of our shift which allowed things to get moving much more easily than would have been possible on the day shift. It took a while before the "apathy" characteristic of the day shift set in.



The most frustrating aspect of the afternoon shift was that we were so isolated from the goings-on of the factory. The work we did was auxiliary to the dayshift's--finishing up orders and often doing the jobs they didn't like (or so we suspected). And we only picked up tidbits of Federal gossip. We never got enough information about what the company was doing, production schedules, who was being promoted, demoted etc, etc. that are the basis for so many conversations that workers have. We also never heard a word about the union. Our only contact with it came at Christmas time when they gave us all chocolates.

It was in this context that we talked a few times during the first few months about how we should have a steward. (There was an afternoon steward in the metal shop, but he was a Cypriot and a man, so the only person who ever consulted him was our foreman). At first I didn't really see how it would relate to developing autonomous struggle, but then began to see it as an occasion to attempt to develop a certain collective process. I visualized it as a means of developing a rank and file struggle, not of revitalizing the grievance procedure or lending the union credibility in any other way. People talked about how a steward might help break down the communication gaps between the day and afternoon shifts. I thought that by getting to know the balance of forces between management, workers and union, we might be in a better position to develop autonomous struggle ourselves. And also, in a small plant like Federal the role of steward isn't as clear-cut as in a large place. Capital doesn't have the same need for "workers' policemen". Most stewards in fact played a very cosy game with the bosses, but it wasn't because conditions forced them to. I expected the union to resist the idea from the start, so I foresaw the necessity of fighting against the union initially.

I began by talking to a couple of women who seemed the most militant-- one Scottish woman in her 40's with trade union experience back home, and a 28-year old Jamaican woman with no previous experience with unions. I was really counting on these women; if they hadn't agreed I wouldn't have continued. In fact, they responded very positively to the idea and were responsible for initiating many of the discussions that took place.

Things actually moved much faster than we expected. After we held a meeting of our department one lunchtime to talk about it, we went to the union. Not only did they agree, but they insisted on holding an election the following night. In fact the President was so eager that he arranged to get his own candidate put up for the election-- a man, of course, whose most striking characteristics were dull-wittedness and sucking up to the bosses.

The disadvantage of all this was that a genuine collective development hadn't had time to really take roots, and we were told that the steward was to represent another department as well as our



own-- the other department that had started on afternoons at the same time as us but which was composed of immigrants who spoke little English.

We held another lunchtime meeting that night to talk about what had happened (a group of about 10 women) and to talk about who to nominate for steward. Although I hadn't taken it for granted by any means, the other women assumed that I would be their choice. (I have since realized that it's inevitable that anybody who is vocal, knows the contract and has managed not to alienate too many people is going to be considered good material to be the workers' "representative". The next night I was elected steward.

From then on the two other women and I raised a number of issues and had them dealt with. We pushed for a safety monitor and elected the Scottish militant at another lunchtime meeting. Then we began to fight management on a number of safety issues-- nothing spectacular, but common complaints. What we didn't do, however, was to continue the collective process we had begun to develop. I got into an "exemplary mentality", i.e. show the workers what can happen if you struggle and then everyone will begin to struggle. (See Sojourner Truth, "Reflections on Organizing" in Radical America, March-April 1972 for further discussion of common methods of operating that leftists use.) The consequence was that when management began to react by taking away some of the workers' "privileges" (such as bringing in radios, watching our trips to the washroom) some of the women began to react against us by saying that we were going too far and we would be all laid off (because the shift was thought to be temporary that was seen as a possibility). I really think in retrospect that our own "vanguardist" method of operating was responsible for that polarization. I see now that we should have continued our practice of shopfloor meetings (for some reason the company never objected to our using the lunchroom for this purpose) to discuss what working conditions should be our priority for action, how we should act on them, and to generally allow the workers to be responsible for decisions that, after all, affected them. I'm not sure, however, if this would have broken down people's fear of direct confrontation with the bosses.

From that point on, until the question of the contract came up some time later, I didn't see any issues come up that people were really ready to take on.

Being a steward definitely resolved certain problems of identity (as a political person, as a militant), but none that wouldn't have been resolved anyway over a longer period. People came to see me as a militant, and certainly dependable and ready to help-- a social worker. We could never overcome the traditional way a steward is seen-- as the person who you delegate to take care of your problems. People expected me to take care of even collective problems individually, without their active support. (One example of this was last summer. Leaving work at midnight, women were getting increasingly hassled by men on their way home. So we began to talk about this and how according to law the company is supposed to provide women with transportation



home between midnight and 6:00 a.m. A group of about 15 of us decided that we should demand that management pay our taxifares. We then came to the question of how we were going to demand it. It was assumed by everyone but me that I as steward should deal with it. I talked about how much more effective it would be if we all went in to Personnel, but the women insisted I go alone. Of course management refused. But as a "lesson" to me for being so uppity--I talked about laying a complaint with the Department of Labour--they threatened to let us off a few minutes before midnight each night. That of course wouldn't deal with the problem itself, but it took the company off the hook legally; and because it represented a loss in pay for the women, was an attempt on the company's part-- and the union which consented because they were pissed off that I hadn't gone through "proper channels" with my request-- to isolate me from the other workers. When the group of women met again to talk about it all, I tried to draw some of the lessons of strength in numbers etc., but people's reactions were mostly ones of discouragement and "oh well, we tried our best."

I don't think it was a question of personal failure. I think it's the logical extension of that process. If you don't think the power of a group of workers can be embodied in the shop steward alone, then you have to start thinking of alternative forms of organization that express that power. The union structure certainly doesn't.

I always took a critical approach to the union as a whole, and the people I worked with never identified me as a part of the bureaucracy (all the other stewards were integrated into it). When we talked about the union they talked about it as a third force, and would always say the "union should do this or that" and not associate me with their criticisms of it. I tried to avoid going through union channels whenever possible (partly out of necessity because the union consistently screwed us) and take direct action, but the passivity of the women was never really broken through. I did manage to gain the wrath of the union bureaucrats however. On a number of occasions they lied to me, co-operated with management behind my back on issues that concerned my department, and unsuccessfully attempted to discredit me. A few times people said that we needed a new executive, and once a couple of them suggested that I run for president. But for the most part the alienation and cynicism about the union was pretty strong-- I would have had to struggle extremely hard against people's better instincts if I'd wanted to develop a union reform thrust.

### The Contract

The most significant struggle we undertook, in both its positive and negative aspects, was the one that came up around the contract. I went to a union meeting at which the executive sated its strategy for negotiations. It was basically that, given that the women got relatively high wages for the electrical industry, and that the men's were low, the union was going to trade off high wage increases for the men with next to nothing for the women. When I reported this back to the women



there was a reaction such as I'd never seen before. Not only were they livid, they also insisted on doing something about it. First of all they wanted me to be on the negotiating committee. I was hesitant, partly because I had no intention of playing any conciliating role with the union (by this time I saw the union almost as much the enemy as management) and didn't know how that would work out, and also I was considering quitting. In fact the nominations were held at a union meeting when I was out of town and none of the women could go as meetings were held when they are working, so I wasn't nominated. However, when I came back to work the following week they wanted me to demand nominations be re-opened (one of the many examples of how my "leadership" seemed to stifle rank and file initiative). Because nobody had been nominated from the night shift, we decided we had to have our say somehow. So we held a series of lunch-time meetings to discuss proposals and a final list was compiled. (For the demands, see Appendix II). Some of the demands I think represented a solid sense on the part of the women that they must push for equality with men on the job, and that classifications and pay differentials are major obstacles. (It's probably easier for women to recognize that because they're at the lowest end of every scale and can and can only gain from equality.) We demanded that the union president come to a lunchtime meeting we were holding to present him with our list of demands.

What had happened by this point however was that I had gotten another job and had given notice at Federal. I had told women a month previously that I was intending to leave, but I don't think they really believed it until I gave notice. I had thought of leaving for a long time because I wanted to get into a collective organizing situation working with other leftists and Federal didn't appear to have very much potential for development. By leaving at that time I both halted any further development of the struggle and confirmed in my mind that when it came down to it, I had played such a central role in everything that except for the two militants who worked with me to elect a steward etc. and who had long since quit, there was nobody else willing and able to take leadership. I don't think that was because the women didn't want to fight, particularly on this last issue; but they didn't know how.

Before I left the women elected a new steward, but she was a woman who clearly wasn't a militant and in fact resigned the position a few weeks later. It was a half-hearted attempt at maintaining some control over negotiations, but my quitting left a vacuum of leadership that hasn't been replaced. In fact, in the four months since I left the women haven't heard a word from the union.

When I left Federal, my conclusion about the experience was basically that the form of collective struggle autonomous from the union was a sound one, but that because of the lack of history of struggle in the plant and amongst those women, it would make more sense to try to develop it in another factory under what appeared to be more promising conditions.

#### COLLINS RADIO

I won't go into the same detail about Collins as I was only there



for a couple of months before I was laid off. It is interesting because it had a very different kind of workforce with a very different level of consciousness. As a result, it began to challenge a great many of my conceptions of how to organize women in the workplace.

The vast majority of women were either English-speaking Canadians or British (many Scottish). There was a very small number of East Europeans, but they spoke excellent English. The reason for this appears to be related to the type of industry - aeronautics and telecommunications. The work was quite technical, and because we were considered unskilled it required a lot of supervision. It would have been very difficult for someone who couldn't speak English fluently. In fact the company made it impossible by requiring stringent written and practical tests as a precondition for permanent employment.

I don't think I have developed an adequate analysis yet to account for the different levels of consciousness between workers at Federal and Collins. I was much more upfront about my politics and my life generally, and that of course provided the basis for many discussions about women, marriage, etc. Certainly the fact that people spoke English made a difference. It meant that they watched TV, read papers and magazines and generally were much more aware and interested in politics in Canada and elsewhere. We had many talks about Watergate, Vietnam (Collins being tied into the war industry made this especially relevant), American imperialism in Canada and elsewhere, and relations of production at Collins itself. And this was with quite broad sections of women, not just one or two.

But what excited me the most were the discussions we had about women: the family, husbands, boyfriends, sex, birth control, the women's liberation movement, etc. These struck me as the topics that were of the most interest to women. When I told some of them that I was involved in some way in the "movement", several immediately asked if they could come to meetings. I began to see that this was perhaps the way of mobilizing people that I hadn't seen before - around the specific questions women have as women, not trying to force them into seeing their work outside the home as the primary contradiction in their lives.

Much of the "progress" I've made in clarifying and putting the last couple of years of working in a factory into a political context has come out of the Collins experience and many discussions with a wide range of people about workers' autonomy as it applies to women and the wages for housework perspective more specifically. Some of these will follow in the conclusion.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Steward Position as an Instrument For Developing R & F Autonomy

There are two basic ways in which the role of steward is played. The first is the business union one of the "go-between" between management and the rank and file workers. In this situation the union acts as a buffer, preventing direct confrontation between labour and capital. Technically the steward is there to police the contract for infringements on the part of the rank and file or management. But the



contract itself can at best only control the rate of exploitation; it does nothing to abolish it. When a dispute arises between the boss and the workers, the steward steps in with the grievance procedure, the major impact of which is to take the struggle off the shop floor and away from the rank and file. (Men involved in the National Steel Car wildcat in Hamilton say that they had more power before they had a union. "We used to stop the boxcar line. If things didn't go right we just shut down and sit. The company didn't do anything -- they came down there and talked to us so they could get it going again. We were our own representatives and we got more done. And we'd soon start back up again when they'd start talking. They'd have to talk." For the rest of the article see "Inside a Wildcat" in On the Line, July 5, 1973.)

The second conception of the steward's role -- common to both militant trade unionists and the the traditional left -- is that of the steward as the "representative" and leader of the rank and file vis-a-vis both the boss and the Union bureaucracy. The traditional left, which views the union as the workers' organization in the workplace struggles, usually tries to take over steward positions to use them to lead shop floor struggles (and often to prove that "communists are ready to fight for the workers"). Sometimes this means in fact fighting vigorously for the workers, but seldom does it mean contributing to workers themselves developing the capacity to fight collectively for themselves. And often such leftist stewards end up objectively playing the same "cop" role vis-a-vis the rank and file as business unionist stewards, usually rationalizing this by arguing that "the workers don't know any better", "this isn't the right time to struggle" etc. (see M. Glaberman, The Left-Wing Committeeman).

I attempted to work outside both these conceptions. I tried to use the stewardship as an instrument to encourage people to fight for themselves, to put their actions where their analysis and anger were. The fact that for the most part this proved impossible in practice reflects the objective structure of unions, which allows only a delegated form of struggle rather than mass struggle which workers directly develop and control. I wouldn't make a principle of never running for union steward, but I think it has severe limitations as part of the process of developing autonomous rank and file struggles.

#### Women's Autonomy and Workers' Autonomy

Women who work outside the home do not see that work as the major focus of their lives. This goes for young/old, married/single, Canadian/immigrant. For women who have husbands and kids it is obvious. But even for single women, they see their jobs as a necessary means of survival. Period. This is for several reasons. The first is that society defines women's work as being in the home, and the bourgeois media ensures that everybody is constantly bombarded with this notion. Society also says that only men define themselves by their work outside the home. The more basic reason for women's attitude to work outside the home is rooted in the historical development



of the working class. Women have never developed a "producer's consciousness" or a strong identification with their work because they have always been excluded from the skilled sectors of production where such consciousness originated. Nor have women ever been integral to the unions, which developed historically among skilled workers. (see G. Viale's paper on unions which will be translated shortly.) Because the jobs that women do are the most boring and the most menial, it is difficult for women to take much pride in their jobs. (Of course many men feel the same way, but talk to a transport driver or an auto worker and you'll be surprised at how such work does relate to their male egos.)

I used to think that until women are forced to take jobs outside the home, their revolutionary potential is secondary to that of women in the labour force. Equally, I felt that women workers had to "get serious" about their role as producers. I am absolutely not now saying that we should ignore the work women do outside the home, or the fact that increasing numbers of women are being forced to take jobs outside the home. I continue to see struggles in the workplace as essential. But I do think that we must challenge the traditional left theory that the power of the working class lies only at the point of production -- defined as the factory/workplace -- presumably the only place where surplus value is directly produced. The workers' autonomy perspective, by analyzing modern capitalist society as the social factory, is saying that every aspect of life must become part of the struggle. Exploitation occurs everywhere, and among broader sectors than simply the industrial working class, and struggle must take place everywhere that exploitation is to be found.

This perspective implies that just as different sectors of the proletariat are exploited, so are different aspects of people's lives. Exploitation doesn't cease when workers punch out at night. It follows them along the expressways in their cars or on the public transit, into the grocery store and then into their homes and relationships with their spouses and children, and finally into their bedrooms where the woman pretends she's not feeling well and the man either 'rapes' her or goes to sleep feeling frustrated and depressed.

This analysis has major implications for women who work outside the home. It is not sufficient to relate to them simply as workers. To do so is to ignore the potential for struggle in every area of their lives, as well as to ignore the potential for common struggles with women in other sectors of the class. (And this isn't reformist politics, as so many traditional leftists think. One of the most significant examples of class struggle in recent years in North America is the struggle of women on Mothers' Allowance and welfare recipients to receive a living wage independent of waged labour.)

Also, from my experiences of working with women workers, their interest in struggles in the factory is limited. They want their work to be as safe and as easy as possible. They want the same pay and benefits as men, because they have to pay the same amount for rent and food. But they don't want to rotate their jobs, they are



not particularly interested in "equal opportunity" for advancement, and they certainly don't want "workers' control". What they want most is to get out and go home. At Collins an "obvious" struggle at first seemed to me to be around the annual lay-offs. The only obstacle to that struggle was the majority of women who couldn't wait to be laid off. (To be clear, these women didn't want to abolish their jobs, because they needed the money. But as long as they could collect pogeey or otherwise have an assured income they would definitely prefer not to work.).

This consciousness indicates to me a tremendous potential for women workers. They have no stake at all in waged work in capitalist society. As one of the most exploited sectors of the workforce, they have no stake in the classification and seniority system. For all workers, classifications and seniority rights are points of division. Most classifications are meaningless -- there only to give appearance of upward mobility. Seniority is a system of giving some workers more rights than others -- basic rights that all workers should have. But women, who are at the lowest end of the classification scale (even though the work they perform is obviously of equal value to capital) and who have little interest in promotions, have the potential of leading the struggle to abolish unequal pay and benefits (pension, group insurance) etc., for all workers, and thereby attack the weapons the bosses use to divide all workers. This to me is a whole crucial context for women's struggles in the workplace. Other areas must of course be issues that arise about working conditions, safety, etc.

The traditional left demands in the workplace (an end to 'discrimination' against women in the form of demands for equal pay and equal opportunity as examples) and the traditional structure (Unions) must be surpassed because they are totally inadequate -- and often antagonistic -- in the struggle against wage labour. The fight to end discrimination is in fact a fight to equalise the conditions of exploitation -- not to abolish them. The demand of equal pay for equal work must be replaced by the demand of equal pay for everybody. In other words, an end to classifications and divisions between men and women, skilled and unskilled. So too with "equal opportunity". Not only do most women not want to acquire more responsibility for production, but to demand it is only to perpetuate the distinctions the bosses (and unions) make between jobs, responsibilities and therefore pay. I am quite sure that if women really wanted "equal opportunity", they would have begun to struggle for it long ago.

I also think it's important to see that women's cynicism and disinterest in the union is not a reflection of lack of class consciousness but rather of advanced consciousness. They, like most workers, can see how the union consistently defends the interests of the bosses, and to a lesser extent, those of a small number of skilled (male) workers. The union's role is to help develop classifications and seniority systems etc., not to fight against them.

Equally important in workplace struggles are the questions that affect women specifically as women. Is it conceivable to begin struggles



for a four-day week for women in recognition of the time they need to reproduce the labour power of their families? Struggles for day care that say that where capital benefits capital pays? Wages for housework so that women don't have to work outside the home at all? Generally, as well as struggles that unite women and all workers in one workplace, struggles must develop that unite women in different workplaces in their common struggle against capital, and with women whose work is primarily in the home. Recognition of the importance of the autonomy of women's struggles is only beginning. Discussions and practical work must continue and expand.

POWER TO THE SISTERS AND THEREFORE TO THE CLASS

Frances Gregory



## APPENDIX

### Appendix I

A quote from the IUE's Code of Ethical Practices:

"Like the beginnings of industrial unionism during the Depression, the origins of the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers AFL-CIO during the latter 1940's were rooted in another ethical revolt -- this one against the perversion and corruption of democratic unionism by Communism.

Consequently, the IUE possessed from the beginning a deeply ingrained heritage of ethical responsibility. To IUE members and leaders alike, individual and organizational rights are doubly precious because they were won, to an unparalleled extent, in a long and self-sacrificing struggle against the largest and most powerful Communist-controlled labor organization ever to appear on the American scene."

### Appendix II

Proposals for negotiations submitted by a group of workers from Stab-lok and Assembly:

1. In keeping with the tradition of the IUE and the Ontario Human Rights Code, we would like to see an end to the discrimination against women in the present contract. We have two proposals in this regard:

(a) Abolishing labour grades 2,3 and 4 and upgrading these classifications to grades 5,6 and 7. We feel this demand is justified by the fact that the work in labour grades 2,3, and 4, commonly done by women, involves similar skills and responsibilities to those of higher grades, commonly done by men. We feel that the principle "equal pay for equal work" should be replaced by "equal pay for work of equal value". The worth of a job shouldn't be determined solely by the physical effort involved, but also by the skills and responsibilities involved.

(b) Abolishing the separate categories for single and married women in the group insurance plan. Instead, determining the amount of weekly disability benefits and life insurance by the basic weekly earnings. This proposal and the above must be seen in the light of the fact that women's financial needs are the same as men's. Many women are supporting themselves or families: no woman works just because she wants to, but rather out of economic necessity.

Strengthening the position of women workers does not weaken any other group of workers, but strengthens the whole.

2. A straight cents per hour increase rather than percentage increase. We feel this is in the best interests of the majority of workers so that the gap between the more highly paid and less highly paid workers doesn't grow any larger. We also feel that the increase should be in addition to the



present cost of living allowance. We shouldn't accept any proposal by the company to absorb the cost of living allowance into a wage increase. Needless to say, we expect the union to demand equal wage increases for men and women.

3. The company should pay 100% OHIP.

4. Many other unions have negotiated for denticare plans, to be paid partly by the company and partly by the workers. Given the high cost of obtaining adequate dental care, we feel we should begin a similar program at Federal.

5. We feel that if a qualified medical doctor recommends that a worker should have a change of job for health reasons, then the company should agree to place the worker in a suitable job in consultation with the union.

6. Regarding production standards, in the present contract article 22.05 states: "It is agreed that estimated or temporary rates may be changed or withdrawn at the discretion of the company." We would like this amended so that no rate can be changed without a thorough time-study being done.

7. Also on production standards, we would like a clause in the contract to the effect that no worker is expected to produce a full hour's production rate during break hours.

8. We wonder whether the company is paying adequate attention to workers' safety. This is especially questionable in regard to fire drills. At one point the night shift discovered that several of the fire exits were either locked or inaccessible. We think it is reasonable to demand that the company perform a fire drill at least once every three months, in order to familiarize all workers with fire exits and routine.

9. There have been a number of instances in the Stab-lok department in the last year of probationary workers being "laid off" for a period of time and then recalled, because they have been unable to make the hourly production rates. We feel that this intimidation of workers is intolerable, and feel that one way in which it might be stopped is to have a provision in the contract for probationary workers to file grievances. If probationary workers cannot gain the same rights as workers with seniority, then they should not have to pay union dues.

10. There should be a number of sick days off with pay each year, as is provided for in the Federal Civil Service and many other companies.



# WORKERS' STRUGGLES IN

## ADVANCED CAPITALISM::

### THE POST OFFICE

#### Introduction

The most useful way to introduce this paper might be to say briefly how this kind of work fits into what has come to be called the "new tendency". As I see it, what has drawn us together to share our organizing experiences through the Newsletter and a few inter-city meetings has been a common assumption about how we should go about defining an approach to the class struggle in Canada. Our common assumption is that the starting point is direct involvement in and analysis of the specific characteristics of the class struggle today. In one way or another, we have rejected defining our approach to struggle by starting from one or another revolutionary tradition (e.g. Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Mao), none of which developed in relation to the specific conditions of the class struggle in advanced capitalism. Because of this political option on our part, other militants (and perhaps even ourselves at certain times?) mistakenly conclude that we are anarchist, spontaneist, syndicalist or anti-nationalist. In fact, what we are saying is that the question of organization or the national question have to be dealt with in a context, which is the specific conditions of the class struggle in advanced capitalism. Otherwise, we run the risk of defining the class struggle from the angle of the question of organization or the national question, rather than the other way around.

To date, we have emphasized two aspects in the process of defining an approach to the class struggle in Canada:

(1) Direct involvement in and analysis of the class struggle. For many of us, this has taken the form of work experiences and involvement where possible in workplace struggles; for others, it has been involvement in women's, community and student struggles. The fact that we have done so much analysis of the trade union, for example, reflects our direct involvement at the rank and file level (rather than as union organizers or officials) in workplace struggles.



(2) Analysis and discussion of broader political perspectives on the class struggle emerging from other advanced capitalist countries where the level of struggle is more developed--e.g. Italy and England. There too, we have looked to organizations whose starting point is the class struggle today rather than revolutionary tradition-- e.g. Lotta Continua and Big Flame.

This paper reflects a discussion among some militants in Toronto who were trying to put together both these aspects of the process of defining an approach to the class struggle in Canada. We had already discussed in some detail a number of workplace struggles in which some of us had been involved as individual militants. To help us analyze in more depth some of the broader features of the struggle, we decided to discuss the analysis of workers' struggles in advanced capitalism which has come out of Italian workers' struggles in the last decade, and particularly as it is reflected in two organizations of the extra-parliamentary left--Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio. (See, e.g., "Mass Worker and Social Capital", Radical America, v. 6, no. 3, May/72, pp. 1-21; "Workers' Struggles in the Capitalist Crisis", RA, v. 7, no. 2, March/73, pp. 15-31). Many of us found this analysis very useful as a general perspective on the character of workers' struggles today. Others found the strategic direction it suggested more questionable, as indicated by Norm's article in this issue of the Newsletter.

This paper was written to see to what extent the general analysis could throw light on a specific situation of struggle in Canada. The main point of the paper is that workers' struggles have to be analyzed in terms of the specific characteristics of the organization of capitalist production and its effect on the composition of the working class in the different stages in the development of capitalism. The conclusion of this sort of analysis is that workers' struggles in advanced capitalism have a different content and organizational form than in earlier periods.

It is obviously important that we have some general political perspective on the class struggle in advanced capitalism. But a general perspective is just that-- a perspective and not a broader analysis of advanced capitalism in Canada and of the pattern of workers' struggles here. As our involvement in particular struggles grows, this third aspect of our work will need much more emphasis, as the necessary basis for seeing how our political work fits into the class struggle in Canada in a broader way. This will happen as the problems of the struggle force us to broaden and deepen our analysis. For example, this is what we've been trying to do in the industrial intervention group in Toronto, as we discuss how to relate practically to the move by rail workers towards one industrial union, given our general analysis of unions and the class struggle. Without our previous discussions of the general features of workers' struggles in advanced capitalism, we would be unable to evaluate the rail workers' struggle. At the same time, we are not analyzing this struggle for academic purposes, but to enable us to see how best to intervene and do ongoing work in this struggle. This is what we are coming to grips with now....

John



## 1. Postal Workers' Struggles and the Manual-Skilled Mail Sortation Process

(a) The heart of any mail sortation process (defined broadly as the delivery of mail from sender to addressee) is the specific sortation that takes place in centralized sortation centres. In Canada, this part of the process to date has been essentially manual and skilled. In this process, mail sortation combines the skill of the manual sorter with the relatively complex sortation systems devised by specialized white collar personnel who historically have been part of management in the Canadian Post Office (CPO). The key labour component of this sortation process has been the skilled manual sorter, whose skill resides essentially in the ability to recall instantly the sortation system corresponding to the address on the mail, (e.g. a City Mail Sorter in Toronto has to know a primary sortation of all streets in Toronto into 21 postal stations, as well as a final sortation of mail from a certain number of the postal stations to the letter carrier's route. This would add up to about 10,000 points of distribution that a skilled sorter is required to have for instant recall.) In the manual-skilled sortation process, increasing the speed of sortation (i.e. the speed with which a letter is routed to its destination, not the speed of sorting letters into pigeon holes) depends on the development of more refined sortation and the ability of the skilled manual sorter to memorize them -- thus, in the final analysis, speed also depends on skill. Mechanical aids are of little importance -- in the manual-skilled sortation process, there have been no real changes in the technique of sortation in the last 75 years. (The cost of simply mechanizing the manual part of a sorter's work would probably never be justifiable from capitalist criteria because it would not result in significant increases in speed. E.g. postal coders in the new automated system sort from 40 to 50 letters a minute, with a machine-fixed rate of production and with much less sortation knowledge, compared to a possible 25-30 letters a minute by manual-skilled sorters, who sort mail into more detailed routings. Furthermore, the constant changes in routings would require costly adjustments to machine-related systems). The integral relation of productivity to skill in the manual sortation system is indicated (evidence is hard to come by) by the decline in productivity in recent years as the bosses have introduced totally unskilled sortation systems in order to bring in cheaper labour power. (Although an individual unskilled sorter can sort faster than a skilled sorter because no recall factor is involved, mail sorted this way has to be sorted more times to break it down to the more refined routings.) As we shall see later, this has not been the only factor in the decline of productivity at the CPO.

(b) The power postal workers have developed in their struggles to date has been based on the importance of skilled sortation in the current sortation process. On the one hand, the essential nature of their skill has limited the use the bosses could make of the industrial reserve army (e.g. to re-compose the work force with unskilled labour; use of scabs during strikes), and has been the essential factor (together with workers' struggles in other sectors of the class) in winning wage increases since 1965 which far outstrip productivity. On the other hand, their skill has allowed postal workers to establish a definite form of control over their



immediate work situation. Until the 1960's, it seems that this control over the work situation was quite functional to capital. Postal workers had the "producer's consciousness" of the skilled worker who exercises a real responsibility in production, and therefore identifies with his work. In the case of postal workers, this was expressed in the attitude that "the mail must go through" and identification with the role of "serving the public". This control over the immediate work situation which the postal worker's skill provided became antagonistic to capital in the 1960's, when postal workers began to refuse to play the role of cheap labour and resisted the bosses' attempts to increase productivity. For example, postal workers waged a successful struggle against the bosses' plan to impose individual production quotas on sorters.

At the same time, the struggle against individual production quotas illustrates the categorical character of the struggle of skilled postal workers -- i.e. the defense of their own position and basis of power in isolation or at the expense of other categories of postal workers. For example, the skilled sorters have never fought with part-time semi-skilled sorters (women) to abolish individual quotas the bosses have imposed on them. There has always been great mutual hostility between these two groups, with the skilled sorters viewing the semi-skilled sorters as a threat to their jobs (because the part-time semi-skilled sorters get lower wages and produce more, the PO has assigned them more and more work that previously was done by skilled sorters) and a threat to their control over the immediate work situation (the bosses say -- if part-timers can sort that fast so can the full-timers).

The central role of the skilled postal worker in struggles is reflected in the job classification system. The wage structure and working conditions of all postal workers are built around the skilled sorter classification, with the latter's skill being the reference point for "rationalizing" the wages and working conditions of other postal workers. (E.g., until the last few years, the CPO contracted out most pick-up and truck delivery work to private outfits. The workers who did this work shared in the wage levels won by truck drivers over the years in the trucking industry as a whole. But when the CPO integrated this work back into the department, their wages had to be aligned with the wage structure at the PO. In the mail sortation process, truck drivers were "unskilled", so they got big wage cuts. This was the background of the Lapalme struggle in Montreal and the wildcat by Toronto postal drivers in November, 1972, who had been integrated into the CPO only a few months before).

(c) The central role of the skilled sorters is reflected in the trade union organization of postal workers. Historically, the first union of postal workers was a skilled sorters union, formed in 1911 and soon affiliated with the Trades and Labour Congress, a federation of predominantly skilled workers' unions. (Another union of the "elite" of skilled postal workers, the Railway Mail Clerks' Federation, also existed from this early period until railway mail sortation was phased out in 1970. They had the highest wages of all postal workers). The skilled sorters' union has always wanted to incorporate the less skilled postal workers into its union, but has succeeded only in doing so with



the unskilled inside postal workers. (And even then, the name of the union was only changed from "Dominion Postal Clerks (i.e. the skilled sorter) Association" to "United Postal Employees of Canada" in 1928, then to Canadian Postal Employees Association" in 1931). Semi-skilled outside postal workers have always refused to join the skilled sorters' union and have always had their own union (now the Letter Carriers Union of Canada). The inside workers' union is now called the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, although it remains essentially a skilled sorters' union, reflected both in its emphasis on defending skilled workers' interests and in the composition of its national and local leadership. As long as skilled sortation remained the central part of the sortation system, providing a basis of power for postal workers, this leading role of the skilled sorters was a source of power for all postal workers. Although wage disparities developed between skilled and unskilled, the wages of the unskilled were tied to those of skilled workers. At the same time, unskilled workers provided a reservoir of militancy in postal workers' struggles, although that militancy, expressing the interests of a different sector of the class, had to be channeled through the skilled workers' union and was thereby not directly contributing to their own interests (essentially, the interests of the "mass worker" as defined in Part 4 of this paper).

## 2. Postal Workers' Struggles = "Production Crisis" for the Bosses

Until the mid-1960's, the bosses were able to contain the effects of the skilled workers' power based on the manual-skilled sortation system by recourse to measures which weakened and divided workers to a certain extent, although the manual-skilled system itself was not basically changed. For example, the bosses introduced limited unskilled sortation methods, enabling the use of lower-paid sorters; the use of "casual" labour was also a tool the bosses used against postal workers. ("Casual" labour was defined by the bosses as temporary workers, thus removing them from the union, and also enabling the bosses to pay lower wages, no benefits, and have total right to lay-off and re-hire). These and other changes resulted in an increase in production per worker during the early 1960's; furthermore, the relation of wage increases to production increases altered only slightly in favour of wages.

This situation was changed dramatically in 1965 by the three-week wildcat strike by postal workers across Canada, which consolidated the power of skilled postal workers against the bosses' production plans and laid the basis for the "crisis" which has dominated the PO since then.

Since 1965, capital in Canada has become aware it faces a crisis in the PO: while the PO provides an increasingly important service to capital (reflected by the large increase in mail volume throughout the 1960's -- almost 90% of which is business - related mail), the cost of this service has become too great. The bosses point to the rapidly increasing deficits at the PO since 1965, running from \$34 million in a budget with total revenues of \$281 in that year to \$100 million (total revenues of about \$500 million) in 1971, with forecast



the basis of their skill; now the bosses use the same rationale to pay new categories of unskilled workers lower wages. For example, postal workers who operate the new postal coding machines in the automated Ottawa PO -- their work corresponds to the first stage in the manual sortation system -- are paid 50 cents an hour less than skilled manual sorters. This wage is the lowest for any category of postal worker, thus ensuring that the work force will be gradually re-composed with new strata of workers previously uninvolved with the struggles of postal workers; e.g. most of the workers hired to operate the coding machines were white collar women workers who probably increased their wage level by at least 50 cents an hour over the clerical-secretarial type of work available to women in Ottawa. The bosses calculate that by automating the skilled part of the mail sortation system alone (thus not even counting savings from mechanization plans for many other parts of the system currently ~~done~~ by skilled labour), they can cut the cost of first class letter sortation by 20% in the short term, and from 25 - 40% in the medium term.

(b) The bosses are also aiming at removing the basis of power which enable skilled workers to exercise a form of control over their immediate work situation, and particularly their resistance to the bosses' production plans. Not only do they hope that production quotas etc. can be imposed more easily on new categories of postal workers (as they have been on part-time women sorters), but the total re-organization of the postal operation breaks up the forms of control and resistance workers have in the present set-up and gives the bosses a chance to impose new work standards, etc. The machines themselves are meant to impose their own discipline on workers: the machines are set at a particular sortation rate; mis-sorts are rejected by the machines and can be traced back to the sorter, a light on each coding machine signals the absence of the worker etc.

While the major trend of the bosses' solution is the general de-skilling of the working class at the PO, their solution also involves the creation of a relatively small, though significant, stratum of workers with a fairly high skill level. This new stratum falls into two categories: (1) Workers who will maintain the new automated machinery. These jobs are open to current postal workers, who will be given a three-year training course, both on the job and at community colleges; (2) White collar workers whose task will be the development of more refined sortation systems with corresponding computer programmes, quality control, etc. This category will be filled entirely by community college and university grads. In the manual system, the corresponding tasks were done almost entirely by promoting postal workers from the ranks. The creation of this new stratum of skilled workers plays an important role in the bosses' solution: on the one hand, it creates on a new level the old division between skilled and unskilled workers, but more intensive now because of the inaccessibility of these skills (requiring years of schooling under capitalism) to most of the unskilled workers; on the other hand, it creates the illusion of individual upward mobility, and reinforces the "legitimacy" of the social division of labour at the PO. When the jobs to maintain the new machines



were posted at the Toronto PO recently, a very large number of postal workers (from the very young to some who were in their 50's) leapt at this "opportunity" for acquiring a marketable skill and much higher wage rate.

(The bosses can change the composition of the working class to attack the basis of workers' power in different ways. In the Canadian PO they are doing it at present mainly by changing the mail sortation process itself to alter the skill level of postal work. They can also change the composition of the working class by drawing on different sections of the working class where the level of struggle is more or less developed (e.g. part-time women sorters, etc.). The U.S. Postal Service in the last 10 years offers an interesting example of the bosses trying both. After the Second World War, the U.S. PO re-composed its work force in the large cities of the north with black workers from the south, who were willing to accept any waged job with some job security. This use of black workers to re-compose the work force increased in the early 1960's, when automation was introduced into the U.S. PO and new strata of unskilled labour were required. Today blacks make up a majority or near majority in the central Post Offices of the 21 largest urban areas in the U.S. But the struggles of black workers, and their refusal to play the role of cheap and docile labour force, both throughout the U.S. working class as well as in the PO, have turned capital's tactic on its head. Now the U.S. Postal Service is attempting to "de-compose" the work force again by decentralizing the large city PO's by setting up smaller sortation centres in the white suburbs, where housing for blacks is non-existent and transportation from the inner-city ghettos almost impossible. For example, Chicago's main PO, which is overwhelmingly black, has been cut down from 25,000 to 19,000 workers in the last few years alone. In the U.S., capitalist "efficiency" dictates decentralization of postal sortation; in Canada, it dictates centralization. In both, it should be clear, it is workers' struggles which dictate what form "capitalist efficiency" takes).

#### 4. Postal Workers' Struggle Against the Bosses' Plan

The argument of this paper is that the content and organizational forms of workers' struggles have to be analyzed in terms of the specific composition of the working class in different stages of the development of capital. The transformation of the mail sortation system means that the composition of the working class at the PO is changing from skilled to unskilled. In this context, the content and organizational form (the trade union) of skilled workers' struggles come into question, and the necessity of defining a new basis of struggle for the "mass worker" in terms of both content and organization, becomes evident.



## A. The Union Struggle Against the Bosses' Plan

We have already analyzed how the trade union organization of postal workers's struggles has reflected the central role of skilled sortation in the manual-skilled sortation system. The job classification system, wage structure and the on-the-job power of postal workers reflected the skilled class composition of postal workers and their basis of power in the struggle with the bosses. As long as their skill remained central to the mail sortation system, the defense of their skill level was a defense of their real basis of power, and their struggle advanced the interests of unskilled postal workers to a real extent. But when the bosses change the production process itself in order to undermine the basis of workers' power -- skill, the workers' key weapon in the old sortation system, becomes its opposite -- the key weapon the bosses use to "rationalize" wage cuts for workers. This can be illustrated by briefly outlining how CUPW -- the organization reflecting the manual-skilled sortation system -- has developed its line on struggle in recent years:

### (a) "Categorical" Defense of Position of Skilled Workers

The main line of struggle of CUPW has been the defense of the wage level and working conditions of the skilled postal workers. This general line was clearly expressed by a CUPW official recently:

If our classifications are destroyed and our work is done by machines and be Level 1's (the lowest-paid category of postal workers who operate the new postal coding machines in Ottawa) we will have no bargaining power whatsoever. Whatever power we have is based upon our ability to control the work in the post office. Without that power, there will be no grievances, no protection against arbitrary hours of work, bad conditions, layoffs, harrassments, firings, or any other anti-worker measures the post office can come up with.

The defense of the position of skilled workers has involved, e.g.:

-- insistence that all full-time sorters retain full knowledge of the entire sortation system, even after most knowledge sortation has been phased out.

-- insistence on job rotation for full-time sorters, so all will get a chance to work on the "skilled" jobs that remain.

-- fight against the use of "casual" workers and part-time workers in the unskilled sortation sections.

This line of struggle assumes the legitimacy of the classification system and the "evaluating" of wages on the basis of skill. It is thus powerless when the bosses de-skill the work -- this was most evident in the union's failure to successfully prevent the bosses from placing the postal coders in the lowest classification. The union's failure to



prevent postal coders being classified in the lowest pay category seems to have led it to recognize it can't really defend the current classification system. There are rumours that some sections of the national and local leadership are considering a push for a "single classification corresponding to minor differences in "skill" and "responsibility" in the new automated PO. Apparently all postal workers would start at Grade I, and move "up" to other grades as skills and responsibility were acquired. This sounds like a reformed system to promote individualism, competitiveness and illusions of "careerism" -- it's hard to imagine a system more divisive of workers and therefore more appealing to the bosses!

(b) Sectional Defense of Postal Workers

CUPW has always complained that gains in wages and working conditions warranted by the militancy of postal workers' struggles are restricted by the fact that the government doesn't want to establish a new wage pattern for other federal government workers. Thus the union wants the PO to become an independent Crown Corporation, so its struggles can be separated from those of other federal workers. This sectional approach to struggle rejects the leading role postal workers' struggles have played in relation to other federal workers/

(c) Integration of Workers into Capital's Plan

CUPW has consistently taken the position it is not against automation in the PO as long as postal workers' share in the benefits". Essentially this is the response which has characterized trade unions faced with the bosses' attack on their power: the trade-off of higher wages for increased productivity (involving reduction of number of jobs, increased production discipline, etc.). This integrative approach by the union has begun to take the form of an explicit adoption of the "industrial democracy" line: institutionalizing "workers' input" into the bosses' system. This has become a major theme of union propaganda in the last year as illustrated by the national leadership's trumpeting that the union-management consultation committee, inserted in the recent contract, represented a "first step" towards "full industrial democracy".

The union's line on struggle fails to reflect the changed composition of the work force at the PO and the changed basis of power for postal workers' struggles. While categorial and sectional defense reflected a real (though limited) basis of power when skill was essential to mail sorting, it has become purely a divisive tool in the bosses' hands when the mass no longer reflect any real differences among the work force and no basis of workers' power. But unions cannot transcend the categorial and sectional defence which has historically defined their approach to struggle against capital. The real power of workers which unions once reflected to a certain extent has disappeared in the era of the mass, unskilled worker. Today, the union's "power" is derived from its ability to play capital's game of preventing the development of the power of the mass worker.



## B. The "Mass Workers'" Struggle Against the Bosses' Plan

Since both the content (categorical and sectional defense) and the organizational form (the trade union) of postal workers' struggles no longer correspond to the present composition of the working class, what then is the new content and form of struggle which can advance the struggle? This can be answered only briefly, to provide a general idea of the political perspective with which one would attack the tactical problems of how best to intervene in the struggle of postal workers. This paper will not try to deal with the tactical problems themselves at this time.

The de-skilling of the mail sortation process and the resulting change in the composition of the working class there is not a process affecting the post office alone, but rather reflects an entire phase of development which has affected the working class in all advanced capitalist countries. This process involves not simply a "sociological" transformation, but a transformation of the character of the struggle between workers and capital: the vast majority of workers in advanced capitalism (both blue-collar and white collar, waged and unwaged) have no material link at all to the capitalist organization of work and production. The skilled worker was bound materially to the capitalist organization of production because of the centrality of skill in earlier phases of capitalist production; skill was therefore a basis of power, in terms of both wage bargaining power and control over the immediate work process, in workers' struggle with capital. This has all changed in the era of the "mass worker", whose dominant characteristic is the destruction of skill in production, with the consequence that most workers are not bound materially to any particular skill category or sector of production. Objectively, workers are now interchangeable in any category or sector of production. Thus workers' objective attachment to the capitalist production process has been reduced to its "pure" form: only the wage chains the "mass worker" to work.

This objective, material autonomy of the working class from the capitalist organization of production is a strength for capital-- as long as the struggle over wages and working conditions is based on "skill" differences and productivity. But the transformation of the composition of the working class and the destruction of the class's material link to capitalist production can also be the basis for a greatly expanded power for the working class: the material basis for the division of the working class into skilled and unskilled has been swept away (and with it the material basis in the production process itself for the race and sex divisions of the class). The material basis of power for workers' struggles is no longer skill, but rather the objective, material unity of the working class in its autonomy from the actual material organization of capitalist production. The struggle over wages and working conditions can no longer view wages as rewards for skill or an "exchange" for productivity, but rather as the fruit of workers' struggles as workers assert their needs autonomously of the "needs" of capitalist development.



Thus in advanced capitalism, the content of workers' struggles becomes a struggle against wage labour itself. At one level, this means that as workers' struggles over wages become divorced from concern over their effect on continued capitalist development (for example, by refusing to tie wage increases to industry or state-imposed productivity guidelines), the working class's needs come to be defined autonomously of the definition of the class as wage labour in capitalist development. This occurred, for example, when British miners in 1972 defied both threats of mine shutdowns and state wage guidelines to struggle for what they defined as a living wage. By saying that their needs were more important than a viable capitalist coal industry and British capital's attempt to stay competitive in world markets, the miners refused to struggle on the bosses' terrain and chose the only route that could win the strike. Another example of the struggle against wage labour: one of the characteristics of capitalist development which has greatly sharpened in advanced capitalism is the increasing proportion of the working class which is being thrust into the industrial reserve army (via unemployment and under-employment, education, housework, etc.). Since the 1930's, capital has tried to assure the maintenance and reproduction of this sector of the class through such measures as unemployment insurance, welfare, guaranteed annual income. These measures are aimed at re-inforcing the classic functions of the industrial reserve army in capitalist development: cheap labour power to meet the needs of cyclical capitalist development and to meet the needs of marginal enterprises; club to discipline the employed working class (fear of lay-off and unemployment, use of scabs, etc.). The bourgeoisie is facing a crisis today as it faces the demands of this sector of the working class for a living income: if the "incentive to work" is destroyed (i.e. wages without working amounting to as much as wages for working), then the function of the industrial reserve army will be undermined. Thus the struggle of unemployed for a living income which meets their needs rather than capital's need to keep them serving the function of the industrial reserve army is a struggle against their specific function as wage labour in the capitalist production process.

In the workplace, the struggle against wage labour also means the struggle against all links between wages and productivity (production incentives, bonuses, etc.) and the struggle against the capitalist organization of production itself. In the era of the "mass worker", the capitalist organization of production (everything from the job classification system, the assembly line, "scientific" production rates, the system of authority and discipline in production, etc.) is the dis-organization of the working class; the organization and unification of the class in both factory and office thus requires an explicit attack on the capitalist organization of production. Workers' struggles in Europe have made visible what the traditional left has always obscured: the organization of production is not "above" the class struggle, in the sense that the capitalist character of production is fully expressed in capitalist ownership of the means of production. The actual organization of production



is the most concrete form of the social relationship between wage labour and capital. The concrete way capital has organized production historically has always aimed at pumping the maximum amount of surplus value from the working class as wage labour. When skill was central to the capitalist organization of production, that skill gave workers a certain power within the material organization of production to struggle over the share of value produced; at the same time, this struggle had a defensive character. In the era of the "mass worker", the only power workers have is to struggle against their role as wage labour. For the first time in the history of capitalism, the material basis now exists for a total struggle against wage labour, including the actual material organization of production. Such a struggle is necessary not only to unify the working class in the struggle against capital, but also as the pre-condition to building a genuinely non-exploitative system of production in communist society. (For a very suggestive article on how the struggle against wage labour has developed in the European working class, see the article from Lotta Continua, "Cultural Revolution in the Factory", in For Canadian Workers: Lessons from Italy, pp. 23-27, available from the Community Resource Centre, Windsor)

The content of the struggle of the "mass worker"-- the struggle against wage labour-- cannot be "fitted" into the trade union, as if the union were somehow "above" the fundamental changes in the organization of capitalist production and the corresponding changes in the composition of the working class. Trade unions developed historically as skilled workers' organizations when capitalist production was still mainly characterised by the centrality of skill. But trade unions have retained the same approach to workers' struggles-- categorial and sectional defense-- even though this approach no longer reflects a basis of power, but rather fits capital's plan to keep divided and dis-organized the working class in its "mass" composition. Capital has not only undermined unions as organizations for workers' struggles by de-skilling the production process; since the 1930's and particularly in recent years, it has directly used unions as instruments for the capitalist planning of production and consumption. This transformation of the role of unions vis-a-vis capital and the working class has to be analyzed not as the result of the "sell-out" of the union leadership or of the revisionism of left trade union leaders, but rather as the result of objective changes in capital and the working class. (See the article by Lotta Continua militant G. Viale, "On Unions and the Class Struggle")

It is important to emphasize that this perspective on workers' struggles in advanced capitalism is not the result of an "ideological" choice that seeks to transcend the limited, "defensive" character of workers' struggles by calling for more "revolutionary" forms of struggle. The perspective outlined above derives from the transformation of capitalist production and the related change in the composition of the working class, which has rendered both the traditional form and content of workers' struggles impotent even in the most limited, "defensive" struggles.



What does all this mean concretely in the struggle of postal workers against the bosses' plan? The power of the "mass worker", unlike that of the skilled worker, cannot be based on the defense, however militant, of any category or classification of workers in the new mail sortation process. Any new system of classifications will not be based on real skill differences; the bosses' goal is to remove any real skill from the system in order to destroy skill as a basis for workers' struggles. Job classifications and corresponding wage differentials have become a tool in the bosses' hands to divide workers and perpetuate the illusion of individual upward mobility. This type of struggle is clearly on the bosses' terrain, as the union's defeat over the postal coder classification illustrates. The power of postal workers now has to develop on the basis of the homogenization of skill levels and the objective unity of all postal workers as "mass workers". Their power is organized in the struggle against the bosses' plan to use them as cheap labour to provide a service for capital, and in the struggle against the tools the bosses are implementing to keep them divided and disorganized in the new mail sortation system.

A few examples will help illustrate the meaning of this perspective of struggle. The struggle against the bosses' plan to automate the mail sortation system as a means to smash the power of postal workers, cut wages, and re-establish control over workers' productivity should develop against the specific tools the bosses use to "rationalise" these goals. This would mean developing a perspective of struggle which refuses to tie wages to a job classification system, thus refusing wage differentials and struggling for equal pay for all postal workers. Any linking of wages to productivity should also be refused. Wages would then cease to be seen as "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work", and wage differentials as rewards for different skill levels. All postal workers have the same needs and thus need the same wage. This was the perspective of struggle which a rank and file committee tried to develop during the 1973 contract struggle at the Toronto Post Office. The specific demand we advanced, in the perspective of attacking the classification system as a tool of the bosses, was wage parity for postal coders (who the bosses had placed in the lowest-paid classification) with skilled sorters, and closing the wage differential between (unskilled) mail handlers and (skilled) sorters.

Another example was a recent struggle in the Toronto Post Office occasioned by the bosses assigning a number of skilled sorters to do unskilled sortation alongside part-time unskilled sorters. These unskilled sorters get 50¢ an hour less wages, and are on an individual production quota system. The union took a purely defensive position of ensuring that skilled workers would not be de-classified as a result of the move; a signed statement to this effect was exacted from management. The union also got assurances that all skilled sorters would rotate to both skilled and unskilled duties, thus protecting them against being permanently assigned to unskilled jobs. Assurances were also



demanded that skilled sorters would not be subject to production quotas. This approach made sense when skilled sortation was the basis of power for postal workers, but today it is strictly on the bosses' terrain. The workers' terrain for struggle is to attack the use the bosses make of the unskilled sortation system-- as a tool to artificially divide workers into "skilled" and "unskilled" categories, and thereby get more production for less pay from a weakly organized group of workers. This would imply a struggle of skilled and unskilled workers to eliminate production quotas for unskilled sorters and bring their wages up to the level of skilled sorters.



# AGAIN ON THE REFUSAL OF WAGE LABOUR

-A RESPONSE TO D. FEICKERT, NEWSLETTER #2

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is written as a contribution to the recent discussions among certain segments of the left (Selma James and the Italian extra-parliamentary left) about the concept of "refusal of work." I am attempting to add to the development of this theory on a number of points. In my reading of other papers, I have found much unclarity and lack of detailed analysis on such points as the historical development of "refusal" and what this phenomenon means as far as revolutionary organizing goes. Several of my thoughts on this subject have arisen directly from my experiences and observation of working and organizing in the Toronto textile industry. My concern is that although the theoretical and historical level of analysis of this subject is still, I would say minimal, already there are some of the "new tendency" "spontaneists" urging that the left must develop the "tactics of organization to actualize the strategy of refusal." I feel that such a suggestion is definitely premature if not incorrect. Because some phenomenon exists within the working class is not enough of a reason by itself to take it and convert it into a "spontaneous strategy" of the class. While rejecting the idea that revolutionary strategy can be determined and imposed by a Leninist vanguard party, we must not over-react and become "workerist." to do so would abrogate the responsibility of revolutionaries to use their abilities of research and analysis. We must as Mao says "take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas) then go to the masses..."

## THE PHENOMENON OF REFUSAL

There can be no doubt that modern capitalism is being faced with a relatively new crisis. Bosses are finding it increasingly difficult to get workers to work the way they used to. Even with unemployment rates and inflation soaring workers (especially the young workers) are taking more days off, working slower or wasting time on the job because they just "don't like working". workers no longer stay with the same company for 20 or 30 years, and hence have much less of a sense of "company loyalty." Sabotage is also reaching crisis levels in some large industrial sectors



(notably auto). All of these are aspects of the situation that is called "refusal of work." The recognition of this problem extends far beyond the arena of Marxist theorists. Bourgeois industrial relations experts and sociologists are frantically searching for a way to reverse or even contain the trend. When Newsweek and Fortune magazines devote entire issues to this topic and the problems that it poses, there can be no doubt that the bourgeoisie is viewing "refusal" with great concern.

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

An important question to be asked when attempting to analyze and understand such a phenomenon as "refusal" is "why is this happening now and not 30 or 50 or 100 years ago?" As Marxists we must study the historical development of capitalism to understand why "refusal of work" has only appeared so recently.

Until the early 1900's an important and powerful section of the working class in the industrialized countries were the craft workers. These were skilled workers such as printers and metal workers, who were among the first groups of workers to organize themselves (Knights of Labour, the German workers' council movement) into employees associations. Being highly skilled, organized and essentially in control of the "process" (if not the means) of production, they had sufficient power to win substantial gains from the bourgeoisie. Since every such advance by the workers represented a corresponding loss to the boss, it is not surprising that alternate processes of production were sought which would break the power of the craft worker and re-establish a higher rate of accumulation. Frederick Taylor provided the answer in the form of "scientific management" or "Taylorism". This method used "efficiency studies" and then broke the production of a commodity into numerous single-step operations which could be done by large numbers of unskilled workers on an assembly line, and used prods such as piecework payment to increase the rate of work for each operation far above its previous rate.

Such a reorganization of the process of production had the effect of causing a major "recomposition" of the working class towards more unskilled "massified" workers, as well as increasing production and profits. By reducing the level of skill required to do each job, the amount of training to train a replacement for any worker was greatly reduced. Where before a metal worker would apprentice for several years to acquire his skills, in the new assembly line factories most jobs could be learned in less than a week. Also the workers no longer had control over the production process. Workers had to keep up to the rate of the assembly line and could be convinced that bosses were "necessary" to control overall production. Both of these results represented significant reductions of the power of the class. One important point to be noticed is that there is no evidence to show that the introduction of "Taylorism" resulted in a response of the working class in the form of "refusal of work."

In the factory where I worked there were two women who I got to know whom I will describe. Both are (I would say) class conscious workers who understand their exploitation, hate bosses, and have taken significant parts in the union organizing campaign presently going on. However, they have very different attitudes to their work. Agnese\* has worked for



for the company for 35 years, does mending and hand sewing and normally gets paid by piecework. Alice\* is a cutter's helper who stacks the blanks ready to be cut by the cutter (a man). She gets paid a time rate, is 26 years old and has worked for the company for 2 1/2 years. Agnese is very bitter and knows that some of the piece rates have changed only a few cents in 25 years, yet she is very disdainful of the "new help" (like Alice) and highly critical of their ability to work. Agnese works hard and would rather go home (without pay) if there is no work than slow down and dog it and get paid on time work rate. Alice on the other hand works amazingly slowly, folding where it is not necessary then unfolding, spending long breaks in the washroom, doing just enough work to keep the foreman off her back. The question arises "what has changed in the last 30 years to explain the vast differences in these two women and their attitude to work?"

I think that the answer to that question and perhaps an important point in understanding "refusal of work" is to see it as a new contradiction of capitalism that has arisen out of the bourgeoisie's attempts to resolve a previous contradiction of capitalism.

The introduction of Taylorism resulted in significantly increased rates of commodity production. Initially this meant a corresponding jump in profits. This however could only continue as long as there were adequate markets in which to sell the products, for when the markets become saturated the only way to increase the volume of sales is by lowering the selling price. This would have the undesirable effect (for the capitalists) of slowing down the cycle of capital accumulation.\*\* Thus an ever increasing market is a necessity if capitalists are to maintain and increase their profits.

Imperialism has partially provided some answers to this need. As well as the new markets it gives for saleable commodities, it also provides "markets" for the vast production of military goods. Neither of these however have provided an adequate answer to the need for ever increasing markets. By the late 50's and early 60's it was becoming obvious to the capitalists that the limit of external markets could not be far away. Their solution was to shift technological research and development away from the problem of creating better quality products and more efficient ways of producing them, to the problem of creating new consumer "needs". Changing designs (e.g. cars) minor innovations (new, improved Duz with 12% more bleaching power), and new gadgetry (vegematic) all had the effect of making a product obsolete soon after it was bought, thus requiring a new purchase. In many cases products are purposely made more shoddily and specifically designed to fall apart much sooner than similar products made a few years ago (see Greg's comments about the quality of bicycles at CCM). Also the last 10 to 15 years have seen the massive increase in commercial advertising, the primary purpose of which was to convince people of their "need" to buy more and more. All of these were capital's attempts to create a self-sustaining market which would enable them to continue to expand the cycle of capital accumulation. In doing this however, the bourgeoisie has planted the seeds of yet another contradiction of capitalism.

In the Grundrisse, Marx says "work is a positive creative activity" and that under normal conditions each person requires a certain portion

\* not her real name

\*\* from Gorz "Technical Intelligence and the Capitalist Division of Labour", in Science for the People, vol. 5 no. 3.



of work or "cessation from rest". It seems to me that even when workers are producing under some form of forced labour (slavery, serfdom, wage slavery) the ability to contribute to the production of something that they know to be useful (socially necessary work) provides a certain amount of satisfaction and pride in their work. Now however, when a worker is producing something that is "garbage", what possible feeling of pride or accomplishment can (s)he have? Whereas 30 years ago workers were producing for use, now they know that they are producing "waste" and that therefore their labour is "waste". All the necessities and even luxuries of a well-planned society could be produced in a fraction of the time in far more human circumstances. Even if only subconsciously I think that workers understand this, and I believe the phenomenon that we are seeing now is not a "refusal of work" or even a "refusal of wage labour", but really a "refusal of socially unnecessary work".

*capitalist labour.*

#### A STRATEGY OF REFUSAL?

The question which now arises is whether or not the left can or should attempt to base a revolutionary strategy around the phenomenon of "refusal of socially necessary labour", and if so what form it should take. Perhaps part of my tendency towards opposing such a strategy lies in not understanding what people like Tronti mean when they push "refusal of work" as a strategy. Nowhere have I seen any of its proponents ever outline any specifics or sample tactics of such a strategy. As a result of this lack of clarification I can only assume that what is meant is encouraging and organizing workers to sabotage production, to go on welfare or unemployment insurance, take days off etc.

In my own work experience, attempts to put these ideas into practice have caused me to experience a number of contradictions. In my time at one textile mill the job I found to be most personally satisfying was when I took it upon myself to repair a small labelling machine which was broken. It was a real challenge to me and when I finally succeeded in getting it fixed I felt a strange mixture of pride and guilt. On the one hand was the personal satisfaction of finding a problem and overcoming it, but on the other was the realization that my skill and creativity had (by a tiny amount) increased the bosses' profit. The amount I would receive in wages for my time was far less than what it would have cost the boss to replace or have the machine sent out for repairs. This sense of contradiction and confusion was repeated in numerous different situations at work. I often had to force myself to keep my work rate down. I found that generally time seemed to pass faster when I worked at a rate faster than was minimally necessary. Whenever I got bored or hungry etc. I found that I tended to speed up and so I had constantly to remind myself to slow down. Also I had to stifle my desire to suggest or make changes which would improve the efficiency and humanize the production process. Sometimes such changes can be made on the sly such that the benefits are seen directly by the worker (do a job faster and have more time off at the end) but in general the improvements I saw would produce no direct benefit to the workers since the boss would just appropriate the saved time and hand out other work to be done in that time. Perhaps if major savings were made in production time this could even mean layoffs for some of the workers.



This is exactly the same contradiction we are faced with by the question of "technological change". In some ways I feel that the idea of "refusal of work" is the same kind of approach as those who oppose technology. Obviously we must fight the way in which technology is used to ~~control~~ workers, not technology itself. Similarly refusal, sabotage, dogging it, are all understandable responses to the illogicality and waste of the capitalist system, but do not in themselves represent a positive direction in which to develop a strategy. Rather we must build a strategy around the proposal that technology and workers' creativiyy can and will free us from socially unnecessary labour. In the long run our aim is not to destroy the process of production but to take control of the means of production and re-organize the process ~~of~~ production, no longer defining efficiency in the capitalist terms of volume of production and profit, but in human and social ~~terms~~.

If such ~~is~~ in fact our goal then to conceive of sabotage etc. as a strategy makes no sense and would only confuse the class about our real objectives. We must recognize that the phenomenon of "refusal" represents only a passive tactic of survival but certainly not an aggressive revolutionary strategy. We need at this time to further develop our analysis of "workers' autonomy" to build militant and offensive rank and file workers' organizations which will become capable of smashing capitalism and through the organ of workers' councils to institute a new system of production.

--Norman



## ORGANIZING NOTES

How Another Leaflet Got Issued At Chrysler's After We Said It Wouldn't.....

In the last newsletter in this section, were copies of two leaflets distributed at the Chrysler's Motor Plant #2. At the end of the Introduction to these leaflets we said that....."(we) will not issue further leaflets until this task (building a rank and file committee) is completed." There has, however, been another leaflet without a corresponding committee. Why?

It was difficult for us to analyse the success or failure of our previous leaflets. Although there was much discussion, and even strong support for the leaflet, when a rank and file meeting was called, no one showed. Coupled with our lack of success in the meeting, was the ever increasing feed-back from the workers themselves about our "group" being the opposition to the union leadership. What the worker's were experiencing in our practice was not a break from past union-oriented militants but a direction continuation. They thought that we were looking to replace Horn (the plant chairman) and although we might be sincere and militant it was still only something that remotely affected and involved them.

Clearly, Gerry and I could not continue to issue leaflets in a manner that reinforced perceptions we clearly rejected, and still hope to build a movement that was deep inside and a part of the class.

An occasion arose, however, where a leaflet was distributed inside the plant directly involving three or four workers. The leaflet, which follows, described an incident where a worker's watch and wallet were stolen. After hearing about the theft, I discussed with the worker involved plus workers in the area the possibility of issuing a leaflet not only to inform, but also to point out how the act of stealing generates an atmosphere of distrust among ourselves and thereby limited our collective resistance to the boss. They agreed and later that night, I wrote while they dictated the leaflet. The next afternoon we distributed it throughout our department and a number of recreation rooms. The response was unanimously favourable. Besides the whole process of developing issues around concrete experiences about which the workers themselves had written, it drew lessons and raised topics that otherwise seem abstract and remote.

Also, spontaneously other workers in the department, after reading the leaflet organized a petition and raised \$90 to help off-set the stolen money. This was done not only on our shift, but on the other two shifts as well.

While it would be wrong to draw too optimistic a conclusion from this activity; since workers often give money or vote as a substitute to direct struggle; it does suggest a very different response and development than the other leaflets generated. Most importantly, it indicated the type of process that might contribute more fruitfully to the developing worker's movement.



AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT BUT AN IMPORTANT LESSON

Last Saturday around 11:00 P.M. ( the afternoon shift ) a worker in 9824 was taking a shower. Leaving his clothes in the outside cubicle, he finished the shower, only to find his wallet and watch missing.

As the case with everyone, his wallet contained important personal papers such as his driver's license, car ownership, medical and hospital insurance cards etc.. These cards take a long time and considerable hassle to replace.

Everyone can sympathize with the way our fellow-worker felt after losing his wallet. Besides losing the money which we bust our backs for, the lost time and inconvenience suffered in recovering your papers adds "salt to the open wound".

The most important thing, however, is the atmosphere this kind of incident creates among the workers. When you ask almost anyone why we can't organize they reply to the man, "the other guys will screw you". When we suspect that everyone is a potential thief, we'll never build the trust together that we need in order to protect ourselves.

Only a very few workers would steal from us, but these few help to destroy the unity we need so badly-

PLEASE HELP FIND THE WALLET AND DISCOURAGE STEALING



CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Newsletter,

As part of our continuing attempt to provide material relevant to the New Tendency, some of the Windsor militant have formed a publications group. The group called Mile One Publications, in conjunction with the Community Resource Centre will soon begin to reprint articles.

However, at the moment and for this issue of the newsletter the publications we are suggesting are from two U.S. groups -- Sojourner Truth and Bewick/Ed publications (Facing Reality). Also included and worth a special note is Essays On Marx's Theory of Value by I.I. Rubin (275 pp.; \$2.00) The book recently printed by Black and Red was written and subsequently banned in the Soviet Union in 1928. Rubin's work makes explicit the dialectical logic of Marx's Capital.

from Sojourner Truth (their descriptions):

General Strike in France by Andree Hoyles 44pp. \$.40

This is a detailed factory by factory account of the events of May '68. It is invaluable for those interested in drawing strategic conclusions from the most important of recent working class struggles in an "advanced" capitalist country.

Soviets in Italy by Antonio Gramsci 39pp. \$.35

An examination of the issues raised by the factory occupation in Italy in the early 1920's with particular emphasis on the relationships between the socialist party, the trade unions, and the workers' councils.

United Front Against Imperialism by the S.T. organisation 30pp. \$.25

A criticism of the strategic approach of the Revolutionary Union, including an examination of the implications of this approach in various areas of practical work.

Mass Organisation in the Workplace (S.T.) 20pp \$.30

S.T.O. approach to production organising. An analysis of the labour contract system and a criticism of the common left priority on rank and file caucuses aimed at union reform.

Organising Working Class Women (S.T.) 22pp \$.20

Discusses the specific role of women in the economic-social order of today and from this begins to determine what this role means for the development of autonomous worker's organisations which actively include women.

from Bewick/Ed:

Witches, Midwives and Nurses by B. Ehrenreich & D. English 45pp \$.50

A history of women Healers.



A Worker's Inquiry by Karl Marx 12pp \$ .25

100 questions that ask not for opinions but facts. By the time a worker has answered the entire list, she or he will have faced a mirror of her or his own exploitation and its mechanisms in great detail.

"Consciousness raising" through investigation.

Dialectic and History: An Introduction by CLR James 22pp \$ .25

"History fills out slowly, but the impulse for concrete universality is ever-present, working itself out in new ways. With the leads James offers, we can look at the revolutionary process in a new way, to see our civilization, or what remains of it, as by no means necessarily succumbing to the hell it has prepared for itself.

Punching Out by Martin Glaberman 32pp \$ .25

A popular widely-distributed pamphlet on factory life.

Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor by Bill Watson 10pp

A short article reprinted from Radical America dealing with one worker's experience of organized resistance to production inside the factory.

From Sundown To Sunup: The Making of the Black Community by George P. Rawick

Traces the history of afro-americans. Contrary to the common assumption that the enslaved Afro-Americans were passive subjects, they were, Rawick demonstrates, active and vital subjects of their own history. 210pp \$3.50

As explained in Newsletter #2, we would appreciate suggestions for literature and material that we should distribute. Further, the CRC is willing to provide a mail order book service to those comrades who live in areas with limited access to left books. We are currently compiling a bibliography to this effect which will be mailed out to Newsletter subscribers.

Solidarity,

Ron

Orders to: Mile One Publications  
c/o Community Resource Centre  
3210 Sandwich St.  
Windsor, Ontario

### Support and Solidarity

The newsletter has received a letter of support from an American group called Philadelphia Solidarity. As part of their political work P.S. provides an extensive literature list which includes a number of interesting titles which are virtually unavailable in Canada. The literature list including costs follows:



### Revolutionary Theory

WORKERS' COUNCILS' and the Economics of Self-Management by P. Cardan	\$1.50
THE IRRATIONAL IN POLITICS (Authoritarian Conditioning & Sexual Repression by Maurice Brinton	.90
REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION by Solidarity (London) US edition includes Party and Class by Anton Pannekoek	.15
British edition includes The Struggle for Self-Management-- An Open Letter to I.S. Comrades by Solidarity (London)	.30
THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT (see above)	.30
THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM by Paul Cardan	.30
MODERN CAPITALISM AND REVOLUTION by Paul Cardan	1.50
*WORKERS' COUNCILS (Parts I and II) by Anton Pannekoek	1.00
AS WE DON'T SEE IT by Solidarity (London)	.30
SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM by Solidarity (London)	.30
FATE OF MARXISM by Paul Cardan	.20
HISTORY AND REVOLUTION by- Paul Cardan	.90
CRITIQUE OF "HISTORY AND REVOLUTION" by Bob Potter & M. Brinton	.30

### The Russian Experience

BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS' CONTROL 1917-1921 by Maurice Brinton	Br. ed. 1.50
	U.S. ed. .80
THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION by Alexandra Kollontai	Br. ed. \$1.50
	U.S. ed. .65
KRONSTADT COMMUNE by Ida Mett	
KRONSTADT 1921 by- Victor Serge	.30
FROM BOLSHEVISM TO THE BUREAUCRACY by Paul Cardan	.30

### Other Historical Lessons

*OBSOLETE COMMUNISM: The Left-Wing Alternative by- Gabriel & Daniel Cohen-Bendit (France, 1968)	1.25
THE MASS STRIKE IN FRANCE May-june 1968 by Root & Branch	.75
HUNGARY 56 by Andy Anderson	1.50
RAPE OF VIETNAM by Bob Potter ( US Edition )	.35
SPARTAKISM TO NATIONAL BOLSHEVISM by Solidarity (Aberdeen)	.60
THESES ON THE CHINESE REVOLUTION by Cajo Brendal	.60
THE COMMUNE by P. Guillaume & M. Grainger (Brinton)	.25
CEYLON: THE JVP UPRISING OF APRIL 1971 by Solidarity (London)	1.50
POLAND: 1970-71 Workers vs. State	free
COLLECTIVES IN SPAIN by Gaston Leval (1936-37)	free

### The Industrial Struggle

STRATEGY FOR INDUSTRIAL STRUGGLE by Mark Fore	.60
THE GREAT FLINT SITDOWN STRIKE AGAINST GM 1936-37 by W. Linder	.60
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT: The Fisher-Bendix Occupation by J. Jacobs	.30
CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE GM STRIKE (1970)	.35
SORTING OUT THE POSTAL STRIKE by J. Jacobs	.20
GMWU SCAB UNION by Solidarity (london)	.30
LABOUR GOV'T VS. THE DOCKERS 1945-51 by solidarity (london)	.30
HOSPITAL VOICE #1 (Philadelphia, 1970)	free



Education & Miscellaneous

THE GREAT BRAIN ROBBERY by K. Patton  
EDUCATIONAL IDIOCY IN SCOTLAND by Solidarity (London) .30  
SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SCIENTISTS OR SOLDIER-TECHNICIANS .30

Publications

SOLIDARITY NEWSLETTER published by us appears every two or three months, 15¢ each, maximum sub. accepted \$1.50, bundle rates 9¢ ea. All back issues available. Also available are back issues of SOLIDARITY (LondOn) 30¢, SOCIALIST INDUSTRIAL BULLETIN (DeLeonist), 25¢, INTERNATIONALIST (Council Communist) 75¢, Root & Branch 50¢, SOCIALIST FORUM (DeLeonist) 25¢.

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Philadelphia, PA 19101

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PLEASE NOTE+++++++

Copies of Newsletter #2 are no longer available.

Copies are available of Organizing For Workers' Power by

A. Sofri for 35¢ ea.

Write to:

The Newsletter,  
P. O. Box 38,  
Postal Station "E",  
Toronto, Ont.

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANY AMOUNT WILL BE GLADLY RECIEVED AT THE ABOVE ADDRESS.

REMEMBER--AN OPPOSITION PAPER MUST BE SUPPORTED BY THE OPPOSITION-----  
----- THATS YOU -----



## C O N F E R E N C E   R E P O R T

This is a synopsis of the newsletter workshop that was part of the Windsor Conference Aug 4-6. As this was the first opportunity for people from different cities to rap, a lot of decisions were made there that affect the direction of the newsletter. By writing this, discussion and debate can be opened to people who were not at the conference.

The workshop began with a discussion of the orientation and distribution of the newsletter. The last newsletter, 90% of which was given away free, was sold through the C.R.C. in Windsor, the Book Centre in Toronto and Spartacus Books in Vancouver. This arrangement will be continued. It was seen as an important way of contacting people whom we do not know personally. The consensus was that the newsletter was primarily an internal publication. "Internal" was loosely defined as people who are interested in, and investigating a new tendency. "Internal" does not mean those belonging to a closed group or those holding a specific line.

If distribution was general and wide-spread (pick it up at Cole's) the feeling was that the level of debate would be compromised for the sake of a more general readership. We would have to assume that most people reading it knew little or nothing about the perspectives and ideas of the new tendency.

Along with this there was a feeling that even in a primarily "internal" newsletter it will be important to prevent mystification. The articles should be comprehensive, explicit and clear in their definitions of terms.

There has been a tendency for the newsletter to reflect only the debates and struggles of southern Ontario. Our debates, like the 401, have tended to go between Toronto and Windsor, sometimes missing the Kitchener exit. It was decided that a special effort by the editors would be made to respond fully and personally to all correspondence (especially from outside Southern Ontario.) and to request suggestion and articles.

People outside the S.Ont. debate are encouraged to write not only articles, but letters explaining what kind of articles they want, what kinds of themes they want dealt with, and how they use the newsletter. Also comrades travelling across the country are planning to visit with newsletter people to help spread and share ideas, and to open new lines of communication.

It was thought, when the newsletter was originally conceived, that the editorial board would perform merely technical functions. We now understand that more editing, criticism, selection and written introductions are needed. The decisions that are being made are political as they determine and direct the newsletter. This would be a problem if a small group of people in southern Ontario (Toronto) had the power to make these decisions. To prevent this concentration of power, it was resolved to expand and rotate the editorial board. The expanded editorial board



will consist of two people representing each centre at the workshop (Kitchener, Toronto, Windsor, Winnipeg.)

The editorial board functions as follows: The production will continue to take place in Toronto. We will keep using Offset press. The editing and pulling together of the articles will rotate between the four above-mentioned centres. Articles should be submitted to members of the editorial board in each centre. Criticism and suggestions will then be mailed to the centre responsible for putting out that issue.

It was decided to levy a \$2.00 fee on militants in each of the four centres. so the subscriptions would not be necessary. This way people can feel free to pass them around to their friends. This doesn't preclude donations!!

We found the workshop to be productive, as it was the first chance for people in different centres to get together and discuss the functioning of the newsletter. We hop the direction of the newsletter will continue to be a discussion amongst the people interested in it.

Trice Simister  
Lissa Donner







