

MOVIES ABOUT WORKERS

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HUNGARY
RECONSIDERED
ASIAN WOMEN
& U.S. INDUSTRY

Cover: Photograph is scene from Northern Lights, the small stills are from F.I.S.T., Saturday Night Fever, Blue Collar and Norma Rae.

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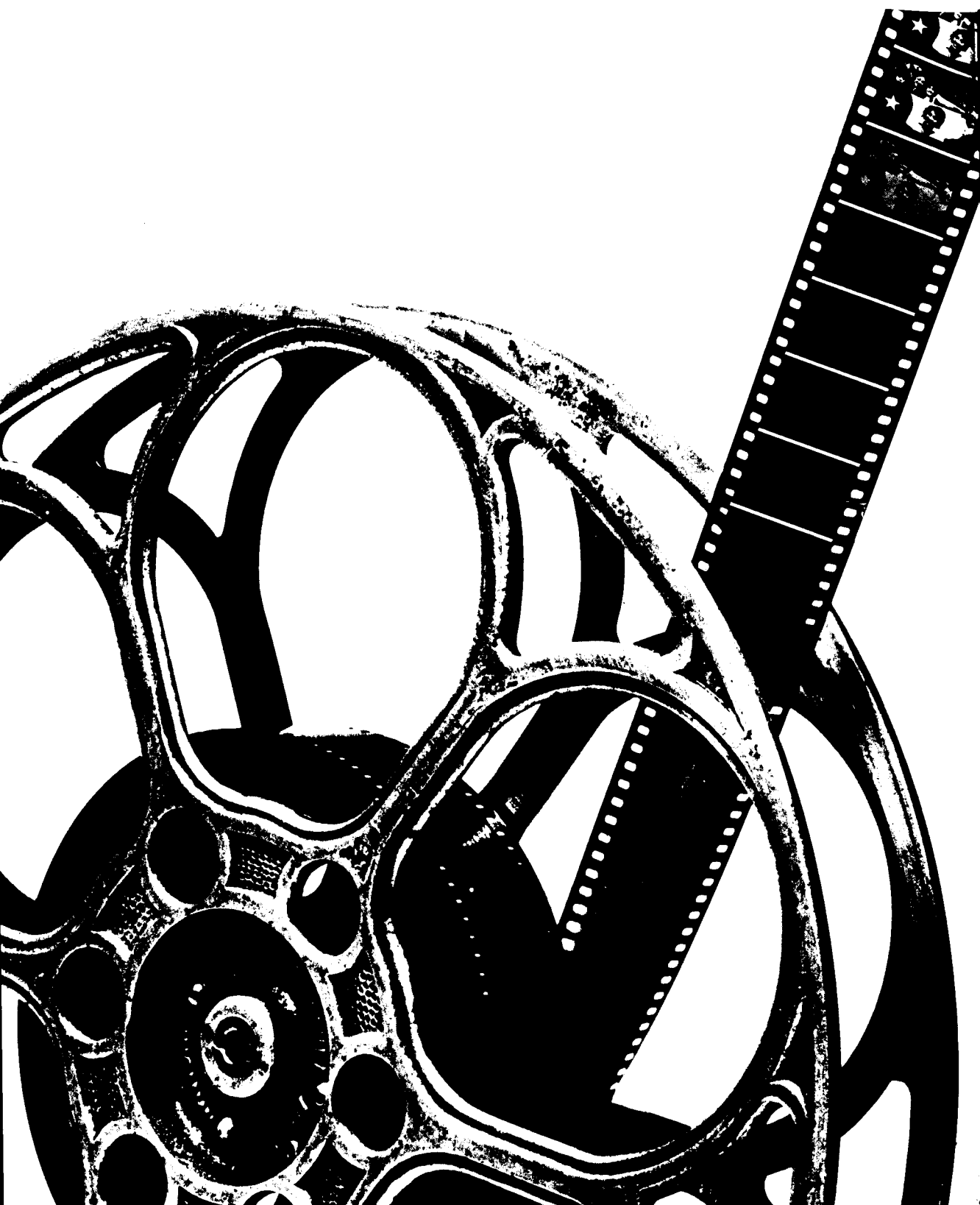
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INTRODUCTION

WORKING CLASS FILMS

This issue of RA has two articles on recent developments in films. Lynn Garafola's article, "Hollywood and the Myth of the Working Class," discusses such box office successes as "Rocky," "The Deer Hunter," "Saturday Night Fever," and "Norma Rae," as well as some commercial productions that didn't do so well, such as "Blue Collar" and "F.I.S.T." John Demeter's article, on the other hand, looks at two examples of a new class of technically advanced non-Hollywood left-wing movies: "The Wobblies" and "Northern Lights."

In a curious way, the Hollywood films that Garafola writes about are more political than the left-wing films. "The Wobblies" and "Northern Lights," a film about the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, are so anxious to affirm the worth and importance of these forgotten movements that they often fail to look at them politically and strategically. Rather, they attempt to arouse a sense of radical history and of solidarity. They do not ask why these movements failed to achieve their goals in any lasting sense, or suggest what they have to tell us about our politics today.

The Hollywood films, as Garafola points out, do have a political message for the present. Cumulatively, if not in each case, they react against the revolts of women and non-whites by asserting the ethnic white male working class as an alternative rebel category, one in which all non-class divisions are presumably resolved on the basis of traditional supremacies. This kind of politics is particularly evident in "The Deer Hunter." It would be

easy, but not very helpful, to say that this tendency in the films represents the preferences of those who control movie-industry financing. More importantly, what the films reflect is a general assertion throughout society of nostalgia and defensiveness as responses to social dislocations. These films try to pass this defensiveness off as being particularly a working class attitude, so as to remove from it the taint of privilege.

Both groups of movies have their strengths, in addition to the fact that they are well-done as films. "Northern Lights" and "The Wobblies" assert (by context as much as content) individual commitment and confidence as absolute values. The elderly Nonpartisan League veteran who closes "Northern Lights" with a series of knockout punches at his invisible enemy gives us a psychological boost that can't be measured in terms of correct politics.

The commercial films, for their part, also have a positive effect in that they assert a healthy pride of class. This pride is particularly apparent in relation to the middle class setting which has predominated in American TV and film productions since the 1940s, which encouraged working class self-denigration by making that class invisible. By comparison with the saccharine unreality of most of the old middle class fantasy films, moreover, the films discussed by Lynn Garafola, despite their element of traditional romanticism, are realistic. "Saturday Night Fever" and "Rocky" at least can be appreciated for implying that the reality of working class life can be faced with some artistry and dignity, and even that some kinds of artistry and dignity are peculiarly working class.

Independent Left filmmakers have come far from the days of Newsreel films, with their machine gun blasts of political commitment which were accessible only to a decidedly political audience. As John Demeter shows, the

existence of an audience to support the production of Left films like "The Wobblies" and "Northern Lights" shows that progress is slowly being made toward the creation of a popular Left culture.

MALAYSIAN WOMEN WORKERS

The situation in Iran forces us, once again, to confront the dreadful power of American imperialism in the Third World. The U.S. government, along with American oil companies and banks, helped the Shah and his secret police to terrorize and exploit the country in order to obtain oil and a military ally in the Mideast. In many other Third World countries U.S. companies support a similar, if less spectacular, kind of oppression, again hiding behind the mandate of "economic development."

Rachael Grossman's article on Malaysian women in the electronics industry provides us with a revealing account of the personal and social costs inherent in the dual exploitation and paternalism which characterize the activity of international capitalism. She shows how women are brought into electronic component factories with the lure of consumer goods as well as the hope for real liberation from the isolation and desperation of traditional patriarchal families. Grossman graphically demonstrates that the silicon chips so necessary to computerized "progress" in the U.S. are produced through the super-exploitation of Asian women. The article shows the power of American imperialism to define "liberation" for Third World proletarians in terms of commodities and "lifestyle" which can only be purchased if they submit to the most brutalizing and wrenching of urban industrial experiences.

Grossman's article also forces us to see the importance of an international division of labor. More and more, American workers are part of a worldwide job market, in which capitalists seek to play off one segment of the

workforce against another. This comes out vividly in Grossman's article when she talks about the relationship between the California and the Southeast Asia employees of the same electronics firms.

Too often, the response of American workers and unions to the new situation has been one of nationalism and protectionism. The garment unions' thinly veiled "Buy American" campaigns come to mind. The longstanding co-operation of the AFL-CIO and several individual unions with the CIA in seeking to repress radical labor movements abroad also comes to mind. As American working conditions and living standards continue to decline, it becomes increasingly clear that the strategy of national chauvinism is a losing one for the American working class. In country after country it is American imperialism that helps to insure the low Third World wages that American workers complain about. What is needed instead is a strategy based on class solidarity across national boundaries. The sporadic boycotts of goods bound for Chile, as well as the successful boycott of Rhodesian chrome by black longshoremen earlier in the 1970s are examples of this kind of solidarity. There has to be a lot more of it.

HUNGARY

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 stands as a watershed in the history of international socialism. It was the first (and still the only) full-fledged popular revolution against a nominally socialist regime. Only with Soviet troops and tanks, and even then only after protracted resistance, was "order" restored in Hungary. The Revolution, moreover, was supported by

massive numbers of members of the ruling Communist Party itself, willing to risk the consequences of popular revolt in order to throw off the control of their country by the Soviet Union.

The authors of our article on Hungary, Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher, are among a half-dozen students of the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs who are collectively known as the Budapest school. Now in exile, they were young Hungarian CP members in 1956 who enthusiastically supported the revolt. Now they are looking back on the experience. For them the crucial aspect was the emergence of workers' councils to run production and, in a real sense, to run the country during the brief interlude before the final Soviet invasion. Even after armed resistance was smashed, the councils continued to meet, to maintain a general strike, and to bargain with the new regime; in effect they maintained a system of dual power for several weeks after military defeat.

The authors do not romanticize the councils, or the Revolution itself. Instead they argue that leftists should support any democratic revolution, and take their chances with its political content while trying to influence it as much as possible.

Despite the article's somewhat difficult language and style, the points it raises are important ones for left-socialists to discuss. What will a revolution consist of in a "socialist" country that is not actually run by its working class? The question of how to move beyond the status quo in Communist countries, without moving backwards instead, is one that will be of more and more importance to internationally minded socialists in the years to come.



HOLLYWOOD & THE MYTH OF THE WORKING CLASS

Lynn Garafola

After a long hiatus, Hollywood has rediscovered the “working class.” In quick succession have come *Rocky* and *Blue Collar*, *F.I.S.T.* and *Norma Rae*, films which have received full press coverage and, in some instances, enjoyed critical and financial success. They have also sparked considerable debate, particularly on the left — praised by some as marking new attitudes toward working-class life and damned by others as striking all time lows in sexism. Above all, they have been decried for their prevailing tone of cynicism toward working class life and institutions. While all these criticisms are to an extent justified, key questions about the way these films view the relationship of ethnicity, class, and race remain unasked. Beneath the veneer of the media’s post-Vietnam “radicalism” lurks a profound yet unremarked irony. For what these films ultimately purvey is a nostalgia for old-time values and touchstones, closely attuned to the rightward drift of the country’s political mood in the seventies.

The most striking thing about these films is that for Hollywood “working class” America is “ethnic.” Since the release of *The Godfather* in 1972 audiences have been deluged with films portraying “ethnic” characters and situations. *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *The Deer Hunter* are but a sampling of a long list of titles which have reached the silver screen. The full extent of the blitz is underscored by the range of television shows centered around identifiably “ethnic” characters — *Kojak* and *Baretta*, *Petrocelli* and *Angie*, *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*.

Clearly, ethnicity is a major media theme of the seventies. Sylvester Stallone’s “Rocky”

and Tony (John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*) are Italian in descent, Johnny Kovacs (Stallone in *F.I.S.T.*), Slovak, Harvel Keitel, in *Blue Collar*, Polish. Their world is bounded by the ethnic ghetto of the decaying inner cities or the bedroom suburbs just beyond, their religion a Catholicism of a statuary rather than devotional nature, their language an English that suggests the presence of another tongue.

But is this pot pourri of Italians, Slovaks, and Poles a fair picture of the working class today?

Certainly, there was a time when working-class America was a mirror of the unmelted races of southern and eastern Europe. From 1880 onwards, millions poured through Castle Garden and Ellis Island from the most underdeveloped of Europe's empires and kingdoms to sweat in the factories and mills of America's cities. But the day when organizers, like those in Lawrence and Paterson, had to labor in more than a dozen languages has passed. In industry after industry, blacks and Latins have joined older generations of ethnic Americans on the assembly lines, while the children of the latter have slowly but perceptibly moved into middle-class and white-collar occupations. The blanket identification of "ethnic" and "working class" in the American media of the seventies is patently misleading.

What is true is that virtually every one of these films recreates that configuration, harking back to the heroic days of labor in the thirties or to a climate of unambiguous moral and social values. The emotional core of *F.I.S.T.* lies in the organizing struggles of the Teamsters during the Depression. This turbulent period, to which Stallone devotes fully sixty minutes of the film, is portrayed as the working class' "finest hour" — a time when people knew right from wrong and individuals rose to heroic deeds. Although set in the present, *Blue Collar*, too, draws on mythologized images of the thirties. As in the iconography of

the period, the heroes are blue collar workers of heavy industry, men whose strength matches the raw power of the old-time assembly line. And the film's mood of disillusionment is sharpened by a sense of militant traditions betrayed.

If the depiction of labor betrays a retrospective yearning for heroes and unequivocal triumphs, that of the neighborhood reveals a similar nostalgia for the sense of community and "rootedness" that is increasingly absent from American life. (Whether it ever existed in the U.S. as it once did in Europe is a moot point. Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, which follows workers on the move in the Southwest, uses the boxcar — as John Dos Passos did in *U.S.A.* — as a symbol for a country uprooted and transient even before World War I.) In *Rocky*, as in *Saturday Night Fever* and *F.I.S.T.*, the neighborhood is less a frame for events than a living protagonist. Indeed, these films draw their vitality from the concreteness of their locations — the rubbish that litters city curbsides, the distinctive character of frame or row houses.

Even more important, the neighborhood is a symbol of continuity: it rests on a web of mores and relationships that bind people to one another as well as to the past. Even if one leaves the "old neighborhood," as Travolta chooses to do when he heeds the call of Manhattan, it remains a psychic and physical touchstone. Nowhere is this symbolic dimension more clearly drawn than in *The Deer Hunter* where the rituals and neighborliness of the film's Slavic community symbolize American innocence in the face of the "alien savagery" of the Vietnamese. Even those who have condemned on political grounds director Michael Cimino's portrait of the war, have praised as authentic his vision of working-class life. In fact, Cimino's locale, a Ukrainian Catholic factory town, is more a film convention than a sociological reality, simply echoing the wedding

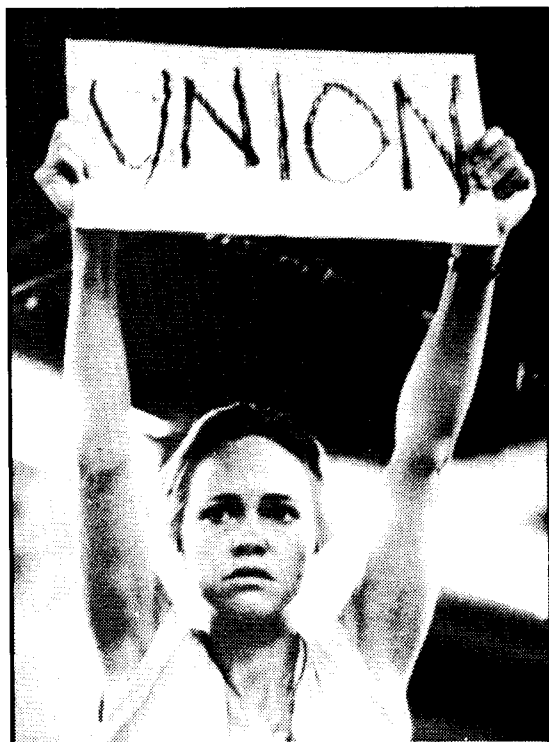


scene in *The Godfather* and the male camaraderie of *Mean Streets*. Although pockets remain, such communities are on the decline in the country today, and Cimino himself filmed not on location in the U.S. but in Canada.

It is not without significance that the emergence of Hollywood's "ethnic" theme coincides with an explosion of "ethnic," and especially Italian-American talent in the film industry, and the appearance of "ethnic power" on the country's political horizon. As both a reflection of and reaction to Black Power in the sixties, the recent growth of ethnic consciousness dates from the closing days of the Vietnam War and coincides with the publication of Richard Gambino's *Blood of My Blood* and Michael Novack's *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, some of the best known of the writings on this politically ambiguous phenomenon. As an affirmation of cultural values and challenge to remaining discrimination, "ethnic power" is a long overdue slap in the face of WASP economic and cultural hegemony. But to the extent that it finds political expression in backlash movements such as Mario Cuomo's short-lived Neighborhood Preservation Party, a force in New York's 1977 mayoral campaign, it represents a thinly-veiled attack on the hard-won advances of the minorities since the sixties.

As portrayed in these films, the working class is not only ethnic, but male, and not only male, but *macho*. With the exception of *Norma Rae*, whose protagonist is both a woman and an organizer, the women in *F.I.S.T.*, *Blue Collar*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Rocky*, when they appear at all, play second fiddle to the men.

The problem is not merely that their place is in the home, that they move from family to husband or that they are sweethearts, wives, and mothers. Certainly, the lives of many blue collar women have been marked out along conventional paths, and all too many have embraced the gender roles assigned by society. But, naturalistic veracity aside, the fact remains that the characters have been drawn to fit not only Hollywood's traditional images of women, but the stereotypes pandered by the most outspoken antagonists of contemporary feminism.



If damning by neglect is the pattern that emerges in most of these films, in others like *The Godfather*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *New York, New York*, ethnic women are the objects of physical violence. Connie, Annette, and Francine in these films grate under the constraints of society's traditional roles. Whether demanding affection, a more equitable division of labor in the home or the freedom to pursue a career, all three voice dissatisfaction and independent needs. Yet in every instance, confrontation leads to violence. Annette is gang-banged by Tony's Bay Ridge pals in *Saturday Night Fever*, Connie in *The Godfather* is beaten black and blue by her husband, and Francine, eight months pregnant, is pummelled by Robert DeNiro in Scorsese's *New York, New York*. However, in setting the ethnic male against his powerless female counterpart, the filmmakers enact not only the drama of sexual warfare, but cultural warfare as well. The ethnic woman is transformed into a symbol of the ghetto itself, a link in the physical and cultural chain of ethnic continuity. The violence she provokes is a measure of group self-hatred and stems from the profound ambivalence underlying ethnic America's accommodation with its dual heritage and identity.

It is on the question of women's work that politics and nostalgia converge. At a time when over half the married women in America work — many, in fact, on assembly lines — Hollywood purveys traditional images of women and family life. Since *The Godfather*, Sunday dinners and weddings have become *de rigeur* symbols of old-time togetherness, destroyed in the passage to prosperity and Americanization. But, contrary to myths of America's long ago, the grandmothers and mothers of today's women did not merely tend their pots, particularly if they were working-class. Many labored in factories, others did home work — even after they were married.

Talia Shire in *Rocky* does in fact work. However, her cashiering job in a pet shop takes a back seat to the romantic plot. Making work a peripheral rather than central concern is hardly a sexist oversight as men's work in these films also serves as little more than a backdrop to the intrigue. For Hollywood, however, fitting windshields or driving trucks is more "real" than changing diapers or selling canaries. It is glamorous and action-packed. It also defines blue collar work in terms of the past, without reference to "post-industrial" patterns of employment in which the presence of women and the spectre of obsolescence figure prominently. For women's work, as indeed, a majority of jobs today performed by men, stands increasingly outside heavy industry in the white-collar and service sectors. Moreover, with the introduction of computers and automated equipment, it has become mechanized and humdrum as never before. As auto workers and miners, steelworkers and teamsters move into the ranks of labor's "aristocrats," a new proletariat of key punch operators and bank clerks has emerged. If the assembly line at General Motors epitomizes labor in the thirties, a word-processing unit is its symbol in the seventies.

Tendered under the guise of nostalgia, then, is a conservative ideology that seeks to turn back the clock to a family-centered past. It is no coincidence that this comes at a time when the White House is proclaiming the virtues of family life, the Catholic Bishops are throwing all their resources into anti-abortion campaigns, and insurance conglomerates are sparing no efforts to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment. Home though the U.S. may be to the women's movement, the ideology of "woman's place" has proved remarkably resilient. What has changed is the class focus of its family appeal. Where the fifties and early sixties gave us the suburban bliss of *Father Knows Best*, Hollywood in the late seventies dishes up the working-class ethnic family as the meat and



James Dean takes on the nuclear family in "Rebel Without a Cause," 1954.

potatoes of social stability — the official answer to feminism, gay rights, open marriage, and the alternative lifestyles that have dotted the national horizon since the early seventies.

The past decade did not merely brush, it fundamentally altered the patterns of American life. Sons went off to war or into exile, daughters left home to take lovers and jobs, divorce rates soared, "gay" entered the popular vocabulary. Families looked at themselves and saw obsolescence on the wall and found their thoughts straying to the past — to tightly-knit immigrant communities where kin had banded together, to generations of ancestors whose survival stood in triumph over those who sought to destroy them.

Thus, at a time when the family was facing its greatest test, it was reborn as a symbol of permanence. Significantly, *The Deer Hunter* ends with a secular act of communion in which a surrogate family breaks bread together. This, like key scenes in *Roots* and other "working-class" films, calls upon an ideology that has not only been outstripped by the pace of change but runs counter to the ways people are actually conducting their lives. Beneath an occasionally radical facade, the appeal of these films rests on nostalgia and a ritualistic affirmation of a now departed *status quo*.

Another startling pattern that emerges in virtually every one of these films (as well as television programs like *Kojak* and *Petrocelli*) is



the graphic contrast between the male protagonists and their female counterparts. Time and again, the “ethnic” hero — “swarthy,” tough, and street wise — is paired with women who are the very antithesis of identifiable ethnicity. Almost always (Talia Shire is a rare exception), the latter are blond, tall, and “ultrafeminine”; their accents like their backgrounds are “de-regionalized,” their class origins obscured. Even Melinda Dillon, who plays Stallone’s Slovak wife in *F.I.S.T.*, conforms to the pattern in physical appearance as much as in her speech.

Surely, it is no accident that most of the male characters are “Italian.” (Harvey Keitel is an honorary “paisan” as Martin Scorsese’s alter-ego in his early films; in *F.I.S.T.*, the hero is a Slav, but he is played by the “Italian Stallion” of *Rocky*.) For what the media understands by “Italianness” is a throwback to simpler, more primitive states of being: physical strength and violence, loyalty to outworn codes of honor, emotional spontaneity untempered by “middle-class” reflection, an uncomplicated sexuality that combines “instinct” with a protective chivalry and “respect.”

But if to male middle-class America “Italianness” suggests a kind of barbaric atavism in which intellectual backwardness and undiluted *machismo* converge, it also has other connotations. Italians, particularly those from the South, are the black men of Europe; in their veins flows the blood of North Africa, and in contrast to the physical ideal of WASP America, they are not altogether “white.” Among other things, therefore, these “working-class” films subliminally extol a *machismo* which weds sexuality to color. “Ethnicity” should thus be read as a codeword for “race” — race sufficiently “lightened” so as to remain acceptable to the moviegoing public, yet still “dark” enough to retain an exotic appeal.

In his pre-“born again” incarnation, Elbridge Cleaver had some perceptive things to say about the complex relationship of race and sex in American culture. White society, he wrote in *Soul on Ice*, created an image of the black male as a “Supermasculine Menial,” whom it envies, fears, and despises. What we thus see in these films is a ritualized expression of very traditional American fears and desires. Transforming the heroes into “ethnics,” however, kills two racial-sexual birds with one stone. It allows the white male audience to shed its middle-class codes of repression and identify vicariously with direct expressions of violence and sexual power (nowhere more completely than in the films of Martin Scorsese). On the





other hand, to the extent that the celluloid heroes are "white," the fear of sexual emasculation by the black male is neatly sidestepped. Indeed, in films like *Rocky*, *Blue Collar*, and *Saturday Night Fever*, that fear is doubly neutralized by the introduction of black (or Latin) characters who enact in exaggerated form the same (white) roles. That they lose out in terms of audience sympathy has less to do with the intrinsic nature of their roles than an interpretation of those roles untempered by magnanimity or compassion. Travolta comes out a hero precisely because he hands over his prize to the Puerto Rican contenders, Rocky because of the grace and humility he shows under pressure.

If these films rely on stereotyping and code images to create their blue collar universe, the ethos they purvey is solidly middle-class. The guiding myth underlying *Saturday Night Fever* and *Rocky* is Horatio Alger: achievement and self-improvement, affluence and material accumulation. "Marrying up" into the ranks of homogenized blondness is one example of this. But the pattern appears with striking clarity in *Saturday Night Fever* where the solution to Tony's aimlessness is a subway ride to Manhattan. The Manhattan, however, to which Stephanie tries to lure him, is a far cry from the bright lights and Broadway glitter of myth. It is a specific phenomenon of the seventies: a landscape of renovated town houses and chic con-



sumerism, hallmarks of the “gentrified” urbanites who make up the city’s “New Class.” To make it, Stephanie insists to Tony, you’ve got to get your head together, work hard, and mix with the right people. What she’s really saying is that the American dream comes at the price of abandoning one’s ethnic and working-class roots. To assimilated America, Brooklyn is no more than a colorful backdrop to be exploited for its accents and humor. “Real life” begins when the fantasies of America’s image-makers have been taken to heart, and their myths have become articles of faith.

With *The Godfather*, the cultural reality of ethnic America — invisible in the sixties — was resurrected. At the same time, a peculiar phenomenon emerged. Unlike European films such as Alain Tanner’s *La Salamandre* or Lina Wertmüller’s *All Screwed Up*, working-class identity was defined not in terms of work but as a life-

style. Tailfin cars and juke-boxes, half-sentences and four-letter words — all of which were associated with black and working-class culture and recycled in the sixties into the counterculture — became the cinematic code for working-class life while the workplace retreated to the background. Like landscape in a genre painting, a Detroit assembly line added color. But the dramatic conflicts and action had their source elsewhere. If “real life” for Tony begins once he leaves Brooklyn, for Hollywood’s other working-class heroes, it begins outside the factory gates.

Because class is a matter of lifestyle rather than economics, with the exception of *Norma Rae*, class conflict in these films is muted. The workplace appears as an isolated environment where bosses play a negligible role save for an occasional foreman and where there is no apparent connection between what happens on

the shop floor and what happens on Wall Street. The real culprits of *F.I.S.T.* and *Blue Collar* are the unions — less because of their collusion with management than a generalized post-Watergate mistrust of bureaucratic institutions. Under a mask of critical liberalism, Hollywood projects onto the union and its membership the moral paralysis and cynicism associated with government. Cynicism, too, is the prevailing attitude toward collective action and the very notion of solidarity. Indeed, a typically American brand of individualism runs through these films, in which the “little man” takes on the Goliath of institutional corruption in the manner of an investigative reporter. His efforts, doomed to failure, are an object lesson in the pointlessness of political action, an appealing theme, no doubt, to the corporate conglomerates that now control Hollywood’s major studios and distribution channels.

Hollywood’s myth of the working class has been significantly shaped by Paul Schrader and

Martin Scorsese, John Avildson and Sylvester Stallone, people who were touched by the catchwords of the sixties but unmarked by their radicalism. To a remarkable degree their films register the mood of the times. They have caught the pulse of the country, its uneasy accommodation with the changes of the past decade, its yearning for symbols of continuity. For Hollywood’s new breed of filmmakers, the working class is ultimately a pretext in whose name corporate media voices the vague discontents of the seventies while discrediting the politics of change.

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INDEPENDENT FILM & WORKING CLASS HISTORY

A Review of "Northern Lights" & "The Wobblies"

John Demeter

Hollywood's cinematic rediscovery (and rewriting) of working class history parallels another recent development in American film — the appearance of a growing collection of independent, left, labor history films. *Northern Lights* (1978) and *The Wobblies* (1979) are two recent additions to a group that has included, among its more widely-known works,¹ *Union Maids* (1976), *Harlan County* (1977) and *Babies and Banners* (1978).

Aesthetically and commercially, the two new arrivals are bringing a moderate degree of success and a growing "legitimization" of the genre: *Northern Lights* won the award for Best First Feature at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival, among other notices,² and *The Wobblies* was selected for screening at the New York Film Festival last Fall. Following on *Harlan County's* Academy Award in 1977, one can only hope that the critical praise and exposure of both new films is pointing to a wider acceptance of this challenge to the media conglomerates' stranglehold on American film production and distribution.

Viewing the films politically, and in light of that long-term struggle, *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* present some lessons and questions for the "American Left" and the "independent cinema." Understanding that both these groups significantly overlap in these productions, we can see the films as a chance to reflect on the problems and potentials of that interrelationship. The five days of discussion, debate and struggle among the 400 participants at last June's "First U.S. Conference for an Alternative Cinema" was perhaps the clearest affirmation of the ties between left political activity and many independent media workers. While moving towards uniting these elements, the conference also reflected

the problem of disorganization that both groups presently confront, and the funding/distribution dilemma faced by left film.

I was struck by one particular pairing mirrored both at the conference and in both *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* — that of elderly working class activists and 30-year-old filmmakers. It was a relationship that speaks quite clearly to the present and future alliance of film and political work.

The twelve interviewees of *The Wobblies* are aged 75 to 97, while the narrator of *Northern Lights* is 94. The overwhelming majority of media activists, meanwhile, at the Alternative Cinema Conference (including the producers of both films) came formed of the anti-war, black and women's movements of the '60's. The most visible presence of these activists' historical "roots" came in the person of three 70 year old producers whose work formed the base of the Communist Party's Film and Photo League in the '30's.³ In fact, the session chaired by these veteran activists (Tom Brandon, Leo Hurwitz and Leo Seltzer), at which they screened a number of their works, was one of the largest attended sessions at the conference.

The coming together of these two eras of politics and progressive media comes as no surprise. On one hand, it reflects a growing interest in some parts of the left to resurrect, study and analyze the historical roots of American working class and political radicalism. But at the same time, it also unveils a generational gap represented by the absence of left political leadership and progressive media representation from the '40's and '50's.⁴

This disrupted history of both the people's movement and its media chroniclers presents, then, a major developmental problem for independent left cinema. The promising development of the new body of labor history films may help to overcome that disruption.

In serving as a link between present struggles

and popular insurgencies of the past, *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* could not have come at a more opportune time. While *Union Maids* and *Babies and Banners* centered on the climactic trade union struggles of the '30's, particularly chronicling women's strategic roles in that period, the two newer films delve back even further, to the period before World War I that many historians consider the heyday of American socialism. In an era of widespread militant working class agitation, it was a time when populists and socialists alike were able to succeed electorally and by mass action in many areas of the country. It was also a period that witnessed a vicious and large scale response of state repression that suppressed and aided the demise of those movements.

As the near obliteration of much of this era from popular consciousness indicates, the repression was quite extensive. The historical and political importance of both films is thus magnified by their presentation of the first person witnesses of that period.



Henry Martinson

Northern Lights, a 90-minute dramatic "feature," is framed by the on-screen introduction and epilog of 94 year old Henry Martinson. Martinson is a former organizer for the Non-partisan League, the grass roots organization of populists and socialists, that swept to victory in

North Dakota's state elections (1916) in an anticapitalist campaign directed against Eastern grain and banking interests. Shown reminiscing with an old diary at the outset, Martinson returns at the film's dramatic conclusion to speak of the need for continued struggle and presents us with the picture of an activist whose life-long dedication to socialism remained unaltered by the eventual demise of the NPL.

Providing most of the narration and anecdotal history in *The Wobblies* are the twelve octogenarian rank and file activists, whose insight and humor inject the film with a rare vitality and perspective. Addressing the audience at the screening of the film at the New York Film Festival, one of the film's subjects, 83 year old Irma Lombardi, challenged viewers "to take it [the film] more seriously than just a good film." She added, "Of course, it's a nice picture, but it should bring home [to you] the sacrifice men and women paid."

Had either film been delayed, we would have stood to lose this first-hand testimony and witness. In fact, since the completion of *The Wobblies*, two of the interviewees have died. But each film's importance extends beyond its "timing." Both speak clearly, whether in matters of organizing and unionism or repression and fragmentation of the left, to areas of present-day urgency.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Northern Lights is actually two stories. One is presented on film, the other is to be found in the three year odyssey of its directors, John Hanson and Rob Nilson, and their co-workers to fund, produce and distribute the work. The process of their work could produce a story almost as interesting as the film.⁵

The film was produced by the San Francisco-based CineManifest⁶ for approximately \$330,000. It grew out of the director's primary connection to the history of struggle of small



Shooting the foreclosure scene.

farmers in the northern mid-west. Hanson was raised there and his grandfather was a NPL member and organizer; Nilson's grandfather was North Dakota's first filmmaker and had produced early footage of the NPL period. Their film seeks to retrace a lost heritage neither of the filmmakers remember learning anything about either from relatives or in public school.

With financial backing from the North Dakota Committee for the Humanities and Public Issues (an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities), they began the research. Originally intended to form the middle film of a short documentary trilogy on the League and its history, *Northern Lights* evolved into a feature length dramatic work. With the personnel and experience of CineManifest behind them, the directors decided to ambitiously expand the project once further funding became available.

The filmmakers, actors and crew began travelling the state, researching the League and interviewing farmers and historians. Their efforts won over the Divide County Historical

Society in Crosby, North Dakota, which mobilized the people of the county to provide clothing, props, farm machinery, old cars and the know-how to authenticate the period piece. In addition to providing scene ideas, the farmers played all but the three leading roles in the film, in some parts speaking in their old Scandinavian dialect (sub-titled in the film). In short, they participated in almost every phase of production. Many parts of the film were played back at different points for their reaction and criticism.

Given that history, it is no surprise that the world premiere of the film was held on July 12, 1978 in Crosby, a town of 1,800 people. The film broke box office records at the town's only theater, the Dakota, and audiences rose to give the film a standing ovation. From Crosby, the crew travelled with the film all across North Dakota running what they characterized as a "grassroots political campaign." In addition to the critical success the film enjoyed during its rural, small town run, it proved able to financially support the outreach and distribution campaign. The producers did find themselves taxed by the many hours consumed in this type of work. It was the personal commitment of the staff and crew that supplanted the large media blitz most large studios can bankroll.

Hanson described their apprehension in setting out for Minneapolis and urban theaters: "The picture was in black and white, no stars, no sex, had foreign languages with subtitles and to top it off had a political theme." Runs in Minneapolis, Madison and Seattle proved the work could more than hold its own. After the trip to Cannes, the unexpected award, and the ensuing enthusiastic reception among European T.V. and film distributors, *Northern Lights* was assured of a modicum of success. The testing of the domestic market began again with a sweep through the Northeast in the Fall of 1979.

"All of this has been very good for our egos," Hanson commented, "but the question remaining is whether our distribution path and future attempts modelled on ours are economically viable." It appears that, at this time, it is not. Short of a national network to support and sustain independent film, questions of funding and distribution remain as the major hurdles.

All of this does not address the core of conscious political cultural work — the content, use and direction of the form. This remains problematic with the absence of a broad-based cultural formation or movement. That the aforementioned works have evolved in such an atmosphere speaks perhaps to the likelihood that conditions are ripe for this coalescing. But, leaving the larger questions aside, I'd like to discuss *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* — the films.

Northern Lights presents an instructive and vital addition to the predominantly documentary nature of most independent left film. Filmed in a grainy black and white, the film captures, in its bleak silhouettes and harsh contrasts, a sense of the land and its work that *Days of Heaven*, for all its lush cinematography, neatly opaqued. Focusing on the organizing efforts of farmer Ray Sorenson (Robert Behling) in the weeks before the successful NPL electoral campaign in 1916, the film is set against a backdrop of small, family wheat farms beset by harvest-threatening late fall blizzards. The film details Ray's reluctant entry into populist organizing at the urging of local League representatives. ("I've never met an organizer yet with a sense of humor," Ray comments.)

The young farmer opts at first to cynically ignore the organizer's overtures — "Is it fair to raise people's hope with all this talk?" — and work the harvest on his parents' farm with his brother John (Joe Spano). Heroically, Ray, John and neighboring farmers set to save not



Ray organizes a reluctant farmer ...

only their wheat but that of his fiancée's ailing parents, in the midst of a howling blizzard. Had I not known that the blizzard was real, I would have credited it to brilliant studio-set special effects.

As was the case for many small farms at that time, it was the grain and banking interests that defined the "benefits" of the harvests. The farmers were forced to store their wheat and hope the fixed wholesale prices would rise. At this point, Ray's father dies and he must stand by helplessly with his fiancée, Inga Olsness (Susan Lynch), as the local banker (played by the local banker) forecloses on her parents' farm and evicts them.

The conditions now gradually move Ray to consider more active work with the Nonpartisan League. Sitting in a bar at the local grain elevator, he comments sardonically, "He [the dealer] steals the grain from you in the front and sells it back to you as liquor in the rear."

As Ray takes to the backroads of North Dakota, the film enters into its strongest portrayal — detailing the thankless, arduous task

of winning over the isolated immigrant farmers, many of whom shared Ray's initial mistrust of "politics." The patience, humor and persistence of his efforts to defuse this cynicism is pictured, in both language and setting, quite realistically — a realism that connotes accuracy and humanism while avoiding romanticism. In fact, when one young farmer challenges Ray to wrestle him for his signing on with the NPL, I cringed in anticipation. But, it's Ray who's pinned, leaving the barn with the admonition that his opponent was the real loser.

But *Northern Lights*, beyond the historical narrative, is also a story of the tension between the political and personal aspects of Ray's life — his work on the farm and organizing with the NPL contrasted with his relationship to his brother, family and Inga. It is here that the film loses some of its probing, questioning edge.

The film does anchor its story, at its opening and conclusion, in the relationship of Inga and Ray. Following her parents' eviction and Ray's enlistment into the NPL, however, she is relegated to a sit-and-wait role. Inga serves to oc-



... while Inga waits.

casionally remind Ray of the "personal" — their postponed marriage, her loneliness. But she serves only to remind us of "questions" ("Sometimes the little things come first," "I don't know what the woman's role is now") the film evades tackling or confronting. Asked if it would have been inconceivable (historically) for Inga to have joined Ray in organizing, John Hanson referred to the few noted woman organizers of the time — Kate O'Hare, Emma Goldman and Mother Jones — and stated "she [Inga] would have had a hard time making it." "And there were local women who were very intelligent and persuasive in their own arenas but it would have been unrealistic," he added.⁸ "Realism" here, however, only subtly served to reinforce the stereotypical splitting of the personal and political. Ray's character remains very much the unemoting male organizer and the possible freedom in this dramatic form to delve briefly yet noticeably into that contradiction went untapped.

Northern Lights is at times stylistically self-conscious, producing some narrative dryness that was in no small way due to the economic pressures that forced an anti-improvisational manner in the filming. It still remains a very good film and one that will serve to bridge the long gap from *Grapes of Wrath*, *Salt of the Earth* and *Native Land* to new dramatic features chronicling an "unsanitized" people's history on film.

THE WOBBLIES

Made at a cost of approximately \$180,000, *The Wobblies* culminates nearly five years of research by co-producers Stew Bird and Deborah Shaffer. While *Northern Lights* aids the rediscovery of North Dakota's Nonpartisan League, *The Wobblies* took on the task of resurrecting a national revolutionary labor organization whose erasure from popular consciousness was nearly as complete and vindic-

tive as the persecution it buckled under at the outset of World War I. Made in the mold of *Union Maids* and *Babies and Banners*, *The Wobblies* is the most ambitious and politically direct labor history documentary to date.

The documentary grew from the script of "The U.S. Vs. William Haywood et al.," a play authored by Bird that was performed at the Labor Theater in New York in 1977. It was the personal contacts developed during the play's run, with ex-Wobblies who travelled to see it, that spurred on the work of the feature-length film.

With the research for the play as a base, Bird and Shaffer then began to construct a network of connections, with the Wobblies themselves, oral history projects, unions and leftists, that spanned the country. Eventually they were to anchor the film on interviews with twelve rank and file I.W.W. activists: Irma Lombardi, 83; Jack Miller, 89; Angelo Rocco, 95; James Fair, 80; Sophie Cohen, 77; Roger Baldwin, 95; Art Shields, 90; Nicholas Steelink, 89; Tom Scribner, 80; Dominic Mingone, 86; Nels Peterson and Katie Pintek, both 89. The group fairly represented the main arenas of struggle for the Wobblies in the period from 1905 to 1918: Paterson, New Jersey, Lawrence, Mass., and Philadelphia in the East; Bisbee, Arizona, Chicago, Illinois, and Seattle, Washington, in the Midwest and West.

Composed of nine men and three women, the group of interviewees included only one black. While this racial makeup accurately spoke to the outreach efforts of both mainstream and radical groups of the time, the directors were still frustrated in not being able to convey the I.W.W.'s progressive record among blacks and immigrants. As Shaffer explained, a large part of the I.W.W.'s work among black dockworkers took place in the organization's first years and nearly all the contacts they could track had died. Additionally, they were handi-

capped by the class and race bias of many historians, whose oral history and research work often deals only with white, male workers from that and following periods. She and Bird took up, in desperation, a six-month advertising and leafletting campaign around the docks of Philadelphia ("Was your grandfather a Wobblie?" read one leaflet) which resulted in their one black subject.

They encountered similar problems in the South, where the I.W.W. had brought many black and white workers together for the first time. The lack of written historical records in many rural parts of that area left the filmmakers unable to track many contacts. "If the film does anything," Stew Bird commented, "it will cause people to want to learn more [about the I.W.W.] ... and their organizing down South."

With their twelve interviewees, the producers assembled a cinematic collage of rare film footage, stills, newspaper headlines and graphics to frame and elaborate the anecdotal history and reminiscences provided by the elderly activists. Complementing that portrait was the cultural work and its artifacts that provided people with perhaps one of the main contributions of the Wobblies — the cultural work embodied in their posters, leaflets and art work and their songs of struggle, satire and celebration. The music, particularly, is presented in the film quite movingly by Alice Gerard, Joe Glazer and Mike Seeger.

Underscored by the focus on rank and file Wobblie activists and their stories, the film also reflects the producers' attempt to present this history to a broader audience. And it is for this audience they attempted to debunk the many



Memorial services held for victims of Everett, Wash., massacre, May 1, 1917.

myths and false ideas that get resurrected along with the political history. "Nobody wants to deal with this period [1890-1920]," claimed Bird. "It's a period when the I.W.W. and the Socialist Party were very strong, a significant time for all labor, and people still continue to think that they didn't exist and that GM and Standard Oil, on the other hand, have been around as long as the U.S.," he added.

Both Bird and Shaffer point to the little-known realization that only twenty percent of the country's workers are now unionized as typical of the mythology that hinders trying to understand the conditions faced by the Wobblies. While unionism is a key element in the documentary (in fact the film shows the roots of many reforms — the eight-hour day and end of child labor — in radical not mainstream labor agitation), it is also an area where the film's weakness in presenting organizational history appears. While the producers acknowledge the I.W.W.'s preeminent position as the radical link in the period spanning the Knights of Labor and the C.I.O., that connection is unclear and not strongly supported in the film. The similarities in the I.W.W. and C.I.O.'s "industrial unionism" and the emergence of many of the latter's leaders from the ranks of the Wobblies is glossed over.

To be honest, the filmmakers flatly state that they were not attempting anything resembling a complete organizational history in the film. They are seeking to reach the rank and filers with the message that it was people like them who formed the base of groups like the I.W.W. "It's important for workers to understand that there's a history of radicalism in this country that's as American as apple pie," Bird related. That the film comes close to conveying just that message is in large part due to the humor, naturalness and conviction of the interviewees themselves.

There are many sharp and striking anecdotes

and comments in the interviewee's recounting of the "bottom-up" history of their activism. My favorite was Jack Miller's definition of sabotage as "the conscious withdrawal of efficiency." Unfortunately, these glimpses are the only small sense we get in the film of the activists' lives outside of the workplace or their organizing, and the film suffers some from this lack of connection to day to day social concerns.

Beyond the strikes, confrontations on picket lines and stories of militant trade unionism, *The Wobblies* is also a story of the American radical movement and the widely feared organization that attempted to merge both the vanguard party and industrial union under one



Paterson, N.J., strikers marching up New York's Fifth Avenue, 1913.

banner. In not attempting a complete organizational history, the film renders a sympathetic and at times, uncritical, view of the Wobblies. "The Wobblies' socialism was impossible to whitewash," explained Deborah Shaffer. And one result is a left labor history film that raises the vocabulary and parameters of socialist organizing in a direct, upfront style.

It becomes clear in the film why the I.W.W. represented such a direct challenge to American capitalism. What is not totally clear is why that vision disappeared. Much of the responsibility for their demise, although slightly overstated in the film, was of course due to one of the most widespread campaigns of repression this country has ever seen. And the film documents that with the newspaper headlines, accounts of the mass trials, deportations, lynchings and collusion between the A.F.L., the newly-formed F.B.I. (this was J. Edgar Hoover's first "case") and agents-provocateur. The directors even resurrected a Walt Disney propaganda cartoon from that era showing "Little Alice's Egg Farm" being infiltrated by the "Red Henski" (strikingly resembling Lenin) who agitates the chickens on to cries of "Smaller eggs" and "Shorter hours."

For all their charm and convincing accounts of the era, the Wobblies interviewed present little insight into what happened to the organization. As Irma Lombardi laments, "That's what hurt me.... I was looking forward and felt certain they would take over and then I never heard anything anymore." It is in this story of left fragmentation and division in the ranks of labor, spurred by repression, that the film speaks to the U.S. left and working class movement today. While incomplete, it can still serve as an adequate introduction to those contradictions.

Describing their attempts to recruit old antagonists to discuss the Wobblies in Bisbee, Arizona¹⁰ the directors realized the intensity

FELLOW WORKERS:



Remember!

WE ARE IN HERE FOR YOU; YOU ARE OUT THERE FOR US

I.W.W. poster — August 4, 1917.

with which the Wobblies were still viewed — pro and con. "People still knew who was on either side, it [the forced deportations of I.W.W. members] was still a hot issue and people refused to talk to us," Bird recalled. That intensity will certainly follow the film today — particularly in its sharp portrait of the A.F.L.-I.W.W. rivalry.

In terms of audiences, *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* should prove particularly accessible to senior citizens, left and labor organizations, unions and ethnic groups.¹¹ Beyond their educational and historical value, they can speak to a wider, if not mass, audience than previous works.

Reflecting on these two recent films, some critical points come to mind. As clearly as they

and other films mentioned aid us in eradicating the national blind spot of radical and working class history, they also present a challenge to consider more closely the cultural presentation of that hidden history. Mass culture abounds with daily oversights and periodic attacks of amnesia that serve to blur our collective memory of the '60's — let alone periods two or three decades before.

While both works represent a clear growth of political cinema, both *Northern Lights* and *The Wobblies* demonstrate some lack of incorporation of the lessons of the Feminist Movement in this country. For all their manner of direct political orientation and historical insight, they still fall short of connecting work and political activity to people's everyday lives. There is still a separation of the personal and political, and lack of a fully dimensional portrayal of social and political life. The earlier films, *Union Maids* and *Babies and Banners* particularly, provided us with that orientation but without the full political context. So, perhaps, we're approaching that merger: demystifying the past and incorporating the lessons of our lifetime.

JOHN DEMETER is an editor and staff person of *Radical America*, and a member of the Angry Arts Film Collective.

Northern Lights is available through New Front Films, 325 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012. (212) 431-3717.

The Wobblies is available through Stewart Bird at the Center for Educational Productions, 320 W. 90th St., New York, NY 10024 (212) 874-5645.

NOTES

1. These three films are perhaps the best known of a number of commendable films produced in recent years. *Children of Labor* and *Shape of an Era* document the lives of Finnish immigrants in the midwest and their strong tradition of Socialist activity, while *Eugene V. Debs and the American Movement* is a short but powerful reconstruction of the life of the great Socialist and trade union leader. They and others are listed in the special issue of the *Film Library Quarterly* on "American Labor Films" and is available for \$7.00 from American Labor Films, P.O. Box 348, Radio City Station, New York, NY 10019.
2. *Northern Lights* also won best picture at the Portuguese Film Festival in the Fall of 1979.
3. Tom Brandon has put together a selection of these films for special screenings. His films and others of the Film and Photo League are also discussed and listed in the FLQ "American Labor Films" issue.
4. Carl Marzani's films for UE, *Native Land* and *Salt of the Earth* are few of the films from this period that come to mind. But McCarthyism and Cold War repression greatly depleted the body of activist filmmakers of the previous decade. David Helpen's *Hollywood on Trial* is a good aid in understanding that era and its impact on film.
5. Hanson and Nilson in fact put together an 18-page paper on the self-distribution of *Northern Lights* titled "It's A Nice Little Movie, But It Isn't Commercial."
6. CineManifest has produced two short documentaries on the NPL — *Prairie Fire* and *Survivor*. *Survivor* is the story of Henry Martinson, the narrator of *Northern Lights*.
7. Interview with Rob Nilson and John Hanson, *Film Quarterly*, Summer, 1979.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. So intense was the repression encountered by the I.W.W. in Bisbee, that from the point of their banishment in 1917 there was no union in the town until 1935.
11. While fairly untested with audiences, *The Wobblies* was partially funded by the U.A.W. and officials in the union have requested copies of the film to show to members. The film was also invited to be shown at the national A.F.L.-C.I.O. convention in Washington in late November, 1979. It is opening in Boston in late February, 1980. *Northern Lights* has had a fairly successful appeal among ethnic, labor and activist audiences in urban areas and largely favorable response in rural areas.

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WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

Rachael Grossman

"We hire girls because they have less energy, are more disciplined, and are easier to control."
— Personnel officer, Intel Corp., Malaysia

A group of women was wrapping gifts of talcum powder and candy for the upcoming Christmas party, while I talked to the personnel officer at the Intel plant in Penang. She described the charts which hang beside each operator's chair on the plant floor to record the quantity and quality of her daily production. She told me about factory-wide competitions and weekly quotas sent from California.

This personnel officer, a very likable Malay woman in her late 20s, spoke casually. But her message was brutally clear. There is a direct relationship between her ability to control and involve "her girls" and the numbers on the productivity charts. "Personnel operates with the goal of having management and operators cooperate. Otherwise, we can't survive."

The Intel plant in Penang, Malaysia, is a subsidiary of one of the largest semiconductor firms based in northern California's "Silicon Valley." Women make up 90 percent of the assembly workforce in this 1400-person plant, as they do in the other 18 electronics factories on the island of Penang. Approximately 19,000 women work in these factories, and several thousand more work in electronics factories in other places in Malaysia. In all, between 200,000 and 300,000 women work in electronics plants throughout Southeast Asia.

Electronics, especially semiconductors, is the fastest growing industry in Southeast Asia.

It is also the technologically most advanced industry in the developed economies, providing critical components to all others. Governments, banks, factories, armed forces and other major institutions are changing their operations to incorporate new electronic products — all involving some kind of “brain” — while even individual consumers find themselves increasingly dependent on such gadgets as hand calculators. Ironically, the almost invisible element in this glamorous, breakthrough industry is the repetitive, semi-skilled labor of Asian women. Driven by the need to cut prices in their competition for profitable shares of the market, virtually all the major semiconductor companies have sought cheap labor to perform the labor-intensive parts of their operations. To a large extent, they have found it in Asia, where women assemble the tiny components of products ranging from digital watches to multi-million-dollar computers. Their labor makes possible the low prices which in turn have made possible the explosive growth in the market for semiconductor-based devices.

Because they must keep productivity high and costs low to be competitive, semiconductor firms have put a great deal of effort into developing a whole battery of methods to manipulate and control the women who work in their plants. Their personnel policies now combine authoritarian discipline with the most sophisticated human relations techniques. Most highly developed in Malaysia, these techniques specifically exploit the traditionally defined attributes of femininity — passivity, submissiveness, sentimentality, sexual desirability — while creating a factory lifestyle distinct from that of the general society. Their purpose is to make workers more immediately productive and to inculcate into them a long-term sense of identity with the company. At the same time, the emphasis on passive and ornamental femininity is intended to forestall the rise of any sense of independence or unified strength among the

women workers. In the patriarchal societies of Southeast Asia, the sudden concentration of women in advanced industrial enclaves might well be expected to foster the emergence of a strong feminist consciousness among them. The carefully planned personnel policies work against this.

RECREATION AS TECHNIQUE

Beauty contests are the most dramatic example of the way electronics factories manipulate traditional concepts of femininity and gender roles. “The last beauty contest winner spent M\$80 [US \$40] on her evening gown. But she made so many slits up the skirt — to show more leg, you know — that she can’t wear the dress anymore.” The personnel officer was very matter of fact about the extravagance, which she saw as an example of how seriously the workers take participation in the beauty contest. This year’s beauty contest winners will receive: first prize, a package tour to Medan (the nearest big city); second prize, a cassette player; and third prize, a night for two at the Rasa Sayang (the ritziest hotel in Penang). When I asked about the implications of offering a night for two to 18-year-old Malay women, primarily from rural Muslim backgrounds, the officer quipped, “We tell the winner, ‘This is your prize. Whatever happens nine months from now, we aren’t responsible.’ ”

One American plant manager in Penang explained, “We’ve developed recreation to a technique. Recreational activities keep turnover down. We spend US \$100,000 a year on personnel activities.” He listed such stereotypically feminine activities as sewing classes, a monthly shoe sale, singing competitions and the beauty contest as well as a library, the company store and sports events. A plant manager in the Philippines described the only function of his large personnel staff as “creating activities.” Monthly company publications contain an end-

less stream of images of women as sex objects and passive providers. Their features range from pictures of the scantily clad beauty contest participants to romantic poetry and sexist humor. There are also notices of such activities as classes in cooking or using cosmetics.

Much of the organized recreation takes the form of competition, which is intended, in the words of one personnel officer, to "develop incentive and motivation." Competitions also pit workers against one another, strengthening their sense of individualism and their willingness to work hard. The contests, highlighted again and again in the monthly publications, run the gamut of possibilities — singing contests, sports contests, "guess whose legs these are" contests, talent contests, crazy-costume contests.

Production competitions, also billed as "fun," barely mask speed-ups and provide the rationale for increasing quotas. Like the other contests, production competitions take place at all levels of the organization. They range from individual contests based on the individual daily charts hanging beside each worker to competitions between subsidiaries in different countries. Workers in one Indonesian factory reported they had been asked to compete with the productivity charts of workers in other Asian subsidiaries of their company. Individual winners usually receive special mention in the company publications, sometimes with a box of candy or some money. Departments win trophies, special outings or a party. At Intel two winners of a factory-wide competition for the most productive worker of the year even won a trip to company headquarters in California.

In the transition from beauty contests to production competitions, the guiding principle behind all the clever games becomes suddenly visible: control. Discipline is strict, because electronics components are either perfect or unusable. Workers are assigned quotas and monitored by daily productivity charts. They are



THE MISS AMD BEAUTY CONTEST

Miss AMD-Manila '78 The parade of contestants vying for the title "Miss AMD for 1978" wore casual dresses in the first round and "maong shorts" and daring red mid ribs in the final round. Miss Liwanag V. Ancog won the title for Miss AMD '78 on which she is entitled to a free trip to Penang, Malaysia.

prohibited from talking on the factory floor. They must wear uniforms. They are allowed an average of only 45 minutes break time during an eight-hour shift, and workers at the Fairchild factory in Indonesia reported having only one ten-minute tea break and a 15-minute lunch break. They also said about 20 women were laid off every week for failing to meet their production quotas.

Discipline extends beyond the factory floor as management uses a variety of methods to orient workers' lives around factory schedules. In Malaysia, factories rotate shifts every two weeks. "They like rotating shifts. They plan their lives around the rotation," explained a personnel officer at Monolithic Memories, Inc. Yet the workers complained that changing shifts every two weeks meant they could not plan many activities or enroll in classes outside the factory, and they found it hard to readjust their sleeping and eating habits. A workers'

manual at Advanced Micro Devices-Philippines (AMD) demands another form of subordination to factory requirements: "Do not accept employment by another company, work part time or hold any other job without the consent of the personnel manager and the general manager."

"TOGETHER TO STAY, TOGETHER FOR GOOD"

From the day a worker enters the factory, she is bombarded with such slogans as "Catch on to the Motorola Family Spirit and build a good future for yourself and your family." These portray the factory as a family incorporating many of the patriarchal features characteristic of real families in Southeast Asia. "Big brother" male supervisors lord it over the female operators. The plant manager, usually an American, presents himself as a kindly — but nonetheless demanding — father figure, playing basketball with the team, kissing the beauty contest winner, eating in the factory canteen. As the manager of Fairchild's Indonesia plant explained, "What we are doing resembles a family system in which I am not just the manager but also a father to all of those here in Fairchild. This conforms to a very important Indonesian principle, that of the family [*kekeluargaan*]."²

For the women, brought up in families in which the father's word is law, the image is compelling. While the culture of the factory is radically different from that of their homes, the stress on family ideology helps prevent them from recognizing the implications of their own independence from their families. At the same time, the family analogy legitimizes the combination of authoritarian discipline and "indulgence" (recreation) which management uses so effectively to keep workers in line. For management, the point is to preclude any desire by workers to organize themselves to challenge the management-imposed factory consensus. Man-

agement representatives throughout Southeast Asia express the same thought: "If management operates well, it is my hope that a union will be unnecessary." "Unions only set up an adversary relationship between workers and management." "Intel doesn't believe in unions. We believe in finding out what workers want. We conduct twice-yearly attitude surveys with workers." Back in California a semiconductor executive went further, explaining that the industry stresses human relations to prevent unionization, because it would raise wage costs now and "rigidify" the size of the work force in the future.³ The industry wants to retain its ability to lay off workers if the market slumps or if automation becomes profitable.



Photo by Jerry Elmer

AN INTEGRATED ASIAN CIRCUIT

The use of personnel policies to create a distinct culture within the factory is more dramatic in Malaysia than in the other Southeast Asian countries. Foreign-owned semiconductor corporations are now well established in Malaysia, particularly in Penang, and some of them have begun to upgrade their operations, adding testing and automated bonding processes. Malaysia is becoming the center for testing in Southeast Asia. National Semiconductor (NS),

for example, tests products from its plants in Thailand, Indonesia and Penang at the Penang plant. The automated bonding machines cost \$50,000 per unit and allow a single worker to produce 10 times as much as one working with a microscope. These more complex processes require virtually fail-proof factory discipline. Malaysia has been chosen for upgrading because its educated, English-speaking workers have shown themselves to be easily trainable and controllable. Most of the electronics workers have not held any other industrial job, and many of them are the first female members of their families to hold such jobs. They are particularly susceptible to the appeal of the "Western culture" which is offered as part of the employment package. As a result, electronics workers are conspicuous wherever they go, identified by their elaborate make-up, tight jeans and high heels.

In Hong Kong and Singapore, where industrial work and Western culture are more familiar and job mobility is more common, workers hold out for hard cash rather than being impressed by such offerings as beauty contests and cosmetics classes. Both Singapore and Hong Kong have become regional headquarters for the electronics industry, providing high-skilled jobs and better wages to their workers. Singapore has become particularly attractive to international industry because of its highly controlled society, free port status, good harbor and well-developed communications infrastructure. Electronics subsidiaries there provide warehousing, final testing and some marketing services for other Asian subsidiaries of their companies.

In the Philippines and Indonesia, on the other hand, poverty reduces the need for elaborate personnel programs. The personnel manager at AMD-Philippines reported as many as 500 applicants a week for 50 openings, and a personnel officer in Indonesia reported 500 applications *a day*. With the overwhelming un-

employment indicated by these figures, the companies do not have to make the efforts they do in Malaysia to win the fealty of their employees. As one Indonesian worker commented, "No matter how bad it is, it's a job. That's better than nothing." Hence, personnel activities in Philippine and Indonesian factories are usually watered-down versions of what is done in Malaysia. Furthermore, in the Philippines, the pervasive American influence lessens the impact of the semiconductor culture.

Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand (not covered in this report), are the last frontier in the highly integrated Asian circuit of semiconductor factories. In these countries, poverty and unemployment spawn extremely cheap labor forces, but they also threaten political instability in the future. At the same time, these countries lack necessary infrastructure. An American manager in Indonesia illustrated the problem when he complained that it is easier to telephone Santa Clara than the other side of Jakarta. The plants located in the poorer countries are the most labor intensive and least expensive, what one American manager called "jellybean operations." They are plants which can be closed down on short notice if the political climate appears too risky or if they become economically superfluous. The NS plants in Thailand, Indonesia and Penang, for instance, do the same work, so that political upheaval in one country will not precipitate a breakdown in the overall production cycle.

A GLOBAL ASSEMBLY LINE

The production process of which the semiconductor factories in Southeast Asia are a part is literally a global assembly line stretching more than halfway around the world. While it has grown with the general expansion of multinational capital, it has received a special impetus from the nature of the semiconductor industry. Semiconductors are the "brains" of the new generation of electronic products: hand

calculators, digital watches, computers, communications equipment, "smart bombs," and strategic missile guidance systems all share the same type of component. The industry has come into being since the 1947 invention of the transistor, and it has grown with help from generous Pentagon contracts and research done at Stanford and other universities. Many of the largest companies are headquartered in the area around Stanford, known as "Silicon Valley," because silicon is the basic material for semiconductors.

Competition in the industry is still so heated that prices for its products are falling faster than the cost of production. "A transistor which 12 years ago cost \$25 now costs 15 cents," bragged one American executive in Penang. In the race to survive, companies have introduced new products, such as electronic toys and home computers, while cutting costs in every feasible way. Since, ironically, much of the production process for these labor-saving devices is extremely labor intensive, labor costs have been the major target for economizing. In California, 90 percent of the assembly workforce is young and female. More important than cutting costs in California, however, has been the division of the production process into smaller and smaller discrete segments. This and the microscopic size of the semiconductors (which makes it practical to ship unfinished parts from one plant to another) has allowed the industry to shift its most labor-intensive work to places where labor is cheap. Furthermore, the very equipment produced by the industry makes finely tuned long-distance coordination possible. As a U.S. manager in Asia quipped, "Santa Clara is just a telex away."

The first moves were to Mexico, but the industry soon looked to the even cheaper labor of Asia. Fairchild Camera and Instrument Co. set up the first Asian assembly plant in Hong Kong in 1962. During the 1960s, other U.S., European and Japanese companies expanded to

Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. Searching for ever cheaper wages, the semiconductor industry then moved into Southeast Asia, coming to Singapore in 1969, Malaysia in 1972, Thailand in 1973, and the Philippines and Indonesia in 1974. The manager of a plant in Malaysia explained how profitable these moves have been: "One worker working one hour produces enough to pay the wages of 10 workers working one shift plus all the cost of materials and transport."

THE FAST-FINGERED MALAYSIAN

The electronics industry has not operated in a vacuum in constructing its Asian circuit. Asian governments, looking for development capital and solutions to their employment problems, have actively sought labor-intensive investment. Semiconductors have appeared particularly attractive, according to one Malaysian government official, because "they are so fast moving. They come in and quickly soak up people." In addition, governments hope to acquire new technology from the semiconductor industry. In wooing foreign investment, Asian governments have stressed the availability of large, cheap pools of female labor. Glossy brochures describe the prospects in terms similar to the following from *Malaysia: The Solid State for Electronics*:

The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small and she works fast with extreme care. Who, therefore, could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench-assembly production line than the oriental girl?

Domestically, Asian governments have taken measures to make their country's women even more attractive as potential employees by ensuring that they will not resist demands made on them by the foreign firms. In 1970, when electronics companies wanted to locate in Malaysia, the government provided for excep-

"I TEST AROUND 3,500 CHIPS A DAY"

I started working at Fairchild in January, 1978. They put me in the optical test section where I have to look through a microscope to test the chips before they are bonded. It took me two weeks to get used to using the microscope.

When I first came last year, they paid me Rp 390 a day [US \$.80]. After the three-month "training" period they gave me Rp 450 a day. Now I get Rp 490.

After the training period they set my quota at 15 trays a day. Now I have to test 25 trays a day. I think there are between 160-180 chips in each tray, so I test around 3500 chips a day.

I get up at 5:00 a.m. and take the bus to work. The shift starts at 6:00 a.m. and goes until 2:00 p.m. They don't let us talk during work, but we can talk during our breaks. We have a ten-minute tea break at 8:00 a.m. and a 15-minute lunch break at 9:15.

After six months I became sick with red eye [conjunctivitis]. I don't know why this happened. Other friends at work got sick too. The supervisor told me to clean my microscope so nobody else would get it. Then he gave me a two-week medical leave. While I was at home, my family all got red eye too.

I don't earn enough to give my mother much, but I give her food money sometimes. I like to buy my brothers and sisters *basko* [noodle soup sold by street vendors]. It costs Rp 50 a bowl, so if I buy it for all of us, it costs my whole day's salary.

tions in the law which protected women from night-shift work. In the Philippines, Presidential Decree No. 148, issued shortly after the declaration of martial law in 1972, reduced maternity benefits from 60 percent of pay for 14 weeks to 100 percent of pay for six weeks, and limited coverage to the first four children. According to the personnel director at one textile factory, "This made it profitable to hire women again."

Perhaps even more serious than removing legal protections has been the active role of all capitalist Southeast Asian governments in putting down all forms of worker protest. Over and over again the story is told — in the Philippines, in Indonesia, in Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea: "As soon as the protest began, carloads of police and government officials descended on the plant. . . ." Such actions are backed up by the laws prohibiting strikes in "vital" industry, which normally includes foreign-owned manufacturing plants.

At times, government officials address their own citizens in tones similar to those they direct at potential investors, seeking to convince them that government and workers share the same interests. In a recent article entitled "Why We Woo Foreign Investment," Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed asserted: "The government could not help the people if they refuse to realize the importance of a better economy and to be more responsible. . . . Workers must uphold their dignity and not cause problems that would scare away foreign investors. They should instead be more productive so that government efforts to attract investors would be successful."⁶

"SOAKING UP PEOPLE?"

In actual fact, the electronics corporations have failed to live up to the expectations of their hosts in providing employment. While they have brought thousands of jobs to Southeast Asia, their requirements for young edu-

cated (high school) female workers have meant that they have brought a new category of people into the workforce rather than reducing the ranks of the unemployed. A recent study in Penang found that over two-thirds of the workers had never worked before and came from families whose female members had never worked for wages.⁷ Malaysia defines "active unemployed" as men who have registered as unemployed on the Labor Exchange, and government officials complain that the electronics firms are not helping them, because they rely almost exclusively on women. In the Philippines and Indonesia, many electronics workers are the daughters of teachers or low-level bureaucrats and had aspired to but could not find white-collar jobs.

The question of who is "unemployed" is a

complex one in Southeast Asia, as in most of the developing world. The overwhelming unemployment characteristic of these countries arises from the stagnation and even impoverishment of agriculture while most resources are directed into building up an urban industrial sector. Because so much capital is required to create new industries and the infrastructure that must accompany them, the new industries do not grow fast enough to absorb the increasing flow of people pushed out of peasant family farming. In addition, a large proportion of each country's surplus is siphoned off by foreign investors repatriating profits. While there are many variations, peasants generally work for themselves as smallholders or tenant farmers. As long as they retain their land, there is a certain amount of choice possible whether

How it's done

Semiconductors are microscopic electronic circuits which are the latest in a line of technology that began with the invention of the transistor in 1947 and the development of the integrated circuit in the early 1960s. Integrated circuits now bring together up to 100,000 transistors, resistors and other circuitry on a single chip of silicon half the size of a small fingernail. The production of these products is an integrated and very segmented process which includes highly educated scientists in the U.S. and thousands of assembly workers throughout the world.

Semiconductor companies locate their research, development and the initial capital intensive stages of production primarily in the "Silicon Valley" in northern California. Scientists and engineers design complicated,

multi-layered circuit patterns for each semiconductor device, drawing giant versions that range up to 60 inches square. Each design is then photographically reduced until it is virtually invisible to the naked eye.

Assembly workers in California fabricate the initial stages of the semiconductor based on the microscopic negatives. First they "dope" the layers of silicon with various chemical impurities in order to create electrically conductive and non-conductive areas. These positive and negative specks act as transistors, tiny electronic switches that shuttle the electrical circuit about. Other workers then photograph the circuit pattern, etching the pattern into the wafer with acids and solvents. These wafers are then baked in ovens at temperatures over 900 degrees Fahrenheit. For this process, assemblers must insert special gases — arsenic, boron and antimony — into the ovens to alter

to reduce a family's standard of living or seek other employment. At the same time, however, the commercialization of agriculture results in the outright loss of their land for large numbers of peasants.

Until recently, it has been the men — fathers and sons — who have sought wage labor when family farming could no longer support the people dependent on it. The men have migrated to cities to take whatever jobs they could find, while the women often stayed behind to run the household and continue farming. In cases where the family lost its land, all its members accompanied the father to the city. When women migrate to look for work, however, it is not mothers, but daughters, who go. While they frequently send money home, their families do not accompany them. By its reliance on

women, the electronics industry offers new opportunities and new hopes for women seeking income. However, the requirement that electronics workers possess a high school education means that these jobs are not available to the majority of women looking for work. In fact, a personnel officer at NS-Philippines reported that 30 percent of the assemblers there are college graduates and another 30 percent have some college education.

For the electronics firms, the newness of the work force they are creating is an advantage. Not only are the young women more tractable than older women or men might be, but since they are not believed to be supporting families, their wages can be kept low and they can be laid off with relatively few repercussions. Thus the employers give first preference to women with

the electrical characteristics of each device in specified ways. This entire process is repeated for each layer of the pattern, often as many as ten times.

Once the wafers are fabricated, women test each wafer with computerized equipment, sorting them into categories. Because the equipment needed for testing can cost up to \$350,000 per unit, this process is generally carried on in or near company headquarters in California.

At this point, wafers are shuttled to Asia. There, Asian women perform the labor-intensive, routine, intermediary assembly operations. When the wafers — 2 to 4 inches in diameter — arrive in Asia, workers slice them into up to 500 separate chips. At this point, miles of aisles of assemblers take over to bond these chips to circuit boards. An assembler peers through a microscope for seven to nine hours a day, bonding each chip with as many as 50 gold wires

— each the size of a strand of human hair. Each bonder must work at top speed as individual quotas run as high as 800 chips per worker per day.

Further along the Asian assembly line, other workers bake these chips in 600-1000 degree ovens, sealing each chip inside a plastic or ceramic protective coating. Testers then check the reliability of these components, dipping them in tanks of chemicals and applying electric currents to the components. This step in the process, previously carried out in California, is increasingly being transferred to Asia. Companies either send these components to their other Asian subsidiaries for assembly into simple products such as calculators or they ship the components back to California for the final assembly of products ranging from home computers to military surveillance systems.

no work experience and generally refuse to hire married women, although they do not necessarily fire them if they marry after being hired. The ability to lay their workers off at will is essential to the electronics firms, because the work is almost by definition temporary. After three or four years of peering through a microscope, a worker's vision begins to blur, so that she can no longer meet the production quota. The unspoken expectation of the company is that she will marry and "retire" by the time she becomes unfit for the work, but she will be laid off in any case.

The nature of the industry also requires an expendable work force, for the fierce competition means each company experiences strong ups and downs. Some will survive only a few years before going under, but in the meanwhile, they have employed numbers of Asian women. An NS executive in California predicted that within ten years, only three or four semiconductor firms would still exist.⁸ However, it is still too early to tell which three or four firms will survive. Hence, the host countries have no control over the durability of the investments they so eagerly seek.

The recession of 1974 provided a vivid example of the impact on Asian workers of world economic trends and decisions made in California (or elsewhere). Approximately 15,000 workers — one-third of all electronics workers — lost their jobs in Singapore alone.⁹ Some factories in Penang laid off thousands of workers, while others cut the work week to three days. In the Philippines, where the first electronics plant had recently begun operations, one-fifth of its 200-person work force was laid off.¹⁰ Meanwhile, more automated processes are available — enabling one worker to produce 10 times as much as she does now manually — and could be introduced on a wide scale whenever companies deem it profitable to replace workers with machines.

If electronics plants do not provide perma-

nent jobs, then perhaps they train women for other work? Not so. As highly compartmentalized segments of a multinational production process, the jobs develop skills with no application in other industries. Bonding, for example, requires looking through a microscope, and testing, dipping into tanks of chemicals. As the only part of the electronics process which comes to Southeast Asia, there is not even an opportunity for advancement or transfer to other kinds of work within the same industry. Similarly, this kind of division of the production process does not lead to the growth of local semiconductor firms, because there is no transfer of technology to the local economy. Government officials whom I interviewed in more than one country expressed dissatisfaction with the failure to acquire technology, and one U.S. Embassy official in Jakarta asserted, "The only thing electronics investments give the country is the RP 500 [US \$.80] a day wages!"

SUBSISTENCE OR LESS

For the women on the production line, there are tangible consequences of their position within the international structure of the industry. The companies use various means to keep wages low, although many of the electronics workers are expected to contribute substantially to their families' income. In the Philippines and Indonesia, women are paid less than the minimum wage for as long as six months, during which they are considered apprentices. With legal minimum daily wages of 11 pesos in the Philippines and Rp. 500 in Indonesia, electronics apprentices receive eight pesos or Rp. 390 respectively. Yet personnel officers readily admit that a new operator can learn her job in a week, or at most, two. Such pay is in many cases less than subsistence for one person. In Manila, a worker living in the six-by-six-foot extension of a squatter hut told me she needed ten pesos a day to pay for the bare minimum of fish, rice, water and rent. A community organ-

izer in the province of Bataan reported that peasant families often had to support their daughters for the first months, and often the first year, of employment in factories in the Bataan Export Processing Zone or Manila.

Rather than institute adequate wages, companies use monetary bonuses as a means to put pressure on their workers even after the apprenticeship period. In order to earn adequate income, a worker must qualify for bonuses, which are paid for perfect attendance, punctuality, high production, work on the microscopes. With any infraction of company rules or a single absence in a month, a woman loses her eligibility for extra payment. This is particularly rampant in Hong Kong, where industry uses monetary incentives rather than recreational activities to discipline and motivate the work force. There a worker earning a daily base wage of HK \$24 (US \$5) can collect an additional living allowance (US \$.60), meal allowance (\$.40), and travel allowance (\$.20). However, if she is 15 minutes late, she will lose all allowances for the day. Less extreme versions of this system coexist in other parts of Southeast Asia with nonmonetary incentives.

At plants in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and the Philippines, employees receive a thirteenth month bonus at the end of the year instead of higher monthly pay for 12 months. A worker hired at mid-year has her bonus prorated, while one who leaves during the year receives none of the bonus. Workers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines reported that their employers had tried to avoid giving them the year-end bonus, resulting in strikes and walk-outs.

Wages increase somewhat after the apprenticeship period, and most women begin contributing to their families once their own subsistence needs are met. In the Philippines many workers employed for more than two years report that they send half or more of their monthly earnings home. In Malaysia, where

electronics workers come from slightly less severe economic backgrounds, they still turn over 25 to 50 percent of their wages to their families.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

A photograph of the interior of an electronics plant is striking for its sense of immaculate order: a spacious, well-lighted room in which rows of women dressed in white bend over gleaming microscopes. On an actual walk through a plant, however, the visitor often gags on the strong smell of chemicals, and a trial look through a microscope quickly produces dizziness or a headache. Toxic fumes and eye ailments are the twin enemies of electronics workers. Yet the companies do not inform them of the health hazards their jobs entail, and management-run health and safety committees actually divert attention from these problems.

"Hey, Grandma!" Young women greet their slightly older co-workers at the factory gate every morning. In Hong Kong most electronics workers over 25 are called "Grandma" because they wear glasses. While workers in Southeast Asia are much newer to electronics work than those in Hong Kong, they too are beginning to have serious eye problems. In 1975, just three years after the first electronics plant opened in Penang, nearly half the workers there complained of deteriorating eyesight and frequent headaches — the result of microscope work. Most workers suffer at one time or another from conjunctivitis, a painful and highly contagious inflammation of the eye. Individual comments echoed this worker's story: "After some time we can't see very clearly; it's blurred. We'll be looking into the microscope for over seven hours. We have to work with those gold wires, very thin like our hair..."¹¹ Virtually anyone who stays on the job more than three years must eventually wear glasses. Companies usually refuse to pay for the glasses — although they require 20-20 vision when they hire.





Caustic chemicals, all toxic and many suspected of being cancer-causing, sit in open containers beside many workers, giving off the fumes which so assault the first-time visitor to the plant. They include TCE, xylene, and MEK, all particularly dangerous acids and solvents which are used extensively throughout the production process. Workers who must dip components in acids and rub them with solvents frequently experience serious burns, dizziness, nausea, sometimes even losing their fingers in accidents. A major cause of accidents is the high speed at which workers are required to carry out their tasks. It will be ten or fifteen years before the possible carcinogenic effects of these chemicals begin to show up in the women who work with them now.

Management representatives deny or trivialize the dangers of electronics work. Sometimes their denials are unintentionally revealing, however. The manager at Hewlett-Packard in Malaysia answered my question about eye problems: "These girls are used to working with 'scopes. We've found no eye problems. But it sure makes me dizzy to look through those things." Personnel departments set up management-worker health and safety committees, but these seldom address the real hazards or consider ways to correct them. Instead of questioning the way in which chemicals are handled, they generally focus on health and safety poster or essay contests, fire drills, or an annual health and safety week.

A BED AND A CUPBOARD

As a new segment of the work force, many women — although not all — have to move long distances from their homes to take jobs in the electronics plants. The conditions in which they live away from home reflect both the meagerness of their wages and the social disruption caused by foreign-dominated industrialization in enclaves not integrated into the local economy. In Malaysia, where wages and

living conditions are better than in the other countries I visited, electronics workers live in boarding houses. Four to eight women usually share a room. In a hostel where I stayed, each individual possesses a bunk space and a two-foot cube of a cupboard. The kitchen, outfitted only with 19 kerosene stoves, is shared by 50 women.

"Watch out for your camera. Someone might steal it." My hostess was carefully re-locking her cupboard. I was surprised. Couldn't I relax in her room? Couldn't she relax? "No," she explained. "We work different shifts I didn't know all of these people before, and we haven't all become friends. Besides, people are moving in and out all the time."

She doesn't rent a room, because she can't afford one. She rents the bed and the cupboard and has no control over the other women who rent beds and cupboards in the same room. In a society based overwhelmingly on families and stable communities where people have known each other for generations — and where women's roles have been defined only in family terms — the individual migration to an industrial center is a lonely one. Neither their own backgrounds nor the factory's encouragement of competitive individualism prepares these women for developing lasting relationships with strangers. In some cases, the physical living conditions are not much worse than those at home, but the isolation without privacy creates stress.

In the Philippines, factory women live in even grimmer conditions than in Malaysia. Many are able to afford only a place to sleep in a squatter shack pitched in a slum. In the boarding houses, ten women share a room, which is "furnished" only with straw sleeping mats.

COFFEE AND COSMETICS

After casting a sidelong glance at the men at

Chemical analysis of women

— a chandra —

SYMBOL:
WOE

OCCURANCE:

Found wherever men exist.

PHYSICAL PROPERTIES:

Very active — Boil at nothing and may freeze any minute. Melt when properly treated. Very bitter if not well used. Great pretenders. Where spreading of news and incidents are concerned, they are better than BBC.

CHEMICAL PROPERTIES:

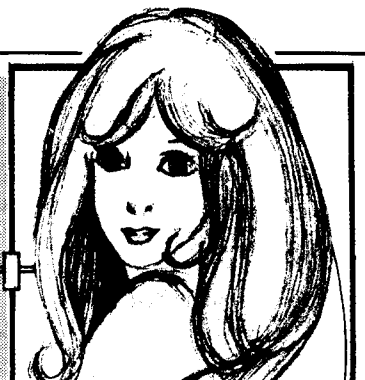
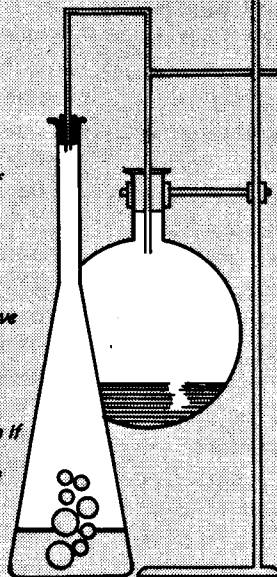
Very active. Possess great affinity for gold and precious stone. Very choosy. Violent reaction when left alone. Able to absorb great amounts of expensive food and clothing. Turn green when placed beside better looking specimens. Age rapidly. Possess the best accessories which men like most.

USES:

Highly ornamental. Useful as a tonic in acceleration if in low spirits, etc. Equalise distribution to wealth. Are probably the most powerful (Income) reducing agent.

CAUTION:

Highly explosive when in experienced hands.



A Human Relations Publication

Published by Motorola Communications Group, Free Trade Zone, Bayan Lepas, Penang.

the next table, Tuti shot the rest of us a conspiratorial smile, eyes twinkling. I stared into the coffee I was stirring, pulling the Malay words together in my mind to ask why they had come to work in this factory. Suddenly I laughed to myself, realizing that part of the answer was right here at this coffee stand at 11 o'clock at night.

Malaysian workers' answers to my question were often similar. They come for the money, of course, but also for the freedom. They talk of freedom to go out late at night, to have a boyfriend, to wear blue jeans, high heels and make-up. Implicitly they contrast this social

How a company newsletter describes women.
freedom with the sheltered, regulated lives they would lead with their families in Malay villages and small towns. They revel in their escape from the watchful eyes of fathers and brothers.

Complementing the sense of social freedom is the opportunity to sample a bit of the consumer society which is their image of the West and modernity. On pay day, the factories arrange for sellers of cosmetics and costume jewelry to come in during the lunch break. "Tee-shirt and clothing salespeople are not allowed in, because try-ons would take more than the half-hour lunch break. Whatever we do, we don't disrupt production time," ex-

plained a personnel officer. "I worry about the price of one lipstick," she continued. "But an operator walks up to the salesperson and buys M\$80 [US\$40] worth of cosmetics at once!" She could not explain how an assembler could afford two weeks' pay for a package of cosmetics. Elaborate make-up is part of the electronics image in Malaysia, and the factories even provide classes in how to apply it. All this allows the workers to feel they are part of a global culture which includes the choice between Avon and Mary Quant products, posters of John Travolta and Farah Fawcett-Majors by their beds, and the music from *Saturday Night Fever* played on the factory Muzak system.

Underlying the lifestyle attractions of electronics work, most strongly felt and clearly articulated in Malaysia, is the economic imperative. Women come to work in the factories because their families need or want the income their wages will allow them to contribute to the household. Families who may not approve of the factory lifestyle allow their daughters to go to work when they realize this will increase the family's income. A worker in Indonesia recounted:

When I first started working at Fairchild, I didn't tell my father. He finally found out after a week when my mother explained why I was leaving so early every morning. At first he was upset but then he saw that I was able to bring home some money for food so he let me work. . . . I would like to move out and contract a room near the factory but my parents won't let me do this. It's just that my house is so crowded — with nine brothers and sisters there are always people around. . . . My younger sister wants to apply at the factory for a job, but I don't want her to, I like having my own identity.

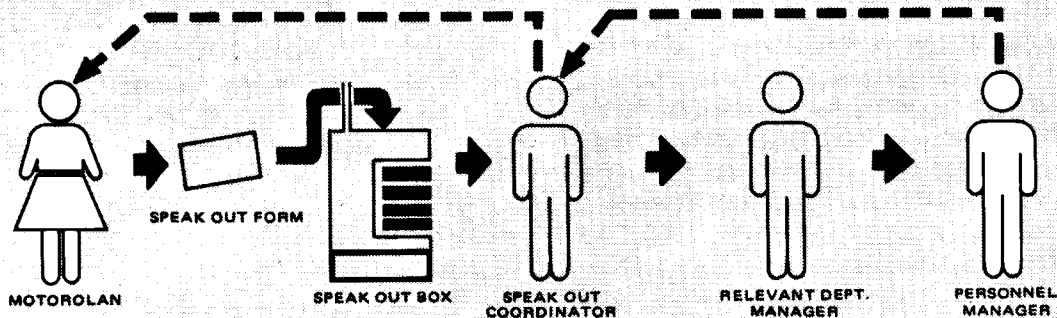
TENSIONS

The role of income provider is a relatively

new one for Southeast Asian women. While women have always shared the work of family enterprises — whether peasant or urban — and supplemented household income by doing cottage craft work, only a small proportion have taken on full-time wage-earning jobs outside the family. Those women who have entered the paid work force have generally been members of the small proletariat taking jobs in such industries as textiles, where they work under sweatshop conditions, or educated women working in clerical or professional positions. The arrival of the electronics industry has dramatically expanded opportunities for young women to play independent economic roles, often at times when their brothers cannot find wage jobs.

While the families welcome their daughters' income, it is often difficult to accept a daughter's greater independence. This tension becomes especially acute when the women push for more freedom or flaunt the alien lifestyle which is so actively encouraged inside the factory. It is particularly severe in Malaysia, where the factory culture is more pronounced than in other countries in the region. The Intel Penang personnel officer complained, "Our major problem is complaints from parents, and brothers in particular, when they see the cultural changes and new lifestyles their daughters and sisters are taking on." In an attempt to overcome parental disapproval, several factories have arranged Parents' Days to "show parents that the working environment is actually very amenable." These events feature tours of the plant and free snacks and activities. Other plants have established factory-run hostels for workers so that parents will not worry about what their daughters do during unsupervised hours. The hostels feature chaperones and strict rules: residents must sign in and out, giving their destination when they leave, and they must return before 11:00 p.m. If they have

SPEAK OUTTHE MOTOROLA WAY



An excerpt from **Kommunikator**, the "human relations publication" of the Motorola Corp. (Malaysia).

guests, they must provide complete information about them. Workers living in these hostels are quite wary of talking to outsiders. One group with whom I had become friendly would not let me enter for fear of repercussions from the chaperone.

Despite such measures, the tension persists, perhaps most of all for the workers themselves. They have been thrust into a limbo between two worlds, neither of which fully accepts the other. When they take on the styles and mannerisms encouraged in the factories, they may find themselves ostracized by their families and communities. Yet if they do not, they find themselves considered "backward" and perhaps unfit for factory work. One Malaysian worker recounted an experience familiar to many:

When I first came to Penang, I lived in the kampung [village] near the factory because it reminded me of my kampung back in Ipoh. But after a couple of months I moved out of the kampung and into a boarding house in the town because all the older kampung men were bothering me, telling me that I was loose and bad...

The poignancy is heightened when one remembers that most electronics workers will be forced by deteriorating vision to leave their jobs before they are 30.

TIES TO CALIFORNIA

While they seek to become members of a global culture by consuming its products, Asian electronics workers in fact share much more than they know with their California co-workers. Approximately 60,000 assemblers work in the plants of Silicon Valley to begin the semiconductor production process and to test the finished products after Asian assemblers have completed their work. Ninety percent of these American workers are women, and roughly half of them are of Asian and Latin origin, including Filipinas, Koreans, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Azoreans. Unlike their Southeast Asian sisters, many of the women in California plants are single mothers who provide their families' primary support.

Workers in Asia and California are subject to many of the same conditions and problems, including job hazards, high production pressures, coercive discipline and human relations techniques aimed at preventing independent

worker organizing. In California, the hazards arise from the great number of chemicals used in the fabrication of silicon wafers. The pressure to produce is expressed in forced overtime, speed-ups and competition. California executives regularly attend seminars on "How to Make Unions Unnecessary," which simulate organizing drives and discuss likely organizer personality types. It is in such management meetings that the personnel techniques are refined for use in California and export to Southeast Asia.

Women in California are very aware that women in Asia carry out part of the production process, because their employers constantly remind them. Many of the Southeast Asian electronics workers, however, do not realize that women in California do work very similar to their own. The companies use the international division of labor to manipulate and intimidate their workers, rather than providing ways for the workers to develop a feeling of kinship among themselves. California workers are threatened with the loss of their jobs if they organize themselves or make too many demands on their employers: the plant can always shift their work to Asia. For the Asian workers, the immediate threat is not that the plant will move. Rather, they are presented with the productivity records of workers in other subsidiaries and pushed to produce more to keep up with or surpass them. But they do not receive information about workers in other subsidiaries which would help them to identify with them as colleagues or sisters.

DILEMMAS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The semiconductor industry presents its Southeast Asian women workers with short-term dilemmas and long-term contradictions. Jobs which seldom last longer than four years can bring profound changes into their lives for years to come. While the newness of the industry in Southeast Asia means there are relatively

few veterans of semiconductor employment, it is essential to consider what will happen to these workers when their time in the electronics plants is over.

For the short term, the tens of thousands of jobs the electronics industry has brought to each Southeast Asian country have created new economic roles for women, potentially raising their status and undermining the patriarchal structure which often makes families oppressive for women. At the same time, however, by stressing Western versions of feminine passivity, the companies have been able to prevent the workers from realizing their potential for independence.

In Taiwan and Hong Kong, where the industry has offered employment for over a decade, workers complain that their families have pressured them to remain in the factories despite their personal wishes not to. Their complaints also reveal the impact of the factory culture in creating impossible dreams, as in this narrative from a Taiwanese worker:

I'd like to learn singing. I like music. Then I could be a singing star. But my family doesn't agree to that. Right now I'd like to quit this company, but my mother says to stay because the pay at this company is higher.... The manager here is a louse, just like an "elder brother pig." He's always getting fresh with us girls.... Next year for sure I'm going to get work in Taipei.¹²

Particularly common is dissatisfaction because families have become so dependent on their daughters' incomes that they resist the daughters' wishes to marry. After marriage, the women either stop working or use most of their income to set up a new household.

Industry personnel policies which encourage Western manners and consumption habits often make it difficult for women workers to fit into their communities and families. Thus when their periods of employment in the semiconductor factories end, they face serious questions

3 DAYS OF MASS HYSTERIA

PENANG, Sat. — Mass hysteria continued successively for three days among women production workers on all shifts of a factory in Bayan Lepas here. More than 10 workers in the production line at the factory were again gripped with hysteria at about 10.15 this morning.

Without strikes, without unions, without collective bargaining, Malaysian workers have regularly shut down factories for hours and even days at a time with spontaneous outbreaks of possession by spirits affecting hundreds of workers. "Spirits" provide Malay women with one of their few culturally acceptable forms of social protest. Their culture does not condone expressions of anger and strong emotions by women.

A possessed woman becomes "hysterical," going into contortions and often taking on a totally different voice and personality. In one possession which I witnessed, ten adults were needed to restrain a very slight teen-aged girl. In another, a worker who was possessed in her hostel began to shout that she hated being there, hated working in the plant and wanted to go home to her mother. Afterwards, she and others went to great pains to explain that it was not she who was

speaking but a spirit who was speaking through her. Hence, she was not responsible for what she had said.

Mass possessions in the factories usually occur during times of high production pressures, changes in the production process or other generally recognized tension. Incidents commonly begin with one worker seeing a spirit in her microscope, often that of her mother. The vision sweeps through the factory floor, and suddenly several hundred women are hysterically weeping and writhing. Though management personnel try to remove the affected women from the floor immediately, the outbreaks frequently close the factory down in a subconscious wildcat strike. One American manager openly acknowledged the connection between possessions and working conditions: "If people believe management cares, there are no problems. Hysteria doesn't occur." Affected workers always receive a paid two-week medical leave in a further, implicit admission that possession is linked to working conditions.

Workers and management alike offer many explanations for the epidemics, usually revolving around unhappy spirits or ghosts. According to one theory, the spirits are ghosts of prisoners of war killed on the factory sites by Japanese during World War II. Management efforts to end the outbreaks have ranged from importing industrial relations experts from New York to hiring local spiritual healers, on a monthly stipend, to exorcise the spirits. But the possessions continue.

about their ability to find other jobs or marry. Church organizers in South Korea, where electronics industries are over ten years old, report that many former electronics workers have no alternative but to become prostitutes to support themselves.

While their new economic roles actually bring women workers into an international system, the companies deliberately work to prevent them from recognizing their own importance. The stress on foreign images of femininity fosters the illusion that consuming Western products makes a woman part of an international culture. The stress on competition and individuality makes it difficult for women to cooperate with each other in the same plant, much less develop links with women working in the same industry in other countries.

The ramifications of the electronics companies' manipulation of their women workers reach into other "female" industries as well. Semiconductor firms have divided their workers from those in other industries by requiring more education as a condition for hiring and creating an image of superiority among them. Throughout Southeast Asia, workers and observers reported that women in other industries view electronics workers with both envy at their style and apparent freedom and contempt of their flaunting of alien lifestyles. Such divisions make it difficult for workers to cross industry lines to organize themselves or even understand their common position as workers and as women. The industries' manipulation is particularly effective in Southeast Asia, because industrial work in general is so new there. Few women have been "toughened" by experience in wage labor, and few have begun to feel the long-term contradictions which their present work implies.

Nonetheless, resistance is beginning. Regular reports of protests, sit-ins, and work stoppages come from established factories in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Worker militancy in

Hong Kong during the late 1960s discouraged further foreign investment for several years and may have been the catalyst in the decision of many semiconductor firms to locate new factories in other Asian countries. Even in these newer factory posts, resistance is taking shape. In the Philippines, for example, workers in one U.S.-owned plant are developing a union despite heavy government restrictions on all labor organizing. Workers periodically halt production for short periods to press demands in all Southeast Asian countries.

A major aspect of organized worker resistance — in the Philippines, South Korea, and Hong Kong as well as in California — is the investigation of their particular roles in international production. As they challenge the companies, workers find they must understand this international structure if they are to be successful in organizing across national and eventually industry lines. In one first step toward developing an international labor movement to confront multinational capital in the semiconductor industry, workers in Hong Kong have organized trips to visit workers in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. One woman summed up her trip to the Philippines in early 1978:

*The 11-day trip was over, but the sight and sound of the Philippines was embedded in my heart. The Hong Kong workers should learn from them, because generally speaking we were not so aware of fighting for power. This tour has helped me to identify my role.*¹³

NOTES

Unless otherwise cited, interview material was obtained during a fact-finding trip to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines from November 1978 to January 1979.

1. Operator's Handbook; Advanced Micro Devices (Philippines), p. 6.

2. Daniel Dhakidae, "If Management Works Well, Then We Don't Need a Labor Union" (interview in Indonesian), *Prisma*, September 1976, p. 45.
3. Interview with a National Semiconductor executive, October 1978.
4. *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 1972, p. 36.
5. Linda Y. C. Lim, "Women Workers in Multinational Corporations: The Case of the Electronics Industry in Malaysia and Singapore," Michigan Occasional Papers, No. IX, Fall 1978, p. 7.
6. *New Straits Times*, November 27, 1978, p. 32.
7. Lim, op. cit., p. 30.
8. Interview with a National Semiconductor executive, October 1978.
9. *New Nation* (Singapore), January 24, 1975.
10. Enrico Paglaban, "Philippines: Workers in the Export Industry," *Pacific Research*, Vol. IX, No. 3 & 4 (March-June, 1978), p. 18.
11. Lim, op. cit., p. 32.
12. *Voices*, Christian Conference of Asia-Urban-Rural Mission, Japan, October 6, 1978, p. 15.
13. Linda Gale Chen, "The Effect of Industrial Employment and Management Policies on the Lives of Taiwanese Working Women," paper delivered at a conference on "Modern Man and His Industrial Environment," May 13-14, 1978, Taichung, Taiwan, p. 16.

Other sources of important information are:
 "Free Trade Zones and Industrialization of Asia," special issue of *AMPO*, Tokyo, 1977.
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 Both are available from SRC.

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LETTER

Dear persons,

We wanted to let you know how pleased we were with the coverage you gave to the Combahee River Collective's organizing around the murders of Black women in Boston in the winter of 1979.

There was one serious typographical error in the reprinting of our pamphlet, however, that we feel it important to call attention to. In our list of the kinds of women who don't necessarily have men to rely upon for protection we included lesbians. The sentence originally reads: "The idea of men protecting us isn't very realistic because many of us don't have a man to depend upon for this — young girls, teenagers, single women, separated and divorced women, lesbians, widowed women and elderly women."

Not only did we want your readers to know how this sentence actually appeared in the pamphlet, but we also wanted to convey that it was a difficult and principled political decision for us to include even a mention of lesbians in a pamphlet aimed at the Black community. The level of homophobia and anti-feminism in our community is undoubtedly higher than in white communities, if for no other reason than the fact that the feminist movement has made comparatively little impact there. As Black feminists we are totally committed to confronting and changing reactionary attitudes and practices around the issues of sexual politics and sexual identity and decided to include lesbians as a legitimate group of women in the Black community whose lives were just as much in danger as any other Black women. By providing this information, we hope that your readers will get an even clearer idea of the scope of our politics.

Sincerely,
 The Combahee River Collective



HUNGARY, 1956

The Anatomy of a Political Revolution

Ferenc Feher & Agnes Heller

The Hungarian Revolution as a classic political revolution has not lost its relevance, and its lessons are especially important for socialists. Certain of these lessons can only be drawn when people on the radical left no longer idolize political revolution.

How can it be maintained, without gross exaggeration and national bias, that in the century which spawned 1905, the February and October revolutions, and the Chinese Revolution, this uproar in a small country was a classic political revolution? There is only one reason: since the cataclysms of 1848, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 has been the only pure political revolution. It did not spring from a crisis triggered by war (mostly by a lost war) — as did the Paris Commune, the Russian 1905 and 1917 revolutions, and the Hungarian and German revolutions of 1918-19 — but from a crisis caused by the loss of legitimacy of a tyrannical regime. A 'pure revolution' means that the only considerations motivating its protagonists are related to the structure of the social order and not to external factors, and that as a result the mechanism of social revolution becomes visible.*

Hungary in 1956 is a case study of a pure political revolution because the ruling stratum *totally* lost its legitimacy. In all aspects of social life Hungary was the most crushed and humiliated, the least free country of eastern Europe. Civil society in its entirety was

*It is important to note that the often slandered Hungarian '56 revolution had nothing in common with the *rightist revolutions*, Mussolini's March on Rome, or Hitler's advent to power. The latter were not the uprisings of an oppressed civil society against tyranny but the opposite: the tyranny's *coup* (in the disguise of a revolution) against democracy.

subjugated to the political state: no relations — neither contractual nor personal — remained unaffected by the tyrannical caprices of the state. The police terror which was indiscriminately directed against Fascist war criminals, former bourgeois, real and invented enemies of the regime, and sometimes certain “founding fathers” of the regime itself, assumed unbearable dimensions. And let us be clear: it was terror, not law enforcement. Of a population of ten million, approximately 300,000 were in internment camps, subject entirely to police administration, not even formally protected by the fragile “court jurisdiction” of the period; tens of thousands were in prison; and thousands were executed. Conditions during and after detention did not differ from usual Fascist procedures. Physical torture as a habitual method of interrogation and the simplest means of obtaining confessions, the execution of juvenile “political delinquents,” the use of hostages (mostly the defendant’s family members) to “enforce the law,” the beating to death of prisoners before and after (!) indictment as a simple act of revenge, the discretion of prison wardens and secret police officers over the life of the prisoners for whom they did not have to account, the “confiscation” of executed convicts’ belongings (without even forwarding letters of farewell to their families), failure even to inform families of the fact of execution — these methods were in part faithful imitation of “socialist law enforcement” in the Soviet Union, in part “Hungarian innovations.” Even Stalinist leaders of “fraternal countries” (Gottwald in Czechoslovakia and Bierut in Poland, for example) complained about the eagerness of the Hungarian leaders to involve them in mass terror, an involvement sought because Rakosi and his terror apparatus did not want to accept sole responsibility for their actions.*

Economically, the calorie intake of the population in the early 1950s remained on a World

War II level. Yet the leaders, who felt themselves doubly insecure — with regard to their own people and with regard to Moscow — wanted to produce “spectacular results” and tried to accomplish the most unrealistic economic projects. For example, they proceeded to set up a huge steel industry in a country which was not only small, but which also lacked all the necessary raw materials.

No wonder, then, that when this people revolted it revolted totally, and as is usual in case of total revolutions, it found symbols for its rebellious spirit. The destruction of Stalin’s statue had the same symbolic meaning as the storming of the Bastille. Indeed, the famous photos of jubilant demonstrators carrying pieces of the statue of the tyrant mark the end of a historical period. Politically, Stalin did not die in 1953, but in 1956 in the room where Khrushchev gave his “secret speech,” and on the streets of Budapest.

Yet all the characteristics of oppression evident in Hungary were also present in other “people’s democracies,” some perhaps even more conspicuously. Elsewhere, however, they did not produce revolution. A mechanical view of history, totaling up the causal factors, will not explain events. The revolution broke out because of the simultaneous presence of many “accidental” historical factors: an *opportunity* for the rebellious mood of the country to be expressed publicly; a *language* in which complaints and demands could be articulated; an *opposition* able to articulate the outrage of the population and formulate a program without being outlawed in the very first moments; a *moral crisis* in the tyrannical ruling stratum which paralyzed vital power centers; a *feeling of false confidence* on the part of the masses,

*These three, Gottwald, Bierut, and Rakosi, were among the most Stalinist Eastern European Communist leaders. They were most dependent upon and loyal to Moscow, and had the weakest internal popular support.

especially regarding the organs of coercion; and a *leader*. All these factors were present in Hungary between 1953-56, mostly because of historical chance.

Strange as it seems, the historical opportunity for "reform" was provided, as is usual in dialectical parables, by the Devil himself. According to a generally accepted explanation corroborated by eye-witnesses still alive, L. P. Beria, head of the USSR's security police, initiated changes in the Hungarian leadership in an attempt to outwit his colleagues (after 15 years of mass murder) with a new-found reformism and liberalism. Rokosi's "*false zeal*" was counterproductive.*

Imre Nagy, Beria's new "partner," was, of course, meant as a mere implementer of tactical changes, another Comintern functionary in the service of long-term Soviet aims. Today, more than 20 years after his heroic (because self-chosen) death, the world knows that *this act* was one of the greatest mistakes the Soviet leaders committed *in sizing up a personality*. It is less generally known that Nagy's "new government policy" of 1953 (three years before Khrushchev's secret speech) was intended as a "deStalinizing" plan — without mentioning Stalin's name. The plan included drastically curtailing arbitrary police prerogatives; putting "socialist legality" on the agenda for the first time; and loosening the unbearably tight reins over the peasantry. Imre Nagy's "new program" annulled the results of forced collectivization and softened the Orwellian system of "natural taxation."[†] It condemned the official economic policy as a whole. It is not only a tragic and frustrating counterpoint, but also an important political fact that Rakosi gave a

speech a week after Nagy's which was an open denunciation of all the promises of the "new government policy." It was his turn now, Rakosi believed, to fear for his life. He understood the workings of the new regime as paralleling the "inner-palace" struggle between Gottwald, the president of the Czech republic, and Slansky, the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, a fight in which each protagonist was ready to liquidate the other. In fact, when Gottwald won, Slansky was executed. For the first time since the 1920s, when the Trotskyist opposition was liquidated in the Soviet Union, there was a public confrontation between two programs in a country led by communists.

It was an awkward public confrontation, for there could be no public acknowledgement of the division. But both partners possessed the language with which to fight out their policy differences. That is how an oppositional force, *a critical communist intelligentsia*, could appear on the political scene without being immediately outlawed. The language of tyranny, in its full vigor, is *homogeneous* and does not tolerate any kind of semantic deviation. But now, in the *political gap* created by two contending programs, when there was no one "correct party line," the opposition could resist the party apparatus by referring to party documents. Even later, after Rakosi's short-term victory in March 1955, the opposition could articulate its message in conventional communist ideological and political terms.

The exclusive credit for having prepared the

*Beria *calculated* and produced a dangerous tension. Since in private conversations he generally used the cynical language of his opposite number in the Gestapo, Heydrich, the words of farewell he allegedly addressed to Rakosi may well be authentic: "You were the first and last Jewish king in Hungary!"

[†]"Natural taxation" was a system in which the central government prescribed which villages had to provide particular quantities of agricultural produce (such as wheat and livestock, etc.) so that the general provisioning system for the country as a whole could function. In fact, this form of taxation never worked well because peasants sabotaged the system by hiding their goods; the government responded by sending peasants to internment camps.

outbreak of the 1956 revolution belongs to the communist intelligentsia opposition. These intellectuals paid a heavy price in executions, long imprisonments, and life-long emigration, and for years endured a barrage of criticism. We can disregard the post-1956 official label of "treason" (the executioner should not be taken seriously as a social moralist). The fact remains that both liberal-conservatives and liberal-democrats attacked the oppositional Communists for monopolizing the political scene with their belated self-lacerations, whereas they (liberals, conservatives, democrats) had known and warned in advance about the horrors of a totalitarian regime, the principles of which had been so vehemently and aggressively defended some six-seven years earlier by the same communist intellectuals. These criticisms were not unfounded, and yet they demonstrate the political ignorance of the critics. Had an openly liberal opposition appeared on the scene in 1953, it would have played into the hands of Rakosi's eager apparatus, which was waiting for the smallest sign of "counterrevolution" to justify ending the whole policy of reform. Beyond that, it would have dispirited the reformers themselves, who were then still doctrinaire communists, sometimes still half under the Stalinist spell. The self-delusion of loyalty to the party while defending its best interests against party leaders was a historically necessary vehicle for making key issues public while keeping them temporarily within the language of a party consensus.

Remaining within the consensus provided the opposition with more than freedom of maneuver. Only by talking the same language as the party cadres and giving the same categories a different meaning were they able to bring about the inner moral crisis which paralyzed vital centers of the regime. A group of communist writers were the avant-garde of the opposition. They were characterized by exuberant emotions

and a limited amount of political realism. When they repeatedly recited in public — mostly in mediocre verses and prose but with genuine feeling — the sufferings of the innocently executed and imprisoned, and when they emphasized for their fellow-functionaries how all this debased the "cause," they shocked those who were still intact morally, or at least sensitive.

The importance of that moral shock is epitomized by two classic cases. One of them is that of Pal Maleter, who was executed together with the prime minister. A colonel of the army and later minister of defense of the Nagy government, he was sent with his tank unit to put down the armed resistance in the first days of the revolution, but he joined the uprising, providing an example for the whole Hungarian army. The case of Sandor Kopacsi was even more important, if less legendary. A young communist functionary working in the Ministry of the Interior, he realized from the reports of the writers what horrors were committed by his "colleagues," and how he — a young and militant anti-Fascist — was becoming not much better than the hated Gestapo officials. He felt an indirect responsibility, and with a naive terminology but a sincere commitment he wanted "to repent before his people." As a police commissioner of Budapest he was in a key position: when he refused to order a fusillade against the demonstrators and instead invited the personnel of the police barracks "to join the revolutionary people," he saved thousands of lives and gave a crucial impetus to the revolution. All this could only have been implemented by an opposition speaking the language of the ruling group.

Of course, the historical role played by the oppositional communist intelligentsia was created partly because they were morally shocked intellectuals, "professionally" sensitive to the horrors of the Rakosi times, and partly by the fact that they defended the inter-

ests of their stratum. As so-called creative intellectuals, they could no longer pursue their own "profession" under the devastating circumstances created by Stalinism. However, even this is a legitimate motive and it does not diminish their value in the preparation of the revolution.

We have mentioned a certain amount of necessary self-deception among the preconditions of the revolution. What was first seen, and was perhaps meant, as sincere self-criticism and an attempt to return to the democratic roots of socialism, turned out to be a series of tactical maneuvers aimed at adjusting the



On the evening of October 23, 1956 — the first day of the revolution — demonstrators toppled the giant statue of Stalin in Budapest's Stalin Square.

regime to a changed situation. When "the Party itself," through the person of Imre Nagy, argued that injustice had been done, that "moral reparation" was necessary, and that socialism cannot exist without democracy, it seemed to be impossible ever to return to the policy of executions, mass detentions, and imprisonments. This confidence was strengthened by the Khrushchev "secret speech" at the Twentieth Congress (which was, of course, no secret at all to the Hungarian intelligentsia) because the self-repair of socialism, up to that point a Hungarian affair, attained world-historical dimensions. Little Hungary, with its great sufferings, seemed to be the forerunner of the revitalization of "genuine socialism." Not the enthusiastic writers lacking experience in the history of Bolshevism, but such a skeptical and experienced man as Lukacs shared the optimism. He told us he had twice in his life entertained illusions: first in 1919-20, when he believed that the world would be grasped within a year by a victorious proletarian revolution; and second in 1956, when he believed that socialism would be purified from Stalinist dirt, also within a year. This false confidence in the impossibility of a return to tyrannical practices was necessary for the revolution. Moreover, the self-deception was not exclusive to communist intellectuals, or this small nation would not have undertaken the big leap which in retrospect seems not even to have been a calculated risk.

The Hungarian Revolution had a leader, too, in the person of Imre Nagy. To the utter surprise of his Soviet superiors, Nagy widened the planned course of the 1953 tactical maneuvers into a prelude of the "self-criticism of socialism." He was sufficiently "unpolitical" in 1955, when he was first ousted by Rakosi, not to try to remain in power by making a formal self-criticism. Rather, he organized an open oppositional center, just as if he had not been witness to the fate of the opposition in the



Imre Nagy during the revolution.

1920s and the 1930s. In prolonged secret negotiations with the Soviet and the Kadarist leadership in Rumania in early 1957, he was offered a last chance: he could have been pardoned or he could even have joined the Kadar government, at the cost "only" of abandoning his colleagues to their fate and renouncing the revolution. He chose death on the gallows instead.

Of course, the word "leader" needs elaboration. Imre Nagy was anything but charismatic. In the beginning people accepted him probably because they understood, shrewdly, that there

was no alternative to a man from the communist opposition. But almost at once, and unanimously, they “voted” against him in practical terms, as on the afternoon of 23rd of October when he made an especially unskillful speech in front of the Parliament and advised the demonstrators to “go home peacefully.” They “voted” thus whenever he proved to be weak or inconsistent from the viewpoint of the revolution. On the other hand, in a revolution in which there was no longer any state power, when Nagy’s government possessed no armed forces, when all the maneuvering politicians of the overthrown regime (some of them in fact victims of Rakosi) were watched with the utmost suspicion by the “man on the street,” when people — naively — no longer believed that they needed a “camouflage communist” against the Russians, and when everyone could pick up weapons on the street, no one made an attempt to reject Imre Nagy. Until the dawn of November 4 he remained the acknowledged prime minister of the revolution. This man, with (or despite) his 40 years spent in the Communist party, gained a vote of confidence from the Hungarian population.

It has also been argued many times that Imre Nagy was an admirable man of morality, a genuine martyr, but not a real politician. The criticism is twofold. In several episodes during his first term as prime minister, he was accused of having missed the opportunity to seize power, liquidate rivals, and imprison adversaries of both the Stalinist and the bourgeois-liberal poles. Even Lukacs, who, after 1956, never cared to utter a word against Imre Nagy, told us in 1955 when we suggested to him that he should contact Imre Nagy and his group: “One does not make politics with mediocre writers and private moralists. I was an old factionist myself in the 20s; I know how things like that should be handled: one organizes a faction with influential functionaries and seizes the power centers instead of giving popular talks.”

The second accusation is that Imre Nagy was an opportunist, or in a milder form, that he constantly yielded to the population, especially during the days of the revolution. In fact, he repeatedly yielded to demands for such specific reforms as obligatory religious education. This demand, by the way, was put forward in a characteristic manner by the workers’ council of the largest proletarian district in Budapest — apt tribute to the glorious record of the official and officious “atheist educators” of a nation! However, Nagy never made concessions to his basic socialist ideas or the interests of a Hungarian democracy then in the making.

Apart from the question of the wisdom of his “deferential” behavior, which needs no further apologies from a statesman amidst the unexpected events of a revolution, the Luxemburgist character of his basic political attitude was clear from the beginning. Once he understood that the guiding principles of his life were at least problematic, Imre Nagy, a loyal Bolshevik for thirty-four years, and a man not without vanity, was nevertheless ready to begin a political learning process anew. Hence his readiness to yield to the people. Nagy could not have known at the beginning, after his lengthy Bolshevik indoctrination, that political pluralism and independence from the Soviet Union could be compatible with fundamental socialist values and ideas.

Nagy’s critics did not really know him. Instead they imagined another Gomulka (with his later career of putting down the peaceful strike of Gdansk workers with gunfire). Nagy’s worst mistakes were attempts to be Machiavellian — for example, making a short-term alliance with one of the worst murderers of the Rakosi time, a secretary of the Central Committee. His “moralizing blunders” were phases of his learning process. He could understand only gradually how far he had to go to be accepted by the “toiling masses;” what the new premises were one had to start from. His hesi-

tations stemmed partly from sincere and very firm moral convictions which also had political significance. Without analyzing the problem in theoretical terms, Nagy revoked his confidence in Machiavellian political realism, the Hegelian "dialectics" according to which socialist politics should be based on fear and interest, and opted for a post-Machiavellian socialist politics that connects democracy with socialism. This option led him to the gallows, where he died not only as a national hero but also as a key figure in the history of socialism. When he accepted the practically unanimous decision of the Hungarian population to return to pluralistic democracy (instead of a one-party system and dictatorship) and made it a personal political credo, his firm decision, and the similarly resolute stance of at least the majority of his followers, dealt a devastating moral and political defeat to the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The long and tortuous story of Eurocommunism had begun.

The history of the Hungarian Revolution reveals at the same time the specific difficulties of the opposition in the Soviet Union and in the people's democracies of the post-Khrushchev period. With Khrushchev's fall, the hopes (or self-delusions) for effective self-criticism of Bolshevism disappeared; they remained alive only in such "last Mohicans" of Leninist opposition as Medvedev. Simultaneously, the language spoken by oppressor and oppressed in common disappeared as well. The opposition no longer speaks the language of the "masters;" it refuses the linguistic consensus deliberately. The classic case is Poland, where, for example, Michnik very energetically emphasizes the "insufficiency of revisionism."* This very language shows to what lengths the oppo-

sition has gone: it first accepts the derogatory label "revisionism," and then rejects that same notion because it is not sufficiently radical from the viewpoint of the opposition. In this respect, the present opposition in eastern Europe is more mature than the "proto-Eurocommunism" of the mid-1950s Hungarian intellectual resistance because it has been aware of its own pluralistic character from the beginning. But it is also in a much more complicated situation, for it lacks the possibility of public expression which the Hungarian opposition, because of the linguistic-conceptual consensus, possessed, even if only for a moment.

The power elite does not grant any tolerance to any opposition; the elite has never trusted its opponents. Such a cynically clear-headed tyrant as Ulbricht,* for example, watched Imre Nagy from 1953 on with the deepest suspicion, and in private conversations urged "the most radical measures" against him, Lukacs, and others. The elite is ready to imprison opponents unhesitatingly, even if the opponents invoke the "ideal type" of that same regime against the regime itself (as Bahro does).**

Until now, we have spoken about the "proto-Eurocommunism" of the Hungarian intelligentsia because we have dealt only with the background of the Hungarian revolution. When analyzing the revolution itself, our focus and our terminology will be entirely different. For the "revolutionary masses" (to apply the language of the masters to the subjects) had created in eleven days an entirely different consensus, both negative and positive. The negative consensus of the population consisted in the "no" announced to the overthrown regime by almost everyone, irrespective of social stra-

*Adam Michnik, born 1946; active in the mid-1960s student opposition; now active in defense of persecuted striking workers; very interesting opposition intellectual in Poland.

*Walter Ulbricht, then leader of the Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic.

**Rudolf Bahro, East German communist dissident of the 1970s, author of *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London, 1978).



October 23: A demonstration of solidarity with the Poles, whose own "October crisis" had brought Soviet tanks into Warsaw on October 19th. This picture shows demonstrators from Budapest University marching to the statue of General Bem, a Polish general who had fought with the Hungarians in their revolt against the Austrians in 1848.

ta, political credo, or cultural background. The sham elections in the "people's democracy" generally brought a 99 percent vote in favor of the government which elicited public ridicule: had it come to a plebiscite in the days of the revolution, the only real — negative — 99 percent vote in Hungarian history could have been produced with the following question: Do you want to see the overthrown regime restored? And even then, it is doubtful whether high-ranking party and secret-police officials could have amounted to one percent of the population. The total of those faithful to Kadarism, the 150,000 to 200,000 — altogether two percent of the population — who joined the reorganized party before May 1957, is greater than the number who would have voted for the old regime. We know from personal experience that many of the people who later

joined the Kadarist party claimed to be for a democratic socialist regime during the revolution and some of those who joined did so only because they regarded the party as the exclusive channel of a renewed opposition.

It is more difficult to find the elements of positive consensus, but there were at least two of them: the demand for free elections with a secret ballot in order to establish a multi-party system; and the demand for national independence. Many people on the Left (and there were many Leftists still in Hungary) accepted one or both of these principles, but with some hesitation due to their Bolshevik training. As a frame of reference, however, Bolshevik principles were clearly a fiasco. The "toiling masses" rejected these principles so decisively that whoever did not adopt an openly Fascist position and did not want to "teach these masses a

lesson" by force (with an alien power the only force possible) had to bow at least inwardly before the wish of those same masses.

After the revolution was crushed, we repeatedly heard from both friends and foes about the "immaturity" of the Hungarian masses. Adversaries, old-time Stalinists and Kadarists, tried to explain the "scandal," the emergence of the "counterrevolution," by the immaturity of a whole nation. Friends referred to it when later reconstructing the history of the revolution by raising this sympathetic question: when did the Hungarian masses, in their understandable but naive ardor, go beyond what was acceptable to Moscow? We think that what is regarded as immaturity was actually the *resoluteness* and *historical greatness* of the Hungarian Revolution, elevating it much higher than the "famine mutinies" of Berlin in 1953 or Posnan in 1956. The popular Hungarian joke that 1956 was the final exam in a nearly decade-long party seminar proved to be entirely correct. The Hungarian masses learned the lesson and memorized the scenes from the revolutionary movies with which they were fed *ad nauseam*: they first captured the communication centers of the regime — the radio stations and the printing presses; destroyed its symbols, tokens of Stalinist domination and self-confidence; and undermined and disbanded its organs of coercion by mass agitation. They distributed weapons on the streets, created new newspapers and new organs of political authority, and declared their unanimous will to have free elections. On the 3rd of November, one day before the Russian army moved in to take over and restore a new variant of the overthrown regime, the Stalinist tyranny no longer had organs, authority, or symbols of legitimacy. What more can testify to the maturity of a political revolution?

The Hungarian Revolution also had another problematic feature: a spectacular gap between the revolution's existing practice and its pro-

fessed ideologies which caused considerable inner tension even for many of its adherents. On the one hand, the mass movement in revolt returned to the democratic traditions of socialism (which had indigenous Hungarian roots as well, reaching back to the 1918-19 Hungarian Revolution), to the establishment of workers' councils. The pride of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was the spontaneous and universal creation of democratically elected councils in factories, scientific and public institutions, schools, offices, and all the work places. (To add the grotesque to the abominable, the later Kadarist victors, who crushed the workers' councils by relying on a foreign army, and who openly professed themselves to be the Bolshevik elite, complained about the "nondemocratic character" of the councils, since their loudest and "most demagogic" elements shaped the opinion of the passive whole.)

The practice of the councils was socialist in a double sense. First, they issued the slogan, "We will not return either factory or land," and this was a double-edged program, directed just as much against landowner and industrial capitalist as against state exploitation, both socialist objectives. Second, the direct democracy of the workers' councils was the centuries-old recurring ideal of every truly socialist movement.

On the other hand, the dominant political ideology one could hear or read on the streets, in work places, on the posters on the walls, or in most of the revolutionary press was a confused *mélange* of nineteenth century Hungarian nationalist phrases and cold war "anti"-ideologies — self-hypnotizing gestures of an allegedly existing Hungarian (national-revolutionary) greatness. For the first time since the war and the massacre of nearly half a million Hungarian Jews, one occasionally heard or saw anti-Semitic slogans. This contradiction between being and consciousness remained a mystery only for those dialecticians who lectured the nation at obligatory seminars about the dialectic-

tics of being and consciousness. The Hungarian population, a forcibly homogenized mass of state wage-laborers, exploited, terrorized, and oppressed by the state, revolted in the socialist manner of a wage-laborer against the oppression: for one week in Hungarian history it changed the property relationships, not in words but in fact. But since the oppressive state called itself socialist and was a doctrinaire force that demanded absolute ideological obedience from the citizen, and since there were few visible individuals who called themselves socialists but did not identify themselves with the oppression, the spontaneous mass movement could not articulate itself in any other way but by being "anti."

It was this discrepancy between ideology and practice — the former analyzed in full detail in the party press, the White Papers, etc., the latter either ignored or denigrated — that was declared to be the proof of a coming conservative dictatorship. And undoubtedly, in a small country, in case of the victory of a revolution exposed to still vigorous cold war influences, conservative dictatorship was an actual danger, and a combined result of pressure from abroad and hysteria from within.

The forces of a militant Right *did* appear on the scene, wearing the halo of martyrdom from Rakosis's prisons, where Fascists were often treated in a Fascist way. It is the combination of this phenomenon — the sporadic but undeniable presence of Rightists on the political scene, shadows from a pre-1945 period — and the atrocities committed on the streets of Budapest that seemed to justify the Kadarist-Soviet propaganda which claimed that the Hungarian political revolution was halfway to a Fascist counterrevolution. We who at the time openly protested against the atrocities and demanded they be stopped are perhaps entitled to make some remarks here in defense of the honor of the Hungarian Revolution. The Hungarian population, which learned from its postwar

governments that what political mass murderers deserve is exemplary public executions, knew that this was the moment when mass murderers must be punished or they would slip away. One of the dirty and grotesque aspects of every political revolution is that in its first days "justice" is practiced crudely (that is to say, in a way it should not be practiced). In Hungary the result was that men with records and morality little better than certain Gestapo chiefs in occupied countries now live in Budapest unharmed, perhaps having had a few years' imprisonment and gentle handling by their own former colleagues and subordinates, while in the stormy days small secret police functionaries and many entirely innocent people were lynched instead of the real criminals. These conditions resulted from the actions of a small circle of self-appointed avengers, often common criminals just released from prison, while the mass of the population stood by and watched events with a very limited gusto.

All this, however, does not justify the assumption that conservative dictatorship was imminent in Hungary. Nor does it justify any kind of Soviet intervention. We have already mentioned the powerful factor that influenced the whole political scene in the opposite direction: the workers' councils. They were grimly determined to defend the collective (that is, socialist) ownership of the "forces of production." Given that determination, they could not have remained indifferent to a conservative dictatorship which would immediately have endangered this collective ownership. Only occupation by the greatest army of the world combined with exceptionally barbarian legislation (for example, declaring any person inciting to strike liable to the death penalty) crushed this determination.

Under peaceful conditions, when the blood-thirsty mood of revenge vanished, the free Hungarian elections would most likely have produced a poll not drastically different from



A squadron of Soviet tanks in the center of Budapest.

the 1945 results. Of course, communism (even Imre Nagy's "proto-Eurocommunism") would have represented a small minority; Lukacs' pessimistic prediction of ten percent seems overconfident to us. But that was a historical punishment morally uncrippled communists had to be ready to take. Also a matter of course, the political scene would have been dominated by parties very similar in ideology and in orientation to the Italian Christian Democrats and to Italian neo-Fascists.

But just as certainly there would have been a powerful coalition of socialists, social democrats, and peasant deputies relying directly on

the irrevocable political deed of the Hungarian wage laborers in revolt: the system of workers' councils. This in itself could have written a new chapter in the experience of European democratic socialism, the first historical experience of mixed democracy. By mixed democracy we mean the combination of direct democracy (in the management of factories, units of production, and social organization) with a representative system, thereby providing also a positive solution of the question of private property as opposed to a negative solution, the confiscation of all property by the state.

We must analyze separately the resistance of the Hungarian population after the Soviet invasion. That there was practically no pillage in spite of the fact that the city was without proper police or other authority for weeks, in itself showed the political consciousness of the population. Furthermore, people spontaneously found a more effective means of resistance than armed urban guerrilla warfare, a tactic doomed to failure against the strongest army of the world, and one which could only have resulted in the total destruction of the major Hungarian cities. The more effective strategy was a general political strike, to our knowledge the first one since the Russian Revolution of 1905 (with the possible exception of Spanish mass demonstrations against the monarchy), and a unique achievement of the Hungarian working class. For seven weeks the strikes continued, sometimes dwindling into a partial paralysis of a few branches of industry, then enlarging again into a universal work stoppage.

The strikes, which paralyzed Hungarian economic and social life (the government centers could only operate by being based directly on the Soviet Army's sources of supply), were not aimed at the disruption of civil society as such. They were not suicidal actions directed against the population — for example, social service workers never ceased work. They had well-defined political objectives: the withdrawal of

the Soviet Army and the return of the arrested Nagy government. Later they had more restricted aims: an act of solidarity with their imprisoned leaders, Racz and Bali. Needless to say, all this was a hopeless rear-guard action; nevertheless it is a good feeling for Hungarian socialists that while no single Russian factory went on strike for the exiled Leon Trotsky, the Hungarian workers proclaimed a general strike for two workers who appeared on the historical scene only for a moment, but who were elected by them and served them loyally.

There were two remarkable features in this use of the general strike. The first was that it channeled the political dynamism from a suicidal armed resistance inspired by indignation and despair into a *peaceful* but *active* force. We emphasize both adjectives. It was actually the "mutinous" workers, and not the government speaking constantly about moderation, who saved Budapest and other Hungarian cities by inventing an active but peaceful method of resistance, and by demonstrating their fighting spirit without guiding the population into self-destruction in the face of an adversary that was determined to do anything in order to put down the resistance. These workers saved Hungary from mass deportations and mass exterminations, and they concluded its revolution at the same time. The latter act was acknowledged, in a curious way, by the government itself. Later it was vogueish in the cynically enlightened circles of Kadarism to speak ironically about the "only strike of world history that was remunerated by the employer," that is to say, the Kadarist government. Kadarists did not realize, however, that the state's allegedly generous remuneration itself demonstrated the extent to which that state had been crushed by the striking workers. The state had had to acknowledge the workers' political authority, and to conduct open negotiations with the delegations of the Workers' Councils.

The workers' resistance was a demonstration

of the irresistible force of a general strike. The fantastic sight invoked so often by mystical socialists like Sorel and so much resembling the Apocalypse in their imaginations in actuality had a much more prosaic but just as powerful dynamic. Either the workers were paid by a central authority, for there was no other source that could have materially sustained a whole population, in which case the material resources of the state would have run out in a few weeks; or the salary was refused them, in which case plundering would have been the only way the population could have provided for itself, and the central authority would have been confronted once again by an unresolvable dilemma.

No government on its own could solve this problem. The Shah of Iran was expelled by his people using similar methods; De Gaulle could not have resisted the wave of demonstrations in 1968 had they actually come to a lasting general strike. The reason the Hungarian government succeeded is obvious: the Soviet Union, with its inexhaustible resources (inexhaustible at least for this purpose) and its well-known and grim reputation for going to any lengths to crush the resistance of the population of small nations. The Kadar government correctly localized the center of political resistance in the Budapest Workers' Council, which unified the most variegated forces, views, and layers of the country's "war of independence" and political revolution. When after six to seven weeks of strike the government arrested the Council's leaders, issued emergency punitive decrees which punished even inciting to strike by the death penalty, and when the authorities enforced their decrees partly by Soviet soldiers, partly by the one percent we mentioned above who were *not* part of the Hungarian consensus, then the backbone of the Hungarian resistance was broken and the revolution collapsed.

If we try to draw a balance sheet of the Hungarian Revolution, there is one crucial negative

factor: the Hungarian "test" meant the end of the experimenting spirit on the part of the leading bureaucracy. Even if the bureaucrats once had a sincere inclination for the socially honest, that is the radical and practical self-criticism of bolshevism, no serious social experiment has been launched or tolerated ever since. The reaction to Hungary also showed the ultimate unity of interests of the East European countries. Not only were arch-conservative regimes such as Ulbricht's East Germany or Novotny's Czechoslovakia ready to participate in Hungary's repression, but also Gomulka's sulking Poland, with its half-baked rebellion, kept dutifully in line (and not only because of the presence of the Soviet Army). When Hungary "went beyond what was tolerable," Tito not only gave his at that time very important consent to the Soviet intervention, but also helped select an adequate leader of Hungary and even offered to join the intervention. (The last offer was, however, turned down by the cautious Khrushchev, who did not want untrustworthy allies in close quarters.)

On the other hand, the Twentieth Party Congress and the Hungarian Revolution have been inseparable phenomena in the process of understanding "really existing socialism" for western leftist parties and western radical intelligentsia. The later Eurocommunist parties were still totally Stalinist at that time (like the French or Spanish), or, if on the way to a political awakening, were still very wary of open conflict with the Soviets on such a crucial matter (like the Italian). None were able to recognize or admit that in the politics of Imre Nagy and the Hungarian Revolution lay the forerunner of something they wanted to become: a socialist-pluralist democracy. It is a very complex question, so far unanalyzed, to what extent and through what channels the Hungarian Revolution and its proto-Eurocommunism influenced their policy. Obviously they had to wait for the second drastic shock of

Prague in 1968. But for the socialist-communist-Marxist intelligentsia a personal way out, compatible with retaining their radical ideas, was open for the first time since bolshevism conquered a considerable part of the radical western intelligentsia. The mass exodus from their parties of communist intellectuals who remained leftists, sometimes even Marxists, and who could no longer be simply declared agents of the capitalist secret services, changed the leftist ideological map of the western economies. This was a direct result of the Hungarian Revolution.

Was Hungary in 1956 "the second revolution" Trotsky was so eagerly awaiting? We do not think so. The distinction seems to be more than mere theoretical hairsplitting. For Trotsky, the "second revolution" was the "genuinely proletarian, genuinely socialist one," resulting in "authentic" socialism. We have tried to point out, however, that the "toiling masses" participating in the Hungarian Revolution were not involved with any doctrinaire preconceptions. Although they created institutions which pointed toward a possible socialist future, and meant at least a safeguard against a conservative dictatorship, they simply did what every political revolution is destined to do and did no more: they destroyed a political tyranny. The Hungarian Revolution *did not fight out any specific social formation* and this socially neutral character was part of its greatness. Revolutions, which are legitimate weapons against every tyranny and every conservative rigidification of an originally democratic system, have only two alternatives. Either they are without any definite social model, although they may include the spontaneous creation of organizations and institutions — soviets, workers' councils, etc. — which act in the present to circumscribe the future, or they carry one doctrine and exclude all others. In the latter case they usually end, as they have from Robespierre to Lenin, in a new dictatorship of the political

state over civil society. Despite the fact that radical socialists are often the forerunners and protagonists of political revolutions, there is no such thing as "genuinely socialist" political revolution. Either the forces realizing the revolution leave open the field of alternatives for the emancipated society, in which case the outcome may or may not be a socialist one, or they impose their particular doctrine on the population, and in that case it is at best "despotic communism," as Marx put it.

Thus we formulated the alternatives of the Hungarian Revolution in terms of democracy or conservative dictatorship and not, as the Kadarist "White Papers on the Counterrevolution" did, in terms of capitalist dictatorship or socialism. Indeed, *precisely as socialists* — for whom else would it have been a problem at all? — we were not indifferent to the outcome of the Hungarian events. However, we did not and do not identify their dictatorship with socialism as such. With the exception of the social conditions prevailing in Greece, Portugal, and Spain at that time, there was no situation worse for the Hungarian working class than it had before or immediately after 1956, a situation of poverty and oppression, absence of trade unions and the elementary rights of coalition and organization. The real alternatives were democracy or conservative dictatorship.

The hundred thousands of anonymous Hungarian militants who made the revolution were neither doctrinaire nor interested in a genuine socialist revolution. Their interest was in democracy, whose "classless" character was a source of ridicule for all the high priests of various socialist doctrines. It was precisely through this democratic goal that the Hungarian Revolution did its duty toward a nation and, at the same time, kept the door open for a genuinely socialist transformation, which is the most one could say about any radical political transformation in this century. It was not only an anti-Leninist political revolution, but also

one which through practice criticized all other forms of socialist ideas which retain important elements of bolshevism.

Ferenc Feher and *Agnes Heller* live in Melbourne, Australia and are connected to the universities at Canberra and La Trobe respectively. Critical students and close friends of the late Georg Lukacs, Feher and Heller recently left their native Hungary after several years of deepening differences with the Kadar regime. Their essay on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is part of their effort to develop a critical Marxist appraisal of the experience of Eastern European socialism. Agnes Heller, a prolific writer, has published numerous articles in *Telos*; two of her books are now in English: *Theory of Needs in Karl Marx* (St. Martin's) and *Renaissance Man* (Routledge). Ferenc Feher, who has written extensively on modern culture and on Lukacs's thought, has just completed a book re-evaluating Jacobinism in connection with problems of democracy and dictatorship in modern revolutions. Feher's essays have appeared in *New German Critique*, *Praxis* and *Telos*.

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A REUNION OF SHOEWORKERS

The First Massachusetts History Workshop

Marty Blatt, Jim Green, & Susan Reverby

Some of the stitchers and cutters had not seen each other for decades, not since they had been together “at the bench” in the waning days of the Lynn, Massachusetts, shoe industry. On October 27, 1979 they gathered together at the Hibernian Hall in West Lynn to see each other again, to celebrate their history, and to recreate the spirit of an old-time union meeting. We organized the event as a Workshop to learn more about the living history of Lynn’s remarkable workers and to carry on the process of doing people’s history in this once prominent industrial city. We had our own hopes and plans for the event, but the day really belonged to the shoeworkers, and, in the end, we were simply glad to be there, as organizers, participants, and informed listeners.

Seventy former Lynn shoeworkers attended the Saturday Workshop at Hibernian Hall, adjacent to the General Electric River Works, where many of the workers were in the midst of a strike. A number of the strikers attended the workshop along with the historians, journalists, and labor unionists contacted by the Workshop organizers. We saw the event as an experiment, an attempt to bring together working people in a community with historians who have studied that community. For us, it was an effort to break out of our own isolation as radical historians and work together with people who have an important story to tell. We were not sure the experiment would succeed, but by the time people left Hibernian Hall, we were told that the event had been successful on many levels: as a reunion and celebration for the workers, as a recreation of an old union meeting, as a “workshop” that stimulated some further research, and as a meaningful cultural event for most of the participants. In writing

this report, we hope to encourage others to organize similar events, but we also want to describe some of the difficulties and limitations involved.

The inspiration for the Massachusetts History Workshop came from Britain where Raphael Samuel and the students at Ruskin College, Oxford, have been organizing history workshops since the 1960's. These events are now well described in *History Workshop: a journal of socialist historians*; they bring together worker-historians and university based-historians, often in a certain city, like Dublin, or community like London's East End, to explore common historical and political concerns, and to work toward democratizing people's history. These impressive events are of course the product of long-standing institutional, cultural and political connections between the British labor movement and left intellectuals, notably historians. They also draw upon the sophisticated local, social history widely produced in the U.K. and upon the scholarly abilities of worker-historians. Indeed, after attending the Ruskin History Workshop in 1976 (the subject was workers' education) one of our group, Jim Green, was impressed by the very scholarly character of most presentations.

We knew that the conditions that make the British history workshops successful did not exist generally in the U.S., but we also believed that the process of bringing historians and workers together could begin in certain communities, though necessarily on a more informal, experimental basis. We knew that a good deal of careful preparation would be necessary. We began meeting in November of 1978, and did most of the actual organizing in the late summer of 1979. As our discussions developed we realized that we needed to develop our own model for a workshop that would meet the situation we faced. Still, the work of British comrades served as an inspira-

tion and an example of how to democratize the process of doing people's history.

Lynn, Massachusetts proved to be an ideal community in which to organize our first History Workshop. The choice of Lynn was determined by several factors. First, the Essex Institute in Salem secured a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to produce a museum exhibit on the shoeworkers of Lynn. Marty Blatt worked as a researcher and curator for that exhibit for several months, and, in the process, he did most of the essential researching and organizing work required for our History Workshop. Marty's work with the Institute was crucial to the success of our project, since the rest of us, who do not live or work in Lynn, could not have done the essential ground work. Furthermore, the budget granted us by the Essex people made it possible to pay for some of Marty's time and to organize the event properly.

Second, we knew a number of left historians who had studied Lynn shoe workers extensively. Except for Libby Zimmerman, whose dissertation concerns the difficult choices of Lynn working women, past and present, most of the historians focused upon nineteenth century concerns. We were confident, however, that they could lead informed discussions about the lives of twentieth century shoeworkers. We were right.

Third, the city of Lynn and its workers have a long tradition of militant, democratic unionism that extends back to the great shoeworkers' strike of 1860 (the largest up to that point) and even earlier. One of the historians in the Workshop group, Paul Faler, wrote in a recent issue of *Radical America*:

Workers in Lynn have had a long tradition of class solidarity and struggle. Working class consciousness originated with the skilled shoeworkers of the pre-factory era who established working-class institutions — unions, news-

papers, co-operative stores and shops — and a working class ideology.

Other historians who worked with us have traced this tradition in later periods of Lynn history: Mary Blewett in her work on the women stitchers who formed the Daughters of St. Crispin, Alan Dawley, whose book *Class and Community* centers on the late 19th century when the Knights of Labor were strong, and John Cumbler, whose study *Working-Class Community in Industrial America*, traces the militant, democratic tradition into the twentieth century and suggests that it carried over from the shoe industry to the electrical manufacturing industry which is now predominant in Lynn. The leftist-led United Electrical Workers established a large local in Lynn (#201) during the 1930's and 40's. Indeed, Albert Fitzgerald, elected president in 1941 with influential Communist support, is a native of Lynn and still resides there. The anti-Communist successor of the UE, the International Electrical Workers, is of course much more conservative, but its Lynn local did inherit some of UE's democratic traditions. Frank Kashner, a radical GE worker, mentioned this in his history of a recent "rank and file strike" at the River Works (RA, vol. 12, no. 6).

The most successful aspect of the Workshop was that it served as a reunion for old shoeworkers. The sessions were informal and this was fortunate because a good deal of meeting and greeting was taking place during the discussions. The social aspect of the event was enhanced by the fact that we ordered food, coffee and snacks from a caterer so that people could have breakfast, stay for lunch and keep going most of the day. Jennie Stankiewicz, staffperson for Local 2 of the old United Shoe Workers, helped a good deal and encouraged us to bill the event as a party and a reunion, and to emphasize the availability of free food and drink. As a result, we deempha-

sized the historical aspect of the meeting, and decided that the historians should play a very informal role in stimulating and directing discussion. In general we liked the spontaneity and gaiety of the event, even though it meant that the discussion sometimes lacked focus and continuity. The historians were able to guide things enough so that important conversations did take place. We all learned a lot of history. Many of the shoe workers and other unionists who attended expressed their appreciation for the day, not just as a reunion but as a chance to reaffirm and celebrate their history. The retired shoeworkers were happy to have a chance to talk to each other again and to tell stories to younger people who appreciated the significance of what they had done.

There were many emotional high points of the day. Two stand out. Ralph Pirone started the Workshop and began the first session by describing his father's work as a shoemaker in Italy, his own migration to the U.S. in 1911, his early work in Lynn before, as he said, "he understood the struggle." He also described the great 1917 lockout, the 13-month strike of 3000 shoe workers against the giant Plant Shoe Co. in Jamaica Plain, and the way in which he was radicalized by a Socialist Labor Party lecturer



Ralph Pirone.

and by the ordeal of Sacco and Vanzetti. It was quite a beginning. Later in the day, in a session on unions, 84-year old Mae Young, the leading organizer for the United Shoe Workers in Lynn during the CIO days, told us what the union struggle meant to her. Though she is now blind and moves slowly, Mae's mind is sharp and her voice is clear. As she spoke to some of the people she had organized 40 years before, we all felt transported back to an old union meeting. Indeed, several speakers said that they felt that mood creeping back in.

The Workshop began with a sign-in. It was important for us to have people's names and addresses, so that we could do follow-up interviews. We also plan to send out a booklet commemorating the event. After coffee, Paul Faler, who has written about the early Lynn cordwainers, led a discussion about the labor process. Workers emphasized the pride of their craft, whether they were male cutters or female stitchers. They also took some pride in the industry itself which made Lynn the number one shoe city in the country. Many who had moved on to work at the General Electric plant strongly preferred working in the shoe shops where labor discipline was weaker. Indeed, several women in a small group discussion made it clear that they liked the shop better than school. As one man put it: "It was a good game while it lasted." He had been a dinker* as a young man, and had organized a dinkers' craft union. He opened a small shop in the 1920's, lost it in the Depression, and then went to work at GE. He went back to the shoe game though and finished his working life at Benson Shoe, one of the two operating plants left in Lynn.

Some of us were surprised by how many people described the importance of handwork and pride of craft in an industry we regarded as highly mechanized. The workers emphasized

*A dinker was a worker who punched out leather with a pattern or die.

this by bringing artifacts which they passed around — a 75-year-old piece of fancy-grade leather, a cutting knife, and a whet stone. James Robinson described the hand lasters he knew as a boy: "They were very proud of their craft. Nobody could ever tell them anyone would replace them." (The lasting machine did eventually eliminate them, though.) "I recall before World War I, your shoemaker was a gentleman," Robinson told us. "He'd get up in the morning and get all dressed up — starched collar and everything — and off to work he'd go. He'd get into work and take off his clothes and hang them from the beams of the ceiling." When they came home, Robinson remembered, the hand lasters looked like they were returning from church.

After this initial large-group discussion, which tended to be dominated by a few of the men, we broke up into small groups. This was essential because everyone had a story to tell and we found it difficult to interrupt the old men once they got started on their speeches.

Some of the people from the Essex Institute, which financed the event, tape recorded the morning discussion, and so we are now able to retrieve some of the statements. We did not view the day as an occasion to record oral histories, however. These should be done later. In fact, Mary Blewett, one of the Workshop members, will be doing follow-up interviews with the women unionists she met that day.

After lunch, Alan Dawley and John Cumber, who have both written books on Lynn's militant union tradition, led a discussion on the city's labor movement. Alan began by passing out large reproductions of a lithograph depicting the great 1860 strike with women stitchers leading a parade. A hot discussion ensued in which the old Boot and Shoe Workers Union, the conservative AFL affiliate, was denounced as a "manufacturers' union." Margaret DeLacey, an organizer for the more militant, democratic, United Shoe Workers, bitterly re-

counted what she had heard about the AFL union's sell-out in the 1903 strike! Alan and John were able to draw out a few points about the ultra-democratic tradition of the United Shoe Workers and its precursors, though we hoped that more would be said about this remarkable democratic impulse that has always characterized Lynn unionism. During the speeches by the organizers, a number of statements were made about young people not understanding the union struggle. At about that time a number of young GE workers came in and one of them explained the issues in their strike, partly redeeming the reputation of the younger generation.

The main criticism we later made of the Workshop was that we failed to integrate these young GE workers into the discussions. We did have some cooperation with the officers of the IUE Local and informally with some of the local activists, but we did not push hard enough for their involvement. As a result, we missed an important opportunity to help pass along

Lynn's militant traditions. This would have been a particularly good time to do so, because the shoe industry is now all but finished in Lynn, and the two shoe unions have been incorporated into larger internationals. The presence of more young people would have helped to transmit some of the oral tradition in the community. Some of the old shoeworkers have little respect for the young, and their attitudes toward work, especially if they are minorities, but the inclusion of more young people might nonetheless have given the retired shoeworkers more recognition from their own community. Under those circumstances we might have also felt better about inviting more young historians and activists from outside the community. As it was, we did not publicize the event outside the North Shore, for fear that vocal, young leftists would outnumber quiet, old shoe workers. We were overly cautious about this. Indeed, we were pleased by the role other historians and activists played as interested listeners. Next time, we will work much more on establishing



Marty Blatt of Massachusetts History Workshop with union organizers Margaret DeLacey and Mae Young, right.

the ground work for an extended dialogue in small groups.

We hope there may be a next time in Lynn. We plan to help with the work of finding a permanent home in Lynn for the Essex Institute museum exhibit. If such a location is found, perhaps in an old shoe factory, there would be an ideal setting in which to organize future workshops.

In general, the day moved from a focus on work, to unions and then to family and community. The discussion on the last topic was organized by Susan Reverby, Mary Blewett, and Libby Zimmerman, who prepared by reading some of the Lynn literature and other writing about doing oral histories with working women. By the time this discussion began, however, people were getting tired and were beginning to leave, so we broke down into small groups immediately. It is unfortunate that we cannot say more about this aspect of the Workshop because family and community issues might provide the best foci for these events in other industrial communities which lack Lynn's militant union tradition. In sum, the organizers decided not to impose much structure on the discussions, and this proved to be a wise decision. Most people stuck to the broad topics and had a chance to speak their minds. The small groups were essential. We abandoned a more organized plan in which the historians were to meet with key participants in advance to raise certain questions. Instead, we adopted a scheme in which the historians simply started off by saying why they were interested in Lynn and asking a few general questions. Then, they kept the discussion going with other questions. It may seem as though the historians played a minor role, but we, as organizers, could not have put together the Workshop without the help of people who had really studied Lynn seriously and could lead discussions in an informed way.

Marty Blatt's work as a staff member on the shoe workers exhibit at the Essex Institute was crucial to the success of the Workshop. The curators of the exhibit — which ran in Salem from September 1979 through January of 1980 — allowed Marty to do some work on the October 27 event during the summer, and provided us with a budget to pay airfares of two historians, to rent a hall, hire a caterer and do publicity. These funds came from a grant to the Essex by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Given the availability of these funds, especially for projects involving union and community groups, we think historians and activists planning such events in the future should apply for grant money. We would have been hardpressed to organize the Lynn History Workshop without these funds.

A few words are in order about the Exhibit itself, which is entitled: "Life and Times of Shoe City: The Shoe Workers of Lynn." It raised many questions about the new wave of "public history." What interest do the citizens of declining industrial communities like Lynn, Lawrence and Lowell have in celebrating the past? Mary Blewett has explained the opposition of working class families in Lowell to the National Park Service's attempts to glorify industrial history as a tourist attraction.* What kind of impact can left historians have in federally-funded history projects whose directors may have questionable politics? The Lynn workers' own lives clearly emerged from the Essex exhibit through photographs, machines, and artifacts of many kinds. The text accompanying the display was usually very pointed. Unfortunately, the exhibit was held, not in Lynn, but in Salem, a wealthy commercial city — the historic antithesis of Lynn — in an elite, WASP institution. Nonetheless, the exhibit

*Mary Blewett, "The National Park Service Meets the Working People of Lowell," *New England Labor and Community Newsletter*, Vol. I, No. 2 (1979).

treats workers with respect and intelligence. It allows us to follow the early artisans through the late 19th century and mechanization and provides an intimate view of 20th century workers' lives through various memorabilia, including boxing gloves and a team photo of an old semi-pro baseball team from the Brickyard, Lynn's multi-ethnic working class district. Even the usual NEH requirement of seeing "both sides" of an issue is met very well in the exhibit which contrasts a replica of a 1915 workers' kitchen with a manufacturers' drawing room from the 1870's.

These accomplishments, Marty told us, came only after a great deal of struggle within the project staff. Some of the curators and designers had no gut feeling for working class history and apparently thought they could move from mounting portraits of great white men and displays of antique dolls to an exhibit on shoeworkers using the same basic approach. In a more insidious way, certain consultants hoped to use the exhibit to extract money and prestige. Indeed, the whole prospect of a permanent museum in Lynn, funded by state



Shoe sticher at work, c. 1901.

"heritage park" money, is fraught with trouble, because many urban developers see museums as attractions for wealthy newcomers, not as institutions controlled by longtime residents. Despite these limitations, the Essex exhibit was a success, as were the films and plays scheduled along with it.

Through his work with the Institute Marty was able to make valuable contacts with shoe workers by doing oral histories, collecting artifacts, and getting to know the community. He organized visits to shoe factories for us and led us to luncheon sites where we met many elderly shoe workers and enlisted their participation. In this way, he also met Jennie Stankiewicz of the United Shoe Workers Local 2, who contacted many other shoe workers. Jennie created some genuine enthusiasm for the event among the pensioners she met, and along with her husband Henry, a retired shoe worker and GE employee, she made sure that rides were arranged for those who needed them on the day of the Workshop. And it was Jennie, who, with an organizer's sixth sense, persuaded us to build up the Workshop as a reunion and a celebration.

We were of course pleased that the shoeworkers enjoyed our first History Workshop, but there was definitely something in it for us as well. The meeting at Hibernian Hall reaffirmed the importance of history in working people's lives; it enhanced our confidence as popular historians; it encouraged us to make future contacts with people in working class communities; and it convinced us that workers, under the right circumstances, are anxious to work with historians to explore the past and its meaning for the future.

MARTY BLATT, JIM GREEN, and SUSAN REVERBY are the organizers of the Massachusetts History Workshop. They would welcome correspondence with interested groups.



"Vision of the New Eden," from David A. Moore, *The Age of Progress*, 1856.

BOOK REVIEW

Unorthodox Marxism

Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *Unorthodox Marxism* (South End Press, 1978). Box 68, Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123 — \$4.80.

Unorthodox Marxism is an attempt to look at contemporary society in the United States critically, with a Marxist point of view, and at the same time to look at "orthodox" Marxist theory critically, with a "realistic" point of view. The authors define "orthodox" Marxism as a theory which "emphasizes material conditions, the economic sphere, the contradiction between forces and relations of production, and the proletariat and the bourgeoisie." "Reality, however," they state, "marches to the beat of a different drummer." (p. 5) The

book sets itself yet a third task. It attempts to theorize, in detail, an alternative social system, a socialist society based on decentralized democratic production and consumption councils coordinated "via direct participatory collective self-management." (p. 269)

Unorthodox Marxism retains the heart of Marxist thought as it develops its alternate theoretical perspective. It keeps people and the social relations of production and reproduction as the key to understanding the complexities of advanced capitalism. But it insists that orthodox Marxism overemphasizes the economic to the detriment of other equally important aspects of contemporary society. Albert and Hahnel see four factors — patriarchal, racial, authority and class relations — as *inseparable* aspects of system reproduction, all of which must change, must be overcome together, if we are to build a new, equitable society. Further, they cite certain errors in orthodox theory which "still reigns unparalleled as the under-

lying basis of most left thought.” (p. 7) *The Labor Theory of Value, perhaps the cornerstone of the orthodox Marxist economic analysis of capitalism, is simply wrong. It is built upon a set of suppositions about economic life which have likely never been good approximations of the real world, and certainly aren’t now. Chief among these are the assertions that capitalism is competitive so that capitalists and workers can freely move about from industry to industry, and that consciousness is but a simple reflection of material interests. The theory virtually ignores the roles of racism and sexism. It misunderstands the effect of economic activity upon its human agents. It overlooks the full complexity of economic production and consumption — how each activity produces and consumes not only goods but also social relations, consciousness, and personalities. The Labor Theory of Value mistakenly takes insufficient account of the fact that society molds its own economy, just as the economy molds society.* (pp. 6-7)

The authors argue that it is not the labor time embodied in commodities which determines differences in exchange value but rather the complex social relations built upon the reality of differences in bargaining strength between capitalists and workers, among capitalists, and among workers, and that these determine not only value and wages but also what and how commodities are produced.

They also criticize “crisis theory.” They do not deny the inherent contradictions in capitalism but look instead at its reproductive capacity to ask how and why it has consistently survived or offset economic crises.

We take a more flexible attitude towards capitalist institutions than orthodox Marxists. ... We see no “inevitable” falling rate of profit, and we can envision the possibility of system reforms that diminish the chances of the other kind of contradictions discussed by orthodox Marxists. In a sense we see capitalist

institutions as potentially moldable to the point where all the contradictions emphasized in orthodox crisis theory can be perpetually postponed. (p. 81)

The latter point holds particular interest for me in these days of astronomical oil company profits and of economic uncertainty, double-digit inflation, high unemployment and social service cutbacks. If most of us see coming a period of increasingly obvious political and economic struggle with all the attendant pain and turmoil, few of us truly believe that revolutionary change is around the corner. There is little evidence of systemic weakness of crisis proportion; despite the current “crisis” of the economic system, despite voter apathy and general “malaise” in the land, most of us believe that capitalism will once again survive current conditions.

It is difficult for me to categorize this book in relation to other Marxist theoretical works. It is not Leninist although it does envision party structures and activities. The envisioned revolutionary party must have (unlike Leninist parties):

1. internal democracy, 2. a self-definition as a tool of the revolution rather than its chief means and ends, and 3. a self-clarity concerning the membership who are not “professional revolutionaries” divorced from the community, but instead, in Gramsci’s phrase, “organic intellectuals” merged with the community. And we add a fourth, which is just the provision that there be caucuses of all types allowed within the party, and especially that there be caucuses paralleling the existence of autonomous council movements, as with say women and blacks.” (p. 326)

The book places great reliance on and trust in the individual in society. It draws on the workers’ councilist tradition but expands the concept beyond the experiments of the past. It is the first general theoretical work I’ve seen which places such primary importance on sexism, not

seeing it as something to be overcome only after the revolution. It sets forth different boundaries for the struggle we face, not just overcoming the capitalist mode of production but overcoming all the social relations of capitalist society at the same time — patriarchal, racial, authority and class relations.

The authors discuss aspects of the “complex tapestry” of society separately only out of necessity to create their argument, always coming back to the point that these aspects are in fact completely intertwined, inseparable, and must be looked at “totally.” They argue they are thinking dialectically, i.e., relationally, historically, structurally and “wholeistically,” in examining human beings and the societies that humans create and by which they are created. Their analysis sees societies as having two aspects — a *human center* and an *institutional boundary* — dynamically interrelated and determining one another, together conceptualized as “social formation.” (pp. 104, 109) A society’s “core characteristics . . . determine the major contours of what people are and can be in a particular society, and what fulfillments they can attain, of what oppression they will endure, and of how they may develop themselves.” (p. 109) All societies will have economic relations, sexual and kinship relations, authority relations, and internal and external community relations. The form that these four core characteristics take delimit societies one from another. Their argument is that

... in the United States the active core characteristics are racism, sexism, classism, and a specific extension of hierarchical dynamics we call authoritarianism, and that they interact in such a way that only a “totalist revolutionary movement” stands a chance of really succeeding. (p. 118)

By its very nature, this is not a “how-to” book. It does not attempt to lay out a revolutionary strategy but rather attempts theoretically to “provide methods that socialist move-

ments might find useful, and partial analyses that can help such movements pursue their own studies and political activities.” (p. 217) But because the authors feel it is not enough to set forth their criticisms, they also, in chapters 7 and 8, set forth their concept of a revolutionary councilist society and a revolutionary process. The economic relations of production and consumption would not be regulated by market mechanisms. The interaction between production and consumption councils would proceed through a series of negotiations to determine what quantity of which goods would be produced and how they would be allocated. The authors see room for institutional variation in these economic councils including, especially at first when the core characteristics of capitalism are not yet overcome, caucuses of women and minority groups working to establish institutions for resolving racist and sexist conflicts. The decision-making process would, of necessity, be cumbersome, but rational decisions taking into account the real needs and wants of real people based on scarcity and availability of raw materials would be made with provision for rotation of jobs and development of skills for the many, not just the few.

As a woman, as a worker, as a student of society, I read *Unorthodox Marxism* with sustained excitement. Albert and Hahnel insist that humans have innate qualities which help govern their way of being in the world, that we are not infinitely moldable and therefore we resist attempts to reduce us to less-than-human entities, mere units in the production process. The very concept “class struggle” embodies this idea of humans as resisters of oppression and exploitation, and evokes the question of why and how an oppressive and exploitative system like capitalism continues. This book gives us an analysis which goes beyond current economic theory. I confess I find it difficult to envision just how the struggle will proceed and I am not terribly optimistic that we, creators of

and created by capitalism, can and will soon learn the skills of discourse and negotiation which revolutionary councilist socialism will require. Nevertheless, I think Albert and Hahnel are "on to something." Their argument that racism, sexism, and authority relations are, with class, primary aspects of late capitalism seems absolutely correct to me. And the council system they envision would provide a vehicle for members to give priority to their needs, thus turning upside down the present system in which

... we experience technology governed not according to ... social criteria but to the requisites of increasing profits, disciplining workers, and preventing worker collectivity and solidarity. (p. 259)

Further, Albert and Hahnel address issues of culture and everyday life. They see variety (and experimentation) as a core characteristic of socialist society and recognize that real self-management will include on-going debates about priorities — immediate fulfillment vs. future development — which will arise in all areas of democratic participatory socialist planning. They address issues of revolutionary process founded in an ideological counter-

hegemony differing from that which Marxist-Leninists or feminists or anti-racists or anti-authoritarians would propose. They see revolutionary councilist consciousness manifesting "an awareness of the full totality, of how capitalist society reproduces, and of the socialist alternative" (p. 317) and, through practice, furthering and merging that awareness with the common sense of the masses. Only further discussion and future praxis can determine if this revolutionary councilist model has merit. The authors at least have had the courage to set forth the first sketches for a set of working drawings. The final blueprints and the construction of the edifice itself requires the labor and the intelligent creativity of all of us. This book is important because it addresses head-on the questions of system reproduction, providing new insights and new material for discussion at a time when insights and discussion are vital. My hope is that this book will call forth critical response from many segments of the left and in doing so will generate new theoretical discussion and political activity which can only enhance our understanding of the world which we create and by which we are created.

Anne Kenney

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Conditions: Five. The Black Women's Issue, guest edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith; 208 pages; \$3.00; P. O. Box 56, Van Brund Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

Conditions, a magazine of writing by women with an emphasis on writing by lesbians" is regularly edited by Elly Bulkin, Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, and Rima Shore. Published since 1977, *Conditions* has been a major vehicle for feminist writing and criticism. Issue #5, in the words of the guest editors, "clearly disproves the 'non-existence' of Black feminist and Black lesbian writers and challenges forever our invisibility, particularly in the feminist press." The editors did an elaborate job of outreach in soliciting manuscripts, consciously trying to overcome the obstacles Black feminists face in getting their work published.

Too often, on the left and in the dominant culture, Black women are conceived of simply in terms of their relationship to those in power, as victims and as resisting oppression through, for example, struggles against sterilization abuse and for welfare benefits. The terms of the discussion flatten out experience; missing are

the dreams, aspirations, fears, ways of regarding oneself and relating to others which inform their struggles and broaden the meaning of what constitutes resistance. Through various mediums — songs, poetry, fiction, journal writing, essays and reviews — the authors explore these other terrains. From a poem about the political significance of beauty parlors to a journal entry on friendship interrupted by marriage, to a call for a Black lesbian culture, the writings of these Black women invoke the meaning of the "personal is political."

Perhaps the thread of *Conditions: Five* is revealed in this excerpt from *Sula* by Toni Morrison, used in one of the essays: "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate for it let them use each other to grow on... they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for."

Conditions: Five is a valuable resource and tool for bringing the ideas of Black women to a broader audience. It is a perfect text for courses in women's studies, literature, Black studies, writing, etc. Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel are writers and have been active in the Combahee River Collective, a Boston Black feminist organization.

Marla Erlie

Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*, South End Press, 1978, \$4.80 paperback.

Charles Denby, editor of the Marxist-humanist paper *News & Letters* in Detroit, wrote the main part of this book in 1952 under the pseudonym Matthew Ward. It has long been out of print and hard to find; *Radical America* wanted to reprint it as a special issue in 1973 but could not get permission. Now South End Press

has performed a signal service by managing to get it back into print, with a beautiful cover and with a lengthy afterward by the author. (Pages 1-179 are the original book and pages 180-294 are new.)

The original book is largely a string of vivid anecdotes, following Denby/ Ward from a Deep South plantation childhood to Memphis (where he was chauffeur to a wealthy lawyer) and to the Detroit auto plants. The complexity of race relations in all these settings comes through very strongly: blacks are never pictured as merely passive victims but as holding some kinds of power over whites. The Detroit chapters, without a hint of preachiness, repeatedly show instances in which racism yields to the common interests of workers in certain shop-floor situations. These chapters are an extraordinary source of insight into the relationship of race and class. Denby's experiences as a militant shop steward make concrete the notion that class solidarity often *depends* on a direct challenge to racism.

It has to be said that the afterward is a disappointment. We get much less of a sense of the author's own direct experience in his episodic recounting of the black struggle from the time of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956. The politics are largely the same as in the original book, but much of the immediacy is gone.

Jim O'Brien

Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis: Italian Marxist Tests of the Theory and Practice of a Class Movement: 1964-79, \$8.75, 1979; and *Italy 1977-8: Living with an Earthquake*. \$2.25, 1978, (Red Notes, BP 15, 2a St. Paul's Road, London N.1. Great Britain).

The Marxism of the Italian far left deepens our understanding of the forms of contemporary class struggles and the power of autonomous mass movements. While the Italian gov-

ernment and Communist Party charge that the autonomous left supports the Red Brigades, people within these movements accuse the Red Brigades of elitism, and search for non-parliamentary democratic and collective forms of revolutionary activity. While suffering from an economistic view of changes in capitalism and the sources of radical opposition, the work represented in these two pamphlets is exciting, if difficult, and worth a close reading.

Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis is the best introduction to the history of this strand of Marxism, with coverage of recent arrests of Antonio Negri, the professor from Padua arrested and charged with the murder of Aldo Moro. The introductions by the editors usefully explain the theory and terms used in the articles, and situate the theory within the development of the left. Important essays by Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri and others suggest the ways in which their reflections on the developing mass struggles led them to develop their "struggle against work" perspective. Among Negri's work translated here is the long essay, "Capitalist Domination and Working Class Sabotage" arguing that sabotage is a rational form of proletarian resistance today. A collection of pieces about the arrests of Negri and others and several interesting articles surveying struggles at FIAT over the years complete the volume.

Italy 1977-8 is more limited in scope; it documents the struggles among the so-called "marginalized" — students, youth, women, unemployed — that burst forth in the spring of 1977. Again, this contains useful introductory comments that set the events in context, a couple of more theoretical articles that assess the significance of that part of the Italian movement, and documents from the revolutionary left about the collapse of Lotta Continua and the increased importance of the women's movement.

Allen Hunter

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