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THE SELF-HELP & Bbattered WOMEN'S SHELTER MOVEMENTS

CLERICAL WORKERS

GRAMSCI & EUROCOMMUNISM

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RADICAL AMERICA

Volume 14, Number 3 May-June 1980

INTRODUCTION 2

GRAMSCI AND EUROCOMMUNISM 7
Carl Boggs

HELPING OURSELVES: THE LIMITS AND POTENTIAL OF SELF HELP 25
Ann Withorn

BATTERED WOMEN'S REFUGES: FEMINIST COOPERATIVES VS. SOCIAL SERVICE INSTITUTIONS 41
Lois Ahrens

NOTES ON RACE, MOTHERING, AND CULTURE IN THE SHELTER MOVEMENT 48
Renae Scott

"UNION FEVER": ORGANIZING AMONG CLERICAL WORKERS, 1900-1930 53
Roslyn L. Feldberg

GOOD READING 71

LETTERS 74

INTRODUCTION

Carl Boggs' essay on "Gramsci and Eurocommunism" addresses itself to the use and misuse of one of the most important Marxist thinkers of our century. A supporter and interpreter of the factory council movement in Italy during the First World War, and then a founder and leader of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci has attained almost mythic status as a leading theoretician of the revolutionary transformation of advanced industrial societies. Yet like other thinkers in the history of Marxism, including Marx himself, the meaning or application of Gramsci's analysis of Italian society to the present is hotly contested.

Gramsci's writings have not fared well at the hands of the Italian Communist Party. Characterizing the development of Italian communism since the 1930s as a return to the social democracy of the pre-war era, Boggs shows that the PCI has appropriated Gramsci to justify policies which were strikingly similar to those which he opposed half a century ago. The interest in the PCI in doing this is obviously to enable them to claim an unbroken lineage between the revolutionary policies of the Party's founder and the evolutionary and class-collaborationist policies of the Party's leaders today. That the PCI would want to reinforce its revolutionary legitimacy — particularly in an era when it is attacked from the left for being reformist as well as from the right for being Stalinist — is understandable; and Boggs' essay is an excellent case study of the ways in which contemporary political concerns transform and domesticate the very meaning of a body of revolutionary ideas. Boggs goes on to show, however, that there is more to this transformation than a misuse of sources and

texts, and an illegitimate defense of the policies of the current leadership of the PCI. Because of the influence and prestige of Eurocommunism, particularly the Italian party, in the United States, the transformation of Gramsci into an evolutionary socialist has helped to lend a false "revolutionary" legitimacy to social democratic strategies, as well as to partially deprive us of the insights that remain timely and useful in attempting to build a revolutionary movement in the United States today.

The "social democratization" of Gramsci is ironic, for Boggs shows that there is no doubt about the revolutionary aim of Gramsci's thought. Like Lenin, Gramsci had little use for the mechanical 'marxism' that dominated the European (and American) socialist movement prior to the Russian Revolution. Not "objective conditions", but an active, struggling working class would end the misery of capitalism and establish the new order. In pursuit of this goal, Gramsci analyzed the obstacles to revolutionary mobilization that were both specific to Italy — such as the importance of Catholicism or the backwardness of the rural South — as well as problems of a more general nature, such as parliamentarism, or the hold which bourgeois ideology and culture has on the working class. This latter problem, which Gramsci called "bourgeois hegemony," emphasized the importance of struggling in the intellectual and cultural, as well as the economic, spheres, and pointed towards a redefinition of the "struggle for socialism" by showing that bourgeois civilization had to be overthrown in its totality, and that a mere change in the ownership of the means of production or a military "seizing of state power" were only *part* of the process of socialist transformation.

As revolutionaries suffer from the "transformation" of Gramsci into an "evolutionary socialist" by social democratic forces, it is the loss of timely and useful insights for the building of a revolutionary movement in the U.S. today that is most acutely felt. Similar lessons abound in the history of "self-help" in this country. With a history that has included misunderstanding by the left, cooptation by the state and occasional manipulation by the right, the self help movement in this country remains a clear reflection of the limits and abuses of the bourgeois state. As Ann Withorn's article concludes, it is an area that holds many insights and possibilities for left activity and influence. As we approach the worst economic hard times in this country since the Depression, it is clear that much of the work that falls within the realm of self-help will suffer from the budget-cutting necessary to maintain the military-industrial priorities of capital. As "Last hired, first fired" epitomized the attack on the social gains of the '60's in the workplace, "Last funded, first cutback" is the current fate of service and self-help efforts across the nation.

Ironically, it was during the Depression era that self-help reached its most widespread, militant and politicized stage. Evolving from the mutual aid associations of the 19th century, self-help surfaced as unemployed councils and the organizations of urban poor and small farmers that fought for the provision of basic social necessities in the '30's. As the Welfare State arose to meet the demands of the self-help movement, the focus shifted and now presently centers around issues of emotional support and struggle against the institutional alienation now prevalent.

While the focus of much self-help has changed, the essential dynamic of collective action and shared empowerment remains. The act of helping oneself and others in a group provides such power that continues to eclipse both professional 'helpers' and the passive reception of aid for those who experienced it. The added awareness that it is the 'helped,'

rather than the helper or the state, who can best shape and evaluate the form of assistance, is a further strength. When those feelings of empowerment and strength are informed by a realization that bourgeois institutions are not natural and that people are not stuck, powerless, in a permanent slot, politicization results. As history has revealed, this politicization does not by itself lead to revolutionary action.

A critical question for self-help, thus, is its relation to revolutionary social change. To assume a progressive character, it has to be tied to a radical political movement. This type of self-help then grows out of a political context, with the movement as the carrier of the politics. The clearest recent examples are the various self-help activities (around rape, consciousness raising, battered women and self-defense) developing from the feminist movement. Growing from the movement's understanding of the pervasiveness of sexual oppression in capitalist patriarchy, these groups represent both a challenge to the existing system, whose problems they confront, and a prefigurative vision of a new (socialist) society.

Often, when large social or political movements subside, structures like self-help usually continue. Carrying on without a movement to inform it and raise the necessary questions, opens the path to negative transformations. Cooptation and the duplication of capitalist relations replace a revolutionary or progressive character. Lois Ahrens' account of the Austin (Texas) Battered Women's Center, is one example.

Ahrens' article demonstrates how certain weaknesses in the movement that led to the establishment of the center allowed liberals to be able to control its operation and ultimate direction. The women who established the center were not informed by a politics that made them aware of the hegemony of the liberal feminist movement, and their reproduction of capitalist forms of organization, which led to the depoliticized, service-orientation of the center. Some participants were only able to assess what happened in retrospect.

Viewing the present capitalist economic crisis in the United States, and the accompanying rise of the right, we can't help but wonder about the future of self-help. In that context, we can only speculate on its ability to withstand the heightening of sex, race and class divisions that are currently evident in attacks on the ERA, affirmative action and even minimal social service. Will the state seek to pass on to self-help groups more and more of the services it will be reducing? Will these services subsume the psychological and emotional support groups that abound now? Will the assumption of certain services as a basic right transform into resistance when they are removed or deferred? Can self-help groups then reflect and consolidate that anger?

The tasks for socialists in the self-help and service sectors — continuing to encourage self empowerment and meeting survival needs while, in Gramsci's words, stripping away the mask of bourgeois democracy — are clear but far from simple. Under present conditions there has been great difficulty in avoiding liberalism. This takes its clearest form in the suppression of questions of race, class and sex in favor of bourgeois solutions. It rears its ugly head when capitalist culture begins to be reflected, not challenged, in specific situations like the Texas shelter. We need only look to the experiences of the '30's for further precedents.

While the self-help formations of the Depression era benefitted from the input of the Communist Party and other groups for political direction, they also were aided by the extensive family and community networks that gave emotional and psychological sustenance to the fight for material provisions. Those networks do not exist on such a scale today. Even closer,

the creation of an alternative cultural space that arose from the women's movement of the '60's and '70's is now being challenged. We need to critically assess our program for replacing the institutional "fathers" the movement of the '30's sought as a remedy to the social ills of that period. The parameters of the struggle may be different. The need is just as urgent.

In this vein, we're pleased to include some excerpts of articles on the battered women's movement by a Boston-area activist, Renae Scott. She has worked with Transition House, a local shelter, and an area-wide network of battered women's groups. As the Combahee River Collective (Nov.-Dec. 1979 *Radical America*) deepened the questions for the movement against violence against women, Scott's addressing of the issues of racism, mothering and culture within the shelter movement provide some needed critical reflections.

Rounding out this issue is Ros Feldberg's analysis of the organizing of clerical workers during the first three decades of this century. Feldberg's piece continues a discussion of the clerical sector (see Margery Davies, "Women's Place is at the Typewriter," *RA* July-August 1974; Mary Bularzik, "Sexual Harassment at the Workplace," July-August 1978) that we are planning to address in the next few issues of *Radical America.*

CORRECTION

In our last issue, we neglected to say that Linda Powell's review of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* was a revised and expanded version of her review in *Conditions Five:* The Black Women's Issue.

GRAMSCI AND EUROCOMMUNISM

Carl Boggs

Perhaps no twentieth century theorist has contributed more to the revitalization of Marxism in the advanced capitalist countries than Antonio Gramsci.* In some circles, Gramsci has emerged as *the* architect of a new strategy for socialist transformation in the industrialized societies. Whatever the validity of this claim, and despite the very amorphous and often disorganized character of his writings, Gramsci's own commitment seems clear: from beginning to end, from his early journalistic essays through the factory council articles in *Ordine Nuovo* to the Communist party writings and the *Prison Notebooks*, he stressed the immediacy and urgency of revolutionary struggle. Gramsci's thought was more or less consistently directed toward the aim of constructing new organizational forms and social institutions that could embody the totality of socialist authority relations, production, and culture — whether in the councils as "nucleus of the new state" or in the mass party as instrument of popular insurgency.

*Born in Sardegna in 1891, Gramsci moved to Turin in 1911 and, while still a university student, became involved in Socialist party politics. For nearly a decade, he contributed (as both editor and writer) to most of the important PSI periodicals and newspapers, emerging as one of the party's leading intellectuals. Disenchanted with the moderate reformism of the PSI leadership, in 1919 Gramsci helped to start the *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order) movement and journal, which was rooted in the factory council movement in Turin. With the council failures of 1920, Gramsci put his energies into founding the Italian Communist party at Livorno in early 1921. During his PCI years (1921-26), Gramsci served as a delegate to the Comintern in Moscow (1922-23), was elected as a PCI deputy to parliament (1923-26), and took over the party leadership after the arrest of his rival Amadeo Bordiga in 1924. In late 1926, with the consolidation of Mussolini's fascist regime, Gramsci's parliamentary immunity was suspended and he was arrested, tried for "sabotage against the Italian state" (in 1928), and spent the final eleven years of his life in several Italian prisons. Between 1928 and 1935 Gramsci wrote a collection of essays and notes (most of which were finally translated into English in 1971) which came to be known as the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci died in April, 1937.

Opposite: Gramsci as a young man.

Yet the fate of Gramscian Marxism has not always been very consistent with its origins; the very amorphousness of his intellectual *style* has encouraged a surprisingly diverse range of interpretations of the theory, including some which appear to conflict dramatically with both the substance and guiding motivation of Gramsci's prolific work. The recent appropriation of Gramsci by the leading "Eurocommunist" strategists in the Italian, French, and Spanish Communist parties is the most important example of such a conflicting and distorted interpretation. Seizing on Gramsci's theoretical legacy, his immense appeal to European intellectuals, his "open," "creative," and "Western" Marxism, and his status within the international Communist movement (in part the result of his long incarceration in Mussoini's prisons), Eurocommunism has sought to depict him as the inventor of the "democratic road to socialism" — that is, of a peaceful, gradualist strategy rooted primarily in electoral, parliamentary, and trade-union struggles leading, presumably, to a far-reaching internal transformation (or "democratization") of the bourgeois state apparatus. Within this schema, Gramsci is viewed as the architect of a tradition that extends through Palmiro Togliatti and present-day Eurocommunist innovators such as Enrico Berlinguer, Santiago Carrillo, and Georges Marchais.

This appropriation of Gramsci by Eurocommunism and social democrats, however, rests upon a mystification of the actual historical and theoretical record. Gramsci's early role in the founding of the Italian Communist party — and in the formation of its political strategy — has been grossly distorted. More important, Gramscian revolutionary concepts — for example, "ideological hegemony," "social bloc," "war of position," and "democratic transformation" — have been taken over by Eurocommunist leaders, integrated into a limited, moderate, social-democratic framework, and thus robbed of their initial meaning as a guide to revolutionary praxis. This process has gone far beyond the normal redefinition of themes and concepts that is always a part of the theoretical renewal necessary to meet new social conditions. The fate of Gramsci at the hands of Eurocommunism more closely parallels the fate of Marx within the Second International or Lenin within the development of the Soviet Union. In each case, revolutionary theory and vision served to legitimate a politics that ultimately subverted the meaning and intent of the original theory and vision.

THE POLITICS OF EUROCOMMUNISM

While the term "Eurocommunism" goes back only to 1975, with its initial formal proclamations in the joint Berlinguer-Carrillo statement of March 1977, the theory underlying it has much earlier origins. As the postwar strategy of Communist parties, these origins can be situated in the years 1944-47, when Togliatti outlined the theory of structural reformism (the famous *via Italiana*) that would shape PCI politics after 1956. Thus, insofar as recent Eurocommunist departures contain any real novelty, it is in their *codification* of long-standing world-views, strategies, and practices; in their openly systematic *elaboration* of Togliattian Marxism rather than in any fundamentally new vision of the transition to socialism. Moreover, to the extent this version of the "democratic road" owes a theoretical debt to classic Marxist writings, it is not to the "founding father" personified in Gramsci, but to Eduard Bernstein's "evolutionary socialism." But the PCI leadership today, anxious to disavow the imagery of social democracy, embraces Gramsci while distancing itself (at least symbolically) from the heritage of the Second International.

The fundamental premise of the Eurocom-

munist model is that the complexity of advanced capitalism requires a conception of socialist transformation that transcends both classical Leninism and social democracy. The former is transcended by abandoning insurrectionary politics and the "dictatorship of the proletariat," the latter by rejecting the Kautskian theory of cataclysmic crisis and economic collapse as the basis of revolutionary rupture. The new strategy anticipates a prolonged struggle for hegemony in which "democratization of the state" takes place as gradually and peacefully as possible, with no sudden or qualitative break, under conditions of relative institutional stability. It envisages no dramatic sweeping away of the old order, no frontal assault on bourgeois political institutions. It is characterized by several proposed strategies: the utilization of bourgeois democratic forms and structures as the *primary* means of achieving a power transfer and dismantling capitalism; the reform of these structures through a broadening of their participatory character (a kind of Gramscian "war of position" defined in institutional terms); an alliance politics that attaches great significance to an expanding "middle strata" of civil servants, professionals, technicians, etc., and points toward a "social bloc" of progressive forces opposed to the monopolies; a commitment to the preservation of ideological diversity, constitutional rights, and political pluralism beyond the transitional period and into socialism itself; a rejection of vanguardism and the monolithic concept of the party; the goal of a professionalized civil service that would undermine parasitic and narrow interest-group influences; and massive expansion of public investment and social services in a way that would gradually subvert the hegemony of corporate interests.

A major defining characteristic of Eurocommunist strategy is a revised Marxist theory of the state and the role of the party. Leninism assumes that the bourgeois state rests above all on coercion, that it functions essentially as an agency of class domination; revolutionary politics is thus directed *against* the state and toward the "seizure of power" by a vanguardist party. The Eurocommunists, on the other hand, insist that the political structures of advanced capitalism are in fact quite complex and contradictory, their strength resting more upon ideological and cultural consensus than upon force. Bourgeois democracy, accordingly, cannot be reduced to a simple mechanism of class domination; it is *in part* the outgrowth of mass struggles that gained social and political successes in opposition to the bourgeoisie. There is no monolithic system controlled by a single class. Since the bourgeois state apparatuses are a vital, if not decisive, arena of class conflict, they must be viewed as a partially autonomous sphere that can be utilized by leftist opposition as effectively as by the ruling class.

Following their interpretations of Gramsci, Eurocommunist leaders and theorists point to a shifting of ideological and social blocs within the state — a changing equilibrium of class forces rooted in an expanding socialist consensus. The transition is viewed as an infinite series of steps toward democratization, in which the party is not expected to become the socialist state but functions as a mediator between the state and masses.[1] As Carrillo has suggested, with each shift in the old class equilibrium (as expressed, for example, in the demise of Francoism in Spain and the growing fragility of Christian Democracy in Italy) the Left finds new space within which to insert itself and "turn around the ideological apparatus" against the hegemony of monopoly capital.[2] With each stage of democratization, with each advance of the Left *within* bourgeois institutions, the crisis of legitimacy and of state

power mounts; in contrast to the orthodox "before" and "after" model, Eurocommunism thus presupposes an evolutionary transformation in which bourgeois democracy shades gradually into *socialist* democracy. The guiding premise here is that late capitalist societies will experience prolonged periods of relative economic and institutional stability even in the midst of production and legitimation crises. Carrillo is emphatic that "economic and political catastrophe" is difficult to imagine today in the developed countries.[3]

In Italy, the PCI's postwar strategic evolution, and the theoretical "renewal" that accompanied it, has sought a "Gramscian" form of legitimation. Berlinguer, since his ascent to the position of party Secretary-General, has never tired of stressing the PCI's Gramscian origins and strategy — a self-concept that seems most appropriate to Italian traditions and the peculiar conditions of Western European capitalism. Party leaders, in their visits to foreign countries, advertise the PCI's democratic-road strategy as a continuous development from Gramsci to Togliatti to Berlinguer.[4]

PCI efforts to imprint Gramsci's stamp on the democratic-road model have stressed all the guiding motifs of Gramscian Marxism: "hegemony," "social bloc," "war of position," and "organic intellectuals." For Pietro Ingrao, Gramsci was the originator of the "war of position" strategy that emphasizes ideological preparation and social struggle as a prelude to the conquest of power, and counters Lenin's "seizure of the Winter Palace" with a gradual build-up toward socialist hegemony within the political framework of bourgeois society.[5] For Paolo Bufalini, the PCI has been steadily advancing toward hegemony through its participation in local and national government, made possible by its successful (electoral) mobilization of a "new historical bloc" — the very strategy outlined by Gramsci. Indeed, "never has Gramsci been so relevant today, never have his thought and teachings been so alive." More specifically, "The road to the formation of our party's strategy — the national democratic road to socialism — was opened by Gramsci... [He] laid the groundwork, and began the elaboration of this strategy with the contribution of many other militants... with the contribution of Togliatti."[6]

The theoretical equation of Gramsci and Eurocommunism, as reflected in the work of Carrillo and others, is not limited to Italian interpretations. This image of Gramsci also looms large, for example, in the Spanish, French, Japanese, and Australian parties. Carrillo's *Eurocommunism and the State*, probably more than anything else, argues this presumed relationship. Carrillo views structural reformism as a struggle to democratize the existing state apparatus — to overturn capitalist domination by using, instead of fighting against, bourgeois political structures — a struggle made possible by the weakening of bourgeois power in the Mediterranean.[7] Carrillo, as leader of the Spanish Communist party that only recently emerged from forty years of fascist dictatorship and underground struggle, finds in the Eurocommunist vision "the idea of a new political formation [which] is linked with that of the hegemony of the bloc of forces and culture in society." The result would be a confederation of political parties and social organizations that would carry out the democratic road on a consensual basis.[8]

The tendency to see in Gramsci the main inspiration of Eurocommunist strategy is shared by diverse theorists and observers, from "left" Eurocommunists like Fernando Claudin to American commentators like Max Gordon. In Claudin's view, the democratic road flows logically out of the "war of position" strategy, which is grounded in Gramsci's original analysis of the European capitalist state. He suggests

that "From 1934 onwards Togliatti readopted the Gramscian analysis, modified by gradualism and tacticism characteristic of his own vision." This laid the basis for a working class ascent to hegemony within the confines of capitalism and representative democracy.[9] Gordon stresses the importance of Gramsci's influence on the PCI's break with "Bolshevik orthodoxy" and the Soviet model of political organization, for what Gramsci bequeathed was a "legacy hostile to the substitution of dogma for analysis of reality in the application of the classics of revolutionary socialism."[10] Here, as elsewhere, the Gramscian connection is presented in quite general and impressionistic terms, embellished with frequent references to "hegemony," "bloc," and "democracy," but lacking much real assessment of the original theory.

GRAMSCIAN STRATEGY AND BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY

Had Gramsci not been one of the founders and early leaders of Italian communism, it is unlikely that his theoretical legacy would have been so enthusiastically harnessed to the contemporary politics of Eurocommunism. For, as I shall emphasize, Gramsci's thought was in fact *consistently* and even harshly antagonistic to those themes, strategies, and objectives that characterize the democratic road: electoralism, economistic trade unionism, antimonopoly bloc, political evolutionism, and internal transformation of the bourgeois state. From the early years (including the factory council phase) through the formation of the PCI and into the final period of incarceration and the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci — whatever his switches of emphasis — insisted that the transition to socialism required the sweeping *overthrow* of bourgeois political institutions, meaning a fundamental break with the entire capitalist system and the construction of a new, revolutionary form of authority. Changing obstacles

Editorial board and staff of Ordine Nuovo; Gramsci in lower right.

and methods of struggle might necessitate a reformulation of tactics, but this *strategic* objective always remained in focus. For Gramsci, the main task — whether in conditions of crisis or stability — was creation of an independent proletarian culture and network of institutions.

In his early writings, Gramsci had already developed a powerful critique of the way in which electoral-parliamentary activity and trade unionism had come to dominate the politics of the Socialist party, which thus became immobilized and incapable of carrying out anticapitalist struggles. The difficulty was that the party system, unions, and parliament had evolved mainly on the terrain of bourgeois democracy and that, while such structures could be used for limited, tactical mass struggles, they could never become instruments for advancing revolutionary goals; however "neutral" they appeared, they normally functioned to legitimate bourgeois power and interests. From Gramsci's perspective (that of the revolutionary Left within the Socialist party), the abysmal failure of the party and the unions was marked by an internal decline of popular commitment and spirit.[11]

Gramsci characterized the pre-1920 Socialist party as an inactive "conglomeration of parties." Incapable of taking the initiative, it altered and shifted its colors to satisfy the requirements of vote-getting and institutional bargaining. Never a principled abstentionist in the fashion of his political opponent Amadeo Bordiga (who completely rejected all forms of parliamentary activity), Gramsci argued that socialist involvement in electoral politics made sense only insofar as it forced the bourgeoisie to reveal its "fraudulent commitment to democracy," provoked an authoritarian response, and thereby opened the door to crisis and mass upheaval.[12] The goal was to immobilize parliament by "stripping the democratic mask away from the ambivalent face of the bourgeois dictatorship and reveal it in all its horrible and repugnant ugliness." Gramsci refered to the "parliamentary circus" — a bogus public sphere designed to delude the masses into believing that real change can only be achieved through electoral and reformist action — *outside of* which and *against* which revolutionary politics must ultimately be directed.[13] Likewise, "trade union action, within its own sphere and using its own methods, stands revealed as being utterly incapable of overthrowing capitalist society; it stands revealed as being incapable of leading the proletariat to its emancipation..."[14] From a standpoint typical of his *Ordine Nuovo* essays, Gramsci argued: "Trade unionism stands revealed as nothing other than a form of capitalist society, not a potential successor to that society. It organizes workers not as producers, but as wage-earners, i.e., as creatures of the capitalist, private property regime, selling their commodity labor." In the end, he felt, the unions reproduced narrow self-interest, commodification, and individualism instead of revolutionary solidarity.[15] Moreover, in the case of both parties and trade unions, their increasingly bureaucratic structures produced

Factory occupation, September, 1920.

an alienated politics remote from the self-activity of the popular strata.

This critique involved not only an attack on the *specific* Italian institutions and processes that Gramsci closely observed in his own practice, but a more comprehensive rejection of bourgeois democracy as a significant realm of political struggle. Writing at a time of massive popular upheavals and revolutionary optimism, Gramsci insisted that these forms were part of the bourgeois totality that had to be transcended. Thus: "... the revolutionary process can only be identified with a spontaneous movement of the working masses brought about by the clash of contradictions inherent in the social system characterized by the regime of capitalist property. Caught in the pincers of capitalist conflicts and threatened by condemnation without appeal to the loss of civil and intellectual rights, the masses break with the forms of bourgeois democracy and leave behind them the legality of the bourgeois constitution."[16] Gramsci added that the socialist movement should "ceaselessly spread the conviction that the current problems of industrial and agricultural economy can be resolved only outside parliament, against parliament, by the workers' state."[17] With each advance of the

movement, of popular mobilization within local workplaces and communities, the old structures would lose their credibility (and legitimacy) while increasingly taking on the character of "empty shells."

Gramsci contended that a fallacy of all previous Marxist schemas had been "the acceptance of historical reality produced by capitalist initiative," which meant preoccupation with the *existing* state as something to be seized or transformed. A new approach to politics and authority was needed: "We are persuaded, after the experience of the Russian, Hungarian, and German revolutions, that the socialist state cannot emerge within the institutions of the capitalist state, but is a fundamentally new creation in relation to them, if not in relation to the history of the proletariat."[18] Not the *conquest* of power, but a *process* of revolutionary development rooted in everyday proletarian life and culminating in new forms, was the basic premise of Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* theory.

Given the strategic bankruptcy of bourgeois institutions, Gramsci looked for inspiration to the syndicalist tradition. He wrote that "...the solution to the pressing problems of the current period can be found only in a strictly proletarian center of power" — namely, the factory councils (which had already sprung up in Turin and elsewhere) and popular assemblies, or "soviets," which were expected to mushroom Russian-style as the movement progressed.[19] The councils and soviets, as organs of direct, grassroots democracy, would be the nucleus of an unfolding revolutionary state which — counterposed to the centralized bourgeois state apparatus — could give expression to the historic emancipatory principles of workers' control and self-government. As structures created by the workers themselves at the point of production, they would broaden the scope of democracy and channel popular revolt *against* the established political mechanisms.[20] The local organs, moreover, would expand the very definition of the "political," opening up more space for psychological involvement in the revolutionary process: "The existence of the councils gives the workers direct responsibility for production, leads them to improve their work, institutes a conscious and voluntary discipline, and creates the psychology of the producer, the creator of history."[21]

GRAMSCI AND THE RISE OF ITALIAN COMMUNISM

With the paralysis of the Socialist party in the midst of crisis, and following the collapse of the council movement in 1920, Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* group became leading forces in molding the new Communist party. The politics of the PCI — and of Gramsci as well — was shaped by the Bolshevik Revolution, the Comintern, and by what was understood as Leninism. While agreeing with the concept of a disciplined revolutionary party, Gramsci's "Leninism" was less vanguardist than some Italian tendencies in that it continued to stress the role of "national-popular" formations such as the councils and the newly-formed workers' and peasants' committees. And while Gramsci's own approach was less insurrectionary during 1921-26 than in the preceding years, he remained as uncompromisingly hostile to bourgeois political institutions as ever. Thus, whereas local democratic structures received less attention in Gramsci's PCI writings, the search for a "prefigurative" synthesis of party and councils was still evident. Finally, although the rise of fascism sharply influenced PCI priorities during this period (especially after 1924, when leadership shifted to the *Ordine Nuovo* faction), Gramsci still focused on the immediacy of *socialist* objectives. What "united front" tactics meant for Gramsci, in contrast to the Popular Front approach later adopted by

Togliatti, was a process of mass mobilization fusing antifascist and anticapitalist struggles, directed not only against the Mussolini regime, but against bourgeois domination in general.

The real significance of the early PCI presence in Italian society, as Gramsci saw it, was its embodiment of a revolutionary identity. Through the Communist party, the working class was able, for the first time, to break decisively with bourgeois political traditions and with the "bourgeois parliamentary state"; the PCI opened up the possibility of an "autonomous" socialist development within a "new state system."[22] The party's historic goal — even if not always effectively advanced in the early years — was to create the basis of socialist democracy out of the ashes of bourgeois democracy, to assist in the "explosion of new democratic institutions" that would "counterpose themselves to parliament and replace it."[23] Gramsci argued, in typical fashion for this period, that "it is a necessary precondition for revolution that the complete dissolution of parliamentary democracy should occur in Italy."[24] Breaking with bourgeois traditions also meant a critical (though by no means unambiguous) approach to the unions, which Gramsci viewed as a "source of bourgeois ideology and capitalist discipline." Here he attacked the PCI's initial tendency to remove itself completely from trade union struggles in the name of "purity." Gramsci pushed a strategy of building revolutionary groups within the factories, around the councils and committees, that could split these forms away from the union hierarchy and "enlarge the sphere of activity."[25]

Later, even after the consolidation of fascist power, Gramsci returned to the earlier themes of workers' control and revolutionary democracy. He argued that revolution was still on the agenda, no matter how loudly the Socialists called for an essentially defensive posture to combat fascism. The PCI's line was "opposed as much to constitutional opposition as it is to fascism — even if the constitutional opposition upholds a programme of freedom and order which would be preferable to fascism's one of violence and arbitrary power."[26] In Gramsci's estimation, the strength of fascism was illusory; it had created nothing more than a false national integration, leaving the regime vulnerable to new crises and renewed cycles of mass mobilization. Anticipating a massive democratic upsurge against Mussolini's rule, Gramsci hardly considered a scenario based upon long-term political stability.

In the "Lyon's Theses," a strategic and programmatic document written for the PCI's Third Congress in January 1926, Gramsci set out to translate Marxism and Leninism into the language of Italian history and politics. His guiding principle was the "democratizing" of Leninist strategy to fit the more complex conditions of European capitalism; the revolutionary party was still indispensable, but the actual conquest of power would have to be grounded more in popular movements and ideological consensus than was the case in Russia. From this premise, Gramsci argued that socialist transformation would have to move beyond the limits of both vanguardism (which stressed a rapid insurrectionary seizure of power and rigid organizational formulas) and social-democratic reformism (which looked to an internal restructuring of the bourgeois state).[27] While the "Lyon's Theses" is sometimes cited as the PCI's initial departure along the democratic road (possibly because Togliatti had a hand in authoring it), such an interpretation confuses Gramsci's focus on collective participation as an element of *socialist* democracy with a strategic commitment to bourgeois democratic institutions. On this issue Gramsci did not waiver: the fundamental task of the PCI was "to organize and unify the industrial and rural

proletariat for the revolution and the foundation of the workers' state," placing "before the proletariat and its allies the problem of insurrection against the bourgeois state..."[28]

These themes were carried forward and theoretically elaborated in the *Prison Notebooks*. Removed for the first time from daily political involvement, the victim of fascist repression, Gramsci put forth a more pronounced "Jacobin" or Leninist Marxism. Despite his obsession with antifascist struggle (or perhaps *because* of it), Gramsci devoted great attention to the problems of revolutionary identity, the transformative role of the party, and the directive function of intellectuals. At the same time, he revised his view of fascism: not only was the regime itself more stable than he had predicted, but its diffuse reactionary ideology corresponded to certain widespread elements already present in mass consciousness. Thus, while Gramsci continued to stress revolutionary goals — the objective conditions for beginning the transition to socialism presumably being just as ripe as ever — he adopted a long-term perspective. The "forced integration" of fascism made immediate popular insurrection less likely. This produced Gramsci's well-known turn toward the "subjective" dimension in the *Prison Notebooks*, where the concerns of philosophical renewal, praxis, mass consciousness, ideological hegemony, and the role of intellectuals gave new depth and complexity to his theory of the party and of the transition.

The concept of "hegemony" enabled Gramsci to advance beyond Lenin's narrow and one-sided vanguardism. From Gramsci's viewpoint, what orthodox Marxism lacked was an understanding of the often subtle but penetrating forms of ideological control and manipulation that served (along with repression) to bolster all bourgeois institutions. The idea of hegemony filled this void by calling attention to the role of various world-views or

French pamphlet protesting Gramsci's imprisonment, 1933.

"organizing principles" (made up of belief systems, values, myths, habits, etc.) in reproducing capitalist society, not only within the spheres of the state and production but through the educational system, media and culture, religion, the family, and everyday life. To the extent that prevailing ideologies are internalized by the general population, they took on the character of "common sense." This was the source of Gramsci's dual perspective, which corresponded to his famous categories "war of movement" and "war of position," and which can be roughly translated into the two broad phases of socialist politics — insurrectionary struggle for power and (what necessarily precedes it) the subversion of ideological hegemony. For any movement to succeed it

would have to become "counter-hegemonic." It would have to undermine bourgeois domination in every sphere of civil society — social and authority relations, production, culture, and education — before "frontal assaults" on the state could be effective. The destruction of the old institutions was seen by Gramsci as a single phase in the long-term historical modification of social forces that occurs "underneath the surface" of formal bourgeois structures.[29]

Counter-hegemonic politics would thus be conducted against rather than through the existing state, by mobilizing a "social bloc" or "revolutionary historical bloc." Gramsci used the term "bloc" to refer to the historical synthesis of popular movements, defined by their ideological homogeneity and concrete political expression rather than by sociological categories. It suggested the building of popular alliances that transcend a rigid class basis and coalesce around common psychological responses — for example, nationalism, anticlericalism, regionalism, and ethnic identity. While nonsocialist in many cases, such appeals could serve as radicalizing catalysts at particular historical moments, linking up diverse strata (e.g., workers and peasants) in a counter-hegemonic movement. Gramsci's concept of "bloc" therefore signified far more than simple alliances, elite coalitions, or loose configurations of political groups constructed for the purpose of winning new positions within the bourgeois state. On the contrary, it reflected a process of mass revolutionary mobilization that could lead to an entirely new system of social and authority relations.

The force of Gramsci's theory and strategy derived in great measure from the expanding role of ideological and cultural forces in advanced capitalism. Insofar as the "Leninism" of the prison writings assimilated Gramsci's earlier commitment to popular struggles and workers' control, he ended up with a more dialectical conception of the transition than Lenin, one rooted in a complex, organic relationship between the "global" and local element, between party and councils, between the process of destroying the old state and that of generating a new one in its place. Thus, Gramsci not only shared Lenin's concept of revolutionary identity and a total break with bourgeois institutions; his dualistic model in fact went much farther than the statist premises of Bolshevik strategy by linking politics with everyday life, the goal of social and cultural renewal, and the task of constructing a new democratic socialist state.[30]

THE EUROCOMMUNIST ROAD: GRAMSCI OR BERNSTEIN?

We finally arrive at the Eurocommunist fabrication of a semiofficial and instrumentalized Gramsci that, while appealing to contemporary proponents of the democratic road, bears little resemblance to Gramsci's original theory. Basic Gramscian concepts have been systematically misappropriated and distorted by Eurocommunist strategists. Ideas have been translated into a strategic framework that has emptied them of revolutionary content. While this phenomenon is hardly new within the Marxist tradition, what makes the attempt to legitimate structural reformism in Gramscian imagery different is the extent to which it has been successful. After all, the language appears to be the same, and Gramsci was one of the founders (and martyrs) of Italian communism.

The PCI's postwar adoption of the "war of position" — a guiding tenet of Eurocommunism — perhaps best reflects this process of linguistic mystification. For Gramsci, as we have seen, the war of position was actually only one side of a dualistic strategy that also incorporated the "war of movement": whereas the former referred to the long, organic phase of ideological-cultural struggle and transforma-

tion of civil society, the latter involved the political-military struggle for institutional power. Gramsci's conception is thus based first on a reconstruction of everyday life (consciousness, social and authority relations, culture, etc.) and second on the overturning of old structural barriers within a scenario of crisis, class polarization, and popular upheavals. The Eurocommunists have completely jettisoned this second dimension — the war of movement — and in the process have abandoned the very possibility of rupture, or revolutionary break, that has always been central to Marxism. Thus, whereas democratic road theorists anticipate economic crisis, it is not of a catastrophic sort leading to intense class struggle and popular mobilization; whereas they see a legitimation crisis, it is not fundamental or explosive enough to provoke an attack on the bourgeois state. As Henri Weber has noted, Eurocommunism in effect denies the possibility of a revolutionary situation in advanced capitalism.[31]

Moreover, the war of position itself has been radically redefined by the Eurocommunists. Instead of broadening the terrain of struggle within civil society to incorporate new arenas of social life and popular struggles as the basis of a counter-hegemonic formation strong enough to produce a real shift in the balance of class forces, it has effectively narrowed it to the bourgeois political-institutional realm. Thus the PCI, for example, has pursued the *via Italiana* (and more recently the "historic compromise") with the aim of expanding the space for maneuver within parliamentary democracy and inserting the party into the administration of bourgeois power — in other words, as a means of securing new "positions of strength" within structures that have little organic connection with everyday social existence. And the PCI, owing to its electoral successes, has made great advances in this direction. Yet it has consistently failed to present an alternative to capitalist society or to utilize its power in favor of the many popular, "emergent" movements that have appeared in Italy since the mid-1960s (e.g., feminist, ecology, youth, and rank-and-file working-class movements).

Gramsci's concepts of "hegemony" and "social bloc" have met the same fate. In its earlier Gramscian usage, hegemony reflected the ideological side of bourgeois domination; to contest successfully for power the working class would have to counter the system of hegemony with its own elaborate world-view or "integrated culture" — that is, with its own counter-hegemonic mobilization. Again, it is this counter-hegemonic dimension, involving above all the qualitative struggle for new social and authority relations, that is missing from the Eurocommunist vision. "Hegemony" is thereby reduced to a rationale for a pluralistic, non-coercive politics (compatible with the "peaceful transition") or a minimalist strategy that entails winning influence within the logic of bourgeois democracy. Its revolutionary meaning disappears from sight. Similarly, Gramsci's notion of "social bloc," or "revolutionary historical bloc," was tied to an emergent formation — a unique congruence of social forces that emerges through counter-hegemonic struggles — that gained its first institutional expression at the grassroots level. The PCI's frontism transformed this schema of popular mobilization into an "alliance strategy" grounded in electoral-parliamentary politics, elite coalitions, and a version of antimonopoly bloc that extends to sectors of the bourgeoisie itself. Eurocommunism has inherited this mechanistic, elitist definition of "bloc."[32]

Finally, the Eurocommunist parties — whatever their pretenses of charting the first truly democratic path to socialism — today embrace what Gramsci would have found a false commitment to "democratization." For Gramsci, "democracy" meant proletarian or socialist

Gramsci toward the end of his life.

democracy built around movements for workers' control and direct self-government. It necessitated a break with bourgeois institutions, and the development of new local structures of power such as councils, signifying the birth of a qualitatively different kind of politics and state power. Gramsci contended that with advancing capitalism, parliamentary forms would become virtually impotent, enfeebled by the encroachments of the authoritarian state. The Eurocommunist version of democratic transformation, with its roots in Togliatti's theory of structural reforms, seeks to extend and perfect bourgeois democracy through broadened participation, curtailment of monopoly power, professionalization of the civil service, and "decentralization" (more power to local government). It assumes that by winning significant economic and social reforms, and by helping to diffuse a participatory ethic, the left can whittle away at the inequalities of power and privilege without having to abandon civil liberties and the multi-party system.

The problem with this strategy of democratization is that, despite its apparently "progressive" or "advanced" character, and despite its positive departure from Leninist centralism, it remains confined to the boundaries of bourgeois pluralism. Having rejected the Soviet model, it has failed to develop a conception of socialist democracy that challenges the logic of alienated politics (the indirect, detached nature of involvement), statism, and the social division of labor. *Concretely*, the Eurocommunist preoccupation with the goal of an internally reformed state ignores the role of collective organs of struggle — workers' and community assemblies, action committees, and grassroots movements of feminists, students and others — in shaping a more comprehensive democratic and socialist transformation. In failing to confront the problem of how to generate new modes of political life, of how to arrive at a different relationship between political structures and mass activity, Eurocommunism has resisted coming to grips with the real corporate-bureaucratic impediments to democratization.[33]

In the end, we find an "innovative" strategy that invokes the mystique and political language of Gramsci, but which has little in common with the actual historical Gramsci. Today, Eurocommunist theorists emphatically deny the "actuality of revolution" and the possibility of insurrection, social struggle, and popular control over the economy and state as "utopian" and even dangerously "adventurist." While they still formally cling to anticapitalist, socialist programs, such claims are destined to become abstract as they grow more and more removed from the methods and strategies — and the vision — necessary to achieve them.

This separation of goals from strategy, inherent in a linear, organic evolutionism that restricts socialist transformation to bourgeois institutions and negates the theory of "rupture," was the essence of classical social democracy — and a major source of its difficult fate. Not Gramsci, then, but Bernstein emerges as the first creative theoretical genius behind the Eurocommunist dream of a democratic road.

CONCLUSION

The systematic distortion and misappropriation of Gramsci by the Eurocommunists poses issues that go far beyond the destiny of Gramsci's Marxism or even of the Communist parties themselves. It is not a matter of preserving the integrity or purity of one theorist's contributions, nor of clinging to the memory of a revolutionary period that has long since vanished. Nor need we prove that Gramsci's political vision and analysis were in the long run correct, much less that they ought to be directly applied to the present context in the advanced countries.

At issue is something entirely different: the potential impact of strengthening social-democratic currents in Western Europe and the U.S. on the future development of socialist and progressive movements. Insofar as social-democratic perspectives have become dominant — even fashionable — within the Left in a number of countries, the pressures favoring a narrow pragmatism seem insurmountable. On the other hand, such pressures tend to limit the kinds of questions that can be asked; they restrict the scope and possibility of revolutionary vision, language, and commitments. On the other hand, these pressures reinforce already strong tendencies which insist that social transformation can amount to little more than securing limited reforms within the existing political framework. Eurocommunism is situated squarely within this evolving strategic world-view, however much it protests against those who have anticipated its eclipse as a revolutionary force. And much like earlier phases of social-democratization, it is being defended and justified in the name of past revolutionary symbols and images that have been emptied of political content. Why this should be true is not difficult to understand. All strategies of social change require some form of theoretical legitimation. Just as the legacies of Marx and Lenin have been employed to justify bureaucratic centralism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, within Eurocommunism the heroic stature of Gramsci is invoked to rationalize what amounts to a recycling of the very social democracy that Gramsci himself so strongly detested and opposed.

In Southern Europe and the U.S. sectors of the Left have seized upon Gramsci's concepts of ideological struggle, democracy, mass participation, political alliances, etc., as an antidote to Leninist vanguardism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the Soviet model of the single-party state. Guided by the simplistic assumption that the only strategic choice is between an outmoded Leninism and a modern, "realistic" structural reformism, this approach inevitably associates the legacy of Gramsci with the vision of a harmonious, linear, parliamentary road to socialism. While it pays lip service to typically Gramscian themes — the transformation of social relations, culture, and everyday life — it fails to explain how these goals can be achieved without simultaneously creating the institutional basis of a new democratic state, without pressing the aims of social struggle. Hence, in the midst of economic and political crisis, we find the contemporary social-democratic currents absorbed within a bourgeois logic: for Eurocommunism this can only mean a retreat into the politics of austerity, law and order, and bureaucratic influence, while for similar forces in the U.S. —

where no mass socialist movement exists — it means integration into the orbit of the Democratic Party.

APPENDIX: TOGLIATTI AND THE ORIGINS OF "EUROCOMMUNISM"

Although efforts to pinpoint the theoretical and strategic origins of Eurocommunism are bound to be arbitrary, a good case can be made for the period beginning in the mid-1930s. This is when the PCI, under the guidance of the Comintern and the leadership of Togliatti, first adopted Popular Front tactics. Indeed, Togliatti, along with Dimitrov, helped formulate this policy at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935. In a complete turnaround from the confrontational politics of the "third period," the frontist approach looked to broad alliances of antifascist forces working mainly through electoral-parliamentary and trade-union activity as a means of defending bourgeois democracy and strengthening the international position of the Soviet Union against the challenge of Mussolini and Hitler. "Frontism" came to be identified with the defensive struggle against fascism, not a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and for socialism. In the late 1930s, Togliatti (in Moscow) argued for frontist tactics in a series of articles published in the party journal *Stato Operaio*; with the PCI leadership either underground or in exile, it was prepared to accept the Comintern-Togliatti line.[34] In July 1941, the PCI stated that its objectives were to overthrow the fascist regime, reestablish constitutional freedoms, form a popular government, and arrest the fascist hierarchs. This reflected a dramatic shift from the PCI's Fourth Congress at Dusseldorf in 1930, where Togliatti called for an insurrection of the Italian people against fascism, the destruction of fascism *and* capitalism by revolutionary methods, and the establishment of soviets and a dictatorship of the proletariat.[35]

A French leaflet announcing Gramsci's death.

An important Comintern figure for eighteen years, Togliatti internalized the outlook of the Soviet leadership — its perception of world politics, its sense of priorities, and its strategic and tactical orientation. His attachment to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was unqualified. Togliatti's influence encouraged the development of frontist attitudes among PCI leaders that carried over into the Resistance and

postwar years. Hence the real consequences of the Popular Front would not be felt until the mid-1940s and later, when short-range tactics (for the overthrow of fascism) were built into an institutionalized long-term strategy that became known as the democratic road to socialism. By 1944-45, the war and the partisan mobilization generated new revolutionary opportunities: the power structure was in shambles, councils and local structures had proliferated in northern and central Italy, and the PCI had grown into a thriving "national-popular" party. But such revolutionary opportunities were never pursued. Togliatti, on his return from Moscow in 1944, steered the party toward a frontist and defensive "new course" strategy; the PCI spurned insurrection, turned away from local democratic forms, induced the partisans to surrender their arms, and moved toward collaboration with bourgeois parties around the immediate goals of "reconstruction," enacting a Republican constitution, and building a government of "national unity." The PCI entered every Italian cabinet between April 1944 and May 1947, hoping to solidify institutionally its attempt to create a broad antifascist coalition.

The PCI's close attachment to the Soviet Union during those years was reinforced by the Soviet role in defeating Germany and by the common struggle against fascism. Yet Stalin's aims were far removed from those of "proletarian internationalism"; they were primarily to secure a sphere of control in eastern Europe and maintain stability elsewhere so that the USSR could rebuild its own society. A revolution in Italy (or elsewhere in Europe) would disrupt these prospects by forcing a Soviet conflict with the Allies. Therefore a frontist policy that defined fascism rather than capitalism as the target of struggle and emphasized moderate, electoral tactics was functional to Soviet interests but disruptive for socialist movements in Western Europe. It may well be that such tactics also corresponded perfectly to the Soviet premise of "capitalist stabilization" and the decline of the proletariat as a revolutionary agency in the advanced capitalist countries.[36] Whatever the explanation, the PCI *did* operate as an instrument of postwar stabilization.

Togliatti's genius — both in his party leadership and his theoretical capacity — resided in his shrewd application of Resistance themes and Gramscian concepts, within a frontist orientation, to the challenges and pressures of the postwar situation. For example, Togliatti soon appropriated Gramsci's ideas of "national-popular" struggle, "social bloc," and vying for ideological hegemony, but translated them into a framework of elite alliances, electoral mobilization, and structural reform of the bourgeois state: the Gramscian vision of revolutionary transformation was jettisoned. The "party of a new type" envisaged by Togliatti was a mass-based, national formation, but one that would struggle for an "expanded democracy" within the political institutions of the nascent Italian republic. Togliatti's famous editorials in *Rinascita* during the late 1940s and early 1950s hammered away at this departure from pre-1935 PCI strategy, while legitimating it in explicitly Gramscian (and even Leninist) terms. Of course the Comintern's Popular Front was conceived in a strictly tactical maneuver, and this was surely the definition given it by the PCI during and immediately after the Resistance. In retrospect, however, frontism can be understood as the genesis of the *via Italiana,* as institutionalized tactics that evolved into the PCI's contemporary democratic road strategy.

Only after 1956, however, with the Soviet de-Stalinization campaign and Togliatti's affirmation of a "polycentric" world Communism, could the PCI launch the *via Italiana* in earnest. Togliatti began to outline theoretically the

premises of a political strategy within and through the bourgeois democratic state; the state apparatus would not have to be destroyed by the working class and replaced by new proletarian forms, but could be internally reformed and democratized in the process of building socialism. Togliatti noted the "complexity" and the increasingly popular character of the modern parliamentary system, and concluded that state power could be gradually transformed from a mechanism of capitalist domination into a sphere of open contestation where elements of socialism could be introduced. In PCI parlance, the idea of a "secular, non-ideological" state would supplant the outmoded Marxist concept of an "instrumental" state.[37] Thus, with each electoral gain, with each new reform, with each new institutional position conquered, the PCI — in alliance with other "democratic" antimonopoly forces — could set in motion a power shift away from corporate power and toward socialism. It could, in the language of Gramscian strategy, hope to achieve "hegemony" within institutions that were no longer dominated by a single class. And since the boundary separating state and civil society in "neo-capitalism" was more diffuse than ever, bourgeois political structures were more vulnerable to incursions of all sorts.[38]

These were the strategic premises — linked to an evolutionary, peaceful, and more or less stable transitional process routed through a reconstituted bourgeois state — that paved the way to the "Eurocommunism" of Berlinguer, Carrillo, and Marchais a decade after Togliatti's death. Although possessing no real theoretical originality, Eurocommunism — like the *via Italiana* before it — represents a unique amalgam of traditional social democratic, frontist, and neo-Marxist currents. It reflects not the extension of Gramsci, for whom the democratic roat was nothing but a massive deception, but his misappropriation for clearly nonrevolutionary objectives. As we have seen, the reintroduction of Gramscian concepts barely conceals an underlying strategic content that actually recalls Bernstein rather than Gramsci; for the PCI, the historical and theoretical determinants of the present strategy go back to 1944, or even 1935, but no earlier.

FOOTNOTES

1. Pietro Ingrao, *Masse e potere* (Roma: Editori Reuniti, 1977), pp. 250-53. This takes up a familiar Togliattian theme — the gradual modification of structures — and carries it one step further by arguing that the party itself should never be the exclusive agency of political hegemony.
2. Santiago Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), pp. 27-28. Carrillo stresses that as the bourgeois state expands in scope and functions it becomes the major locus of contradictions in late capitalism; but this point is never really developed.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 28. It is necessary to distinguish here between *chronic*, ongoing crises that are endemic to capitalism — basic contradictions — and *catastrophic* crises of the sort that might lead to systemic collapse. The Eurocommunists recognize the first — indeed base their strategy on it — but insist that global capitalism (in the absence of war) is strong enough to contain the latter. This perspective differs from orthodox (Kautskian) Marxism, which assumed that normal crises of the capitalist economy would gradually build toward cataclysmic rupture, but is consonant — as I shall indicate later — with Bernstein's evolutionary strategy.
4. This was one of the themes that emerged from the presentations of Sergio Segre and Lucio Lombardo Radice at a conference on Eurocommunism in the U.S. in October 1978. Maxy Beml, "Marketing Eurocommunism," *Telos* no. 38.
5. Pietro Ingrao, "La svolta di 1956 e la via Italiana al socialismo," *Rinascita*, January 21, 1977.
6. Paolo Bufalini, "Le origine della nostra politica," *L'Unita*, April 24, 1977. This article was one of many published in a special issue of *L'Unita* commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Gramsci's death. The "key role of Gramsci's influence" on current PCI development is also emphasized by leading PCI figure Giorgio Napolitano, who sees in the "struggle for hegemony" an imperative for socialists to outdo capitalists in managing the economy. See his *The Italian Road to Socialism* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1977), p. 46.

7. Carrillo, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
9. Fernando Claudin, *Eurocommunism and Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978), p. 85.
10. Max Gordon, "The Theoretical Outlook of the Italian Communists," *Socialist Revolution* no. 33, p. 31.
11. Gramsci, "Syndicalism and the Councils," in Quintin Hoare, ed., *Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), p. 109.
12. "Revolutionaries and the Elections," *op. cit.*, p. 127.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.
14. "Electoralism," *op. cit.*, p. 105.
15. "Syndicalism and the Councils," p. 110. For an elaboration of these themes, see my *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 86-89.
16. "The Party and the Revolution," *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
18. "La Conquista dello stato," *L'Ordine Nuovo* (July 12, 1919), in Mario Spinella, ed., *Antonio Gramsci: Scritti Politici* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1967), p. 221.
19. "First: Renew the Party," in Hoare, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
20. "Two Revolutions," *op. cit.*, pp. 306-307. The Sorelian syndicalist influence upon Gramsci's early thought is evident here not only in the emphasis on extraparliamentary politics, but in the productivist bias toward strictly workplace activity.
21. "Sindacato e consigli," *L'Ordine Nuovo* (October 11, 1919), in *Scritti Politici*, p. 248.
22. "The Communists and the Elections," in Quintin Hoare, ed., *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 33.
23. "The Elections and Freedom," *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
24. "One Year," *op. cit.*, p. 82.
25. "Our Trade Union Strategy," *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168. Gramsci opposed the Bordiga-inspired strategy not only in the sphere of trade-union politics but in other areas where it also lacked a sensitivity to popular, "spontaneous" forms of struggle.
26. "The Programme of *L'Ordine Nuovo*," *op. cit.*, p. 235.
27. "Lyon's Theses," *op. cit.*, pp. 340-341 and 360-361. In his analysis of social democracy, Gramsci cautioned that one should not allow the reality of fascism to obscure the fact that social-democratic currents represent not the right wing of the proletariat but the left wing of the bourgeoisie.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
29. See, for example, "Notes on Italian History" and "The State and Civil Society," in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishar, 1971), pp. 57, 235. The origins of such an approach can already be detected in the "Lyon's Theses" and even in some of Gramsci's earlier writings.
30. For a more comprehensive assessment of the differences between Gramsci and Lenin, see my *Gramsci's Marxism*, ch. 5, and Paul Piccone, "Beyond Lenin and Togliatti: Gramsci's Marxism," *Theory and Society* (Winter, 1976).
31. Henri Weber, "Eurocommunism, Socialism, and Democracy," *New Left Review* no. 110, p. 13.
32. At issue here is not so much the strategic requirement of broad alliances, or even the scope of such alliances, but their political definition. In the case of the Eurocommunist parties, that definition is primarily electoral.
33. For an excellent discussion of this point, see Ernest Mandel, *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism* (London: New Left Books, 1978), pp. 164-177.
34. Gramsci died in April, 1937. The available evidence, based upon reports from his brother and other visitors, indicates that Gramsci never supported Popular Front policy. See Lucio Colletti, "Gramsci and Revolution," *New Left Review*, no. 65, pp. 91-92.
35. Charles F. Delzell, *Mussolini's Enemies: the Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 127, 207.
36. This point is developed by Herbert Marcuse in his *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 39-41.
37. Such theoretical statements are repeated throughout Togliatti's writings and reports, especially in the period 1958-1964. A good sampling is contained in Togliatti's *La via Italiana al Socialismo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1964) — for example, pp. 179-182; 192-196; and the sections "9 Domande sullo stalinismo," "Per un governo democratico delle classi lavoratrici," and "Per uno nuova maggioranza."
38. Probably Togliatti's most ambitious effort to build a connection between Gramsci and his own theory of structural reforms is his "Nel quarantesimo anniversario del partito comunista italiano," in *Il partito* (Roma: Editori Riunit, 1964).
39. Lucio Magri refers to this as the "organic limitations of a specific strategy rooted in history," reflecting a critical strategic choice (by the party leadership) that fundamentally shapes future development. See "Italian Communism in the Sixties," *New Left Review*, no. 66, p. 39.

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HELPING OURSELVES
The Limits and Potential of Self Help

Ann Withorn

Self help has emerged as a widely acclaimed "major thrust" of the eighties. Popular magazines, *The New York Times* and the federal government have all recognized the potential of the "self help movement" to influence human service policies and programs. Hundreds of thousands of self help groups now exist across the country. Some are affiliated with nation-wide organizations while others are more isolated local efforts where people join together to help themselves cope with and cure a wide range of human problems. Ideologically they range from the conservative piety of an Alcoholics Anonymous to the radical feminism of feminist "self-health" activities.[1]

Is this activity simply an extension of the self-absorption of the seventies? Is it a retreat into individual solutions and a ploy to keep people from demanding what they need from the state? Or does it reflect a growing, healthy skepticism of professionals and the welfare state bureaucracy? Could it be a sign of a potentially important rise in commitment to popular democracy? What, indeed, is the proper response of socialists and feminists to this growing phenomenon?

These questions are of some importance to the Left in the United States. The simple magnitude of current self help activity, especially among working class people, calls upon us to have, at least, an analysis of its political implications and an understanding of its appeal. Further, the experience of feminist self help suggests that there may be ways to combine selected self help activity with a broader socialist and feminist strategy. At its best, self help may even serve as one way to formulate a left politics which is more grounded in the daily

Opposite: Photo by Ken Heyman, from The Family of Woman.

experience of working class life and which thereby helps define socialism more broadly than the economistic formulations which so often characterize it. In addition, an understanding of the power of self help as a means for individual change may also go farther in comprehending the fundamental inadequacies of the social services provided by the modern welfare state.

WHAT IS SELF HELP?

The nature of self help itself gives rise to the contradictory questions raised above. Self help is the effort of people to come together in groups in order to resolve mutual individual needs. Today this activity consists of individuals sharing concerns about personal, emotional, health or family problems. Sometimes community or ethnic groups which organize to improve their neighborhoods or social situations also call themselves self-help groups. The major reasons for defining an activity as self help are that it involves group activity and meetings of the people with the problem, not outside experts or professionals, and that the main means by which difficulties are addressed are mutual sharing, support, advice-giving and the pooling of group resources and information. Members benefit as much from the sharing of their problems and the process of helping others as they do from the advice and resources provided by others. In most cases there is a strong ethic of group solidarity, so that individual members become concerned about the progress of other group members as well as in their own "cure".

Within this broad common definition, however, there is wide variety in focus and emphasis for self help groups. At one end of the spectrum are the politically aware feminist self help efforts, in health care, rape crisis, battered women shelters and other service areas. Here self help is self-conscious, empowering democratic effort where women help each other and often provide an analysis and an example from which to criticize and make feminist demands on the system. At the other end are groups which focus on the specific problem only, like AA, other "anonymous" groups or disease victim groups, with self help used only as a means for coping with a problem, not an alternative model for society or even service delivery. In between are groups which have selected self help as a means to help themselves but which also come to draw from the process ways to suggest broader changes, often in the social services system and sometimes in the whole social system. While all share key aspects of self help and all may teach certain critical lessons about the importance of social networks and group solidarity, their differences are crucial and need to be understood and evaluated as a part of any Left critique of self help.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF SELF HELP

Some of the comforts and supports now provided by self-conscious self help groups have always been available. Prior to industrial development village and family networks were the primary means by which people helped each other survive the economic, health and other social difficulties associated with a hard life. As industrial disruption made such supports less accessible early nineteenth century workers began to band together in new forms of "mutual aid" organizations composed of individual craft workers or, in America especially, of groups of ethnically homogeneous workers. These early groups formed to provide for the basic economic and social needs not available from employers, the state, the church or geographic community. Meager resources were pooled to provide burial and family insurance, limited food, clothing and economic support in times of ill health, disability and family crisis. In Britain and the U.S., the emergence of these

"burial societies", "workingmen's aid" associations, "friendly societies" and immigrant aid associations reflected constant efforts by workers to help each other and help themselves to cope with the health and social problems associated with capitalist development. The remaining records of such groups show a growing sense of collective responsibility within the groups and the gradual creation of social networks which performed wider social functions than only the insurance of economic survival.[2]

It is easy to admire these self-consious workers' efforts, like that of Workmen's Circle, to form "an organization that could come to their assistance in terms of need, and especially in case of sickness, that would provide them and their families with plots and decent burials in case of death and extend some measure of help to their surviving dependents, that would, finally, afford them congenial fellowships and thereby lessen the loneliness of their lives in a strange land."[3] It is important, however, to avoid romanticizing this early self help activity. Some groups were controlled by the more conservative and established elements in the craft or community who kept the groups from gaining a more broad "class" identification. Others served as a base from which to distrust or ignore, rather than identify with, the needs of other workers not in the same craft or ethnic group. And, at best, these early groups could only provide the most minimal assistance to their members, still leaving them with major social disadvantages. Of course, in times when public aid was extremely punitive and largely non-existent even such limited efforts were crucial to the survival and strength of workers and their families. But they were also, perhaps, the only means of survival. Self help was the only help available. It was not developed as a better, more humane, alternative means of support; originally it was the only means of support. This is a crucial difference between early self help and current efforts.

Exactly these limits to early self help efforts were what led early unions and socialists in Britain to agitate for greater public responsibility for social needs. In response to this pressure, the British government began to assume, however poorly and unfairly, many of the health and welfare functions of the self help groups. Unions too developed more bureaucratic, but also more extensive, services which met the immediate service needs addressed by the self help groups. The type of care provided by the unions and the government was, however, generally hierarchical and routinized, not imbued at all with the principles of democratic

Picnic of La France Mutual Aid Society, Lynn, Mass., 1915.

sharing and mutual dependence which had also characterized early self help efforts. (Here we see the trade-off which continues into today when small-scale self help efforts are assumed by large public bureaucracies. The service aspects are made more widely available but the mutual aid features are replaced by expertise and bureaucratic priorities.)

In the U.S. the recognition, however grudging, of public responsibility for human needs did not take place until much later, and always in a more limited way. Instead the capitalists, the trade unions and the mainstream leadership of the emerging social work profession united in their arguments that public services might weaken individual initiative and independence. While these forces did not especially appreciate the democratic social roots of self help they did support the ideal that the needy should "help themselves" without looking to public budgets for support. The work ethic, the Horatio Alger ideology and the lack of a broad-based socialist or labor party meant that the very success of worker and Black self help efforts was used to deny the necessity of broader public responsibility for major social needs. Self help became a conservative term, an end in itself, which was invoked to keep workers and minority groups from demanding social assistance. The price of democratic self support became limited material rewards, which were seen as noble and a part of the American tradition of individual effort. Samuel Gompers was a leader in this popularization of a highly conservative understanding of self help:

> *Doing for people what they can and ought to do for themselves is a dangerous experiment. In the last analysis the welfare of workers depends upon their own initiative.*[4]

Given such a climate many socialists and radical blacks grew to be skeptical of self help. They could see the limited material results of asking the poorest workers and black people to care for themselves in their communities, whatever the psychological benefits of local control or mutual aid. Most evolved a strategy of making demands on the state for services and support and then always agitating for more control and input into what was provided. While socialists, communists and black militants of the 1920's and 1930's did not totally oppose self help strategies, they did generally view them as a limited tactic.

The Unemployment Councils and Leagues of the 1930's did support numerous self help activities: clothing exchanges, rent supports, housing and food assistance, transportation help, etc. These groups also organized and made demands on local welfare authorities, however, and never viewed self help as an end in itself — as did certain less political self help groups which arose during the early depression years. Communist-led organizations particularly were critical of their members for falling into work which was "only" self help. Their internal press supported its use only when it accomplished two goals: 1) identifying and developing local activists and providing them with meaningful local work and 2) providing a base for making political demands on the emerging public welfare system. Otherwise the party never explicitly valued self help as a form of organization, even though it supported certain self help-type efforts for its own members — camps, child care groups, even therapy groups. For non-party members the basic criticism remained: that self help efforts necessarily avoided class struggles and confrontations with the enemy unless highly limited in scope and directed toward more "political" work by dedicated party members.

SELF HELP AS A SERVICE ACTIVITY

There is an interesting parallel to these attitudes in the professional developments of the period. Just as the more conservative trade unionists and black leadership supported self help as a means for worker and community independence, so did the more conservative doctors, lawyers and social workers who worked in the private sector. The private health and welfare establishment saw individual and group change coming out of self help activities. More liberal professionals argued that this strategy abandoned the poor and they, therefore, allied with leftists in demanding more public programs. They argued that it was unrealistic to expect the victims of society to help themselves and that outside intervention — from expert professionals funded by the government — was the only reasonable hope for change. These liberal social workers and medical experts gained power in federal and state programs throughout the 1930's and 40's, so that by the 1950's the public health and welfare establishment had become as critical of self help as a service strategy as leftists were of it as political tactic.

Self help came into its own as a service activity during the 1930's and 40's, in spite (or perhaps because) of increasing professional hostility. As the private and public insurance and welfare establishments grew, self help changed form, moving from group provision of welfare insurance and burial services to a process of social supports for dealing with a range of personal, family and emotional problems. The process of self help became important not for itself, as a model and base for democratic self-support, but as a means to achieve personal goals for change or to come to terms with unavoidable difficulties.

The poverty of the Depression gave rise to many self help service projects. Food, clothing and housing exchanges developed, European refugees and internal immigrants organized mutual aid groups. Most important, however, was the birth of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935; it has served as a primary model for self help service activities since its inception. It was founded by a pair of mid-western doctors who found little help in the medical, social work or psychiatric professionals and who began to develop a behavior oriented, religiously imbued, program of group support and pressure for alcoholics. The model consisted of admitting the power of one's problem and drawing help from fellow alcoholics, as well as from a "higher power", in order to learn to stop drinking. This was to be done by developing a network of fellow alcoholics, by attending frequent — even daily — meetings where discussions take place about personal experiences with alcohol and where the goal of sobriety is to be achieved "one day at a time". Drawing upon such basic, simple principles AA grew rapidly, reaching 400,000 by 1947 and currently involving more than 700,000 alcoholics a year.

It is easy for socialists and professionals to criticize Alcoholics Anonymous. Its religious pietism is fundamentalist and limiting. Despite its proclaimed organizational refusal to take federal money or political positions, its veterans have increasingly designed and defined alcoholism services across the country in harmony with AA principles. These programs often exclude women and those who have not "hit bottom" with their drinking, as well as intellectuals or more educated middle class people less comfortable with the somewhat simplistic "Twelve Steps". Yet AA does appear to have a higher success rate than other forms of professional help with the complex problems associated with alcoholism. It does attract a largely working-class population who have little recourse to private services. It also offers alcoholics the experience of a non-drinking community where they can learn to like themselves

better, admit to their problems, trust others and begin to rebuild their lives. One feminist alcoholism counselor summed up its limitations:

AA cannot be everything, especially for women. It can be conservative and rigid. But for many women AA is all there is. It's free. It's non-judgmental but it pushes them to stop drinking. It offers the companionship and support of others who have been through the same things. It gives people hope to go on...

I'm not saying there couldn't be something better, more political, less religious. But on the other hand you have to realize how difficult and complex a "drinking problem" is. It takes incredible energy, patience and fortitude to cope with alcoholics. Maybe only other alcoholics can. And this is an organization they have created which works better than a lot of other things. So what we try to do is supplement AA for women with a more feminist analysis and content, day care services and so forth. The whole process of getting yourself together and stopping drinking is too fragile a thing for us to undermine AA.

Other self help services have formed using the Anonymous model, where the focus is on the problem faced and the process of mutual help and support is valued as an effective means to that end, not as a goal in itself. Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Parents Anonymous (for people who have abused their children) are only three of the dozens of groups which are modelled closely on AA and attempt to help people admit that they have a problem and get help from others in the same situation to overcome it. All groups rely on "recovering" victims to help others, a helping role which is often a major form of continuing improvement for the old time members. Although some groups make greater use of professionals than others, in all peers assume primary roles and outside social networks often grow out of such groups which provide people with a wide range of supports. While there is no hard data, such anonymous groups (most of which, except AA, have been founded since the mid-fifties) seem to attract a largely white, working-class population and create strong loyalties among those helped.

Since the 1940's other services which use self help as a major means of helping people cope with or resolve personal difficulties have emerged. Many drug programs have used self help activities to create "alternative communities" characterized by mutual disclosure, support and pressure. Since the 1940's (and mushrooming in the 1970's) there has been a steady increase in health-oriented self help programs for the families of victims of cancer and other diseases, and for the victims themselves. Stroke victims, cancer victims, heart disease patients, parents of children with Down's Syndrome (to name only a few of thousands) have come together to discuss their feelings, reactions and symptoms and to help each other emotionally. While these programs are often supported by the medical system they frequently come to share vocal and strong criticisms of professionalism and professional care.

The social welfare and medical establishments have reacted to all this increasing self help activity with different types of responses. Sometimes groups have been criticized (often during the initial phases) for "resisting professional treatment" or for avoiding reality. The more critical the groups become of the quality of professional care (a component of almost all self help groups, no matter what their origins) the more they are resisted by doctors and social workers. However, until this happens they are often supported by professionals as another form of service, especially for people with "difficult" problems, i.e. those problems

like alcoholism, drug abuse, "incurable" cancer, senility and other afflictions not amenable to conventional intervention. Indeed, the federal government has become enamoured with self help approaches, providing funds for certain efforts and even identifying the existence of a "continuum of care" including self help at one end and full institutional care at the other, all of which will require some form of public support and monitoring.

As with AA, it is easy to criticize. Most of these self help service efforts can be legitimately viewed as methods by which the established medical, mental health and social work professions get people to provide services to themselves which the professionals won't or can't provide. Cheap care and an avoidance of public responsibility may be obvious. Yet leftists working in these fields also have supported self help services, in recognition of the limits of professional care and in order to support the creation of a stronger, less fearful consumer consciousness, among clients or victims of problems as varied as alcoholism, drug abuse, cancer and chronic disease. In addition, many members of such self help service groups find them much more helpful and acceptable forms of care than other, more professional, services. Such groups may provide release and support which come from sharing and comraderie. These results cannot be disregarded, especially for people who felt desperately alone before the experience. A working class veteran of AA, Overeaters Anonomyous and Smoke Enders reflected similarly on what self help meant to her:

Self help groups really help. They make you feel like you are not alone with yourself or your problem. You share with others and find out you are not the only one who smokes in the shower or bakes two pies for your family and eats one before anyone comes home. I'm not sure how it works, but somehow you feel like trying again.

My sister had, in fact, a daughter that died. She had always laughed at me for my "groups", but after that happened she joined one herself. She just couldn't handle it alone, feeling so guilty and not knowing anyone with the same problem. That's what self help means to me.

Particularly important to many people in self help groups is the opportunity to help others with similar problems. The experience of doing this can be powerful and strengthening, especially for people who have only felt like victims before.

In short, as a form of social service, self help groups have proven themselves to be helpful and empowering to many, despite their potential use as a vehicle for providing cheaper services to unwanted clients. As one aspect of the general social services system, self help services seem a secure and welcome addition. The question remains, however, whether this increased self help activity has any underlying impact for the left. For such discussions we must look to recent efforts of the women's movement.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMINIST SELF HELP

If it weren't for the development of feminist self help, especially in health, we might be less interested in the whole question of whether self help can be a serious part of a socialist strategy. Self help would be seen as merely a social service with little broader political impact. But the impressive efforts of women around the country to take self help seriously as a healthy form of relationship between women and to wed this with feminist analysis may suggest a more general model for reuniting self help with political practice.

Self help has been a central part of most feminist service work, which has, in turn, been

a major area of the feminist movement. Since the late sixties, when women's liberation groups developed "consciousness-raising", the model of women sharing and helping other women has been a basic feminist strategy. Feminist historians looked back and found self help equivalents throughout the history of women — who have formed strong self helping women's networks within the family, neighborhoods and community as a means for basic survival and emotional support.

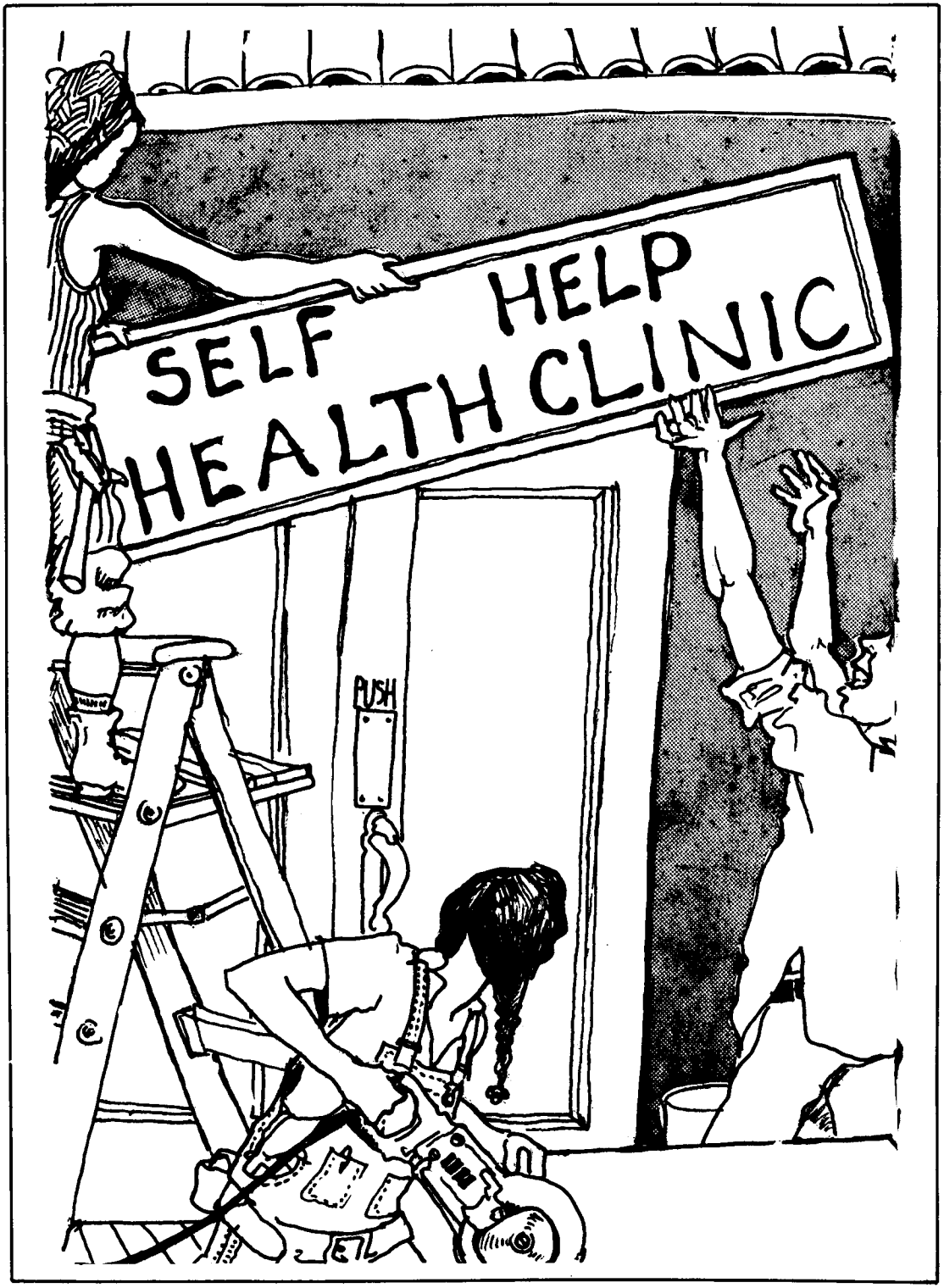
Out of this history and an emerging understanding that "the personal is political" feminists were able to take the process of self help more seriously, to value the experience of working and sharing together in itself, as well as to appreciate the quality of the product of such work. Women were compelled, then, to be more self-conscious in their self help aproaches and to proclaim them as central to feminist goals. In "Jane", an early underground Chicago-based abortion clinic, for example, women developed models of abortion care which included sharing all processes and procedures, discussion of feelings and the trading of mutual experiences among the women abortion-workers and the women seeking abortions. Their approach became standard in many feminist services. *Our Bodies Our Selves*, the classic women's self health care book offered professional information mixed with personal experiences and has been used as a basis for women's health groups across the country. It too has helped to establish the notion of self help — mutual sharing of feelings, information and skills — as a basic tenet of feminist activity.[5]

As feminist services became a major approach of the women's movement — including everything from women's multi-purpose centers, to day care, health and nutrition services, rape and battered women's programs — self help came along as standard feminist practice. The meaning varied, however. In some places it simply meant collective decision-making by staff and a sharing of feelings and information with women who come for service. It was seen as a natural outgrowth of ideas of sisterhood and feminist theory. In the feminist health clinics, however, feminist self help has been most fully defined, has become in Elizabeth Somers words "both a philosophy and a practice through which we become active creators of our destinies."[6]

Since the early seventies, feminist clinics have insisted on education and group involvement of all who came to the clinics. This was viewed as an important antidote to the standard medical model of doctor as god and patient as grateful recipient of his care. Health care workers forged different relationships with women who came for care and also began to explore and share a growing criticism of the medical "knowledge" about women's bodies. The most self-conscious programs, the Feminist Women's Health Centers, led in developing clear guidelines for self help in health care which included pelvic self examinations, group examinations and discussions. They shared an explicit philosophy that self help is more than, and different from, the traditional "delivery" of service:

> *Self help is not being simply service oriented . . . we do not want to be middle women between the MD's and the patients. We want to show women how to do it themselves. . . We do not examine women. We show women how to examine themselves. . . We neither sell nor give away self help. . . we share it. (Detroit Women's Clinic, 1974)*

Feminist self help in health care and other service areas developed in conjunction with the broader feminist movement. Knowledge of the inadequacies and brutality of male dominated medicine came along with a heightened aware-



Graphic by Randy Elliott, for Vocations for Social Change.

ness of the prevalence of rape and women-battering. The system-supporting aspects of all medical and welfare care forced women into developing new models and into looking to each other for information and support. The early successes of many groups in raising the consciousness of women who came for "service" was heartening and sustaining. Sustained practice meant that feminists have been able to put the principles of self help to the test, to explore the need for structure and specialization within a self help framework, to discover the complexities of many health and emotional problems and to determine when professional help may, indeed, be necessary.

All this learning and growth has not been without costs, however. Health centers, particularly, have suffered intense bureaucratic harassment from the medical profession which has been anxious to protect its right to control who practices medicine. Most self help programs have suffered from funding problems of a similar sort. The medical and social welfare establishments demand "legitimacy" before they provide money — through third party payments (Medicaid, private insurance) or direct service contracts. They require, at the very least, a professional "cover" for most alternative services and often refuse funding until bureaucratic, hierarchical structures are actually in place. Some battered women's shelters originally received money, in light of favorable publicity, with minimal hassles, but as time passed welfare agencies pressed to fund a "range" of services (i.e., non-feminist programs), with more familiar, professional approaches. In addition, inflation and cut backs have also limited the amount of money available.

The problems have not been all external either. The time and emotional demands of most self help services have made it hard for most groups to sustain staff, much less to do the continual political education necessary to make the self help offered truly feminist in content. Women with professional aspirations and a lack of feminist values have been drawn to self help efforts. Their pressure can push already overextended feminists to leave rather than fight creeping bureaucracy, "efficiency" and professionalization in their midst. When this happens the mutual aid, democratic and sharing aspects of the service fade as surely as they do when public bureaucracies directly take over.

When such problems are coupled with current general decline in a broad-based feminist movement, they become even more difficult to endure and struggle with. Even in well-functioning self help projects women feel more isolated and less sure of what it all means, as expressed by a women's health worker in 1979:

> *After we finally got our license then we had all this paperwork to do all the time. The women's community seemed less interested because we weren't in crisis anymore. The women who wanted to work in the center are more interested in health care than feminism. It just seems to take more effort to be* feminist *these days, to raise political issues in the groups or work meetings. We're still trying and do OK but I guess it's a lot harder than it used to be.*

Feminist services, then, have not totally solved old problems with self help. They have shown that it is possible for participation in self help to be an effective means for political growth and development. Especially the health services have shown us that self help may often be an intrinsically better model of care and may, thereby, offer an immediate and personal way for people to understand what is wrong with public and private health and welfare services. All have shown the natural links between a

democratic feminist movement and the process of self help. Women who have participated in such programs talk about themselves as "permanently changed. I don't think I can ever accept without criticism the old authoritarian models again." But over time the pressures to provide services on a large scale, with adequate funding, work against the ability to work in a self help manner. Is it reasonable to assume that we could really provide feminist self help services to all the battered women who need them, for example? And if it is not, we are always stuck with the limits of even the most effective self help efforts — that the harder we work and the better we function, the greater the demand and the more impossible it is to meet.

PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL OF SELF HELP

Given all this, how should leftists respond to the likelihood that self help services are likely to continue to grow and re-form in the future? The current momentum and recognition of existing programs seems unstoppable and will probably be even more appealing to administrators wishing to support an image of continued service provision in times of real cut backs. An increasingly popular answer to anyone with a problem will predictably be: "Join, or form, a self help group."

Should more socialists join with feminists in sponsoring overtly political "dual self help activities"? Can we join with existing self help programs and "work from within", seeing them as working class organizations needing a left presence in order to achieve a progressive potential? Or should we remain outside the whole effort (except perhaps for pure feminist services) and provide only a critically correct analysis of the hopeless "mass phenomenon"?

These questions are only partly facetious. As advanced capitalism lurches along services and the service economy will become more important. Self help services may play an increasingly important role in this. On the hopeful side, self help activity has the potential to become a base from which people can criticize, demand and affect the nature of the service system in a posiive way and out of which progressive workers and clients can form meaningful alliances. On the negative side, self help services may help to provide an opportunity for another professional cover-up. See, we have a humane system. We even let people take care of each other, after they are near death or incapacitated by emotional and personal problems.

The problem, assuming these options, becomes one of how to assist self help efforts in achieving their potential as a base for criticism and change rather than providing tacit reaffirmation of professional hegemony and the capitalist welfare state.

In promoting the potential of self help we cannot, however, ignore certain limits which may be built into the activity. First, we cannot deny that the nature of self help, and the enormity of the difficulties which bring people to it, often emphasize only the personal dimensions of people's problems. Even if the social components of problems are admitted, as they are in feminist and some other self help efforts, the stress remains on how the victim can change, rather than on the implications for broader social action. There can even be a new form of victim blaming which takes place in self help: "We are so fucked up only we can help each other." Admittedly this is an aspect of all psychological services, but the self help model, with emphasis on social support and reciprocity, may serve to mask the individualistic approach more. It also may make it harder for people to move on to other activities because the self help group may form the only support system people know (AA has a strong history of this; people become professional alcoholics, still centered in the group and their problem,

long after drinking has ceased to define their lives). For self help activity to lead to broader criticism of the social service system or the whole of society, these tendencies must be recognized and alternatives made available, at least to those who can make use of them.

Second, even with self help set in a broader context, the questions of scope and relationship to the state will still affect us. Self help activity is probably only a limited service tactic which, while it can form a base for criticizing and pressuring the larger system, can never fully replace the professional, bureaucratized services, at least under capitalism. This is a more difficult proposition to accept in practice than it sounds in theory. We get sucked in, we want to "save the world" and it is difficult to remember the political analysis which tells us that the problems we face are generated by social forces beyond our immediate control. It is hard, as those involved in self help often admit, to have to push the state to provide services which we know will be inferior to what we can do through self help (but on a limited scale). All this leads to burnout and frustration, especially when broader movements are not active enough to help us keep our activity in perspective.

Finally, there are some philosophical problems associated with self help, which are similar to those surrounding many populist efforts. Many self help groups, especially including feminist activities, become so skeptical of organization and expertise that they become almost mystical and anti-intellectual. While the class origins of current organizations and expertise may lead to this, as an overall approach it becomes self-defeating. In the process of self help, some people become "experts" in the problem; must they then leave the group? Or groups tend to "reinvent the wheel", perpetually relearning everything about problems from a feminist, working class, consumer

or black perspective. While Barbara Ehrenreich's and Deidre English's suggestion that we "take what we want of the technology without buying the ideology" sounds good, the full criticism of all professionalism which is inherent in healthy self help may make this difficult.[7]

Furthermore, we still have to fight rampant specialization in self help groups. Granted, DES daughters have different needs from mastectomy patients and from ex-mental patients, but to be effective, self help concerns will need to be linked together in broader analysis of processes and problems. All this must be accomplished while recognizing that people in immediate pain may resent any deviation from their immediate problems.

These are serious drawbacks, not to be ignored. Yet current circumstances suggest that leftists should, still, become involved in many facets of self help. We have the accumulated experience of feminist self help to guide us away from some of the worst pitfalls. We have the undeniable broad public interest in self help to provide a responsive climate for our efforts. Finally, and most importantly, we have a national social and economic situation which may make self help once again a necessity for survival. Inflation and creeping recession have already made daily living more tenuous and pressured. The Proposition 13 approach to social services will make professional supports less available, subject to more competition among those deserving service and more bureaucratization and formalities before services can be delivered. Given such a set of factors, it is not unreasonable for leftists to support and initiate self help efforts as both a broad base for criticism and change in the social service system as well as favorable settings for people to become exposed to socialist and feminist ideas and practice.

The primary base for our involvement in self help groups can be personal. As feminists and socialists most of us experience problems in our lives as women, men, parents, children, lovers, survivors, drinkers, procrastinators, shy people, fat people, lonely people. Joining or starting a self help group can help us as people, not just as activists with an agenda. This has been a major source of strength within the women's movement. Women have helped each other and been helped themselves with some real personal and political issues in their lives. The sharing and loss of isolation which comes from self help activity are real and can provide us with tangible energy and strength. (This is not to say that we cannot foster the creation of self help groups other than those we join. We can; the history of the battered women's groups proves this, but it won't hurt if we get some self help too.)

Because self help groups deal with problems which always contain a political as well as personal component, our political perspectives can be a real asset to such activity. All self help groups contain an implicit criticism of the bureaucratic and professional services. We can play an honest role in bringing this anger and criticism to the surface. Our perspective on why social programs and experts fail may directly help members of the group to stop blaming themselves for whatever problem they have and speed up the development of a social critique within self help groups. It may also help individual group members learn about socialism and feminism in a grounded, not abstract, way. As one woman — not a socialist — described,

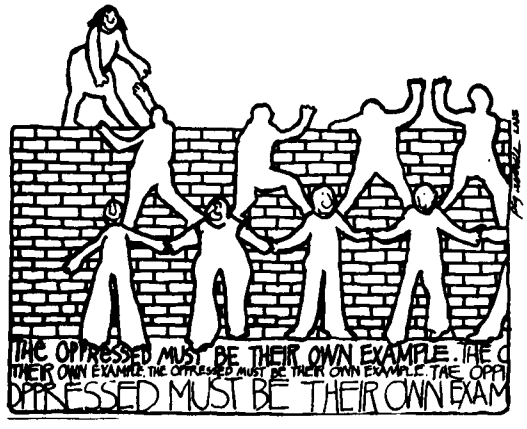
I was always afraid of that stuff: socialism, feminism. It sounded like violence and anger and at least it meant big changes in the world which were beyond me. Then I became involved in a self help group here [at school] where some of the women were feminists and one was a socialist. They talked about social-

ism and feminism as people helping each other, as people trying to make a world where we could relate to other people more equally. That made sense to me and I started getting interested.

Here the natural links between self help and socialism/feminism reemerge. At its best self help provides exactly the kind of equal sharing, helping and caring that we believe a socialist society can embody. The participation in such activity may help newcomers understand what we are working toward and offer the collective experience we all need if we are to continue to think that socialism is indeed possible.

As self help groups grow in their criticism of the health and social welfare system and in individual receptivity to left ideas, socialists and feminists can help to organize the new-found understanding and anger into pressure groups for change. We can also help groups make alliances with service workers who do not see themselves as elitist professionals but rather as workers with a natural alliance to clients. Another way to foster such alliances is to foster workplace self help groups in human service agencies which take up a range of issues, help build new networks, and draw parallels between workplace situations and those of clients. In other workplaces we might use self help groups as another form of organizing which can strengthen the connections and supports which workers can provide each other on the job.

At a less personal level we can fight to preserve the victories of feminist self help — especially the women's shelters and women's clinics and also oppose federal attempts to professionalize and control such services as a condition of funding. Theoretically we might do some analysis which helps us better understand the nature of self help activity: How is self help activity related to the populist trends and values in this country? Can it actually serve as "prefigurative



communism" and allow people to experience, even briefly, the social relations which would exist under socialism? How is it related to anarchism or to the notion of "counter-hegemony" discussed by Gramsci? Although removed from the fray, such theoreticl pursuits could help those engaged in self help better understand the nature of their activity and perhaps assist them in avoiding the frustration which so often accompanies self help work.

Finally, at the least, as socialists and feminists we need to view the impulse which brings people to seek self help instead of professional care as a healthy act which embodies the faith in oneself and one's comrades which is essential if we are ever to have socialism. The left needs to find ways of expressing support for this current widespread energy and to help it grow. Who knows, we might even find a little help for ourselves in the process.

NOTES

1. There is a very large current literature on self help. The leading figures in this area are Frank Riessmann and Alan Gartner, who have written *Self Help in the Human Services* (Josey Bass, 1977) and sponsor the National Self Help

Clearinghouse (CUNY, 33 West 42nd St., Room 1227, New York, NY 10036).

2. For a useful review of this history see Alfred H. Katz and Eugene I. Bender, "Self Help Groups in Western Society: History and Prospects," in *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, XII, no. 3 (1976).

3. Maximillian C. Hurwitz, *The Workers Circle* (New York, 1936).

4. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 2 vols. (New York, 1925).

5. Pauline B. Bart, "Seizing the Means of Reproduction: An Illegal Feminist Abortion Collective — How and Why it Worked," Abraham Lincoln School of Medicine, University of Illinois, Chicago.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Helin I. Marieskind and Barbara Ehrenreich, "Towards Socialist Medicine: The Women's Health Movement," *Social Policy*, September-October, 1975.

Ann Withorn is an editor of *Radical America* and is interested in all aspects of human service. Most of the quotes in the article are taken from comments and papers written by human service workers in a course she taught on "Self Help" at the University of Massachusetts/Boston.

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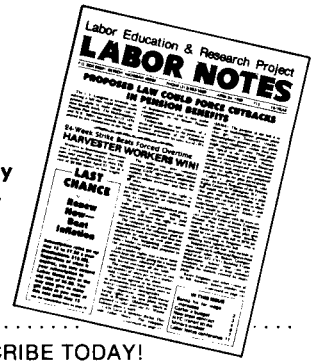

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FROM THE MOVEMENT

BATTERED WOMEN'S REFUGES

Feminist Cooperatives Vs. Social Service Institutions

Lois Ahrens

Refuges for battered women, like rape crisis centers, seem to be undergoing a transformation throughout the United States from feminist, nonhierarchical, community-based organizations to institutionalized social service agencies. The shelter in Austin, Texas provides a typical example of this transformation. As someone who witnessed this process as part of the original Coalition on Battered Women which formed in Austin, Texas in November 1976, and later as one of the shelter's two staff people first hired in May 1977, I have had a long association with the Center, from planning to implementation stages. This experience may help feminists working with battered women avoid the pitfalls we faced.

When we began in November 1976, we were a coalition of twenty women who represented a feminist counseling collective, a women and alcoholism task force, a Chicano group, nurses, social workers, grant writers, a women's center, the local mental health agency, and women who had themselves been battered or who had come from families where mothers or sisters had been battered. We represented a diversity of agencies, ages, ethnicities, and ideologies. Though our differences were abundant, our common goal kept us striving to have everyone's concerns heard. We spent hundreds of hours talking about what we wanted the goals of the group to be because we felt that process to be crucial to creating a non-bureaucratic organization. Through discussion it appeared that we all believed hierarchical models are oppressive to all people, and have historically been especially so to minorities and to women, in particular, battered women. Because of this conviction we believed that the structure of refuges for women should be models for collective work. Each individual should

have her own area of expertise and that work should be done in a collaborative manner. We argued that this method would allow for personal growth for staff members and also serve as a model to women living in the Center by showing that women can work together co-operatively, without bosses.

Further, the group ostensibly agreed that when we create bureaucracies each worker's role in the shelter becomes more specialized and fragmented. Such specialization leads to individual involvement in only one area and creates a familiar syndrome. First, workers begin to feel less responsibility and involvement with the entire program. They begin to view work as a 'job', lacking political purpose. Second, the individual worker feels less empowered and less capable of working as peers with women who come to the refuge. Women are transformed into 'clients' to be routed from one desk or department to another (and nowhere viewed as complex individuals). In this scheme everyone suffers and feminist hopes for new models of support are dashed.

PHASE ONE: THE FORMATIVE STAGE

In the beginning, our group was singly-focused, and functioned in a collective and task-oriented fashion. At the time, there seemed to be general agreement on issues such as the value of a feminist perspective in the shelter, the inclusion of lesbians as visible members of the collective, and the need for workers and residents in the shelter to share in decision-making and leadership. We viewed ourselves as a collective, and a very successful one. Our Center opened in June 1977, funded by county and private mental health funds.

PHASE TWO: SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

Soon after the shelter opened, the twenty coalition members agreed to form a twelve-member Coordinating Committee. The coalition agreed that a smaller number of women was needed to meet more frequently to direct the actual workings of the new Center. They elected twelve of their group according to how much time and energy each could devote to a Coordinating Committee. Three different things began to happen at that point. First, two of the Committee members became paid staff people. Staff was working approximately eighty hours a week and therefore had greater and greater knowledge of the shelter operations. Other Coordinating Committee members began to feel threatened by this shift and started treating the staff as 'paid help'. Simultaneously, many Coordinating Committee members chose not to work directly in the shelter. A division grew between members with day-to-day knowledge of shelter happenings and those who became more divorced from the daily realities faced by paid and nonpaid staff. Secondly, many of the original Coalition members who identified themselves as radical feminists became involved in other projects instead of continuing with the Center. They felt they had worked to establish the shelter, but were not interested in committing time to its daily operation. This created a definite tilt in ideological perspective on the Coordinating Committee and a significant lessening of support for the few remaining radical feminists. Third, the Center for Battered Women began its own process of incorporating as a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

PHASE THREE: BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Until that point we operated under the tax-exempt status of the Austin Women's Center. Six months after the Austin Center for Battered Women began its own incorporation process, elections were held to choose a board of directors. Unfortunately, the first board was not representative of the community. Ballots were sent to those on the mailing list and to all those

who had participated in volunteer training. Individuals who merely "expressed interest in the issue of battered women" composed one part of the electorate. Women volunteered to run for directors. This loose system allowed board members to be selected who had had no previous contact with the Center or whose knowledge of the Center was only through friends of the incumbent board members. Volunteers in the shelter were already working overtime, and most could not be convinced of the necessity of volunteer representation on the board. The majority of volunteers had had little or no previous experience as volunteers or as board members, since they were former battered women who were divorced, working full-time jobs, and caring for their children. Most felt their primary interest was in working directly with battered women in the shelter, not in serving on a board.

This vague and unrepresentative election allowed for board members to be elected who represented no community or group, making them responsible or responsive to no one but themselves. This problem grew when two minority women (both volunteers with a community base), feeling overlooked and misunderstood, resigned from the board. The board, rather than address the issues raised by their resignations or call new elections, replaced them by appointing two personal friends, an Anglo male lawyer and an Anglo woman.

The staff viewed this as a consolidation of power by the board, and challenged the appointment rather than election of new board members. The staff protested a number of issues. First, no attempt was made to fill the vacancies with other Black and Chicano women involved with the shelter. Second, the board was not addressing the issues the two women had raised. Third, there had been no precedent for having men on the board. The staff indicated to the board that it was essential for them to examine their own racism and the Center's credibility in the Black and Chicano communities. Further, we were concerned that the replacement board members had no ties to the daily operation of the shelter. The board responded to our concerns by sending letters to the ex-board members thanking them for their past work. Both women continued to work in the Center.

Further, staff recommendations that all board members participate minimally in the eighteen-hour volunteer training was turned down. Board members were elected and served without prior knowledge of the Coalition's original plan for the working of the shelter. The board/staff division became sharper as fewer board members maintained contact with battered women at the shelter. This division and the fact that the more strongly feminist women had already left the original group and so did not run for the board, helped to solidify the more professional, liberal feminist block on the board. This segregation of board members from the program paved the way for what was to come.

PHASE FOUR: ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

During this time the Center was growing in the scope of services and programming it offered women and children. The number of staff began to expand from the original two. In July 1977 we hired the first full-time counselor, and by October five staff people funded by CETA were hired. During the same month the board decided that the Center needed an administrator who would report to and make contact with the funding agencies, keep track of the finances, and oversee the Center's administration. An administrator was hired in November and the staff of eight women was divided into two work groups: those involved in funding, administration, and the running of the house, and those who came into direct contact with the women and children using the services of the Center. The latter came to be known as direct services or program staff. The direct services staff consisted of myself as director, two counselors, a childcare worker, and a lawyer/advocate. It became clear to those of us in services that the administrator's principal concern and involvement was the board. We, on the other hand, were concentrating on providing good services, training large numbers of volunteers, and expanding our funding, and felt that this focus would speak for the validity of the internal structure of the shelter.

The administrator never had been a battered woman, nor had she been through the volunteer training. She had little or no contract with women residing at the Center. In response to her approach, two groups developed. One camp, composed of the direct services staff and a large number of volunteers, was collectivist and feminist; the other, made up of the board and administrator, placed greater value on those with credentials and on a hierarchical structure. Under the influence of the administrator, the board of the Center for Battered Women was beginning to push for *one* director. The stated rationale for this was that other agencies would be better able to work with an organizational structure similar to their own, and that funding sources would be reluctant to grant funds to any group with an 'alternative' form of organization. This seemed at the least ironic, since all the funding we had received prior to this organizational change had been granted because or our demonstration of the direct relationship between a nonhierarchical structure and the power issues of violence against women. We had argued that the Center should provide a mode of cooperative, nonhierarchical work, and that the one-up, one-down model was counterproductive in working to change women's (and especially battered women's) lives. Nonetheless, in February 1978, the board voted to make the administrator the director.

PHASE FIVE: DISINTEGRATION

The first step was to demote and render powerless the staff who had been instrumental in formulating the original program and poli-

K. Kollwitz.

cies — in this case, the direct service staff. This was accomplished by rewriting job descriptions into jobs containing very specific and fragmented functions. Policy-making power went completely to the director. Staff meetings became little more than lectures by the director, allowing no avenue for staff input. I resigned. Three weeks later the board, with guidance from the director, fired one counselor, the childcare worker, and the lawyer. Two of them were dismissed for 'insubordination'. The Center was left with one counselor, who then resigned, leaving none of the original direct service staff. The task of ridding the Center of the original staff was complete.

There were many reactions to this upheaval. Upon resigning I wrote a letter to all volunteers stating the reasons for my resignation and listing the changes which I thought would be forthcoming. Meetings with staff, a few residents and as many as forty volunteers followed. In these meetings volunteers challenged the right of the board to make the changes. They discussed the composition of the board and the resignations of its two volunteers. Volunteers pressed for more representation on the board. The CETA workers hired lawyers and began to appeal their firing to the City of Austin. Ex-staff and volunteers approached funding sources, warning of changes in policy which would have a detrimental effect on the program. Volunteers and ex-staff began to pressure the Women's Center (which was still the parent group) to exercise its authority over the Center for Battered Women board. Joint Women's Center and CBW board meetings were held, with as many as sixty people attending. However, the Women's Center board finally opted to not exercise its control, stating that it had not entered into the internal workings of the CBW board prior to this, and would not do so now. Funding sources monitored the events, but felt it was not wise to intervene into intraorganizational disputes. Many volunteers withdrew completely, feeling the situation to be hopeless. The fired CETA staff appeals dragged on for more than a year and finally, after many hearings, the staff decided that the issues had been lost and trivialized in the process. 'Winning', they felt, would mean nothing. They dropped their cases. The board emerged stronger than ever. All the opposition staff and volunteers were gone from the Center.

PHASE SIX: DISCREDITING AND MALIGNING

The next step was to find a way to discredit the program and policies of the original staff. The most expedient way of doing this was to let it be known through the informal social service network that the director and her allies had prevented a lesbian (translated 'man-hating') takeover. This was said despite the fact that among the five staff and forty volunteers who left the Center perhaps not more than five were lesbian. With this one word — lesbian — no other explanation became necessary. The validity of the charge remained unquestioned since none of the original staff or volunteers remained. Other agencies willingly took the shelter into the social service fold.

PHASE SEVEN: THE AFTERMATH

The following is a summary of events in the Center since the transition from a collective to a hierarchical structure. The progression toward developing a model of a 'professionalized' social service institution divorced from the community it was to service is evident.

The new leadership of the Center for Battered Women has said that it is very important to separate the issue of feminism and sexism from that of battered women. With the new federal emphasis on the nuclear family, the Center chooses to look at battered women as a 'family violence problem', but refuses to con-

sider the societal, cultural, and political implications of why women are the ones in the family so often beaten. Soon after the original staff people left the shelter, men began to be trained and to serve as volunteers working directly with the women in the house. In the past, those who felt that men should not work in the house as volunteers compromised with those who felt that positive male role-models are necessary. The result was that men were included in regular volunteer training and received additional training to work with children in the house. Now, however, men are also answering the telephone hot-line and staffing the Center.

In the view of the founders of the Center, it is not a good idea for men to work in a shelter for battered women. Their presence can reinforce old patterns for battered women. Male volunteers and/or staff can easily be cast (or cast themselves) in the role of rescuer, encouraging a dependent role. Just when they need to be developing their own strengths, battered women can focus their attention on a man as the person most likely to solve their problems. This helps to perpetuate a continued cycle of dependence and inequality — two of the causes of battering.

The Center for Battered Women has undergone the transformation to a social service agency by becoming more and more removed from its 'client' population. The feminist ideology brought insights into programming for battered women. This belief demanded that staff and volunteers not make separations between themselves and battered women. We were able to integrate an understanding of the oppression and violence against women with a concern for the individual woman. This same ideology created a shelter based on the opinion that informal worker/resident relationships, self-help and peer-support would be more effective in fulfilling some of the immediate needs of battered women than rigid, bureaucratic structures. For example, women now living at the center must make an appointment to see a counselor days ahead of time. In the past, this type of interaction between the staff and a woman could just as easily have taken place at the kitchen table as in an appointed time in a more formal office setting.

There is now a distancing of staff from women who stay at the shelter. Direct service people complement policy and procedures made by an administrator and board which is divorced from the group they are intending to serve. Little room remains for the less formal, more supportive sharing which was an original goal.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There are some lessons from our experience which may help insure that feminist-based shelters remain places that are responsive to the needs of battered women:

1. It is essential that women who organize shelters have an identifiable feminist analysis, which encompasses an understanding of the ways in which that analysis affects services to battered women. In addition, it is crucial that this specific analysis be part of all board orientations, volunteer training, and public education. This policy is necessary in order to make all who come in contact with the shelter understand that feminist ideology is not a tangential issue, but basic and essential. It will serve the dual purpose of informing possible shelter participants of the ideological basis of the program, as well as continually placing the issue of battered women in a feminist cultural and political context.

2. The issue of lesbianism has lost none of its volatility in recent years. Lesbians have continually taken part in all aspects of the women's movement, and the battered women's movement is no exception. It is therefore imperative that each group or collective initially acknowl-

edge lesbians as a valuable part of their organization as one way of eliminating lesbianism as a negative issue. This can be accomplished by publicly encouraging the active participation of lesbians as staff, board, and volunteers. Further, position papers outlining the ideological framework of the shelter must include the contribution of lesbians in all aspects of the shelter program.

3. As feminists we realize how vital the inclusion of ex-battered women, working class, minority women, and volunteers are in forming a community-based governing board. Too often, these women have little money, little time, and little children! While their inclusion may not guarantee the development of a feminist analysis, it is a step toward keeping services tied to needs.

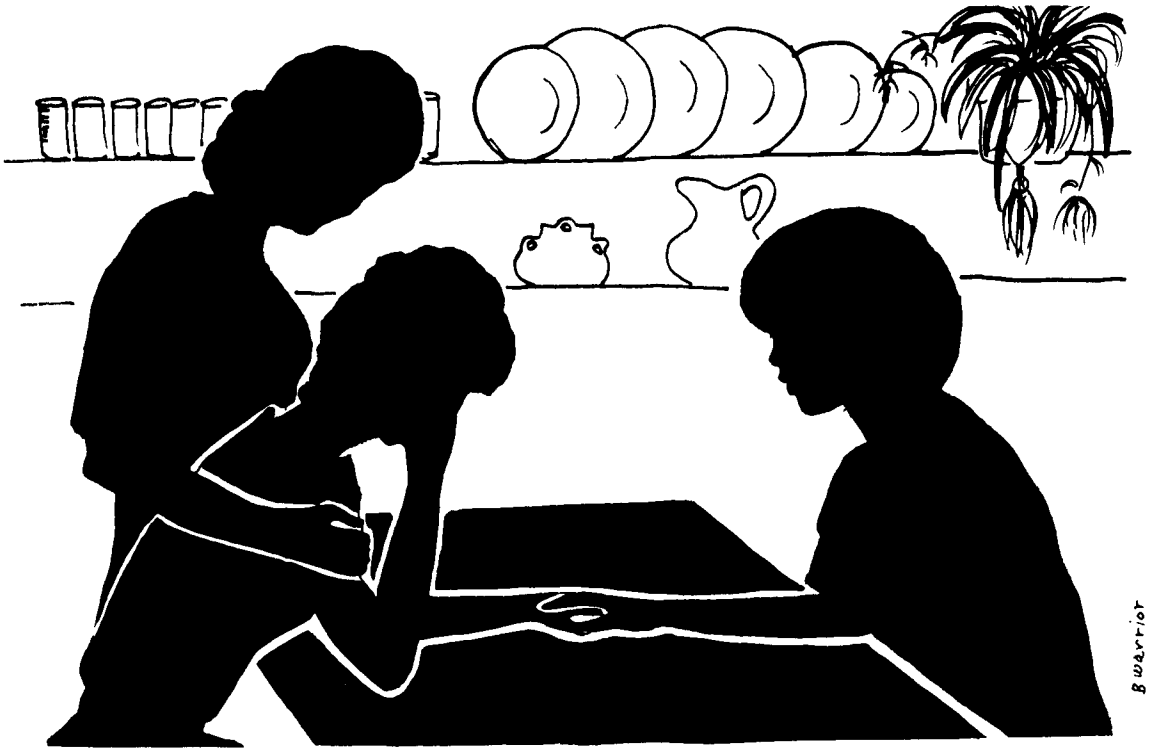
4. Those of us who have worked developing refuges for battered women know we cannot exist in a service vacuum. In order for a shelter to be effective, we must initiate and maintain working relationships with the police, courts, hospitals, welfare departments, and mental health services. We must also, however, maintain our own organizational integrity. We can work with the police or welfare, but we also must retain enough freedom to be able to be an effective and strong advocate for women who are beaten. Links are vital, but we must be cautious, and understand the tenuous line between working with existing agencies and being seduced by the 'respectability' and seeming advantages these law enforcement and social service agencies appear to offer, often at the expense of the battered women. The feminist stance and advocacy role must not be diffused.

5. Feminist shelters must join other feminist services and groups in providing a base of support for one another. The roles and functions of each group may be different, but the shared ideological base is of critical importance. This alliance will provide an alternative to the traditional social service network. It is important in terms of referrals, but even more vital because it provides a constituency which can understand the broader implications of the shelter's work. Indeed, should they be needed, other groups can be political allies as well as friends.

CONCLUSIONS

The lure of building powerful social service fiefdoms is not gender-based. The shelter movement will attract women (and men) who view these services as stepping stones to personal career goals. It is vital for us to recognize that many in local, state or federal agencies will more easily accept that which is already familiar, those who do not threaten their own beliefs. The community support needed to maintain a feminist-based shelter for battered women requires political sophistication. Self-education, our own raised consciousness, and good faith are not enough. Consensus decision-making works only if everybody is playing by and believes in the same rules. Our unhappy experience shows that battered women's shelters committed to the full empowerment of women will remain feminist in content and approach only by constant discussion, analysis, and vigilance.

LOIS AHRENS identifies herself as part of the radical feminist movement. She was a founder and is an active member of Womenspace, a feminist action group and counselling collective in Austin, Texas. She would like to hear from people who have had experiences similar to those described in her article; and she can be contacted through RA.



NOTES ON RACE, MOTHERING, AND CULTURE IN THE SHELTER MOVEMENT

Renae Scott

In our struggle to open shelters, to stay open and to provide safety for battered women, we constantly make choices that determine the priorities of our projects. There is always one more thing to do — a meeting, a crisis, a class to help us learn how to run the shelter more effectively, and a wide variety of issues to deal with.

In some shelters, people feel there is no need to deal with race, race issues or racism. As a Third World Woman I feel this is a mistake. Even if there were apparently no visible Third World Women in your community, that is no excuse...

Has adequate outreach been done to alert Third World Women to your shelter? Has your staff been sensitized around race issues and language barriers? Racism takes various forms. It could involve out and out remarks — about different kinds of foods, values and communities — or something more subtle. And both are devastating to the woman on the receiving end. Racism can and does affect the running of shelters. For example, when you define and develop what you consider to be the most necessary services to meet a battered woman's most basic needs, do you consider some bilingual staff members to be a basic necessity?...

In our shelter, our biggest discussions have

been around how different cultures view discipline... The next biggest issue has been around food... Do the surroundings — pictures, books, magazines, etc., reflect other women's experiences? Do books reflect multi-racial children — just as you would have them to be non-sexist?... Have groups come in to do training around Race? Deal with it now before you have to — before it becomes a problem in your shelter...

In Urban areas our battle is constant — never being able to put it lower on the priority scale. You may think, isn't the life of a battered woman overwhelming enough, leaving the battering situation? Do we have to put that on her head too? I think *yes*. We in the shelters are about *change* — changing each woman's life — and the world she will be in after leaving the shelter will be different also. She may work for the first time in her life, and Third World women may work in the same workplace. It's a start to learn about other people's lives, and at some point women realize there is a commonality in their lives, i.e., leaving the battering situations, and support can be gotten from that alone.

—from "Race and the Shelter Movement," National Communications Network for the elimination of violence against women, 1978.

On many levels the role of mothers and mothering has not been adequately addressed in the women's movement in general and in the battered women's movement in particular, and ha been paid only lip service.

The role of mother is an overwhelming, awesome responsibility... If the movement is about choices and choosing, choosing to be a mother should be a role that the movement and women in general respect and support. There are various organizations and support groups within the women's movement that address women's health issues, going back to school, assertiveness training, etc. But there are very few if any support groups around raising children and dealing with that stress of still trying to be part of a movement...

The issue of mothering touches the shelter movement on several levels. One is that there are various philosophies in different shelters concerning salaries. Should all staff people be paid the same whether or not they have children, and should mothers receive special benefits? Does the shelter pay a living wage or are the salaries prohibitive to mothers; in which case, could supplements be provided to mothers in the form of childcare or reimbursement for childcare expenses?

The obstacles for a battered woman to overcome are numerous. To add children to the list may only add more. Be sensitive to a mother's needs. Landlords may not want to rent to women with children. Help her fight that. There's also the question of her children missing school, and organizing tutoring in the shelter. In addition, it is important to provide staff with basic information about early childhood development, to better equip the staff to deal with mothers and children in stressful or crisis situations.

If we are to have many different women within the movement, we must realize that issues concerning mothers and mothering must be confronted and resolved by all those involved.

—from "Mothers and Mothering," NCN, 1979.

Shelters, especially those in the cities or close to major cities, often house racial/ethnic groups of women. This "melting pot" of groups sometimes simmers near the blow-up point and nowhere is this more evident than in the kitchen. Women who were silently tolerating each other or separating within their own racial/ethnic groups openly begin to reveal their feelings.

The kitchen becomes a battleground of ethnic

righteousness. Women wrinkle their noses in disgust at each others' food or outright refuse to eat. The children sit watching and listening, learning well the lessons of prejudice.

...The phrase, "If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen" is inappropriate for shelters because the kitchen is where everything happens. Women support each other, there they cry with each other, there they prepare the food and eat. It also gets very hot and heavy in the kitchen.

Food is an issue that people can relate to easily. It's an emotional issue, and compounded with women from different races and class backgrounds can be a very explosive one...

... Now it's my turn to cook. In my culture, beans can be a soup, eaten alone or with other dishes, but they must be seasoned, seasoned with salt, pepper, maybe salt pork or bacon or ham hocks. "Ham hocks," you say, "what are those?" How would most of you react to ham hocks? Well, that's the same way most women react to them, too. They either say that they've never seen them or tasted them, or they refuse to eat them, and the children often do the same. If this is the way you eat, the attack on your food becomes a personal attack...

Americans in general are spoiled. Many people feel that ethnic foods are only to be eaten in restaurants, rather than encouraging their children and themselves to respect a culture different than theirs through food served in the home...

...Shelter staff could begin dealing openly with the situation, instead of ignoring racial/ethnic tensions or lightly smoothing over bad feelings. Staff people could use conversation at dinner or some other forum such as support groups or house meetings as an opportunity to increase the women's understanding of each others' differences, and to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about other groups' customs, behavior and style of living.

...Food symbolizes strongly held cultural beliefs or reflect racial lifeways and getting women to be open to not only trying different foods, but more importantly, reassessing and changing negative attitudes and feelings about others, will be a slow process...

—from "Culture in the Kitchen," with Curdina Hill, *Aegis*, 1979.

Passages excerpted from articles in *Aegis*, a magazine on ending violence against women, P.O. Box 21033, Washington, D.C. 20009.

RENAE SCOTT has worked with Casa Myrna Vazquez and Transition House, two Boston-area shelters for battered women, and has written for Aegis, Sojourner *and edited a pamphlet on community outreach to Third World women.*

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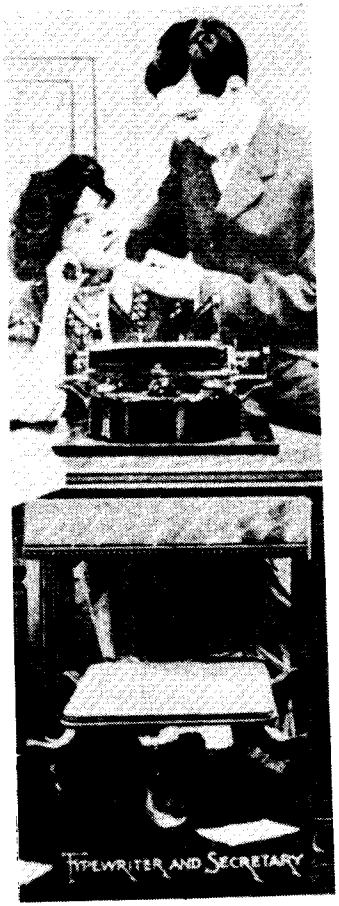
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Roslyn L. Feldberg

"And now the typewriter girls of Montreal, Canada have the fever and are talking about forming a union. Say, girls, don't*; take my advice and each of you find some nice young man and form a union of two, for life; that's the best form of union."*[1]

We do not know whether or not the "typewriter girls" of Montreal took the editor's advice, but we do know that by the end of the 1920s, the "fever" was spent, leaving few traces of labor unions among clerical workers. Despite numerous struggles and personal sacrifices in the previous three decades, only one union, the Bookkeeper's, Stenographer's and Accountant's Local #12646 of New York, continued into the 1930s as an active, vital union. Even as of 1977, only 8.2% of all clerical workers were unionized, and the proportion among women was certainly lower still.[2] Although this article deals only with the period 1900-1930, many of the conditions which hindered unionization then continue to exist today.

I. INTRODUCTION

How can we analyze this low level of unionization? It can be understood largely as a consequence of the response to women clerical workers by their male "comrades" in the labor movement. Men believed that this group of workers was "unorganizable," and therefore not worth a great deal of effort to organize. This view not only prevented labor from wholeheartedly supporting the organizing efforts which were made during this period,

but it also formed the basis of most subsequent relationships between labor unions and women clerical workers.

Why were women clerical workers then seen as unorganizable? The answer is that women clerical workers were different from other workers: they were white-collar, mostly white, mostly native born, mostly young and single and, most important, women; whereas other workers were blue collar, often immigrant, mostly married, and most important, male. Union men saw these differences as a barrier to organizing. First, they assumed that women were less organizable because they were women: their 'traditional' place in family life and their expectations of wifehood and motherhood were thought to reduce their long term interest in employment and, therefore, to reduce their interest in organizing. Second, at that time clerical work was seen as relatively good work for women, and it was assumed that people (and especially women) with good jobs would not organize, especially when they could be easily replaced.[3] Third, clerical work, because it was white-collar and done in offices, was not seen as "real work," and clerical workers were not seen as "real workers." Only blue-collar or manual workers were expected to organize, while clerical workers were expected to dissociate themselves from "real" workers and from unions.

There was some truth to these assumptions. The characteristics of women clerical workers were as described. Clerical work was relatively good work for women at that time,[4] and it did represent a degree of upward mobility for women who otherwise would have worked in factories or in domestic service. Some clerical workers probably did see themselves as separate from and better than "workers." However, if we accept this line of reasoning, we would not expect to find any organizing among clerical workers — and we do find some, even in the face of an indifferent and often hostile labor movement. That finding suggests that the usual explanations of the low level of unionization among clerical workers do not tell the whole story. This paper adds new information and new analysis to that story.

The situation of women clerical workers in the early 1900s has a new importance today. Once again there are attempts to organize clerical workers — again, often initiated and supported by women outside the major labor unions — and again we hear prophesies that clerical workers will not organize. These prophesies reflect the same stereotypical notions about women clerical workers prevalent at the turn of the century. Understanding early organizing efforts, their strengths and their defeats, may help us to avoid recreating the conditions that contributed to their failure.

II. EARLY ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE CLERICAL WORKERS

1. Organization before 1900

Interestingly, the first attempts to organize clerical workers came at the time when women were entering clerical occupations. The most active organizing appears to have been among stenographers — the group which, combined with "typewriters," was over 60% female before the turn of the century.

By 1890, stenographers in many states and cities had joined together to form "associations." At least thirty-four associations made public reports of their meetings, and their statements of purpose were similar. The Reading, Pennsylvania Stenographers' Association announced as its object: "to bind together all the stenographers and typewriters for mutual improvement, sociability, unity and harmony of feeling with a view to combine their efforts for the maintenance of practical efficiency in the stenographic professions." Its membership was

seventy-five, and of its fourteen officers, five were women. An association in Chicago certified its members and assisted them in obtaining positions. Several of the associations commented on the need to *maintain wage levels.*

Formed in response to business conditions that expanded opportunities in clerical work and, at the same time, led to a mushrooming of commercial colleges whose graduates threatened to cheapen the field of stenography, these early associations were essentially craft unions. Individual (male) stenographers argued against "public school masters 'boosting' hundreds of other fellows [sic] up the same stump..." by teaching shorthand in the schools[5]; and the associations grew increasingly militant about the need to control entry into their craft. In 1890, the Grand Chief Stenographer of the Order of Railway and Transportation Stenographers wrote to the editor of the clerical trade magazine informing him that the requirement of 'teaching shorthand to others' had been eliminated from the constitution of the Order. "Any person with any sense at all would not be guilty of injuring his interests by increasing the supply."[6]

In the 1890s, unlike the previous decade, there were no statements blaming women for the difficulties facing stenographers, nor were there calls for their exclusion from the field or from the associations. Instead, an 1891 call for a national association explicitly included phonographers, typewriters and "all worthy members of the professions." The problem of low wages was blamed on "incompetents who will work for correspondingly low wages." The source of these "incompetents" was alleged to be the "three month schools." The failure to blame women specifically suggests that by now the job market was sexually segregated: that women were *entering new positions, not competing with men.*

2. Sex Segregation in Clerical Occupations, 1900-1910

As more women entered the clerical occupations, more explicit patterns of sex segregation were established. Most women entered the newer occupations of stenography and typewriting, while the traditional jobs of general clerk and bookkeeper remained male strongholds.[7] However, even within stenography, sex-based mechanisms of exclusion barred women from the best-paying jobs, reserving these for men. Overall, this pattern of sex segregation kept women in the lower levels of the occupation, making them more vulnerable to employers, more dependent on marriage, and less likely to establish ties with those male clerical workers who had had organizing experience.

The justifications for barring women varied from their competence to their moral purity. Managers for the railroads argued that women did not understand the business as well as men did. In 1902, the president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad announced that no more women would be hired as stenographers in the operating departments because he wanted "all clerks to fit themselves for higher places..." and believed that women cannot "grasp the railroad business in the way the men do."[8] A year later, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad announced that it had "nothing against women, but that they stand in the way of regular promotion among the rank and file."[9] Other railroads were expected to adopt the same policy.

Saying that women "stand in the way of regular promotions" indicates that women were not promoted. They were hired as stenographers at a particular level and were expected to remain there until they left the organization. Restricting the levels for which they were hired guaranteed that there would be no opportunities for promotion for women stenographers on the railroads. Although the brotherhoods of

Typists and clerks at Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., 1897.

male railroad clerks had been organized for at least a decade, they did not protest these limitations.

Women stenographers were also being excluded from jobs in the courts. Here the rationale was based on women's moral purity and propensity to marry. One writer argued that women stenographers were "innocent" and should not be exposed to the harsh realities of the courtroom, "an atmosphere of such distressing controversies," while the Nassau County Clerk (New York) announced an end to the hiring of "girl typewriters" because they marry and leave their positions.[10]

The more women entered the occupation, the more rigid distinctions between men's and women's positions became. Separate, non-competing labor markets were institutionalized. In the federal Civil Service, men's stenographic positions typically paid higher wages ($900 vs. $600 per year) and offered more opportunities for advancement than women's positions. In industry, too, men got preference. The Remington Typewriter Company employment bureaus announced that over 2,000 requests for male stenographers were refused in 1901 alone due to insufficient supply.[11] Women could not apply for those jobs.

Everywhere the rationale was the same: the "girl" would marry, or at least expect to marry, and leave the job; therefore, there was no point in permitting her to occupy a position that could be held by a man, who would see it as the basis of his future career. This logic served to rationalize both paying women less and reserving the best positions for men, a combination of actions which, in turn, increased the economic pressure on young women to marry. In a crowded labor market, this combination insured a changing but ample supply of low-paid women clerical workers and of young women eager to become wives. In addition, it separated women into a distinct group within the occupation. This very separateness served

to keep women in their place. It cut them off from craft traditions, as well as from the organizational experience of the previously organized male clerical workers, and thus made it more difficult for women to organize or to gain control of entry into women's jobs in the occupation.

3. Women Begin to Organize, 1900-1930

In this context, women clerical workers began to organize. They formed their own associations of stenographers, typewriters, bookkeepers, and other clerical occupations. Interestingly, their first organizations were *not* labor unions, but mutual benefit societies. In 1902, 600 girl stenographers from Toledo, Ohio, were "seriously considering starting and maintaining a restaurant in that city for their own use."[12] Pittsburgh stenographers "subscribed to the stock of a cooperative lunchroom for female stenographers and typewriters only," no dish to cost more than five cents. The common problems female stenographers and typewriters faced were beginning to evoke a collective response.

Soon women clerical workers turned their attention to labor unions. In 1903, "stenographers and typewriters of a feminine persuasion" formed a labor union in Worcester, Massachusetts. 1904 saw delegates from office locals in Washington, D.C., and Indianapolis seated at the AFL national convention.[13] In that same year, typewriters in New York held a "secret meeting" to discuss unionization. Fifty men and women attended and agreed that typewriters and stenographers of both sexes should be admitted as members.[14]

That 1904 attempt did not succeed. In 1908, however, a new organization was formed which included "the women stenographers, typewriters and bookkeepers in Greater New York."[15] This union, open only to women, (under a local charter from the American Federation of Labor) was called the Bookkeepers and Accountants Union No. 1 of New York. The organizing campaign was headed by Helen Marot, executive secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, and three assistants — all members of the League. Principal purposes of the union were regulating the hours of employment and improving the conditions of women workers in offices. They chose as their slogan "equal pay for equal work," comparing themselves to hod carriers, whose work required less skill but received more pay, and indicating that they would struggle to defend this slogan. Miss Marot explained: "We have incorporated the equal pay for equal work plan in the constitution of the union and we shall have no controversy with the men on that account."[16]

It is not surprising that the first major campaign to organize clerical workers took place under the auspices of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), rather than an established union. The unions were simply not organizing women clerical workers. Male industrial workers were their priority. If any organization were to support organizing among clerical workers, it would be the WTUL, which held a unique place in the labor movement. It was an organization of women, feminists and unionists, which "attempted to serve as a link between women workers and the labor movement and as a focal point for unorganized women interested in unionism."[17] Its members, drawn from both upper-class and working-class women, sought to create an egalitarian organization. They aimed to introduce unionism to unskilled and semiskilled women workers, and to help these women build unions — while at the same time maintaining connections to the male-dominated labor movement which so often ignored these women. With these aims, it is not surprising that the WTUL supplied the first known organizers to work with women clerical workers.

Soon after, women in other cities joined the organizing effort. A Chicago local of the Stenographers Union began in 1911 with 300 "girls." They aimed to have 10,000 members within a year, to enforce a minimum wage of $12/week with one year's experience, and to offer their members a free employment agency, night school in "subjects bearing on their work," physical culture classes, free medical service by women physicians, and an "out-of-work" (unemployment) fund.[18] The emphasis on *girls* in the announcement, and on medical care by women physicians, suggests a "women only" organization. The list of demands hints at their working conditions: an overcrowded labor market, low wages, and problems with unemployment. Inclusion of physical culture classes may reflect an association with the settlement house movement, as well as the Chicago chapter of the WTUL.

By 1912, "union fever" among clerical workers had run up against some obstacles to organizing. The founding of a new union for stenographers and typists in Kansas City gave organizer Helen Marot an opportunity to argue that this latest example was evidence that clerical workers can and should organize.[19] Marot described the union's founder, and its members, as "exceptional women... They are, in fact, so superior, that they can afford to belong to a labor union, or anything else for that matter which seems good in itself... And that is the lesson that our pretentious office workers have to learn. We are just people, but people with common interests so vital they will, if we let them, break through all the petty social distinctions and place us alongside of real men and women in touch with life." Marot saw in women clerical workers a sense of social distinction that separated them from "real" working class men and women and prevented them from recognizing their interests in unionization. To her, this was a blindness clerical workers could ill afford.

Despite the problems Marot saw, the "fever" was not spent. Another new Stenographers and Typists Union formed in St. Louis in 1912, and the Chicago union, now working closely with the WTUL, began a campaign to encourage men as well as women to join. Even during World War I, union activity continued. A new Boston local Accountants and Office Employees #14965, formed in 1916 with the assistance of the WTUL, announced a program of "street meetings" for the spring. Meanwhile, the Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York unions remained active. The New York union, known as the Bookkeepers, Stenographers and Accountants Union, was said to be "one of the most flourishing unions" that met at WTUL headquarters.[20]

The 1920s saw a decline in organizing activities among clerical workers.[21] No new unions were formed and only a few major campaigns are reported. The Bookkeepers, Stenographers and Accountants Union of New York continued to be the most active union, but its biggest and most successful campaign, the 1923 organization of bank clerks employed in the "labor banks" concentrated on male clerical workers. In contrast, the unsuccessful 1927 drive to organize Metropolitan Life Insurance Company resulted in the firing of at least one woman organizer, who was later pictured with three other organizers holding placards in a demonstration which urged office workers to join the union.[22] The only other city in which union activity definitely continued was Boston. Here, the Stenographers Union was said to be conducting "an aggressive campaign" and to have hired a special organizer for the work, following up on earlier success in the nearby town of Quincy.

Despite these drives, the vast majority of clerical workers remained unorganized. This failure caused Rose Schneiderman, in her presi-

dential address to the 1929 WTUL National Convention, to single out clerical work as one of three special fields requiring "intensive cultivation."[23]

III. ORGANIZING: CONTEXTS AND PROBLEMS 1900-1930

It is clear from the number of organizations that were formed and re-formed during the teens and twenties, and from the current organizing drives among clerical workers, that the early efforts did not succeed in establishing lasting unions.

If current efforts are to be more successful, the problems of the earlier attempts must be understood. On the one hand, it is always difficult to organize previously unorganized workers. The possibility of success is never clear, while the possibilities of failure or loss of a job are very evident. In the period prior to the National Labor Relations Act, these latter possibilities seemed all the more likely, whatever the group of workers being organized.

On the other hand, organizing clerical workers also seemed to present particular problems. The most obvious of these problems — the attitude among clerical workers that unions were for factory workers — was recognized by the clerical organizers and outsiders alike. As Alice Bean, a clerical organizer affiliated with the WTUL said, "... average American office workers... do not feel that they are 'wage earners' but have a notion that they are professionals and, therefore, it would be degrading to join a union. They leave unions to the factory workers."[24] Unfortunately, the distance between clerical workers and the unions was assumed to be the product solely of the ideas and life situations of the clerical workers.

But attitudes are not born in isolation. They develop in particular social and historical circumstances. In this case, those circumstances included the structure of offices and economics

Office scene, 1900.

1. The immediate context — the set-up of offices, economy of clerical work, and life situations of clerical workers.

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The set-up of offices in this period created some special problems for clerical organizing. A small number of workers were scattered among a great many offices. In the small offices, the clerical workers were likely to have closer personal ties to their bosses than to clerical workers from other offices. Even in large offices, the clerical workers were often separated into different areas which afforded little opportunity to get to know each other, while in the early clerical pools, favoritism and competition for the best jobs undermined solidarity. It is true that many industrial workers were also located in small shops, but the situation for clerical workers was extreme. Industrial workers, even in small shops, were likely to have at least one or two workmates with whom they could freely associate, while a typist in a small office could easily be the only woman, cut off from the company of a male bookkeeper or general clerk.

If the structure of office work separated

office workers from each other, it insulated them almost completely from factory workers. They worked in a different setting (usually cleaner), had different hours, did different tasks (although the degree of division of labor and the productivity measures might be similar), and had closer contact with management. Furthermore, they rarely spoke with factory workers in the course of their work, even when they worked in the offices of the factory. Thus, the presence of unions among the factory workers did not necessarily bring the unions closer to the office workers, and may have added to the view of unions as alien.

The economics of clerical work in this period also created barriers to unionization. Clerical work was expanding rapidly, but so was the clerical labor force. Wages were low and declining and fears of unemployment were very great.[25] The pattern was an extension of that noted by male stenographers in the 1890s. As one office worker wrote to the editor of *Life and Labor* in 1912:

> *... a younger element is more and more crowding in, who because of inexperience and inefficiency, and mostly because of financial pressure, accept the most paltry wages. What follows — is that really experienced and qualified stenographers and clerks have a hard fight, getting even twelve dollars.'*[26]

The workers had no control over entry to the occupation. Certification was by high school diploma, a credential widely available to native-born young women, or by the diploma of a "business college" run by private entrepreneurs. There were no formal apprenticeships in clerical work in general, and few informal ones in the jobs open to women. The supply of young women prepared for office jobs was more likely to reflect the effectiveness of the schools' (public and private) publicity than the availability of jobs.

Finally, the life situations of clerical workers probably did dampen their enthusiasm for organizing. While they have been accused of viewing their work as "professional," it is more likely that many saw it more as an interval between childhood and marriage.[27] While this attitude did not make organizing easy, it did not necessarily prevent it. The same absence of "responsibilities" (especially financial ones) and of expectations for long-term employment that may lead young, single workers to accept poor working conditions may also leave them freer to be militant.

2. The Social Context: "Women shouldn't..."

One factor that affects workers' responses is their perception of how appropriate and effective unions are for workers in their position. On this point, clerical workers received little encouragement. Unions were viewed as organizations for factory workers and as organizations for men. Joining a union meant proclaiming one's status as a worker. Women were not "supposed" to be "real workers." They were supposed to be working at a job only until they got married and had children. If their family circumstances were such that they "had to work" beyond that time, that was judged an unfortunate situation, but it still did not make them "real workers." Thus there were no grounds for the women to be militant, fighting for rights as workers. Nor did they have access to an alternative view. Everywhere they looked — the church, the newspapers, the social reformers, other women, even the male unionists in their own families — the message was the same: organizing unions was not appropriate for respectable women.

Journalists, reformers, and other voices of popular culture sympathized with the plight of employed women and argued for improve-

ments. Special investigations documented both the terrible working conditions women faced and the low wages, primarily in factories, but in shops and offices as well. Appropriate methods of redress, however, were considered important. Improvements were to be won in ladylike fashion, through the exercise of quiet influence and moral suasion among men who would champion their cause. Women were not to act militantly or to wield power directly. They were to be protected, not to become their own guardians.

The paradox was clear. Lillian Wald wrote in 1906: "Protective legislation is evidence of a public sentiment as to the necessity of guarding the interests of women... yet, [there is] a seemingly deep-rooted prejudice against regulation by [women] themselves when expressed in trade unionism, a curious confusion of democratic principles." Such a prejudice seriously restricted organizing among "respectable" single women, especially when so many of them lived at home under the authority of parents or relatives.[28]

3. Labor Movement Context: "Clerical workers wouldn't ..."

If the prevailing social opinion of the day was that women were not "real workers" and "shouldn't" organize, the view of organized labor seemed to add the element that women, and women clerical workers in particular, "wouldn't" organize, and that whether or not they tried made little difference to the labor movement.

As early as 1904, the clerical organizer Elsie Diehl had invited a representative from the AFL and several other labor men to address the first public meeting of clerical workers organizing for a labor union. Two other office workers' unions sent delegates to the 1904 AFL convention. The AFL did not reciprocate this interest. When the Chicago office workers local formally requested the AFL to send a woman organizer to assist them, the AFL executive council let the matter die.[29]

It was rare for women from clerical backgrounds to be trained as organizers within the labor movement. In two instances women had to fight to prove themselves real workers in order to receive training. The stories of these women illustrate how completely the male leadership of the labor movement continued to reject the idea of supporting organizing drives among women clerical workers as late as 1925.

Two women interested in clerical organizing were admitted to the Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York, one of several schools run by the labor movement to train organizers. The first was Rose Goldberg (pseudonym), a twenty-one-year old Jewish woman from New York who applied as a member of the Bookkeepers, Stenographers and Accountants Union. She had to lobby hard for admission because her two years of evening classes at Hunter College, which she attended while working full-time since the age of 13, made her a "college girl" for some members of the admissions board. They were also troubled by her lack of "industrial experience," the hallmark of the real worker. At graduation from the program she faced similar problems. She proposed employment in a large insurance office so she could begin organizing clerical workers, but her teachers directed her to work as a secretary or journalist in the office of a union. There was no sense of hostility in their response — rather a sense that the organization of office workers was not a priority issue, and that she could better contribute to the labor movement in another capacity.

Sophie Caldron, a nineteen-year old woman from a similar background, who had been very active politically, had even greater difficulty securing admittance to Brookwood. Her first application was rejected on the grounds that

she did not have "sufficiently thorough experience in the trade union movement to benefit fully from the course — and you are still young..." A year later she was admitted. However, after her first year, the faculty recommended that she withdraw from the school and "go into industry" before completing her course. The basics of their decision can be inferred from the statement of the Student Body in answer to Sophie's appeal. "While the students do not consider the clerical forces of being equally important with workers in basic industries, yet they maintain that it is of sufficient important character to demand immediate consideration by the trade union movement and that people should be trained to cope with the white collar workers' problems." It is not certain whether she was allowed to complete the second year.

Even when women clerical workers were organized, they were not treated as equals by "fellow" trade unionists. During World War I, women and men were organized together in the railroad offices, but the supervisors were still able to treat the women "as jokes or pets"[30] and male coworkers were friendly only as long as rigid differentiation of jobs by sex was carefully maintained. In part, this behavior may have reflected the unionists' inability to view the women as real workers, but it may also have been an attempt to reserve preferred jobs within the occupation for the men. The distance between office workers and the industrial unions insured that neither the leaders nor members of these other unions would see unionization of women clerical workers as a goal vital to their own political strength.

Alice Henry wrote in 1914 that none of the established labor unions or associations (such as the National Union Label League or women's auxiliaries) had taken the organization of women wage earners as their task.[31] Reviewing employed women's relation to the labor movement a decade later, she found few changes, and offered further evidence of the unwillingness of union men to organize women into their occupations.[32] The behavior of organized male clerical workers was part of the pattern. Until employed women generally were supported in their organizing efforts, there was little hope of union support for organizing women clerical workers.

IV. CLERICAL ORGANIZING AND THE WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE

If the major themes in previous discussions of the failure of clerical organizing are "unorganizability" and life situations of clerical workers, then the minor theme is the influence of "middle class" women or groups outside the labor movement. Once again, the accepted story seems incomplete.

From what we know of the various union locals, the women who organized them came from two groups. One group was clerical workers who were employed in the offices of trade unions, had long-standing commitments to unionism, and wanted to apply its principles

to their situation.[33] These women initiated unions out of the belief that all workers should be organized, including those who work for labor organizers. The second group was women from middle-class backgrounds, or women from working-class backgrounds who had been upwardly mobile. These women, many of whom were associated with the WTUL, wanted both to alleviate the common problems of working women and to help women escape from the lowest level jobs into better ones. They were oriented to legislation as well as to organizing. Their legislative efforts aimed at extending labor laws to cover office workers in the areas of unhealthful, unsafe or inhuman working conditions and regular hours of work,[34] while their attempts to boost women clerical workers into better jobs emphasized upgrading individual qualifications.

Despite direct and indirect labor affiliations, the methods these two groups of women used did not closely parallel traditional union practices. Organized labor was male labor, and attempts to use its tactics ran into problems that reflected the social prescriptions for women's "respectability" — the prejudice against women's forming *any* trade unions, for example, the structure of clerical work, and the special problems of employed women. If women could overcome these problems, they faced further difficulties making sufficient contacts with workers who were distributed among many offices, and of finding suitable meeting rooms, since women without male escorts had little access to "public" gathering places.

In addition, the set of issues developed for male workers did not encompass the special problems relevant to women employees. While women workers were subject to the economic power of their employers in the same ways that men were, they faced the added problems of patriarchal power: the power of men to command (and judge) the behavior of women.[35] In clerical work, this meant that employers had the power to reward or punish women economically according to whether the women met the men's standards of feminine attractiveness in appearance and demeanor. Elsie Diehl called one version of the problem "companionship," explaining that companionship was the employing of typewriter girls by men who did not need them. They sought companionship instead of workers.

> *We want to remedy this through a big organization like the American Federation of Labor. Now when good salaries are paid to typewriter girls it is because they have winning faces and charming manners. We want quiet girls who are not charmers to get as good pay for the same work. There are many other things that we could remedy by concerted action.*[36]

Female office workers also faced employers' demands for personal services (sewing "buttons on vest, coat and trousers, and selecting Christmas presents for the employer's family"[37]) or even sexual advances — problems which were also outside the experience of union leaders.

Trade union strategy relied primarily on paid organizers employed for that purpose by the American Federation of Labor or one of the established unions, to conduct organizing campaigns. Since the AFL had never worked in clerical organizing, such resources were not available for these campaigns. Thus, clerical organizers were "on their own" — without the guiding experience, the interest, or the resources of organized labor.

That clerical organizing was carried out instead in close alliance to the WTUL, is not surprising. This was the one organization which readily accepted organizing women clerical workers as possible and worthwhile. Here workers were not suspect as workers because

they were women or because they were white-collar. Furthermore, the main purpose of the WTUL was to organize unorganized women workers. While the distance between clerical workers and trade unions was troublesome to WTUL organizers, they were nonetheless accustomed to the difficulty unorganized workers often had in seeing the value of unionizing. Finally, the intertwined problems of clerical workers as workers and as women made sense in an organization whose members were unionists and feminists. The problem of absolutely low and relatively declining wages in clerical work was well known. Less fully articulated, but also familiar, was the relationship between low wages and patriarchal power. These problems did not place clerical workers beyond the scope of unions. Within the WTUL, they were evidence that clerical workers needed to organize.

The WTUL's acceptance of organizing women clerical workers was concretely expressed. From its early days (1904) the League provided organizers to assist in arranging campaigns and space for organizing meetings. Meeting space was a particular problem for women. While men could congregate in barber shops, saloons, bowling alleys or even on street corners, there were few public places available to women. The League offered the kind of space that women could enter without fear of damage to their reputations. In addition, the WTUL developed experience in organizing employed women. In a short time, its collective experience far surpassed any that the male-dominated labor movement could offer — even if it were willing, which it was not. Finally, the organization itself, as a combination of upper class and working class women, lent an aura of respectability to organizing that may have made it more possible for women to join its efforts.

In relying on the WTUL, clerical organizers were not so different from organizers working with other groups of employed women. As one observer reported in 1911, "Women's unions, more than men's, have been developed and influenced by leadership from outside the ranks of wage-earners." This pattern was seen as having particular consequences: the "greatest result of the trade union movement among women has been in the direction of a united stand for protective legislation," a strategy that has been compatible with the "willingness of women to make the greatest sacrifices in conjunction with others for a common cause..."[38] This implies that the association with "outside" groups has been a major factor directing women toward a legislative rather than an organizational strategy, and thus would account in part for the low level of organization among clerical workers. At first hearing, this is a convincing interpretation. Circumstantially, the backgrounds, skills, and orientations of the upper class members of the WTUL would contribute to a shift from organizing to more inclusive legislation and worker education. I now question that interpretation. It is not "wrong," but its emphasis is misleading.

In the period 1900-1930, women clerical workers were employed in a sex-segregated, never-before-organized occupation. Isolated from the mainstream of labor, they were of little threat and little interest to male unionists. Organized labor wrote them off as "unorganizable," reflecting the popular view that because women, especially women clerical workers, were not "real workers" it was neither possible nor important to organize them. The women themselves learned that organizing was not appropriate for "ladies," and that unions were for male factory workers. This combination of circumstances encouraged clerical workers to see themselves as separate from organized labor, a view which was continually reinforced by organized labor's lack of support for their organizing efforts. In this context, clerical

A Women's Trade Union League Demonstration.

organizers came to rely on sources sympathetic to, but outside of, organized labor — primarily the WTUL. While the resources of the WTUL and backgrounds of its members *made possible* a transition from an organizing to a legislative emphasis, they cannot be assumed to have *caused* the transition. On the contrary, I would argue that the WTUL made it possible for women clerical workers interested in organizing to receive much-needed support.

The limited successes in organizing union locals from 1900-1920 and the decline in attempts during the 1920s reflect the possibilities for effective action. Neither the attitudes of the clerical workers, their personal characteristics, nor the backgrounds of the organizers and their supporters can adequately account for the difficulties in clerical organizing during that particular period. These "facts" are indicative of the position of women clerical workers, but they still do not preclude organization. Other "facts," such as the limited resources available to the organizers, economic and employer pressures (especially after 1920) against unionization, and the denigrating response of the labor movement contributed significantly to the failure of the early attempts to organize clerical workers. Indeed, as one reads of the persistent efforts made with so little encouragement or recognition, one wonders how those involved maintained their determination.

To me, this analysis suggests that the issue of "organizability" cannot be prejudged. It is not only a product of circumstances, but also of our responses to them. Rather than attempting such judgments, our analysis should aim at discovering the actions we can take to help create conditions which foster organization.

NOTES

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Mary Bularzik, JoAnne Preston and Ross Feldberg for reading early drafts of this paper, and the editors of *Radical America* for suggesting revisions. Janice Weiss first introduced me to the *Journal of Commercial Education*.

Data for this paper have been gathered primarily from journals and newspapers of the period. The most important sources have been *Life and Labor*, the magazine of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), the bulletins of that organization, and *The Typewriter and Phonographic World* (TPW), a monthly magazine devoted to the interests of the stenographic professions and their practitioners, later called *The Journal of Commercial Education*. Occasional reports in newspapers and other journals supplement these materials, as do primary documents from the Brookwood Labor School Collection of the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, and secondary sources.

1. Editorial comment, *The Typewriter and Phonographic World*, 24 (1904), 90. This journal is referred to in subsequent footnotes as *TPW*.
2. U.S. Department of Labor, *Directory of National Unions and Employee Associations*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1977.
3. "Replaceability" rested on the need for little prior training. In the case of clerical workers, the high school supplied that training. Therefore, even when the clerical function was recognized as strategic, the people who did it could be easily replaced. JoAnne Preston first suggested this point to me.
4. Elyce Rotella, "Occupational Segregation and the Supply of Women to the American Clerical Work Force, 1870-1930," paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass. Clerical work continues to be relatively good work for women. In 1976, the median weekly earnings of full-time women clerical workers were $147, compared to $111 for women in sales, $149 for women in crafts, $121 for women operatives except transport and $218 for women in the professions. As usual, these earnings were considerably less than those for men in the same occupation. Women clerical workers earn on average 64% of the earnings of men clerical workers. (United States Department of Labor, *U.S. Working Women: A Databook*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 1977.
5. *TPW*, 1 (1885), 218.
6. *TPW*, 6 (1890-91), 101.
7. In the period 1870-1900, women stenographers and typewriters increased dramatically. From less than 1% of the small female clerical work force in 1870, stenographers and typists came to account for 46.5% of all women clerical workers by 1900. In the following decades, their rate of expansion slowed so that by 1930 they were down to 40% of all female clericals (calculated from Alba Edwards, *Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943.
8. *TPW*, 20 (1902), 242.
9. *TPW*, 22 (1904), 201.
10. *TPW*, 24 (1904), 113; *TPW*, 26 (1905), 342.
11. *TPW*, 20 (1902), 260.
12. *TPW*, 20 (1902), 367.
13. Benjamin Solomon, "Project on White Collar Unionization," unpublished, held in the University of Chicago Library. This is a useful source on many areas of white-collar unionization.
14. *New York Tribune*, April 22, 1904.
15. *New York Evening Journal*, June 26, 1908.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Nancy Schrom Dye, "Creating a Feminist Alliance," *Feminist Studies*, 3 (1975), 24.
18. *Survey*, 27 (1911), 1380.
19. *Life and Labor*, 2 (1912), 292-294.
20. *Life and Labor*, 6 (1916), 28.
21. The period in which clerical organizing was most widespread was 1904-1916. This was a period of growing feminist activity, with renewed efforts to accomplish labor organizing and with the organizing emphasis in the WTUL. It is also a period in which college-educated women were being encouraged to take up "secretarial" work.
22. *New York Daily News*, Oct. 22, 1927.
23. Gladys Boone, *The Women's Trade Union Leagues in Great Britain and the United States of America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 187.
24. *Life and Labor*, 5 (Jan. 1915), 6.
25. The entanglements of the wage issue are considerable. Average wages of all clerical workers did decline relative to those of all workers in manufacturing and railroads between 1900 and 1971. See Grace Coyle, *Present Trends in the Clerical Occupations* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1928), pp. 31-32; and Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 286-287. But it is not clear whether the average wage of women clerical workers declined relative to the average wages of women in factory work. See Evelyn Nakano Glenn and Roslyn L. Feldberg, "Clerical Work: The Female Occupation" in Jo Freeman, ed., *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, 2nd ed., Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1979.
26. Coyle, *Present Trends*, pp. 31-32.

27. This was certainly the message implicit in the type of positions they could secure and explicit in the discussions of "girl stenographers and typewriters" appearing in the *TPW*. Articles on the marriageability of women stenographers and typewriters were standard fare in the first decade of the century, along with "amusing" newspaper stories of employers' problems in retaining their female employees. See Margery Davies, "Women's Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force," *Radical America*, 8 (July-Aug. 1974), 1-28 for the images of women as office workers. Almost all clerical workers were single prior to 1920. See Roslyn L. Feldberg and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Who Sits Behind the Desk: An Exploration of Class Origins of Women Clerical Workers," paper presented at American Studies Association, Boston, 1978. Almost 60% of them were under twenty-five, compared to 40% for employed women as a whole. See Coyle, *Present Trends*, p. 15.

29. Lillian Wald, "Organization Amongst Working Women," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 27 (1906), 640-641; Feldberg and Glenn, "Who Sits Behind the Desk."

30. Barbara M. Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 235.

30. Maurine Weiner Greenwald, "Women Workers and World War I: The American Railroad Industry, A Case Study," *Journal of Social History*, 9 (Winter 1975), 154-77, p. 162.

31. Alice Henry, *Trade Union Woman* (New York and London, 1915), p. 60.

32. Her assessment is consistent with contemporary analyses offered by other women in the labor movement. See, e.g., Helen Marot, *American Labor Unions* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1914) and Theresa Wolfson, *The Woman Worker and the Trade Unions* (New York, 1926.

33. *Life and Labor*, 5(1915), 348.

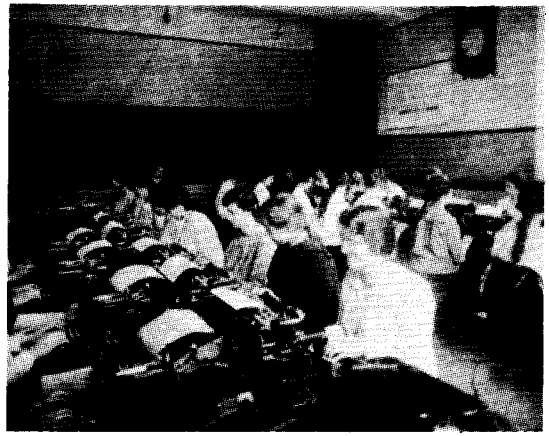
34. *Life and Labor*, 5(1915), 7, and Vol. 6(1916), 106.

35. For extended discussions of patriarchy as a structure of men's power over women, particularly in relation to capitalism, see Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," pp. 137-169 in Martha Blaxall and Barbara Reagan, eds., *Women and the Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); and Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979). For a more focused analysis of patriarchal power in relation to employed women, see Mary Bularzik, "Sexual Harassment at the Workplace," *Radical America*, 12 (July-Aug. 1978), 25-43.

36. *New York Tribune*, April 22, 1904.

37. *TPW*, 30 (1907), 345.

38. John B. Andrews and W. D. P. Bliss, *The History of Women in Trade Unions* (1911; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), pp. 17, 18, 223.



Typing class, early 20th century.

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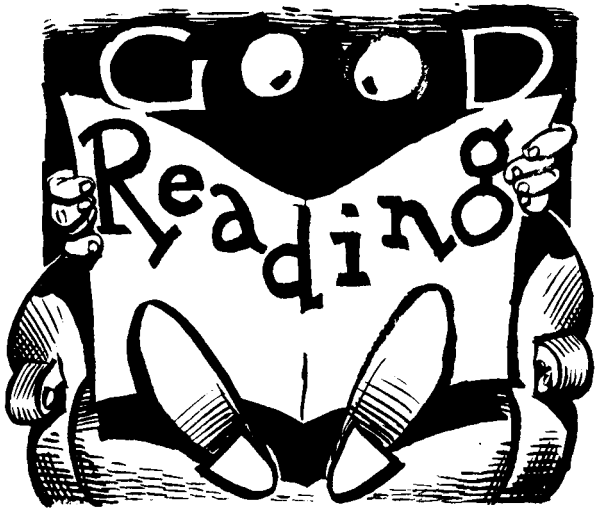

Zhores A. Medvedev, *Nuclear Disaster in the Urals*, W.W. Norton & Co., 1979
Robert Jungk, *The New Tyranny: How Nuclear Power Enslaves Us*, Warner Books, pb. $2.50
Institute for Southern Studies, *Tower of Babel: A Special Report on the Nuclear Industry*, in Southern Exposure, Vol. VII, No. 4, Winter 1979

A year after the "malfunction" at Three Mile Island, ideological fallout remains at dangerously high levels. While there are no failsafe methods of counteracting this politically incapacitating syndrome, known as ideological hegemony, methods do exist for preventing its total invasion of the body politic. No nuke political action remains high on the list of effective antidotes, but that action can be strengthened by regular doses of counter-hegemonic writings. The pieces under review here can help us ward off the worst ideological emissions as well as sensitize us to the constant low-level background ideology that is constantly messing with our minds.

With the disposal of waste of all sorts and especially nuclear waste among the main political-ecological problems of the 1980's, Zhores Medvedev's *Nuclear Disaster in the Urals* is to be welcomed because it is a detailed study of the ecological results of an explosion of underground nuclear waste that took place in 1957 or 1958. Painstakingly and inventively using Soviet scientific papers that do not *openly* discuss the accident — that was common knowledge in the region and led to hundreds of deaths and the removal of people from an area of many square miles — Medvedev studied it and concludes, "When people will reinhabit this region is hard to predict."

Even if such accidents could be prevented, even if nuclear energy was demonstrably safe, it would still be sensible to oppose its development because of its attendant political and social developments. For instance, the CIA knew about the accident in the Urals, but did not make that information public because of fears of provoking anti-nuclear sentiments in the West. Repressive legislation against anti-nuke demonstrators is already a part of Kennedy's "Grandson of S-1" bill in Congress. As Robert Jungk argues, "nuclear energy provides the justification for the power elite of industrial nations to pursue 'tough policies' and a 'hard path.' Those who do not submit to such an authoritarian form of government are simply dismissed as 'subversive.' " That is the thesis of Jungk's book, which he argues rather journalistically and — at times — sensationally. Cumulatively, however, he is convincing that the pressures toward technocratic control, repressive screening of employees in the nuclear industry, action — violent if need be — against critics, etc. are already well under way.

Finally, the book length study by the Institute for Southern Studies, brings these ecological and political dangers together with an analysis of the economic and political forces promoting the development of nuclear energy and nuclear weaponry in the South. It ranges over such topics as waste transport and disposal, the anti-union push in the nuclear construction industry, detailed studies of the who's who of the southern energy companies, and accounts of anti-nuclear organizing in the South.

Taken together these books suggest the wide range of tasks that lie before us, what their connections are and how powerful and determined our enemies are.

Allen Hunter

Fred Halliday, "Revolution in Afghanistan," and "The War and Revolution in Afghanistan," in *New Left Review*, #112, Nov./Dec. 1978 and #119, Jan./Feb. 1980, $2.90 and $3.50.
Alan Wolfe, *The Rise and Fall of the 'Soviet Threat': Domestic Sources of the Cold War Consensus*, Institute for Policy Studies, 1979, $3.95 pb.

International relations cannot be understood apart from domestic developments in the involved nations. Recent *Nation* articles by Fred Halliday and Alan Wolfe show that internal dynamics in Afghanistan and the United States are significant for understanding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. reaction to it. As useful as those articles have been, these longer pieces by Halliday and Wolfe provide more developed arguments.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is wrong and to be condemned. Yet it clearly does not follow that official U.S. explanations of Soviet intentions are correct, or that U.S. government actions should be supported. Halliday's two *New Left Review* articles provide accessible discussions of political and military developments *within* Afghanistan that help us understand: 1) the social forces that led to the April 1978 coup that brought the revolutionary People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power; 2) the myriad of insurmountable problems the new government faced in attempting to transform the society; 3) the internal factional violence within the PDPA, and the use of violence and bureaucratic arrogance by the government toward much of the population; 4) the nature and development of the counter-revolutionary opposition, its international ties, and 5) the particular events that precipitated the Soviet actions in December of 1979. While Halliday's explanation of the Soviet intervention can lend itself to apologetics, and while we also need to know more about internal Soviet developments that favored intervention, his discussion of Afghanistan *itself* is an important corrective to those analyses focussing only on big-power confrontations.

Alan Wolfe's short book — while never denying the history of U.S. imperial expansion — notes that there have been several waves of specifically anti-Soviet (as opposed to more general anti-communist or national chauvinist) offenses since World War II. He argues that there are five different domestic political and economic forces that determine the strength of anti-Soviet perceptions and mobilizations: 1) shifts in relative power of the two political parties; 2) threats to the power of the executive branch, the President; 3) growth of inter-service rivalry; 4) major disputes inside the foreign policy elite over where the "true interests" of the U.S. lie; 5) military spending as part of a political coalition held together by a commitment to economic growth. Wolfe argues that the manner in which these variables have coalesced in the past has led to Democratic not Republican administrations taking the strongest anti-Soviet stands. In a compressed presentation that is questionable on some points, he does persuasively show that U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union is a result of the resolution between conflicting interests of competing groups.

While these readings need to be supplemented with ones about the internal dynamics within the Soviet Union, they do help us to understand recent events to the east of Iran.

Allen Hunter

Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, Anchor/Doubleday, 1980.

In its annual report for 1953, the House Committee on Unamerican Activities (HUAC) glibly reported that "perhaps no major industry in the world today employs fewer members of the Communist Party than does the motion-picture industry." The "dream factory" had been sanitized and a clear message delivered to the nation's latest and ever-growing cultural phenomenon — television. America was in the grip of McCarthyism and no arena so typified the struggle to consolidate control over the nation's populace than the Hollywood purges of Communist Party members, sympathizers and "fellow travellers".

To their credit, Ceplair and Englund's lengthy and detailed study of that period, *Inquisition in Hollywood,* avoids myopic concentration on the personalities and testimony of the HUAC hearings, and the

jailing of the Hollywood 10, to provide the most complete and studied treatment of that period to date. In fact, the authors provide a critical portrait of the Communist Party's influence and role in Hollywood that begins with the principals' longstanding support and participation in progressive and radical causes evolving from the activism of the '30's.

As the authors' state in their introduction, the renewed interest in that era has not produced much systematic and serious research beyond nostalgic reminiscenses, left and right apologies or simple rehashing of public testimony. Their approach is to present an institutionally oriented history — of Hollywood and the studio system, the Screenwriter's Guild and the labor-class divisions in the industry, the Communist Party and its Hollywood cadre and the Cold War repression of HUAC and black listing — through scores of personal interviews with participants from the left and right. While useful, this approach does slight questions of aesthetics, the role of cultural work in the Party and the tension between the "boring from within" strategy of most of the Hollywood Party elite and the "alternative film" work of the Film and Photo League, Nykino and Frontier Films which languished as much from the control of the studio system as from Party neglect.

Much detail is given in the book to an analysis of the hierarchy of the studios and the class divisions of labor typified in the role of the screenwriters. The dichotomy apparent in the interviews, of a "professional" life on the studio lot and a time after work filled with organizing, study groups and party work is presented by the authors as an "American dilemma," but provides a great deal of insight into the transformation of the Party's base during the Popular Front period. Ironically, it was the experience of defying HUAC and openly fighting repression that provided many of the principals with the ability to finally and publicly merge art and politics. The cost for them was loss of work, destruction of personal lives, even exile.

In short, *Inquisition* provides a much needed answer to the historical shortcomings and extreme anti-communism of previous work on the subject. It is not the definitive treatment of the American film industry or the Communist Party in that period, but represents a serious and critical treatment of their curious courtship. At a time of renewed cold war rattlings and increasing conglomerate control of the communications industry, the book is an invaluable aid.

John Demeter

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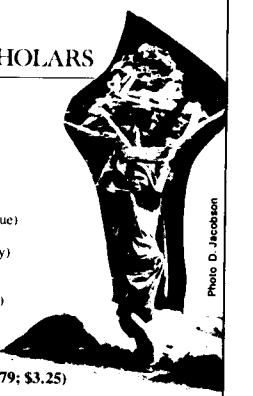

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LETTERS

We would like to encourage readers to send us brief responses to our articles and comments on important political issues. We will print as many as we can of those which seem of general interest to our readers.

Dear Editors and Readers,

I have some problems with the article on Hungary by Fehrer and Heller in the Jan.-Feb. 1980 issue of RA.

1. They seem unable to see that Hungary was not and is not communist or socialist in any sense whatever — it is a state capitalist regime. When workers create workers councils and take over the means of production from the old rulers and begin to form a new society, that is the classic definition of a *social* revolution. Why do they insist on calling it a political revolution (pure or otherwise)?

2. To call Imre Nagy a leader of the Hungarian Revolution is a travesty. His importance to the revolution was that he was a follower. He kept making demands on the revolution; the revolution ignored them and went its own way; Nagy then followed along, 24 or 48 hours later. His importance to the revolution was that he served as a figurehead for the nation and did not get in the way too much. His personal courage is interesting, but irrelevant.

3. To speak of the masses as being naive or having false confidence is simply intellectual arrogance. If only the masses had the good sense to wait until the correct intellectuals (or leader, or party) told them when to revolt. One could say the same things about the Paris Commune, about the 1905 Revolution and on and on. It is interesting that Marx and Lenin never thought in those terms. Marx was critical of some things the Commune did (or didn't do) in private correspondence. But he insisted that the victory of the Commune was its own working existence and that is how he wrote about it in public. Lenin thought the same way about the 1905 events and thought the 1917 Bolshevik revolution was a success when it lasted one day longer than the Commune. All revolutions have the annoying habit of appearing at inopportune times without having first calculated all the risks. Tough shit!

4. I believe that revolutions, or particular aspects of them, can be criticized and lessons learned. But I have the uneasy feeling, which I can't really document, that Fehrer and Heller are damning the Hungarian Revolution with faint praise. I hope I'm wrong. At least it is being discussed. In the worlds of eastern and western Europe every effort is being made, quite understandably, to turn it into a non-event.

Martin Glaberman

Dear Readers and Editors,

Our rejoinder will be brief since Glaberman's letter offers little opportunity to advance theoretical discussion, and to label others should be his prerogative.

1. There is nothing in our text which indicates that we regard Hungary (or any other Eastern European country) as socialist or communist. In fact, we do not. But neither do we regard them as "state capitalist," according to a post-Trotskyist tradition, but something else. We offer a social analysis of the content and meaning of this "something else" in *Dictatorship Over Needs*, a book we have written together with Gyorgy Markus, which we hope will be published soon.

2. Glaberman calls our critique of the Hungarian masses' false self-confidence "intellectual arrogance" and adds "... Marx and Lenin never thought in those terms." First, we believe that what Marx, Lenin or anyone else thought is *not binding* for a socialist (an enlightened person and no hero-worshipper by definition). It can be important, stimulating, etc. if we believe in the relevance of their doctrine (as we personally do for Marx and do not for Lenin), but it is not an article of faith to be blindly followed. Second, if our article is to be criticized, it should be because we too loyally follow Marx's Hegelian twist: into the *positive* factors moving history ahead towards its pre-set telos, Marx regularly built in people's false consciousness, false confidence, etc. Third, and for Glaberman's information, Lenin felt, in spite of verbose "populist" rhetoric, an outright *contempt* for the "masses' inconstancy."

He founded the Bolshevik *coup* precisely with this inconstancy. Glaberman may find the relevant quotations in E.H. Carr's pro-Leninist book, in the volume dealing with the preparation of the October Revolution. For our part, we did not want to be either pro- or anti-Leninist in this article. We simply sought to make use of the natural right of every (good or bad) historian: to assess the Hungarian masses (of which we were then two) as best we could.

3. On one point we cannot avoid being personal. Glaberman's judgment of Imre Nagy (as anyone's) can be discussed and accepted or rejected. However, when he writes of Nagy, who *chose* death in programmatic defense of the Hungarian revolution (a revolution that Glaberman zealously stands with), that "His courage is interesting but irrelevant," Glaberman reveals his total lack of moral sense. Whatever Glaberman's personal convictions may be, it belongs to Stalinist-style historiography to spit on the corpse of the innocently executed and to feel oneself, by this very gesture, to be on a summit and capable of world-historical judgment.

Whether we have written a eulogy or a slanderous account of the Hungarian revolution (which we have not renounced or ceased to identify with while in Hungary through twenty difficult years) is a matter for the reader, not us, to decide.

Agnes Heller
Ferenc Feher

Dear Comrades:

I received the promotional material describing *Radical America*.... However, I am still confined to prison and therefore simply do not have the money with which to purchase a subscription. If the magazine could be sent to me gratis, I would certainly appreciate it.

As we move into the '80s — a period that I personally believe will be more traumatic for all progressive peoples than was the '60s — a concerted grass-roots effort designed to unify the various groups on the left must be made. Idle rhetoric simply cannot accomplish the major tasks that have been enunciated by the many factions. Capitalism, ever adaptable to a changing world economic environment, has created the pretexts necessary to foster a nationwide, indeed a world-wide, hysteria that all thinking peoples should clearly understand as a call to increase military spending.

While many may disagree with me, I foresee a period of growing tension and open hostilities not far over the immediate horizon. Elected officials in Virginia have defeated ERA in the face of Carter's call for a registration of women and men. Interestingly enough this registration, and future draft, has been carefully designed to call-up only the very young in an attempt to forestall the mass rebellions within the ranks of the military in the future. This topic should — and there are others deserving of our attention — be given the greatest media attention in order to show our friends the nature of this administration which is clearly capable of entering any action in order to remain within the corridors of power.

For all these reasons and more I would enjoy receiving *Radical America* and would want to take a more active role insofar as submission of materials for editorial consideration.

Thank you for any consideration my request for a free "prisoner" subscription may receive.

In Struggle,
Jasper L. Holland, Jr., #103710
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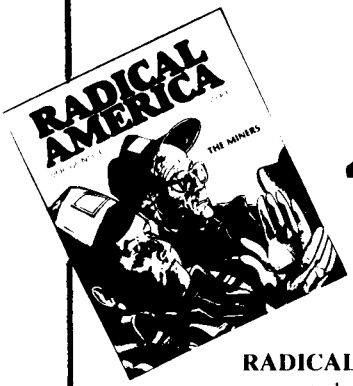

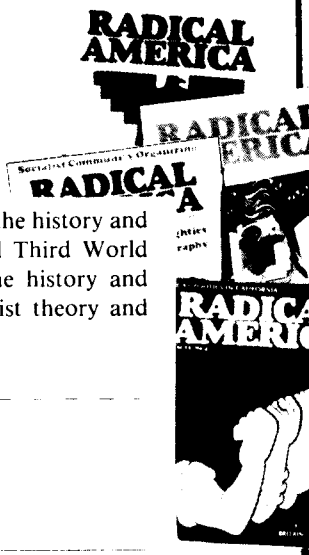

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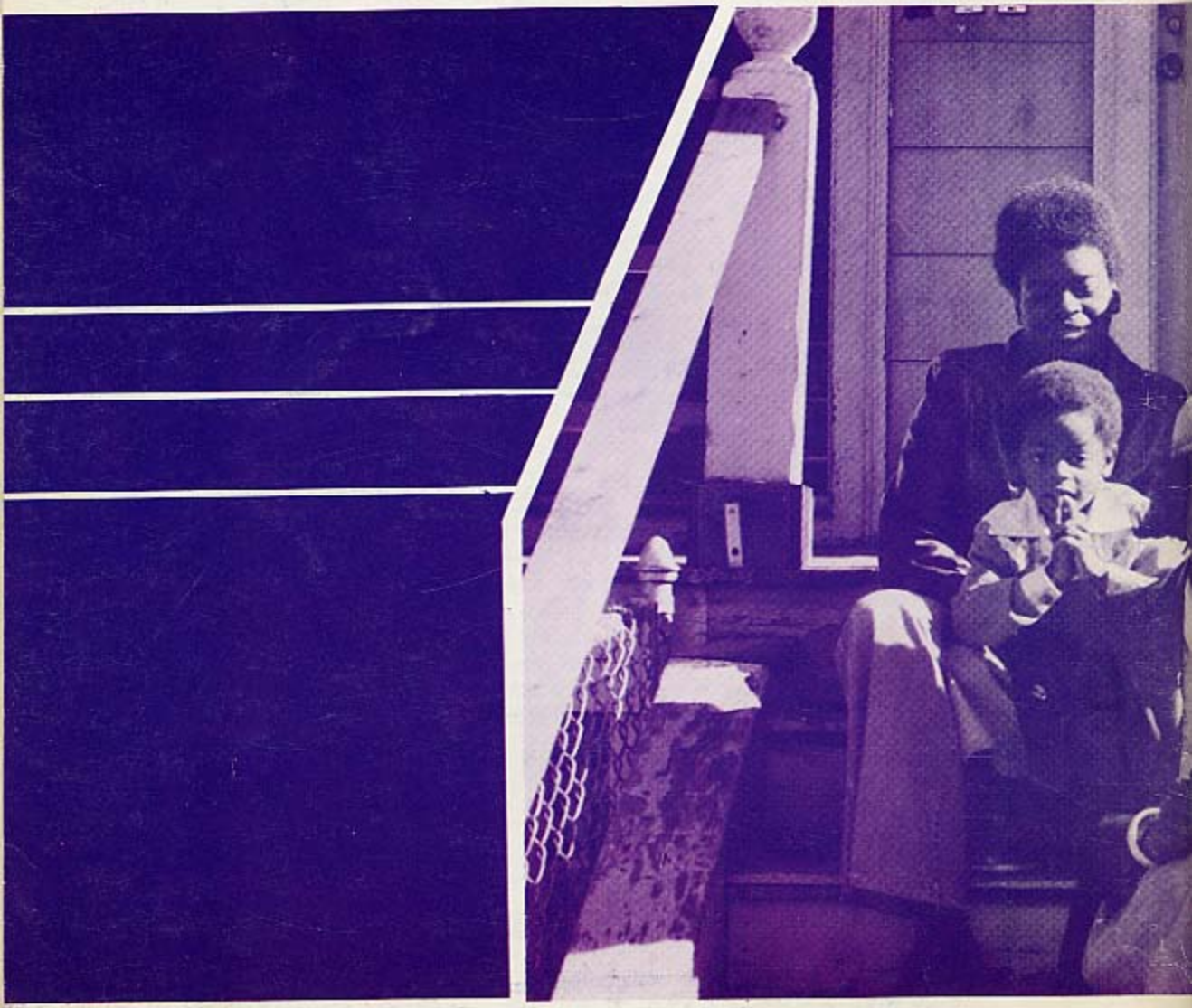
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