

# Creation and Its Enemies:

## “The Revolt Against Work”



REVISED FORM F 716

**DEATH REGISTRY**

**SAN FRANCISCO**  
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU  
1,880 MARKET STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102

**CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
OFFICE OF THE STATE REGISTRAR OF VITAL STATISTICS

NAME OF DECEASED

**afl-cio**

IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH		DEATH CERTIFICATE	
A Refusal of workers to be humili- ated any longer by union oppression.		Despite the best ef- forts of management, government, and leftists, this corpse suc- cumbed to workers' desire to end the disease of Organized Labor.	
DUE TO B Unions' transparent role as wage labor's last effective police force.		Destroyed with such other relics as authority, representation, private property, duty, mediation, rules, productivity, parties.	
UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH C The AFL-CIO was the enemy of freedom, creativity, pleasure.		from birth	
OTHER CONDITIONS Racism, pollution, bureau- cracy, corruption, etc.			
DID AN OPERATION PRECEDE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES DEATH <input type="checkbox"/> NO	DATE (several)	KIND OF OPERATION Unions given progressively greater doses of (condition: terminal) authority in attempts to discipline members.	
ACCIDENT OCCURRING DURING HOSPITALIZATION		DATE	
VISITING CHIEF		INTERNE	
HOUSE OFFICER		PREVIOUS INTERNE	
CORONER NOTIFIED	DATE	TIME	BY WHOM
		A.M. P.M.	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCEPTED <input type="checkbox"/> REFUSED
AUTOPSY DESIRED <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	PERMISSION FOR AUTOPSY GIVEN BY		RELATIONSHIP SUPERINTENDENT & APPROVAL
ANATOMICAL FINDINGS Subject in advanced state of decomposition.			
BODY DELIVERED TO Unclaimed.		SIGNATURE—AUTOPSY SURGEON	

**John Zerzan**

1/1

**Creation  
and  
Its Enemies:  
“ The Revolt  
Against Work ”**

**John Zerzan**

**Mutualist Books  
box 1283 rochester, ny**

**1977**

The cover graphic reads "all power to the imagination", a favorite slogan of the May-June 1968 events in France.

Typesetting and production consultation by EASY GRAPHICS,  
Buffalo, NY; printing by OCTOBERGRAPHICS, Buffalo, NY

WHAT ARE THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS FACING ORGANIZATIONS TODAY? Lack of employee motivation, poor quality, lowered productivity, high absenteeism and product sabotage top the current list of concerns.

—UCLA Center for Quality of Working Life (1976)



**'Economic Survival'**

# Global Unionism Heralded as Key To Labor Future

By LASZLO K. DOMJAN

ST. LOUIS (UPI)—A longtime labor leader-turned-university professor believes global unions are needed to bargain with the growing number of multinational corporations.

"It's a matter of economic survival," Ernest Calloway said.

Calloway keeps track of interlocking directorates and big-money power plays as part of his duties as a professor of urban affairs at St. Louis University. He joined the university after retiring as the longtime research director for the Joint Council of Teamsters.

Without unions that cross national boundary lines, organized labor has no way to deal with a corporation that can quickly shift operations from the United States to Asian countries, Calloway said.

IN SUCH cases a company finds workers whose wages may be less than a tenth of those of American workers and who are willing to put in long hours and six-day weeks without extra reward.

"It has been the historic pattern of American unions to follow the growth patterns of industry," Calloway said.

"If corporations are global, then we need global unions to bargain with them."

Calloway said the leadership of organized labor is aware of the problems posed by international corporations, and some of the labor hierarchy is getting around to the global union concept. However, he believes the unions are moving too slowly.

The automobile and shoe industries are prime examples of foreign competition which has cost American workers their jobs," he said.

# Preface

I have held a variety of blue-collar and white-collar jobs, which provide some practical background to these essays. In addition to membership in several locals of such unions as the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and the Teamsters, I was, in 1968 and 1969 respectively, vice president and president of the San Francisco Social Services Employees Union.

It would be a great error not to acknowledge the critical work done by Paula on the topics dealt with here. It is primarily her exacting sense of autonomy which disallows her being listed as co-author.

These essays have been published or reprinted by such outlets as Black & Red/New Space, Echanges et Mouvement, Fifth Estate, Internationale Korrespondentie, Les Temps Modernes, Solidarity, and Telos.

John Zerzan



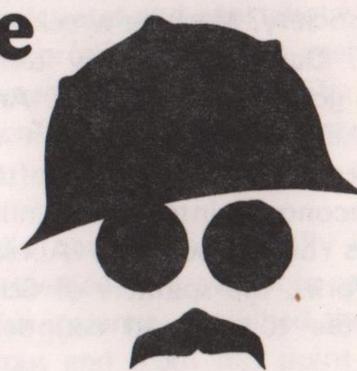
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	5
Who Killed Ned Ludd? .....	6
Unionization in America .....	14
Organized Labor versus "The Revolt Against Work":	
The Critical Contest .....	27
More on Organized Labor .....	44
Unionism and the Labor Front .....	49
Return of the Luddites .....	56

Preface

# Who Killed Ned Ludd?

## A Salute to the Workingmen of Western New York



### CONTRIBUTORS:

County of Erie;

City of Buffalo;

AFL/CIO;

Seymour H. Knox Foundation; The Buffalo Statler Hilton Hotel; William Hengerer Company; Media Study/ Buffalo;

Office of the Mayor;

## ILLUMINATED WORKINGMAN

Citizens Advisory Committee

State University of New York at Buffalo: U.U.A.B., Department of Main Place Mall Association; with the support of The National

Theater, Center for Media Study; Endowment for the Arts and

The New York State Council on the Arts.

An Intermedia Performance of Dance, Film, Slides, Video and Music

(A papier-mache likeness of Ned Ludd is one of the) symbols of the days that have gone, a reminder of what the workers' attitude to the new ideas might be if the unions had not grown strong and efficient.

—Trades Union Congress magazine *Labour*, at the time of the Production Exhibition, 1956

In England, the first industrial nation, and beginning in textiles, capital's first and foremost enterprise there, arose the widespread revolutionary movement (between 1810 and 1820) known as Luddism. The challenge of the Luddite risings - and their defeat - was of very great importance to the subsequent course of modern society. Machine-wrecking, a principal weapon, pre-dates this period, to be sure; Darvall accurately termed it "perennial" throughout the 18th century, in good times and bad. And it was certainly not confined to either textile workers or England. Farm workers, miners, millers, and many others joined in destroying machinery, often against what would generally be termed their own 'economic interests.' Similarly, as Fulop-Miller reminds us, there were the workers of Eurpen and Aix-la-Chapelle who destroyed the important Cockerill Works, the spinners of Schmollen and Crimmitschau who razed the mills of those towns, and countless others at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

Nevertheless, it was the English cloth workers - knitters, weavers, spinners, croppers, shearmen, and the like - who initiated a movement, which "in sheer insurrectionary fury has rarely been more widespread in English history," as Thompson wrote, in what is probably an understatement. Though generally characterized as a blind, unorganized, reactionary, limited, and ineffective upheaval, this 'instinctive' revolt against the new economic order was very successful for a time and had revolutionary aims. Strongest in the more developed areas, the central and northern parts of the country especially, *The Times* of February 11, 1812 described "the appearance of open warfare" in England. Vice-Lieutenant Wood wrote to Fitzwilliam in the government on June 17, 1812 that "except for the very spots which were occupied by Soldiers, the Country was virtually in the possession of the lawless." The Luddites indeed were irresistible at several moments in the second decade of the century and developed a very high morale and self-consciousness. As Cole and Postgate put it,

"Certainly there was no stopping the Luddites. Troops ran up and down helplessly, baffled by the silence and connivance of the workers." Further, an examination of newspaper accounts, letters, and leaflets reveals insurrection as the stated intent; for example, "all Nobles and tyrants must be brought down," read part of a leaflet distributed in Leeds. Evidence of explicit general revolutionary preparations was widely available in both Yorkshire and Lancashire, for instance, as early as 1812.

An immense amount of property was destroyed, including vast numbers of textile frames which had been redesigned for the production of inferior goods. In fact, the movement took its name from young Ned Ludd, who, rather than do the prescribed shoddy work, took a sledge-hammer to the frames at hand. This

insistence on either the control of the productive processes or the annihilation of them fired the popular imagination and brought the Luddites virtually unanimous support. Hobsbawm declared that there existed an "overwhelming sympathy for machine-wreckers in all parts of the population," a condition which by 1813, according to Churchill, "had exposed the complete absence of means of preserving public order." Frame-breaking had been made a capital offense in 1812 and increasing numbers of troops had to be dispatched, to a point exceeding the total Wellington had under his command against Napoleon. The army, however, was not only spread very thin, but was often found unreliable due to its own sympathies and the presence of many conscripted Luddites in the ranks. Likewise, the local magistrates and constabulary could not be counted upon, and a massive spy system proved ineffective against the real solidarity of the populace. As might be guessed the volunteer militia, as detailed under the Watch and Ward Act, served only to "arm the most powerfully disaffected," according to the Hammonds, and thus the modern professional police system had to be instituted, from the time of Peel.

Intervention of this nature could hardly have been basically insufficient, though, especially given the way Luddism seemed to grow more revolutionary from event to event. Cole and Postgate, for instance, described the post-1815 Luddites as more radical than those previous and from this point imputes to them that they "set themselves against the factory system as a whole." Also, Thompson observed that as late as 1819 the way was still open for a successful general insurrection.

Required against what Mathias termed "the attempt to destroy the new society," was a weapon much closer to the point of production, namely the furtherance of an acceptance of the fundamental order in the form of trade unionism. Though it is clear that the promotion of trade unionism was a consequence of Luddism as much as the creation of the modern police was, it must also be realized that there had existed a long-tolerated tradition of unionism among the textile workers and others prior to the Luddite risings. Hence, as Morton and Tate almost alone point out, the machine-wrecking of this period cannot be viewed as the despairing outburst of workers having no other outlet. Despite the Combination Acts, which were an unenforced ban on unions between 1799 and 1824, Luddism did not move into a vacuum but was successful for a time in opposition to the refusal of the extensive union apparatus to compromise capital. In fact, the choice between the two was available and the unions were thrown aside in favor of the direct organization of workers and their radical aims.

During the period in question it is quite clear that unionism was seen as basically distinct from Luddism and promoted as such, in the hope of absorbing the Luddite autonomy. Contrary to the fact of the Combination Acts, unions were often held to be legal in the courts, for example, and when unionists were prosecuted they generally received light punishment or none whatever, whereas the Luddites were usually hanged. Some members of Parliament openly blamed the owners for the social distress, for not making full use of the trade union path of escape. This is not to say that union objectives and control were as clear or pronounced as they are to all today, but the indispensable role of unions vis-a-vis capital was becoming clear, illumined by the crisis at hand and the felt necessity for allies in the pacification of the workers. Members of Parliament in

the Midlands counties urged Gravenor Henson, head of the Framework Knitters Union, to combat Luddism—as if this were needed. His method of promoting restraint was of course his tireless advocacy of the extension of union strength. The Framework Knitters Committee of the union, according to Church's study of Nottingham, "issued specific instructions to workmen not to damage frames." And the Nottingham Union, the major attempt at a general industrial union, likewise set itself against Luddism and never employed violence.

If unions were hardly the allies of the Luddites, it can only be said that they were the next stage after Luddism in the sense that unionism played the critical role in its defeat through the divisions, confusion, and deflection of energies the unions engineered. It "replaced" Luddism in the same way that it rescued the manufacturers from the taunts of the children in the streets, from the direct power of the producers. Thus the full recognition of unions in the repeal acts in 1824 and 1825 of the Combination Acts "had a moderating effect upon popular discontent," in Darvall's words. The repeal efforts, led by Place and Hume, easily passed an unreformed Parliament, by the way, with much pro-repeal testimony from employers as well as from unionists, with only a few reactionaries opposed. In fact, while the conservative arguments of Place and Hume included a prediction of fewer strikes post-repeal, many employers understood the cathartic, pacific role of strikes and were not much dismayed by the rash of strikes which attended repeal. The repeal Acts of course officially delimited unionism to its traditional marginal wages and hours concern, a legacy of which is the universal presence of "management's rights" clauses in collective bargaining contracts to this day.

The mid-1830's campaign against unions by some employers only underlined in its way the central role of unions: the campaign was possible only because the unions had succeeded so well as against the radicality of the unmediated workers in the previous period. Hence, Lecky was completely accurate later in the century when he judged that "there can be little doubt that the largest, wealthiest and best-organized Trade Unions have done much to diminish labor conflicts," just as the Webbs also conceded in the 19th century that there existed much more labor revolt before unionism became the rule.

But to return to the Luddites, we find very few first-person accounts and a virtually secret tradition mainly because they projected themselves through their acts, not an ideology. And what was it really all about? Stearns, perhaps as close as the commentators come, wrote "The Luddites developed a doctrine based on the presumed virtues of manual methods." He all but calls them 'backward-looking wretches' in his condescension, yet there is a grain of truth here certainly. The attack of the Luddites was not occasioned by the introduction of new machinery, however, as is commonly thought, for there is no evidence of such in 1811 and 1812 when Luddism proper began. Rather, the destruction was levelled at the new slip-shod methods which were ordered into effect on the extant machinery. Not an attack against production on economic grounds, it was above all the violent response of the textile workers (and soon joined by others) to their attempted degradation in the form of inferior work; shoddy goods - the hastily-assembled "cut-ups," primarily - was the issue at hand. While Luddite offensives generally corresponded to periods of economic downturn, it was because employers often took advantage of these periods to introduce new production methods. But it was also true that not all periods of

privation produced Luddism, as it was that Luddism appeared in areas not particularly depressed. Leicestershire, for instance, was the least hit by hard times and it was an area producing the finest quality woolen goods; Leicestershire was a strong center for Luddism.

To wonder what was so radical about a movement which seemed to demand "only" the cessation of fraudulent work, is to fail to perceive the inner truth of the valid assumption, made on every side, of the of the connection between frame-breaking and sedition. As if the fight by the producer for the integrity of his work-life can be made without calling the whole of capitalism into question. The demand for the cessation of fraudulent work necessarily becomes a cataclysm, an all-or-nothing battle insofar as it is pursued; it leads directly to the heart of the capitalist relationship and its dynamic.

Another element of the Luddite phenomenon generally treated with condescension, by the method of ignoring it altogether, is the organizational aspect. Luddites, as we all know, struck out wildly and blindly, while the unions provide the only organized form to the workers. But in fact, the Luddites organized themselves locally and even federally, including workers from all trades, with an amazing coordination. Eschewing an alienating structure, their organization was, wisely, neither formal nor permanent. Their revolt tradition was without a center and existed largely as an "unspoken code"; theirs was a non-manipulative community, organization which trusted itself. All this, of course, was essential to the depth of Luddism, to the appeal of its roots. In practice, "no degree of activity by the magistrates or by large reinforcements of military deterred the Luddites. Every attack revealed planning and method," stated Thompson, who also gave credit to their "superb security and communications." An army officer in Yorkshire understood their possession of "a most extraordinary degree of concert and organization." William Cobbett wrote, concerning a report to the government in 1812: "And this is the circumstance that will most puzzle the ministry. They can find no agitators. It is a movement of the people's own."

Coming to the rescue of the authorities, however, despite Cobbett's frustrated comments, was the leadership of the Luddites. Theirs was not a completely egalitarian movement, though this element may have been closer to the mark than was their appreciation of how much was within their grasp and how narrowly it eluded them. Of course, it was from among the leaders that "political sophistication" issued most effectively in time, just as it was from them that union cadres developed in some cases.

In the 'pre-political' days of the Luddites - developing in our 'post-political' days, too - the people openly hated their rulers. They cheered Pitt's death in 1806 and, more so, Perceval's assassination in 1812. These celebrations at the demise of prime ministers bespoke the weakness of mediations between rulers and ruled, the lack of integration between the two. The political enfranchisement of the workers was certainly less important than their industrial enfranchisement or integration, via unions; it proceeded the more slowly for this reason. Nevertheless, it is true that a strong weapon of pacification were the strenuous efforts made to the interest the population in legal activities, namely the drive to widen the electoral basis of Parliament. Cobbett, described by many as the most powerful pamphleteer in English history, induced many to join Hampden Clubs in pursuit of voting reform, and was also noted, in the words of

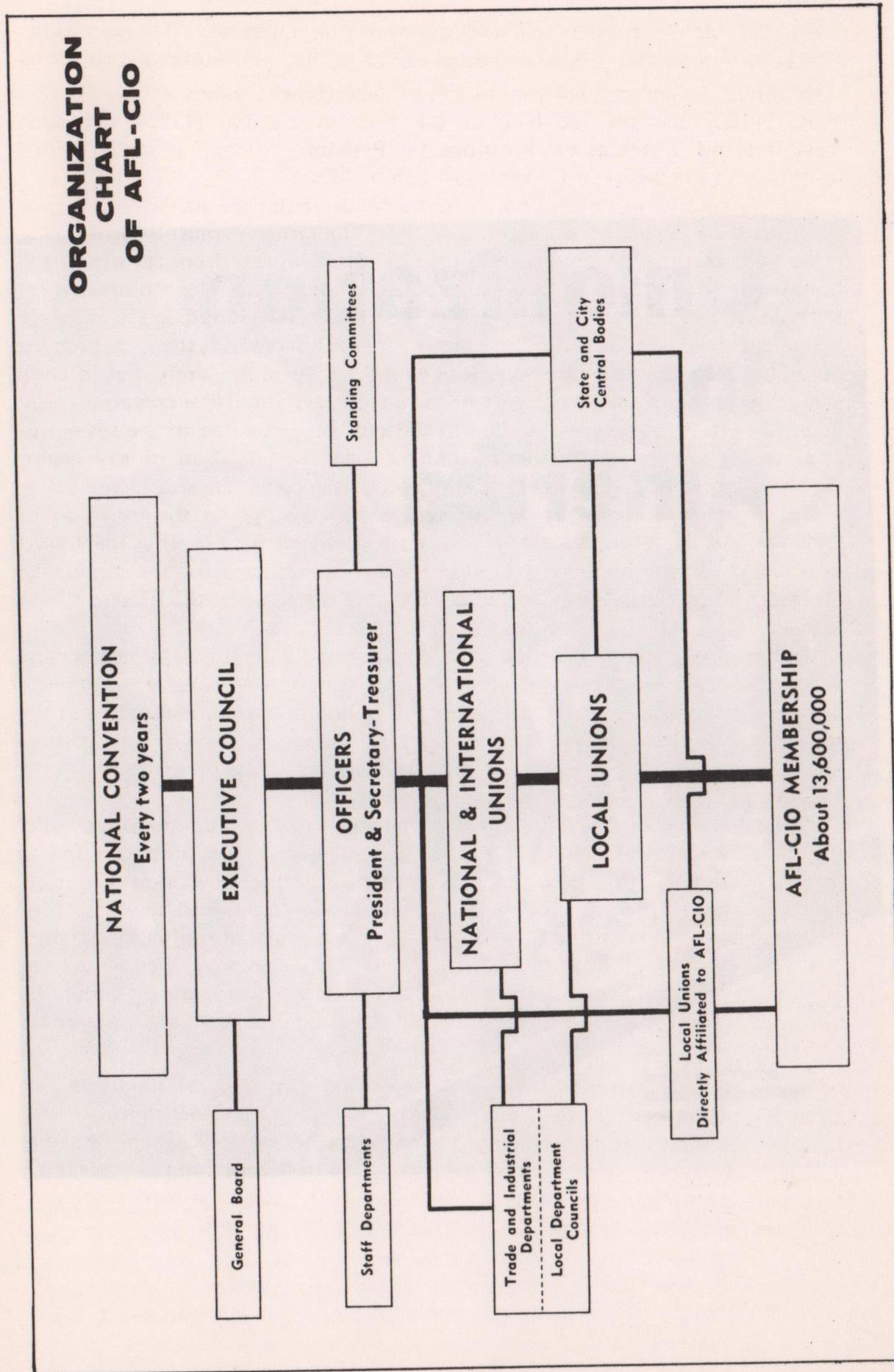
Davis, for his "outspoken condemnation of the Luddites." The pernicious effects of this divisive reform campaign can be partially measured by comparing such robust earlier demonstrations of anti-government wrath as the Gordon Riots (1780) and the mobbing of the King in London (1795) with such massacres and fiascos as the Pentridge and Peterloo "risings," which coincided roughly with the defeat of Luddism just before 1820.

But to return, in conclusion, to more fundamental mechanisms, we again confront the problem of work and unionism. The latter, it must be agreed, was made permanent upon the effective divorce of the worker from control of the instruments of production - and, of course, unionism itself contributed most critically to this divorce, as we have seen. Some, certainly including the marxists, see this defeat and its form, the victory of the factory system, as both an inevitable and desirable outcome, though even they must admit that in work execution resides a significant part of the direction of industrial operations even now. A century after Marx, Galbraith located the guarantee of the system of productivity over creativity in the unions' basic renunciation of any claims regarding work itself. But work, as all ideologists sense, is an area closed off to falsification. Work activities are the kernel, impervious to the intrusion of ideology and its forms, such as mediation and representation. Thus ideologists ignore the unceasing universal luddite contest over control of the productive processes. Thus class struggle is something quite different to the producer than to the ideologue.

In the early trade union movement there existed a good deal of democracy. Widespread, for example, was the practice of designating delegates by rotation or by lot. But what cannot be legitimately democratized is the real defeat at the root of the unions' victory, which makes them the organization of complicity, a mockery of community. Form on this level cannot disguise unionism, the agent of acceptance and maintenance of a grotesque world.

The marxian quantification elevates productivity as the summum bonum, as leftists likewise ignore the ending of the direct power of the producers and so manage incredibly, to espouse unions as all that untutored workers can have. The opportunism and elitism of all the Internationals, indeed the history of leftism, sees its product finally in fascism when accumulated confines bring their result. Then fascism can successfully appeal to workers as the removal of inhibitions, as the "Socialism of Action," etc. - as revolutionary - it should be made clear how much was buried with the Luddites and what a terrible anti-history was begun.

There are those who already again fix the label of "age of transition" on today's growing crisis, hoping all will turn out nicely in another defeat for the luddites. We see today the same need to enforce work discipline as in the earlier period, and the same awareness by the population of the meaning of "progress." But quite possibly we now can recognize all our enemies the more clearly, so that this time the transition can be in the hands of the creators.



# Unionization in America



Never Too Young  
to Learn About Steel  
see page 2

Throughout the Left there is a wrong impression of the labor struggles of the Depression, which obscures our understanding of the nature and origin of the increasingly anti-union 'revolt against work' today.

John Zerzan

Trade unions in the 1920's were generally in a weak and worsening position. While union membership constituted 19.4% of non-agricultural workers in 1920, only 10.2% were organized by 1930. The employee representation plans, or company unions, of "welfare capitalism" were being instituted as substitutes for unionism, in an effort at stabilized, peaceful industrial relations.

There were some, however, who even before the Crash realized that independent unions were essential for effective labor-management cooperation. In 1925, for example, Arthur Nash of the Golden Rule Clothing Company invited Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers to organize his employees. Mr. Nash explained in this way: "I had a job that I could not do, and I just passed the buck to Mr. Hillman." Gerard P. Swope, president of General Electric, tried as early as 1926 to persuade the AFL to organize a nation-wide union of electrical workers on an industrial basis. Swope believed that having an industrial union might well mean "the difference between an organization with which we could work on a business-like basis and one that would be a source of endless difficulties." In 1928 George Mead wrote "Why I Unionized My Plant," describing in glowing terms his bringing the papermakers' union to his Wisconsin employees. Also in 1928, Secretary of Labor Davis asked that year's AFL convention to eliminate jurisdictional squabbling and get on with the kind of mass organizing that business desired. Another example of the pacifying, stabilizing possibilities of unionization followed the spontaneous strike movement of Southern textile workers in 1929. Commenting on AFL efforts to organize the union-less and uncontrolled mill workers, the *Chicago Tribune* in early 1930 expressed its support: "The effort of the Federation to organize the mill workers of the South deserves the endorsement of far-seeing businessmen throughout the country."

But with the onset of the Depression, the weakness of the AFL and its craft union approach became even more obvious. With the trend toward fewer skilled workers, the Federation's attempts to sell itself to industry as a frankly peace-keeping institution were increasingly out of touch with its capabilities. The Crash, moreover, did not awaken the craft union leaders to a new awareness of the changing industrial order. Noted businessman Edward Louis Sullivan classified the AFL as simply "reactionary."

In the early 1930's, some labor leaders became involved with a group of far-sighted businessmen who saw the need for mass unionization. John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman, destined to play major roles in the formulation of the National Recovery Act of 1933 and the formation of the CIO, came to realize by 1932 that government and business might be enlisted in the cause of industrial unionism. Gerard Swope, the above-mentioned president of GE,

unveiled his Swope Plan in 1931 with the help of employers like Chamber of Commerce president Henry I. Harriman. Self-government in industry, via extended trade associations which would operate outside anti-trust laws, was the basis of the plan. An essential facet was to be the unionization of the basic industries, with unions possessing the same kind of disciplinary power over the workers as the trade associations would exercise over individual firms.

In their enthusiasm for a controlled, rationalized corporate system, these labor and business leaders were as one. "Lewis and Hillman, in the end, differed little from Gerard Swope and Henry I. Harriman," in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. President Hoover labeled these plans "sheer fascism." By 1932, in fact, the government stood committed to labor's right to organize. Pre-dating the NRA by a year, the Norris-Laguardia Act not only outlawed the "yellow-dog" contract and certain kinds of injunctions but fully sanctioned the right to collective bargaining.

Section 7a of the NRA became the focus of attention after its enactment in June, 1933, however, and the reason seems two-fold. 7a's guarantee of labor's right to collective bargaining had the weight of a strong resurgence of labor unrest in 1933, as compared to the relative quiescence of 1932. Fully 812,000 workers struck in 1933, whereas only 243,000 had struck in 1932.

The second reason for the utilization of Section 7a was that it was part of a whole stabilization program, which embodied the Swope Paln-type thinking on the need for a near-cartellization of business and the curtailment of much competition. Swope, nto surprisingly, was one of the NRA's main architects - along with John L. Lewis.

With the NRA, the full integration of labor into the business system came a step closer to fruition. In the context of a continuing depression and increasing worker hostility, the need for industrial unionism became more and more apparent to government leaders. Donald Richberg, an author of both Norris-LaGuardia and NRA, decried craft unionism's failure to organize more than a small minority, and saw industrial unions as the key to industrial stability. As labor writer Benjamin Stolberg put it, in his "A Government in Search of a Labor Movement," "The old-fashioned craft leader is through, for he is helpless to express the increasing restlessness of American labor." And Stolberg knew that President Roosevelt saw the need for unions, in order to safely contain that restlessness: "NRA was wholly an administrative measure . . . It shows that Mr. Roosevelt believes that what American industry needs desperately is the recognition and extension of the trade union movement."

Concerning FDR, there is ample evidence that Stolberg is correct and that Roosevelt consistently held to a basic belief in collective bargaining. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he sat on the Executive Board of the National Civic Federation, that early and important organization of heads of business and labor formed to promote amity through contracts and close communications. As Governor of New York, Roosevelt had been impressed by Swope's arguments and "had talked to John Sullivan of the State Federation of Labor in New York about the possibility of industrial unions being organized in plants like General Electric," according to Frances Perkins.

Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor, recounted the President's advice to a group of businessmen: "You don't need to be afraid about unions . . . You shouldn't be afraid to have them organize in your factory. They don't want to run the business. You will probably get a lot better production and a lot more

peace and happiness if you have a good union organization and a good contract."

It was not surprising that Roosevelt's choice to head the NRA, Gen. Hugh Johnson, "appreciates that industry cannot function without organized labor," in the judgment of Stolberg. Nor is the opinion of *Fortune*, that most prestigious of big business periodicals, surprising as regards the NRA as vehicle for unionization. In December, 1933 *Fortune* implied disapproval of the Ford Motor Company as being "ruled primarily by fear," while noting that firms unionized under NRA's 7a have the joint strength of both NRA and union officials to limit strikes. The phoney, staged strike became a safer bet at this time, owing to the NRA presence. In August 1933, for example, the ILGWU staged a strike of New York dressmakers, carefully arranged by union and NRA officials to last exactly 4 days and bring the unorganized dressmakers into the union and under an NRA code.

Where the AFL did not attempt stage-managed strikes, it worked to defeat legitimate walk-outs. Louis Adamic concluded that "The Federation as a whole . . . sabotaged or suppressed all important rank-and-file or spontaneous movements in 1933 and 1934, especially those in steel and rubber. The one exception was the Bridges movement on the coast." It is far from clear, however, that even one exception occurred.

Under the leadership of Harry Bridges, the organizing of West Coast longshoremen had culminated in the famous San Francisco general strike of July, 1934. Charles Larrene, the maritime labor historian, concludes that the only "benefit" obtained by the workers was their being brought under union contract: "The terms under which the prolonged, violent strike was settled were similar, to be sure, to some of the proposals for settlement made before the strike began. Looked at in his perspective it might seem that the strike served no purpose. But looked at in the larger context of collective bargaining, the strike was both unavoidable and necessary."

The settlement of the 1934 strike marked the beginning of a change in consciousness for San Francisco employers; though waterfront strife continued sporadically until 1937, the employers had begun to see that all that union officialdom really wanted was the closed shop, with the dues and power over the membership it entails. And for this, union discipline could then be put to the service of guaranteeing an absence of trouble from the longshoremen. Roosevelt, as indicated above, learned this lesson rather earlier; his Secretary of Labor, noting the lack of White House alarm over the SF general strike, commented on the power of union officials over union members: "Sensible labor leaders advised (sic) the men to get back to work, that this was no time for an unconsidered sympathetic strike, even if it was also in their own interest."

*Fortune* viewed Bridges as one of the "gifted, temperamental, power-wielding leaders of American maritime labor without whose compliance no decrees of the Maritime Commission are likely to keep the peace." The pro-Bridges article praised him and other labor leaders for their introduction of stable regularised labor relations to shipping and other industries.

San Francisco employers had come, by 1937, to fully appreciate the necessity of unionization as the key to a dependable work force. Irving Bernstein, in his authoritative history of Depression labor, tells us that in 1937 "the town's leading businessmen formed the Committee of Forty-Three, hoping to persuade the unions to join in a program to stabilize labor relations. The labor

people declined." The union chiefs declined, it should be added, because they feared membership reaction to institutionalized labor-management collusion of this kind. Bernstein continues: "But the Committee served a purpose - to commit San Francisco's employers to collective bargaining. And it was those with experience with Bridges and the ILWU, notably the two leading owners of steamship lines, Roger Lapham and Almon Roth, who led the way, forming the SF Employers Council which had as its purpose "the recognition and exercise of the right of the employers to bargain collectively."

Given the effective control over workers that only unions can manage, it was not at all out of place that San Francisco employers should have striven for collective bargaining, nor that the promotion and coordination of contracts quickly spread up and down the Pacific Coast.

Meanwhile 1934 and 1935 saw a deepening trend toward labor militancy and violence. The bloody Electric Auto-Lite strike in Toledo and the street warfare of the striking Minneapolis truck drivers were among the most spectacular of 1934, a year in which 40 strikers were killed. In less than eighteen months, between the summer of 1933 and the winter of 1934, troops were called out in sixteen states. The important point is that the AFL could not control this activism; though it might stall and sell out the workers, it could not provide the kind of organization that could enroll all of a firm's workers into a single, industry-wide union and bring peace under collective bargaining. Workers resisted the conservative craft form of organization and the constant jurisdictional bickering that accompanied it and began to experiment with new organizational forms. For example, union locals in Hudson and Oldsmobile plants seceded from the AFL in August, 1934, to elect representatives from their own ranks and negotiate democratically. The *Wall Street Journal* discussed speculation as to the radicalism of the independents for several days, in articles such as "More on the Secession," and "Disaffection Spreads." Labor partisan Art Preis provides some revealing figures: "By 1935, the membership of the AFL federal auto locals had dwindled from 100,000 to 20,000. When the Wolman Board of the NRA took a poll in 1935 to determine 'proportional representation' in a number of plants in Michigan, of the 163,150 votes cast, 88.7% were for unaffiliated representatives; 8.6% for leaders of AFL federal locals."

If the NRA and its Section 7a was intended to fix labor "into a semi-public unionism whose organization was part of a government plan," in Stolberg's words, Washington in 1935 yet hoped to make good on the 1933 beginning. From the point of view of industrial peace, the impetus, as we have seen, was certainly stronger by 1935, when the Wagner bill was being considered. Supporters of the measure, like Lloyd Garrison and Harry Millis, put forth the "safety measure" theory, arguing the importance of assisting unionism and portraying the state as friend of the worker, in order to combat worker radicalism. Leon Keyserling, legislative assistant to Senator Wagner, feared an uncontrolled labor movement, and saw a goal of government-sponsored labor relations which could reduce conflict and induce labor and business to work together in concert with government.

The pressing need for a government guarantee to unionism was readily appreciated and the Wagner bill breezed through the Senate in May by a 62-11 margin. Nonetheless, all of the standard accounts continue to assert business'

steadfast opposition to the bill in spite of the evidence. The eminent business historian Thomas Cochran, for example, re-affirms the old thesis, only to admit that "the struggle in Congress appears very mild . . . All of this is hard to explain."

By this time, of course, leading elements of business and government saw collective bargaining as imperative for the steadying of the industrial order. Secretary Perkins is worth quoting at some length:

It may be surprising to some people to realize that men looked upon as the conservative branch of the Roosevelt administration were cooperative in bringing about a new, more modern and more reasonable attitude on the part of employers toward collective bargaining agreements. Averell Harriman of the Union Pacific Railroad, Carl Gray of the same railroad, Daniel Willard of the Baltimore and Ohio, Walter Teagle of the Standard Oil Company, Thomas Lamont of J.P. Morgan and Company, Myron Taylor of U.S. Steel, Gerard Swope of General Electric, and Robert Armory, a textile manufacturer, were among those whom I asked for help from time to time in difficult situations, where the problem was to start collective bargaining negotiations. Roosevelt knew that these people had helped and was always very grateful to them.

Nor was this "more reasonable attitude" merely a privately expressed one. Of many instances which could be cited, is the speech of Henry Heimann, head of the National Association of Credit Men (*Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 1934), which called for the abandonment of the company union idea and the control of labor in strong, national bodies.

By the time of the 1935 AFL Convention, the stage was set: workers in auto, rubber, radio, textiles, and steel were furious over the inaction, bad faith, and collusion with management that they saw in the AFL. The vast majority of General Motors workers, for example, regarded continued membership in an AFL auto local as proof of being a paid agent of GM, according to Wyndham Mortimer. Craft-style unionism stood in dire need of replacement by newer forms if unions were to contain the nation's workers.

John L. Lewis, the conservative and ruthless head of the United Mine Workers, was to lead the move toward industrial unionism. A Republican up to and during the 1932 presidential campaign, he ruled the often resistant miners by dictatorial methods. The servility and corruption of the union begat constant revolts from the ranks against Lewis. A miner interviewed by Studs Terkel testified to this state of affairs when he spoke of a UMW field representative being tarred and feathered "for tryin' to edge in with management," and declared that the "chairman of the local was thick with the superintendent of the mine." In October, 1933 *Fortune* related the miners' hatred of Lewis during the 1920's and the "Lewis Must Go" campaign of 1932. Generally quite pro-Lewis, "his repressive tactics in the union" were mentioned, and the article concluded with the judgment that the prospect of organizing 30,000,000 workers did not frighten Lewis - nor, by very strong implication, should it frighten business.

With Lewis' famous - and no doubt calculated - punch to the jaw of Bill Hutcheson, boss of the Carpenters Union and a major craft unionism spokesman, a split from the AFL was signalled. The blow, at the 1935 AFL

Convention, enabled Lewis to represent himself to the bitter and distrustful industrial workers as a new kind of leader. "By attacking Hutcheson, he was attacking the trade unionism these workers so bitterly hated . . . Hutcheson symbolized to millions of frustrated workers that craft-unionism policy that had defeated their spontaneous organizations," in the words of Saul Alinsky.

Within a month of the October convention, the Committee for Industrial Organization was formed by Lewis and a few others in the Federation who headed industrial-type unions. By early 1937, locals of those unions affiliated with the new CIO were expelled from all city and state AFL councils, making the break final and official.

The CIO began with a feudal structure in which all officers were appointed by Lewis, giving it an important advantage over its AFL predecessors. Whereas the AFL officials needed decades to emasculate the fairly autonomous city and state central councils and establish centralized national power, the CIO chiefs established complete control over collective bargaining and strike sanction almost from the outset. Leaders of both the AFL and CIO were "agreed on the necessity for circumscribing the increasing militancy in the basic industries . . . No one in the AFL or in the CIO was under any illusions that Lewis, Murray, Hillman, and Dubinsky were out to build a radically new kind of movement," as Sidney Lens put it.

The presence of Communists and other leftists within the CIO does not alter the picture, and not a few business leaders understood the anti-radical character of the new organization. For example, "when the CIO was organized and the left-led United Electrical Workers began to organize GE, Gerard Swope rejoiced," noted Ronald Radosh. Swope, the NRA architect, informed one of his GE vice presidents that "if you can't get along with these fellows and settle matters, there's something wrong with you." The UEW was praised by Swope as "well-led, the discipline good." Radosh, in fact, concludes that "it was the more politically radical unions that led the integration of labor into the corporate structure."

Worker action continued to develop, however, in the relative absence of unions throughout 1935 and 1936. New forms of struggle and organization were adopted which deeply frightened business, government, and union superiors alike. Employee-run independent unions sprang up, often employing radical tactics which challenged the traditional rights of management to define the nature of the job. The "skippy," for instance, was a very effective form of defiance that was spontaneously adopted by the man on the assembly line. Workers might quietly agree to skip every fifth fender or leave untightened every sixth bolt to protest intolerable job conditions. Rapidly the line would come to a halt in complete confusion, with enraged but helpless foremen at a loss to single out the participants.

The most threatening device and the one to become very widely utilized was, of course, the sitdown strike. Like the skippy it more often than not was employed by the "unorganized"; in fact, the sitdown reflects worker suspicion of union structure and control. As Louis Adamic put it so well:

Most workers distrust - if not consciously, then unconsciously - union officials and strike leaders and committees, even when they have elected them themselves. The beauty of the sitdown or stay-in is that there are no leaders or officials to distrust. There can be no sell-out. Such standard procedure as strike sanction is hopelessly

obsolete when the workers drop their tools, stop their machines, and sit down beside them. The initiative, conduct, and control come directly from the men involved.

The sitdown seems to have first become an established tactic in the rubber factories of Akron. Between 1933 and 1936 it became tradition in Akron, developed largely because the union had failed to resist the speed-up.

The speed-up appears to have been the chief single cause of discontent throughout mass production. A 1934 study of the auto industry revealed that the grievance "mentioned most frequently . . . and upper-most in the minds of those who testified is the speed-up." Tactics like the sitdown were taken up when workers felt they had to challenge the employer's absolute right to control the work process, in the absence of union interest in questioning management prerogatives. The challenge to the speed-up came not only out of the sheer fatigue felt over the absolute rate of production, then, but also because the production worker was not free to set the pace of his work and to determine the manner in which it was to be performed. In the factories was joined the battle over who was to control the worker's life on the job. This was the real issue; as Mary Vorse put it, "the auto workers' discontent came in about equal parts from the speed-up and the absolute autocracy of the industry."

The struggle was waged not only by the auto workers, of course, but it was GM workers who waged one of the most important fights. And the role of the union as conservator of the existing relationships, rather than as challenger of them, may be clearly seen in the context of the great GM sitdown strike.

Actually the sitdown movement that was beginning to spread rapidly by late 1936 was anything but a part of CIO tactics. It "sprang spontaneously from an angered mass of workers. All American labor leaders would have been shocked, scared and instinctively opposed to the initiation or approval of this disorderly revolutionary upheaval," according to Saul Alinsky.

The 44-day GM sitdown began on December 28, 1936, when some 7,000 at Cleveland's Fisher Body plant struck. Two days later workers in Fisher Body No. 2 in Flint sat down and the spontaneous movement quickly spread throughout the GM system, bringing it to a standstill.

The former Harvard economist J. Raymond Walsh stated flatly that the CIO had certainly not called the strike: "The CIO high command . . . tried in vain to prevent the strike." As Wellington Roe wrote: "To the public, at least, Lewis was its originator. Actually Lewis had no more to do with the sitdown strike than some native of Patagonia." Although, as James Wechsler, Lewis' biographer, recorded, "he gave a superb initiation of a man who had worked everything out in advance."

Again, it was the lack of control over the assembly line that produced the sitdown among auto workers. Henry Kraus' book on the GM strike expressed it this way: "It was the speed-up that organized Flint, as it was the one element in the life of all the workers that found a common basis of resentment."

Though union officialdom feared the undisciplined sitdown movement, Lewis and the CIO realized that they must move fast if they hoped to keep up with and establish control over it. Hence Lewis declared on December 31, very early in the strike, that "The CIO stands squarely behind these sitdowns."

This tactic was essential at the time, though approval of sitdowns was revoked just as soon as the CIO could get away with it. Len DeCaux, editor of

the CIO's Union News Service, stated that "as a matter of fact, the first experience of the C.I.O. with sitdowns was in discouraging them."

When the GM strike began, very few employees belonged to the CIO-affiliated United Auto Workers; in Flint only one in 400 belonged to the UAW. It was not, apparently, an easy matter for the CIO to achieve control over the strike. Kraus' account contains several instances of the difficulties encountered, including, "The strike committee had not yet completely established its authority and there were accordingly some resistance and friction at first with a certain tendency to anarchy of action." Wyndham Mortimer, another very pro-union source, admitted that "A very disturbing factor on the union side was that several members of our negotiating committee were convinced that no one in the leadership could be trusted, from John L. Lewis down."

Before centralized authority was effected, many radical possibilities remained open. Sidney Fine's authoritative *Sitdown* recognized the sitdowners' resistance to hierarchical procedures, commenting on the "fierce independence" displayed by the workers. The situation prompted Thomas Brooks to assay that "for a brief time, the CIO teetered on the brink of the revolutionary industrial unionism of the Wobblies." Alinsky states similarly that "the General Motors strike bordered on revolution."

The sitdowns in rubber, which had occurred, from Louis Adamic's observations, "without encouragement from any rank-and-file organizer," much less from any union, and which were almost invariably successful, reached a very important climax at GM. And inasmuch as the GM sitdowners were so vitally concerned with controlling the assembly line as the key issue, basic antagonism between workers and union was implied from the start. The CIO had to attach itself to the sitdown phenomenon and, at least initially, make a show of supporting the workers' actions, but there existed a vast chasm between the attitudes of that movement and the respect for management's rights of the CIO.

CIO leaders tried from the beginning to find a way to squelch the occupation of GM property. In a revealing passage, Secretary of Labor Perkins tells us:

The CIO came to the support of the automobile workers, although I know for a fact that John Lewis and Sidney Hillman and Lee Pressman, CIO counsel, made great efforts to get the men to leave the plant . . . But they would not publicly desert them."

CIO officials had no interest in taking up the issue of speed-up. Regulation of the speed of the line was listed as eighth of eight demands submitted by the UAW to GM on January 4. Predictably the February 11 settlement dealt almost exclusively with union recognition and not at all with speed-up. The union had been granted sole-bargaining-agent status for six months in the 17 struck plants and looked forward to consolidating its position in the enforced absence of any rivals.

When Bud Simons, head of the strike committee in Fisher Body No. 1, was awakened and told of the terms of the settlement, he said, "That won't do for the men to hear. That's not what we've been striking for." And when the union presented the settlement to the strikers, distrust mounted in relation to the unanswered questions as to speed of the line, authority on the shop floor, and working conditions.

The workers' forebodings were borne out by the negotiations which followed the evacuation of the plants. GM's policy was "above all, to preserve managerial discretion in the productive process, particularly over the speed of the line." The fundamental demand of the strike - to the strikers - had been "mutual determination" of the speed of production, but under the contract signed March 12 local management was ensured "full authority" in these matters. Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., GM president, became satisfied that the union was not out to challenge management's rights, and reported "we have retained all the basic powers to manage."

In addition, the union became the effective agency for suppressing workers' direct action against speed-up or other grievances, pledging that "There shall be no suspensions or stoppages of work until every effort has been exhausted to adjust them through the regular grievance procedure, and in no case without the approval of the international officers of the union."

Workers were plainly dissatisfied with the outcome of their sitdown, a fact usually ignored in the many accounts of the 'victorious CIO breakthrough' of the GM occupation. William Knudsen, GM vice president, said that there were 170 sitdowns in GM plants between March and June, 1937, as workers who had become conscious of their great power did not automatically submit to union-management hegemony. Union officials scurried from place to place to quell these stoppages, which they considered a very serious threat to union authority. A *New York Times* article called "Unauthorized Sit-Downs Fought by C.I.O. Unions," described the drastic efforts used to end the sitdowns, including the dismissal of any union representative sympathetic to them. The same April 12, 1937 article ascribed the sitdowns to "dissatisfaction on the part of the workers with the union itself," and reported that "they are as willing in some cases to defy their own leaders as their bosses."

Interestingly, the Communists were just as concerned with restoring proper order via traditional union structures as anyone else in the CIO. Even Eugene Lyons' hysterical *The Red Decade*, which found almost everything in the 1930's to be Party-controlled, did not try to say that the sitdown movement was Red-inspired or dominated.

A sitdown wave moved with amazing rapidity to all types of industry and business in the spring of 1937. *New Masses* of May 4 noted that "the strikes of the Woolworth and Grand girls gave a stunning surprise both to their employers and to the working-class movement." Evelyn Finn, a seamstress interviewed by Studs Terkel, told of the sitdown she was involved in: "The boss was goin' crazy. The union officials came down. They went crazy, too. It was a hilarious day."

The ending of the movement could be effectively and lastingly engineered only from the inside. Before business and government could formulate a solution the union leaders themselves had put the lid on sitdowns. An industrial relations expert on the subject: "The sitdown is too easy a tactic for good discipline . . . because workers can secure grievance settlement by interrupting production through a sitdown, they may eventually think, what's the use of joining a union and paying dues if we can get what we want this way?"

The sitdowns were ended with the unions cooperating with management in the ouster of the workers, for of course the CIO had no intention of helping employees take power over their own jobs. As CIO official Mike Widman put it,

"My union experience taught me that the direction of the working force is vested in management. The union shall not abridge that right, so long as there is no discrimination or unfairness."

Walter Lippmann, in the spring of 1937, warned recalcitrant businessmen "that the more they treat Mr. Lewis and the CIO as public enemies to be resisted at all costs, the more impossible they make it for Mr. Lewis to develop discipline and a sense of responsibility in the ranks. . ." By this time, however, many more employers were peacefully signed up with the CIO.

In March (1937), after three months of secret negotiations, US Steel's Myron Taylor signed a recognition agreement with Lewis, typifying the many industrialists impressed with CIO usefulness. The *New York World-Telegram* reported that "two financiers closely identified with Morgan interests said they had only praise and admiration for Mr. Lewis . . . apparently thoroughly in accord on the main theme that complete industrial organization was inevitable, they hinted that other industrial leaders may be just as receptive to unionization of their plants as is Myron C. Taylor, chief of Big Steel."

The critical CIO role in quelling or preventing sitdowns was certainly not lost on employers. In the steel industry, the CIO's Steel Workers' Organizing Committee found many willing customers, due to management's inability to control its employees unassisted. Charles Haines, producer of steel-making equipment and a member of one of the pioneering steel families of America, was representative of this management awareness. Stability was desired and hence the employers "were asking the SWOC to straighten out their labor difficulties," in Mary Vorse's words.

The bloody "Little Steel" strike was clearly an exception to the quickening trend of employer acceptance of unionism. Concerning the Little Steel strike, by the way, the CIO could have been successful, at least could have avoided the score of dead, had it not been so opposed to the use of the sitdown. Labor commentators Preis, Levinson, Lens, and others agree that the killing of pickets and demonstrators would have been obviated by the use of the sitdown tactic. And more than one writer has wondered if the whole "Memorial Day Massacre" march of unarmed strikers - and the likelihood of their being shot - was not planned by union leaders to produce union martyrs.

A contract with SWOC was a safeguard against work actions, and employers were appreciative. For example: "Major officials of the U.S. Steel Company have repeatedly and publicly attested the satisfactory character of their contractual relations with the unions," reported Robert Brooks. John L. Lewis was to the point when he said in 1937, "A CIO contract is adequate protection against sitdowns, lie-downs, or any other kind of strike."

Professor of labor relations Benjamin Selekman observed that "union leaders have sought to calm down the new members with their seemingly insatiable demands." Likewise, Carroll Dougherty judged that "The induction of large numbers of raw recruits untrained in unionism made guidance from the top necessary," adding, almost as an afterthought, "Yet there was danger that such guidance would develop into permanent dictatorship."

It didn't prove easy for the unions to impose discipline on the many new members. As we have seen, their "seemingly insatiable demands" were never uppermost in the minds of the union leaders; labor leaders must appear to

support worker demands, if they are to initially interest them in union representation. "Only later does the union seek to instruct the individual member in his responsibilities, and such education is a slow process . . . Individual members must come to realize that they cannot take matters into their own hands," wrote John Dunlop.

Exclusive-bargaining-agent status, or the closed shop, is the primary institution by which the union enforces control of the workers. Golden and Ruttenberg, two SWOC officials, candidly argue in *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy* that unions need power and responsibility to maintain discipline. With the closed shop, the union acquires, in effect, the power to fire unruly members; if a member is dropped from the union, he is dropped from his job. Golden and Ruttenberg, as so many other union spokesmen, point out that the union is likely to make noise until it gains the closed shop arrangement, and that management rapidly comes to see the need for a strong (closed shop) union, in the interest of a contained work force. The price of cooperation is thus the closed shop, and it satisfies both union and management.

By 1938, according to Brooks, only a "small minority" of employers opposed collective bargaining as guaranteed by the Wagner Act. It becomes easy to see why. Union leaders were "anxious to demonstrate to the management their responsibility, and their willingness to accept the burden of 'selling' the contract to the rank-and-file and keeping the dissidents in line," according to consultants Sayles and Straus. In many cases, unions simply replaced personnel departments.

As business came increasingly to the awareness of unions as indispensable to the maintenance of a relatively stable and docile labor supply, the ranks of labor exhibited more and more dissatisfaction with "their" new organizations. The 1945 *Trends in Collective Bargaining* study noted that "by around 1940" the labor leader had joined the business leader as an object of "wide-spread cynicism" to the American worker. Similarly, Daugherty reported that workers were chafing under the lack of structural democracy in the unions: "There was evidence, by the end of 1940, that the rank and file were growing restive under such conditions."

Workers, after some initial enthusiasm and hopefulness regarding the CIO, were starting to feel the 'closed system' nature of compulsory unions. In discussing union-management cooperation in the steel industry, CIO officials Golden and Ruttenberg admitted, for example, that "to some workers" the cooperation only added up in practice to "a vicious speed-up."

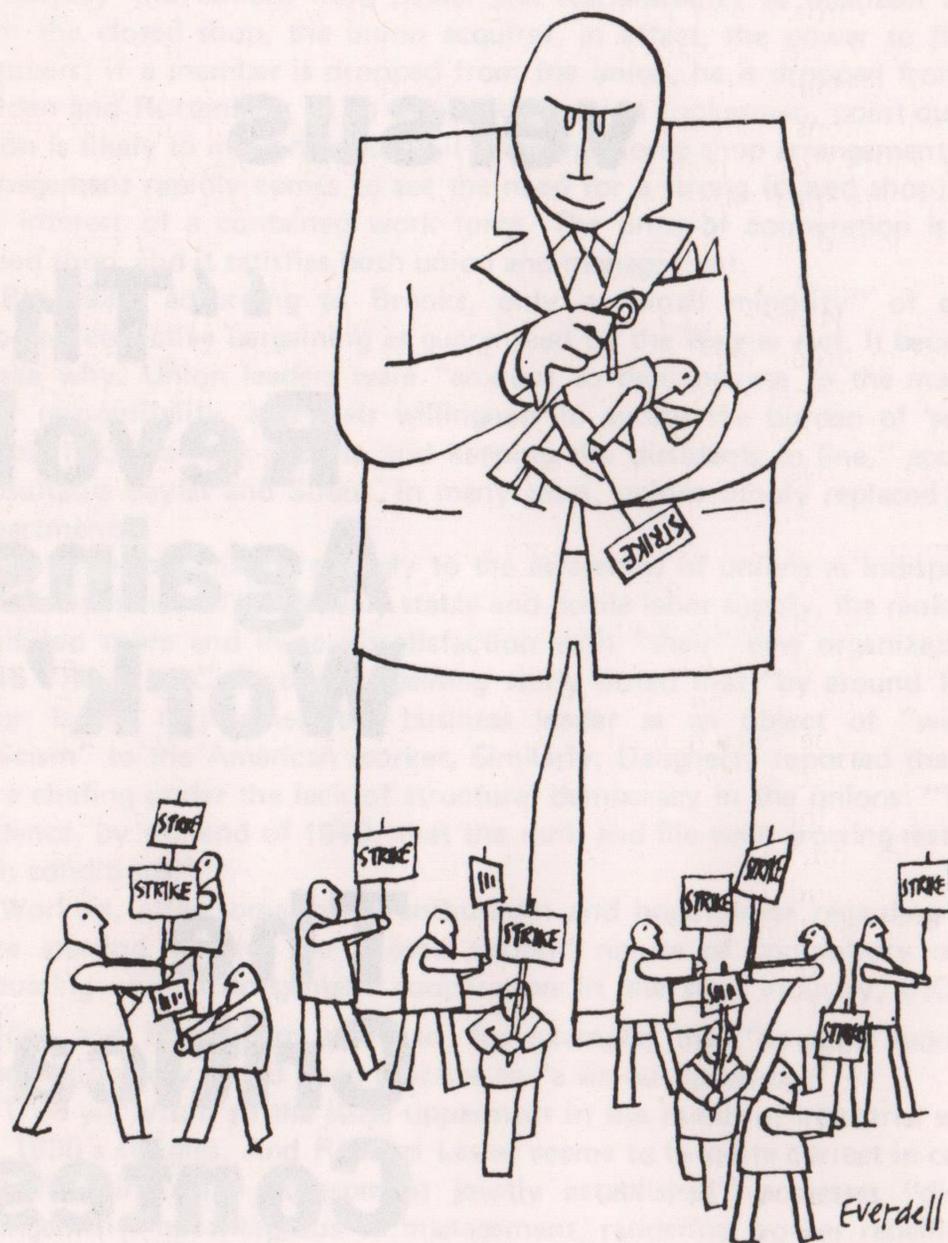
Thus we return to the issue uppermost in the minds of industrial workers in the 1930's struggles. And Richard Lester seems to be quite correct in concluding that "the industrial government jointly established" possesses "disciplinary arrangements advantageous to management, rendering worker rebellions more and more difficult."

# Organized Labor

versus

**“The  
Revolt  
Against  
Work”:**

**The  
Critical  
Contest**



The massing together of the workers is a great inducement to "socialist iconoclasm" which is the threshold to anarchy.

—John Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1955)

Serious commentators on the labor upheavals of the Depression years seem to agree that disturbances of all kinds, including the wave of sit-down strikes of 1936 and 1937, were caused by the 'speed-up' above all.<sup>1</sup> Dissatisfaction among production workers with their new CIO unions set in early, however, mainly because the unions made no efforts to challenge management's right to establish whatever kind of work methods and working conditions they saw fit. The 1945 *Trends in Collective Bargaining* study noted that "by around 1940" the labor leader had joined the business leader as an object of "widespread cynicism" to the American employee.<sup>2</sup> Later in the 1940s C. Wright Mills, in his *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders*, described the union's role thusly: "the integration of union with plant means that the union takes over much of the company's personnel work, becoming the discipline agent of the rank-and-file."<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-1950s, Daniel Bell realized that unionization had not given workers control over their job lives. Struck by the huge, spontaneous walk-out at River Rouge in July, 1949, over the speed of the Ford assembly line, he noted that "sometimes the constraints of work explode with geyser suddenness."<sup>4</sup> And as Bell's *Work and Its Discontents* (1956) bore witness that "the revolt against work is widespread and takes many forms,"<sup>5</sup> so had Walker and Guest's Harvard study, *The Man on the Assembly Line* (1953), testified to the resentment and resistance of the men on the line. Similarly, and from a writer with much working class experience himself, was Harvey Swados' "The Myth of the Happy Worker," published in *The Nation*, August, 1957.

Workers and the unions continued to be at odds over conditions of work during this period. In auto, for example, the 1955 contract between the United Auto Workers and General Motors did nothing to check the 'speed-up' or facilitate the settlement of local shop grievances. Immediately after Walter Reuther made public the terms of the contract he'd just signed, over 70% of GM workers went on strike. An even larger percentage 'wildcatted' after the signing of the 1958 agreement because the union had again refused to do anything about the work itself. For the same reason, the auto workers walked off their jobs again in 1961, closing every GM and a large number of Ford plants.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Jacobs' *The State of the Unions*, Paul Saltan's *The Disenchanted Unionist*, and B.J. Widick's *The Triumphs and Failures of Unionism in the United States* were some of the books written in the early 1960s by pro-union figures, usually former activists, who were disenchanted with what they had only lately and partially discovered to be the role of the unions. A black worker, James Boggs, clarified the process in a sentence: "Looking backwards, one will find that side by side with the fight to control production, has gone the struggle to control the union, and that the decline has taken place simultaneously on both fronts."<sup>7</sup> What displeased Boggs, however, was lauded by business. In the

same year that his remarks were published, *Fortune*, American capital's most authoritative magazine, featured as a cover story in its May, 1963 issue Max Way's "Labor Unions Are Worth the Price."

But by the next year, the persistent dissatisfaction of workers was beginning to assume public prominence, and a June, 1964 *Fortune* article reflected the growing pressure for union action: "Assembly-line monotony, a cause reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, is being revived as a big issue in Detroit's 1964 negotiations,"<sup>8</sup> it reported.

In the middle-1960's another phenomenon was dramatically and violently making itself felt. The explosions in the black ghettos appeared to most to have no connection with the almost underground fight over factory conditions. But many of the participants in the insurrections in Watts, Detroit and other cities were fully employed, according to arrest records.<sup>9</sup> The struggle for dignity in one's work certainly involved the black workers, whose oppression was, as in all other areas, greater than that of non-black workers. Jessie Reese, a Steelworkers' union organizer, described the distrust his fellow blacks felt toward him as an agent of the union: "To organize that black boy out there today you've got to prove yourself to him, because he don't believe nothing you say."<sup>10</sup> Authority is resented, not color.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to more direct forms of opposition to an uncontrolled and alien job world, we encounter the intriguing experience of Bill Watson, who spent 1968 in an auto plant near Detroit. Distinctly post-union in practice, he witnessed the systematic, planned efforts of the workers to substitute their own production plans and methods for those of management. He described it as "a regular phenomenon" brought out by the refusal of management and the UAW to listen to workers' suggestions as to modifications and improvements in the product. "The contradictions of planning and producing poor quality, beginning as the stuff of jokes, eventually became a source of anger . . . temporary deals unfolded between inspection and assembly and between assembly and trim, each with planned sabotage . . . the result was stacks upon stacks of motors awaiting repair . . . it was almost impossible to move . . . the entire six-cylinder assembly and inspection operation was moved away—where new workers were brought in to man it. In the most dramatic way, the necessity of taking the product out of the hands of laborers who insisted on planning the product became overwhelming."<sup>12</sup>

The extent and coordination of the workers' own organization in the plant described by Watson was very advanced indeed, causing him to wonder if it wasn't a glimpse of a new social form altogether, arising from the failure of unionism. Stanley Weir, writing at this time of similar if less highly developed phenomena, found that "in thousands of industrial establishments across the nation, workers have developed informal underground unions" due to the deterioration or lack of improvement in the quality of their daily job lives."<sup>13</sup>

Until 1972—and very often still—the wages and benefits dimension of a work dispute, that part over which the union would become involved, received almost all the attention. In 1965 Thomas Brooks observed that the "apathy" of the union member stemmed from precisely this false emphasis: ". . . grievances on matters apart from wages are either ignored or lost in the limbo of union bureaucracy."<sup>14</sup> A few years later, Dr. David Whitter, industrial consultant to GM, admitted, "That (more money) isn't all they want; it's all they can get."<sup>15</sup>

As the 1960s drew to a close, some of the more perceptive business observers were about to discover this distinction and were soon forced by pressure from below to discuss it publicly. While the October, 1960 *Fortune* stressed the preferred emphasis on wages as the issue in Richard Armstrong's "Labor 1970: Angry, Aggressive, Acquisitive" (while admitting that the rank and file was in revolt "against its own leadership, and in important ways against society itself"), the July, 1970 issue carried Judson Gooding's "Blue-Collar Blues on the Assembly Line: Young auto workers find job disciplines harsh and uninspiring, and they vent their feelings through absenteeism, high turnover, shoddy work, and even sabotage. It's time for a new look at who's down on the line."

With the 1970s there has at last begun to dawn the realization that on the most fundamental issue, control of the work process, the unions and the workers are very much in opposition to each other. A St. Louis Teamster commented that traditional labor practice has as a rule involved "giving up items involving workers' control over the job in exchange for cash and fringe benefits."<sup>16</sup> Acknowledging the disciplinary function of the union, he elaborated on this time-honored bargaining: "Companies have been willing to give up large amounts of money to the union in return for the union's guarantee of no work stoppages." Daniel Bell wrote in 1973 that the trade union movement has never challenged the organization of work itself, and summed up the issue thusly: "The crucial point is that however much an improvement there may have been in wage rates, pension conditions, supervision, and the like, the conditions of work themselves — the control of pacing, the assignments, the design and layout of work — are still outside the control of the worker himself."<sup>17</sup>

Although the position of the unions is usually ignored, since 1970 there has appeared a veritable deluge of articles and books on the impossibility to ignore rebellion against arbitrary work roles. From the covers of a few national magazines: Barbara Garson's "The Hell With Work," *Harper's*, June, 1972; *Life* magazine's "Bored On the Job: Industry Contends with Apathy and Anger on the Assembly Line," September 1, 1972; and "Who Wants to Work?" in the March 26, 1973 *Newsweek*. Other articles have brought out the important fact that the disaffection is definitely not confined to industrial workers. To cite just a few: Judson Gooding's "The Fraying White Collar" in the December, 1970 *Fortune*, Timothy Ingram's "The Corporate Underground," in *The Nation* of September 13, 1971, Marshall Kilduff's "Getting Back at a Boss: The New Underground Papers," in the December 27, 1971 *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Seashore and Barnowe's "Collar Color Doesn't Count," in the August, 1972 *Psychology Today*.

In 1971 *The Workers*, by Kenneth Lasson, was a representative book, focusing on the growing discontent via portraits of nine blue-collar workers. *The Job Revolution* by Judson Gooding appeared in 1972, a management-oriented discussion of liberalizing work management in order to contain employee pressure. The *Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare* on the problem, titled *Work in America*, was published in 1973. Page 19 of the study admits the major facts: ". . . absenteeism, wildcat strikes, turnover, and industrial sabotage (have) become an increasingly significant part of the cost of doing business." The scores of people interviewed by Studs Terkel in his *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and*

*How They Feel about What They Do* (1974), reveal a depth to the work revolt that is truly devastating. His book uncovers a nearly unanimous contempt for work and the fact that active resistance is fast replacing the quiet desperation silently suffered by most. From welders to editors to former executives, those questioned spoke up readily as to their feelings of humiliation and frustration.

If most of the literature of "the revolt against work" has left the unions out of their discussions, a brief look at some features of specific worker actions from 1970 through 1973 will help underline the comments made above concerning the necessarily anti-union nature of this revolt.

During March, 1970, a wildcat strike of postal employees, in defiance of union orders, public employee anti-strike law, and federal injunctions, spread across the country disabling post offices in more than 200 cities and towns.<sup>18</sup> In New York, where the strike began, an effigy of Gus Johnson, president of the letter carriers' union local there, was hung at a tumultuous meeting on March 21 where the national union leaders were called "rats" and "creeps."<sup>19</sup> In many locations, the workers decided to not handle business mail, as part of their work action, and only the use of thousands of National Guardsmen ended the strike, major issues of which were the projected layoff of large numbers of workers and methods of work. In July, 1971, New York postal workers tried to renew their strike activity in the face of a contract proposal made by the new letter carrier president, Vincent Sombrotto. At the climax of a stormy meeting of 3,300 workers, Sombrotto and a lieutenant were chased from the hall and down 33rd Street, narrowly escaping 200 enraged union members, who accused them of "selling out" the membership.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to the Spring of 1970, 100,000 Teamsters in 16 cities wildcatted between March and May to overturn a national contract signed March 23 by IBT President Fitzsimmons. The ensuing violence in the Middle West and West Coast was extensive, and in Cleveland involved no less than a thirty-day blockade of main city thoroughfares and 67 million dollars in damages.<sup>21</sup>

On May 8, 1970, a large group of hard-hat construction workers assaulted peace demonstrators in Wall Street and invaded Pace College and City Hall itself to attack students and others suspected of not supporting the prosecution of the Vietnam war. The riot, in fact, was supported and directed by construction firm executives and union leaders,<sup>22</sup> in all likelihood to channel worker hostility away from themselves. Perhaps alone in its comprehension of the incident was public television (WNET, New York) and its "Great American Dream Machine" program aired May 13. A segment of that production uncovered the real job grievances that apparently underlied the affair. Intelligent questioning revealed, in a very few minutes, that "commie punks" were not wholly the cause of their outburst, as an outpouring of gripes about unsafe working conditions, the strain of the work pace, the fact that they could be fired at any given moment, etc., was recorded. The head of the New York building trades union, Peter Brennan, and his union official colleagues were feted at the White House on May 26 for their patriotism—and for diverting the workers?—and Brennan was later appointed Secretary of Labor.

In July, 1970, on a Wednesday afternoon swing shift a black auto worker at a Detroit Chrysler plant pulled out an M-1 carbine and killed three supervisory personnel before he was subdued by UAW committeemen. It should be added that two others were shot dead in separate auto plant incidents within weeks of

the Johnson shooting spree, and that in May, 1971 a jury found Johnson innocent because of insanity after visiting and being shocked by what they considered the maddening conditions at Johnson's place of work.<sup>23</sup>

The sixty-seven day strike at General Motors by the United Auto Workers in the Fall of 1970 is a classic example of the anti-employee nature of the conventional strike, perfectly illustrative of the ritualized manipulation of the individual which is repeated so often and which changes absolutely nothing about the nature of work.

A Wall Street Journal article of October 29, 1970 discussed the reasons why union and management agreed on the necessity of a strike. The UAW saw that a walk-out would serve as "an escape valve for the frustrations of workers bitter about what they consider intolerable working conditions," and a long strike would "wear down the expectations of members." The Journal went on to point out that, "among those who do understand the need for strikes to ease intra-union pressures are many company bargainers . . . They are aware that union leaders may need such strikes to get contracts ratified and get re-elected."<sup>24</sup> Or, as William Serrin succinctly put it: "A strike, by putting the workers on the street, rolls the steam out of them—it reduces their demands and thus brings agreement and ratification; it also solidifies the authority of the union hierarchy."<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the strike was called. The first order of the negotiating business was the dropping of all job condition demands, which were only raised in the first place as a public relations gesture to the membership. With this understood, the discussions and publicity centered around wages and early retirement benefits exclusively, and the charade played itself out to its pre-ordained end. "The company granted each demand (UAW president) Woodcock had made, demands he could have had in September."<sup>26</sup> Hardly surprising, then, the GM loaned the union \$23 million per month during the strike.<sup>27</sup> As Serrin conceded, the company and the union are not even adversaries, much less enemies.<sup>28</sup>

In November, 1970, the fuel deliverers of New York City, exasperated by their union president's resistance to pleas for action, gave him a public beating. Also in New York, in the following March the Yellow Cab drivers ravaged a Teamsters' Union meeting hall in Manhattan in response to their union officials' refusal to yield the floor to rank and file speakers.

In January, 1971, the interns at San Francisco General Hospital struck, solely over hospital conditions and patient care. Eschewing any ties to organized labor, their negotiating practice was to vote publicly on each point at issue, with all interns present.

The General Motors strike of 1970 discussed above in no way dealt with the content of jobs.<sup>29</sup> Knowing that it would face no challenge from the UAW, especially, it was thought, so soon after a strike and its cathartic effects, GM began in 1971 a coordinated effort at speeding up the making of cars, under the name General Motors Assembly Division, or GMAD. The showplace plant for this re-organization was the Vega works at Lordstown, Ohio, where the workforce was 85% white and the average age 27. With cars moving down the line almost twice as fast as in pre-GMAD days, workers resorted to various forms of on the job resistance to the terrific pace. GM accused them of sabotage and had to shut down the line several times. Some estimates set the number of

deliberately disabled cars as high as 500,000 for the period of December, 1971 to March, 1972, when a strike was finally called following a 97% affirmative vote of Lordstown's Local 1112. But a three-week strike failed to check the speed of the line, the union, as always, having no more desire than management to see workers effectively challenging the control of production. The membership lost all confidence in the union; Gary Bryner, the 29-year-old president of Local 1112 admitted: "They're angry with the union; when I go through the plant I get catcalls."<sup>30</sup>

In the GMAD plant at Norwood, Ohio, a strike like that at Lordstown broke out in April and lasted until September, 1971. The 174 days constituted the longest walkout in GM history.<sup>31</sup> The Norwood workers had voted 90% in favor of striking in the previous February, but the UAW had forced the two locals to go out separately, first Lordstown, and later Norwood, thus isolating them and protecting the GMAD program. Actually, the anti-worker efforts of the UAW go even further back, to September of 1971, when the Norwood Local 674 was put in receivership, or taken over, by the central leadership when members had tried to confront GMAD over the termination of their seniority rights.

In the summer of 1973, three wildcat strikes involving Chrysler facilities in Detroit took place in less than a month. Concerning the successful one-day wildcat at the Jefferson assembly plant, UAW vice president Doug Fraser said Chrysler had made a critical mistake in "appeasing the workers" and the Mack Avenue walkout was effectively suppressed when a crowd of "UAW local union officers and committeemen, armed with baseball bats and clubs, gathered outside of the plant gates to 'urge' the workers to return."<sup>32</sup>

October, 1973 brought the signing of a new three-year contract between Ford and the UAW. But with the signing, appeared fresh evidence that workers intend to involve themselves in decisions concerning their work lives: "Despite the agreement, about 7,400 workers left their jobs at seven Ford plants when the strike deadline was reached, some because they were unhappy with the secrecy surrounding the new agreement."<sup>33</sup>

With these brief remarks on a very small number of actions by workers, let us try to arrive at some understanding of the overall temper of American wage-earners since the mid-1960s.

Sidney Lens found that the number of strikes during 1968, 1969, and 1971 was extremely high, and that only the years 1937, 1944-46, and 1952-53 showed comparable totals.<sup>34</sup> More interesting is the growing tendency of strikers to reject the labor contracts negotiated for them. In those contracts in which the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service took a hand (the only ones for which there are statistics), contract rejections rose from 8.7% of the cases in 1964, to 10% in 1965, to 11% in 1966, to an amazing 14.2% in 1967, levelling off since then to about 12% annually.<sup>35</sup> And the ratio of work stoppages occurring during the period when a contract was in effect has changed, which is especially significant when it is remembered that most contracts specifically forbid strikes. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures reveal that while about one-third of all stoppages in 1968 occurred under existing agreements, "an alarming number,"<sup>36</sup> almost two-fifths of them in 1972 took place while contracts were in effect.<sup>37</sup> In 1973 Aronowitz provided a good summary: "The configuration of strikes since 1967 is unprecedented in the history of American workers. The number of strikes as a whole, as well as rank-and-file rejections of proposed union settlements with employers, and wildcat actions has exceeded

that in any similar period in the modern era."<sup>38</sup> And as Sennett and Cobb, writing in 1971 made clear, the period has involved "the most turbulent rejection of organized union authority among young workers."<sup>39</sup>

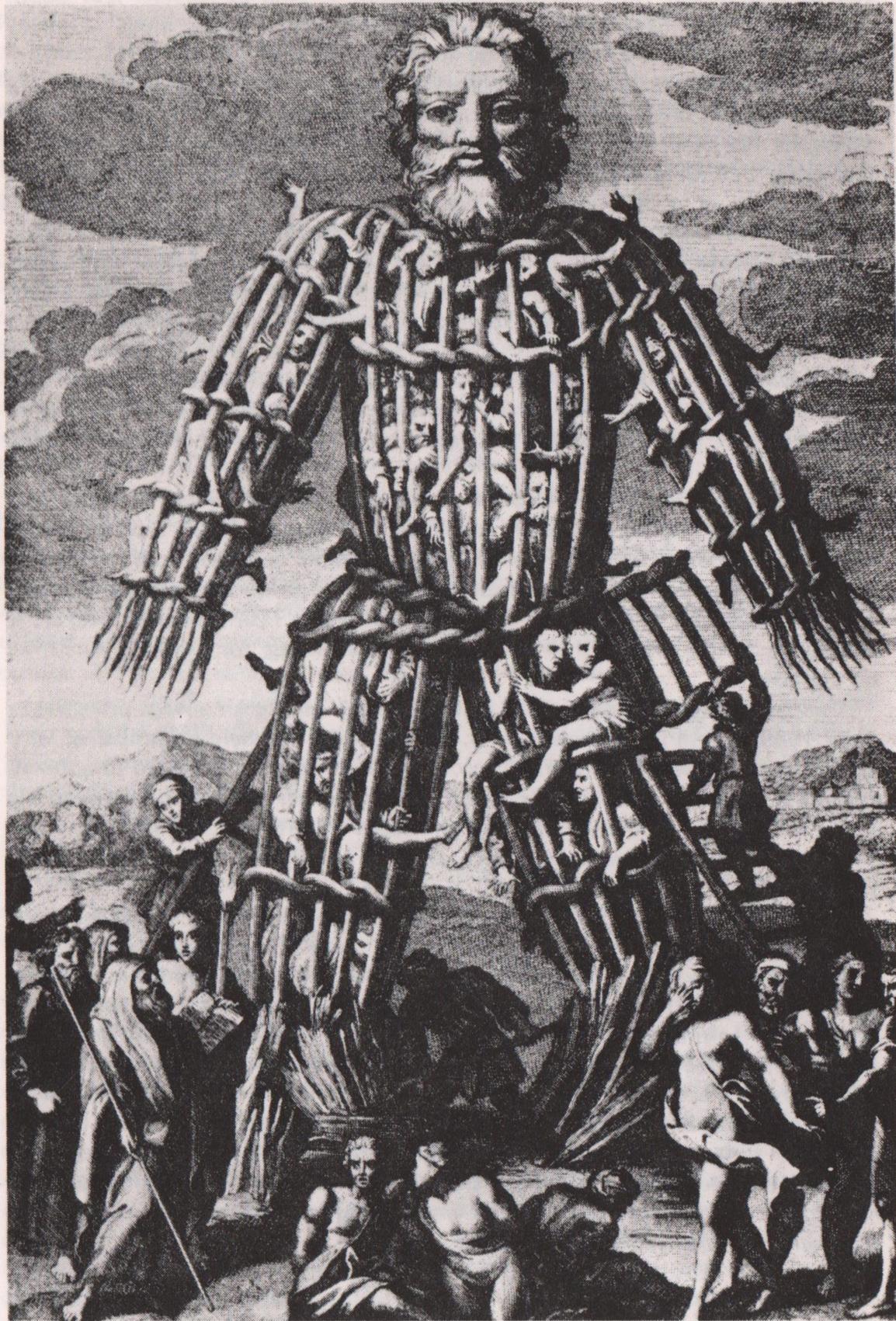
The 1970 GM strike was mentioned as an example of the usefulness of a sham struggle in safely releasing pent-up employee resentment. The nation-wide telephone workers' strike of July, 1971 is another example, and the effects of the rising tide of anti-union hostility can also be seen in it. Rejecting a Bell System offer of a 30% wage increase over three years, the Communication Workers' union called a strike, publicly announcing that the only point at issue was that "we need 31 or 32 per cent,"<sup>40</sup> as union president Joseph Beirne put it. After a six-day walkout, the 1% was granted, as was a new Bell policy requiring all employees to join the union and remain in good standing as a condition of employment. But while the CWA was granted the standard 'union-shop' status, a rather necessary step for the fulfillment of its role as a discipline agent of the work force, thousands of telephone workers refused to return to their jobs, in some cases staying out for weeks in defiance of CWA orders.

The calling of the 90-day wage-price freeze on August 15 was in large part a response to the climate of worker unruliness and independence, typified by the defiant phone workers. Aside from related economic considerations, the freeze and the ensuing controls were adopted because the unions needed government help in restraining the workers. Sham strikes clearly lose their effectiveness if employees refuse to play their assigned roles remaining, for example, on strike on their own.

George Meany, head of the AFL-CIO, had been calling for a wage-price freeze since 1969,<sup>41</sup> and in the weeks prior to August 15 had held a number of very private meetings with President Nixon.<sup>42</sup> Though he was compelled to publicly decry the freeze as "completely unfair to the worker" and "a bonanza to big business," he did not even call for an excess profits tax; he did come out strongly for a permanent wage-price control board and labor's place on it, however.

It seems clear that business leaders understood the need for government assistance. In September, a *Fortune* article proclaimed that "A system of wage-price review boards is the best hope for breaking the cost-push momentum that individual unions and employers have been powerless to resist."<sup>43</sup> As workers try to make partial compensation for their lack of autonomy on the job by demanding better wages and benefits, the only approved concessions, they create obvious economic pressure especially in an inflationary period. Arthur M. Louis, in November's *Fortune*, realized that the heat had been on labor officials for some time. Speaking of the "rebellious rank and file" of longshoremen, miners, and steelworkers, he said, "Long before President Nixon announced his wage-price freeze, many labor leaders were calling for stabilization, if only to get themselves off the hook."<sup>44</sup>

A *Fortune* editorial of January (1972) predicted that by the Fall, a national "wave of wildcat strikes" might well occur and the labor members of the tripartite control board would resign.<sup>45</sup> In fact, Meany and Woodcock quit the Pay Board much earlier in the year than that, due precisely to the rank and file's refusal to support the plainly anti-labor wage policies of the board. Though Fitzsimmons of the Teamsters stayed on, and the controls continued, through a total of four "Phases" until early 1974, the credibility of the controls program



was crippled, and its influence waned rapidly. Though the program was brought to a premature end, the Bureau of Labor Statistics gave its ceiling on wage increases much of the credit for the fact that the number of strikes in 1972 was the smallest in five years.<sup>46</sup>

During "Phase One" of the controls, the 90-day freeze, David Deitch wrote that "the new capitalism requires a strong, centralized trade union movement with which to bargain." He made explicit exactly what kind of "strength" would be needed: "The labor bureaucracy must ultimately silence the rank and file if it wants to join in the tripartite planning, in the same sense that the wildcat strike cannot be tolerated."<sup>47</sup>

In this area too, members of the business community have shown an understanding of the critical role of the unions. In May, 1970, within hours of the plane crash that claimed UAW chief Walter Reuther, there was publicly expressed corporate desire for a replacement who could continue to effectively contain the workers. "It's taken a strong man to keep the situation under control," Virgil Boyd, Chrysler vice chairman, told the *New York Times*. "I hope that whoever his successor is can exert great internal discipline."<sup>48</sup> Likewise, *Fortune* bewailed the absence of a strong union in the coalfields, in a 1971 article subtitled, "The nation's fuel supply, as well as the industry's prosperity, depends on a union that has lost control of its members."<sup>49</sup>

Despite the overall failure of the wage control program, the government has been helping the unions in several other ways. Since 1970, for example, it has worked to reinforce the conventional strike—again, due to its important safety-valve function. In June, 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an employer could obtain an injunction to force employees back to work when a labor agreement contains a no-strike pledge and an arbitration clause. "The 1970 decision astonished many observers of the labor relations scene,"<sup>50</sup> directly reversing a 1962 decision of the court, which ruled that such walkouts were merely labor disputes and not illegal. Also in 1970, during the four-month General Electric strike, Schenectady, New York, officials "pleaded with non-union workers to refrain from crossing picket lines on the grounds that such action might endanger the peace."<sup>51</sup> A photo of the strike scene in *Fortune* was captioned, "Keeping workers out—workers who were trying to cross picket lines and get to their jobs—became the curious task of Schenectady policemen."<sup>52</sup>

A Supreme Court decision in 1972 indicated how far state power will go to protect the spectacle of union strikes. Four California Teamsters were ordered reinstated with five year's back pay as "a unanimous Supreme Court ruled (November 7, 1972) that it is unfair labor practice for an employer to fire a worker solely for taking part in a strike."<sup>53</sup> Government provides positive as well as negative support to approved walkouts, too. An 18-month study by the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce found that welfare benefits, unemployment compensation, and food stamps to strikers mean that "the American taxpayer has assumed a significant share of the cost of prolonged work stoppages."<sup>54</sup>

But in some areas, unions would rather not even risk official strikes. The United Steelworkers of America—which allows only union officials to vote on contract ratifications, by the way—agreed with the major steel companies in March, 1973, that only negotiations and arbitration would be used to resolve differences. The Steelworkers' contract approved in April, 1974, declared that

the no-strike policy would be in effect until at least 1980.<sup>55</sup> A few days before, in March, a federal court threw out a suit filed by rank and file steelworkers, ruling in sum that the union needn't be democratic in reaching its agreements with management.<sup>56</sup>

David Deitch, quoted above, said that the stability of the system required a centralized union structure. The process of centralization has been a fact and its acceleration has followed the increasing militancy of wage-earners since the middle-1960s. A June, 1971 article in the federal *Monthly Labor Review* discussed the big increase in union mergers over the preceding three years.<sup>57</sup> August, 1972 saw two such mergers, the union of the United Papermakers and Paperworkers and the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers, and that of the United Brewery Workers with the Teamsters.<sup>58</sup> In a speech made on July 5, 1973, Longshoremen's president Harry Bridges called for the formation of "one, big, national labor movement or federation."<sup>59</sup>

The significance of this centralization movement is that it places the individual even further from a position of possible influence over the union hierarchy—at a time when he is more and more likely to be obliged to join a union as a condition of employment. The situation is beginning to resemble in some ways the practice in National Socialist Germany, of requiring the membership of all workers in 'one big, national labor movement or federation,' the Labor Front. In the San Francisco Bay area, for example, in 1969, "A rare—and probably unique—agreement that will require all the employees of a public agency to join a union or pay it the equivalent of union dues was reported in Oakland by the East Bay Regional Park District."<sup>60</sup> And in the same area this process was upheld in 1973: "A city can require its employees to pay the equivalent of initiation fees and dues to a union to keep their jobs, arbitrator Robert E. Burns has ruled in a precedent-setting case involving the city of Hayward."<sup>61</sup> This direction is certainly not limited to public employees, according to the Department of Labor. Their "What Happens When Everyone Organizes" article implied the inevitability of total unionization.

Though a discussion of the absence of democracy in unions is outside the scope of this essay, it is important to emphasize the lack of control possessed by the rank and file. In 1961 Joel Seidman commented on the subjection of the typical union membership: "It is hard to read union constitutions without being struck by the many provisions dealing with the obligations and the disciplining of members, as against the relatively small number of sections concerned with members' rights within the organization."<sup>62</sup> Two excellent offerings on the subject written in the 1970s are *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor* by Burton Hall<sup>63</sup> and "Apathy and Other Axioms: Expelling the Union Dissenter from History," By H.W. Benson.<sup>64</sup>

Relatively unthreatened by memberships, the unions have entered into ever-closer relations with government and business. A Times-Post Service story of April, 1969, disclosed a three-day meeting between AFL-CIO leadership and top Nixon administration officials, shrouded in secrecy at the exclusive Greenbriar spa. "Big labor and big government have quietly arranged an intriguing tryst this week in the mountains of West Virginia . . . for a private meeting involving at least half a dozen cabinet members."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, a surprising *New York Times* article appearing on the last day of 1972 is worth

quoting for the institutionalizing of government-labor ties in augurs: "President Nixon has offered to put a labor union representative at a high level in every federal government department, a well-informed White House official has disclosed. The offer, said to be unparalleled in labor history, was made to union members on the National Productivity Commission, including George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO and Frank E. Fitzsimmons, president of the IBT, at a White House meeting last week . . . labor sources said that they understood the proposal to include an offer to place union men at the assistant secretary level in all relevant government agencies . . . should the President's offer be taken up, it would mark a signal turning point in the traditional relations between labor and government."<sup>66</sup>

In Oregon, the activities of the Associated Oregon Industries, representing big business and the Oregon AFL-CIO, by the early '70s reflected a close working relationship between labor and management on practically everything. Joint lobbying efforts, against consumer and environmentalist proposals especially, and other forms of cooperation led to an exchange of even speakers at each other's conventions in the Fall of 1971. On September 2, the president of the AOI, Phil Bladine, addressed the AFL-CIO; on September 18, AFL-CIO president Ed Whalen spoke before the AOI.<sup>67</sup> In California, as in many other states, the pattern has been very much the same, with labor and business working together to attack conservationists in 1972 and defeat efforts to reform campaign spending in 1974, for example.<sup>68</sup>

Also revealing is the "Strange Bedfellows From Labor, Business' Own Dominican Resort" article on the front page of the May 15, 1973 *Wall Street Journal* by Jonathan Kwitney. Among the leading stockholders in the 15,000 acre Punta Cana, Dominican Republic resort and plantation are George Meany and Lane Kirkland, president and secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, and Keith Terpe, Seafarers' Union official, as well as leading officers of Seatrain Lines, Inc., which employs members of Terpe's union.

Not seen for what they are, the striking cases of mounting business-labor-government collusion and cooperation have largely been overlooked. But those in a position to see that the worker is more and more actively intolerant of a daily work life beyond his control, also realize that even closer cooperation is necessary. In early 1971 *Personnel*, the magazine of the American Management Association, said that "it is perhaps time for a marriage of convenience between the two (unions and management),"<sup>69</sup> for the preservation of order. Pointing out, however, that many members "tend to mistrust the union."<sup>70</sup>

The reason for this "mistrust," as we have seen, is the historical refusal of unions to interfere with management's control of work. The AFL-CIO magazine, *The American Federationist*, admitted labor's lack of interest and involvement in an article in the January, 1974 issue entitled "Work Is Here to Stay, Alas." And the traditional union position on the matter is why, in turn, C. Jackson Grayson, Dean of the School of Business Administration at Southern Methodist University and former chairman of the Price Commission, called in early 1974 for union-management collaboration. The January 12 issue of *Business Week* contains his call for a symbolic dedication on July 4, 1976, "with the actual signing of a document—a Declaration of Interdependence" between labor and business, "inseparably linked in the productivity quest."

Productivity—output per hour of work—has of course fallen due to worker dissatisfaction and unrest. A basic indication of the continuing revolt against work are the joint campaigns for higher productivity, such as the widely publicized US Steel-United Steelworkers efforts. A special issue on productivity in *Business Week* for September 9, 1972, highlighted the problem, pointing out also the opposition workers had for union-backed drives of this kind.<sup>71</sup> Closely related to low productivity, it seems, is the employee resistance to working overtime, even during economic recession. The refusal of thousands of Ford workers to overtime prompted a Ford executive in April, 1974 to say, "We're mystified by the experience in light of the general economic situation."<sup>72</sup> Also during April, the Labor Department reported that "the productivity of American workers took its biggest drop on record as output slumped in all sectors of the economy during the first quarter."<sup>73</sup>

In 1935 the NRA issued the Henderson Report, which counseled that "unless something is done soon, they (the workers) intend to take things into their own hands."<sup>74</sup> Something was done, the hierarchical, national unions of the CIO finally appeared and stabilized relations. In the 1970s it may be that a limited form of worker participation in management decisions will be required to prevent employees from "taking things into their own hands." Irving Bluestone, head of the UAW's GM department, predicted in early 1972 that some form of participation would be necessary, under union-management control, of course.<sup>75</sup> As Arnold Tannenbaum of the Institute for Social Research in Michigan pointed out in the late 1960s, ceding some power to workers can be an excellent means of increasing their subjection, if it succeeds in giving them a sense of involvement.<sup>76</sup>

But it remains more than doubtful that token participation will assuage the worker's alienation. More likely, it will underline it and make even clearer the true nature of the union-management relationship, which will still obtain. It may be more probable that traditional union institutions, such as the paid, professional stratum of officials and representatives, monopoly of membership guaranteed by management, and the labor contract itself will be increasingly re-examined<sup>77</sup> as workers continue to strive to take their lives into their own hands.

## NOTES

1. See Herbert Harris, *American Labor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 272; Sidney Fine, *Sitdown* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 55; Mary Vorse, *Labor's New Millions* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1939), p. 59; Charles Walker, "Work Methods, Working Conditions and Morale," in A. Kornhauser, et al, eds., *Industrial Conflicts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), p. 345.
2. S.T. Williamson and Herbert Harris, *Trends in Collective Bargaining* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1945), p. 210.
3. C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), p. 242.
4. Daniel Bell, "Work and Its Discontents," *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p. 240.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
6. Stanley Weir, *USA—The Labor Revolt* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1969), p. 3.
7. James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages From a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), p. 32.
8. E.K. Faltermayer, "Is Labor's Push More Bark Than Bite?" *Fortune* (June, 1964), p. 102.
9. J.C. Leggett, *Class, Race, and Labor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 144.
10. Straughton Lynd, ed., *Personal Histories of the Early CIO* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1970), p. 23.
11. Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 44-46.
12. Bill Watson, "Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor," *Radical America* (May-June, 1971), p. 78.
13. Weir, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
14. Thomas R. Brooks, "Labor: The Rank-and-File Revolt," *Contemporary Labor Issues*, Fogel and Kleingartner, eds. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1966), p. 321.
15. William Serrin, "The Assembly Line," *The Atlantic* (October, 1971), p. 73.
16. George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits," *Liberation* (July-August, 1973), p. 33.
17. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 144.
18. Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Press, 1972), p. 271.
19. *Washington Post*, March 27, 1970.
20. *Workers World*, July 30, 1971.
21. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 11, 1970.
22. Fred Cook, "Hard-Hats: The Rampaging Patriots," *The Nation* (June 15, 1970), pp. 712-719.
23. William Serrin, *The Company and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 233-236.
24. Cited by Brecher, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-280.

25. Serrin, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
29. Roy B. Helfgott, *Labor Economics* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 506.
30. Aronowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
31. *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 1972.
32. Michael Adelman, in *Labor Newsletter* (February, 1974), pp. 7-8.
33. *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1973.
34. Sidney Lens, *The Labor Wars* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1974), p. 376.
35. Richard Armstrong, "Labor 1970: Angry, Aggressive, Acquisitive," *Fortune* (October, 1969), p. 144. William and Margaret Westley, *The Emerging Worker* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), p. 100.
36. Harold W. Davey, *Contemporary Collective Bargaining* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 153.
37. Norman J. Samuels, Assistant Commissioner, Wages and Industrial Relations, letter to author, April 19, 1974.
38. Aronowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
39. Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 4.
40. Remark by CWA president, Joseph Beirne, *New York Times*, July 18, 1971.
41. Aronowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
42. See Jack Anderson's "Merry-Go-Round" column, August 23, 1971, for example.
43. Robert V. Roosa, "A Strategy for Winding Down Inflation," *Fortune* (September, 1971), p. 70.
44. Arthur M. Louis, "Labor Can Make or Break the Stabilization Program," *Fortune* (November, 1971), p. 142.
45. Editorial: "Phasing Out Phase Two," *Fortune* (January, 1972), p. 63.
46. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Work Stoppages in 1972: Summary Report* (Washington: Department of Labor, 1974), p. 1.
47. David Deitch, "Watershed of the American Economy," *The Nation* (September 13, 1971), p. 201.
48. Quoted by Serrin, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
49. Thomas O'Hanlon, "Anarchy Threatens the Kingdom of Coal," *Fortune* (January, 1971), p. 78.
50. Arthur A. Sloane and Fred Witney, *Labor Relations* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 390.
51. From an anti-union article by John Davenport, "How to Curb Union Power" (labeled *Opinion*), *Fortune* (July, 1971), p. 52.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
53. *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1972.
54. Armand J. Thieblot and Ronald M. Cowin, *Welfare and Strikes—The Use of Public Funds to Support Strikers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), p. 185.

55. *New York Times*, April 13, 1974.
56. *Weekly People*, April 27, 1974.
57. Lucretia M. Dewey, "Union Merger Pace Quickens," *Monthly Labor Review* (June, 1971), pp. 63-70.
58. *New York Times*, August 3 and 6, 1972.
59. Confirmed by Harry Bridges, letter to author, April 11, 1974.
60. Dicke Mesiter, "Public Workers Union Win a Rare Agreement," *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 13, 1969).
61. *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Union Fee Ruling on City Workers," October 31, 1973.
62. Joel Seidman, "Political Controls and Member Rights: An Analysis of Union Constitutions," *Essays on Industrial Relations Research Problems and Prospects* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).
63. Burton Hall, ed., *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1972).
64. H.W. Benson, "Apathy and Other Axioms: Expelling the Union Dissenter From History," Irving Howe, ed., *The World of the Blue Collar Worker* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 209-226.
65. *Times-Post Service*, "Administration's Tryst with Labor," *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 14, 1969).
66. *New York Times*, "Key Jobs Offered to Labor by Nixon" (December 31, 1972), p. 1.
67. Phil Stanford, "Convention Time," *Oregon Times* (September, 1971), p. 4.
68. See *California AFL-CIO News*, editorial: "The Convention Caper" (January 14, 1972), for example.
69. Robert J. Marcus, "The Changing Workforce," *Personnel* (January-February, 1971), p. 12.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
71. *Business Week*, "The Unions Begin to Bend on Work Rules" (September 9, 1972), pp. 106, 108.
72. *New York Times*, April 27, 1974.
73. *New York Times*, April 26, 1974.
74. Quoted from Serrin, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
75. David Jenkins, *Job Power* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 319-320.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 312.
77. The San Francisco Social Services Union, a rather anti-union union of about 200 public welfare workers, has emphatically rejected these institutions since 1968. This, plus its vocal militancy and frequent exposure of "organized labor's" corruption and collusion has earned them the hatred of the established unions in San Francisco.

# More on 'Organized Labor'

In the previous article, I discussed the ways in which trade unions enforce the workers' lack of control over their lives on the job. Cited as a typical occurrence was the response of the United Auto Workers to a wildcat strike at the Mack Avenue Chrysler plant in Detroit in the summer of 1973: a large crowd of union officials and committeemen, armed with baseball bats and clubs, forced the workers back to their job. The conservative nature of official strikes, the growth of union centralization and autocracy and the increasing institutionalization of business-labour-government collusion and cooperation were discussed, against the backdrop such manifestations of heightened workers resistance as rising absenteeism and turnover rates, declining productivity, and a much greater anti-union tendency. Events in 1974 have confirmed these observations and call for even more explicit conclusions.

In the spring, shortly after the United Steel Workers imposed a long-term no-strike binding arbitration contract on its members, Joseph Beirne, president of the Communications Workers, warned in effect (in the Wall Street Journal) that unions might be becoming too transparently oppressive:

"Many workers feel alienated from the political process and with little real control over their lives. If the right to approve the contract they will have to work under for two or three years is denied them, how will they react? What directions could their frustrations take? We are dealing here with a question of national stability and that question's importance is overriding."

A sophisticated union leader, Beirne realized the critical value of the strike in releasing pent-up worker pressure and thus serving as an invaluable cathartic or safety-valve. In fact, as Stanley Aronowitz mentioned in *False Promises* the wildcat strike can also serve as a welcome remedy, in the eyes of management.

This is not to minimize the impact of certain wildcat struggles. For example, June, 1974, saw a protracted wildcat at the Ford stamping plant in Chicago over conditions on the job, and a walkout at the Warren, Michigan Dodge truck facility that was suppressed by UAW officials with the help of a bull-horn-equipped judge.

But it is also true that use of the strike in undercutting worker unrest is receiving an ever-wider appreciation. Developments in 1974 show clearly that there is much concurrence with Gordon Taylor's advice to management everywhere that yearly strikes should be arranged, inasmuch as they work so effectively to dissipate discontent. (1). The Supreme Court, for example, ruled in June that the Letters Carriers union could not be sued for publicizing the names of non-strikers and labelling them "scab," because the epithet was a "literally and factually true" statement. And as the Court upheld the use of that divisive sobriquet, more community officials have lent their sanction by voting welfare benefits to strikers for the first time. A.H. Raskin's "Are Strikes Obsolete" (*Saturday Review*, October 19, 1974) describes the loss of sanctity of strikers' picket lines in the eyes of workers. Though deficient in most respects, Raskin's article accurately reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the narrow demands of conventional strikes. Also in June the National Labor Relations Board expanded union authority in a prescedent-setting decision that gave unions disciplinary powers over supervisory personnel union members in strikes. The pattern is ever-clearer; as union, management, and government leaders strengthen the strike as an institution, more workers see through their own manipulation.

John Burke, president of the Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Workers, admitted in 1933 that "only very few workers will stay in the unions voluntarily." (2) Today the evaporation of union loyalty is often virtually complete, at a time when the extensions of unionism seems an inevitable process. 1974 saw significant increases in membership, especially among office workers and those employed by the state, as white collar sectors become at once more important and more robotized. And a call for "international bargaining" is beginning to be taken up, as accompaniment to multinational corporate growth. The United Rubber Workers, for example, signed a "broad cooperative agreement" linking itself to the Japanese rubber workers union for pursuit of "mutual goals." (3)

But if the globalization of union structures is the trend, so is the steady diminution of rank and file influence over the union monoliths. The recent evidence is quite supportive in this area of eroding worker autonomy. In May, the National Commission for Industrial Peace, which included the presidents of the United Auto Workers, Teamsters, Seafarers, United Steel Workers, and the AFL-CIO, issued its report, which mainly recommended scrapping the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act. The Commission agreed that "unions and their officers have been attacked in legal proceedings, that they tended to become shy and not to exercise the leadership and general responsibility" owing to the oppressive Landrum-Griffin Act which enables "small numbers of dissidents to prevent settlements and cause unwarranted turmoil." (4) It is likely that this law will be revised, removing any clauses protective of the rights of union members. The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service released figures in July which gave credence to the union leaders' annoyance at their unruly memberships. The Service reported that 12.3% of tentative contract settlements were rejected in the previous 11 months the highest rejection rate since 1969.

At the United Auto Workers convention in June, union representatives voted to lengthen the terms of international and local officers from two to three years, a move thoroughly unpopular with the rank and file. In July, New York Times and NY Daily News printers voted for an historic 11 year contract as other unions tired of the strike farce, walked through the Typographical Union picket lines. Also in July, Southern Californian carpenters narrowly approved a 3 year contract when AT&T granted it full "agency shop" status in which all employees will be compelled to pay union dues, like it or not. The big CWA newspaper ads were very accurately signed, A NATIONAL UNION IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST.

As the worker is progressively stripped of his rights and degraded equally by management and union authorities levels of resentment rise and become public facts. The Western Assembly on the Changing World of Work was held at Carmel under the auspices of the University of California, and heard on May 31 a most alarming speech by Louis Lundborg former Bank of America board chairman. Lundborg described the boredom of, and anger of, workers turning out poor-quality, soon-to-be-thrown-away products, their lack of job satisfaction manifested in alcoholism, drug use, sabotage, absenteeism, etc. He concluded that planned obsolescence has America on a course leading to "ultimate collapse," and that the only solution is the reversal of this pattern by allowing workers to become artisans in their work again. (5)

A Wall Street Journal survey of truck mechanics showed that "revolt against work" attitudes are not confined to younger workers, but in fact were stronger among 45-54 year age group. (6) A few weeks later, the Postmaster General reported that absenteeism soared among postal workers in fiscal year 1974. (7) In November, during negotiations with the United Mine Workers union, coal industry spokesmen readily offered much higher wages in return for a "reduction in wildcat strikes and absenteeism" to ensure higher productivity. (8)

National productivity has been falling apart due to the massive dissatisfaction so evident. Even greater labor-management collusion has been the main response, in an effort to reverse the sagging per-capita output. The Construction Industry Combined Committee and the Five Pact Labor Alliance, representing management and unions in the St. Louis area, and the Productivity Committee in New York, representing the city and major unions, are examples of joint productivity drives. On Labor Day, President Ford called for a "new struggle for productivity" and in the same month RCA Corp. Chairman Robert Sarnoff was the keynote speaker at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers convention, exhorting the IBEW to push for "greater productivity." The huge productivity campaign of US Steel and the United Steel Workers union has operated in high gear throughout 1974, utilizing full-page ads in magazines and newspapers, and other major propaganda efforts, with dubious results.

And as these campaigns and countless management and personnel polls and studies proliferate, the slogan "job enrichment" is increasingly heard. Swedish firms have been among the most publicized in their efforts to achieve more efficient production via job reforms. Their success is in grave doubt, however, with Volvo's Torslunda plant experiencing a daily absentee rate of 18% and worker turnover in Swedish industry overall at 30% a year. British Columbia's deputy minister of labor, to cite another source, said in the fall that his New Democratic Party is searching for "new ways to reduce the industrial conflict" in British Columbia, citing experiments in "worker control."

As the problem for capitalism deepens, there are seen more and more efforts to reform the unions, notably by ever-present leftist sects and their "caucuses." Yet the time has clearly come for the supersession of the manipulative theory of "extra-union" struggles, in favor of a frankly "anti-union" revolutionary approach. Anton Pannekoek, on target in this instance, declared, "It is the organizational form itself which renders the proletariat virtually impotent and which prevents them from turning the union into an instrument of their will. The revolution can only win by destroying this organism, which means tearing it down from top to bottom so that something quite different can emerge." And today the awareness that trade unions are, in Glenn Brownton's phrase, "inherently oppressive," is spreading everywhere. Those who consider themselves radical are thus encouraged to catch up with the actual movement of the working classes.

1. Gordon Taylor, *Are Workers Human?* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1952), p. 117.
2. Letter from Burke to Jacob Stephen, November 14, 1933.
3. *Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 1974.
4. Report to the President of the National Commission for Industrial Peace (Washington: Bureau of National Affairs, May, 1974), p. 4.
5. Louis Lundborg, "A Banker's Rejection of Our Rapacious Economy," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1974.
6. *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 1974.
7. *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1974.
8. *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1974.

## UAW Leader Fatally Shot in Windsor, Ont.

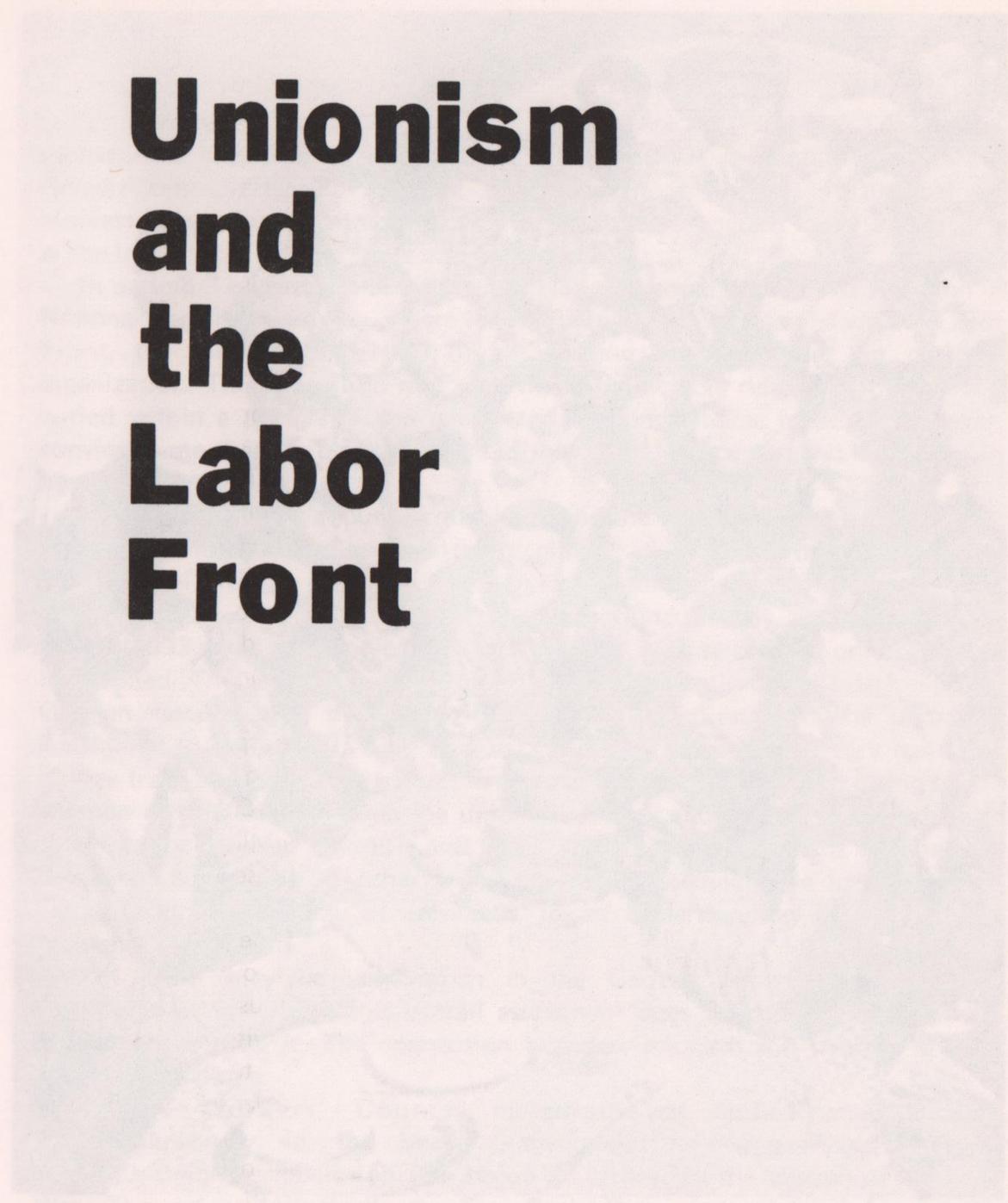
WINDSOR, Ont., Jan. 18 (AP) — Charles Brooks, 62, president of United Auto Workers Local 444, was shot to death in the union hall Monday by an angry union member, according to an official who witnessed the shooting.

Police said Clarence Talbot, 36, of Windsor was arrested.

Ray Lebert, vice president of the 13,000-member local headquartered in this Ontario city across the river from Detroit, said Talbot had been discharged from a Chrysler Corp. engine plant a year ago for excessive absenteeism.

Mr. Brooks, who headed the union local for two decades, reportedly was trying to get Talbot's job back.

# Unionism and the Labor Front



...the ...  
...the ...  
...the ...  
...the ...  
...the ...



When the workers can gather freely and without intermediaries to discuss their real problems, the State begins to dissolve.

—Debord and Sanguinetti, *The Real Split in the International* (1971)

In "Organized Labor versus 'The Revolt Against Work' " I described spontaneous opposition to an increasingly bureaucratic and collusive unionism. Greater centralization of control over workers and more institutionalized business-labor-government cooperation have made transparent trade unions' role as the last effective police force of wage labor.

In passing, I suggested a developing similarity in some ways to the situation in National Socialist Germany, where labor discipline was maintained via the Labor Front, the forced membership of all working people in one, big national organization. This suggestion met with much predictable ridicule, though it was buried within a paragraph and mentioned but once. Some research, however, convinced me that the point is valid and that the reference deserves discussion in its own right.

The standard thesis about German labor and the Nazis - generally accepted by bourgeois and Marxist commentators alike - is that the unions were the backbone of Weimar democracy and the consistent enemies of Nazism. They were, therefore, savagely attacked by the reactionary Nazis, and destroyed on May 2, 1933 when all union offices and resources were seized and union officials imprisoned. This event is seen as the effective inauguration of the dark night of German fascism, and the Labor Front which then replaced the unions is considered to have been a kind of giant concentration camp, the very antithesis of free trade unionism. The subject in fact has been largely ignored, owing to the absence of similarity between the unions and the Labor Front, and the fact of total enmity between unionists and Nazis. With these obvious facts and the zero degree of continuity, in other words, there has seemed little to discuss and certainly nothing much of relevance to an understanding of the role of contemporary unions.

Yet there may be very much in the German experience worth our consideration today, for this overall assessment does far more to conceal the truth than to reveal it. The connection between unionism and fascism, in fact, was a very real one.

If the Workers' Council movement was curbed and rendered non-revolutionary in the years immediately following World War I, employer-union collaboration was begun in earnest in the closing days of the War. The unions (principally the Free Social-Democratic Unions) formed the Cooperative Association of German Industrial and Commercial Employers and Workers with the employers' groups in November, 1918. In many ways a replica of the Nazi Labor Front, this institutionalized collusion endured until worker opposition and economic crisis in late 1923 brought an end to the effort.<sup>2</sup> This candid class collaboration was superseded by the Temporary National Economic

Council, which assumed many of the Association's duties, and by a similar example of growing state involvement, the trend toward government arbitration, also supported by the unions. Franz Neumann saw this process accurately:

Bound so closely to the existing regime and having become so bureaucratic, the unions lost their freedom of action . . . The spontaneity of the working classes had been sacrificed to bureaucratic organizations . . . National Socialism grew in this seed-bed.<sup>3</sup>

Hermann Rauschning saw the unions' constant betrayal of the workers' interests as resulting in their becoming used up in the service of capital and in time a political liability to the ruling classes. A leading industrialist said,

"It was quite all to make these trade union officials, the big and little busy-bodies alike, look thoroughly ridiculous. When we had flattered these gentlemen into donning dinner jackets and tail coats we had begun to make progress . . . The workers began to get sick of their own men . . . We just had to get rid of these fellows."<sup>4</sup>

General von Brauchitsch echoed these sentiments, explaining why the unions were no longer useful to the Weimar rightists:

The trade unions were too ponderous and lethargic; and they had not struck roots deeply enough politically in the younger generation. They were the organizations of the old men, not of the younger generation, which was what mattered.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, "Labor's influence upon the fate of the German Republic was rapidly declining," as Adolf Sturmthal put it.<sup>6</sup> At the end of Weimar there had to be at least the public impression of their demise; to quote Sigmund Neumann, "The destruction of the pre-Nazi labor organizations was an inescapable result of political defeat."<sup>7</sup>

In the last months of the Weimar Republic, the unions had increasingly clamored, however, to be retained in the service of the bourgeoisie. In October, 1932 the ADGB (Free Trade Union Association, which represented nearly all unionized workers) printed an article in the Nazi *Schwarze Front* paper pledging its faith in the "National Idea,"<sup>8</sup> and in the November transport strike in Berlin, "the trade union leaders fought openly against the strikers."<sup>9</sup> Schleicher, the last Chancellor before Hitler, recognized the service the unions were giving the state and strongly considered their incorporation into the government leadership, based on his appreciation of their increasingly nationalist policy.<sup>10</sup>

After Hitler's accession to the Chancellorship on January 30, rightists and unionists continued to work for an open labor collaboration with National Socialism. On March 4, former Chancellor Papen declared that unionism could be a very strong support of the Nazi regime." On March 20, the ADGB Executive Committee swore its fealty, reminding Hitler that "Unions are indispensable and inevitably integrated into the state."<sup>12</sup> On April 1 the Metal Workers Union, Germany's largest trade union, announced that it would solidly and loyally work with Nazism.<sup>13</sup> On April 7, Leipart (head of the ADGB) proclaimed the Nazi government and asked for a role in loyally representing the workers.<sup>14</sup> On April 9, a Statement to the Government by the ADGB Executive Committee declared unreserved willingness "to place at the service of the new state the labor force's own organization which the trade unions have devoted years of activity to creating." It further pledged its full cooperation for National

Socialist efforts to overcome "all tendencies toward disunity" and its support for state "efforts to unify the trade unions."<sup>15</sup> Other union statements and meetings with the Nazis led Erich Matthias to see the development of a "national trade unionism," in which the unions jettisoned any allegiance to democracy in order to obtain benefits from an all-powerful state.<sup>16</sup> On April 19, the ADGB decided to send out a call to all members, inviting their participation in the Nazi celebrations planned for May 1.<sup>17</sup>

It should now be clear that when, say, Richard Grunberger admits that the trade union leaders wanted to cooperate with the Nazis,<sup>18</sup> or Franz Neumann says that union officials agreed to step down if the trade union structure were retained,<sup>19</sup> a real understatement is being conceded. And when the trade union offices and equipment were confiscated and the top officials arrested on May 2, there was no resistance for a deeper reason than merely the unions' rottenness. Active cooperation was at work in the scenario, and a vital continuity was insured. When Labor Front head Dr. Robert Ley declared that the unions had been "brutally and ruthlessly" seized, then, he spoke for public consumption. Much closer to the truth of the situation was the August 7, 1933 article in the *Manchester Guardian*, which spoke of ongoing conferences between union and government officials, toward the organization of the Labor Front.

In terms of structure, personnel, and policy, basic continuities are to be found between the Weimar unions and the Nazi Labor Front. B.N. Prieth's unpublished doctoral dissertation, widely considered the most complete study of the Front in English, acknowledges that it was built on the administrative structure of the old unions.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Vaso Trivanovitch found that the Front was organized according to the basic industries. "There are 18 industrial organizations, corresponding to the former German trade unions."<sup>21</sup> Far from being the antithesis of the unions, the Labor Front "absorbed the former trade unions,"<sup>22</sup> and consolidated them in an extension of the centralization tendencies of Weimar unionism. As Florinsky wrote in 1935, "Within the Labor Front, the trade unions, whose number has been greatly reduced through re-organization, continue to retain their identity."<sup>23</sup> Rauschning perceived this continuity when he referred to "the Labor Front formed out of the trade unions."<sup>24</sup> Though nearly everyone has been confused by the formal inclusion of business in the Front, and by Nazi rhetoric intended to obscure the continuity involved, the National Socialists realized the necessity of unions. As Dr. Ley confided late in 1933, "Nothing is more dangerous to a state than uprooted men deprived of their defense organizations . . . Such men undoubtedly become a constant source of disturbance."<sup>25</sup> Maxine Sweezy expressed this point well: "The National Socialist government recognized that destruction of the labor unions might strengthen radicalism among the workers."<sup>26</sup>

Related to the sameness of structure is the sameness of personnel and policy. "The trade unions were not simply dissolved," according to Pascal, and "Lower functionaries remained . . . in positions such as treasurers of branches (locals), etc. The subscriptions (dues) were still collected."<sup>27</sup> The discredited top leaders had to go, but the Labor Front "retained the services of minor officials of the former trade unions," to quote Helga Grebing.<sup>28</sup> Otto Nathan found that many Labor Front officials "Considered themselves genuine successors of the earlier trade-union movement. and others actually had been functionaries in the

pre-Nazi trade unions,"<sup>29</sup> a finding that would not contradict Karl Bednarik and others who saw the co-existence of national socialist and Marxist views among Weimar unionists. Similar is Albert Speer's recollection regarding the Front's "Beauty of Labor" project: "We were able to draw former union leaders . . . into this campaign."<sup>30</sup> And C.W. Guillebaud, an expert on Weimar labor legislation, noted that often "the same individuals who had held important posts in the Labour Ministry under earlier Governments were still in high offices there." He also found "a continuity of policy . . . which he had not altogether expected to find."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, an examination of Nazi Party documents illustrates the continuation of the Labor Service, created in the Late Weimar period, and the Labor Courts, instituted even earlier.<sup>32</sup> Franz Neumann's assessment underscores the essential continuum:

The Labor Front has driven the process of bureaucratization to its maximum. Not only the relations between the enterprise and the worker but even the relations among the workers themselves are now mediated by an autocratic bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup>

It is also worth noting that even leading resistance figures saw the 'benefits' of the Labor Front. Wilhelm Leuschner, a bourgeois Weimar parliamentarian, wanted its extension post-Nazism, as the "solution to the social problem." Other resistance leaders, such as Habermann and Wirmer, considered the Front a unified trade union and called for the change of its name to "German Trade Union," to be the only change necessary. The 'German Trade Union,' as Goedeler explained, was to be "an organic continuation of the equally comprehensive Arbeitsfront."<sup>34</sup> And the German Communist Party apparently shared this manipulative mentality; the KPD saw the Labor Front as probably the most useful vehicle for "the conquest of the trade union masses."<sup>35</sup> German Socialists, for their part, cynically adopted fascist ideas into their "Neo-Socialist" slogan of "Order, Authority, Nation." As the trend toward state capitalism seems to generally beget state trade unionism, the Left exhibits only its familiar opportunism.

The Nazi factory cell organization (NSBO) engaged in many union-type activities before the establishment of the Labor Front, and in fact often displayed more militancy than did the trade unions. Thus in February and March 1933, for example, NSBO partisans attacked company unions, breaking up their meetings and the like.<sup>36</sup> With National Socialism in power, state anti-depression measures caused real wages to rise, unemployment to decline, and the number of paid holidays was doubled. The tendency of workers to regard the Labor Front as their union, noted by Grunberger,<sup>37</sup> begins to appear less surprising, and Guillebaud went so far as to characterize it as having a "strong pro-worker bias."<sup>38</sup> As Noakes and Pridham observed, Front officials "did not hesitate to apply pressure on employers."<sup>39</sup> Peter Viereck saw its unionist nature perhaps most succinctly: "Ley's Labor Front is the world's largest labor union inasmuch as every single German worker is forced to join."<sup>40</sup>

It is significant, too, to consider the growth in relative power of this super-union, within the practical development of National Socialism. Dr. Ley, as head of the Front, gave more orders than anyone else in Germany and in effect supervised every human being according to Wallace Deuel.<sup>41</sup> David Schoenbaum states that the Nazi Party declined and the Labor Front gained in power after 1933.<sup>42</sup> It "has more and more excluded all other organizations (with the

exception of the Hitler Youth) from the field of social activity," in the judgment of James Pollock.<sup>43</sup>

When the Labor Front was established, it was proclaimed by the Nazis, "an achievement of working-class solidarity."<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the factory cells were deprived of their authority, to preclude any possibility of worker organization at the local level. The "solidarity" was based, of course, on compulsory worker membership in the Labor Front. Under Weimar, the closed shop was not legal; it came with the Nazis. (One is reminded somewhat of the current drive for the closed shop in France, pushed by progressive employers since the factory occupation movement of May, 1968.) Dues to the Labor Front were thus automatically deducted from wages, along with such other practices familiar today, as the use of the work book, or union book, and the growth of compulsory arbitration. And the Nazis were more advanced than the Marxists in their appreciation of the changing work force: their conception of the working class, "workers of Faust and Stirn," included both blue-collar and white-collar employees. In fact, Nazi labor 'leftism' went so far as the Labor Front's demand, in the January 7, 1938 Party paper *Volkischer Beobachter*, for nationalization of the war industries.

Regarding unionism today, we find increasing bureaucratization and centralization: more merging of locals and unions, more workers forced to join unions, the general absence of even formal union democracy, closer and more institutionalized collusion with business and government, more arbitration, bargaining taking place at ever higher levels. When Harvard's George Wald thought he saw union-based fascism developing in the hard-hat violence of 1970, he missed the point. What he witnessed was only a union-engineered release of the tensions built up from a growing imprisonment of workers. The developing fascism has deep roots. Jacques Ellul's description is instructive:

In reality, the growing integration of unions into the state mechanism makes them increasingly an element of state power, and their tendency is to reinforce that power; at that moment a union becomes a mechanism for organizing the laboring masses for the benefit of the state.<sup>45</sup>

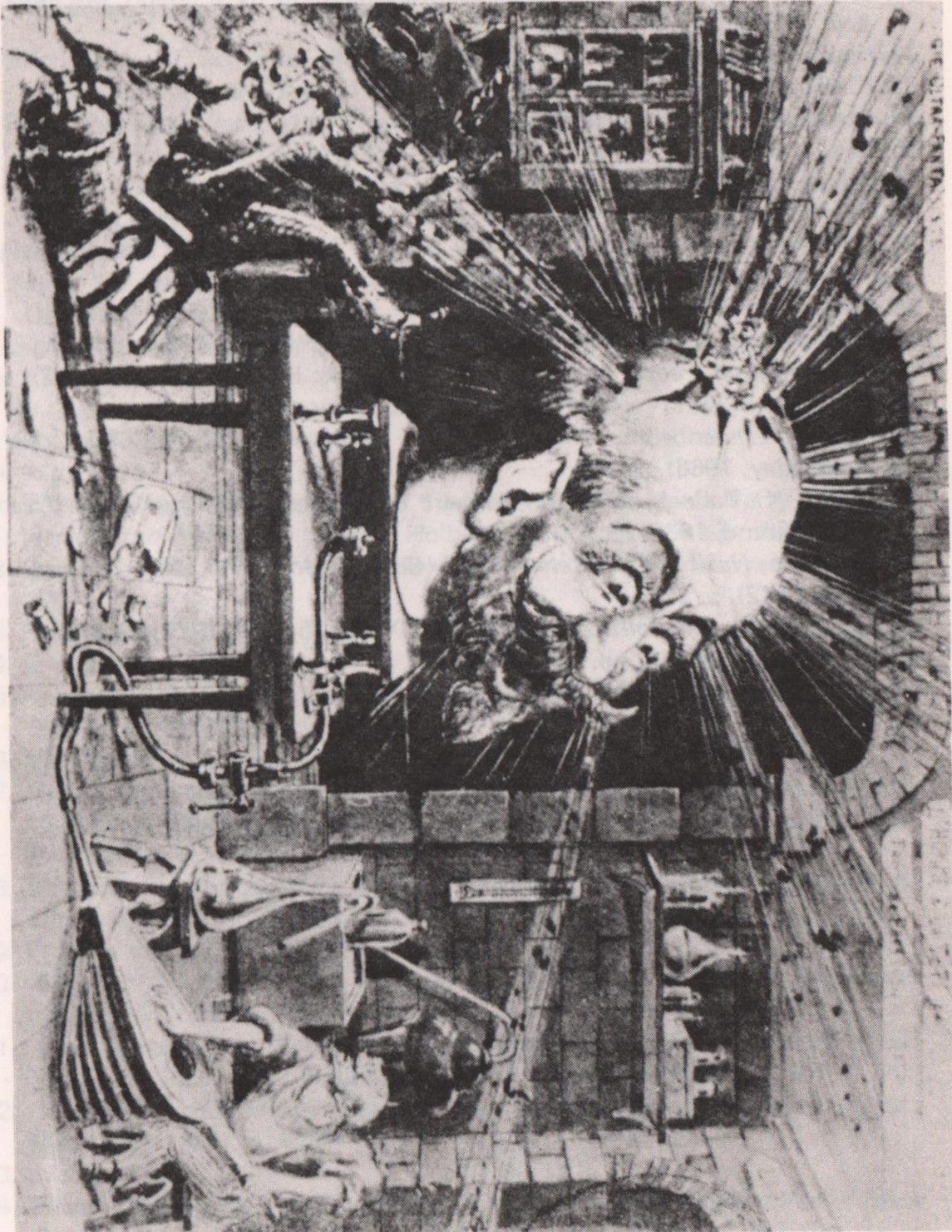
The other side of the story is obviously the worker autonomy and resistance which makes this development necessary in a given form. The militancy of German workers is well-known, and the Labor Front was far from totally successful in containing it. (The miners resorted to passive resistance in 1938 and 1939, and in November, 1939 wage cuts were rescinded, due to plummeting productivity; this was a massive defeat for the regime.)<sup>46</sup>

The 'revolt against work' here - absenteeism, turnover, sabotage, low productivity, anti-unionism - is calling for strenuous disciplinary efforts from the unions. We will see whether the American Labor Front, apparently in the process of formation, is as successful as its German predecessor.

## NOTES

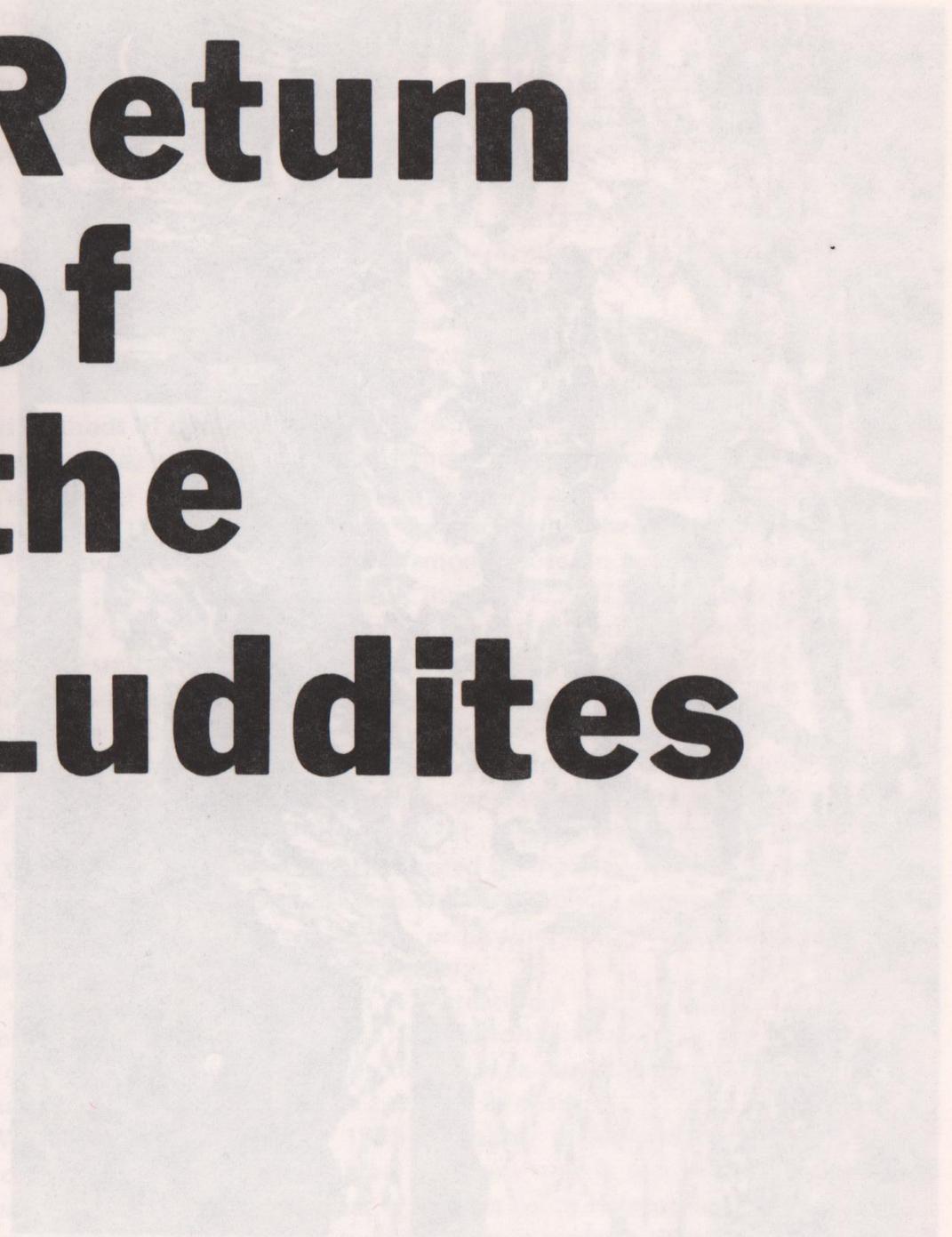
1. See, for example, Helga Grebing, *The History of the German Labour Movement* (London: Wolff, 1969), p. 107.
2. Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 111-112.
3. Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 413.
4. Hermann Rauschning, *Men of Chaos* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1942), p. 209.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
6. Adolf Sturmthal, *The Tragedy of European Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 132.
7. Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 171.
8. Roy Pascal, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (London: Routledge, 1934), p. 148.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
11. Erich Matthias, "The Downfall of the Old Social-Democratic Party in 1933," *Republic to Reich*, ed. by Hajo Holborn (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 81.
12. Daniel Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Monad Press, 1973), p. 129.
13. Pascal, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
15. Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945* (New York: Viking, 1974), pp. 421-422.
16. Matthias, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
17. Graml, Mommsen, Reichardt, and Wolf, *The German Resistance to Hitler* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 155. F.L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1971), p. 129.
18. Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), pp. 19, 187.
19. F. Neumann, *op. cit.*, p. 413.
20. Benedict N. Prieth, *The German Labor Front*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1939.
21. Vaso Trivanovitch, *Economic Development of Germany under National Socialism* (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, 1937), p. 23.
22. Michael T. Florinsky, *Fascism and National Socialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 106.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
24. Rauschning, *op. cit.*, p. 17. See also T.L. Jarman, *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 153-154.
25. Ley, November 15, 1933, cited in Guerin, p. 186.
26. Maxine Sweezy, *The Structure of the Nazi Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 161.

27. Pascal, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
28. Helga Grebing, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
29. Otto Nathan, *The Nazi Economic System* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1944), p. 181.
30. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 57.
31. C.W. Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1939), p. 203.
32. Noakes and Pridham, *op. cit.*, p. 443.
33. F. Neumann, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-419.
34. Graml, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 129-132.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
36. Pascal, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
37. Grunberger, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
38. Guillebaud, *op. cit.*, p. 202. See also his *The Social Policy of Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1941), p. 37.
39. Noakes and Pridham, *op. cit.*, p. 435.
40. Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 289.
41. Wallace Deuel, *People Under Hitler* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), p. 138.
42. David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 280.
43. James K. Pollock, *The Government of Greater Germany* (New York: VanNostrand, 1938), p. 171.
44. Max Kele, *Nazis and Workers* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 3.
45. Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion* (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 174.
46. F. Neumann, *op. cit.*, pp. 344, 347.



27. Lay, November 15, 1843, cited in Guerin, p. 126.  
 28. Martin Szwed, *The Structure of the New Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 151.

# Return of the Luddites



...of the ... workers will continue to be ... the ... important worker participation ...



THE STATE MAY BE GIVEN UP FOR LOST

“What does it matter to me?”

AS SOON AS ANY MAN SAYS

Those who have not been managers may not grasp the extreme malaise and the intense apathy of today's employees . . . the extreme anti-productivity attitudes of much of our workforce.

—Edward Bagley, *Beyond the Conglomerates* (1975)

At Treblinka, a Nazi death camp, “operations” became snarled by alienation on a grisly scale. The camp, manned by the condemned under Gestapo supervision, had achieved an oppression so severe that output approached zero. The brutal instruments of domination had been intensified to the point that the prisoner-workers were reduced to a zombie-like state, in which separate orders had to be given for the completion of each step of the most simple task. But when the subjugation was by necessity relaxed a bit, not only did operations resume but the first steps toward a successful revolt (in which the camp was burned to the ground) proceeded as well.

The workplace in advanced capitalism seems to be the arena of essentially the same kind of combat. Productivity, next to control itself and inseparable from it, is the issue, with our guards forced to install all manner of relaxed or humanized methods of domination in today's ‘revolt against work’ era.

But the four-day workweek, for instance, loudly promoted in the early 1970's as a response to anti-wage labor attitudes, has been quietly dropped, by and large. A June 1975 national survey conducted by the Labor Department disclosed that absenteeism was no lower among those on four-day weeks than among those on five-day weeks. Similarly, the July 8, 1975 *Wall Street Journal* and the February 6, *New York Times* chronicle the “surprising” news that auto worker absenteeism has not diminished and has continued to “raise havoc with production” despite layoffs and recession.

In addition to many other failing gimmicks, for stability capital falls back more and more on its historical ally, the trade unions. In Europe, unions are increasingly an official part of government apparatus, and are expanding and consolidating (with ruling class approval) at a pace and scope that easily surpasses that of the Common Market, as noted by the May 1, 1976 *Economist*. In the U.S., 1976 found the United Auto Workers publicly demanding a seat on Chrysler's board of directors, while also proposing that 90% of foremen be replaced by worker-elected “group coordinators.”

Under a spreading unionism which is increasingly itself a big possessor of capital (see Peter Drucker's *The Unseen Revolution*), increasingly international, and with contract bargaining tied to productivity, a participation emerges as the critical glue necessary to hold together a society in crisis.

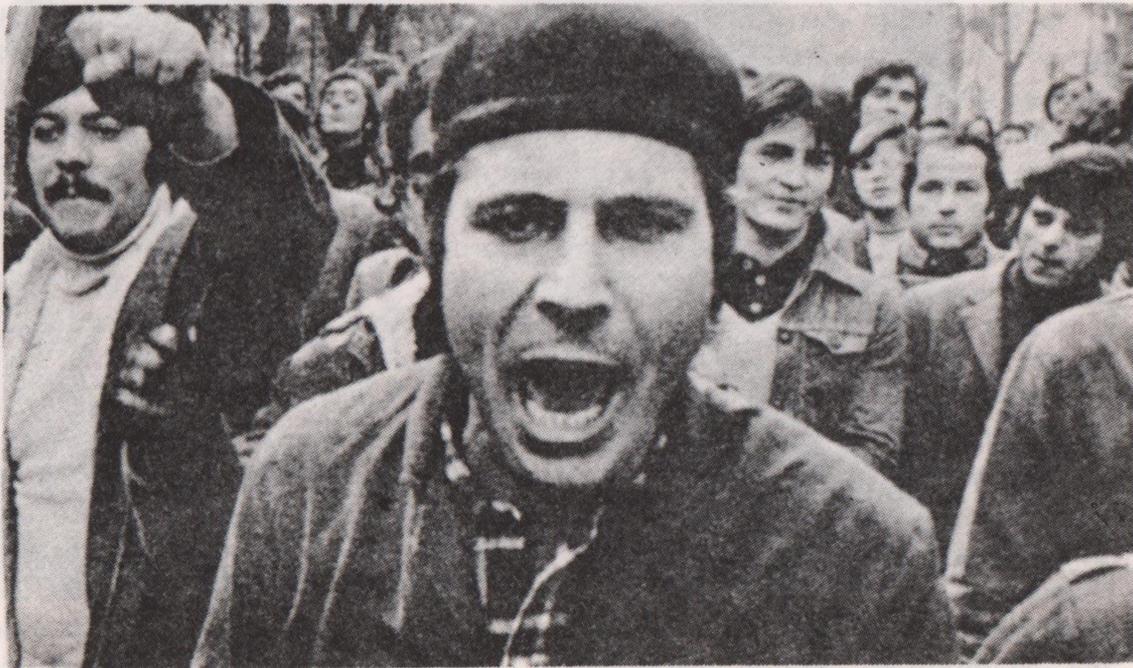
Max Ways, in the September 1975 *Fortune*, underlined the managers' essential dilemma: “The central political problem now is one of cohesion - of finding ways to manage a society that is at once more heterogenous and more resistant to coercion.” It is beyond question that in capital's deep crisis - a crisis in all areas of life - unionism will continue to be extended and will preside over the all-important worker participation required for industrial and social cohesion.

Franz Neumann, in his *Behemoth*, stressed that fascism is perhaps most importantly a popular mobilization, the stabilization brought about through renewed participation in a faltering system. Cesare Vannutelli (University of Strasbourg symposium, March 24-27, 1958) discussed the unions' role in Italian fascism (a much more pronounced and officialized role than the case in National Socialist Germany):

In the first place, the techniques of collective bargaining were effectively and significantly developed. Labor unions took on the task of regulating minutely detailed aspects of labor relations by introducing new bargaining agencies . . . and expanding the scope of labor contracts.

And for truly effective fascism, the limits of participation must be internalized, as revealed in *The Future of the Workplace* by Paul Dickson. Expressing a wishful thinking not confined to himself, the titles of two of his chapters are "The Democratic Office, the Do-it-yourself Factory," and "To Thine Own Self Be Boss."

Along these general lines, it is also clear that tenants' unions, prisoner's unions, GI's unions, consumers' unions, etc. must likewise be developed in order to provide the necessary humanization of anti-human roles, if the death camp is to survive its most profound challenge a while longer. That we are expected to "democratize" our own oppression, however, is the clearest proof that liberation is increasingly within our grasp.



## NOTES FROM THE COLLECTIVE

The question of radicals' relationships to unions, and work itself, is being raised more and more frequently. We take this as an indication that the simplistic "givens" of the Left's past are being questioned, a very positive movement.

The various socialist groups along with the old and new reformists, pursue workplace organizing as though history had stood still, obscuring (in some cases, willfully) the records of failures and betrayals that John documents in these essays.

If this work and others serve to clarify present reality and possibilities and can be absorbed by the re-emerging libertarian-communist and syndicalist movements, (like CNT in Spain and the IWW) it will have filled an historic role.

Mutualist Books is a worker-run publishing collective from Rochester, New York. Since our first book (*Spontaneity and Organization* and *On Hierarchy and Domination* by Murray Bookchin \$1.00), we've learned alot about layout, printing, design, and distribution. We're still learning, and wish to thank all the comrades who have send us criticism and encouragement.

Our purpose in publishing is to aid the spread of libertarian communist discussion and action. Mutualist Books/Black Rose is involved with regional activities in the Rochester-Buffalo area including literature tables, women's self-help, community technology, and neighborhood self-reliance to list a few.

We are also very pleased that the international anarchist movement is growing rapidly. In Spain, the CNT is re-emerging in great strength and in North America Marxism-Leninism is stagnating amidst a flurry of alternative activities and institutions.

As we are small, we are hindered by high production costs, small runs, and no previous balance for advertisements and distribution (we recycle paper for stamp money). Please bear this in mind when "shelling out". We are in debt and any contributions will be greatly appreciated. As important, however, are your contributions of essays, graphics, experiences, and dreams so that we may share them with others.

Our next book, *Common Sense Radicalism* by Neil Seldman from *The Institute of Local Self-Reliance* will be quite a departure form our more theoretical pieces and offers timely ideas on the reorganization of society in quite "common sense" ways.

*Organized Labor Versus "The Revolt Against Work": The Critical Contest* originally appeared in the Autumn 1974 issue of *Telos* (issue 21) and was later reprinted by *Black & Red*. Both parts were published by London Solidarity (Solidarity Pamphlet No. 47) under the title *Trade Unionism or Socialism*.

*Unionization in America* appeared in the August 1976 issue of *The Fifth Estate*.

Some of John's articles have appeared in:  
*The Fifth Estate* (4403 Second Ave., Detroit, MI 48201) an excellent monthly newspaper.  
*The Open Road* (Box 6135, Sta. G, Vancouver, B.C., Canada) is another good anarchist newspaper.

For more information on the CNT, contact:  
International Libertarian Labor Fund, Box 733, New York, NY 10003.