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PROCESSED WORLD 17

**SPECIAL
TALES OF
TERMINATION
ISSUE**



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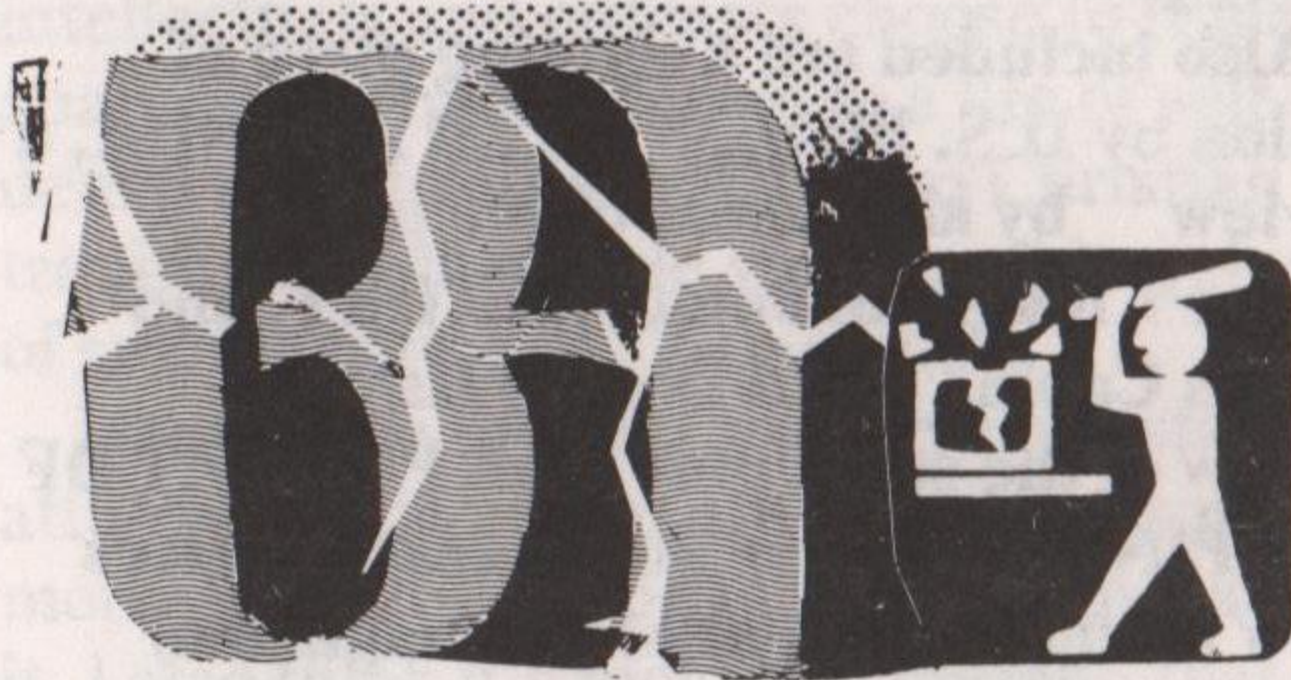
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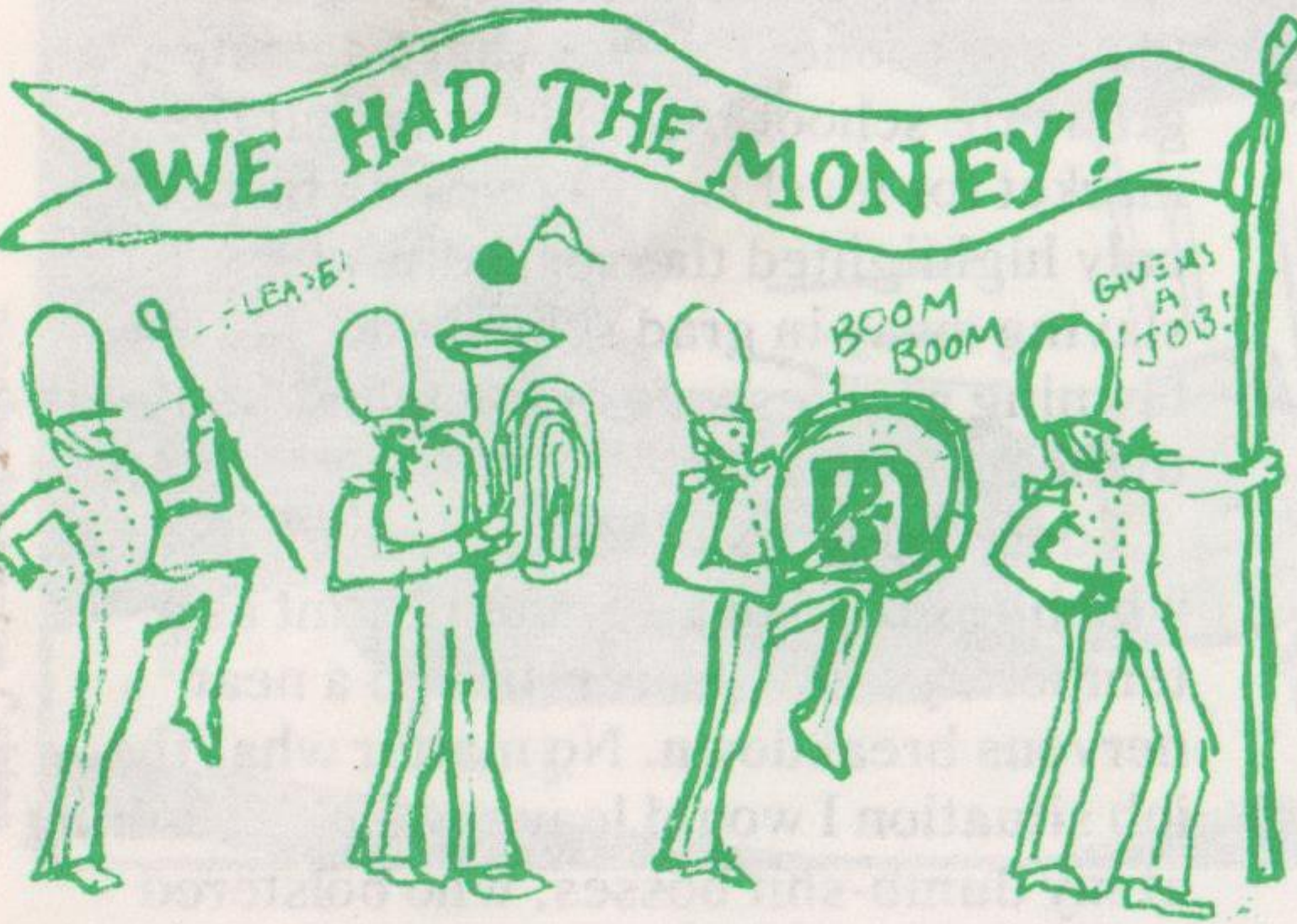
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Talking Heads Roll

till gagging from this summer's star-spangled, corporate-sponsored, sanitized salute to American "liberty"? Well, throw out your Pepto Bismol and plunge right into PROCESSED WORLD 17, the special Termination issue. And remember: Lady Liberty does not have to work for a living.

The issue begins with a special section devoted to the subject of termination—for our purpose, getting fired. Here, Bill Dollar, Lucius Cabins, Florence Burns, Lucille Brown and Zoe Noe recount their sometimes hilarious but more often infuriating experiences of what is euphemistically called "being let go."

We also offer behind-the-scenes close-ups of two contrasting job situations. Dennis Hayes' WHERE'S THE DIRT? analyzes the frighteningly invisible toxic menace to microchip assemblers in Silicon Valley and their even more frightening passivity in the face of corporate pre-rogative. In FLEXING MUSCLES AT FLAX we see the ups and downs of a grassroots unionization drive at San Francisco's biggest art supplies store, via Maxine Holz's interview with two of the participants.

Also included are a riveting piece of fiction by D.S. Black, NAKED AGENDA, a review by klipschutz of the poet Antler's magnum opus FACTORY, and Lucius Cabins's and Dennis Hayes's review of the stage play THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. Poetry and readers' letters (now found at the end of the magazine) round out the issue.

But back to the subject of termination. The PW staff is painfully aware that job loss is a complex and serious issue, several dimensions of which are not covered in the "Tales of Termination." Our stories express the viewpoint of young, single white people for whom firing poses a political indignity, but not an irrevocable threat to their livelihood. There is no mention of the mass layoffs resulting from de-industrialization, or of the plight of its displaced victims, for whom the notorious "bad attitude" is probably nothing more than a frustrated fantasy. For these unfortunates, termination represents a frightening tumble into a pit of unemployment or underemployment from which there is little hope of escape.

Coincidentally, in a recent review of PROCESSED WORLD in UNSOUND magazine, writer George Scialabba comments on PW's restricted point of view. He writes that the magazine has

"given a voice to the poets, misfits and rebels," and also shown that "there's a good deal of the poet, misfit and rebel in ordinary people as well." But he very astutely points out that "the reverse is also true: even in poets, misfits and rebels there are 'ordinary' aspirations, e.g. for stability, rootedness, and yes, for comfort and convenience." Would PW be able to address the issue of "how to grow up and stay radical"? One PWER decided to tackle the flip side of flippancy by recounting the paradox of her search for security.

AN AMERICAN FOR HIRE

I've always been security-minded. On the other hand, I've always resented and despised the very idea of wage labor. Quite a dilemma for a first-generation American who has never occupied the comfortable ranks of the middle class.

Economic stability has always been up there in my top five life goals, owing, no doubt, to the insecurity of my childhood. My immigrant parents never really took to the market economy in America. They remained helpless and insecure in the face of go-get-'em individualism, living humbly and methodically according to the precepts of pre-World War II Europe. My dad diligently paid all the bills in cash, in person, never realizing that a checking account could "save time." Both parents kept the same low-paying jobs for eons, never aspiring to move up the ranks into the conniving managerial class. Ambition, American-style, was to them an extremely crass and distasteful pursuit.

However enlightened my parents may seem, their lack of adjustment to middle class values caused me endless problems. As a kid I suffered adult-like anxiety about money and our lack of it. I was constantly worried by our family's medical bills, inadequate medical insurance, and perpetual indebtedness to this or that doctor. All the anxiety this situation produced seemed to result in more illness, accidents, and bills—and less insurance.

My disquiet over the money problem was exacerbated by my old-world, anti-capitalist father who gave us daily diatribes about the decadence of American mass culture, likening it to the fall of the Roman Empire. He told his little daughters that consumer goods were frivolities master-minded by the rich to keep the working people in chains. They were "wasteful" products that contributed to a "weak" character. Why vacation when you could work? Why eat out when food was just as good at home? And piano lessons? Those were a luxury that only the rich could afford.

Yet our lives were made miserable by the chronic money shortage. My father refused us most of the pleasure products that were *de rigueur* in sixties suburbia. Our junky, used cars continually broke down on the freeway, the car being our sole means of escaping to the beach or the mountains, or to look at the rich people's homes. Our own house was excruciatingly insufficient, with seven people (two of them elderly grandparents) and one very loud T.V., squeezed into its five rooms.

Luckily, my mom's employment at the local department store enabled us to pass as middle class. Thanks to her 20% discount and her uncanny understanding of children's needs, she defiantly provided us with some of the more affordable requisites for membership in the Suburban Club—while teaching my dad a thing or two about the fundamentals of human psychology. Nevertheless, at a very early age, I had an advanced and quite painful understanding of the importance of money in our society.

As a teenager my deepest ambition was to act on the stage, but I quickly abandoned it, realizing that the work was not stable enough for my tastes. Once out of college I opted for a career I felt would better coincide with my political beliefs but still provide a surefire paycheck every month. That "stable" profession was college teaching. It was 1979.

One hitch in the grand plan to marry ideals to economics was that I detested graduate school. Another was that the job market for teaching was closing fast. This only highlighted the absurdity of my slaving away in grad school and the fawning acquiescence of my fellow students to the faculty.

I decided to try other careers for a while, which resulted in a 16-month stint as a temporary word processor and a near nervous breakdown. No matter what the job situation I would leave at 5 p.m. fuming at my dumb-shit bosses, who bolstered

their feeble egos by generating a feverish pace of work; a pace which, I soon realized, masked the work's meaninglessness. This was also about the time I started reading *Processed World*, which awoke me to the fact that wage labor was a no-win situation. Whether word processing for the law firm or thought processing for the university, the employee always loses, financially, psychologically, and emotionally.

It also became clear that any kind of career whatever under capitalism was a sham—and especially so in the 1980s. Professionalization, I realized, was nothing more than a tremendous ruse to get a swollen baby-boom generation to compete harder than its parents for fewer jobs while feeling more important.

Yet, I returned to graduate school, more bitter and suspicious, but still tethered to my longings for security. What mostly got me through three more years was my enjoyment of, and devotion to, assistant teaching, to the exchange between student and teacher. I learned to ignore the higher-ups and do my own thing in the classroom.

What also helped me through was my

decision to chuck academia and start teaching in the community colleges, which I now do part-time. I've come full circle—I'm a teaching temp. I get hired and fired at the whim of the administration, my pay is ridiculously low, I have no benefits and no perks, and there are no full-time jobs to be had.

If this were a few years ago, I'd probably walk out of this situation in a huff. But now I am very carefully planning my ascent up the pyramid into full-time, permanent status, with its insurance benefits, pension plans, and the rest of the perks that buy off the average worker. I know that, as usual, I'll come to resent full-time work—the same early hours, the same commute, the same four walls, the same people, the same surrender of my Self to the institution—despite my appreciation of the students. But right now it seems worth it.

In part, this is because my now-retired parents live off meager social security benefits, and my first-generation instinct is to help them. The other part comes from the me-generation instinct, which warns against getting myself into their situation

when I'm old. I also realize that I would like to have kids and I sure as hell don't want them to inherit my money anxiety. In other words, I am facing adulthood and doing what I think is best.

Do I worry I'll sell out one day and become "too bourgeois"? Not really. Although I've come to recognize and accept my desire for security, I am well aware that it can't truly be fulfilled in corporate America. In reality, the stability of middle-class life is very tenuous. Any serious illness, accident or layoff has disastrous implications for people increasingly denied social services by the state and lacking an extended-family support network to fall back on.

Without any guarantee of financial support should fate be unkind, Americans cling to products of capitalism which symbolize security. They collect "things" as padding, little realizing that the social structure creates the insecurity they run from.

Which brings me to my final point: I think that radicals who have consciously embraced marginality have mistakenly tended to scorn working people's desire for security, creating an artificial barrier more detrimental than useful. These artists, intellectuals and outcasts choose to remain apart and above, married to a life of self-denial and struggle in the best Christian tradition. Such people view anything short of such sacrifice as "selling out."

I desire the life that middle-class status affords: family, pleasure, freedom from money anxiety. I'd be lying if I didn't admit it. I also think it's foolish to pretend that anyone who has struggled or suffered in his/her life *doesn't* want that. Just ask any recent immigrant slaving for minimum wage in a sweatshop, as both my grandmothers did. Or ask me. I hate capitalism and wage slavery, and probably always will. But for now, you can sign me, an American For Hire.

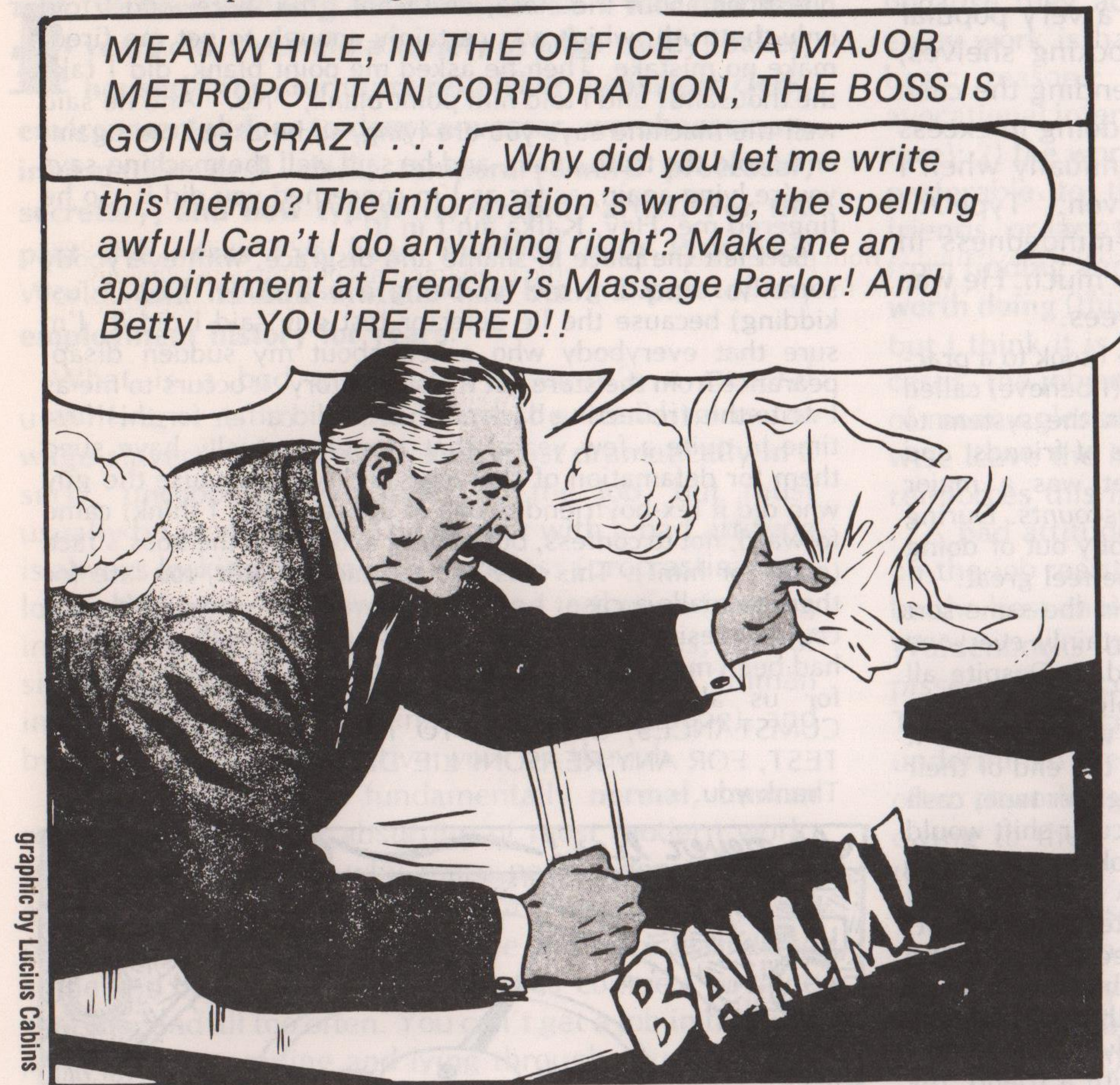
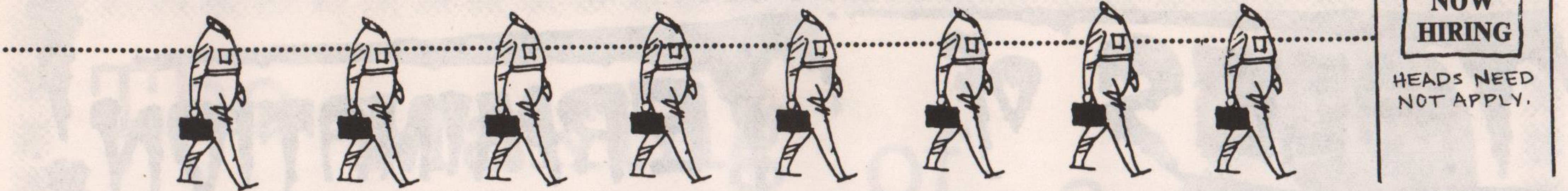
—by Michelle L.P.



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graphic by Pauline Paranoia



graphic by Lucius Cabins



TALES of TERMINATION!



Recently, at a CALA supermarket in San Francisco, I came to the check-out with a quart of buttermilk for myself, and an expensive bottle of ale for a friend, and the young woman at the cash register charged me only for the buttermilk. The boy who was bagging scoped what she did, and we all three caught each other's eye, and nobody said anything, but the girl smiled slightly, and then I said "Thankyoubye" and left, feeling great from the experience. I'm sure they enjoyed the joke, too.

Ten years ago I worked as a clerk in a very popular health food store in San Francisco, stocking shelves, minding the produce and occasionally tending the cash register. The place was very successful, doing in excess of a million dollars worth of business annually when I worked there. The owner was a very driven, "Type A" kind of guy, who showed great single-mindedness in pursuit of the bucks. I didn't care for him much. He was a sleaze who chased the female employees.

The longer I worked in this place, the more I took to a practice which some European intellectuals have (I believe) called "self-reduction," that is, using my place in the system to subvert the system. Friends of mine, friends of friends, and anyone who looked like their food budget was a major concern got fabulous discounts. *Fabulous discounts.* During the time I worked in that store I made a hobby out of doing that type of thing. I know it always made me feel great.

Other people who worked there engaged in the same sort of thing, to one degree or another, and certainly everyone took food for themselves, the boss expected it. Despite all this, the store continued to be very profitable. There was a concrete drop safe in the back of the store, with a slot in it through which the cashiers were to drop, at the end of their shifts, the envelopes containing their cash register tape, cash and checks. Sometimes the take from a particular shift would be so massive the cashiers would have problems jamming the wads of cash through the narrow slot. A couple of them found it very frustrating to have to do this after a tiring shift, and they complained of it. So the boss widened the slot in the concrete with a cold chisel and hammer. A short while later, it was widened again (thick wads of cash) so that a young boy could get his hand and forearm in there easily. Once, when I was in the back of the store getting high with a friend, my friend scoped the drop safe with the gaping maw, and he

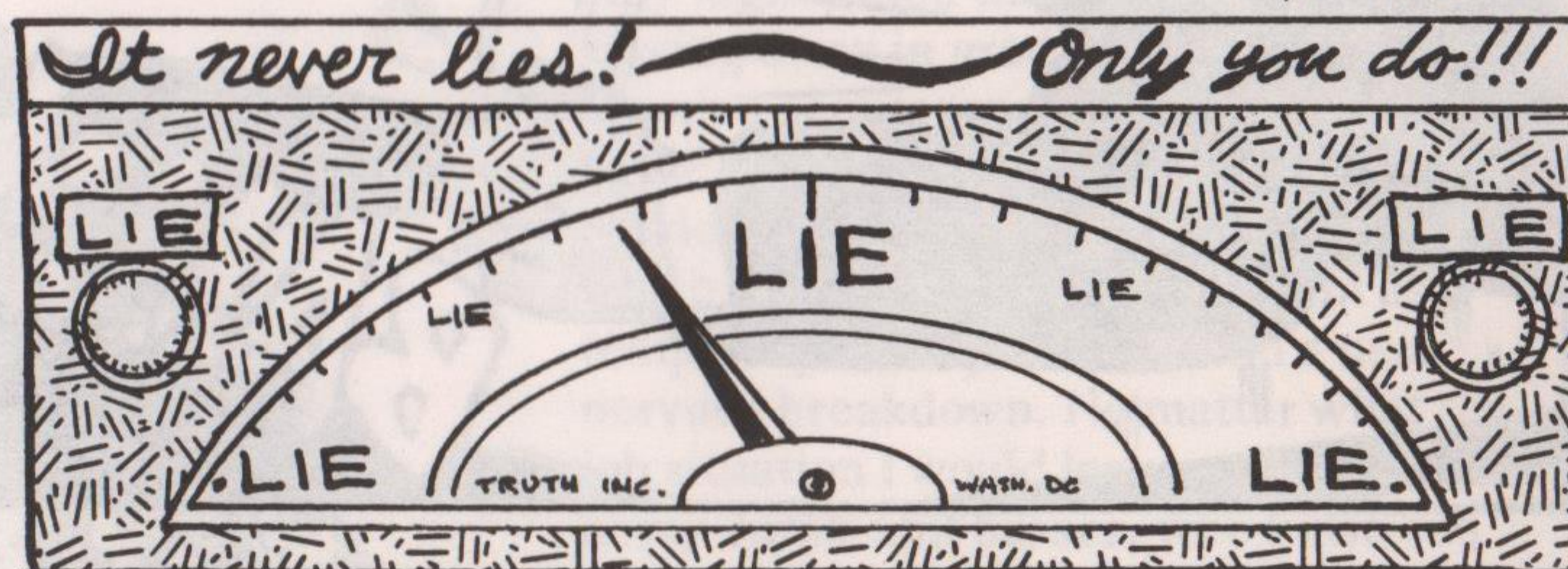
started listing ways I could fish the cash back out, but I never did use any of them. I certainly wish I had.

Somebody else took the initiative. One morning they came up a thousand dollars short (the tape was there, the cash was not) and the proverbial shit hit the fan. Management's solution to this thorny problem was to get everybody to take a lie detector test, or else they could take a walk. Within a day or two the lie detector test guys showed up, and all the employees had to be there, too, or else.

There were two lie detector test guys, and they came in two customized vans with lie detectors inside. No waiting! I said no way was I going to take that lie detector test. The straw boss (a guy I actually liked) said fine, get lost, and by the way that proves to me that you took the thousand bucks. Well that got me steamed. It was a total Catch-22! So I decided, since I was going to be fired anyway, that I would take that test, and confess to all my little crimes (which I thought might actually be fun) and exonerate myself of that one big crime. Wrong, Wrong, Wrong!!! I don't really want to go into too much detail about my ordeal in the customized van. It was horrid, naturally. I sat in this plush chair wired up to this machine like a laboratory animal, while this Marcus Welby android asked me questions and studied the readings on his machine. He started with some really dumb questions, I guess to make sure his machine was working, and then he started asking me questions about the store, and what I did there, and I told only the truth, which was certainly enough to get me fired, make no mistake. Then he asked me point blank, did I take the thousand? and I told him point blank, "No." And he said well the machine says you are lying, so he asked me again, and I told the truth again, and he said well the machine says you're lying again, as far as I'm concerned you did it. So he fingered me. Hey, Kafka ain't in it!

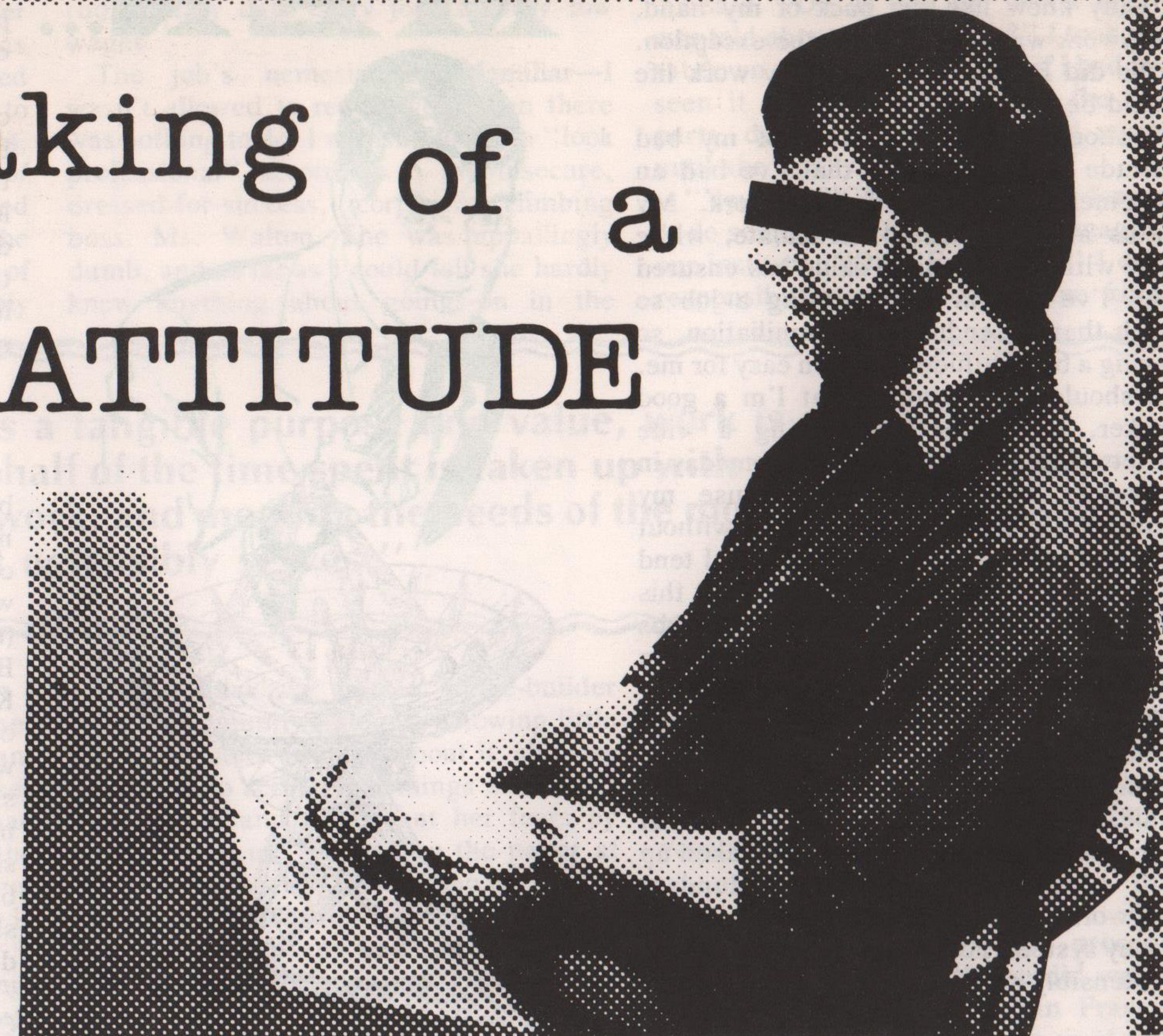
So I left the place in shame and disgrace, with everybody secretly respecting me for being a bad dude (ha-ha, just kidding) because the lie detector test guy said I did it. I'm sure that everybody who asked about my sudden disappearance from the store got the same story. It occurs to me as I write this (reflecting back on that sordid affair for this first time in quite a few years) that I might actually have sued them for defamation of character and won, because the guy who did it (ex-boyfriend of one of the cashiers, I think) came forward, not to confess, but to brag about it to the boss's face (good for him!). This was about a month later, too late for them to make a case, I guess. Anyway the young buck just couldn't resist bragging about what he did. I really do wish it had been me. Oh well, at least there is in this story a moral for us all, which is: DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSENT TO TAKE A LIE DETECTOR TEST, FOR ANY REASON! LIE DETECTOR TESTS LIE!!! Thank you.

by Bill Dollar



The Making of a BAD ATTITUDE

an
abridged
history
of my
wage
slavery



I've been working for money since I was fourteen years old. I've held a variety of jobs: caddy, baker, housepainter, furniture refinisher, bookstore clerk, environmental door-to-door canvasser, warehouseman, information desk clerk, temporary word processor, secretary, and now typesetter/graphic artist. For the past five years I've been involved with Processed World, and its bad attitude has been a part of my employment history for years.

What is a bad attitude? I'd say it's a general unwillingness to submit to the conditions of wage-slavery. It's demonstrated most dramatically in a surly, uncooperative manner on the job, but must usually be more subtle. The worker with a bad attitude is always looking for ways to work less (procrastination, losing things), to surrender less time to the job (coming in late, leaving early, long breaks and lunches, lots of sick days), to further private pleasures and human interaction on the job (talking a lot, smoking dope), and by doing one's own creative work on the job.

A bad attitude is a fundamentally **normal, human response** to the utter absurdity of most modern work. It's a mystery to me why more people don't demonstrate a bad attitude—I suppose it's because they fear unemployment and/or lost income and have learned to smile and hide their true feelings. Of course I've done that too, and all too often. You can't get a job in the first place without smiling and lying through your teeth!

Sometimes people don't demonstrate bad attitudes

because they actually enjoy their work. Why people enjoy work is harder to explain, but I postulate three basic reasons: 1) the work is a convergence of avocational interests and paying work (this is extremely rare); 2) the work, though boring and/or frustrating, is preferable to the individual's life with family, or friends, or lack thereof; and 3) going to work saves one from finding and creating meaning, of deciding **what's worth doing** (this is obviously not an explicit motivation, but I think it is a subterranean spur). In the latter two cases, the job serves as a safe haven from the vacuum of meaninglessness in which this society would otherwise leave the individual. Providing economic security reinforces this feeling.

A bad attitude is also a strategic choice in terms of on-the-job resistance and organizing. It may not always be the best choice either! Often, as in my situations at Waldenbooks and at Pacific Software, my attitude pissed off my coworkers as much as the management. This in turn increased my isolation and despair, which undermined the possibility of active resistance. All too often coworkers are as likely to be adversaries as allies owing to their identification with management, or to their own fear. Alienating oneself from gung-ho coworkers can also be an effective survival strategy.

My bad attitude didn't result from a specific job, or erupt suddenly. I had felt stunted and that I was wasting my time in public school. Growing up in Chicago and Oakland I found myself in classrooms where I almost always sat through reviews of material I

already knew like the back of my hand. Busywork was the rule, not the exception. Little did I realize then that my work life would be remarkably similar.

I should qualify the story of my bad attitude by pointing out that I've had an extremely easy time finding work. My status as an educated, articulate, white male with decent typing skills has ensured that. I've seldom feared losing a job so much that I'd endure any humiliation, so having a bad attitude has been easy for me.

I should also mention that I'm a good worker. I actually enjoy doing a wide variety of tasks and hope to live someday in a society where I can freely use my numerous skills in my community without getting locked into a "career path." I tend to be over-efficient and organized, but this leaves me feeling stupid on paying jobs because virtually all of them have been fundamentally useless to society, and my skills benefited the owners, not me. I don't think all work is stupid and useless, but even when there is a tangible purpose and value, the work is organized to ensure that more than half of the time spent is taken up with superfluous paperwork, redundant busywork, and meeting the needs of the money system, not the actual human needs it ostensibly serves.

WALDENBOOKS

My first "real" job came in 1974 when I got hired by Waldenbooks in a new mall outside Philadelphia, for \$2.10 an hour (minimum wage at the time). I felt lucky because at 17 I wasn't really eligible for employment under Pennsylvania's child labor laws. As it turned out, it was the first time my common sense ran smack into the rules of the job and hence my first display of a bad attitude.

Business was pretty slow, so after dutifully cruising the store to straighten tables and replace sold books, I ended up behind the register with a good book. Much to my amazement, this was **not allowed** by Waldenbooks's chainwide rules! I was supposed to be on my feet for the entire 8-hour shift (it was presumably an act of kindness that my boss allowed a chair behind the counter), and furthermore, we clerks were to greet each customer at the door and try to **sell** him or her books. Allowing people to browse, that time-honored bookstore tradition, was considered bad management. Our manager was frequently chastised for her staff's lack of aggressiveness!

In spite of regular admonitions to stop, I continued to read behind the counter, arguing that no one could possibly be offended by a bookstore clerk **reading**! Of course I also did a huge share of basic store maintenance—book stocking and ordering, minor bookkeeping, etc.—plus I knew where books were better than the other employees—they needed my labor and

MEN...



graphic by T Dill

You've seen what
technology can do...
Are you gonna let
nature stop you now?

knew it, so the standoff lasted for months.

I left for college after Xmas and they begged me to come back for the summer. When I did, I was informed that all males must wear ties while working. That was really too much; no way was I going to wear a tie as a flunky sales clerk for \$2.25 an hour!

After some heavy scenes with the store and district managers, I finally submitted. But I always took my tie off for lunch and "forgot" to put it on afterward. This omission permanently ruined relationships with my more obedient coworkers, who weren't inclined to fight about this. I lasted a few more weeks and then quit—I had completely stopped wearing a tie and blatantly spent time reading at the register. My days were numbered, so I self-terminated.

This job taught me that work wasn't much different from school. I had learned a foolproof strategy in junior high school: work really hard and impress teachers during the first weeks; they'll label you an overachiever and leave you alone the rest of the year. My early work experience taught me that the same strategy worked

just as well on the job. Wage work depends on busywork just as public school does.

Common sense told me that if I had created some "free" time I should be the beneficiary of that "freedom." Obviously this flies right in the face of management's idiotic view that every minute of the work day is theirs and if you finish something that was supposed to take all day, you owe it to them to ask for more (usually unnecessary) work.

BOOKS, INC.

I decided to work full-time at Books Inc. in Santa Rosa in August 1977. What I liked best about the job was its difference from my Waldenbooks one. We could dress comfortably, talk with each other when it wasn't busy, and "borrow" books freely (everyone did, even the store manager). But then my closest friend on the job, Karen, became assistant manager. After our brief affair had soured she suddenly wanted us underlings to restock the shelves more often, cruise the store and not read behind the register. I felt she should be our mouthpiece to management, but she identified with management. Later she accused me of being too political and disobedient.

In October I first approached the Retail Clerks Union, which had an office in the mall. But it was always empty, and no one ever called me back after I'd left a message. I tried again once or twice, not really knowing what I wanted from them. They never did get back to me.

The Xmas rush started in November, and the frenzy continued to mount after the big day. The store was wildly successful, and we workers could tell by our fatigue, sales, and the happy reports from our manager, Loretta, and the chain owner, Lou. We were frequently encouraged to look at the books to see just how well we were doing.

In early January I took a short, much-needed vacation before which I had figured out how much more the store made in the just-passed holiday season than in the previous one. My calculations indicated a 41% increase in revenues, and so I wrote a letter to Loretta detailing this information and encouraged her to ask for 15% raises for everyone. But I had made the mistake of telling her mousy niece, who did the books, that I was writing this letter, thinking she'd be glad for a raise.

When I got back from my vacation, a message directed me to call Loretta before I went to work on Monday morning—highly unusual. I called her, and she said, "I hear you've written a letter to Lou over my head, demanding a raise. Well, you know I have to fire you." I protested because I still had the letter in hand, and it was addressed to her, but she had made up her mind, blaming it all on my attitude problem.

Unjustly canned, I called the National Labor Relations Board. My NLRB staffer didn't think I had much of a case but was very sympathetic and ultimately convinced Lou to settle with me for 2 weeks pay and to post a notice in all Books Inc. stores, prohibiting management's discharge of workers for their "protected, concerted activities." The fact that I had called the union a couple of times, and that some of the other workers would have probably

grants and refugees that prepared them for rudimentary data entry jobs at very low wages.

The job's nemesis was familiar—I wasn't allowed to read, even when there was nothing to do. I was supposed to "look professional" according to my insecure, dressed-for-success, corporate climbing boss, Ms. Walton. She was appallingly dumb, and as far as I could tell she hardly knew anything about goings-on in the

tell me about this?!"

I said, "Oh, is that the yellow leaflet I was told about? Can I see it?" I took it and sat down and slowly read it as if I had never seen it before. I chuckled at the funny parts, dragging out my feigned surprise until she finally exploded:

"You are SICK! You must be deranged to do something like this; it's damaging to our institute, **YOU'RE FIRED!!**" I denied responsibility just in case some kind of

"...even when there is a tangible purpose and value, work is organized to ensure that more than half of the time spent is taken up with superfluous paperwork, redundant busywork, and meeting the needs of the money system, not the actual human needs it ostensibly serves."

defended me in a hearing, saying that I represented them in appealing for a raise, is what won the case for me. A pleasant postscript: three years later, another **Processed Worlder** told me that he had worked at a Books Inc. in Palo Alto at the same time. Both workers and management thought a big union battle had erupted in the Santa Rosa store!

I learned a lot about organizing, although in a halfhearted and undeliberate way. For one thing, it's vital to document that you're trying to improve wages and conditions for all the workers, not just yourself. If you can't prove that, you aren't even technically protected from being fired. Establish a committee clandestinely with the people you know you can count on. Then determine when and if you should go public; often your best protection from management harassment is announcing that you are a union organizer (not necessarily affiliated) because management can be accused of illegal labor practices for any trouble they give you.

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE CENTER

My stint at the Downtown Community College at 4th and Mission in San Francisco lasted a mere three months. But it was a turning point for a couple of reasons. For one thing I learned word processing there, which catapulted me from \$5-\$6/hr. jobs up to \$10-\$12/hr. ones. It also made me aware that most people worked in offices, especially in SF, and I wanted to address this fact, since I too was suddenly an "information handler." As an information clerk I sat right inside the front door and spent seven hours a day telling people where the bathroom was, when and where classes met, and about English as a second language. The school provided two basic services, both primarily for the benefit of the downtown office world: basic training in office skills and English classes for newly arrived immi-

school. I think she was an image-builder for the community colleges. Knowing little and being self-conscious about it, she was pressured to accomplish things she didn't understand, and she'd vent her fears by admonishing me for reading the paper at my desk during lulls. My feeling was that if I could do my job well I should be able to pass dead time in any way I pleased. Much to my chagrin my "superiors" didn't share this outlook.

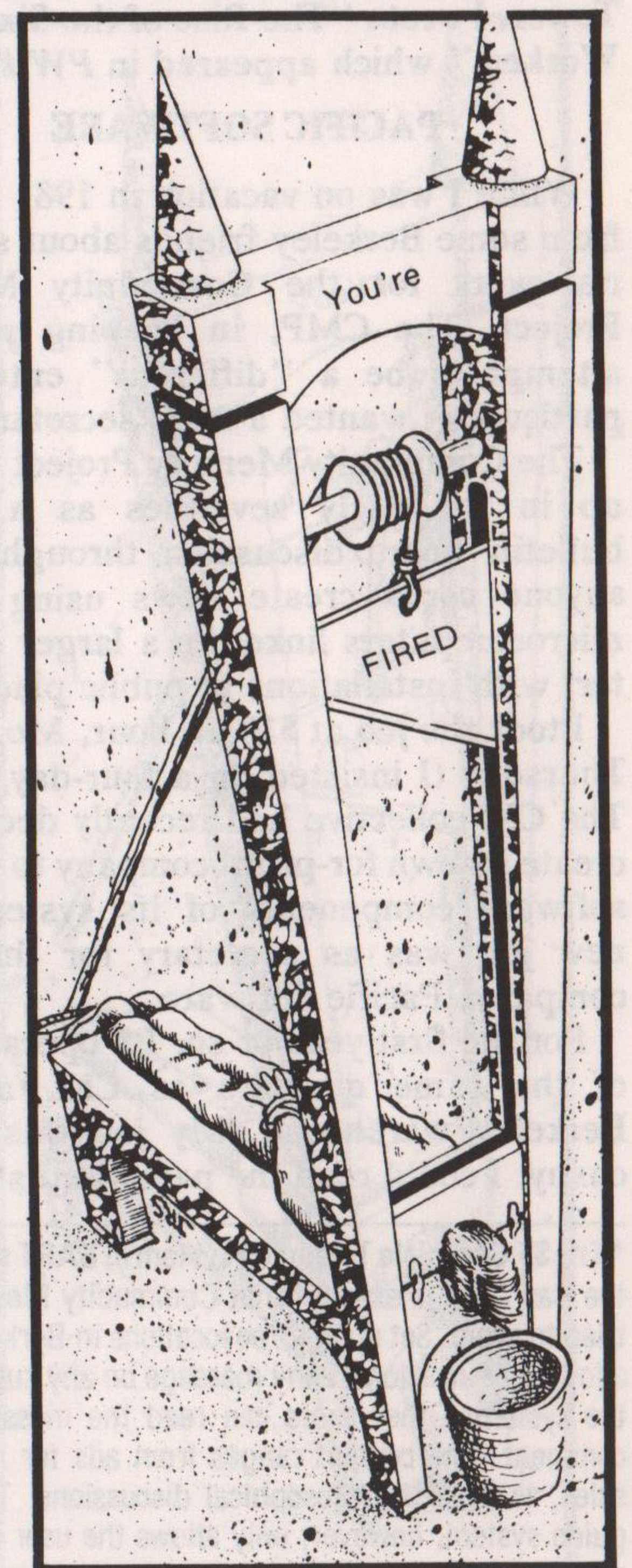
I had never planned to stay long, despite the two-year minimum I promised in the interview. Instead I was going east for a nice, long, summer vacation. About six weeks before I planned to quit, I composed a fake advertisement for the DCCC and had it printed up. This ad summarized all my jaded views of the purpose of this "training institute for the clerical working-class" after a few months of being there 40 hours a week. About ten days before I had planned to quit, I began surreptitiously placing them inside the Fall schedules of SF City College, which I distributed at the front desk. A few days later the shit hit the fan. A coworker came running up to me when I came to work in the morning and asked if I had done a yellow leaflet that had the entire school in an uproar. Apparently a Bechtel executive had turned it in to the administration the night before. I smiled and told her "No, never heard of it." It was nonetheless obvious to my coworkers, who knew of my bad attitude, that I was the culprit.

I was absent from my work station when the snooty director, Dr. B, came in, oblivious to my "crime." She gave me a dark look as I scurried back to my position. Five minutes later the phone rang, and I was told to come to her office. She looked rather pale as I entered. She was boiling but tried to act calm. From beneath a 16-inch pile of papers she pulled out a copy of the leaflet—she had only seen it moments ago and had already hidden it—and thrust it at me, saying "What can you

lawsuit resulted (I had put her name and the school's actual logo on it) and protested that I wanted to complete my final week, but she told me to go. I left feeling quite satisfied with the extra days off before my vacation...

TEMPING

Later, with my new word processing skills, I plunged into the sordid world of office work in downtown San Francisco. Through a couple of different employment



guillotines by JR Swanson

agencies, I quickly found work. After a few one- or two-day jobs, I was placed at the Bank of America data center. Two other temps and I produced a manual that would eventually train computer operators in Florida how to use the BofA computer systems. It was here that I wrote a couple of articles for the first **Processed World** and also got most of the paper for that issue—"two reams a day keep the paper bills away!" Other early PWers got paper from the Federal Reserve Bank (we must buy our paper now, alas, having greater needs).

My other notable temp job was for Arthur Andersen, the big accounting firm. I remember being amazed to get \$11/hr. to sit around all day, answer the phone occasionally and type a few pages of this or that. The corporate ego seemingly dictated that someone sit at every desk. I think my being male really confused a number of the accountants. They had difficulty asking me to do things and probably saved them for the "regular girl" when she got back. Their consternation drove home the importance of sexist social relations in the office.

Temping confirmed that many people shared similar circumstances. Like me, they worked in an office but self-identified as dancers, writers, photographers, painters, etc. Thinking about this while on the thirty-seventh floor of the Spear Street Tower, I wrote "The Rise of the Six-Month Worker," which appeared in PW #2.

PACIFIC SOFTWARE

While I was on vacation in 1981 I heard from some Berkeley friends about secretarial work for the Community Memory Project. The CMP, in keeping with its attempt to be a "different" enterprise, particularly wanted a male secretary.

The Community Memory Project was set up in the early seventies as a public bulletin board/discussion through which anyone could create news using public microcomputers linked to a larger computer, with installations in public places.*

I took the job at \$10 an hour, Monday to Thursday (I insisted on a four-day week). The CM collective had recently decided to create its own for-profit company to sell the software components of its system. My new job was as secretary for this new company, Pacific Software.

For the first year or so, PS operated out of the same quarters as CM, a large Berkeley warehouse. My job was pretty cushy. I could read the paper and start out

*The **SF Chronicle** Teleguide system in BART stations in the Bay Area is exactly what Community Memory has tried to avoid. Set up in three locations in Berkeley, CM allows any user to put any message on any subject into the system. Other users can read the message, and comment. The content ranges from ads for rummage sales, to erudite philosophical discussions. The Teleguide system, however, only allows the user to access numbered menus advertising local businesses that have paid to be listed.

An Illustrated History of TERMINATION

by R.L. Tripp

Many contemporaries view termination as a curse to be avoided. However, in earlier times it was a long sought-after right.



As is often the case, things were bound to get worse before they improved. Rome 71 B.C.



As the years progressed employers began to demand not only high productivity and discipline, but also correct thinking. Spain, 1485.



Being terminated wasn't always a problem of the poor. Paris, 1793.



The advent of the industrial revolution began to shape termination as we know it today.



easy every morning. I could play pool with my coworkers, who were mostly "programmers with politics."

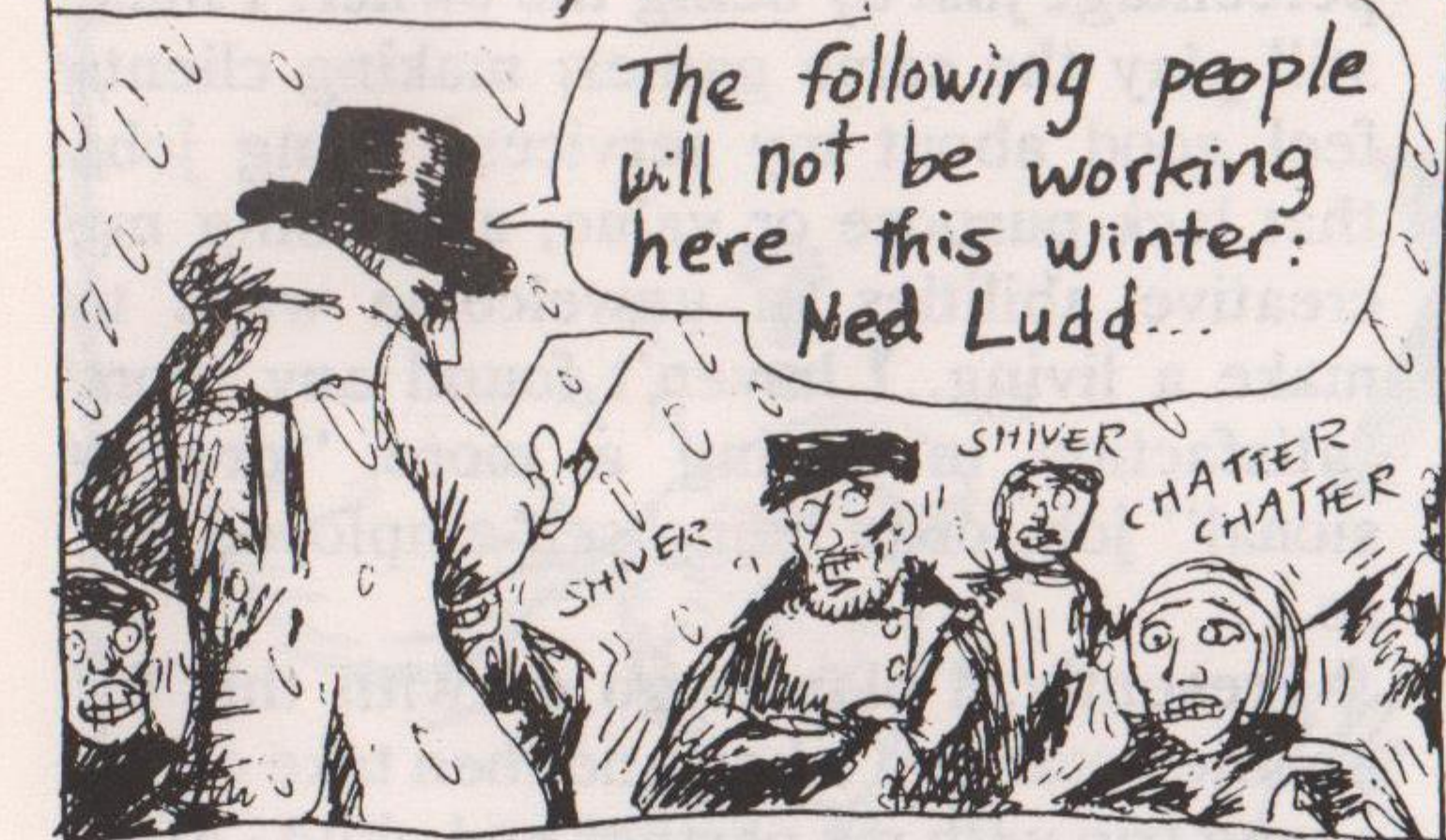
I liked this atmosphere far better than that of regular jobs partly because everyone was paid the same wage, but I quickly discovered that it really was a regular job. My boss, an eccentric fellow named Miller, wanted to make it in the software industry. My job was to fulfill all the tasks he could think of, which were plenty. He was fond of initiating them with rude, cryptic notes; e.g. "please don't fail to mail a c compiler list to Marcellus (just do it)" What was a "c compiler list"? Who was Marcellus? "Just do it"—was the problem in my head?

On a typical day, I had to send out fifteen to forty information packages on our software "soon to be shipped!"—this turned out to be a joke, since the products weren't really ready for more than another year—and answer the incessant phone calls.

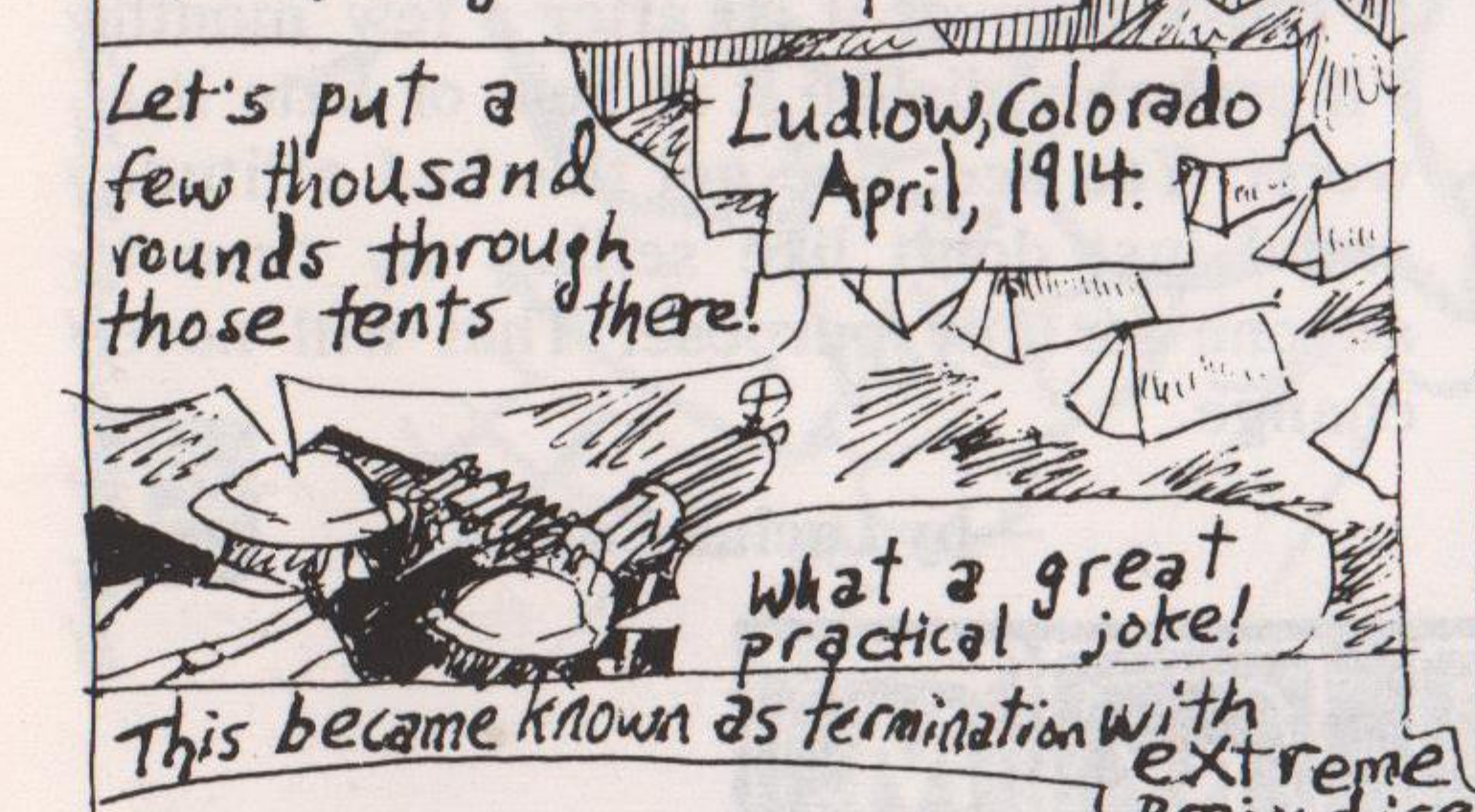
PS slowly abandoned its alternativist pretension and became more of a normal business, eventually moving to plusher quarters a couple of blocks away. The company struggled to stay alive, the founders pumping in new money regularly because the software was permanently just a few weeks away from shipment. After a year of Miller's idiosyncratic leadership—he was interested in what size rubber bands were ordered and how water ran through the postage meter—and the staff's growth to about eight workers, the collective hired real management staff. It seemed that it was the absence of a business plan and experienced managers to carry it out that held back the certain and explosive growth that was "just around the corner."

We old-timers saw this as a threat. The new management's "Pacific Software Salary & Wages Policy" of December 1982 innocuously addressed vacations, overtime, holidays, and educational benefits,

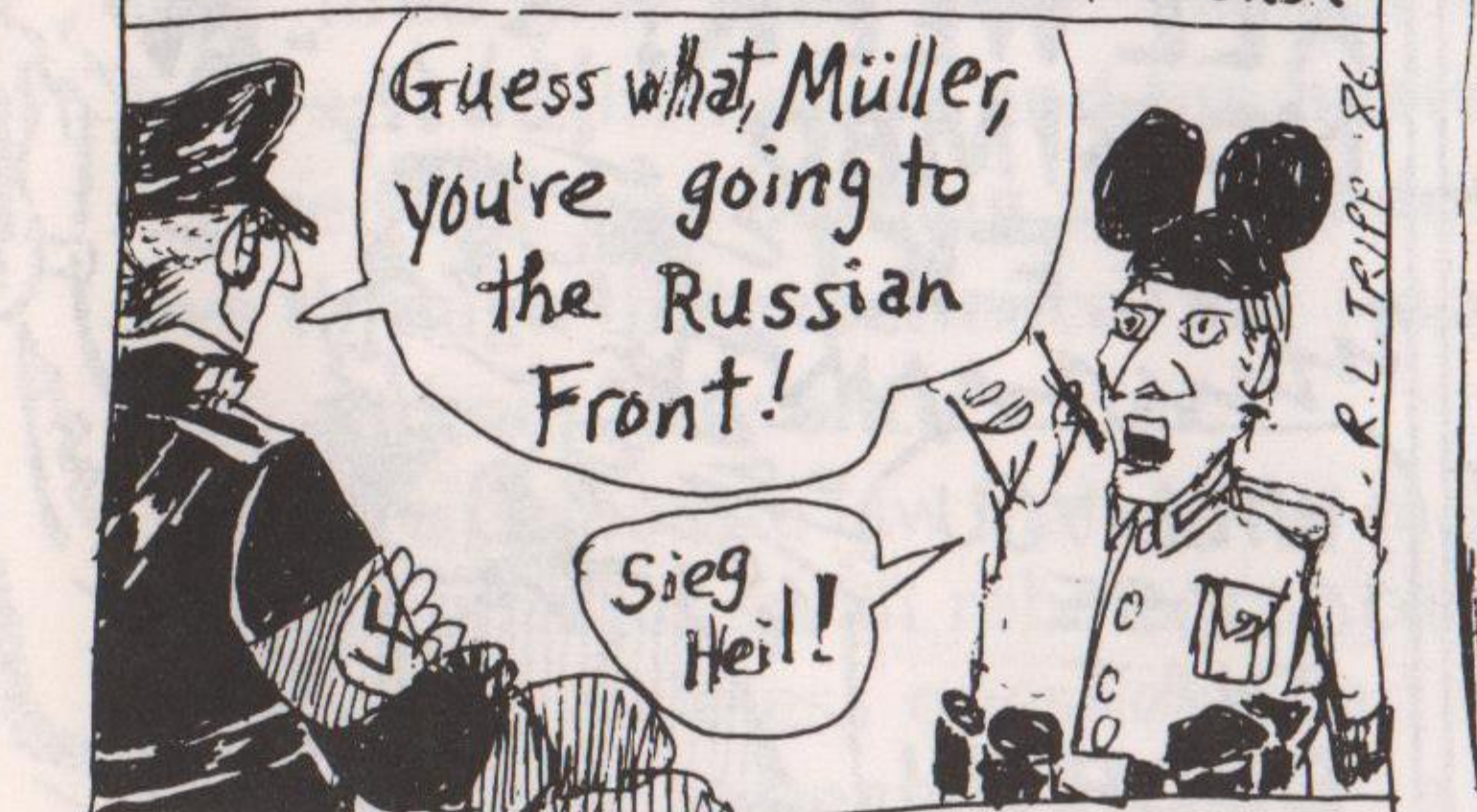
The growth of industry and decline of agriculture led to increasing dependence of workers on steady employment. Leicestershire, 1798.



Efforts on the part of workers to resist oppressive labor relations led not only to being fired, but also being fired upon.



It's hard to imagine that in our century people have been transferred to less desirable posts for mere dress code violations.



but a key parenthetical point provoked my ire. We now had to sign out for lunch. This meant I would either have to take a pay cut or work extra hours for my former pay. Incidentally, many of my coworkers had been docking themselves for lunch all along, but I wrote a memo outlining my position on "free" lunches anyway:

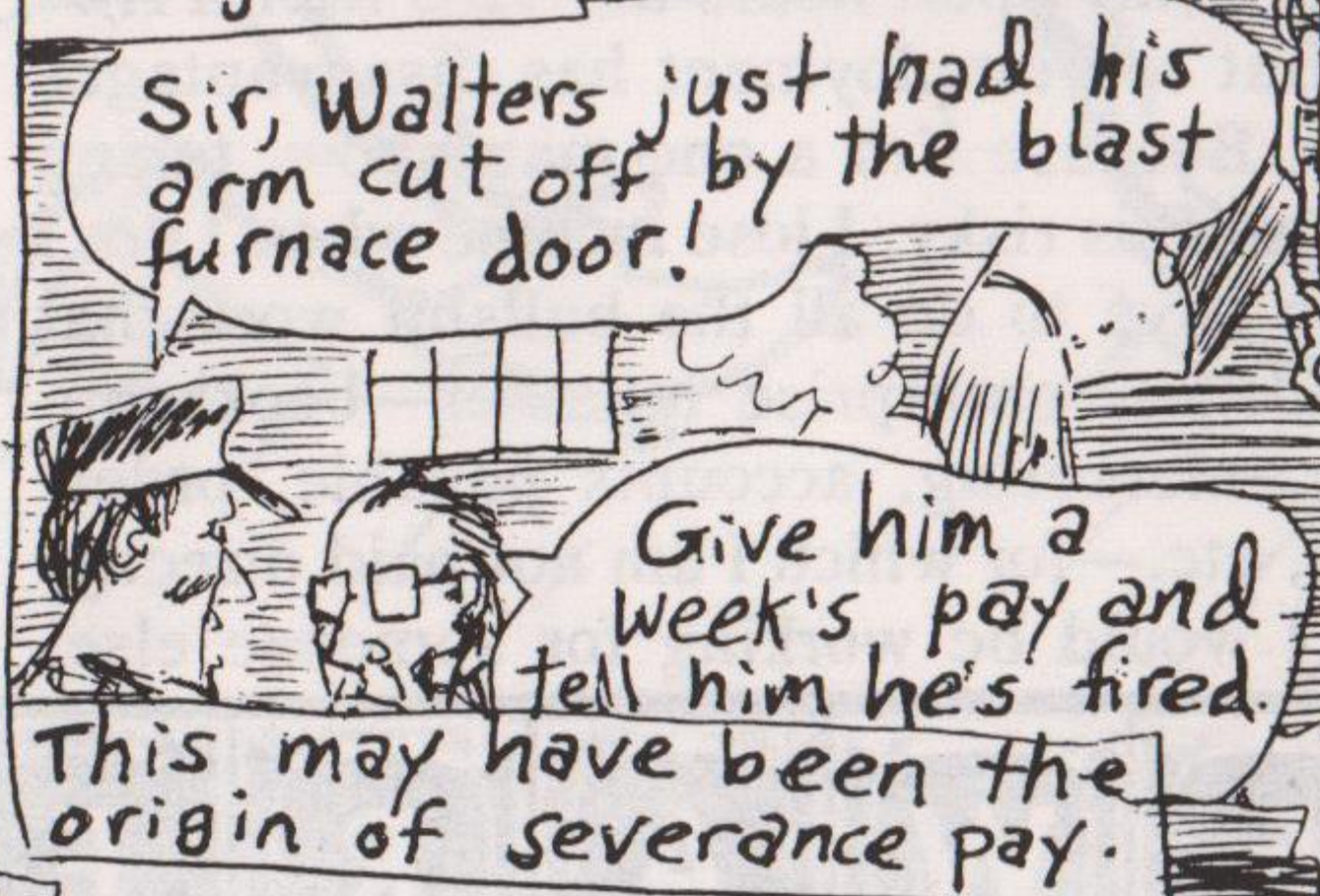
"The assumption underlying the notion that one shouldn't be paid for lunch can only be that it is not working time, that it is in fact "free" time. This is obviously absurd...the hour is entirely circumscribed by work, and its primary purpose is to gain nutritional sustenance and a brief respite from the work routine in order to be able to continue working. Without it the afternoon's productivity would probably go into the negative in a short time..."

Miller responded with a memo full of

The lives of the employed were more strictly regulated by employers who sought to exploit the need to work.



Even in the recent past physical imperfections have resulted in being fired.



So, we can now appreciate the great advances mankind has made with termination.



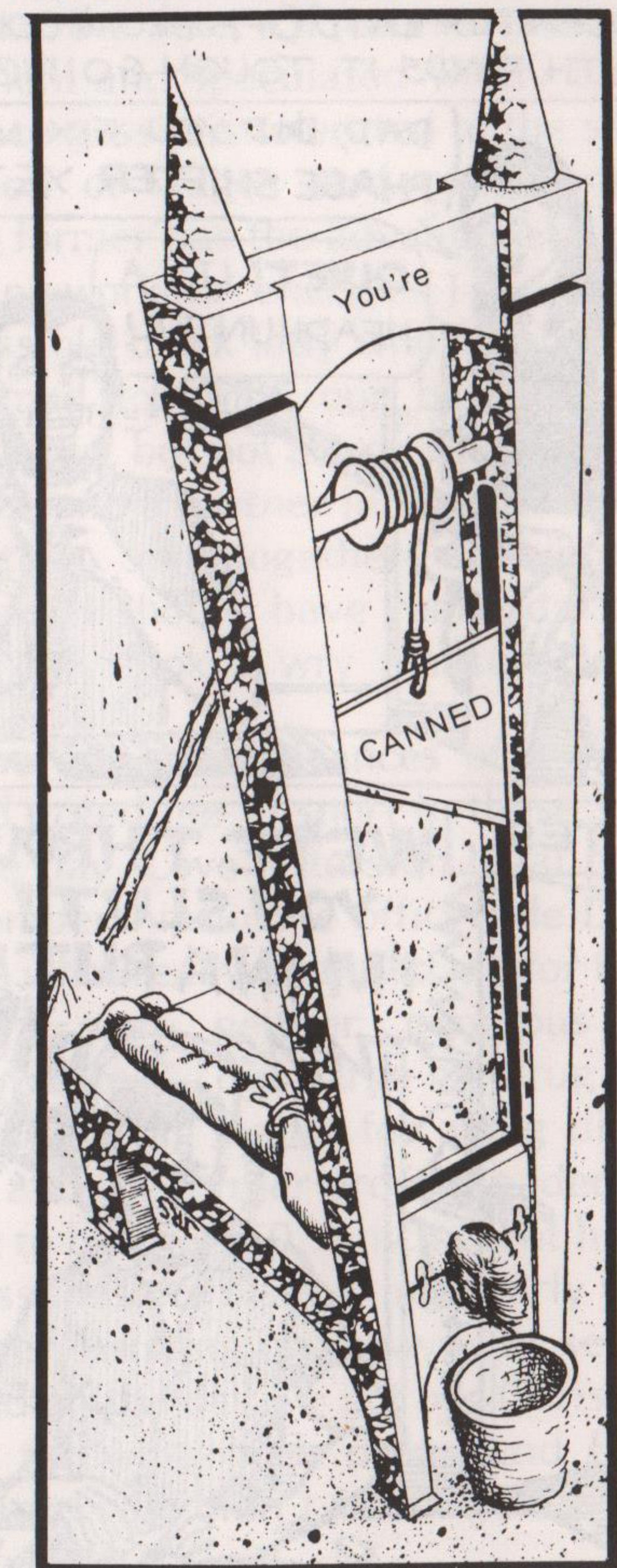
numbers, claiming that my paid lunch cost the primary backer \$10,400 per year, and that if we didn't have paid lunches we could hire an additional five and two-thirds people. But as his word processor I was already wise to his fabricating numbers to suit his purposes. A year earlier I had typed at least 30 different drafts of a prospectus in which he freely changed the numbers to suit his mood. So it was a standoff, and I continued to get paid for my lunch hour while several coworkers continued to sign out.

Meanwhile we employees had created an Employee Bill of Rights for Pacific Software. Most important for us was the establishment of clear job descriptions, because the crisis management style led to enormous tension as demands on people's time and energy escalated. Another key point for us was to have absolute control over who represented us on the "manage-

ment team," via regular elections and rotations. The response of John Dickerson, our nice-guy MBA who'd been brought in as General Manager, was both direct and indirect. A memo he wrote clearly showed that he would work to undermine our efforts: "I will not operate in a General Management capacity in a situation that allows the institutional possibility of sustained Guerilla Warfare on the part of a segment of the staff against Management..."

The new management staff stonewalled this proposal over a period of months, and it was never formally adopted. As late as Feb. '83 they were still making totally unacceptable counter-proposals. Nevertheless, the fact that the staff had been having meetings and formulating demands (and that there was this history of "collective self-management") put management in a defensive position from which it never escaped.

Not surprisingly, I was known for having the worst attitude, which I didn't mind at all because it prevented almost everyone from dumping extra work on me. I often felt very isolated from my coworkers, who were willing to work unpaid overtime, make extra efforts, adapt to arbitrary policy changes, and try to maintain cheerful attitudes. The people I felt closest to had fluctuating attitudes depending on their views of the future and whether they



were getting the status and responsibility they wanted.

I had always maintained that I didn't want to be promoted because I have always thought it worse to **create** gibberish than to **process** it. I did nibble, however, at the possibility of developing print media for the company's products (since I had been working on **PW** I had learned how to do typesetting, layout, design, etc.). Better to get out of being a secretary than be a lifer.

Well, Pacific Software just couldn't cut it in the marketplace. The software products had missed their "window" and were demolished by the competition. The backers ran out of money and couldn't keep a sinking ship afloat any longer. One day in June 1983, there was a Monday morning massacre. More than half the workers were laid off with no warning or severance pay. The strategic planners of this "realignment of staffing levels" foolishly figured that I could and would go back to doing the work of six people, as I had done in the pre-expansion days. Well, I saw my chance, and took it. The day after the massacre, I told my boss I was about to walk out on the spot, unless he would lay me off too, in

which case I would work another three weeks to train replacements. What choice did they have? **NONE!!** So I got my nine months of unemployment benefits and loved every minute of it.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment gave me the chance to launch self-employment, namely typesetting and graphic design, which I'm doing to this day. I decided to try it to avoid further misery in the corporate office, and because my partner and I were going to have a child and I would need a lot more time available for parenting responsibilities. Self-employment has certain enormous advantages over regular jobs—total control over my labor process, my being the direct beneficiary of my own efficiency (finally!), and working fewer hours (my open hours are 12-5 Mon-Fri).

But self-employment has disadvantages too. Because I'm a one-man show, taking days off is risky. I lose income when I do. I also have to do all the bullshit work that holds any enterprise together—bookkeeping, marketing, accounts payable, ordering, etc.—for which I am not paid directly, as I would be working for someone else.

And worst of all, I can't count on a fixed amount of money from month to month, so there's insecurity too. Nor does self-employment solve the problem of selling my time. While no one is raking off a percentage just by being the owner, I must still play the same games: making clients feel good about my services, doing jobs that lack purpose or value, and using my creative abilities in unwelcome ways to make a living. I haven't found any more satisfaction in having a more "professional" job, or in being self-employed per se.

Presently, I plan to go on with this for another year and a half and then take off on a long trip with my partner and child. After that, who knows? Maybe I'll be forced back into temporary word processing; maybe I'll find work as a typesetter or graphic artist. Or perhaps I'll find something totally new to do. Whatever it is, after a few months I'll probably dislike it at best or hate it at worst. You see, I've got this bad attitude, and I just don't like selling my time to anyone for any purpose. That will never change.

—by Lucius Cabins



LIVEWARE BY M₂

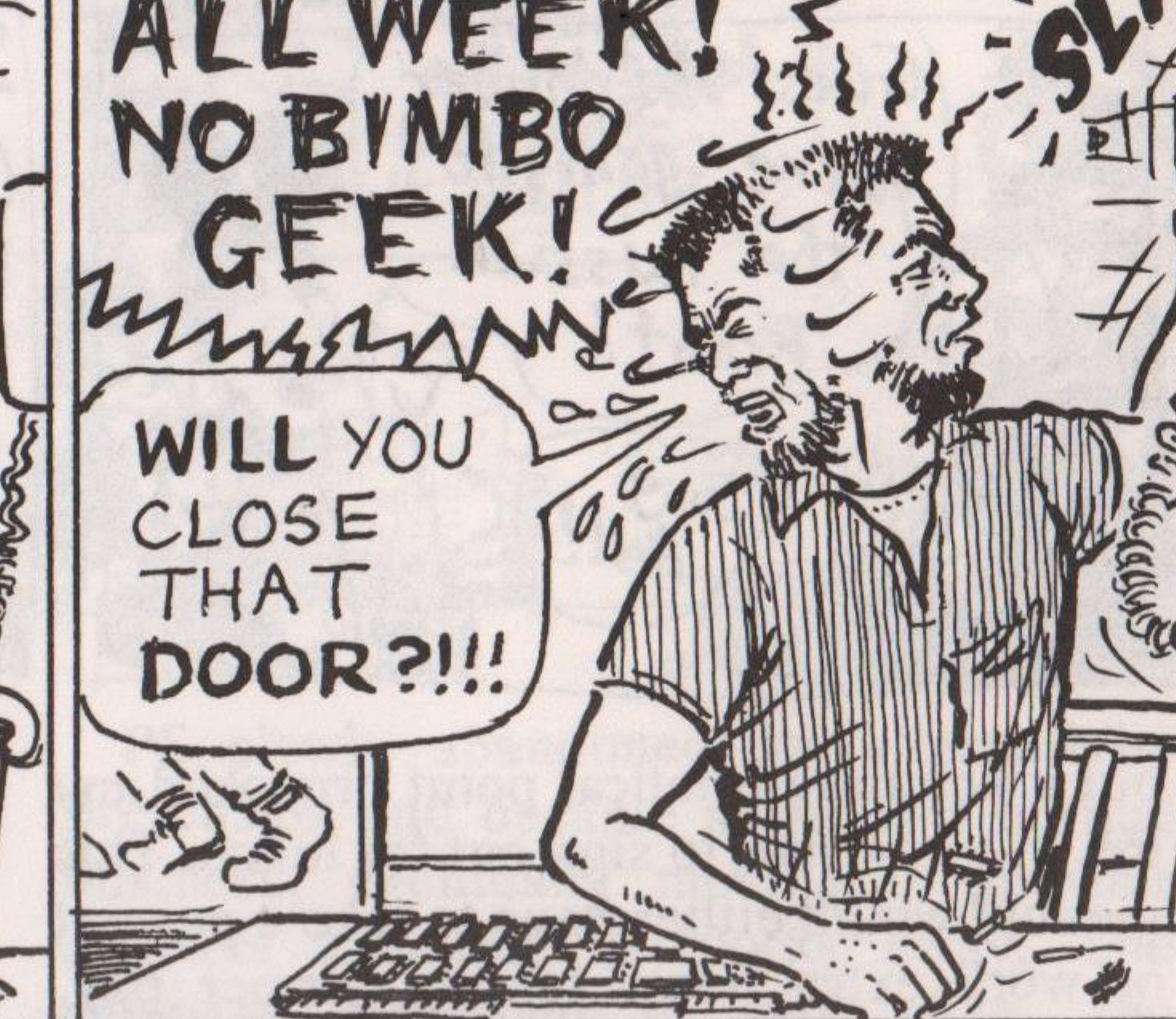
RECENTLY LAID OFF FROM CONTEK, KEITH FINDS IT TOUGH GOING...



RED MEAT? I'M BEAT! WE'RE BORED!



FRESH GLUE ALL WEEK! NO BIMBO GEEK!



LATER... WE'RE THROUGH, YOU SLUT! I'M IN A RUT!



BIG MIXUP, KEITH! PERSONNEL FIRED THE WRONG GUY!—COMPUTER ERROR—YOUR JOB'S STILL HERE—

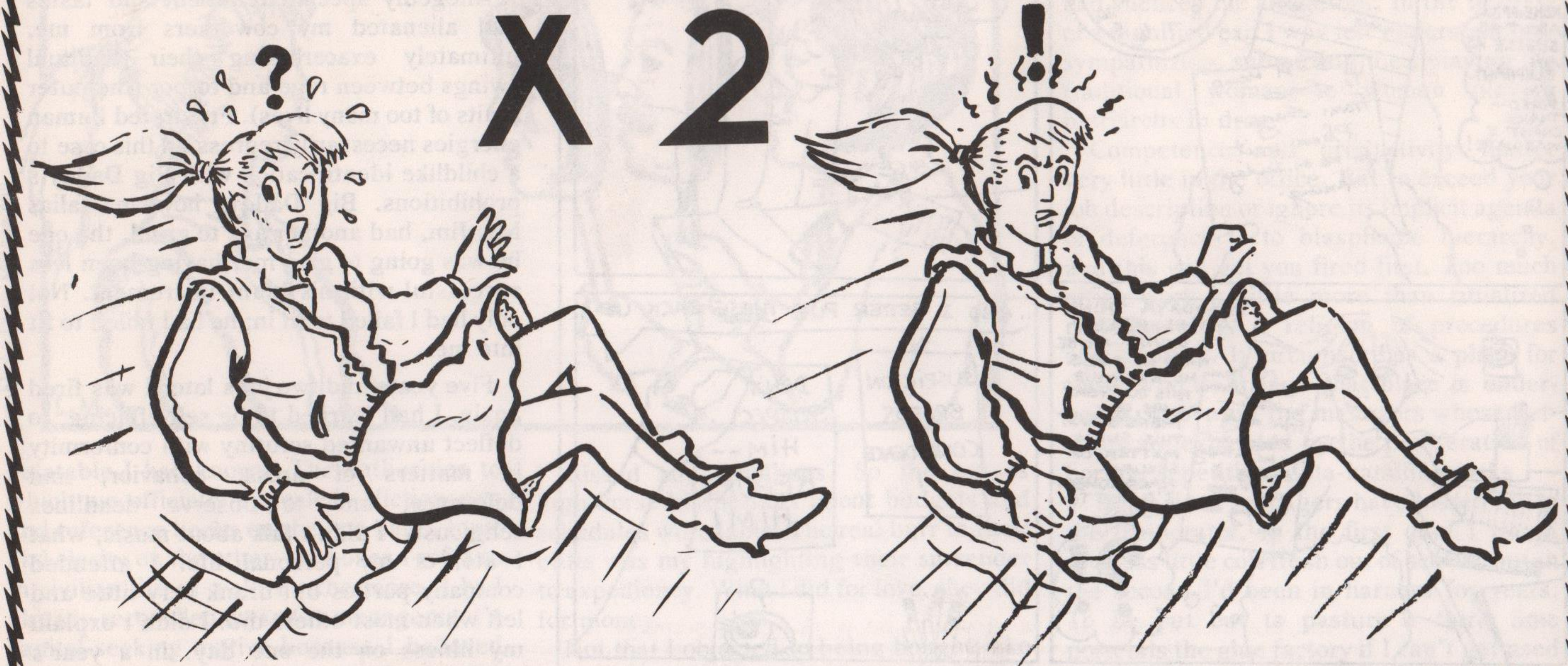


MY TOYS! MORE NOISE! WE'RE BORED!



TERMINATION

X 2



graphic by Louis Michaelson

When I was a child "firing" conjured up images of both hell and burning at the stake. I had been shocked to learn that the bookkeeper my father had fired was still alive months later; somewhere between the hell of sin and the heaven of martyrdom I figured she was burning still. I didn't know you could live through the experience, but I was destined to find out, and not only once.

Both a corporate law firm and a major publisher fired me. A series of small rebellions, coupled with suspect habits and guileless questions had made me a target the first time. To begin with, I was a nonsmoking vegetarian who didn't get many lunch hours because my work schedule had been adjusted to accommodate my rehearsal schedule (I'm a classical musician). And I didn't drink on the few lunch hours I spent with my coworkers, i.e., get into group sloth to pass the time (makes it go too slowly). An affront to my peers, I neither ingested the same things, followed the same schedule, nor settled for a life dominated by work alone.

Moreover, I blew a boss's cover at a meeting in which the phrase "paralegal program" was used. I hadn't known I was in a "program"; would we get certificates? How were our education and progress being monitored? Were we all in this "program" or just some of us? Needless to say, deflating the language of a posturing boss further set the bureaucratic machinery against me. Despite grad school, my tolerance for bullshit wasn't high enough yet.

Then I invited an untouchable to my birthday party.

Office tradition called for a lengthy morning break with cake, a decorated desk, and gag gifts, the birthday boy or girl inviting pals to the fete. Of course everyone noted who invited whom and speculated wildly about the implications. (Office gossip is tolerated to the same extent that discussion of wages and conditions is discouraged, and the former has the advantage of both usurping and deflecting workers' energies.) Among my guests was a toothless old black lady who cleaned the bathrooms. She seemed to enjoy our bathroom relationship as much as I did, but not all my so-called pals enjoyed her. When she and a partner in the firm had to pass cake to each other, sing together, and interact more or less as equals, I should have realized I'd be reined in. Instead I only took a wry pleasure in his discomfort.

Next I spurned the amorous advances of a young cokie lawyer who had urged me to snort in these same bathrooms during the day. Love letters on legal paper notwithstanding, membership in the officewide Drug-of-The-Month Club is what really qualified me for these honors. Certainly he was neither generous nor attractive; he merely wanted to discharge his drug guilt on someone who'd take a big wallet for a big dick. I passed up the latter, and the former proved inadequate right away; he asked to borrow \$50, which I lent him in a moment of weakness, despite his making nearly three times what I did. After insisting on repayment several times, I only collected on the day we got our Christmas bonuses. And after throwing both drugs and bucks away on an ungrateful girl who didn't put out, he was no doubt keen on vengeance.

She Could Never Be Like Everyone Else



His sidekick was the same partner I had compromised at my birthday party. Newly promoted, i.e., made an owner, he hovered between being "just one of the boys" and "king of the mountain." Despite his nice-fat-guy, "call me Jim" approach, I always said "mister," unwittingly contributing to the sexual tension I wanted to ease. Anyway, Mr. Jim led the way on a New Year's Eve afternoon drunk. At 5:00, quitting time for us workers, I swayed down the hall to my cubicle, trailed by a tanked tank in the bulbous shape of Mr. Jim. I remember thinking that I'd better put on my boots carefully; it was too bad that I'd worn such a long skirt because it dramatized lifting it to knee level for the boots. But I scarcely even got that far before I was spreadeagled on my desk beneath a corpulent fumbler literally impressing on me the real relationship between employer and employee. Now I knew what "program" I was in.

I got fired six weeks later for the "irregular hours" that had been sanctioned initially. It hadn't occurred to me to make a stink about sexual harrassment, but even if it had, how could I have successfully battled a hundred corporate lawyers, advocates of the prevailing powers, economic and social? I was an utterly dispensible commodity with no value apart from my utility to them, which would cease once I attempted to discredit them. I nonetheless regret not speaking up for the many women (and men) who had been, were, or would be sexually exploited there, regretting my predecessors' silence as well. They too probably couldn't afford, financially or psychologically, to realize that their jobs were already imperiled by their being the living reminders of ignoble impulses. Anyway, the office manager looked away when he passed me the box of kleenex he kept handy for the bad news he so frequently delivered. He just wanted the

key and an emptied desk, roughly dismissing my incredulous blubberings about the cases I was working on. That admission of the work's relative insignificance is probably the truest thing a boss has ever said to me.

Allegedly special treatment and tastes had alienated my coworkers from me, ultimately exacerbating their habitual swings between rage and torpor (the outer limits of too many lives). Frustrated human energies necessarily regress, in this case to a childlike identification with Big Daddy's prohibitions. Big Daddy, however, alias Mr. Jim, had another axe to grind, the one he was going to give me, having been less successful with his blunt instrument. Not only had I failed to fit in; he had failed to fit into me.

Five years and two jobs later I was fired again. I had learned to be self-effacing, to deflect unwanted scrutiny with conformity in matters of dress, behavior, and deference, and to observe deadlines religiously. I didn't talk about music, what I ate, or my personal life. I attended company parties but drank very little and left when most others did. I didn't explain my illness on the one day, in a year's employment, that I couldn't make it. I figured there was freedom in obscurity but have since learned that even the plainest cloak, like the gaudiest cape, can provoke the bull.

There were three twists in the scenario. The first was that my bosses were women, so I should have been safe, right? Far from it! These women had climbed high enough into the patriarchy's ranks that there were few other women for them to emulate and certainly no nonpatriarchal business precedents for them to adopt. Having no other script, they followed the corporate one, merely embellishing it with artful subtleties and fashionable slogans. These wolves in sheep's clothing laid my illusions about sisterhood to rest along with my vestigial belief in a safe, sensible niche where I could earn my living in peace.

The second twist was my not being qualified for the job I'd really been hired to do, which differed considerably from the one I'd been offered. Ostensibly I'd been taken on as a filler-inner, a gofer, my inexperience justifying ridiculous wages. But my bosses actually wanted a surrogate who could function on par with them for low pay and no benefits. Of course they had to waste their time training me; otherwise they would have had to challenge the budget, i.e., the owner's tightfistedness. Better to clutch their meager allocation with one hand and wring me out with the other.

Twist three was the work itself, the editorial end of book production. The ratio of real work, to "make-work" (ass-covering documentation, fetishized record-keeping, designer typing) was the most



palatable I had known. The authorities to which we officially appealed—dictionaries and reference books on the one hand, logic and clarity on the other—are ones I refer to in civilian life as well. Furthermore, I had already reconciled myself to management's capital-seeking motive because I believed in the product—books.

So, a stooge on three accounts, I eagerly blue-pencilled away, thinking that the content of the manuscripts assigned me was my sole concern. The knight errant comes to mind as I recall the zeal with which I bounded through those pages, roaming deeply into the regions of style and syntactical elegance. I rescued dangles, reunited split infinitives, and righted wrongs of spelling and punctuation. I settled disputes between subject and verb. I drove out cliches. The history of these quests appeared in queries in the margins of manuscript pages. On each I meekly beseeched the author, my liege, to consider proposed changes.

My unfettered leap into the heart of an intellectual endeavor, however, supposedly took too long, cost too much, and cast aspersions on the stylistically negligent author. Only gaffes that could damage my employer's reputation need be addressed. I was told; mistakes in logic or usage often constitute the highly touted authorial voice. The author theoretically exercises veto power, but in practice the budget schedule team, driven hard by my bosses, tramples authorial protest and preferences alike. Profitability determines everything. Slick presentation is all that's needed if you want another book contract, another editing assignment.

Cash register returns seldom justify a worker's intellectual or aesthetic integrity, and my integrity was the real issue in my protracted descent from favor. Having regularly under-reported my hours or else accepted flat fees, I hadn't billed for my allegedly superfluous exertions; nor had

I missed any deadlines. So the bosses high-horse blatherings about budgets and schedules were lame. The real burr in their butts was my highlighting their surrender to expediency. What I did for love, they did for money.

Not that I objected to being bought; like many wage laborers, I had eagerly pimped myself, implicitly promising things that turned my stomach. Things like cheerful acquiescence to any john, any act, any position. But I didn't "do it" right, and probation followed the reprimands while firing glimmered on the horizon. I nonetheless gambled on my last chance and conceded a great deal—yes, my comments were pointless, yes, my ear was quirky; yes, I overdid things. But that wasn't enough. I myself was to be sacrificed to the almighty budget. Probation meant stay of execution, and the last chance wasn't mine to "improve" but theirs to exploit me.

So there I was on Death Row. It scarcely mattered how I did my job, but how they did theirs merits comment in these days of the glorified female manager. They had promised feedback though probation, hence the plethora of sugary memos and encouraging remarks that followed. Predictably, these gratuitous gestures reassured them more than me. As to the inevitable firing itself, one of them offered to take me out for coffee afterward, the next praised my intelligence to the skies, and the last assured me that she really liked me. Pure Kafka, my being railroaded into saying thank you to all three. Instead I asked about references, keeping my tears to myself. Of course they'd be happy to put in a good word for me...

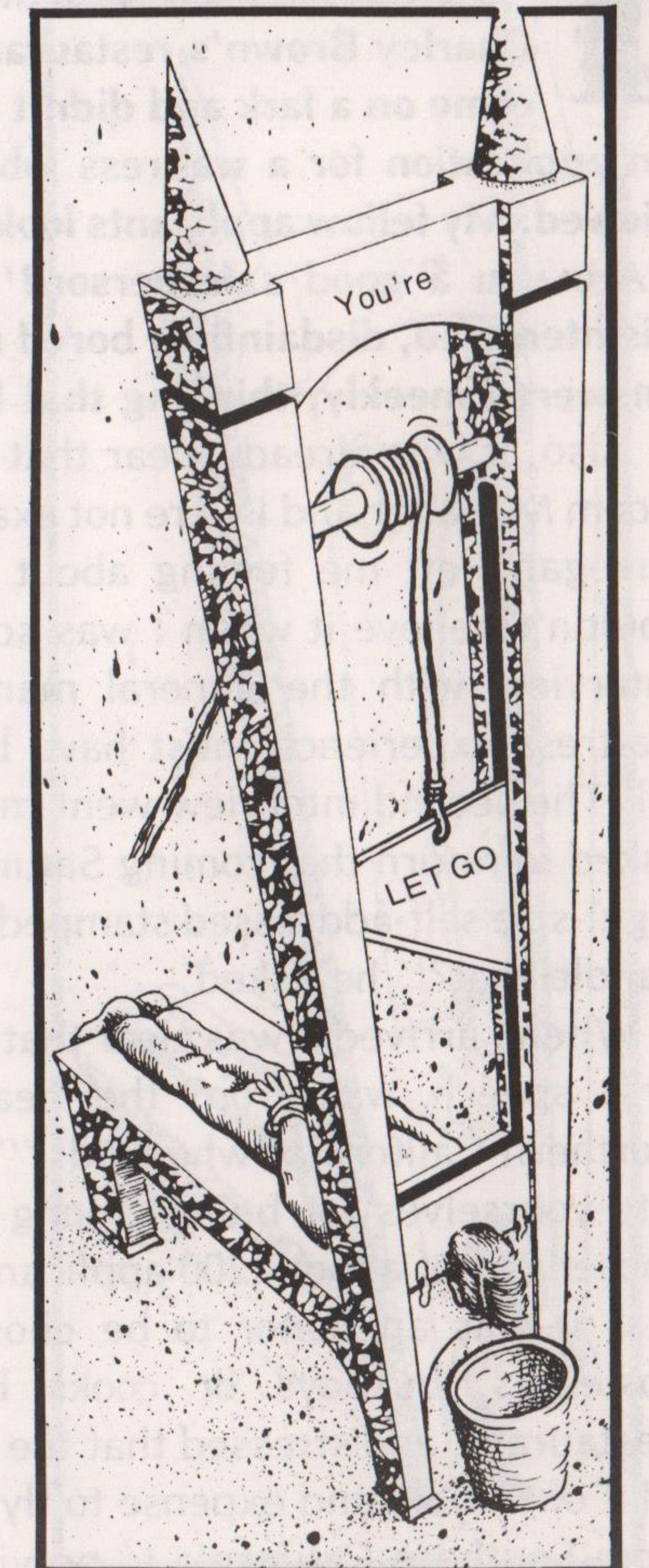
How well they appeased their consciences, these nonaggressive, politically correct bosses of mine. And how efficiently they coddled their vanity and protected Big Daddy's inordinately large piece of the pie all at once. Niceness Control had me hamstrung. My bosses used our confi-

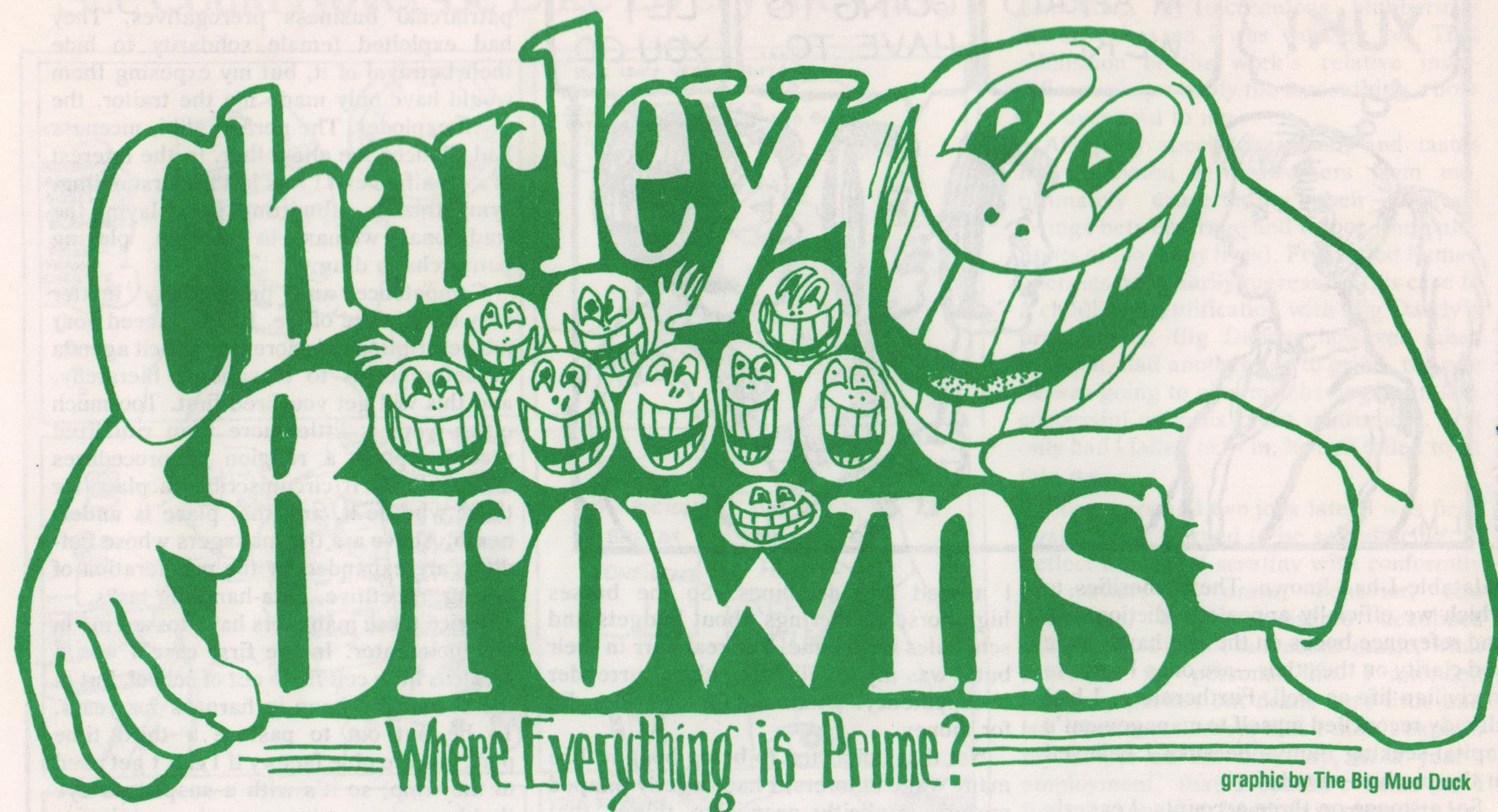
dences about lovers and children, our sharing of recipes and tampons, to further patriarchal business prerogatives. They had exploited female solidarity to hide their betrayal of it, but my exposing them would have only made me the traitor, the myth exploder. The perfect alibi, niceness had silenced me altogether. In the interest of a dignified exit I was left understanding, sympathizing, submitting, i.e., playing the traditional woman to women playing patriarchy in drag.

Competence and productivity matter very little in the office. But to exceed your job description or ignore its implicit agenda of deference is to blaspheme hierarchy, and this will get you fired first. Too much office work is little more than ritualized recordkeeping, a religion of procedures and protocol. It circumscribes a place for those who do it, and that place is **underneath**. Above are the managers whose fiefdoms are expanded by the proliferation of boring, repetitive, data-handling tasks.

Twice these managers have tossed me in the incinerator. In the first case I was a reckless little colt fresh out of school, but in the second I'd been in harness for years. To be put out to pasture a third time portends the glue factory if I can't get used to the whip, so it's with a suspicious eye that I scrutinize my prospective employers now.

—by Florence Burns





graphic by The Big Mud Duck

I was on the third floor of the Cannery where a new Charley Brown's restaurant was opening. I had come on a lark and didn't expect even to fill out an application for a waitress job, much less be interviewed. My fellow applicants looked more experienced. "Are you a good salesperson?" he asked in a very disinterested, disdainfully bored manner. "I can be," I answered meekly, thinking that I wanted out of there.

Also, it was already clear that Mr. Arrogant Dining Room Manager and I were not exactly hitting it off. Mr. Airogant left me feeling about two inches tall, so I couldn't believe it when I was scheduled for a second interview with the general manager. My beefed-up waitress experience must have been convincing after all. The second interview went much better, and I was asked to return that coming Saturday at 1 pm with two legal-size self-addressed stamped envelopes. "Can you handle that?" he asked.

When I arrived it was clear that I had been hired. The first speech was from the head of operations for Northern California, who said: "You should congratulate yourselves for being among the 110 or so people chosen out of about 1200 applicants." He made it clear that it was an honor to be chosen as food servers, hostesses, busboys or cooks by Charley Brown's Restaurant, and stressed that the company had gone to a lot of trouble and expense to fly up a team of trainers from Southern California to provide us with a week of

intensive orientation. We were then handed our training schedule and uniform requirements. Training would last for four days, 10 am-6 pm, with one day off in between. "You'll need that day off to rest," he smiled ominously. I scanned the uniform requirements for food servers: black A-line skirt, white button-down oxford shirt, black leather pumps with a 1½ inch minimum heel. An apron and a tie would be supplied by the restaurant.

I wasn't, however, prepared for the training. From the moment we arrived for our first day of training until we left at night we were kept so busy we barely had time to breathe, let alone go to the bathroom. I soon came to feel as though we were being indoctrinated into some bizarre cult.

Our Teflon Trainers had personalities that combined those of a stereotypical cheerleader and an army drill sergeant. They were slick, hard, and so rah-rah enthusiastic about Charley Brown's that I became suspicious. We were promptly divided into teams, each with a trainer as its captain. Scores were kept for each of the many tests and games. In our first huddle we were made to come up with names for our teams. "The Prime Cut Pranksters," "The Waitrons" or "The Dreamboats" were what they had in mind. Our captain a woman named Malory, gushed about how much she loved working for Charley Brown's and how much money she made. She also mumbled something about

You've got just the brand of intuition and guts we've been looking for, Ms. Vernworthy, and a fine employment record as well.

Well I...

I've always tried to put something deeply personal into my work.

In that case you'll understand...

...what I need from you now.

My urine?!

employee softball games and parties. She was trying to convince us that working for Charley Brown's would be like belonging to some big happy family.

At our first lecture we were presented with Charley Brown's bible, a 70-page food server manual which we were to study faithfully, along with another 20 pages of handouts. The manual covered everything from detailed personal appearance standards, to portion sizes and all the brands of liquor sold at CB's, to the words of CB's birthday songs. Under personal appearance standards were listed the following commandments: **Personal Hygiene**—"Bathe or shower and use deodorant daily; brush teeth regularly"; **Nails**—"Nails well manicured, medium length; nail polish may be any shade of medium red or pink frosted or unfrosted. May not wear exotic shades of green, purple, sparkled, flowered, etc."; **Jewelry**—"One small ring per hand to be worn on ring finger only." And let's not forget **Undergarments**—"White or nude color only, style to complement outfit, undergarments must be worn!"

The rest of the day was a whirlwind of activity. We viewed slides of all the entrees and appetizers and were told to memorize all the prices, codes, ingredients, methods of preparation, portions and appropriate garnishes. The presentation was given by Anna, director of Sales and Service. I promptly developed an aversion to Anna, who was always unnaturally and impeccably coiffed and color-coordinated from her head to her pointy patent leather high heels. She batted her heavily shadowed eyes and opened them wide whenever anyone asked her a question—a perfect little kewpie doll.

The day also included a rather terrifying relay race in which we had to carry loaded food serving trays and cocktail trays, a lecture on company benefits, and a bizarre

speech on "Sanitation as a Way of Life." The grand finale was a contest over which team could sing Charley Brown birthday songs the "best," i.e. the most enthusiastically. Songs were sung to the tunes of "Hey Big Spender" and "Baby Face," and had lyrics like: "Here at Charley's we always say Celebrate, you really rate, and have a great birthday!"

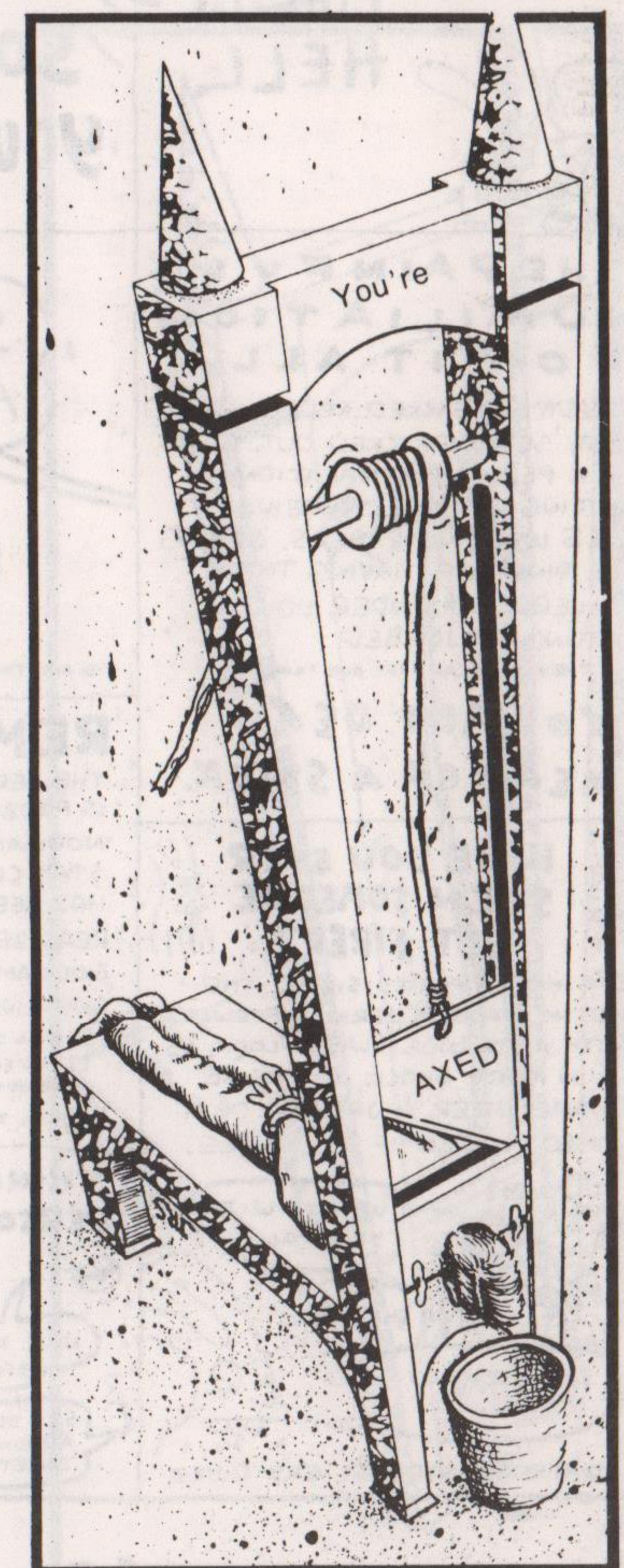
At the end of the first day we were told what to study for the test the following morning. The list was long; I felt as if I were back in college as I stayed up until 3:30 a.m. cramming codes, prices, portions and ingredients.

The next two days again brought a dizzying number of things to learn. There were lessons in writing guest checks and obtaining credit card authorization on the computer, a video on wine serving and selling, a wine bottle-opening session and instruction on everything to do with the bar. I discovered that we were to be cocktail waitresses, too. To top it all off there was a cash and carry system; we were responsible for all the money. At the end of each evening we were required to fill out a very long and complicated accountability sheet, and of course any shortages would come out of our own pockets.

Throughout the training we were instructed in "Charley Brown's Sequence of Service." Everything we were to do or say was programmed from the moment the patrons sat down. Into this program we were expected to insert our own "personality" and be friendly and enthusiastic. The motto was: "No silent service." Everything placed on the table had to be introduced; for example: "Your hot sourdough bread, Sir!" When customers gave us an order we were to compliment them with an enthusiastic "Excellent choice!" or "Great!" In fact, "Great!" was the most frequently used word among the trainers at Charley Brown's. We were also taught

never to ask: "How would you like your meat prepared?" The word "meat" was too open to "loose" interpretation according to our team captain, who confided: "I have a very dirty mind, and if someone asked me how I wanted my meat prepared..."

Meanwhile, throughout each day's training, the only break was a half hour for cold sandwiches, which we lined up for and



graphic by Matthew Finch

ate together. The only really enjoyable part of the training came when we got to sample all the desserts served at the restaurant. The rest of the experience was painful and tension-producing. At first the group seemed to have some awareness that the training experience was, as one fellow commented, "like joining the Moonies." But soon many trainees seemed to have swallowed the Charley Brown line; some were even getting chummy with our trainers. I imagined them becoming clones of the clones. They would start talking alike, dressing alike, acting alike, thinking alike. Horrors! Would I too start incorporating Charley Brown vocabulary into my speech, saying "Great!" and referring to a drink or food item as a "puppy?" Would I start wearing shiny patent leather high heels that hurt my little "tootsies" and so much make-up on my eyes that I would have to bat them to keep them open? Did I want co-workers like Gary, a tall, blond, slick-looking Southern California type who didn't have an ounce of warmth or compassion in his steel-grey eyes, only utter boredom and emptiness?

On the last day of training I was ready with my new uniform (\$75 for shirt and shoes alone). The only thing I didn't have



was motivation. Still, I thought I would try it for a couple of days, for curiosity's sake.

However, when I walked in that morning I was called into the general manager's office. Somehow I knew what was coming. They told me I was being terminated because I didn't "fit in" and mumbled something about test performance, although I had done well on all the tests. They handed me my pay for the past three days and asked for the apron and the tie. "Good luck," said Mr. Dining Room Manager. "Good luck to you," I said with all the civility I could muster. Suddenly my head was spinning. "Try to have a nice day," he said. I felt as if I might cry if I tried to say anything else. It was the indignity of the thing, and the shock. I had never been fired before. I had barely made enough money to cover the cost of the high heels and the shirt.

As I left the office and walked out of the dining room filled with my former co-workers taking their daily training exam, I suddenly started feeling better. I walked outside into the brilliant sunshine with the sapphire blue bay as backdrop, feeling wonderfully free. I decided I was going to have a great day after all.

—by Lucille Brown



LIFE IN HELL

THE PAINFUL HUMILIATION OF IT ALL

GETTING SACKED. RECEIVING THE BOOT. GETTING KICKED OUT. GOING ON A PERMANENT VACATION. GETTING THE AXE. RECEIVING ONE'S WALKING PAPERS. GETTING THE PINK SLIP. HAVING THE ROLLERS PUT UNDER YOU. GETTING DEJOBBED.

THEY ALL MEAN JUST ONE THING.

YOU ARE DEAD MEAT ON A STICK.

CHAPTER 8: SO YOU GOT YOURSELF FIRED

YOU'RE FIRED!

FIG. ONE TYPICAL

REMEMBER:

THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN FIRED IS PROBABLY UPSET. DO NOT EXPECT NORMAL BEHAVIOR-- JUST TRY TO STAY CLEAR. IF THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN FIRED IS YOU, YOU MUST REALIZE YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR GODDAMNED MIND. DO NOT DO ANYTHING RASH. DO NOT:

- ☐ KILL YOURSELF. ☐ KILL YOUR BOSS.
- ☐ KILL EVERYONE YOU WORK WITH. EVEN THE RECEPTIONIST WHO WAS ALWAYS NICE TO YOU.
- ☐ KILL YOUR FAMILY. ☐ KILL YOUR PETS.

NO IT ISN'T. YOU'RE FIRED.

THINGS TO SAY IF YOU JUST GOT FIRED

"I -- JUST -- GOT -- FIRED."

"PLEASE! JUST ONE MORE CHANCE!!!"

"SO LONG, SUCKERS."

"I JUST QUIT MY JOB, EVERYONE! TOODLES!!"

NOW WHAT?

YOU'RE OUT ON YOUR ASS AND FEELING LOUSY. BUT DON'T LOSE YOUR SELF-RESPECT, WHATEVER YOU DO. CRAWL AWAY WITH DIGNITY AND WEEP AND MOAN IN THE PRIVACY OF THE HOME YOU CAN SUDDENLY NO LONGER AFFORD. THINGS ARE NOT TOTALLY HOPELESS. THEY JUST SEEM THAT WAY, AND THEY WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SEEM THAT WAY FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.

BUCK UP!

IT'S TIME TO GET ANOTHER JOB. THIS TIME, CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE. GROVEL A BIT MORE. DEVELOP A POSITIVE, GO-WITH-THE-FLOW PHILOSOPHY. AT EACH JOB INTERVIEW, TRY TO BE RELAXED. DON'T APPEAR OVERANXIOUS. ADOPT A CAREFREE OUTLOOK. SAY:

"NICE KNOWIN' YA."

"NOW WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO?"

"SURE GLAD I AIN'T YOU."

"WELL -- GOTTA GO."

"AND MAYBE -- JUST MAYBE -- YOU'LL LIVE HAPPIER EVER AFTER."

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SOMEONE GET FIRED?

IT'S NOT A PRETTY SIGHT. THE VICTIM STAGGERS JERKILY FORWARD WITH A STRANGE GLASSY LOOK, AS IF IN ACUTE SHOCK, EXTREME SHAME, UTTER CONFUSION, OR A COMBO PLATTER OF ALL THREE.

YOU SAY: "WHAT'S WITH YOU, PAL?"

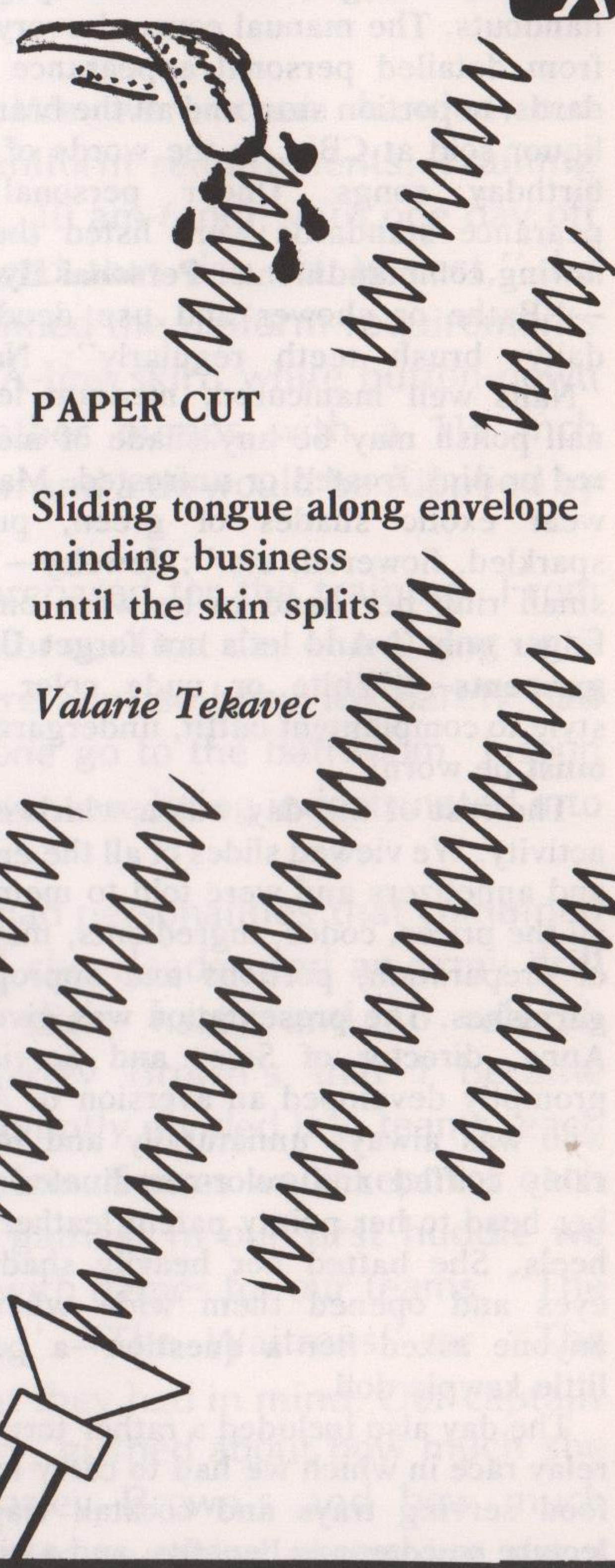
HE OR SHE GURGLES.

"I -- JUST -- GOT -- CANNED."

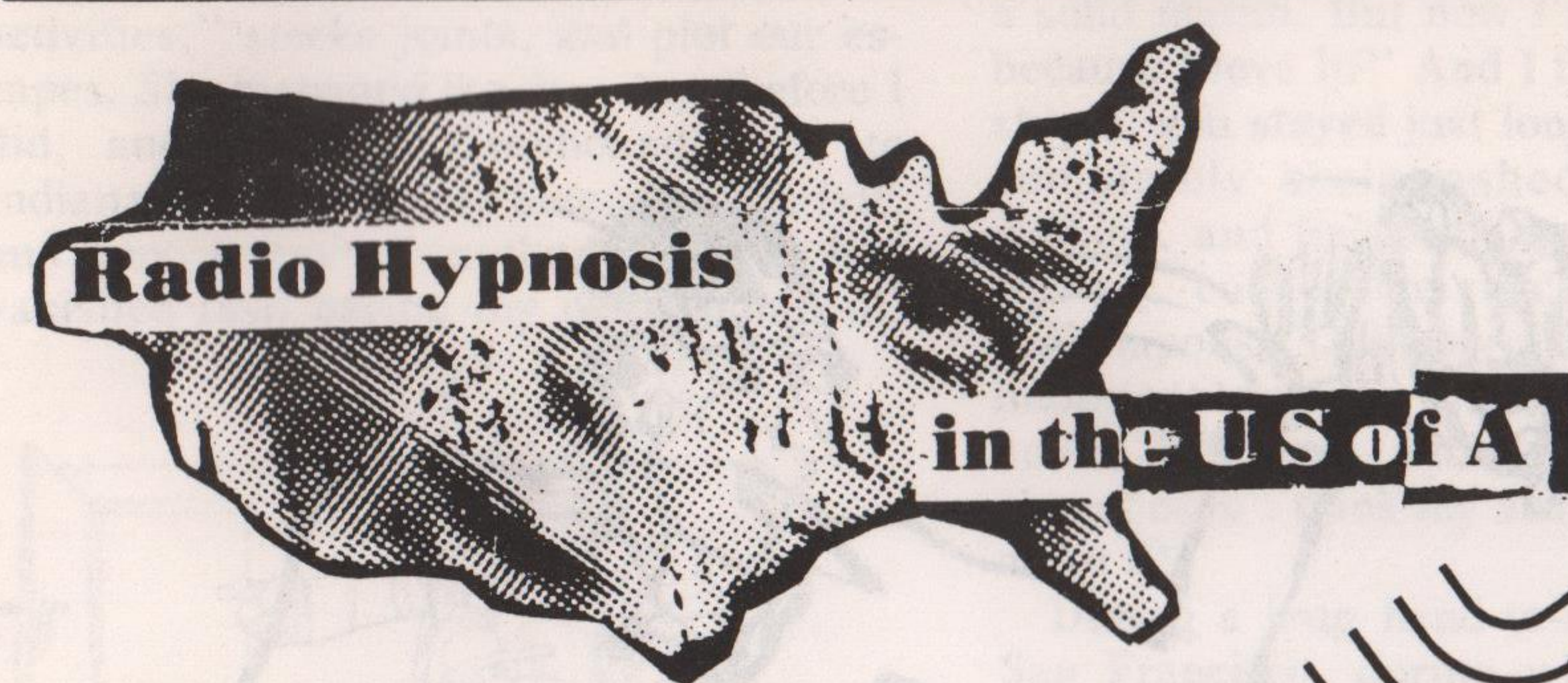
AND THEN YOU BOTH GET VERY QUIET.

©1985 BY

MATT GROENING



PROCESSED WORLD #17



yr raging glory from a basement of crates

cream puffs combing the streets for their cream

the speeding hawaiian in a boring belt of dogs

lets argue the virtues of our 3 fave saints.

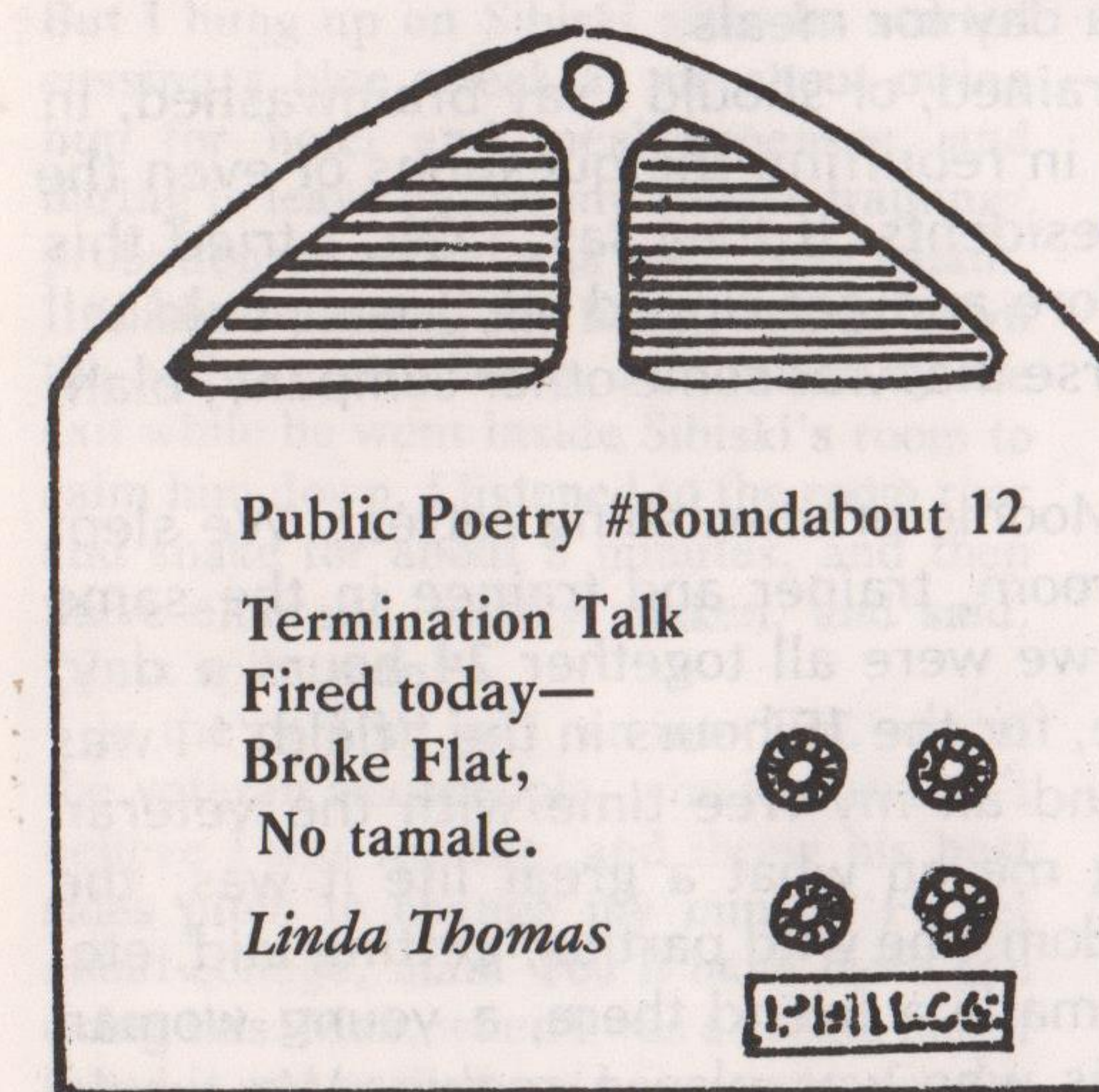
& see the geek urn go & see the bleak burn slow

piled up plates swivel hips caved in faces & a moon that dips

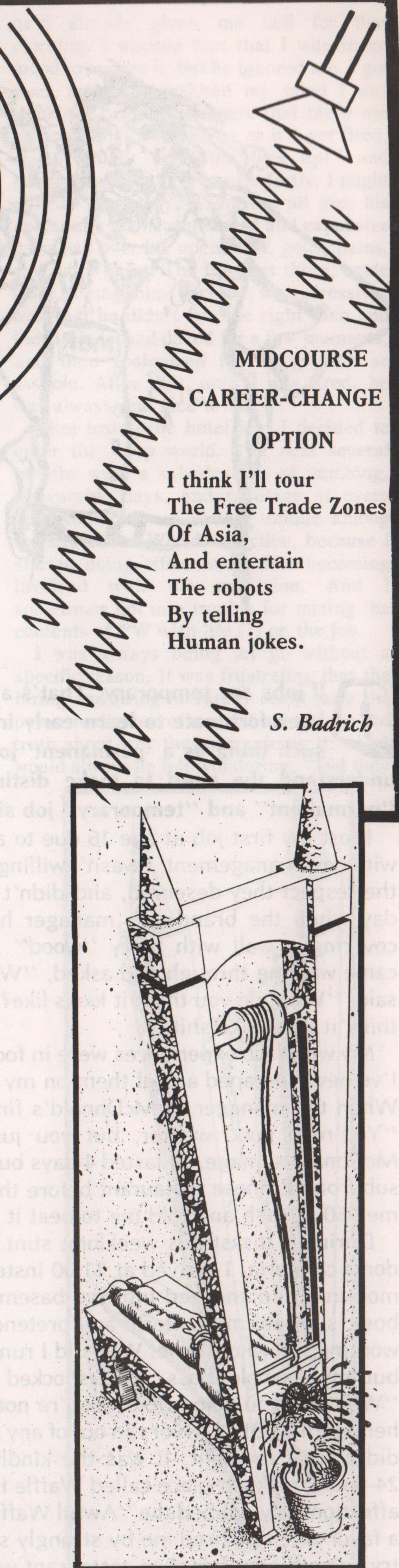
the giggling hordes dragging their feet, horsepower & g-strings

what was it that choked the river & dented the 127th revival tent

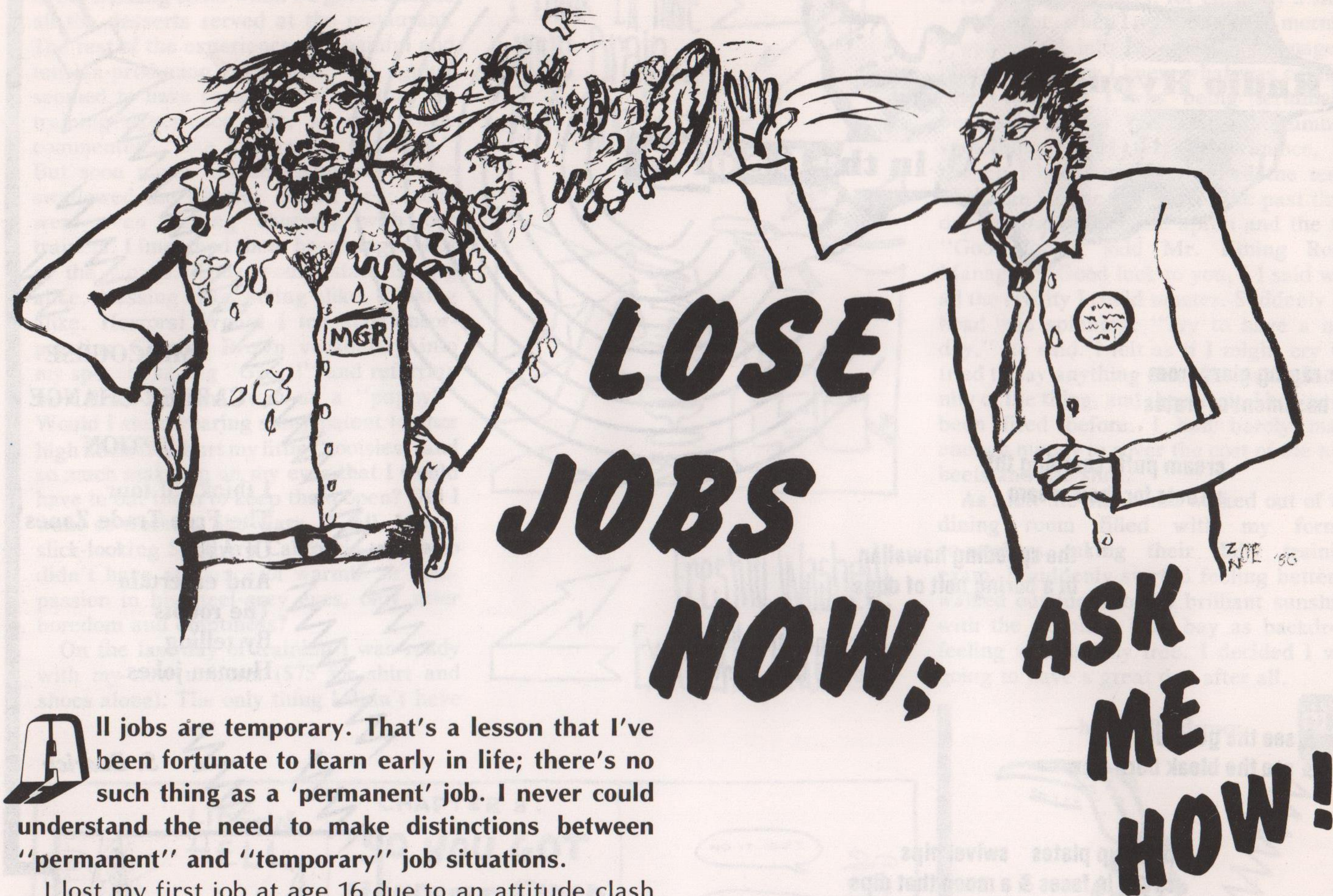
& those who strafe so self righteously fumbling for tradition & tyrants in cement



PROCESSED WORLD #17



By Bart Plantenga



All jobs are temporary. That's a lesson that I've been fortunate to learn early in life; there's no such thing as a 'permanent' job. I never could understand the need to make distinctions between "permanent" and "temporary" job situations.

I lost my first job at age 16 due to an attitude clash with new management. I wasn't willing to give them all the respect they deserved, and didn't help things one day when the brand-new manager had just finished covering a wall with tacky "wood" paneling, and I came walking through and asked, "What's that?" He said, "What do you think it looks like?", and I said, "I think it looks like shit."

My worst job experiences were in food handling, and I've never escaped any of them on my own prompting. When the manager at McDonald's fired me, he said, "You're a good worker, but you just don't fit the McDonald's image." I lasted 4 days bussing tables at a suburban Chinese restaurant before the owner handed me \$50 in cash and told me to beat it.

During a disastrous weeklong stint at the SF State dorm cafeteria, I arrived at 11:00 instead of 10:00 one morning, and sneaked into the basement to avoid my boss, slip into my uniform and pretend I'd been there working the whole time. Who did I run into downstairs but my asshole boss, who shocked me by asking, "What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here until 3:00!" I never ran out of any place so fast as I did at that moment. It was the kindly manager of a 24-hour breakfast place called Waffle House (which we affectionately dubbed the "Awful Waffle") who did me a favor when he fired me by strongly suggesting that I try something other than restaurant work for a living.

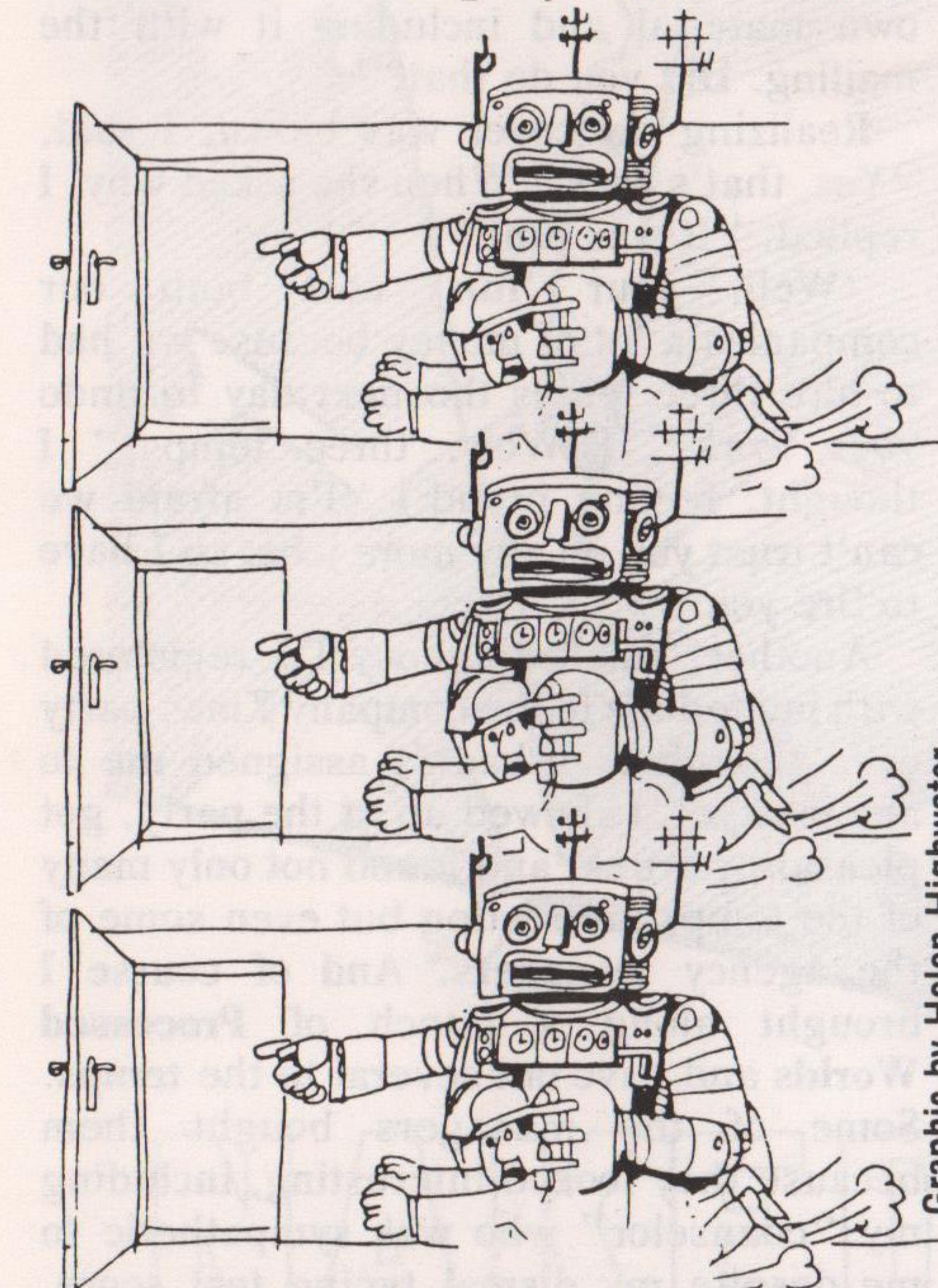
A few weeks after my high school graduation, I was enticed by a classified ad promising "Travel! Adventure! Excitement!" That same day I found myself on a Greyhound to Chicago, with two suitcases packed, anticipating a whole summer's worth of travel, adventure and excitement. I didn't find out until I got there that I had been seduced by one of those door-to-door magazine subscription scams. I was booked for a 2-week training/probationary period, during which I wouldn't make anything except maybe a bonus for reaching quota. My hotel expenses were covered, and I got ten dollars a day for meals.

We were all trained, or should I say brainwashed, in the art of sales; in rebuffing the questions of even the most skeptical residents. If they say, "Oh, I tried this sort of thing before and got ripped off," we would tell them that of course that was some other company, blah, blah, blah.

It was like a Moonie brainwashing retreat. We slept four to a hotel room, trainer and trainee in the same room. Basically we were all together 24 hours a day, except, of course, for the 15 hours in the "field." I was expected to spend all my free time with the veteran salesmen selling me on what a great life it was; the money, the freedom, the wild parties, getting laid, etc.

Fortunately I made a friend there, a young woman from Indianapolis who was also a rookie. We would

sneak out of the hotel between "structured activities," smoke joints, and plot our escapes. She managed it a few days before I did, and took the Greyhound back to Indianapolis. I was very blue after she left, and any traces of enthusiasm I'd had vanished fast, baring my disillusionment.



Graphic by Helen Highwater

Out in the "field" I began to identify with the skeptics I was supposedly trying to win over, and it dawned on me that, yes, it probably was this company that had ripped them off; no wonder the owner-boss, Sibiski, was able to retire at 33! But what really did my attitude in was a morning in which I made one of the day's first sales. The customer invited me in for some coffee, and later we smoked a joint so strong that I wandered around high the rest of the day. I had stayed listening to records with her for an hour and a half, and couldn't possibly sell another subscription.

The next morning I woke up earlier than usual and surprised Steve, my trainer, by slipping into my old blue jeans and a t-shirt. He asked me what I was doing, and I said I was getting out of here. He said I had to call Sibiski and tell him, which I did. But I hung up on Sibiski after he started cussing a blue streak at me about owing him for hotel and meal expenses, and daring to leave before my 2-week training/probationary period was over. Nonchalant, I finished packing my bags, walked down the hallway with Steve, and waited by the exit while he went inside Sibiski's room to calm him down. I listened to the room roar and shake for about 5 minutes, and then Steve emerged, visibly shaken, and said, "Just split, man!"

In the parking lot I ran into Jim, one of the veteran salespeople, who just couldn't believe I was leaving, and threw his best sales pitch to change my mind. "Forget about college, man. You'll have more fun doing this. Man, when I was a rookie here I hated it and packed my bags every day for

a solid month. But now I'm glad I stayed because I love it!" And I thought, "Yeah, stupid, you stayed just long enough to get completely brainwashed!", and kept walking, and found the spaghetti mess of freeway connections back eventually to Indianapolis. That day I also learned an important lesson for the first and last time: never hitchhike with two suitcases. I almost didn't think my arms were going to make it!

During a long hand-to-mouth period in San Francisco, during which I procured food stamps, tried to get G.A., and was too desperately broke to really relax with being unemployed (this was when an unemployment benefit scam would have been nice), but I did use the time well. It was around this same time that I got involved with **Processed World**, and the extra time certainly came in handy to help with production. The state Employment Development Department's job counselors, who are supposed to give us more access to information on all the shit jobs out there, arranged for me to interview at the Leland Hotel on Polk Street, where I was hired as a graveyard-shift desk clerk for a paltry \$3.50/hour. Roughly a third of the residents were older folks who had been there, paying rent faithfully, for years. Another third were transients. And a third were young adults, attracted to the Polk Street nightlife, many of them worked as prostitutes (both male and female), and it was these late-night people I got to know the best. Often they would invite me to their rooms to party in the morning after my shift was over. It was an interesting window on the world.

I'm a late-night person. I get my best work and best thinking done after midnight. I do love mornings but only if I can spend them at the kitchen table, with more than one cup of coffee and an interesting conversation. I don't function well when my morning belongs to an employer.

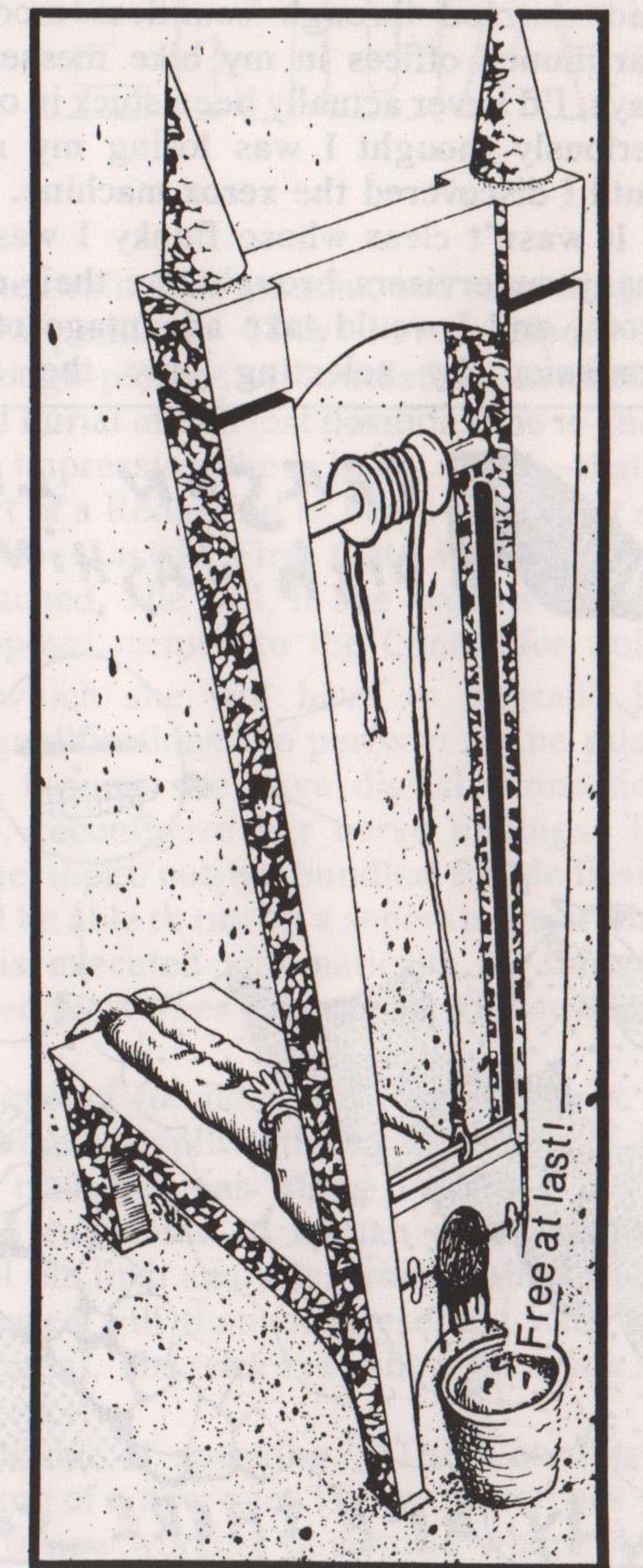
It took me weeks, however, to adjust to my new schedule, but as soon as I had I was fired for showing that I was more sympathetic to the tenants than desk clerks were supposed to be. We were only expected to take their rent money, dispense clean linen, and make wake-up calls. Still I was surprised that I hadn't been fired sooner.

A week earlier I had had a major run-in with my supervisor, who came in to relieve me at 7 AM. He started bitching at me for an insignificant transgression I can't even remember now. He only needed to mention it once but wouldn't let up about it. It didn't help that I was sick. I went straight home and slept until about 10:30 PM, when I had to get up, order a take-out sandwich and salad and ride the bus to work. When I showed up for my shift at 11:00, the same supervisor was there, drunk, and he started raving about the same stupid shit

he'd already given me hell for that morning. I warned him that I was in no mood to endure it, but he ignored me. I got mad, and as I grabbed my salad I was thinking, I don't even care that there are other people in the lobby or if I get fired, and I yelled "Shut the fuck up!" and heaved the salad at him. Perfectly, I might add, so that the dressing ran all over his splendidly manicured beard and expensive perm, all over his open shirt, gold chains, and hairy chest. The funniest thing, aside from seeing him covered with dressing, was that he didn't fire me right then and there. He looked dazed for a few moments, and then **apologized** for being such an asshole. After that, until I was fired, he was always real nice to me.

After losing the hotel job, I decided to enter the temp world. The next several months were a kaleidoscope of numbing, unbearable days, and sabotage at every opportunity. I was sort of unique among the **Processed World** collective, because I started doing office work **after** becoming involved with the magazine. And I sometimes got into trouble for mixing the contents of **PW** with life (?) on the job.

I was always being let go without a specific reason. It was frustrating that the hiring and firing hierarchy could have the power to dispose of me and not tell me the truth about why they were doing it; and I would always be left wondering, "Did they



really mean it when they said they had too many people, or was it because they saw the sticker I put up in the bathroom and suspected me?" I could never tell. Most supervisors are chickenshit when it comes to letting people go; they do whatever they can to avoid controversy and open resentment. I hate those kinds of bloodless purges. I always preferred the situations when I was at least given a reason for being fired. Especially if the supervisor or boss was noticeably upset about something that I did; I would feel a sense of accomplishment. The next job was like that.

I'm the only person I know to actually be fired from a temporary agency. I got away with a lot, however, before it caught up with me.

At Macy's executive personnel office I stuffed gray pinstripe folders titled "The Macy's Management Career Training Program" with various brochures. They were then packaged up and shipped off to college seniors majoring in business. A few hours into the job I noticed that the folders were simply packed without further inspection and got a great idea. I raced home at lunchtime and grabbed a big stack of **Processed World** brochures, which I secretly stuffed into the rest of the folders. I delighted in watching them be packed up for their destinations.

With the same agency's help, I got to sabotage Wells Fargo Bank. Although I had stormed through countless modern, partitioned offices in my bike messenger days, I'd never actually been stuck in one. I seriously thought I was losing my mind until I discovered the xerox machine.

It wasn't clear whose flunky I was, so many supervisors brought me their extra work, and I would take advantage of the confusion by selecting only the most

palatable assignments. One of these was a lengthy prospectus that had to be copied and collated hundreds of times, which made the xerox machine pretty much my domain that week. I did my best to drag the project out in order to recreate hundreds of rare issues of **PW**. How my heart would pound when the machine had jammed up inside with **PW** copy, and I'd hurriedly pull it out, with the Wells Fargo prospectus concealing more bootleg material on top of the machine! Fortunately no-one ever caught me with the machine jammed up on **PW**.

I never felt bad about using Wells Fargo's paper and time to benefit **PW**. Once, in this same office, I had been on an assembly line of temps stuffing 9,000 large envelopes. We were finally finishing up when a supervisor appeared and announced that we had to unstuff all 9,000 envelopes because the signature on the cover letter wasn't bold enough! Otherwise the replacement was exactly the same! I remember staring in amazement as a custodian carted off a 4-foot stack of the old letter to the dump. I figured I must be doing Wells Fargo a favor by actually putting some of their paper to good use.

Two weeks later I was back at the same office helping assemble a prospectus for Wells Fargo employees on leave. Having been asked to xerox about 300 copies of the cover letter, on the way to the familiar copy machine, I stopped at my desk to find something I could copy on the other side of the letter. I chose the "Office Workers Olympics" from **PW** #2, and we temps spent the rest of the afternoon stuffing the "improved" cover letter into envelopes.

I was much less secretive than usual on this occasion, and my co-workers responded coolly, which concerned me. It's

possible that one of them finked on me, but I didn't hear a thing about it until I phoned the agency to see about getting more work. My "counselor" seemed upset and said, "We have reports from Wells Fargo that last Friday you were photocopying your own material and including it with the mailing. Did you do that?"

Realizing my cover was blown, I said, "Yes, that's true." When she asked why, I replied, "It was fun!"

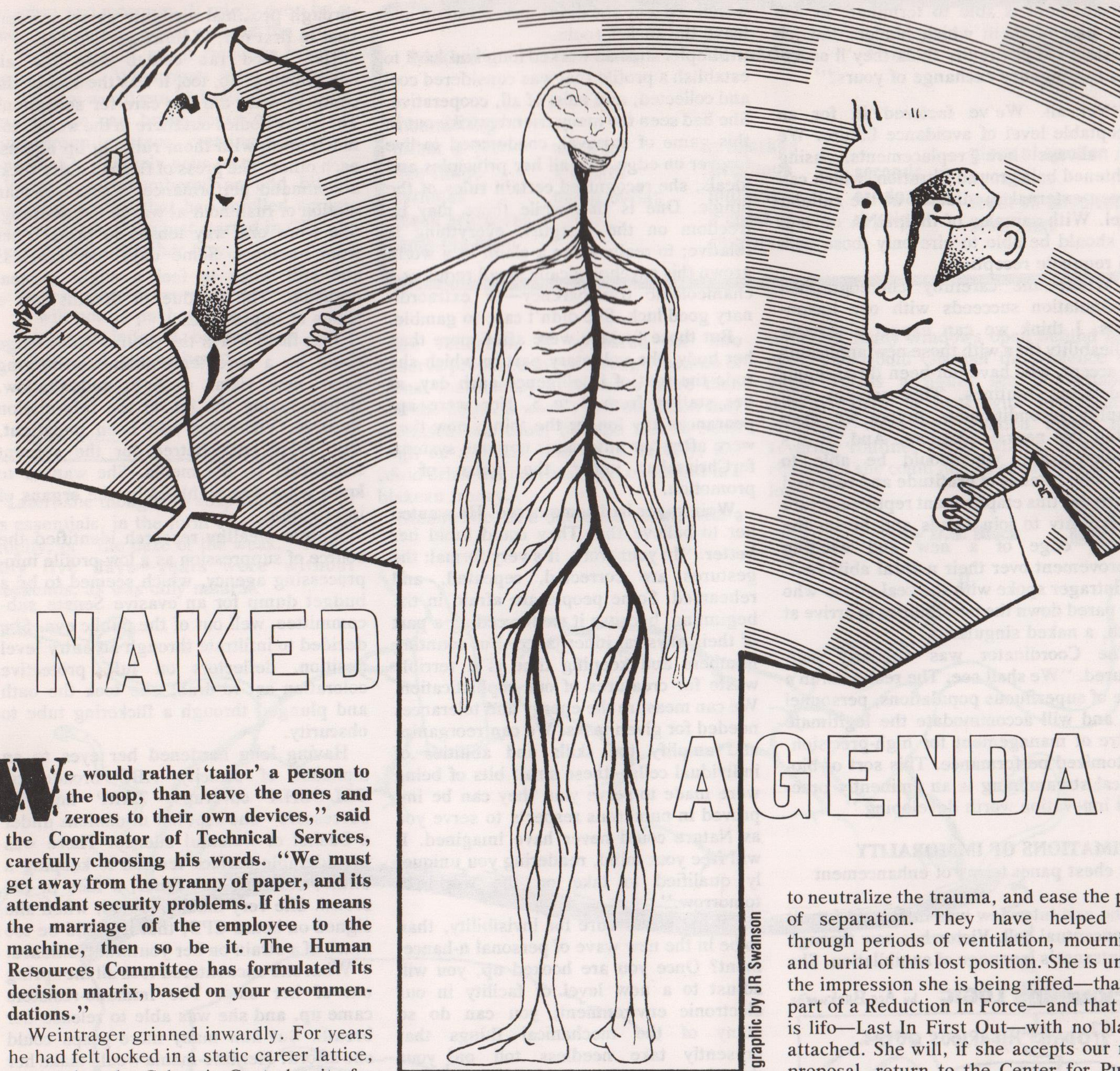
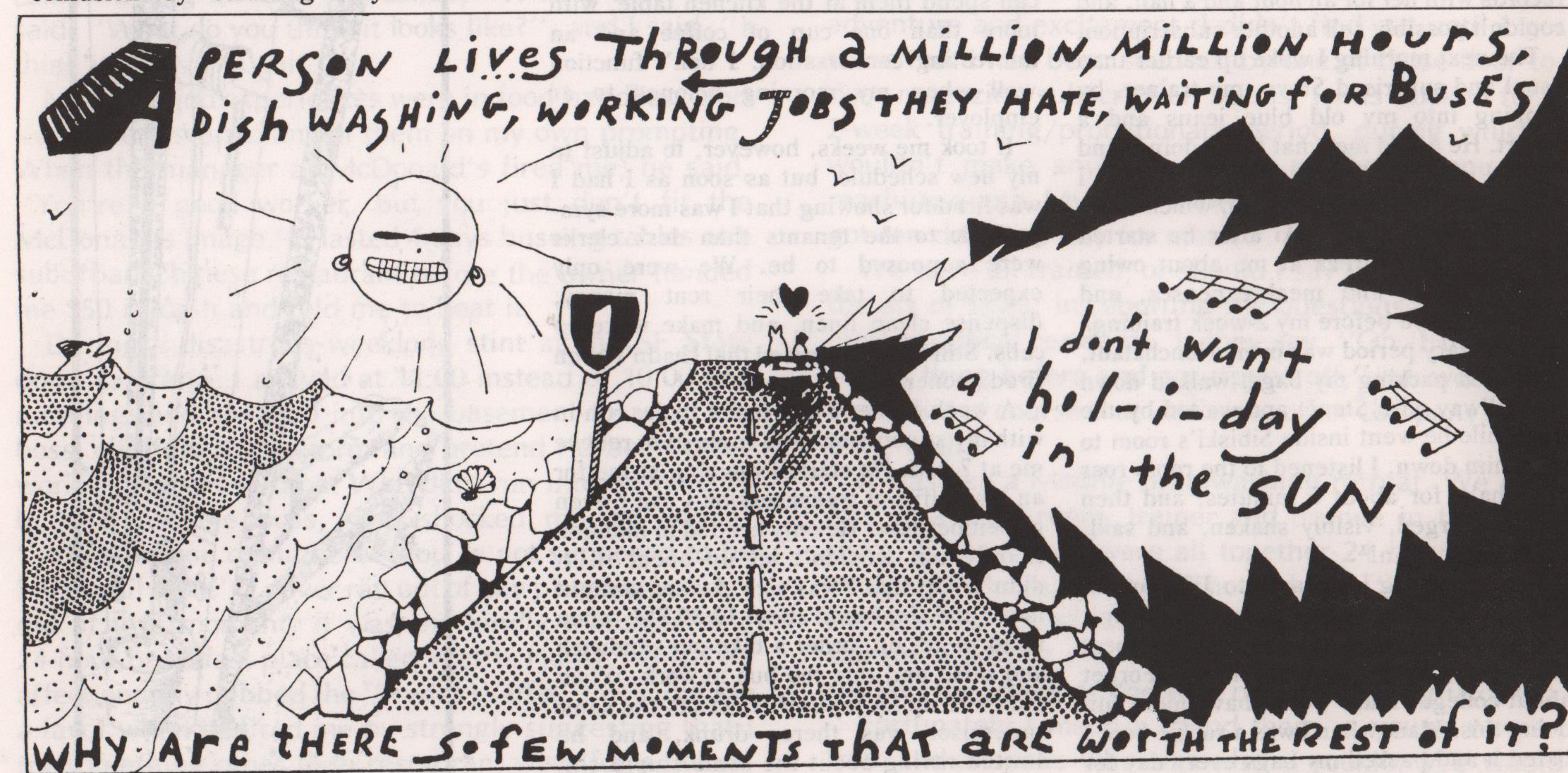
"Well, your 'fun' cost both our companies a lot of money because we had to hire three temps the next day to undo your work." ("Wow, three temps!" I thought, feeling proud.) "I'm afraid we can't trust you on any more jobs, so I have to fire you!"

Another, smaller agency I'd registered with invited me to the company Xmas party even though they hadn't assigned me to any jobs yet. I showed up at the party, got pleasantly drunk, and found not only many of the temps interesting but even some of the agency managers. And of course I brought along a bunch of **Processed Worlds** and gave out several to the temps. Some of the managers bought them because they looked interesting, including my "counselor" who was sympathetic to me despite my dismal typing test score. Several weeks later I ran into her on Market Street at lunchtime while hawking **PW** in costume. She was wearing a gray coat and looked cold, turning a shade grayer when she saw me. I walked up to her and asked happily if she liked the magazine. She looked terrified and said, "It's horrible!", and moved quickly past me.

—by Zoe Noe



graphic by R.B.



We would rather 'tailor' a person to the loop, than leave the ones and zeroes to their own devices," said the Coordinator of Technical Services, carefully choosing his words. "We must get away from the tyranny of paper, and its attendant security problems. If this means the marriage of the employee to the machine, then so be it. The Human Resources Committee has formulated its decision matrix, based on your recommendations."

Weintrager grinned inwardly. For years he had felt locked in a static career lattice, overseeing the Cybernix Control unit of a discrete government agency. Now his subtle calculations were coming to fruition. A new path was in the offing, his career destiny on the rise.

The Coordinator continued. "Quite a well thought-out idea package. The Information Reserve has, as you know, been trying for years to staunch the leak—more accurately, hemorrhage—of data relating to our manipulations of the media. So long as the public is aware of our role as more than a simple regulatory organ of information, we cannot effectively program their understanding of the world."

"It won't take them long to forget, once we've ruggedized our work force," said Weintrager softly. It pleased him to imagine a cap on all those unauthorized transmissions.

"You wish to begin with the key operator in the CPD Division? I understand you've already brought d-termination proceedings against her. Would that not tend to conscientize her against the Reserve?"

"For that reason, it's been a very delicate process," Weintrager explained. "I've brought in support staff over the last couple of weeks to help during the employee's down time to try

to neutralize the trauma, and ease the pain of separation. They have helped her through periods of ventilation, mourning, and burial of this lost position. She is under the impression she is being riffed—that is, part of a Reduction In Force—and that she is life—Last In First Out—with no blame attached. She will, if she accepts our new proposal, return to the Center for Public

Debt, under terms in which she will have to upgrade her physique to fit the new qualifications. To perform at the raised level of expectation will require she have digital connections made to electrosensitize, reconfigure her nerve endings. The modifications will include input/output bundles for dedicated recreation, which she will be able to run on a separate track while the primary work load is executed automatically by the core system, with minimal need for worker awareness. The system is self-regulatory.

"It represents a new level of freedom and empowerment for the employee through ganglia amplification, refinement of the body's electro-chemical transmissions along lines we devise which largely bypass the cul-de-sac of human consciousness. Our strategy is to wait till the final analysis, which comes in the exit interview; the employee will then be presented with this option to abort their dismissal. The trick is to show them it's not the end of the world."

"Which it is, in a manner of speaking." The Coordinator smiled. "And the beginning of a new one. The employee has yet to realize that he or she is now working in a world where Total

Management is able to terminate at will that part of them which hinders the job mission. Do you really think they'll accept this contingency exchange of yours?"

"Not all. We've factored in for an acceptable level of avoidance failure. We can always hire replacements, using tightened background filtration, which can screen external candidates at the cellular level. With samples of their RNA on tap, we should be able to hire only those with the requisite receptivity.

"Where the carefully choreographed dissimulation succeeds with our incumbents, I think we can expect a greater malleability than with those new applicants we accept, who have not been through our tenderizing routines. This salvage will simplify reconditioning, before we even install the neural adaptors. And, if it's handled right, we should be able to engender a sense of gratitude and renewed loyalty for this employment reprieve, a rare opportunity to join hands and be on the cutting edge of a new and exciting improvement over their natural abilities." Weintrager spoke with the zeal of one who has pared down the possibilities to arrive at truth, a naked singularity.

The Coordinator was similarly self-assured. "We shall see. The reality is: in a time of superfluous populations, personnel can and will accommodate the legitimate desire of management for high-precision, customized performance. This sort of biological streamlining is an eminently practical innovation worth developing."

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORALITY
in a chest pane: terms of enhancement

The exit interview was in fact an introit to conceptual hell. Victorrhea saw through Weintrager's language of annihilation. She

BACKWORDS LOGIC by Ace Backwords



wondered why she didn't just stand up and leave the sucker room.

Simple: she had worked long and hard to establish a profile that was considered cool and collected, and most of all, cooperative. She had seen too many friends strike out in this game of survival, condemned to live forever on edge. For all her principles and ideals, she recognized certain rules of the jungle. One is that while there may be freedom on the margins, everything is relative; to really stake a claim in a world grown this psychologically small requires a chameolonic transparency—or extraordinary good luck. She didn't care to gamble.

But those fuckers were after more than her body, the voluntary part in which she rode the seat of intelligence each day, at her station from 8 to 5. Nor were appearances any longer the thing; now they were after her autonomic nervous system, ferChrissake, under the guise of a promotion.

Weintrager had some nerve. He wanted her to believe that They could build her better. "In your work, it's very formal: the gestures are corrected, repeated, and rehearsed. Some people are afraid in the beginning, because it means ceding a part of their physical inheritance. But counting numbers and keeping time is a terrible waste for creatures of our sophistication. We can measure the energy and tolerances needed for given tasks. We can reorganize and amplify the skills and abilities of individual cells—these small bits of being were made to serve you; they can be improved in numerous respects to serve you as Nature could never have imagined. It will free your mind, rendering you uniquely qualified to take on the world of tomorrow."

"What better cure for invisibility, than to be in the new wave of personal n-hancement? Once you are hooked up, you will adjust to a new level of facility in our electronic environment; you can do so many of the mechanical things that presently take needless toll on your thoughts—your imagination—without so much to think, you will be free to think of other things."

Weintrager's eyes were screen deep, flashed her thoughts back through a forest of hypertrophic cursors, to her machine in CPD. She had always wondered when the much feared Debt Squad, with scrambler face plates, would come, automatics levelled, to collect her share of the Public Debt. If she came up short, she could see them twitching a few knobs on their portapacks, then punching a hole in her chest, where they'd install a smartcard to monitor and broadcast her role in the State of Things. It would make no difference whether she was part of the problem or final solution—she had to live their question, even if that meant terminal absorbtion. So she had always hoped to elude their harsh, relentless scrutiny

through proximal visibility as an insider. Last in first out, Weintrager told her.

Her blood ran colder than the air conditioning. So, too, it was the end of the century; what did she care for sensation? Too many bodies out there in the world, too much noise with them rubbing up against each other. The press of flesh in a dry fuck, a command performance in the brownian motion of rush hour at war in the morning. She wore one way lenses to protect her from i-contact. Some days, nevertheless she still woke to feel a slight corneal abrasion. The residue of dreams left a callus of impressions.

Was flesh worth the future? Knowledge could be a sore temptation, considering these new vistas of light and shadow. Before taking the job at the Information Reserve, Victorrhea had been impatient, nay, filled with hatred for the serpent tourniquet on the media. She wanted to know what was withheld by the organs of information.

A little stealthy research identified the source of suppression as a low-profile info-processing agency, which seemed to be a budget dump for an evasive Senate subcommittee, well out of the public eye. She decided to infiltrate through an entry level position, deflectors on full, protective coloration set to drab; she took the oath and plunged through a flickering tube to obscurity.

Having long hardened her eyes to an alphabet of atrocity—ABC broadcasts, CAL-OSHA coverups, ZARP and its successors—she kept her m-motions under a bushel of watchful silence. There was considerable surface tension to keeping a blithe, uncaring demeanor, a face in the crowd. She very much doubted, when she signed on board CPD, that it would be too much of a strain on her youthful resilience.

What she encountered took all the spring out of her step. The immuno-resistors came up, and she was able to release her breath. But how many more gasps could she afford? Her info-mania would make her an easy mark. What she mistook for nourishment, in this day of machine dreams, was perhaps mere exposure to the harsh rays of reality. There was a fine line where lies begin; it made the fear of dismissal a sort of junk nightmare. She saw death in exile from her phosphordot screen of vision. What worried her most was the thought it could become a two way glass.

After leaving her to shake a while, Weintrager had called her in for one of those proverbial offers difficult to refuse: eyes in electrodes to hone her resolution.

The System's giving you a raw deal, it railed inside, till her ribs began to show. She remembered when she was a volunteer at a cerebral palsy clinic, what the handicapped used to call her: TAB: temporarily able bodied.

"Tailoring to the position" was no more radical than yielding the spiritual realm to

churches and mosques. It might even be a kind of evolution, albeit state of the art.

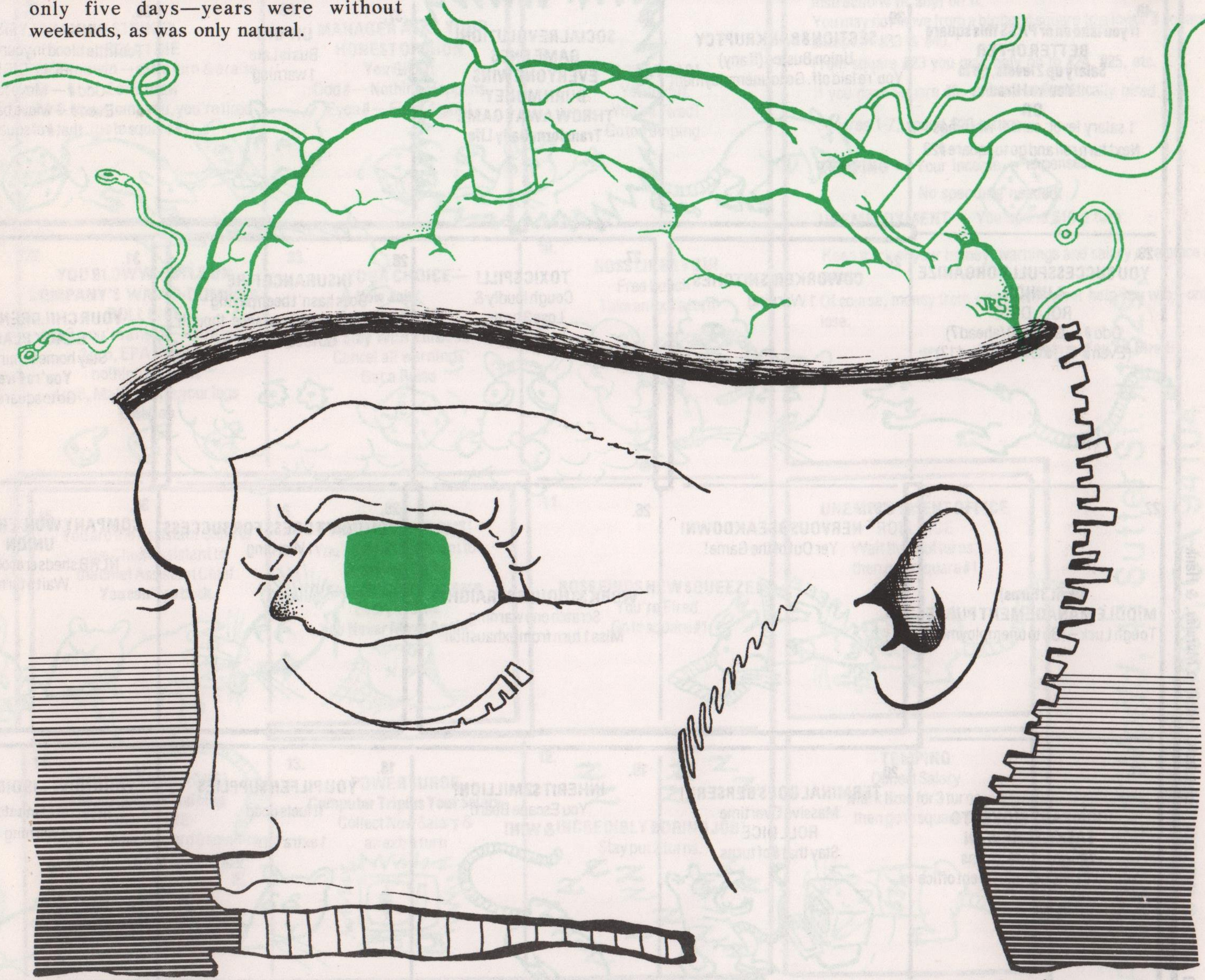
"We're talking about freedom here in the making," Weintrager went smoothly on. "A new world can be built around your dreams; we can bring them out in our mind-screen interface, creating a comfort zone that is uniquely your own."

Victorrhea remembered an odd bit of electronic graffiti that had scrolled across her screen when she just started in CPD. It seemed relevant to her now.

Futile
I will not be pushed, filed,
stamped, indexed, briefed
debtiefed, or numbered.

My life is my own;
I... I...
aye...aye...
The Prisoner

Later, she thought to strip time down to its essentials, in the form of a calendar of cruelty, or "the daze of the weak." It had only five days—years were without weekends, as was only natural.



Graphic by JR Swanson

Maundy	Dewsdays	Vennsdays	Thirsty	Fried Egg
maundering hither & yon bee stings syringes bleed pressures from the head	woke to a breath damp burlap	gridlocked circuitous highways a chest of shipwrecks	seconds sandpaper dry lips	glaze of swollen eyes false teeth on anodized steel links

On reflection, it appeared the Info Reserve proposed to cut through the web of carnal inefficiency—give back more than just the night. It wasn't just the moon they promised this time, but the sun to boot. High on a horse, rearing in ecstasy, she could drink the nervous light of insight in a blakean frenzy.

Meanwhile, in a darkened room, with a

screen of many windows open behind her eyes, she would channel the violence of ennui across a liquid sea of variable density. Back to back with heightened efficiency were the trodden hopes for severing routine, green fatigue. It was a challenge she could just as easily choose to lose.

—by D.S. Black



END GAME

The Fascinating Maze of
EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT —
A Game That Lasts A Lifetime!

INSTRUCTIONS:

Not included but Mandatory

- Dress Clothes, 1 dice.
- Monopoly money, tokens.
- A sheet of paper, pen.

OBJECT: To escape wage labor.

TO WIN: Inherit money or social revolution

TO LOSE: Dead End Job, Breakdown, Bankrupt for 2 turns

Each player starts with \$500 wage every 4 turns once hired. You have \$200 on hand to start the game.

Everybody Starts at Square #1. In counter-clockwise order, each player rolls a dice and moves that # of squares. Follow the instructions (if any) on it.

You may not move from a higher # square to a lower # square except in #33 & #40.

From square #23 you may only go to #24, #25, etc.

If you pass Square #8, you are automatically hired.

Squares 1-7, spend \$20 a turn.

TEMPING — Your income = expenses.
No spending needed.

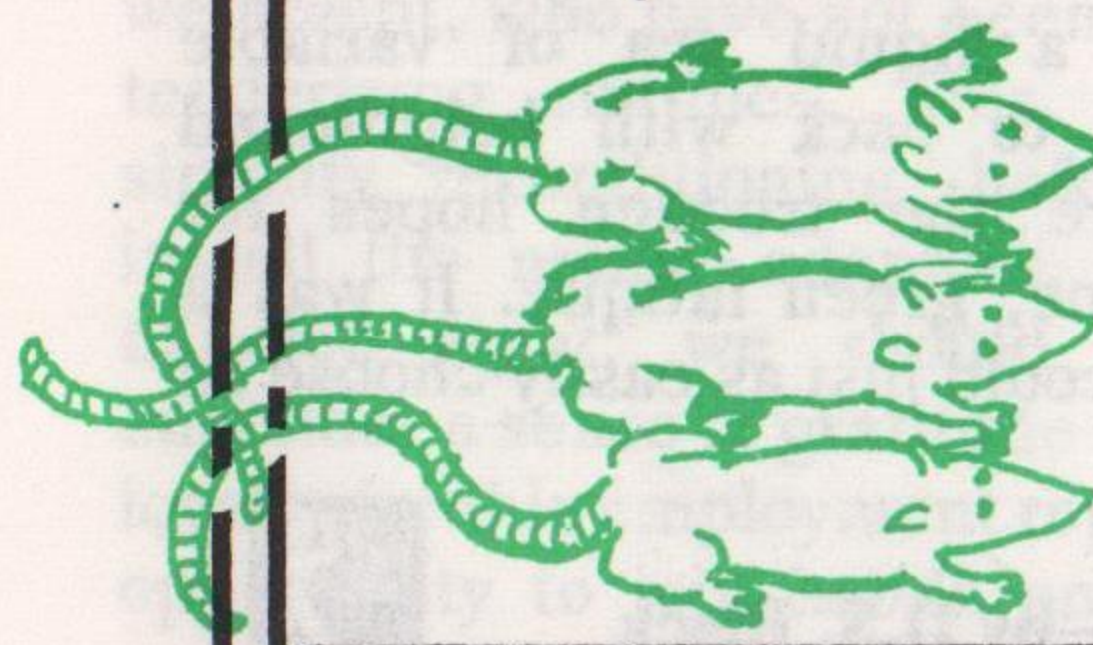









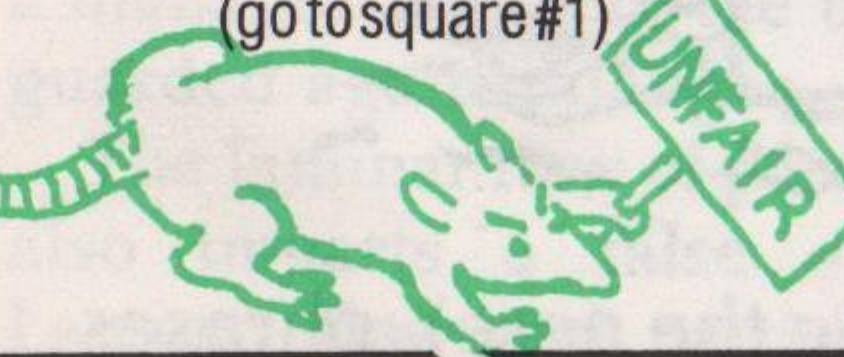

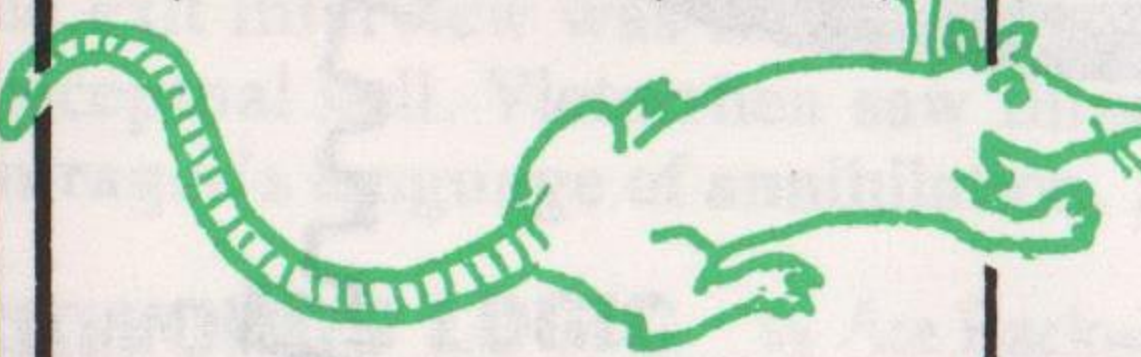
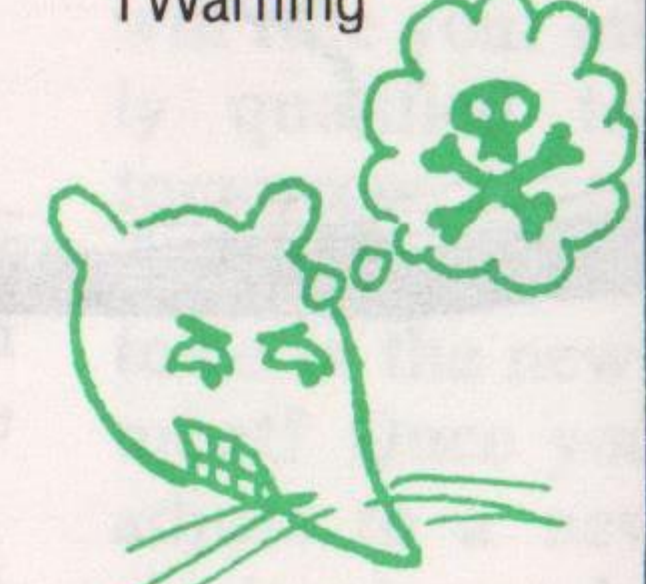
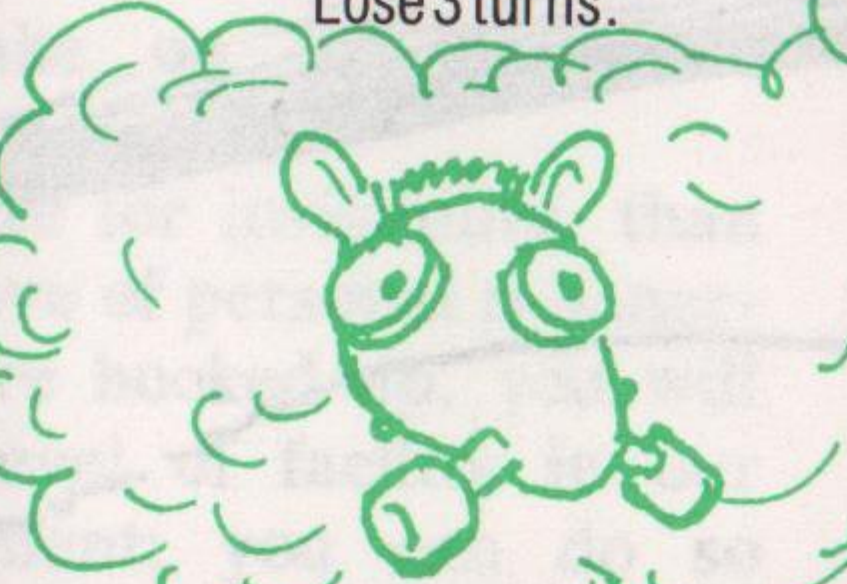

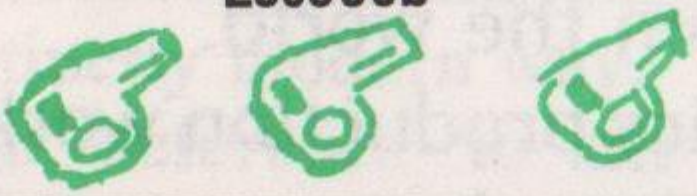













UNEMPLOYMENT — You spend \$10 a turn.


Keep track of your money, warnings and salary on a piece of paper.

Of course, money from wages will never help you win—only lose.

3 Warnings = You're Fired!

Processed World, 41 Sutter St. #1829,
San Francisco, CA 94104

1. WELCOME! to the job market 	2. AN INTERVIEW! Lie — Go Ahead 5 squares Tell Truth — Go Back 1 square 	3. 3957 People in Line ahead of you Wait 2 Turns 	4. NO JOBS! Lose \$50 — Go back 3 squares.	5. BOSS PLAYS OCTOPUS Resist — Go back 4 squares Give In — Go to Hiring & Move Ahead 3 squares. 	6. TEN HOUR INTERVIEW Wait here 2 turns	7. MANAGER CHECKS REFERENCES ROLL DICE Odd # Go Forward Even # Go Back that number of squares	8. YOU'RE HIRED! RAISE SALARY \$100 
40. If you land on or PASS this square BETTER OFFER Salary up 2 levels, go to You're Hired OR 1 salary level; cancel warnings Next turn roll and go to square #23 	39. SECTION 8 BANKRUPTCY Union Busted (if any) You're laid off. Go to unemployment 	38. SOCIAL REVOLUTION! GAME ENDS EVERYONE WINS BURN MONEY THROW AWAY GAME Transform Daily Life 	37. UH-OH! Bus is Late 1 warning 	36. URINALYSIS TEST Too little blood in your THC stream ROLL DICE Odd # — Move forward Even # — Move backward that # of squares 	35. STRIKE! ROLL 1 DIE 1 or 3, you win — extra turn & a raise 2 or 5, draw 4 or 6, they stomp you, you're fired (go to square #1) 	34. MANAGER ASKS YOUR HONEST OPINION You Give It Odd # — Nothing Happens Even # — Fired Again! 	9. GREAT JOB! You love it. You're Fired! Go to Temping.
23. YOU SUCCESSFULLY ORGANIZE A UNION ROLL DICE Odd # — Go to #30 (ahead 7) (Even # — Go to #35 (ahead 12)) 	24. COWORKER SNITCHES 1 Warning 	27. TOXIC SPILL! Cough loudly & Lose 3 turns. 	28. INSURANCE FIRE Boss hasn't been paying unemployment insurance, though Go to square #1 	31. YOUR CHILDREN GET THE BLACK PLAGUE Stay home to nurse them You're Fired! Go to square #1	32. YOU BLOW WHISTLE ON COMPANY'S WASTE-DUMPING ROLL DICE 1 or 3, you're a hero — extra turn 2 or 5, EPA shows up nothing happens 4 or 6, Mafia breaks your legs Lose Job 	33. YOUR CHOICE — A New Job? Go to Square #8 or Stay With This Job Cancel all warnings Get a Raise 	10. BOSS LIKES YOU! Free Lunch! Take an extra turn 
22. (wait 3 turns) MIDDLE MANAGEMENT PURGE Tough Luck — Go to unemployment	25. NERVOUS BREAKDOWN! Yer Out of the Game! 	26. WORK 33 HOURS STRAIGHT! Scratch one warning Miss 1 turn from exhaustion	29. YOU DON'T DRESS FOR SUCCESS 1 Warning 	30. COMPANY WON'T RECOGNIZE UNION NLRB sheds crocodile tears Wait 5 turns 	15. You are the Assistant Chief to the Chief Assistant to the chief Assistant Chief. You can't go back. 	16. CONGRATULATIONS! You're Chief Assistant to Assistant Chief Automatic Salary Increase Every 8 turns You Never Move Again! 	11. BOSS FINDS NEWS SQUEEZE! You're Fired. Go to square #1 
21. COMPANY MOVES TO SASKATCHEWAN You go — lose 3 turns You don't — unemployment office	20. TERMINAL GOES BERSERK! Massive Overtime ROLL DICE Stay that # of turns 	19. INHERIT \$2 MILLION! You Escape Board & WIN! 	18. YOU PILFER SUPPLIES It feels good 1 extra turn 	17. YOUR NOVEL IS DISCOVERED in secret computer file 1 warning 	14. YOU'RE AMBITIOUS! Management Training ROLL 1 DIE Odd # — Move forward 6 squares Even # — Go to Square #22 	13. POWER SURGE Computer Triples Your Salary Collect New Salary & an extra turn 	12. INCREDIBLY BORING JOB! Stay put 2 turns. 

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE
ROLL DICE
Wait that # of turns,
then go to square #1


TEMPING
Collect Salary
Mark time for 3 turns,
then go to square #1




graphic by Louis Michaelson

CHEMICALS RUN AMOK

in the "Clean Room"

WHERE'S THE DIRT?

In cramped change rooms, they enjoy their last casual chatter before the crescendo. They snap on vinyl surgeon's gloves and don white and pale-blue dacron: hoods, jump suits, veils, and booties. As they shroud themselves in nearly identical *bunny suits*, the workers, or rather the images they present to one another, shed their distinctness.

They walk through a narrow vestibule with a grey sticky mat on the floor. Abruptly, the crescendo begins its deafening ascent; they barely hear the stripping sound of the mat cleansing their soles. Along the vestibule walls, crooked plastic tentacle stumps fire a continuous fusillade of air at them, removing dust flecks and lint from the dacron. The roar submerges normal conversational tones—all but shouts and sharp sounds.

Passing through the vestibule to the clean room or *aisle*, the workers take up positions to new tones at different pitches: the dissonant arpeggio of rapidly moving air and loudly humming machines. From the ceiling to the floor, the forced air of the *laminar flow* blows dust particles larger than quarter-widths of human hair. This protects the even smaller circuitry that blots the wafers. But the air flow merges acoustically with the dull whirl of the processing equipment. The consequence of this merger is a cacophonous, low boom—a crescendo that peaks but never falls off.

Above the crescendo, casual conversation is difficult and the distraction often dangerous. Their mouths

gagged and faces veiled (often above the nose), phrases are muffled, expressions half-hidden. The customary thoroughfares of meaning and emotion are obscured. Do furrowed eyebrows indicate pleasure or problem? Like deep-sea divers, the workers use hand-gestures, or like oil riggers, they shout above the din created by the refrigerator-sized machines and the hushed roar of the laminar flow. But mainly, the crescendo encourages a feeling of isolation, of removal from the world.

In any honest estimation, electronics production work must be counted among the most dangerous of occupations, though this statement might clash with the daily perceptions of workers and certainly with that of managers. By the late 70's, the occupational illness rate for semiconductor workers was over three times that of manufacturing workers; all electronics workers experienced job-related illnesses at twice the general manufacturing rate. Yet workers now are denied even these abstract reckonings of the dangers they face, thanks to a sleazy numbers-running operation by the semiconductor industry, and much winking by public officials.

By the early 80s, the industry simply changed the way it recorded injuries and illnesses. The result was a $\frac{2}{3}$'s drop in the occupational illness rate. To this day, a rigged data collection system projects a safe picture of the clean room. At all levels, government agencies have supported this fiction by failing to investigate and refusing to enforce; not a single study of electronics workers' health has been completed. All of this feeds a

milieu of ignorance about clean room work that multiplies the dangers workers face.

Difficult to detect, camouflaged by indistinct and time-released symptoms that afflict workers unevenly, the hazards of clean-room acids and gases are dismissed by most workers. Vigilance is uncommon (as if the decision to live and work near the San Andreas Fault, which promises one day to violently sever and collapse much of Silicon Valley, impairs sensitivity to danger.) A psychology of nonchalance emerges, encouraged by jammed production schedules, supported by a distracting focus on chip yield, and reinforced by the energy-sapping inertia of workplace ritual in a surreal environment. The cues that should alert one to danger instead bolster nonchalance.

Gowning up in outfits that outwardly resemble protective clothing provides the vague sense that we are preparing *ourselves* for another environment, much like putting on boots, coat, and hat for a winter outing. But the bunny suits provide no protection from the chemicals; rather they protect the clean room *from us*—the invisible particles our bodies throw off with every slight movement. Yet more than once have I heard workers (and in one case, a manager) speak of the bunny suit as if it guarded against danger.

The laminar flow of particle-cleansing air also imparts a false sense of safety. Laminar flow and particle filters are not designed to extract dangerous fumes, traces of which can circulate undetected for hours, especially in older fabrication areas. In some clean rooms, the forced air can "kick up" toxic fumes, spreading them outward and upward toward noses and eyes. Still, the sound and feel of flowing air lends a deceptive "cleanliness" to the ambience. The ambience is misleading in a distinctly modern way.

In deference to the fragile wafers—rather than to the dangers that loom everywhere—the workers move in eerily cadenced motion that resembles the tentative movement of astronauts slightly free of gravity. Sudden movements raise eyebrows and suggest accidents. This restrained, unspontaneous motion is the preferred body language. It is a language not everyone can speak, and one which managers bear in mind when screening job applicants. They select women, disproportionately recent immigrants from Central America, the Pacific Rim, and Asia, for the most tedious clean room jobs.

"Men as a group do not do as well" at the lonely, detailed, and monotonous tasks, a male clean room manager confides. "I'm not talking about [women's] little fingers being more agile [than men's]. That's bullshit. But just the way our society trains women and the [lack of?] opportunities that they have, cause them to be more inwardly directed." The same manager applauds

the suitability of maternal instincts to clean room work. "A lot of the dealing with children gets transferred to dealing with wafers: [the wafers become] 'my babies, be careful.'" Perhaps these observations are less real than rationalization for management's *primary* attractions to women (low pay) and recent immigrants (gullibility). But a semblance of truth clings to this rationalization.

The Latin and Asian countries from which so many clean room women hail are experiencing rapid, if uneven, modernization. The comparison to middle-class American culture—the culture of permanent modernization—is not always a stark one. But by differences of degree, the more traditional Latin and Asian cultures impoverish a woman's expectations for herself, binding her more tightly to the world of child-rearing, housekeeping, subservience to men, and poverty-level wage labor. In its traditional or modern versions, it is a world that supports virtues esteemed by clean room managers: diligence to demanding work, humility before male authority (there are probably no female clean-room managers in the Valley), and a halting estimation of self-worth. The women earn between \$4.50 and \$10.00 per hour—pay that requires regular overtime, or other incomes, to constitute a living wage in Silicon Valley. Many of the women are not wise to the traditions of American wage labor and workplace rights. This is disadvantage enough. Some, however, suffer a special anxiety: they are here without immigration cards, and stand to lose everything on a moment's notice. They are the prisoners of a humbling sociology of approval.

By dint of time, attention, and pampering, clean room work approaches that of a 24-hour nursery. For 6-7 days a week on 8-12 hour shifts around the clock, the women move gracefully from process to process, gently bearing *cassettes* or *boats* of delicate wafers from the photolithography of the *steppers*, to the arsine and chlorine doping of the *ion implanters*, to the acid baths and gas clouds of the wet and dry *etchers*. Even gloved hands are too rough for the brittle wafer; workers use vacuum wands, plastic tweezers, or custom pronged tools to "handle" them. Drilled by management in misplaced priorities, many women perceive the most demanding aspect of their work—wafer handling—as the most dangerous. This is because wafer accidents are not easily forgotten, by anyone.

Stamped on each wafer are perhaps 40 to 90 microchips. Workers learn quickly that the boat of 25 wafers they load and carry may represent thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars. To most of the meagerly paid clean-room workers, that is like holding the world in your hands, which are soon putrifying in clammy surgical

gloves. And the wafers must be loaded into the boats, carried, and unloaded often; each is resurfaced, doped and etched up to nine times, microscopically scrutinized more than once, tested, and *back-plated* with gold. Wafer handling requires a sharp burst of concentration and worry that punctuates a routine of machine-tending that even clean room managers characterize as "dull" and "boring."

The pampering prevents accidents to the vulnerable wafers, but it abets fatigue, which many clean room workers relieve with nicotine. On breaks in company lunchrooms they can be seen sitting together smoking cigarettes with almost tribal formality. "It's a ritual you can do quickly and yet it will allow you to relax," observes a clean room manager who doesn't smoke. But you cannot smoke inside a clean room, where you may be stuck for hours at a time. To cope with the tedium and frequent overtime, a few succumb to the allure of amphetamines, though these are not favored as they are on computer assembly lines, probably because 'speed' taxes patience too severely for clean room work.

One of the most fatiguing and otherworldly tasks fall to those who sit atop stools and peer through German microscopes or into Japanese X-ray scanning screens. Through these portholes, they seek misalignments and the patterns of light, invisible to untrained eyes, that indicate scratches or particles on a wafer. Their discoveries may spell disaster for the company's chip yield and usually set in motion a micro-detective story. The investigation generates paranoia among workers who may be implicated, reassigned to another shift, or laid off during a *blind prevention*—the closing down of the clean room until technicians determine the cause of the *yield bust*. When the cause is detected, there is blame to assign, and temporary layoffs can become permanent. This is one reason yield figures are always on the minds and tongues of clean room workers, much in the way the latest stock market quotations preoccupy speculators.

Other concerns cement the clean room's attention to yield. Yield figures are how clean-room managers gauge work performance, how vice-presidents gauge clean-room management, and finally, how The Board reckons its competitive rank in the heat of production. In pursuit of a quarterly quota or a new product release (often arbitrarily scribbled in a marketing plan to please The Board), clean room managers may set entire shifts against each other in competition for the best yield. A surprisingly good yield may precipitate bonuses, free lunches, or spontaneous celebration. It may even temporarily relieve tension in executive stomach linings, bowels, and necks. High or low, the yield functions as a barometer of pressure felt by all. It is a fickle arbiter of

human fate and perhaps the most conscious common frame of reference in the clean room. Like the Sirens' song, it focuses attention away from danger.

* * * * *

In the calculated isolation of the clean room, workers fashion the most sensitive and inscrutable computer components: a variety of chips, disk surfaces, and disk-drive heads. Their microscopic scale and their metamorphosis from mere sand and gas fall plausibly within the realms of revelation and magic, even among the engineers who design and control the transubstantiation.

Managers compare the clean rooms they supervise to the conscientiously scrubbed intensive care units of hospitals. Both are micro-environments requiring special gowns, face masks, and artificial atmospheres. Both connote protection from unseen danger. Even the paths danger stalks are similar: the particles that destroy microchips and the viruses that infect ICU patients are measured in *microns* (millionths of a meter). The analogy conceals a horrible irony.

Engineers design clean rooms to protect modern machine parts—the inanimate “patients” workers treat to support electronic life. But clean rooms are neither clean nor safe for workers. The irony is easily lost in the loneliness, fatigue, and dull ritual of their work. But the undetected dangers produce human suffering that is no less palpable for going unexamined by industry, unreported in local media, and often unattributed by the victims.

Columnists and congressional committees perennially brood over the military's stockpiling of nerve gases. No such brooding accompanies the mundane exposure by electronics workers to arsine, phosphine, diborane and chlorine, the latter internationally abhorred over 60 years ago after its use as a weapon on the Western Front. These gases are prized by the semiconductor industry because they impart electrical properties to microchips. They are among the most toxic substances in the biosphere. When mixed and released under pressure at high temperatures and in extreme environments, they combine to hazardous effect—effects modern medicine studiously ignores.

The chemicals deployed by the semiconductor, printed circuit board and disk-drive industries include life-altering mutagens and carcinogens, as well as less mysterious gases and acids that sear and disfigure human tissue on contact. Many elude detection, despite the criminal reassurances of clean room managers, one of whom (with a Ph.D. in chemistry) told me that workers can sense chemicals “below the level of harm.” Poor warning qualities make most of these chemicals dangerous in a particularly sinister way. Still other qualities simultaneously enlarge and hide

the danger.

Chemical injuries are confusing. They may not announce themselves immediately; trace toxins can accumulate in fatty tissue for years before a weight loss releases them into the victim's system. Then too, the symptoms induced by chronic exposure often are indistinct, masquerading as those accompanying common illness. Chemicals also can spontaneously create harmful compounds. One of many evacuations at a National Semiconductor clean room began with leaking silicon tetrachloride. Silicon tetrachloride emits hydrogen chloride fumes, which, when inhaled, react with moisture in mouth, throat, and lungs to form hydrochloric acid that dissolves living tissue.

Semantic conventions celebrate the confusion. In electronics workplaces, workers see and hear the industry's neutral designations: “agents,” “chemicals,” “gases,” or perhaps “aggressive fluids.” When encountered in soil, in ground water, or in sewage effluent, the same substances are identified by hydrologists and environmental officials as “contaminants,” “poisons,” and “toxic wastes.” Another disarming convention: clean room ceilings contain “laminar flow filters” that “clean” the recirculating air in the work area. Engineers design similar filters into chemical pumps and equipment to “purify” the gas or acid that etches the

delicate circuitry in wafers. But the filters catch only particulates—solid microscopic matter—not fumes that kill brain and blood cells or strip human immune defenses.

How often are workers exposed to dangerous substances?

The answer must be reconstructed from scattered clues that occasionally slip through a tightly-meshed net of secrecy that shrouds the labor process. And the mesh is shrinking. Pleading the sanctity of “trade secrets” in a highly competitive market, the semiconductor industry's production techniques, chemicals—even the brand names of its clean room equipment—now constitute “proprietary information.” In Silicon Valley, local fire departments are the only outside force privy to the chemicals unleashed by these firms. Daily logs that list evacuations and their effects, tapes from such fume-detection systems as are used, injured-worker dismissal memos—these clues are closely guarded by a handful of clean-room and plant managers and the vice-presidents to whom they report. During injured worker compensation hearings, the clues are withheld by obliging lawyers and judges, or otherwise simply evaporate, like the volatile gases they point to.

With hundreds of clean rooms in Silicon Valley, evacuations probably occur weekly, though, like the mysterious runway fires at the Navy's Moffet Field, they are rarely

reported. An IBM-San Jose worker told me of chemical leaks causing evacuations in his clean room an average of once every three months; he had experienced 20 evacuations.

Evacuations imply major exposures. These are likely outnumbered by chronic minor exposures of the sort that occur daily: leaky processing equipment that spews chlorine or silane clouds into the laminar flow; acetone-laced freon that blasts the faces of workers lifting wafers from ultrasonic vapor-cleaning equipment—the equivalent of sniffing airplane glue. Even hooded (ventilated) processing equipment leaks: A “state-of-the-art” dry-etching machine designed for inherently more dangerous gallium arsenide wafers comes equipped with its own laminar flow. But access windows and cracks in the transparent plexiglass doors provide a way out for chlorine vapors. And with most sealed and hooded equipment, the chambers that seconds ago contained arsine, phosphine, and xylene are opened by clean room workers removing an old batch of wafers and inserting a new one.

What kinds of dangers are workers exposed to?

The human nose cannot detect arsine (gaseous arsenic) until it reaches a concentration twenty times the established (and probably understated) danger threshold; likewise with phosphine until it reaches a concentration six times the danger threshold, and diborane 33 times the threshold. Heart palpitations, pneumonia, anemia, skin cancer, and damage to the liver, kidneys, spinal column, and eyes are among the milder symptoms that we know these chemicals induce.

Hydrofluoric and hydrochloric acids are used to harden and etch microchips, in electroplating processes common to the computer industry, and by assemblers outside the clean room to retard oxidation of the solder that attaches chips to boards. Like the gases mentioned above, hydrofluoric acid cannot always be felt immediately. But even a dilute concentration can seep through the skin, destroying tissue in its wake, and causing extremely painful, slow-healing ulcers. The damage is not always as easily or immediately reckoned. The same acid may eat away at the calcium in a worker's bones, especially the lower back and pelvis, thus preparing the possibility years later of a fracture, not ostensibly linked to occupational environment.

Repeated exposure to hydrochloric acid irritates the skin and the upper air passages; the resulting symptoms—laryngitis, bronchitis, dermatitis—double as those from a cold, hay fever, or other allergies. This resemblance makes it possible to dismiss the occupational connection, a resemblance electronics firms take systematic advantage of during

injured workers' compensation hearings.

Trichloroethane (TCA) and methylene chloride, chloroform, and carbon tetrachloride are used as solvents to clean the chips, disk-drive actuators, and computer boards. They contain cancer-causing stabilizers. In small amounts they, too, are undetectable and cause dermatitis, depression, and mental dullness.

Many of these substances induce “sensitization” or “chemical hypersensitivity,” a dread condition that multiplies the harmful effects even of small exposures to chemicals. This disease is easily the most controversial, confusing, and alarming one for all involved, including the medical community, among whom immunological knowledge is in a state of primitive accumulation. This condition is known variously as “environmental illness,” “20th-century disease,” or “chemically induced T-cell inadequacy.” Company lawyers and doctors dismiss it as a “psychomatic disorder.” But by less biased accounts, the diagnosis reads like a technical description of AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

“Chemically-induced AIDS provides a similar picture as virally-induced AIDS,” according to an immunologist who has treated over 400 cases of T-cell inadequacy, half of them Silicon Valley workers. The AIDS phobic American public knows nothing of its *chemically-induced* relative, even though it may be casually transmitted at workplaces where hundreds of thousands of women and men work.

The immune system is a crucible of microbiological war and peace. Whether incited by a perceived or real threat (a psycho/somatic border the immune system straddles to the consternation of parochial researchers) it acts as both sword and shield. But its sentinels are confused and deceived by a world whose substances tinker with the immunological balance evolution has struck. A plethora of new chemicals and viruses generates immense pressure to adapt, and to do so quickly. Apparently, this pressure pushes to the limit our immunological resources to preserve health in the interim.

The pressure to successfully adapt and preserve is played out microscopically. Essential to the body's immune system are the T-cells that detect disease at the cellular level. The sentinel T-cells sense an offending virus or chemical as it enters the body, and then dispatch B-cells, the antibodies or cellular footsoldiers, to dispel the invading substance.

Research suggests that the virally-induced AIDS afflicting the gay and IV-needle-using communities tends actually to *deplete* T-cells in its victims. In contrast, the limited and contested evidence available suggests that chemically-induced AIDS may render T-cells dysfunctional, rather than deplete them.

When chronically exposed to one or a combination of toxic substances, an electronics worker's overstimulated T-cells may simply fail to regulate the B-cells properly. B-cells—and accompanying allergic reactions—are unleashed at the slightest provocation. The confused and overworked immune system fails, and in some cases, never recovers. As this occurs, mere traces of toxic substances can induce violent and life-threatening allergic responses. Workers who bring a history of allergies to the clean room seem to be predisposed to this condition.

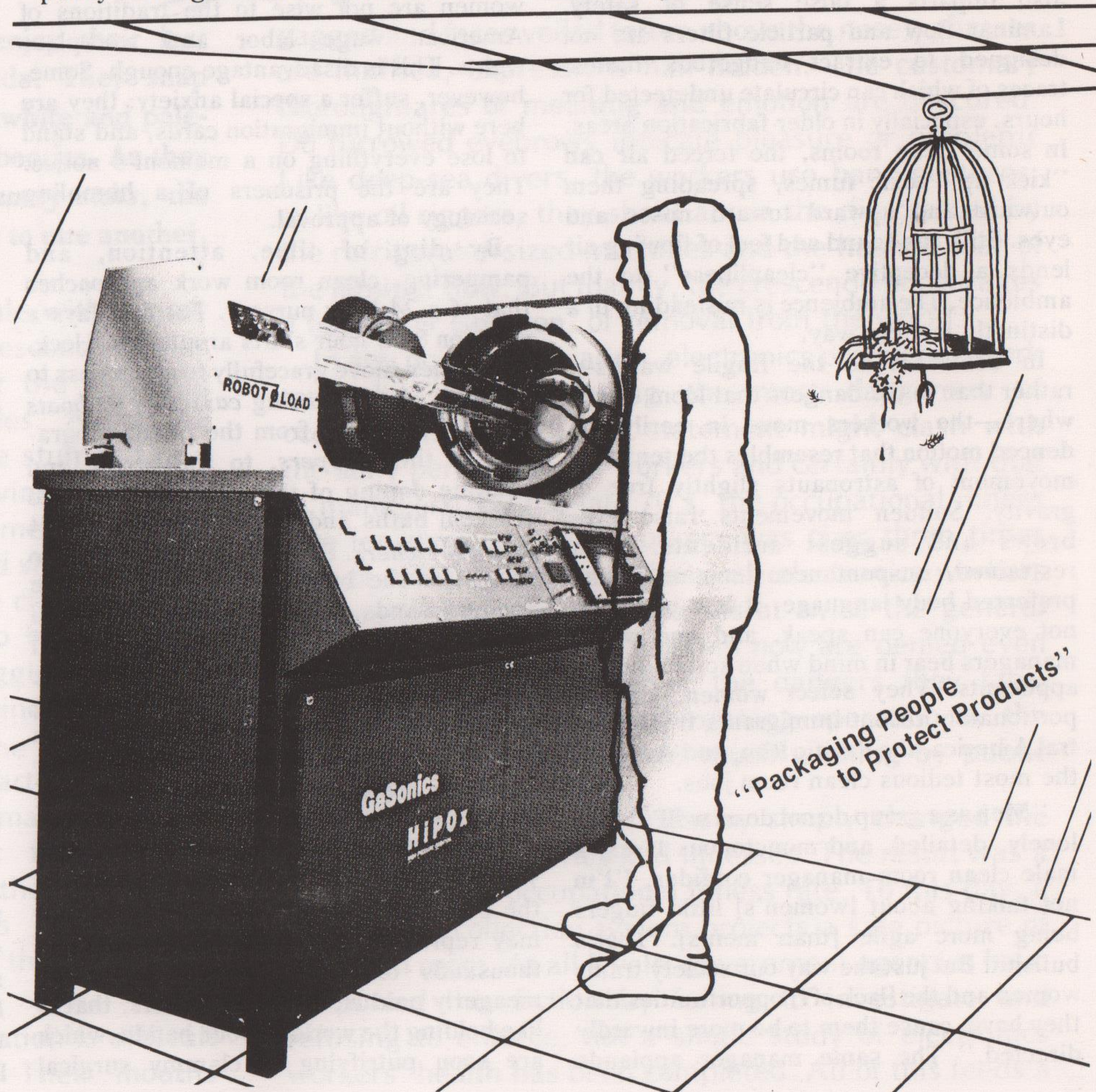
The clean room is a chemical cornucopia; the chemicals it pours forth are found in products that occupy the aisles of pharmacies, hardware stores, automotive shops, and supermarkets and thus find their way into the cabinets and cupboards of kitchens, bedrooms, boudoirs, and bathrooms. These become quarantined territory for many chemically injured electronics workers. For example, workplace exposures to chlorine gas can result in allergic reactions even to mild laundry bleaches at home. Clean-room exposure to the fetal-toxin glycol ether may not only cause miscarriages, but may also induce hyper-allergic reactions to the traces of glycol ether in printing ink, paint, perfume, cologne, and oven and glass cleaners.

With a weakened immune system, the injured worker is prey to a host of opportunistic infections and viruses. The list of symptoms and conditions is long and painful to contemplate: chronic headaches, hyperventilation, colds and influenza, short-term memory loss, laryngitis, eye, bladder, lung, breast, and vaginal infections, menstrual problems, inability to conceive, and spontaneous abortions, some of which have occurred in company washrooms. So insidious is the immunological damage that it may also compromise the effect of antibiotics and conventional treatments. Victims typically require a variety of expensive physical and psychological therapy.

Rivalling the physical misery of chemical injury is the isolation to which it banishes its victims, who now must avoid casual contact with chemicals that are everywhere. This can mean a forced and open-ended retreat from society—friends, lovers, parties, dining out, even walks or shopping trips.

The only feature *San Jose News* article on this topic provided a glimpse of a chemically-injured clean-room worker's modern hermitage:

“She doesn't venture out much beyond her house, which she cleans with nothing stronger than Ivory soap...She no longer keeps pets. She can't bathe her children: chemicals in the tap water make her sick. A trip to the grocery store means a raging headache and a nosebleed by the time she's through. Before she worked at



AMD [Advanced Micro Devices], she reacted only to tomatoes and penicillin; her current list of allergies extends from auto exhaust, beef, and chlorine to wool."

Another disabled and now socially isolated worker told a *MS. Magazine* journalist, "I used to have so many friends. I used to have parties." Violently allergic to hair spray, perfume, cigarette smoke and plagued with ever-present headaches, she has difficulty concentrating and remembering things. "I want to be sharp like I used to be. I want to be interesting."

In the constricted world of the chemically injured, we find the tragic apotheosis of the crescendo—the sense of isolation and removal from the world that the clean room imparts to its workers.

It is an old story. It recalls the maiming of meatpacking workers chronicled in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* or the stealing of breath from miners described in Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier*. In those times, public pressure and direct action by enlightened and outraged workers and their allies prompted attention and redress, albeit too little and too late. Then the unambiguous evidence of industrial barbarism was forgotten.

The carnage in the electronics workplace is rarely scored in spilled human blood, more often in the invisible world of corpse and chromosome. It may have to grow considerably before the negligence is

appreciated and acknowledged. Perhaps half a dozen magazines have run stories on the chemically injured workers of Silicon Valley; some of these deftly avoid obvious conclusions, diffuse responsibility for the atrocities, take corporate denials at face value, or conclude, as clean room managers often do today, that times have changed, that the dangers are no longer with us. Others conclude that more study is required before the danger can be properly understood. This last conclusion is probably correct, though inadequate. Unfortunately, only a handful of people not employed by electronics corporations understand the issues, and their suggestions of preemptive measures—protection that gives workers' health the benefit of the doubt—go unheeded.

When one considers that many of the dangers are avoidable: that existing toxic monitoring technology remains unsold for lack of demand; that installed monitors are turned off to save energy or tampered with to allow higher exposures; and that public officials fail to enforce existing laws, deny funding for potentially revealing studies, issue toothless warnings and not even token fines—then the oversight escalates into criminal negligence. The negligence is no less criminal for being the opaque product of essentially economic and bureaucratic forces, rather than that of manifestly evil men.

The distinction is an instructive one. Clean room managers may genuinely care about their workers' health. But a low chip yield is a more likely source of insomnia because it is the more decisive force in the daily scheme of things. Privately, corporate executives may feel badly about the injuries inflicted by their ventures, but they comfort themselves with the notion that safety costs workers jobs by diverting funds away from "productive" investment.

And what of workers? Their ignorance and inaction can be excused only so long; how many of their sisters must be stricken, fired, and denied compensation by the Corporate Point of View before workers take heart, reject the divisive calculations of job security, and act accordingly?

What it points to is a conspiracy of unquestioned belief in the competitive pursuit of profitable technology. This pursuit underwrites the entire high technology project and prompts corporations to charter themselves in ways that preclude all but inhuman concerns: i.e., their product's margin, its market, and above all, its competition. Ah, competition. The Sirens sing of it. Inside the clean room its melodic dirge can be heard. Its rhythms score the hellish din of the crescendo, above which we hear so little and understand even less.

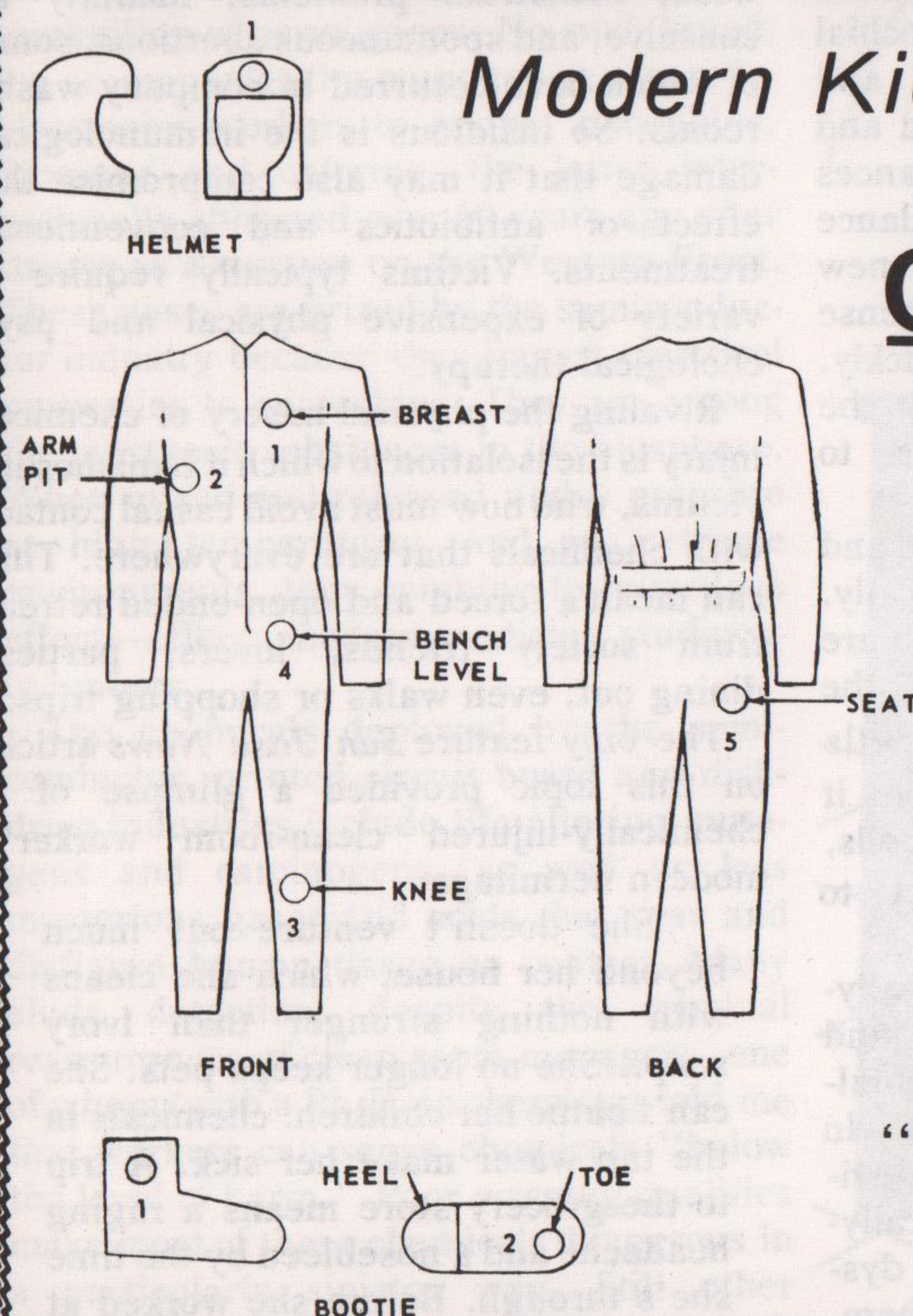
—by Dennis Hayes



BURN, BARBIE, BURN!

Modern Kids Want Barbie's

Clean Room Gear!



Comes with bunnysuit, microchips, tweezers, and dangerous chemicals.

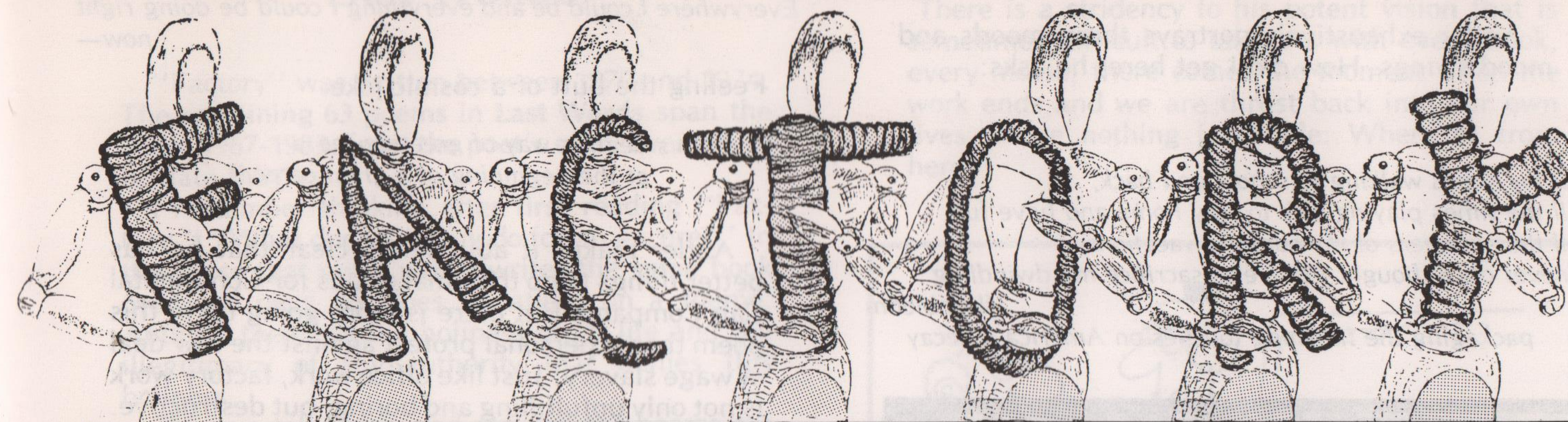
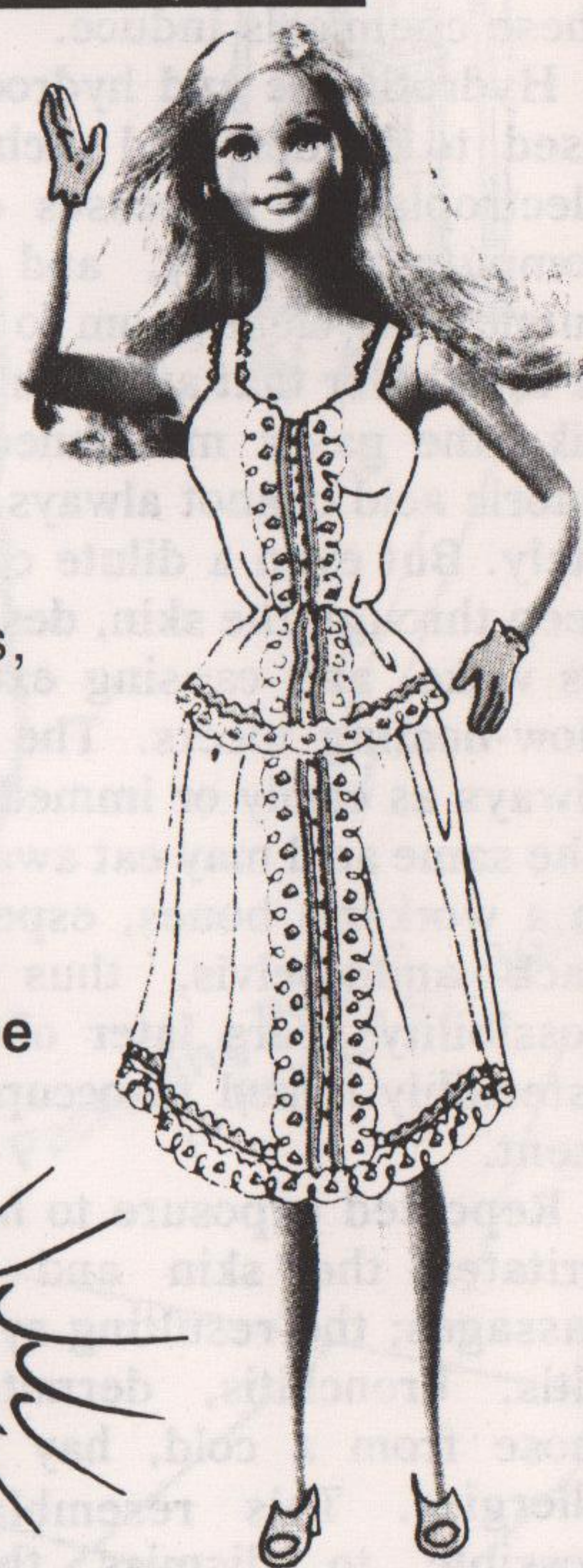
Play with chlorine, gallium arsenide, and hydrochloric acid!

Watch Barbie blister, peel, disintegrate! Then, dress-up a fresh doll—comes with **three extra dolls!**



"Comes in a box, Leaves in a box"

Contek Games Division
Landfill, UT 83443



THE FACTORY AND BEYOND, A review of **LAST WORDS** by Antler (Ballantine Books, NY: 1986) \$4.95. Reviewed by klipschutz.

Who will remember Continental Can Company
was the foremost aluminum polluter on earth?
The five billion bacteria in a teaspoon of soil?
The million earthworms per acre?
What bug? What fish? What frog? What snake? What bird?
What baluchitherium or pteranodon?
What paleolithic man?
How can I apologize to primeval shorelines cluttered with
beercans?
—from "Factory"

To William Blake, factories were "dark satanic mills." The priest-kings of capitalism chose to ignore the disparagements of the eccentric English engraver and the Industrial Revolution spawned the technological Triumph of the West. The United States, as the Firesign Theater put it, decided to "invite immigrants over and make cars."

By now the U.S. has made plenty of cars, and lots of everything else. But, publicly, we chose to call attention not to manufacturing but to marketing—it requires cleverness and handshakes and you can do it wearing a suit. In our national mythology, Vulcan at his forge has been replaced by the Willy Lomans and Lee Iacoccas. Our televisions show a nation of go-getters getting over, with marketing the key to everything from romance to finance to eternal salvation. But behind all the hype is still the Product, and whether it's an after-shave, a briefcase or a Moral Majority membership card, the chances are it comes from a factory.

"Factory" is also the title of a poem, a 1600-line song of praise to Bad Attitude on behalf of all the men and women who spend their lives inside factories while Madison Avenue transmutes their sweat and boredom into The Economy. An epic poem is a poem containing history, and history is the poem written by Time with our blood. "Factory" is history with the blood still wet.

Originally published in 1980 in the City Lights Pocket Press series and hailed by critics and poets—notably Allen Ginsberg—as a major achievement, the poem now appears in a full-length volume, **Last Words**, by a poet who goes by the name of Antler. Antler was raised in and around Milwaukee, where (the poem opens):

The machines waited for me.
Waited for me to be born and grow young,
For the totempoles of my personality to be carved,
and the slow pyramid of days
To rise around me, to be robbed and forgotten,
They waited where I would come to be,
a point of earth,
The green machines of the factory,
the noise of the miraculous machines of the factory,
Waited for me to laugh so many times,
to fall asleep and rise awake so many times,
to see as a child all the people I did not want to be

Written in the 'Whitmanic line'—long, sometimes prosy, free-verse lines of mostly spoken-style American language, meant to be read aloud—the rhythms of the poem's 13 sections rise and fall like music.

In the mid-1800's, Walt Whitman had great hopes for America. It would have been nice if he was right, but he wasn't. Antler updates Whitman, fusing the roles of prophet and witness with social protest in a voice that calls to mind vintage Ginsberg. Yet the voice is Antler's own—less Old Testament and more Midwestern working-class than Ginsberg: something like "Howl" and **The Grapes of Wrath** mixed together.

By turns ecstatic, furious, resigned, punning, informative, vengeful, paranoid, plotting, plodding and delirious, the poem's cycles remind me of the inner life of a workday at any job that occupies the body and leaves the mind to its own devices. Every fear, hope, scheme, dream and despair known to humankind can run through a mind in one eight-hour day.

Antler exhaustively portrays these moods and mood swings. How did I get here, he asks:

*All the times walking to school and back,
All the times playing sick to stay home and have fun,
All the summers of my summer vacations,
I never once thought I'd live to sacrifice my dwindling
fleshbloom
packaging the finishing touches on America's decay*



Graphic by Joe Schwind

The all-powerful faceless Ultimate Bosses:

*And the first shift can't wait to go home,
And the second shift can't wait to go home,
And the third shift can't wait for the millions
of alarmclocks to begin ringing
As I struggle with iron in my face,
Hooked fish played back and forth to work
by unseen fisherman on unseen shore*

The end-of-the-day aches:

His feet feel like nursing homes for wheelchairs

The lives not lived while working:

Everywhere I could be and everything I could be doing right now—

Feeling the butt of a cosmic joke:

*Is this death's way of greeting me
at the beginning of a great career?*

Antler makes it abundantly clear that he has better things to do than make cans for Continental Can Company. But there is more going on in this poem than a personal protest against the raw deal of wage slavery. Just like office work, factory work is not only unfulfilling and boring, but destructive. Somehow we find ourselves daily digging our own—and the planet's—graves in subtle ways that refuse to remain subtle:

*Before, I said—"There will always be room in my brain
for the universe."
Before, I said—"My soul will never be bludgeoned
by the need to make money!"
Before, I said—"I will never cringe under the crack
of the slavedriver's whip!"
Now my job is to murder the oceans!
Now my job is to poison the air!
Now my job is to chop down every tree! . . .
I spend eight hours a day crucifying saviors!
I spend eight hours a day executing Lorcas!*

"Factory" is encyclopaedic and fun. We learn the history of the can, the number of cans used in the world each year, that children who worked 12 hours in factories fell asleep with food in their mouths, how the poem itself came to be written, and why the poet has taken the name Antler. There are dizzying lists of all the products produced in factories, and towards the end of the poem the reader is even accused of looking ahead to see how many pages are left. The poem is prayer, incantation, confession, expose, curse and document. It bears witness to our rage and gives the cage of despair a good hard shake.

Many people associate poetry with Culture, and you know how much we all like Culture when it's capitalized. Pablo Neruda sought an "impure poetry." Kenneth Patchen, who didn't see this world as a benign place, prescribed "a sort of garbage pail you could throw anything into," to dispel poetry's image as pretty, precious and rhymey. Antler has thrown everything in and come out with an impure masterpiece.

Antler offers no readymade answers, any more than Processed World does. But, like Processed World, he asks the right questions with humor and humanity and, pushing an important subject to the snapping point, breaks through in revelation.

LAST WORDS

"Factory" was written between 1970 and 1974. The remaining 63 poems in **Last Words** span the years 1967-1983, from the poet's early twenties to his late thirties.

I remember thinking after first reading "Factory," "What does this guy do for an encore?" In the sense that every writer writes the same book over and over, he does variations on a theme. Antler's theme is the holiness of all life and the illegitimacy of any authority that denies this holiness.

This is a tall order, and some of the poems are more successful than others. Their length ranges from four lines to seven pages. One section, "Reworking Work," expands on the issues presented in "Factory." "Dream Job Offer" is a playful fantasy of a job as a mattress tester in a department store window and includes the lines:

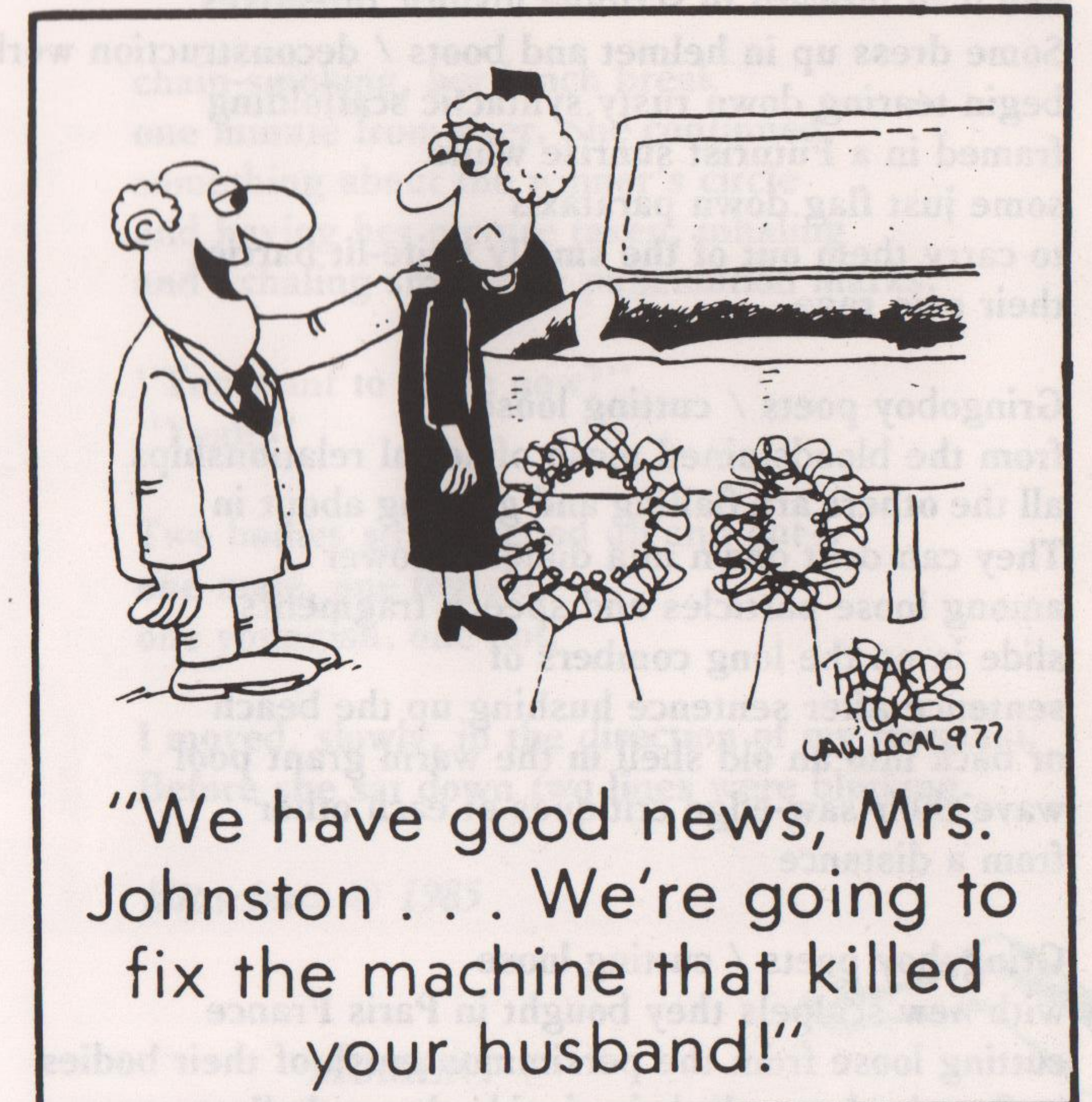
*Only those who enjoy sleeping need apply.
No bedwetters, wetdreamers, sleepwalkers,
sleepwalkers, teethgrinders,
buzz-saw snorers, or those who
wake up in a cold sweat screaming
will be hired.*

The poem seems to me a sophomoric joke, not particularly original, but carried out so well and unself-consciously that it works. It's not profound, but relentless, obsessive. At its best, Antler's exuberant relentlessness becomes profound.

Antler presents himself as a modern primitive, a mescaline visionary, a flower-sniffing backpacker; yet he knows not only what's going on in the world, but in his profession: the poetry world. He knows there has been a swing in the direction of aestheticism and experimental language-oriented poetry. In "Your Poetry's No Good Because It Tries to Convey a Message," his response is blunt:

*Tell it to Jews hanging from meathooks,
Tell it to Wilfred Owen's exploded face,
Tell it to James Wright's cancerous cut-out tongue
Tell it to Victor Jara's hands chopped off
in Santiago Stadium,
Tell it to all the ears, breasts, cocks and balls
cut off in every war . . .
Tell it to 52 million children under 15
working in factories in Southeast Asia. . .
Tell it to the \$100 million it cost to kill
each soldier in World War II. . .*

There is a stridency to his potent vision that is sometimes difficult to take. As with every book, every movie, there comes the moment when the work ends and we are thrust back into our own lives where nothing is simple: Where to from here?



These poems do not answer that question. They do give voice to things I've heard expressed countless times in countless ways: the technopeasants are restless. Antler speaks for hedonists, anarchists and brash believers everywhere when, in "Why No 'Poet Wanted' in Want Ad Column," he talks back to the smug pragmatists and well-adjusted compromisers:

*Especially when you invoke a marijuana blowjob religion,
Especially when you place Solitude Wilderness Vision Quest
above all the Works of Man.
They want you to get a job you don't like
and have to be working full-time
so you can't write anymore.
They want you to confess
your poetry is full of shit.
Somehow your writing
threatens them.
Besides, Christ already said it all—
So don't bother trying to say
something new that's true.
What are the words of a mere mortal
next to the Son of God's?*



GRINGOBOY POETS

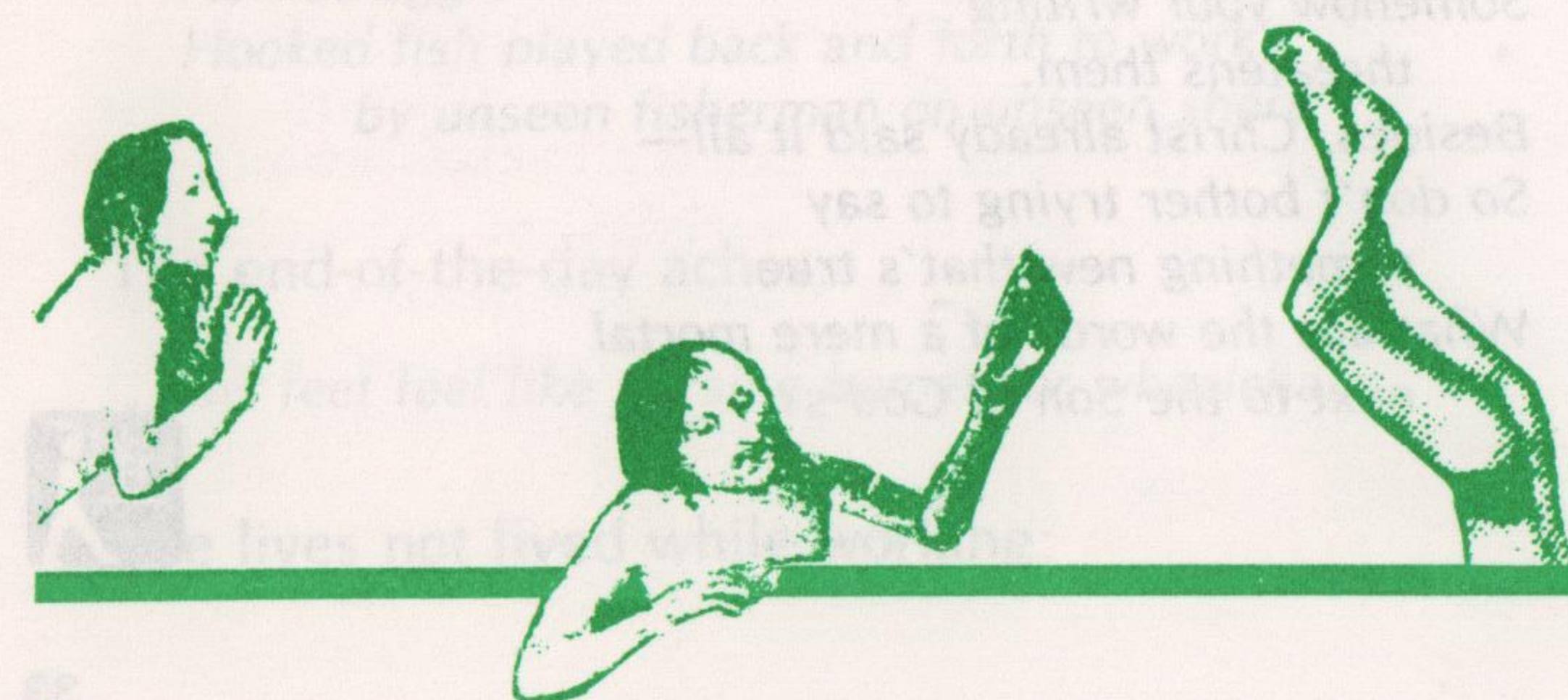
Gringoboy poets / cutting loose
with new pinking shears bought in Paris France
snipping away the wardrobe of unfashionable imagery
Some put on the professional's frowning Lenin-mask
and lean forward to scribble historic directives
Some dress up in helmet and boots / deconstruction workers
begin tearing down rusty syntactic scaffolding
framed in a Futurist sunrise while
some just flag down parataxis
to carry them out of the smelly knife-lit barrio
their own rage

Gringoboy poets / cutting loose
from the bloodstained mesh of social relationships
all the others are flailing and gasping about in
They can drift down in a diatom shower
among loose particles and speech fragments
slide in on the long combers of
sentence after sentence hushing up the beach
or back into an old shell in the warm grant pool
wave their saw-edge critiques at each other
from a distance

Gringoboy poets / cutting loose
with new scalpels they bought in Paris France
cutting loose from the persimmon mush of their bodies
to float in the sunlit brine inside the eyeball
decoding patterns projected on the clean white wall
to flatten themselves into pink bookmarks with legs
so they can crawl between the pages of the dictionary
and fall asleep
to be pure brains curled in secret laboratory tanks
like boneless embryos suckling on their spinal cords

Gringoboy poets / cutting loose
from the apronstrings of that old bag / the Signified
Handsome and talented they get Language to marry them
but when they find out she has her own oxyacetylene opinions
that she does not come neatly apart like a toy typewriter
that she sweats and screams and bleeds
Gringoboy poets feel like cutting loose again
Yes gringoboy poets want a divorce
That's OK / Language wants one too

Adam Cornford



NON FLAME ABSORPTION

Snow in wind stirs pink packets
around sweet n low factory dumpster.
Not far cherry soda wasted.
Not far beef blood
trampled being covered.
5 miles paint plant
same effect. colder.

Unique path enters lights on
connecting vanishing trail
into salted or shoveled experience
to win
paint factory job.

Nathan Whiting

WIND/CHILL FACTOR

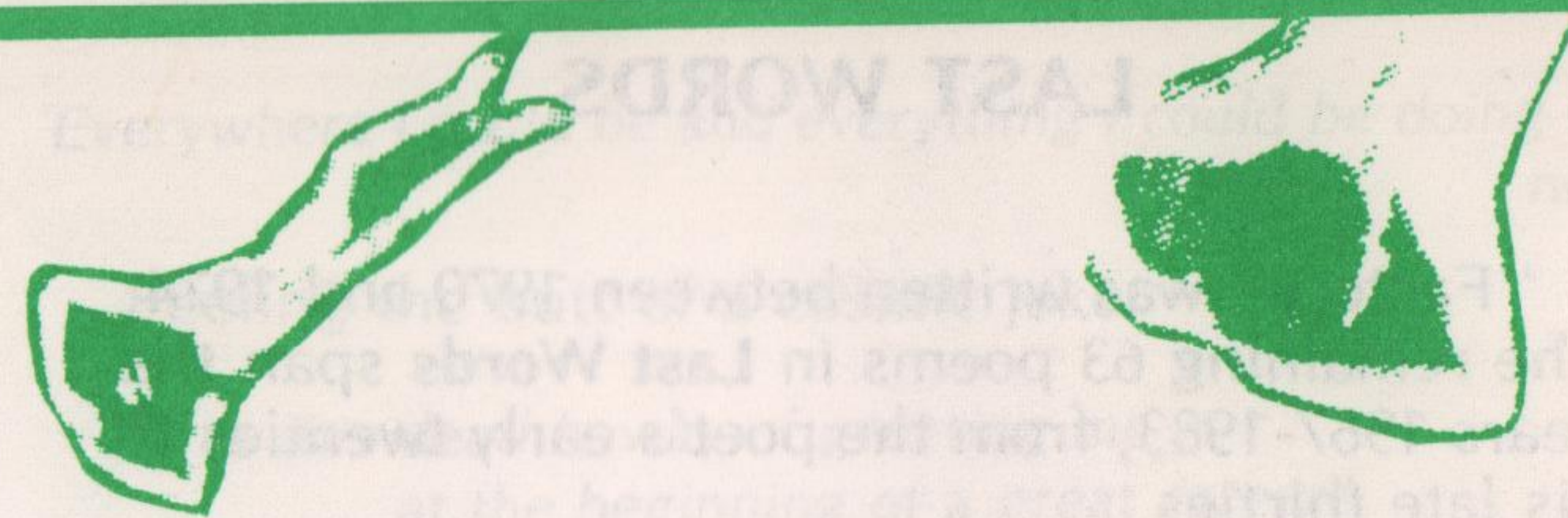
So the ears get cold, ridiculously enough,
and hurt like nails driven slowly into the skull,
and you know that donning a hat
is yet another task to be accomplished,
that life is a secret between a body and a soul,
a picture puzzle in which you are a part.

This touching and betrayal—
the everyday ache you try to assuage
with heat, with Mozart,
with projects and works in progress,
those goals and quotas you strive to meet
in the blessed forgetfulness of work.

Power is what keeps the cold away:
soft flesh, a pleasing smile, magnetism;
or the engine turning wheels
turning sweat into money.

It's a rough, unfinished business,
and each gust hurts fresh before it numbs.
How long can you keep yourself covered?
When will you turn in?

Barbara Schaffer



AN INMATE'S TALE

for awhile, man
i was long gone

my credit cards made a beautiful splash in the water
i let the wind take me out to sea

where
disguised as music
i stowed away in the bell of a famous trumpeter's horn

we were about three choruses into a ballad
when sunrise forced its way through the blinds
but I didnt go quietly

i knew there were jobs
with low pay
and mindless repetition

behind her smile

reuben m. jakson

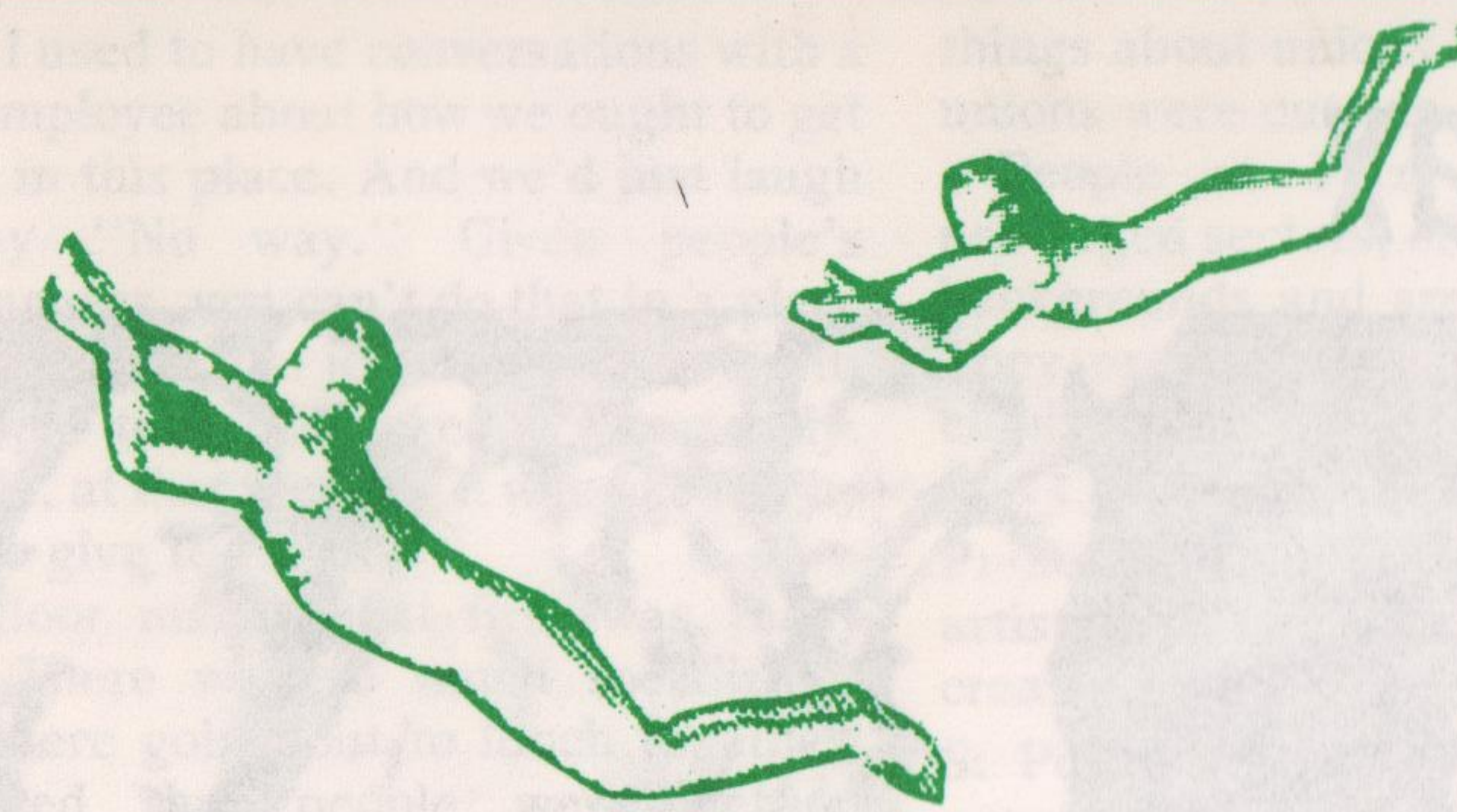


A CLERK'S JOURNAL

It is a fact that a job interrupts my real work.
My real work consists of counting lightning bugs and stars,
Studying the lore of owls, gazing into tree rings,
Watching violets bend in the evening breeze,
Translating and transcribing animal noises,
Waiting for the seventeen year cicada to unburrow
So I can see its red, wet body glistening in the morning
Sunlight, and take for a prize its tiny, alien husk.

G. Sutton Breiding

graphic by Pauline Paranoia



THE RECEPTIONIST'S TALE

"I wish I was out at Golden Gate Fields right now
instead of here. I'd rather be there
than anywhere else in the world. All the horses
and the people." She sat,

chain-smoking, her lunch break
one minute from over. She continued,
something about the winner's circle
and having her picture taken, inhaling
and exhaling smoke for punctuation marks.

"You want to leave now?"
"Yeah."

Two bodies straightened up and out—
one male, one female,
one youngish, one not.

I moved, slowly, in the direction of my terminal.
Before she sat down two lines were blinking.

klipschutz © 1985

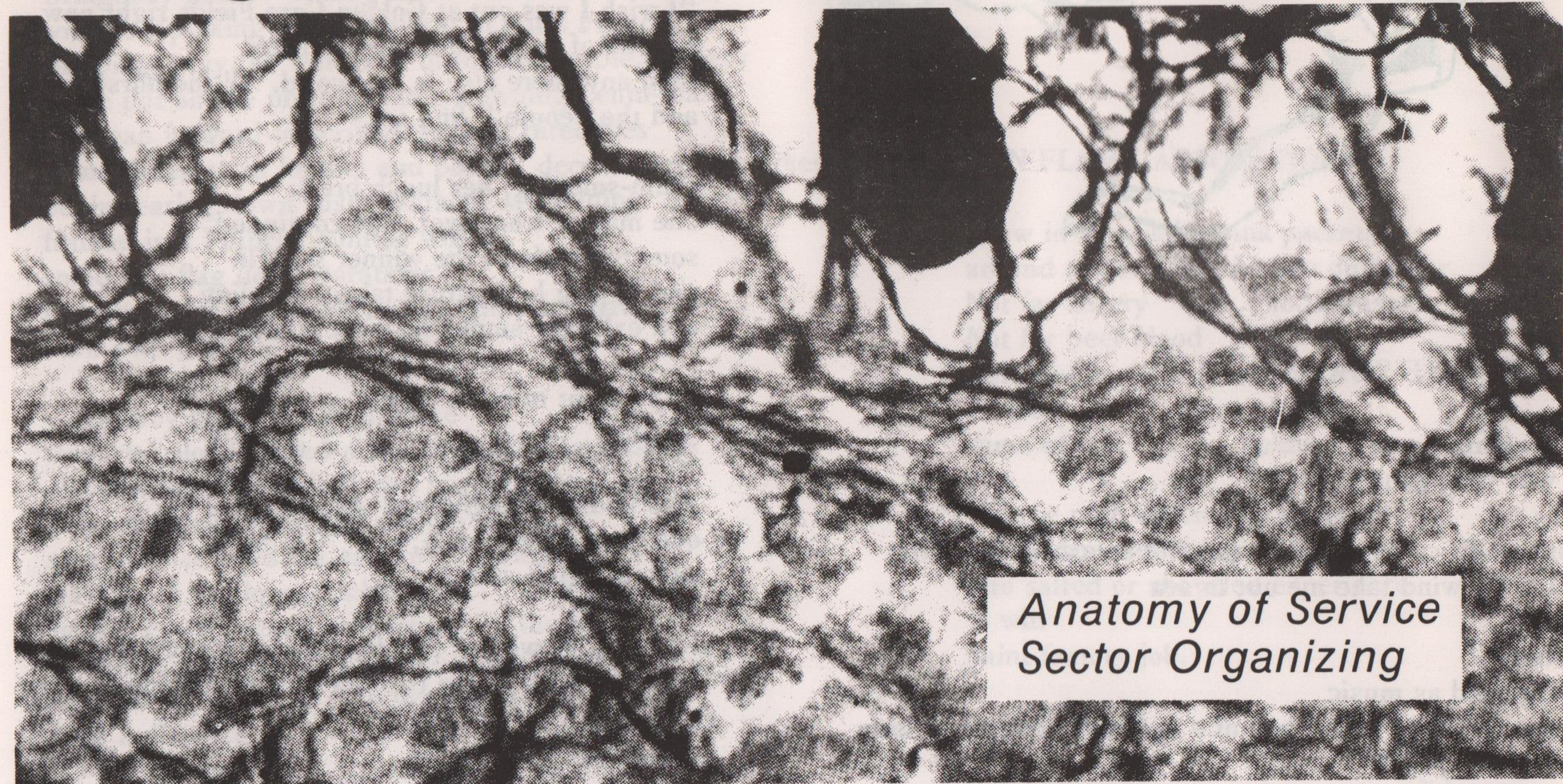
MOMENT

Man talking to supervisor
conflicted gestures of submission
at odds with hate in eyes
through the eccentric surface
of what he seems to be saying
shines a hidden burden
the repressed suffering
of the alienated subject
who unconsciously expresses
the unreconciled nature
of real life
right here in the administrative hallway

Tom Clark



Flexing Muscles at Flax



Anatomy of Service Sector Organizing

In early May 1986, PROCESSED WORLD interviewed Pauline Paranoia, and Stefan Ferreira Cluver, two of the main organizers of a unionization attempt at Flax Art Supplies on Market Street in San Francisco. Owned and run by Philip Flax, the store employs sixty people, who are divided into different sections: thirty work the sales floor, another ten in the warehouse, and the last twenty are managers, office staff, and outside sales people.

Flax workers opted for Service Employees International Union Local 87, which until now has mainly represented the janitorial workforce in many large office buildings in San Francisco. The interview was conducted by Maxine Holz, with occasional help from Lucius Cabins.

M: How and why did you start organizing? A brief history, please? Set the stage...

S: [laughter] An opinionated chronology!... Things slowly began developing in the summer of 1984. Flax had instituted a policy of company meetings where all the employees would be called together and we would supposedly be encouraged to give him our suggestions and opinions. A group of employees drew up a list of suggestions on how to improve things in the store. Flax just took the list of suggestions and said: "No we can't do this, yes, we might do that..." There was no real discussion. He just did what he wanted and, more importantly, promised to do some things he never did. We got a sense that this was not going to get us anywhere.

P: But it was significant that a group of employees presented him with something—anything!

M: So these meetings backfired. They brought in democratic rhetoric, but people took it seriously, and it became the framework for further organizing—just what they wanted to avoid?

S: Right, right... The real breaking point was the annual review process... Every four months new employees get a set raise—after that, there is a yearly review. They are called in one by one and given "an opportunity to present their opinion on the matter" and then they're told what their raise will be.

At the time we speculated that reviews in Oct. 84 were used to get rid of some employees who Flax felt were being a drag on the store—ones who were a little bit cynical or at least not as gung-ho as Flax wanted them to be.

P: Not as drone-like! They weren't androids!

S: What management said was "You seem to have some attitude problems—we don't feel that you're happy here," this kind of thing. There was absolutely no established criteria.

P: They didn't say "You haven't been filling your shelves"—nothing you could quantify. So many people got told they had a bad attitude, it got funny.

S: At first, people came out of the reviews with these shocked expressions on their faces—they were very reluctant to talk

about it. But, the fact that so many people were screwed over in the reviews, given measly or no raises, was a key element in getting people to talk.

Part of our organizing effort was to break the ban on communication in the store. The situation got so wild that people actually started talking to each other, on an individual level, about how messed up this whole review thing was. The employees who approached Flax originally in the company meetings had a meeting of their own to see what they could do about the reviews.

P: That's when I first came into this scene. I've never experienced anything like it—first of all I'd never worked in a place where people had so much contact. I'd worked in big offices where you had your own desk in a row but you never talked as much. I was really impressed by the fact that everybody was being so open about the reviews because I thought "Oh that's such a personal subject" and most places you never talk about how much you make!

The people who started the organizing kept it under wraps, since some people might have gone running to Flax. At first they only approached people they could definitely count on.

S: From one meeting to the next it went from 8 to about 12-16 people. We surprised ourselves with how many people were interested, so we said "What are we going to do?" We talked about looking into

unions. I used to have conversations with a fellow employee about how we ought to get a union in this place. And we'd just laugh and say "No way." Given people's consciousness, you can't do that in a place like this. So, we just joked around about it. But people took that joke very seriously. Suddenly, at that meeting it was like "Why don't we give it a shot?"

The floor manager at first was really happy. There was so much socializing! People were going out to lunch together, they liked that people were getting friendly. What we were doing was establishing solidarity. We were very surprised at the positive reaction we got—after talking to people the first time we had that one-third needed to file for an election.

P: And that's why we went for it—it wasn't a case of the union coming in and forcing us to do anything.

M: Was there any point along the way where somebody said "Why don't we just organize ourselves instead of going to the union?"

S: In a sense we already had tried to organize ourselves. The committee we had before, the company meeting agenda, that was an attempt to organize ourselves.

P: Legal representation was important—later we saw just how important. The legal power of a union was really attractive to us.

S: And protection under the National Labor Relations Act in terms of organizing.

M: Do you have to contact a union to get protection for concerted activity under the NLRA?

S: Not necessarily, but if we were to call ourselves Flax Employees Organization...

P: We would still have to get recognized by the National Labor Relations Board, and that could take three years... It always seemed obvious to me it was better to go with a union because it's hard to get recognized independently.

S: We looked at a few different options: one guy talked to some folks at Teamsters, I have a friend who was working with UFCW (United Food & Commercial Workers), and one worker talked to her husband Richard, who was with Local 87 of the SEIU.

P: Local 87's way of selling themselves was their progressive history, their openness, the fact that we would write our contract. I especially liked that last one because it meant we would have control, ultimately, over the outcome of the whole thing. There was no way we would take pat clauses. We would write every word if it took all the time in the world.

M: Was there suspicion about unions among your coworkers?

S: Yes, because of the kind of people that work at Flax. Most of them have no union experience. They tend to be young, single, college-educated with a professional class background. They probably heard bad

things about unions from their parents, or unions were outside of their experience.

People at Flax come out of more privileged sectors, often they have fine arts backgrounds and are more self-confident. They expect to go on to better jobs, to climb a ladder of some sort even if they don't know what that ladder is.

P: Several Flax employees are practicing artists. They have a sense of themselves as creative but they have to pay rent too.

S: People have this idea that "this job is not my life." Instead of trying to improve their work situation their attitude is, "If I don't like it, I'll quit and be a waiter or anything, I'll move on." And we were saying "Look, whether you like it or not, you're spending eight hours a day here, half your waking life, so why not make it the best work situation possible? You have to take a stand..."

And there's the individualist trip you get here in the US. You as an individual can make it. Because of this people thought they could stand up and take a position against Flax, but at the same time they identified with Flax and the private enterprise lingo.

This dichotomy has created difficulties, e.g. with Richard, who was used to more traditional "working-class" people. Working-class people feel disenfranchised, but they have less illusions that the boss looks out for them and they also have less of a sense of self-power. So in organizing you have to build a sense of solidarity, a sense that they can make a difference, that there is something worth fighting for.

Whereas at Flax, the problem is different. Employees fall for the argument that "Flax is paying us as much as possible." Their folks have been in management positions, so that's who they identify with. You have to convince people that they are workers! A key concept in our organizing was to get people to recognize themselves as workers and working life as a major part of their lives.

M: So let's get back to what happened after contacting Richard?

P: Feelings were running high. The first two weeks were scary, then when we saw we had support, we felt great.

S: We had two-thirds of the people sign authorization cards.

M: So you filed and management then knew what was going on?

S: Yeah, we thought they were on to us but it turns out they were totally caught by surprise. We thought we could win the world then.

Our first obstacle was to define the bargaining unit. The traditional technique, as we learned from Richard, was that Flax would try to hold up the election with challenges to the makeup of the bargaining unit. He would want managers in there so he could control things... To avoid his

challenges and keep momentum going we agreed to a wall-to-wall bargaining unit.

P: That meant everyone, including floor managers. It was the most democratic, but not necessarily the best choice, as we soon found out, though we felt we had to make it at the time.

S: It only excluded five people: Philip Flax, the personnel, operations, and sales managers, and the head accountant. That left all supervisors as well as outside sales people which was a major point of weakness. The election date was set at the end of November, at the same time the bargaining unit was decided, and the vote was scheduled for Dec. 28.

M: What were management tactics during that month between the time the election was set and the election?

P: They handed out flyers with our paychecks at the end of the day so you have no chance to talk about it. The flyers main message was "Here's what you lose when you go on strike, and here's how much you lose with dues." They really hit the economic issues by saying "you're going to be paying money to this organization you don't even know. It's just a bunch of janitors, the dirty scum, blah blah blah..."

S: Flax also started holding mass meetings during work, but the most intimidating thing was the small group meeting with Mr. Flax, the VP of Sales and a couple of floor managers—basically it was 3-4 managers and 5 employees.

P: And they'd say: "We'd appreciate hearing all your views, please speak freely." And you'd say something and they'd say "No that's not true at all, blah blah. Don't bring in a third party who doesn't know what you really need. We always thought we could resolve things here at Flax with our open door policy." He made a big deal of the "open door policy."

M: How did you respond to management's campaign?

P: We would hand out three page flyers explaining point by point in question/answer format, which I thought was really good, and we held meetings.

S: Yeah (laughing) we were good and they were bad.

M: Was there any attempt on your part to keep them confused as to who were the main organizers?

S: On the contrary, our strategy at that point was, the more outspoken you are in terms of your support for the union the more protection you have under the NLRB. Because if you keep your sentiments under cover and they find out, they can frame you and you have a harder time proving they're firing you for union activities.

M: Was this brought up to workers to encourage vocalizing?

S: Yes, in our small group session with

management we were very combative. At this point we went from the peak of support and started losing ground for two reasons. Some people were floored by the management meetings—here they were before the authority figure. And, there were also a couple of people who were anti-union for ideological reasons who went along at first, but when given half the chance they gladly bowed out.

There were people Flax could exert more direct pressure on, such as the outside sales people. We lost them because Flax froze some accounts due to the "volatile situation." That was a big blow to us all.

And, he used the Kissinger theory of madman power management—the person in power becomes unpredictable. So Flax inflated the image he's cultivated all along of being this crazy, arbitrary unpredictable person.

P: Yeah, he would walk by something 7 days in a row, on the eighth day he would notice it and start ranting, chew the person out in public, make them cry. He played that up. At the time we thought it was stupid, but now we realize it was an intimidation tactic.

M: I bet it was selective too, like choosing people he knew would break down. I'll bet he didn't do it to you two?

P: Yeah, that's true.

S: One more important thing happened before the election where our support slipped. We had an important meeting right before the election where a lot of office people showed up, and some managers. They had had a large company meeting which we had messed with a little bit. We had been vocal and defiant against things Flax said to show we weren't afraid. And I think he urged people to come to our meeting to do pretty much the same thing. People were voicing a lot of doubts and things they wanted answers to. Richard's view was that they didn't really want answers to those questions, what they needed was reassurance that we could hang together.

M: So instead of answering questions he'd just give rhetoric about solidarity, which made people angry and suspicious?

P: Exactly. It happened often at important times.

M: What kinds of questions?

S: About dues, etc. He would get around to answering the question, but only after a long philosophical explanation. He wanted to address where he thought they were coming from.

P: And all they wanted was to be told "It's not that much money, only this %" and it's worth it, etc.

S: One other thing that played a role was cultural prejudice or racism. Richard Leung is Chinese-American. He's from Hong Kong and speaks with an accent. I have a strong sense that several anti-union

people also had cultural prejudices.

P: It's sad to say they reacted like this... This did play a role at several key points.

S: That pre-election meeting was important for us, we hoped to rip out of there with an 80% vote. But after this meeting, we went "Oh shit." The committed anti-union people in the store felt if the union came in they couldn't work there. They went all out to mess things up. They were Flax loyalists who thought they were getting a good deal at Flax, and their strategy was to make union meetings intolerable—very frustrating since we were trying to get people to give their free time coming to meetings after work.

M: So these people were turning meetings into a drag. What did you do to try to stop this?

P: We tried everything we could think of. We tried arguing point by point, which didn't work.

L: Did you try to kick them out of meetings?

P: No. I don't know if we should have. Some people wanted to. But if you're

trying to hold a meeting for all employees, and you start kicking people out...

L: It's tricky, but it seems reasonable to me after a period of clear, deliberate obfuscation to say "We're not really interested in the problems you are raising, so if you have had your say, please split."

S: I think the key thing was the problem of facilitation which we didn't address. On this there was already a little tension between Richard and ourselves.

M: Your meetings had no formal structure?

P: Some had more than others. Sometimes we set agendas, and sometimes not.

S: Our problem was, we never managed to get Richard to respect the facilitator so it was hard to get others to do the same. Richard saw himself as a fount of information.

P: He'd think "now is the time for me to come in and inform everybody."

S: Another reason why Richard had so much power in the situation had to do with how the less involved employees saw the organizing effort. Our pitch was—"The

union is us, we can only do what we want to do, when it comes to action, strikes, contracts, pickets, whatever—a contract is only a piece of paper. What the union is, is our determination, our solidarity, our ability to hang together for a common goal." People would hear that but at the back of people's minds, see, Richard was the union.

P: Definitely.

S: And this is why Richard had so much leeway. We could say what we wanted, but Richard's word was official. Maybe we thought Richard should shut up, but the uncommitted people didn't want to hear from us, they wanted to hear from Richard.

P: Because they've been used to hearing from authority figures.

S: We would say "The union is us," but all along people still had an image that the union is like a company to which you pay your dues and then it does things for you.

P: And they wanted the relationship clearly spelled out before they committed

themselves. They didn't want all our ideological claptrap shoved down their throat meeting after meeting.

L: Don't you think skepticism is a reasonable response? You had chosen to legally affiliate with an organization which had legal responsibilities. The notion people had of unions is corroborated by the AFL-CIO itself—they have come out with the idea of trying to sell services to members.

S: No, it really comes down to the old ideas people have of unions. They don't even know about recent stuff like Mastercard unionism. It goes back to the fact that in the US people have no idea of what the labor movement was born from, what it has achieved, the fact that you have the 8-hour day, or the minimum wage because of the labor movement.

M: But you also have a guy representing the union who's not directly answering questions, not respecting the democracy of the organization.

S: But people wanted Richard to talk and

not for us to talk, because he was in a position of authority.

M: How did the election go?

S: We won the election on Dec. 28, 1984 by a squeaker, 3 votes, 55%. Sales and warehouse went for the union and the office, managers and outside sales people voted against it.

M: Kind of a traditional breakdown: white collar and managers vs. blue collar and sales.

S: Those ten people who shouldn't have been part of the bargaining unit were crucial because if you take away those ten votes then the dynamic changes entirely (70% to 30%). The vote had all the negative aspects of being a squeaker though we knew we had most people behind us. But instead of a feeling of "yeah, we won, we've got it," there was a feeling of "Oh, the store's divided" and that hurt us later on. It became difficult to pull together actions.

P: And then, Flax filed objections to the election. If we had won by 80% he would have been at the bargaining table. The close vote gave him the confidence to use the legal process against us. Richard warned this would happen—that Flax would try to use any legal means to obstruct us. Of course the objections were lies. Five months later there was a hearing that established that the objections were invalid. The judge called Flax's first witness "insubstantiated" because he vacillated so much. And the VP of Sales was warned he was on the verge of perjuring himself.

S: In terms of the substance of the legal proceedings, the local board was actually quite helpful. They review cases and then have the power to hold a hearing or just to make a ruling. They ruled in the union's favor. Then Flax appealed their decision, to Washington DC, and that's where the process started messing up. It took DC months to organize a hearing and then after that hearing took place—

P: It went back to the regional and we didn't get certified until Nov. 85. In that year a lot of things fell apart.

S: What killed us is Reagan's NLRB. It's totally in cahoots with management. What do you do? I don't know.

M: What was management's strategy during that time?

S: There were firings and a lot of pressure. First they weeded out the warehouse. It was a real hotbed of union support.

P: They also instigated a new (and oppressive) attendance policy in January after the election—a policy which pressured a lot of people to quit before they'd be fired. It was a major issue because it was a unilateral change of working conditions. All the people who are gone because of it either quit unnecessarily or

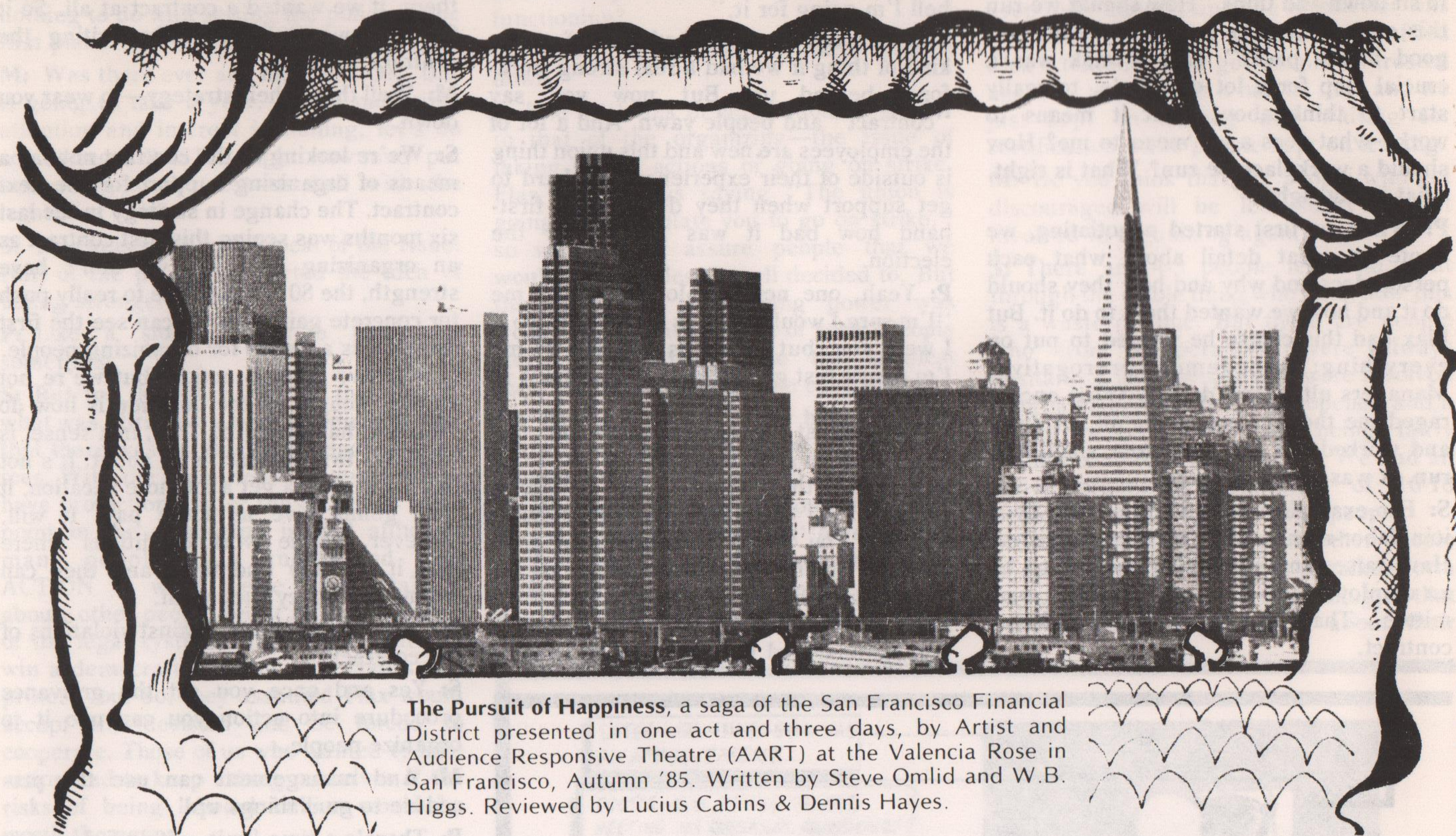


Excerpted from "This Modern World," a full-length work available for \$3 through PROCESSED WORLD.



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PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS



The Pursuit of Happiness, a saga of the San Francisco Financial District presented in one act and three days, by Artist and Audience Responsive Theatre (AART) at the Valencia Rose in San Francisco, Autumn '85. Written by Steve Omlid and W.B. Higgs. Reviewed by Lucius Cabins & Dennis Hayes.

The Pursuit of Happiness," a new musical play about office life, appeared last fall in San Francisco. The performance featured four characters, each at a different level of hierarchy: a young female junior executive, Grace Werkerbee; her disgruntled male secretary, Lee Sloven; a gung-ho bike messenger; and a psycho-babbling Bag Lady, who has dropped out of office work and into philosophy (the voice of Wisdom in this show).

This play featured five musical numbers, three of which could have been cut to the betterment of the show, which ran on the long side. But a snappy and sarcastic dialogue appropriately portrayed the myriad contradictions, banalities and ridiculous aspects of life in the modern office. The play takes its central theme from the title and poses it as a question: why work if it makes you desperately sad (secretary Lee's tormented, nihilist dreams of isolation from the world), physically ill (the bag lady's migraines and dizziness which drove her from office to street), incapable of recognizing happiness in the world around you (the parade of sensual but meaningless affairs in Grace's life), and blind to practical antidotes (captured nicely in the ska-influenced song "Grace Under Pressure")?

The strength of the play lay in its depiction of the absurdities of daily office reality: Grace, eager to fire her insubordinate secretary Lee, is initially dissuaded by the enormous number of termination forms she must

fill out. The following exchange with Lee pushes Grace over the edge:

Grace: ... Did you get those reports done?

Lee: No.

Grace: Lee! I told you I need them today!

Lee: You should have told me earlier. I'm only human.

Grace: Well, can you stay late and finish them?

Lee: No.

Grace: Why not?

Lee: Because I don't want to.

Grace: But they have to be done today! The people upstairs are breathing down my neck!

Lee: That's not my problem.

Grace: Now I'll have to stay and do them!

Lee: Sorry. (He turns to go)

Grace: Other secretaries stay late sometimes!

Lee: Other secretaries are stupid! (He exits)

The play reconstructs the office as a glass house whose occupants absorb and convey unnerving pressure and misery. Isolated from each other by the office hierarchy, they cannot rise above it, even when they share similar frustrations and circumstances. Grace insists that Lee obey a corporate memo to wear a "Happitime" Happy Face button (they work for the Happitime Products Corporation) while in the building. This policy ostensibly protects real employees from bathroom muggings by outsiders sneaking into the building unidentified. Lee abhors the button but succumbs to his boss's pressure. In the following scene,

the bike messenger brings in a package for Lee's boss and Lee demands to know where the messenger's button is:

Bikeboy: Package for Grace Werkerbee (Lee keeps typing). Hey, I said package—

Lee: Wait. (Keeps typing)

BB: (impatient) Look, I gotta—

L: WAIT! (types for a few more seconds, then stops and turns to Bikeboy, disdainfully) May I help you?

BB: Yes, I have a package here for Grace—

L: Where's your button?

BB: My button?

L: How did you get in here without a button? I'm going to have to call the—

BB: Wait. (He digs the button out of his pocket.) You mean this thing?

L: Yes, that thing.

BB: Oh, come on. Look at it! It's ridiculous!

L: Look, I don't like wearing the damn button. But you have—

BB: ALL RIGHT! (puts button on) There. Now will you sign for this?

L: No. I want you to understand why you have to wear the button, so that next time, we won't have this problem...

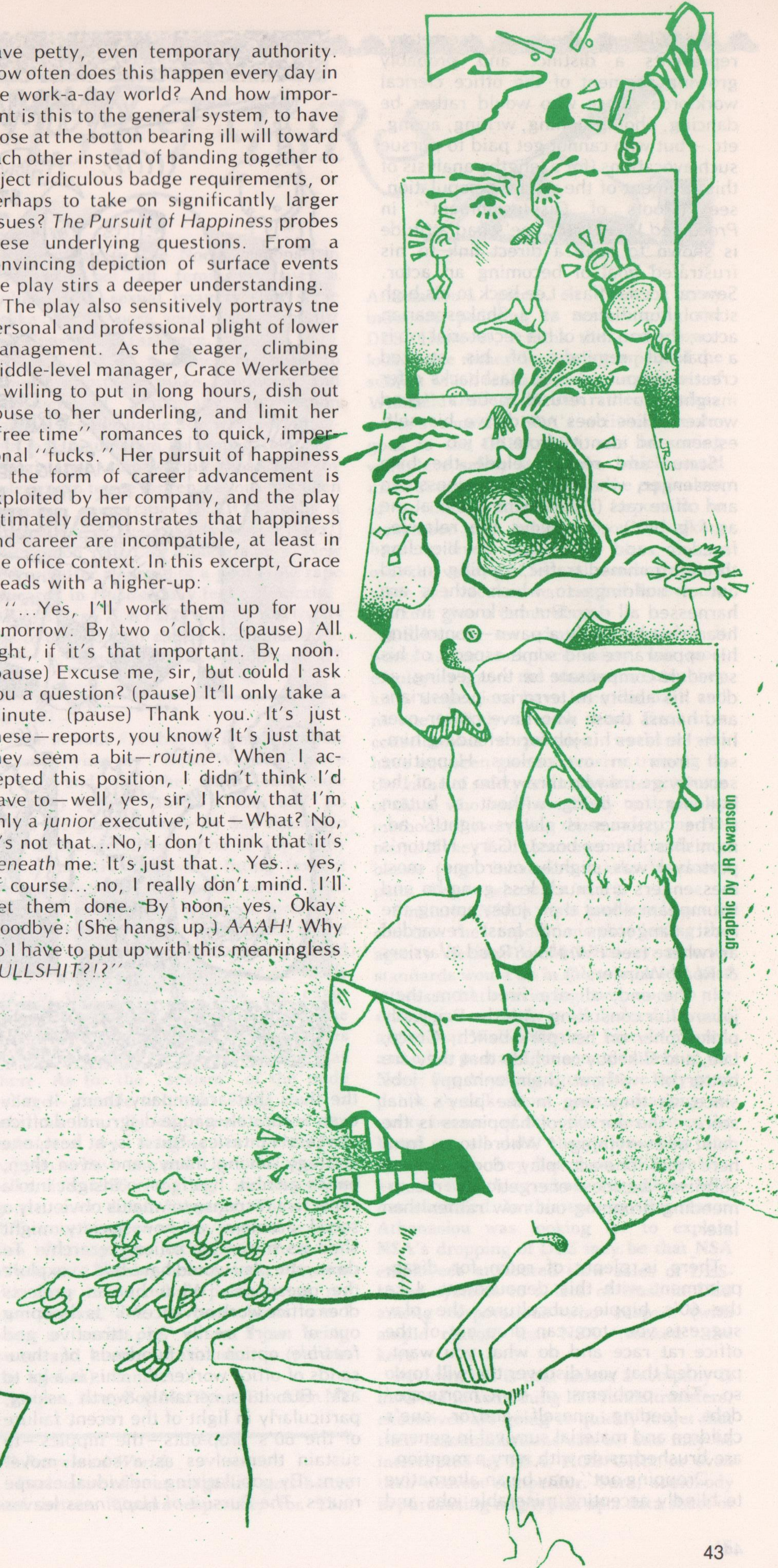
Lee goes on obfuscating and refusing to sign for the package on several absurd grounds, including the possibility that it might be a bomb. When Lee finally signs for it, the bike messenger is all riled up, throws his button out of the window, and slams the package down on Lee's desk, cursing him. Lee smiles maliciously, wishes the messenger a nice day—and calls security to bust the now button-less messenger.

This scene struck me as a perfect example of how the powerless vent the frustration on those over whom they

have petty, even temporary authority. How often does this happen every day in the work-a-day world? And how important is this to the general system, to have those at the bottom bearing ill will toward each other instead of banding together to reject ridiculous badge requirements, or perhaps to take on significantly larger issues? *The Pursuit of Happiness* probes these underlying questions. From a convincing depiction of surface events the play stirs a deeper understanding.

The play also sensitively portrays the personal and professional plight of lower management. As the eager, climbing middle-level manager, Grace Werkerbee is willing to put in long hours, dish out abuse to her underling, and limit her "free time" romances to quick, impersonal "fucks." Her pursuit of happiness in the form of career advancement is exploited by her company, and the play ultimately demonstrates that happiness and career are incompatible, at least in the office context. In this excerpt, Grace pleads with a higher-up:

"...Yes, I'll work them up for you tomorrow. By two o'clock. (pause) All right, if it's that important. By noon. (pause) Excuse me, sir, but could I ask you a question? (pause) It'll only take a minute. (pause) Thank you. It's just these—reports, you know? It's just that they seem a bit—routine. When I accepted this position, I didn't think I'd have to—well, yes, sir, I know that I'm only a junior executive, but—What? No, it's not that...No, I don't think that it's beneath me. It's just that... Yes... yes, of course... no, I really don't mind. I'll get them done. By noon, yes. Okay. Goodbye. (She hangs up.) AAAH! Why do I have to put up with this meaningless BULLSHIT?!"



graphic by JR Swanson

graphic by JR Swanson

Lee Sloven, the surly secretary, represents a distinct and probably growing segment of the office clerical workforce: those who would rather be dancing, photographing, writing, acting, etc.—but who cannot get paid to pursue such avocations (for a lengthy analysis of this segment of the working population, see "Roots of Disillusionment" in *Processed World* #6). Lee's bad attitude is shown to have a direct link to his frustrated goal of becoming an actor. Several scenes flash Lee back to his high school humiliation as a Shakespearean actor; the banality of his secretarial job is a painful reminder of his stunted creative impulses. The flashbacks offer insight into his refusal to be a "good worker": Lee does not derive his self-esteem and identity from his job.

Status and respect elude the bike messenger, who disdains businessmen and office rats ("those who sneer at me as I g by") and enjoys the relative freedom and challenge of bicycling through jammed traffic, zipping in and out of buildings to which others are harnessed all day. But he knows in his heart that he's only a pawn—controlling his appearance and some aspects of his schedule compensate for that feeling, as does his ability to terrorize pedestrians and harass those who have power over him. He loses his job for defending himself from an overzealous Happitime security guard who threw him out of the building for being without a button ("The customer is always right!" admonishes his ex-boss). Gary Hinton's portrayal was slightly overdone: most messengers are much less gung-ho and triumphant about their jobs, among the most dangerous and least rewarded anywhere (see PW #15, "Road Warriors & Road Worriers").

In the end, all are fired from their jobs. After consulting with the Bag-Lady philosopher on her park bench, Grace, Lee, and Bikeboy conclude that they are better off without their unhappy jobs since, as they sing in the play's final score, "the pursuit of happiness is the point of everything." Where to go from here this one-act play doesn't even surmise, besides energetically recommending dropping out now rather than later.

There is plenty of room for disappointment with this denouement. Like the 60's hippie subculture, the play suggests you, too, can drop out of the office rat race and do what you want, provided that you discover the will to do so. The problems of rent/mortgage/debt, feeding oneself and/or one's children and material survival in general are brushed aside with nary a mention.

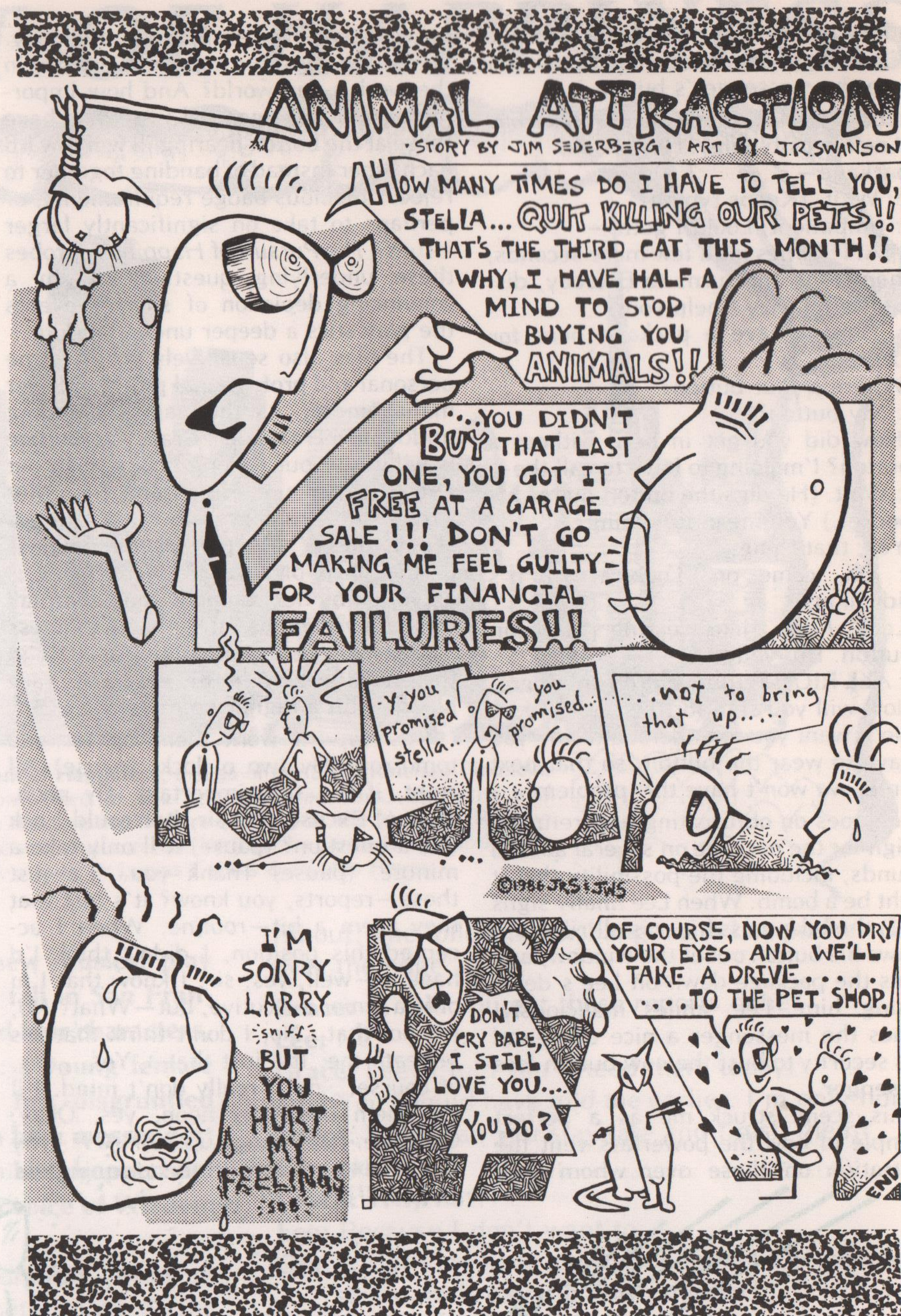
"Dropping out" may be an alternative to blindly accepting miserable jobs and

the lives that accompany them. It may even accurately gauge disgruntled office workers' fantasies. But it is, at best, one strategy among many, and even then, only a gambit. It offers no insight into a collective response to what is obviously a social problem, or how society might shed its miserable office hierarchy. To do so, the play would have had to explore the questions "What human projects does office work advance?" "Is dropping out of work really an attractive and feasible option for hundreds of thousands of office workers?" This is a lot to ask. But it is certainly worth asking, particularly in light of the recent failure of the 60's drop-outs—the hippies—to sustain themselves as a social movement. By popularizing individual escape routes, *The Pursuit of Happiness* leaves

open the likelihood that the system will survive and continue to impose the pointlessness and misery which this play portrayed so poignantly.



AART's next performance project is the whimsical "eYe LovE", an environmental theatre piece which explores how we "tune out" our surroundings in everyday life. It will appear in Washington D.C. in the summer and in San Francisco in the fall. A revised version of *The Pursuit of Happiness* is planned for S.F.'s Financial District. To contact AART, write: 527 30th St., S.F., CA 94131 or 1711 18th St. NW, Ste. 1, Washington, D.C. 20009.



Dear P—

I found your old letter but misplaced the questionnaire. Assuming *Processed World* is gravitating toward the marketing pragmatism of the 80's, let me propose some answers and you all conjure up the questions:

1. 1968
2. 35
3. 1984 Volvo
4. \$32,000
5. Tonic Water
6. Once a week
7. McGovern, None, None, Carter, Mondale
8. New York Review of Books
9. Prophylactics
10. More articles on Travel

Hope this boosts your demographics and display ad rates...

Sincerely, L.H. — New Orleans, LA

To the Editors:

I enjoy your magazine immensely as do many of my friends. I like the concept of dealing with the processes of the processed. My single complaint is that it makes my eyes hurt to go from one color to the next as I'm reading. Really, it is hard on them. I know you will think that maybe I need glasses, but I have had my eyes checked several times lately because of the strain of doing word processing at my job, and my opthamologist assures me that my eyes are 15-20, better by one point than what astronauts need. Not that you'll see me on the next shuttle...

I would appreciate it if you would do an expose of the amount of pain caused by VDTs. Everybody wants to avoid this because there are so many profits involved. Nevertheless, I really hate typing on a VDT compared to typing on this little portable electronic typewriter I'm working on right now. Perhaps the biggest trouble with word processors is that they are always getting their operators lost. It seems like hours and hours are spent debugging the things, often a group of fifteen secretaries will be crowded around a single terminal at my office trying to figure out what went wrong. That's something I haven't seen said in print anywhere before.

Well, what can I say? Maintain output.

Sincerely—K.O., Seattle, WA

Ed. Note: We did a pretty thorough piece on computer hazards in PW #14, called "Unwanted Guests."

LETTERS

Dear P.W.,

Responding to Zoe Noe's response in P.W. #16—not all feminists have a problem with sexual imagery, but some dislike violent porn unlike the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce.

"F.A.C.T." is a direct response to feminist efforts to make producers and consumers of graphically anti-woman material legally liable for whatever mayhem may result from its propagation.

Legislation empowering those hurt by violent porn to sue for reparations has been passed in some cities. F.A.C.T. calls it censorship. [Ed. note: So do many PWers!] The woman raped on a pool table in New Bedford after a spread of a pool-table rape appeared in *Hustler* may feel differently.

Regardless, don't slag anti-porn activists just to defend your choice of graphics.

Sincerely, N.F. — Middleton, CT

Yo PW!—

I see in issue #16 that the female graphic accompanying my "Road Warrior" piece in #15 and also the nude (ooo! how terrible!) collage caused a silly stir. As noted the graphics were by San Francisco bike messengers, not by me or any of my crew, but still they were fitting (except we're mostly a ten-speed scene with special "messenger bags" around our shoulder). The exaggerated graphic of the tough, big-breasted, ass-kicking road warrior mama underscores what we really are—in that genre of comix one exaggerates proportions. If it were a guy, he would be macho-muscled. Sexism comes out of the context—I don't believe it was there. As for the "sexism" of the nude collage—gimmie a break! *Being nude is what we are. By all means correct the imbalance by bringing in penises*—I happen to have one and I love it. Come on folks, it's 1986, long ago we should've gotten over dumb hangups. There is a difference between nudity/sex and sexism. Too often uptight leftists mix them up. When this flaming-hetero sees someone that turns me on and my palms sweat, my face flushes, and my heart beats, am I being a "sexist pig" or am I just being sweet and human? Puritanism is (pardon the ageism) infantile.

See you, love, Bob McGlynn, Brooklyn NY

Hi *Processed World*,

Each issue of your magazine gets better and better. Thanks especially for Tom

Athanasios's piece on NSA's heavy influence peddling in restructuring the DES. However, I think the author overlooked one rather depressing aspect of the subject which tends to make the protests of Whitfield Diffie et.al. look rather pointless.

Let's consider NSA's activities analogous to the OSHA/EPA role in setting workplace safety standards, which would make skeptical cryptologists the equivalent of environmentalists. It's important to remember that whether you're talking benzene levels or DES key sizes, debate over the validity of federal standards takes place in a vacuum that neither bosses nor workers give a damn about.

OSHA can set whatever standards it wants to for workplace safety, but most employers ignore the standards, since they know inspections have been cut back and no one is likely to catch them. Even in a conscientious corporation, workers who have not been given extensive training on the value of safety features (and even some of those who have) are likely to dream up methods of overriding those safety mechanisms if they find them uncomfortable or a hassle (e.g., inhalation masks in closed paint shops—who uses 'em?).

Similarly, NSA's main problem is not to convince the corporations that letting the agency decide communications security standards would be in the companies' best interests, but convincing companies to use encryption methods at all. Indeed, I would argue that Walter Dealey, Lincoln Faurer, and other past and present members of the Never Say Anything agency have only gone public to talk about communications security because of the poor sales across the board on all data encryption chips and systems, be they based on DES, public-key, or something whose very name NSA has classified. In this context, the reason Athanasios was looking for to explain NSA's dropping of DES may be that NSA employees attributed slow sales of DES-based systems to a lack of trust in DES among corporations who suspect (with ample reason) that NSA "cooked" the keys.

My own bet is that unless a company is involved in something like funds transfers, executives are going to quickly forget that their communications can be and may be intercepted by NSA, KGB/GRU, or even their nearest competitor. Sure, somebody in purchasing might pick up a data sheet or

advertisement on a cryptosystem, but when a company is looking at a quarterly bottom line, encryption becomes one of those superfluous frills, like environmental control equipment.

I don't want to downgrade either anti-establishment cryptologists or ankle-biting environmentalists, since somebody has to watchdog the federal agencies responsible for setting standards. Who knows, maybe the influence in standards-setting will become so blatant the watchdogs can send someone up the river a la Rita Lavelle.

But if NSA or its detractors think that your average corporation is the slightest bit interested in either side of the cryptology debate, they're crediting the corporate consciousness with an intelligence it simply does not possess.

And what does this say for the average rank-and-filer—the same blue-collar worker who will remove an uncomfortable safety mask or build an override pipe around the company's multimillion dollar pollution processing system so litho chemicals can be poured straight into the city water system without plugging the sink?

Remember, the annals of cryptology are replete with horror stories of codebreakers able to break into an adversary's code system because a grunt worker at the code machine was too lazy to change the key every 24 hours. It's the same with communications security in general. Privacy and freedom of expression become meaningless in a society where they are not valued. Most Americans don't care what they are able to read because they *don't read*. Most Americans don't pay attention to the argument about the degree Big Brother watches them because they *don't care* if Big Brother has 24-hour access to their homes, bodies, and thoughts.

Sorry for sounding so pessimistic, but I have to treat arguing over the validity of federal standards, regardless of the agency involved, as quibbling that does not involve 99 percent of either the rulers or the ruled. It's a swell hobby and it keeps your hands busy, but it puts most people to sleep.

No more cartoon monoxide,

L.W. — Burlingame, CA



Dear Processed World,

The California prison world revolves around the ringing bell. Its ring proficiently pokes and prods prisoners to everything from breakfast to sleep.

I'm not talking the ding-dong of an old iron bell, or the ding-ding-a-ling of a come-and-get-it dinner bell. No. I'm talking 1980s, state-of-the-art in electronic circuitry, high pitched, long sustained and loud ringing bell. The kind you continue hearing for a few uncertain seconds after

the actual ringing has stopped; the kind you might expect to hear if you live near a jewelry store uptown, or in a fire station.

Ironically, I've yet to hear the prison bell when fire breaks out, but it rings relentlessly during fire drills.

At Soledad prison, the bell shakes inmates out of bed at 5:30 a.m. It ushers them to and from breakfast, pushes them to their job assignments at 8 a.m. sharp, and later breaks them for lunch. The bell gives notice to resume work, ringing again when the work day is done. It sends convicts to their cages for count; it stands them up to be counted. The bell rings on and off throughout the day every day, denoting the start or end of every convict activity scheduled. It finally gives one long blast at 9:45 p.m., signifying the day's final ringing of the bell and also that it is time for everyone to lock up for the night.

"Bells, bells, bells..." wrote Edgar Allen Poe. You hear these bells so many times a day at Soledad, after awhile you hardly hear them at all.

I have a cellmate named Duke who drew a comparison of the prison bell to Pavlov's bell. It was more accurate than I cared to admit; California's prisons are notoriously antiquated, contributing to its 90 per cent rate of recidivism (almost double the national average), but still, I was reluctant to see my humble home as a turn-of-the-century Russian kennel.

As a joke, and perhaps to drive the message all the way home, Duke began barking like a dog every time he heard the bell—every time, from breakfast to bedtime. And if a bell rang in the distance, say, in another cellblock, he would whine and growl and let out an occasional yelp as if he were being teased.

It was a clever and good imitation. I found myself darting up in the morning not because I heard the bell, but because I heard Duke barking and I was instinctively afraid he would start licking my face if I didn't get out of my rack.

It was absurd enough to be funny, to a point. The barking got old in a hurry, though, like any joke repeatedly told. Soon I began ignoring Duke when he barked, hoping to discourage him. This approach failed, only prompting him to bark more zealously.

Eventually I called him on it. I explained that it just wasn't funny anymore and, in fact, having a roommate who only spoke German Shepherd had become irritating and, worse yet, our neighbors were starting to talk. I threatened to purchase a muzzle through a mail-order dog obedience agency, which settled him down to a muffled whimper.

He said he understood, and agreed to abandon his canine ways. We soon learned, however, his barking had become a subconscious habit with him; he was conditioned. Every time the bell would

ring, Duke responded like an excited puppy.

He would catch himself almost immediately, a forlorn look of misery sneaking across his face. To this day it is difficult for Duke to refrain from barking when he hears the bell, although regular sessions with the prison shrink seem to be helping.

San Quentin has a similar bell-ringing policy, but the bell there sounds more like a foghorn, and it is usually out of commission. Its sound is so obnoxious that the convicts are continually severing the speaker lines, judiciously rendering the bell incapacitated.

Most of San Quentin's prisoners are long-termers, well-versed in the daily routine. They do not need a foghorn to tell them their breakfast is already cold.

At other prisons not unlike Soledad, the bell system symbolizes a way of life, and it serves its purposes faithfully. It will forever ring a few minutes before the cage doors are unlocked, and since the doors remain unlocked for only a minute, inmates know when they hear the bell they better get washed and dressed and ready to leave the cell. They do become programmed.

Of course prison—especially prison—has its share of nonconformists: that handful of convicts believing they can hold on to the last threads of personal identity by NOT jumping every time the bell sounds. These subversives are easily identified, as well-groomed and neatly conditioned inmates filing out of the cellblock trip over them and their clothes as they hurriedly get dressed on the tier landings.

The bell also serves as an alarm in the event a fistfight breaks out between two prisoners on the recreation yard. The bell alerts all the guards in the world and sends them swarming to the altercation where they promptly quell the disturbance by diving en masse on top of the two combatants, separating them, handcuffing them, then further restraining them by applying head-locks, kidney-punches, groin-kicks, eye-pokes, hair-pulls and a variety of complicated arm-twisting and bending techniques which are top-secret and taught under a strict code of silence at the California Guard Academy.

How would prisons operate without the ringing bell? How do ex-cons function without the bell to direct them?

The California prison system is home to 50,000 criminals, each with a different past, a different attitude, a different dream. Each dances to the song of the bell, and that is the common denominator. Prisoners are made to respond in the same fashion as Wells's Eloi and Pavlov's dogs, and many live two-to-a-cage in cages so small state law forbids the SPCA to shelter one dog in a cage the same size.

Man adapts, by virtue of his brain and/or force. The long-term effects are predictable: The prison shrink is certain

that once Duke is uncaged and unleashed he will bite somebody.

—Charles "E.Z." Williams, a 27-year old "lifer" who has spent the past eight years at various prisons in the California Department of Corrections, including San Quentin, where he served as editor of the San Quentin News for two years.

Dear Processed World,

My field of maintenance with a major airline is not exempt from computer boondoggles, as you might imagine. In times past flight crews used to record the engine instrument readings on every flight into the aircraft log book. Nowadays each airplane is equipped with data link communications enabling the instrument readings to be instantly transmitted to company headquarters when entered in the cockpit keyboard. Not only does this increase flight crew workload—it's harder to type information than it is to write it down—at a time when the crew complement is being reduced from three to two, it also makes it harder for us mechanics. When an engine develops a problem a complete record of its past performance was there for us to see in the log book, but now this information is buried somewhere in the computerized bureaucracy that not even management levels have gained access to.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours — J.R., San Francisco



Dear Folks,

Something I've missed lately in *PW* (aside from the smaller size, which in itself was intimate and subversive—easy to read at work) is commentary on local news and trends, overviews of Big Brother's plans. Such articles aren't just "doomsaying," they're like storm warnings: Batten the hatches, gang.

Locally I've noticed continued labor losses. According to an early May issue of

the *Oakland Tribune*, Cost Plus nursery employees have just abandoned their strike, and probably won't get rehired. They went on strike when the employer decided to drop their medical benefits and cut their pay by up to \$2/hr. The nursery employees were of course replaced by scabs, and got to watch members of other local unions cross their picket lines without apparent concern (including Muni drivers and even Oakland teachers, who also went on strike recently). They also were threatened (by anonymous goods), and some strikers had their tires slashed. Their savings dwindled, and I've told you the end. Not as dramatic as the Watsonville canning strike, but worth noting. They lost because they had no community support.

Other companies are cutting back wages and/or benefits as well, often instituting a "two-tier" system whereby new hires are paid less for the same work than the present staff (PacBell); or forcing people to take on the duties of employees who quit, without of course lightening their other duties or increasing their salaries (Manufacturers Hanover Trust). The companies save on worker salaries that way, leaving more for management. With rent and living expenses rising, there goes the middle class.

This city is beginning to remind me of Portland economically—sort of a cargo cult, putting up huge buildings on the theory that buildings attract business. Meanwhile, businesses are moving to corporate fiefdoms in San Ramon, Concord and Fremont, so the bosses don't have to drive as far or take BART, and can often pay less for the same work. Temp word processing, which is usually \$1-2/hr. more than permanent word processing, pays \$6/hr. in Sacramento. Check out Sacramento some time: Concord-style downtown monoliths surrounded by a Deep South shanty-town, still a fit place to film HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

Regarding word processing, SF offices are going PC-happy. The people who make purchasing decisions don't know anything about computers, so they're replacing their

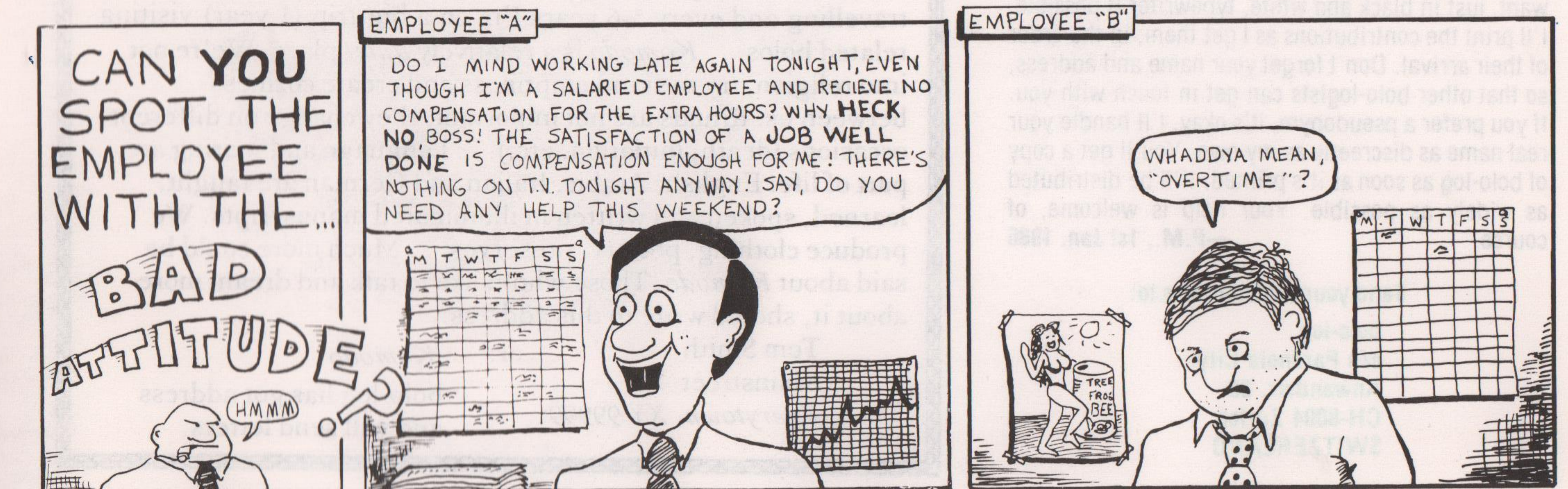
dedicated word processors with micro-computers running a myriad of klutzy programs—as a temp, I'm finding the machinery changing too fast to keep up with (where do you learn SAMNA and SYNTREX anyhow?), and am tired of spending my time and money learning new programs the agencies are reluctant to give me work in ("lack of experience" is the excuse)—and none of them compare with the dedicated systems for ease of use and productivity.

Have considered "permanent" work, but the salaries for that are going down rapidly and the competition for the low-paying jobs is ridiculous. Why fight over chickenfeed? Word processing is becoming lumped with lower-paid secretarial work (not that secretarial work deserves to be low-paid either; just that one out is being denied to us). And the temp word processing market has slacked off considerably the last few months. It's difficult to get work right now; a few days here and there, where once the average was a couple or more weeks. More companies are overworking their underpaid staff, rather than hiring temps.

In summary, this area is deteriorating rapidly. The grey-garbed devotees of Reaganomics are driving out the people who gave SF a reputation for being radical/creative. Rents are rising much faster than wages; people are becoming homeless simply because they're forced to move and can't afford it. Am thinking of relocating, to someplace where the wage/rent ratio is better (*not* Sacramento), and ducking for cover. Hard times coming, if the corporations get their way (and our government is letting them).

'Scuse my pessimism. It's just that improving matters depends on the majority, and they're not likely to do anything. They've been brainwashed into identifying with the interests of the rich. Anybody else feel threatened by the rising tide of "patriotism" and red-baiting?

Good luck — BORED IN THE USA (Oak.)



We have all got more or less precise ideas about a better life. Why should such desires take the form of **bolos**? There are some obvious reasons for this—mass-states are too big and always repressive, while families are too small to be independent. **bolos** are approximately 500 people living together, supplying themselves with food, developing their own lifestyle. **bolos** are in fact very old: tribes, villages, communities, neighborhoods. They can exist in the country or in cities (blocks + agricultural basis). **bolos** are middle-sized units, universal social communities for us or the Third World. They are the only way out of our nightmare of work and misery.

Information on such a vision of a world of villages is available in the pamphlet **bolo'bolo**, Semiotext(e) Inc., 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 USA. The booklet is also available in German and French. Russian, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese translations are planned for this year.

bolos can only originate by new encounters between people. Such encounters happen all the time, of course—"bolo-log" is an attempt to multiply them internationally and to focus them on a possible common frame of vision. "bolo-log" is to be a catalog of bolo-projects or just bolo-fantasies. How do you imagine your **bolo** concretely? How would you like to live with other people? What values or forms of behavior are essential? Have you got any ideas about specific buildings? How would you imagine a **bolo** in your neighborhood? How would work, production, education be organized?

It's impossible to describe a whole way of life on one or two sheets of paper (for your contribution shouldn't be longer). Perfection isn't required, though. If you can give some ideas, some details, some sketches, it's enough to start a contact and further talks and dreams. Maybe it's dangerous to materialize one's own desires, because thinking is also a destructive act. Wouldn't it be thrilling to find a similar **bolo** in the bolo-log, imagined by someone from a country far away? bolo-log could initiate new encounters, stir up new inspiration, create connections useful for the making of real **bolos**.

It is up to you how you describe or illustrate your bolo-project. It can be text, drawings, whatever you want, just in black and white, typewriter if possible. I'll print the contributions as I get them, in the order of their arrival. Don't forget your name and address, so that other bolo-logists can get in touch with you. If you prefer a pseudonym, it's okay. I'll handle your real name as discreetly as my own. You'll get a copy of bolo-log as soon as it's printed. It'll be distributed as widely as possible. Your help is welcome, of course.

—P.M., 1st Jan. 1986

Send your contributions to:

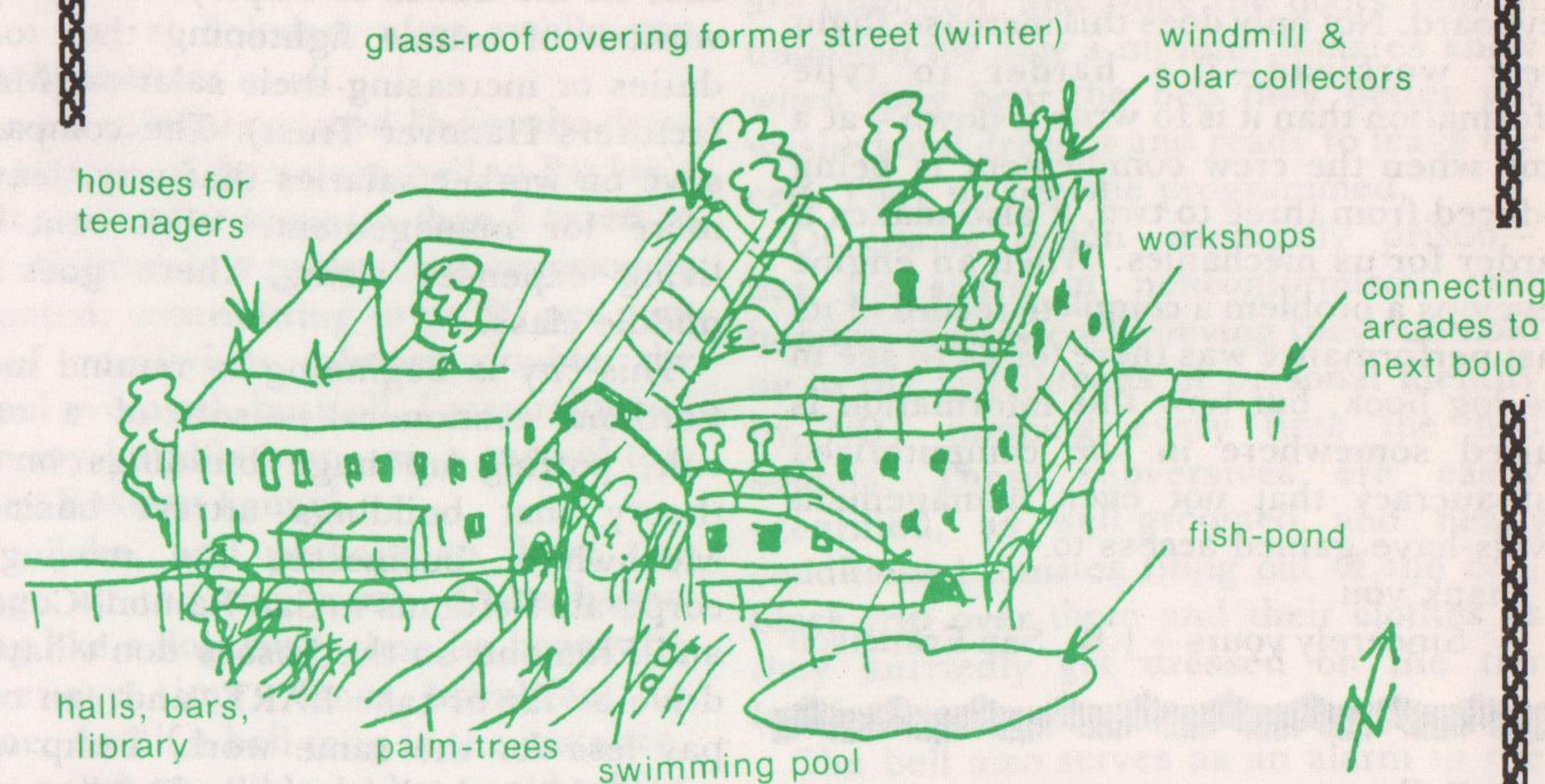
bolo-log
c/o Paranoia City
Anwandstr. 28
CH-8004 Zurich
SWITZERLAND

bolo-log

example 538:

Komodo

My *bolo* should comprise about 500 persons, of all age groups, including children. It is located in a *large city* (like Zurich or Boston) and consists of one or two blocks. There is a swimming-pool on a former street, covered in winter, there are three good restaurants of different cooking styles. Around the pool and comprising the whole of the first floor: large halls with fireplaces, chairs, sofas, libraries, billiard tables, a cinema, pianos, bars, etc. Visitors can drop in freely. It looks about like this (I'm actually living in one of those blocks!):



The external forms of social life can be manifold (6-8 persons as households, but also families, couples, triangles, etc.). Communal life should be flexible. Important "values": *generosity*, curiosity, openness, mobility of mind and body, anti-hierarchical attitude, acceptance of risk, sincerity, equal rights. . . There is a farm (80 hectares) 20 miles away and an alp (in the Alps). There are intense personal/cultural links with *Italy, Algeria, Spain, New York, Japan* and *Samoa* (guests, music [jazz, folk music], cuisine, literature). Like the others I work one month per year on our farm, for two months I'm travelling and every 5-6 years I'm on a big trip (1 year) visiting related *bolos*. . . *Komodo* is a relatively *quiet* place. We're not into religion, try to stand emptiness and create coziness between us. Rituals are not important, they change on different occasions (death, initiation, etc.). . . Language and writing are part of life: English, Arabic, Italian and German are taught, learned, spoken and written in illuminated manuscripts. We produce clothing, pottery, preserves. . . Much more could be said about *Komodo*. Those who'd like to talk and dream more about it, should write to this address:

Tom Smith
Mainstreet
Everytown, XY 99999

or: *Komodo**

* bolo-log has got address
and will send letters.