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Zerowork: Political Materials #1

DECEMBER 1975

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Background: Genesis of Zerowork #1

Introduction

Those who formed the initial collective that published the first issue of Zerowork were a diverse bunch with various intellectual and political backgrounds and, collectively, considerable international experience. George Caffentzis, William (Bill) Cleaver, Leoncio Schaedel and Peter Linebaugh were Americans living in the United States, but George had family in Greece, Leoncio had recently escaped Chile after the overthrow of Allende and Peter had studied in England. While Bill and Peter had both majored in history, during the crafting of Zerowork #1 Bill was working in the library of the New School for Social Research in New York City and active in local union politics, while Peter was teaching history at Franconia College and at New Hampshire State Prison. George had studied philosophy of science and was teaching at Brooklyn College of City University of New York. Leoncio was in the graduate program in political economy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Paolo Carpinano, Mario Montano and Bruno Ramirez were Italians who had all studied in Italy before crossing the Atlantic. But while Paolo and Mario came and stayed in the US, Bruno moved on to Toronto, Ontario after completing both a BA and an MA in the US. Peter Taylor was a Canadian living in Toronto working — and not working — in the Post Office. Paolo and Mario had both studied sociology, and Mario was teaching it at Clark University. Bruno was working on his dissertation in history. The two corresponding editors,

John Merrington and Ferruccio Gambino lived in Britain and Italy respectively. But John had studied in Italy, translated and circulated political materials from Italy in England and participated in study groups with Peter Linebaugh. Ferruccio was at the Department of Political Science at the University of Padua where Toni Negri was chairman, but his frequent travels in Europe and the United States not only kept everyone up-to-date on what was happening and being discussed elsewhere but wove a web of interpersonal relations vital to all involved. (For more detail on the intersecting trajectories of their lives, see the section below with individual biographical sketches.)

These folks came together in the midst of crises both local and international.

Within major Canadian and U.S. cities, such as Toronto, Montreal and New York City, successful and untamed struggles by both waged and unwaged workers had been undermining capitalist control for some years. Ever since public employees in Canada — spearheaded by Post Office workers — had won collective bargaining rights in 1967 and formed the Common Front in Quebec in 1972 — the ability of city, provincial and national governments to provide popular services with cheap labor had been undermined. In New York City street-level and welfare rights struggles had interacted with those of public employees to so undermine the “business climate” of the city as to provoke business flight and job losses in the private sector and fiscal crisis in city finances. By 1974-75 the banks were beginning to refuse to roll over the city’s debt while city government, with the help of union bureaucrats, were beginning to raid union pension funds — not only to cover city debts but to undermine public employee struggles.⁽¹⁾ These crises were forerunners of others to come — of which the automaker abandonment of Flint,

portrayed in Michael Moore's 1989 film "Roger and Me", and the 2013 bankruptcy of Detroit are but two examples.(2)

At the international level, widespread worker struggles in the United States had undermined the ability of the Keynesian state to manage the wage/productivity deals that had been the basis of post-WWII accumulation and had provoked business efforts to compensate by raising prices — causing such an acceleration in inflation as to contribute to the disappearance of the U.S. trade surplus and to provoke President Nixon in 1971 to unhook the dollar from gold and abandon the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. That ostensible "monetary crisis" was soon followed by a state-engineered food crisis in 1972 and the first "oil shock" of 1973-74 — initiated by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) but sanctioned by United States policy makers.(3)

The Analysis

In the midst of these crises, local, national and international, the members of the Zerowork collective put our heads together to construct an analysis of the situation — an analysis that would, hopefully, also reveal strategic implications for workers' struggles. Two things had become obvious to all of us. First, these crises were not the usual "inevitable" crises envisioned by the Left as resulting from the internal laws of motion of capitalism, but were the products of, and responses to workers' struggles. (4) Second, those struggles had achieved the power to throw capital into crisis — and provoke it to counterattack — through a dynamic interaction between the struggles of the unwaged and those of the waged. Indeed, by the time we came together, all of us in the Zerowork collective had seen beyond the classical Marxist definition of the working class as made up of waged workers to a broader view in

which the unwaged — including housewives, students and peasants — were integral both to the expanded reproduction of capital and to the make-up of the working class.

These two shared insights had grown out of both experience and study. On the one hand, several of us had been involved in unwaged student struggles and in the Civil Rights movement that brought us together with waged workers; others had been involved in waged worker struggles but linked, organizationally, to those of the unwaged. Examples of the latter were collaborations between Canadian student activists and blue collar militants in both the national Post Office system and local automobile factories. On the other hand, the emergence of the women's movement had not only brought to the fore the centrality of women's work in the home (and student work in schools) in the production and reproduction of labor power, but produced new theoretical formulations that deepened Marx's limited discussion of that work and its role in capitalist reproduction as a whole. At the same time, study of the origins of capitalist policies in rural areas of the Third World — from the Vietnam War and land reform to innovations in agricultural technology — revealed not only how capitalists understood peasants to be part of the class they were doing their best to put to work but how the struggles of those more-often-than-not unwaged peasants undermined the best laid capitalist plans and forced repeated shifts in counter-revolutionary strategies.

But having become convinced that the crises surrounding us had been brought on by workers' struggles — both waged and unwaged — we still had to figure out what characteristics of those struggles had given workers the power to rupture capitalist accumulation? On the surface, the characteristics were as varied as the struggles themselves and seemed to have little in common — a situation that

led capitalist policy makers — always keen to divide to conquer — to disparage them as distinct “special interest” politics and others, more sympathetic, to honor them as diverse “social movements.” Waged workers had been fighting for more collective bargaining rights (where they didn’t have them, e.g., farmworkers), against corrupt union bureaucrats (e.g., in the United Mine Workers and International Brotherhood of Teamsters) and, pretty much everywhere, for more money (higher wages and pensions), better working conditions and fewer working hours. Women had been fighting for personal, legal and economic equality. Students had been fighting for free speech, for changes in curriculum better suited to their desires, for ruptures in the links between universities and the war machine and for racial, ethnic and gender equality in access to higher education. Welfare rights militants — mainly women — had been fighting for more resources and fewer humiliating intrusions by state welfare agencies. Black and brown militants among the unemployed and partially employed had been fighting for civil rights, racial equality and against police repression. Prisoners (disproportionately black or brown) had been fighting against abuse, for greater legal rights and more freedom within their confinement to study and communicate. Peasants had been fighting for land, for autonomy and for liberation from foreign domination, whether colonial or neocolonial. All of these efforts contested one mechanism or another of capitalist domination, locally, nationally or internationally. But did all these diverse groups constitute sectors of the working class only in so far as they were all subjected to, and resisting, capitalist domination? Or, was it possible to identify enough interconnections to see beyond their differences to an interactive and collective efficacy? We argued that there were.

To summarize our arguments for the existence of such efficacy — as spelled out in the first issue of the journal — the historical

dynamics of struggle that led to a many-sided rupture of capitalist command had two fundamental characteristics. First, there were not only myriad interconnections among the various struggles but those interconnections were pathways through which struggles circulated from sector to sector amplifying their collective effects. Sometimes that circulation was through confrontation; sometimes it was through collaboration; sometimes it was merely the result of some struggles inspiring others. Second, the manifold demands articulated within those diverse sectors, more often than not, involved or supported a common refusal of the fundamental mechanism of capitalist domination: the imposition of work.

The identification of the interconnections and directions through which struggles had circulated were central to the analysis laid out in *Zerowork*. We saw the struggles of waged workers, for example, to have been spurred by the entry into factories and offices of previously unwaged militants, whether from the streets (young black militants moving into Detroit and Flint auto factories) or from schools (ex-student activists moving into many domains of wage labor). We saw the struggles of men — ourselves included — to have been spurred by those of women, both in their intimate personal relationships and in wider social ones as women fought for equalities that challenged the hierarchies of capitalist patriarchy. Indeed, we recognized that the refusal of authority by children in schools was partly the consequence of the refusal of authority by mothers. The resistance of peasants (and other workers in Southeast Asia, and elsewhere) to US government counterinsurgency efforts, we argued, inspired draft resistance and anti-war activity. Just as the struggles of Mexican and Mexican-American farmworkers helped (along with exploitation and repression in the cities) inspire the formation of militant Chicano groups, so, we concluded, did the efforts of later

force changes in the strategies of the former. Other examples can be found in the pages of the first issue of *Zerowork*.

To argue that the refusal of work lay at the heart of so many different kinds of struggle turned out to be one of the most controversial aspects of the analysis. It challenged the traditional socialist perspective that workers struggled against capitalist imposed work only in order to embrace post-capitalist work freed from exploitation and alienation. The inclusive understanding of the working class that included the unwaged meant that some domains that had hitherto been seen as refuges from capitalist imposed work, e.g., families and schools, were argued to also be terrains of the imposition and refusal of work. To the traditional Marxist recognition of worker struggles for shorter working days (and later weeks, years, and lives) detailed in volume one of *Capital*, those of us in the *Zerowork* collective saw other struggles by the waged, such as those for better working conditions, higher wages and pension funds as ones that, when successful, were used to reduce work time. Better working conditions meant less work worrying about and avoiding injury; higher wages financed strike funds and vacations; pensions financed earlier retirement. At the same time, we interpreted practices that were often dismissed by labor union bureaucrats as bespeaking laziness and irresponsibility, e.g., shirking on the job, faked sick leave and other forms of absenteeism, as informal acts of resistance to work — sometimes individual, sometimes collective and coordinated.

In a parallel fashion, once we recognized the activities of housewives and students as involving the work of producing and reproducing labor power, then a whole array of struggles clearly involved various forms of refusing that work. Thus the variety of struggles that defined the women's movement — ranging from the refusal of family altogether (manifested in falling marriage rates)

through the resistance of women to endless procreation and child-rearing (perceptible through falling birth rates and struggles for access to contraception and abortion), the fight for personal and legal equality (and thus less work for, and under the supervision of men, both in the home and outside it) and the assertion of the rights of women to form intimate bonds with other women rather than with men, to the demand for wages for housework from the state — we identified as undermining the capitalist ability to impose enough work within the nuclear family to guarantee the reproduction of a malleable labor force.

Similarly, we interpreted the myriad struggles of students against the imposition of discipline within classrooms, against the power of the state boards of education, school administrators and teachers to unilaterally determine the content of curriculum, against the reduction of learning to training for jobs, against the imposition of the same kinds of gender hierarchies being resisted by women outside of school, against the teaching of history, government and the social sciences that ignored struggles important to them (e.g., those of blacks, browns, women and even students), in short, against the subordination of their learning to educational institutions and programs shaped to justify and reproduce capitalism, as the refusal of the work of transforming themselves into manipulable and compliant members of the working class.

Instead of the post-capitalist vision imagined by socialists as consisting of a parasite-free, one-class society of workers in command of their tools, “zerowork”, evoked for us a future in which the success of worker struggles was tending, among other things, to achieve such a dramatic reduction in work per se that it would become only one activity of self-realization among, and enriched by, other activities. The shared vision of those of us who

crafted Zerowork was thus very much in the spirit of the famous passage in the German Ideology where Marx imagined a communist society “where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, [where] society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind.” But unlike the usual socialist vision of a distant, future communist utopia, we also embraced another of Marx’s early insights, also enunciated in the German Ideology: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.”(5)

Paths to Zerowork

For all those who consciously suffer, and resent, lives burdened with too many hours and too much energy sacrificed to work necessary for survival, and for those who haven’t completely internalized the very capitalist subordination of life to work and become one-dimensional workaholics, the term “zerowork” must be one to conjure with. But could there really be such a thing as zero work, or something close to it? Beyond utopian imaginings, could the real movement actually abolish the subordination of life to work? Are there paths down which we could actually create new kinds of social life in which work could be one of many, freely-chosen forms of self-realization instead of a means of domination? One response to these questions that quickly becomes obvious to anyone who takes them seriously is that technically such paths are quite feasible. A second response is that politically those paths can only be opened

through struggle and the revolutionary abolition of capitalism. Allow me to explain the reasoning behind both of these answers.

With regard to technical possibilities, modern industrialized society has repeatedly demonstrated, in thousands of domains of work, that machines can be substituted for and reduce human labor. This has happened in so many industries — from agriculture through manufacturing to services and communication — that no room can be left for doubt that technological development can be, and has been organized, to reduce the amount of work required to produce this or that commodity. But to what degree can such reductions in particular kinds of work result in an overall reduction in the average amount of work required per individual? There are two ways of answering this question: historically and theoretically.

Historically the rise and spread of measuring, of the gathering of statistics on more and more aspects of modern life have revealed that within capitalism the substitution of machines for human labor has become progressively general. For millions, though not for all, there has indeed been a reduction in the amount of work required per individual. In the United States, for instance, between the mid-1880s and 1940 — a period of rapid technological innovation in industry — the average working week was reduced from 75-80 to 40 hours and from 6-7 days to five. The weekend, that revered two-day period in which millions of waged or salaried workers are freed from any obligation to show up at their jobs, was the result. In the post WWII period — as technological development continued, often facilitated by war-time innovations, a similar reduction occurred in terms of working years as annual vacations emerged, providing many workers with enough days freed from jobs to permit substantial non-work activities, such as travel and tourism. Although some anthropologists have compared such marginal achievements negatively to the vast

amounts of free time enjoyed by some pre-industrial peoples, certainly the course of modern capitalist development has thoroughly demonstrated the technical feasibility of the progressive reduction of work.(6)

With regard to theory, the development of capitalism has included the recognition of the technical possibilities of steadily reducing work on the part of its critics but also of its apologists and strategists. Not surprisingly, writing in sympathy with workers whose lives had been rendered miserable through longer and longer hours of imposed work, the critics of capitalism, of its “satanic mills” and of its dank, polluted working class neighborhoods were the first to herald those possibilities.(7) William Godwin, in his *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and Frederick Engels in his speeches in Elberfeld (1845) waxed eloquent about the possibilities of reducing the total amount of work by eliminating all of those jobs — both private and public — peculiar to the protection and promulgation of capitalism.(8) By 1867 Karl Marx was able to analyze theoretically, in his *Capital*, two phenomena relevant to the possibilities of reducing work. On the one hand, he highlighted the power of living social labor that was repeatedly imagining and inventing new machines and new ways of organizing production to make work more efficient. On the other hand, he showed how capitalists turned that imagination and inventiveness against workers through its relative surplus value strategy of substituting those machines for living workers. By raising labor productivity (i.e., output per hour), such substitution made it technically feasible to enjoy the fruits of such substitution in the form of less work.(9) But instead, capitalists were using those innovations to control workers and impose more work. Ironically, quite different theoretical innovations

by supporters of capitalism could lead to the same conclusions about technical possibilities.

During the rise of capitalism, its theorists — mercantilists and classical political economists — were more preoccupied with justifying the imposition of work and figuring out how to impose more work on people who did not want their lives confined to endless toil, than with exploring the possibilities of reducing work. But, by the end of the 19th Century, the theoretical innovations of neoclassical, marginalist economists clearly revealed that technological development made possible more output with less work. At the time, economists such as Alfred Marshall, were mainly concerned with wielding their theory of marginal productivity to convince workers to restrict their demands for higher wages within the bounds of productivity increases.⁽¹⁰⁾ Marshall examined the conditions under which marginal increases in wages might reduce profits and those under which they would not. The key was the relationship between marginal increases in wages and marginal increases in labor productivity or “efficiency”. In Chapter 11 on wages in his *The Economics of Industry* (1879) we find:

A rise in the Time-wages of any trade tends to diminish profits. But if the wages that are paid for work vary according to its efficiency — if Task-wages are unaltered — the share of the produce of industry that is left for others [the capitalists] will be the same whether Time-wages are high or low. It is only where the rise in time wages is not accompanied by a corresponding increase in efficiency, and therefore Task-wages rise, that the change is injurious to capital.”

Yet this same theory is equally applicable to the issue of work time. Let us imagine productivity — measured in terms of output per hour of labor — doubling through the introduction of machinery.

Then obviously one has choices as to how to realize the fruits of that increase in productivity: double output with the same amount of work, the same output with half the work, or some intermediary combination of more output and less work. Clearly, any choice other than the one that maintains the existing hours of labor involves reducing work. Moreover, if any of those choices that reduce work are made over and over, year after year, then the amount of work will be steadily reduced. Indeed, the ever-diminishing amount of work will asymptotically approach zero.

Therefore, as long as increasing productivity can be achieved, zero work is a goal that can be approached ever more closely. The many decades in which technological innovation has involved rising productivity has been one source of the optimism associated with the modern idea of progress. That idea, for some, has included the continuing technical possibilities of reducing work.(11)

Turning from technical possibilities to political realities is necessarily sobering. Close examination of the historical path of rising productivity cited above reveals that only through sustained organizing and struggle have workers been able to realize the fruits of their innovations in the form of less work. At every step of the way, capitalists have opposed such reductions, often with violent repression. In Section 6 of Chapter 10 of Volume I of *Capital*, Marx described and analyzed the struggles of English workers to reduce working hours. Years later David Roediger and Philip Foner presented a parallel study of workers' struggles in the United States. (12) Only those struggles were able to wrest time away from work as labor's share of the benefits of its own creativity — to win the forty hour, five day week and the weekend. The same history has played out throughout the capitalist world. The better organized and motivated the workers, the more they have won. Workers in Western

Europe, for example, have won greater reductions in work time than those in the U.S. American workers have, in turn, won more than many in other parts of the world.

The reasons workers have fought to free their lives from capitalist imposed work — alienation and exploitation — were also analyzed by Marx. At the same time, he also recognized how capitalists could concede some benefits to workers in exchange for their productivity raising innovations. But why have capitalist employers preferred, in general, to concede greater wages rather than less work? Why the bloody repression against battles for the 8-hour day in the late 19th and first half of the 20th Centuries? One answer emerges from the realization that the core of Marx's theory — his labor theory of value — is really a theory of the value of labor to capital as its most fundamental and thoroughgoing mechanism of social control. Capitalists don't just impose work to get rich by exploiting other people; capital as a whole can only survive by endlessly subordinating people's lives to work. Control-through-work includes not only that exercised directly over waged or salaried employees during formal "working hours" but also vast amounts of formally "free" or "leisure" time. For example, for years, during and after Marx's lifetime, workers fought to liberate their children from mines, mills and factories. As they achieved the ability to do just that, and demanded schools to prepare their children for better lives, capitalist social policy makers — backed by corporate or State funds — swooped in to structure public schooling to incarcerate, discipline and shape children into compliant future members of the labor force. Similarly, capital has intervened in every sphere of so-called leisure time — from the home to domain after domain of recreation — to convert people's activities into the unwaged work of producing and reproducing that ability and willingness to work for capital that Marx

called “labor power.” It has not always been successful, but its efforts have been quite thorough.

The implications of all this are at least three-fold. First, as a result of capital’s attempts to turn all of life into work, the struggle for less work can be found throughout every dimension of capitalist society. Second, for those struggles to successfully open paths toward zero work requires not only the freeing of time from formal jobs, but also the defeat of attempts by capital to convert our gains (e.g., child labor laws) into subtle defeats (e.g., obligatory schooling as mere job training). Third, precisely because we must fight everywhere, what we really need is the revolutionary transcendence of capitalism.

Theoretico-political Roots

One of the complaints leveled against *Zerowork* #1 when it was first published and circulated was that its mode of presentation — the simple exposition of an alternative analysis of the current crisis in terms of class struggle — failed to clearly identify its theoretical and political roots.⁽¹³⁾ This was a complaint shared not only by those to whom the analysis laid out was entirely new, but also by those who were familiar with at least some elements of it and felt that origins deserved recognition.⁽¹⁴⁾ Where did the core ideas come from? The answer to that question is neither singular nor simple, and that is, perhaps, one reason for the absence of any attempt to sketch those origins — a desire to avoid an overly academic exercise in intellectual history. To all appearances the members of the *Zerowork* collective hoped that the analysis in the journal was different and powerful enough to catch the imagination of others and lead to discussions in which its roots would be explored to whatever extent folks felt the need to explore them. This was a choice accepted by some but lamented or resented by others.

To some extent, of course, such exploration has occurred. Gradually, hitherto obscure bits and pieces have been unearthed and shared.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is easier now to map the rhizosphere than it was when the first issue of Zerowork appeared. So, to give some idea of the roots that nourished the thinking and discussion within the collective, I will sketch some of those historical roots — they are multiple — focusing on those most related to the theoretical insights I have mentioned above and connections among them.

Personal note: because I was not involved in the Zerowork collective during the preparation of the first issue, my own understanding of this history began after it was published and required considerable research on both sides of the Atlantic to identify and sort out the various interwoven roots.⁽¹⁶⁾ One thing that became clear to me was that the degree of familiarity with those roots within the Zerowork collective was very uneven. Some were known to all, others to a few, some remained unknown, moments of unfamiliar history.

Let me begin with the understanding that “crisis” in capitalism is first and foremost a crisis in class relations brought on not just by some internal laws of the mode of production but by workers’ struggles. That understanding has at least two identifiable roots.

Workers’ Autonomy in the Sphere of Production

One root can be found running through the history of both anarchist and Marxist theoretical reflection on the class struggle that has seen workers — quite independently of any official leadership, i.e., union or political party — as capable of autonomous collective action in their own interests, both against capitalist exploitation and for alternatives. Segments of that thread can be found in the writings of some in the anarcho-communist tradition, e.g., Peter Kropotkin

or Emma Goldman; some can be found in the works of the Council Communists, e.g., Anton Pannekoek, Otto Rühle and later Paul Mattick and, especially relevant to the genesis of Zerowork, some can be found in the writings of Trotskyists.(17)

Neither of the first two traditions — anarchist and councilist — seems to have had much influence on the thinking of those in the Zerowork collective, either directly or indirectly. The limited influence of the anarcho-communist movement on those Marxists who did have more direct influence in the genesis of the analysis of crisis in Zerowork is the easiest to understand. The long-standing differences and antipathies between anarchists and Marxists — dating from the conflicts between Marx and Bakunin in the First International — has meant that few Marxists, including the original editors of Zerowork and those upon whose works they drew, made a close study of anarchist writings or were inspired by them.(18)

Second, the limited influence of the council communists is a little more difficult to understand. On the one hand, those with roots in orthodox Marxism-Leninism, including Trotskyists, tended to accept Lenin's critique of Council Communists as suffering from an "Infantile Disorder" and failed to engage their writings. This included some who would eventually break with Trotskyism and develop ideas that would mirror, in some ways, the writings of the Councilists. As has often been the case, a lot more energy was expended in sectarian infighting among Trotskyists than in the critique of those outside their circles — other than Stalinists, of course. With respect to the specific issue of the relationship between class struggle and crisis in capitalism, the tendency of Councilists to see working class autonomy only coming into play as the result of crises in capitalism, and to locate the sources of crisis in its internal laws of motion rather than in the struggles of workers, contrasted

with the reverse emphasis of those who would have more influence.
(19) The exception among the Councilists to this conception of the relation between crisis and class struggles seems to have been Anton Pannekoek — but even his work on this subject was largely ignored.
(20)

From the Johnson-Forest Tendency to Facing Reality and Beyond

Among those Trotskyists who largely ignored the Council Communists but who would become influential — directly and indirectly — in the genesis of Zerowork were those associated with the Johnson-Forest Tendency (JFT). Johnson and Forest were pseudonyms of C. L. R. James (1901-1989) and Raya Dunaveyskaya (1910-1987).⁽²¹⁾ These two, and those clustered around them, repeatedly differed with both Trotsky and the leadership of various Trotskyist factions on key issues, especially the nature of contemporary capitalism (which for them included the USSR), the role of Black struggles, the role of the vanguard party and the relationship between working class struggle and capitalist crisis. Those differences were laid out in a series of essays and led first to their leaving the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) along with Max Shachtman to form a separate "Worker's Party", then to a return to the SWP and finally to a terminal split with Trotskyism in 1951 to form their own group, the Correspondence Publishing Committee. Like the Council Communists the members of the Tendency recognized and valorized the autonomous power of workers to not only to initiate revolutionary uprisings, e.g., 1905 and 1917 in Russia, 1918 in Germany, but also to create their own organizations, e.g., factory committees and soviets in Russia and workers councils in post-WWI Germany. Later events in the 1950s, such as the formation of autonomous councils by Hungarian and Polish workers during

the uprisings of 1956 were taken as more concrete evidence of such capacities.(22) However, the ideas of the JFT differed from that of the Council Communists in several ways.

Curious about the apparent failure of those in the JFT to engage with the Council Communists, I once asked Martin Glaberman about this. He recounted two reasons.

We never did deal with the Council Communists, but in informal discussions there were essentially two criticisms. Their view of state capitalism was basically an analysis of the Soviet Union, we saw ours as much broader, a view of a stage of capitalism. Secondly, we rejected their criticism of Leninism and their view of the period from 1917 to 1924.(23)

Although the JFT eventually broke with the Leninist concept of the vanguard party, they continued, for the most part to honor other aspects of his thinking. Beyond those two reasons, we might add two more reasons for their neglect of the Council Communists.

First, partly because of James' experience in the Caribbean, his participation in the development of Pan-Africanism and his writings about Black struggles, there was more awareness, discussion and acceptance in Correspondence of autonomy of sectors within the working class. This was especially true with respect to autonomous struggles by Blacks both in the work place and in the larger society that they argued ought to be recognized as legitimate, be accepted and be valorized.(24) This emphasis on the autonomy of Black struggles within the working class — including how the development of the class as a whole could be driven by Black struggles against discrimination and racism — did not find a parallel in the work of the Council Communists.

Second, whereas when thinking and writing about crisis the Council Communists tended to remain stuck within the framework of debate over the “laws of motion”, those associated with the JFT and Correspondence, while taking a position in those debates, moved on to focus on how workers’ power could rupture capitalist development and precipitate crisis.

The JFT’s position in the debates — enunciated as part of articulating their differences with Trotskyism — affirmed the centrality of Marx’s analysis of “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” in Volume III of *Capital*. This they counterposed to Stalinist, Trotskyist and mainstream economic efforts to shift attention away from production to problems of inadequate aggregate demand.⁽²⁵⁾ At the heart of their understanding and embrace of the theory of “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” was the conviction that the core of capitalism was production and the struggle between workers and capital at the point of production. Moreover, they saw the key process driving the tendency of the rate of profit to fall — namely the rise in the technical and organic compositions of capital — as resulting from workers’ struggles — rather than the more common view that source was competition among capitalists. This was their understanding of Marx’s analysis of relative surplus value in Volume I of *Capital* — which, for them, grounded and informed their interpretation of the discussion in Volume III. The corollary of this interpretation of Marx’s theory of crisis was their insistence that the only struggles with revolutionary potential were those taking place within production in industry. Although they saw things like increased wages and higher standards of living as victories won by the working class, they also saw them as concessions capital could make that left the social relations of exploitation and alienation in production unchanged.

All this, they argued, was characteristic of contemporary capitalism both in the West and in the Soviet Union — a capitalism they called “state capitalism”.(26) State capitalism, they reasoned, was the appropriate label for the stage of capitalist development in which the state planning had become essential to capitalist strategies, regardless of whether the methods of planning were those of Soviet Five-year Plans or a combination of Keynesian and corporate planning. While such planning could help avoid problems of inadequate demand, they argued, it had two fundamental weaknesses. First, it was helpless against the consequences of the tendency to substitute machinery for labor — namely the undermining of the rate of profit. Second, while capital could plan, workers could undermine those plans. This emphasis on the ability of workers to undermine capitalist planning was based on studies of worker struggles against capitalist plans in American factories and worker and peasant struggles against Soviet state planning.(27) These arguments, and others, they laid out in a series of publications, the most comprehensive of which was *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950) crafted to differentiate their position as carefully as possible from others within the Trotskyist movement.(28) Once this differentiation was accomplished and they left the Trotskyist movement to form the Correspondence Publishing collective, they also largely disengaged from the debates among Marxist factions over crisis theory to focus on the phenomenon they had identified as the only source of real change: workers’ struggles at the point of production.

Growing differences between James and Dunayevskaya led to a split in 1958, with Dunayevskaya and her followers leaving to found a separate group *News & Letters*. James and his supporters then changed the name of their group to *Facing Reality*. Given their

common origins, there were many similarities in the theories and activities of these two groups as well as the differences that led to their split and those that developed afterwards.(29)

Because of the participation by most members of Correspondence in workers' struggles, e.g., those of autoworkers in Detroit, they were well aware of how rank & file workers often fought not only their corporate bosses but union bureaucrats and party hacks all too ready to cut deals with management at their expense. Such analyses and the conclusions they drew about the autonomous power of workers and their ability to craft "the future in the present" were laid out in a series of publications over two decades. Probably the most widely circulated of these was *The American Worker* (1947) by Paul Romano (Paul Singer) and Ria Stone (Grace Lee, later Boggs) in which Singer first op. cit. provided a detailed description of life in an East Coast General Motors' plant and Lee then laid out a Marxist analysis of the implications of the life and struggles described by Singer for the "reconstruction of society". This early pamphlet was complemented by other essays by Marty Glaberman such as *Punching Out* (1952) and *Union Committeemen and Wildcat Strikes* (1955) and by Matthew Ward's (Si Owens, later Charles Denby) *Indignant Heart: A Black Workers' Journal*, (1952), based on their experiences in Detroit auto plants. Essentially part of this tradition, although published after leaving the Correspondence Publishing Committee in 1962, was another black autoworker's autobiographical work: James Boggs' (Grace Lee's husband and ex-editor of Correspondence) *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (1963). With the focus of so many of these writings on workers' struggles in large industrial factories, they constituted an American version of what would later, in Italy, be called a "workerist" perspective. In a period in which many Leftists

had written off the American working class as hopelessly bought off — the most recent incarnation of Lenin’s “labor aristocracy” — the revelations about shop floor struggles in these writings refocused many radicals’ attention and hopes on their revolutionary potential — to create crises for capital and open new possibilities for workers.(30)

The direct influence of this earlier work on Zerowork #1 can be found primarily in the article by Peter Linebaugh and Bruno Ramirez, “Crisis in the Auto Sector,” which immediately asserts that “the crisis reflects an impasse in the relations of power between capital and the working class, an impasse which in recent years has been made more visible by the ongoing upsurge of autoworkers’ struggles.” The article draws, in part, on research and analysis previously undertaken by members of the Canadian group the New Tendency (NT), several of whom were working and organizing in the auto plants of Windsor, Ontario. Bruno was a member of the NT and the article references material on auto workers’ struggles in the NT’s main publication *The Newsletter*, of April 1974. Glaberman’s writings, based as they were on his experience as an autoworker across the river in Detroit, were of particular interest to those Canadian militants and influenced Linebaugh and Ramirez’s analysis both directly and indirectly. The influence of this previous work can be seen primarily in the detailed examination of autonomous shop floor struggles often exploding in wildcat strikes against both management and union efforts to mediate/control/limit the conflicts.

Two further important influences on the thinking of those in Zerowork deserve mention — both the work of historians. The first was that of George P. Rawick whose work on slavery in the United States included something largely lacking from C. L. R. James’ study of slavery and revolt in Haiti. Rawick was a comrade of those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and many of those they influenced

(see the brief biographical sketch of Ferruccio Gambino below). Rawick's work on slavery in the American South was based on the assembly of some twenty volumes of slave narratives. His overview volume to that series, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (1973) drew on that mass of first-person accounts by slaves of their lives and struggles, in large part — as the title of the book suggests — during those hours out from under the direct supervision of their owners.⁽³¹⁾ In a sense, Rawick's study, although an historical one, looking back to an earlier time, fulfilled Marx's objective with his workers' inquiry: to learn directly from workers about their struggles. Such a mass of documentation had not been available to James, but Rawick's work made it available and from it he drew his most important conclusion, namely, that there was far more day-to-day self-activity among slaves than had hitherto been recognized. In other words, he discovered a movement of self-determination among slaves — that built the underground railroad and sometimes exploded in violent revolts — that paralleled other examples of working class self-activity. In 1969 he had written a widely-read article about the self-activity of American waged workers in the 20th Century; in 1973 his book on slavery revealed some vital roots of that self-activity.⁽³²⁾

The second influence by historians, and one that is cited by Rawick, was that of the bottom-up British Marxist historians, especially Edward P. Thompson and his *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). In reconstructing the history of workers' struggles in England he sought "to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity." He did so by retrieving stories of those workers' past struggles from the infamous "dustbin

of history” where most historians, including labor historians, had left them. His ability to see past historical accounts of official labor and party organizations to the self-activity of the workers themselves paralleled the perspective of the Johnson-Forest/Correspondence/Facing Reality folks who had gradually weaned themselves of the Leninist desire to organize workers and had begun to explore and reveal the struggles of workers directly.

Thompson’s influence on Zerowork, however, came not only indirectly through George Rawick, and directly through several editors’ familiarity with *The Making of the English Working Class*, but also through the work of one of those editors in particular: historian Peter Linebaugh who had been a student of Thompson in England. (See his biographical sketch below.) Not only had Linebaugh worked directly with Thompson, but he had also worked alongside other young historians who were building on previous bottom-up history in rewriting the story of the relationship between crime and the working class in the 18th Century. The first product of that collaboration was *Albion’s Fatal Tree* (1975) — the “tree” being the hanging scaffold at Tyburn in London.⁽³³⁾ Eventually, Linebaugh’s magisterial *The London Hanged* (1991) would reflect both his historical research and his involvement in Zerowork.⁽³⁴⁾

Other roots of the understanding of how workers’ struggles were the source of crisis in capitalism, grew and proliferated partly as a result of the circulation of the above work to Western Europe where a parallel shift took place from the usual Left union and party politics to a focus on the situation, struggles and power of workers themselves.

Socialisme ou Barbarie

In 1948, shortly after the Johnson-Forest Tendency's reentry into the Socialist Workers Party, Grace Lee went to Paris to attend that organization's Second World Congress. While in Paris, she met Pierre Chaulieu, party name of Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997), a Greek revolutionary who had fled to France after the war and one leader of another small dissident group — this time within the Parti communiste internationaliste, the French section of the Trotskyist IVth International — the Chaulieu-Montal Tendency.(35) Later she wrote of this encounter:

We soon discovered that we had the same interest in the daily lives of workers in the capitalist process of production and similar views about revolution as the liberation of human creativity. I spent a wonderful four months in Paris, mostly socializing with Chaulieu and members of his group.(36)

Castoriadis' described this encounter as an "intellectual love affair between Grace and me." She was, he claimed, "delirious" about a text he had written called "The Phenomenology of Proletarian Consciousness". The main point of agreement, he wrote, was recognition of "the self-activity of the working class."(37)

In a move that Johnson-Forest would adopt three years later, Castoriadis and Lefort broke away from the Fourth International and founded Socialisme ou Barbarie (SoB) as a completely independent organization.(38) Like the JFT, SoB sought new solutions to the problem of working class organization in the autonomous power of rank & file workers.

The meeting of minds between Lee and Castoriadis, and then the sharing and circulating of experience and ideas between the JFT

and SoB more generally, led to the translation and serial publication of *The American Worker* in the first eight issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de Critique et d'Orientation Révolutionnaire* (1949-1965). Introducing the text in the first issue Pierre Guillaume wrote:

Every worker, regardless of “his nationality” of exploitation, will find in [*The American Worker*] the image of his own existence as a proletarian. There are, in fact, deep and consistent characteristics of proletarian experience that know neither frontiers nor regimes.(39)

It also led to collaboration of Castoriadis with Grace Lee and C. L. R. James in the drafting of *Facing Reality: The New Society . . . Where to look for it, How to bring it closer, A Statement for our time* (1958).(40) One chapter, “New Society, New People,” constituted an almost lyrical ode to the reality of working class imagination and power to craft a new society out of the present. The essay sweeps across the world, from the developed First world to the underdeveloped Third, from the new attitudes and behaviors of shop stewards in England through the struggles of women in the United States to anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa. Everywhere they claimed to see “new men, new types of human beings” throwing off the encumbering prejudices and destructive hierarchies of capitalism to develop new ways of being.

Alongside the serialized *American Worker* and articles critiquing various Trotskyist positions, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* published a whole series of reports on the situation and struggle of workers in French factories and drew conclusions about the dynamics of capitalist growth and crisis. With respect to the USSR, SoB shared the Johnson-Forest position that Stalinism had established a form of state capitalism, although they differed in particulars.(41) Articles on the situation and day-to-day struggles of workers included G. Vivier’s

series “La vie en usine” (Factory Life) and Daniel Mothé’s frequent reports on autoworkers at Renault.(42)

But if SoB saw how workers’ struggles could rupture capital, they also recognized capital’s Post-WWII successes in co-opting such challenges to its authority.(43) In a 1961 essay in issue #32 of the journal, Castoriadis argued that post-war capitalist growth was based on the harnessing of workers’ wage struggles. “Capitalism”, he wrote, has learned how to channel “working-class pressure against the consequences of the spontaneous functioning of the economy into ensuring, via the State, economic and social control.”(44) Despite the links between Johnson-Forest and Socialisme ou Barbarie, the work of the later appears to have been largely unknown either to the Canadian militants who were drawing on the works of the former or to members of the Zerowork collective — at least in the period during the crafting of the first issue.

Italian Workerism (Operaismo)

More familiar to at least some members of the Zerowork collective was similar work being done in Italy — inspired, in part, by the translation into Italian of *The American Worker* and of the writings of Daniel Mothé by Danilo Montaldi.(45) Within Italy, rank & file revolts multiplied in the period 1960-62 against not only the leadership of the relatively conservative Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) but also against the politics and strategies of the Socialist Party of Italy (the PSI, Partito Socialista Italiano), the Communist Party of Italy (the PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano) and those of their affiliated unions — especially the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL). The leadership of both parties and unions had essentially colluded with Italian capital’s post-WWII development plans. That collusion led growing numbers of working

class militants and radical intellectuals to rethink their politics and their theory.(46) Inspired by the revolts, by discovery of the writings of workers in the United States and France, and by the rediscovery of the detailed questions in Marx's *A Workers' Inquiry* (1880), radical Italian sociologists such as Raniero Panzieri (1921-1964) and Romano Alquati (1935-2010) — trained, in part, by Montaldi — went into factories such as Olivetti and Fiat to talk with workers about their concrete job situations and their struggles, both day-to-day and periodic wildcat strikes.(47) Sociologists, yes, but sociologists of a new sort — conscious re-innovators of *conricerca*, or co-research, in which the “objectivity” of their investigations was co-produced by these outside researchers and the workers with whom they investigated the situation at hand.(48)

These investigations were carried on, at least at first, by some, in the hope of bringing new understanding and new politics to the unions and to the left parties. Panzieri, for example, still hoped to influence the PSI despite past differences with it. Over time, however, such hopes faded and even when this or that new concept, in one form or another, was assimilated by those faithful to those institutions, or when one of these innovators returned to the fold, the new concepts were sometimes wielded in support of the same old social democratic politics.

In the short term, however, their studies and theoretical reformulations led to the creation of a series of new concepts and new journals to disseminate and discuss them. At the heart of the new reformulations was the replacement of the traditional Marxist focus on capital and its “laws of motion” with an understanding of capital as a set of antagonistic social relations of class in which struggles, especially those of workers, drove the development of the whole. Moreover, the concept of the working class — informed

by the extensive empirical research mentioned above — recognized how divisions in the class were not merely vehicles of capitalist control (pitting one group of workers against others in hierarchies of power). Those divisions were also repeatedly recomposed through historical cycles of workers' struggles that changed the balance of power between the classes. Their analysis provided new theoretical foundations for the phenomenon those in Johnson-Forest/Facing Reality had postulated years earlier: that workers' struggles repeatedly generated new organizational forms. These Italians extended their studies backward in time and across space, examining not merely the history of Italian workers' struggles, but also those of American workers. They discovered how those cycles of struggle not only generated new organizational forms and recomposed the balance of class power but also led, inevitably, to changes in the character of working class interests and demands — changes that had both required and produced new organizational forms.

Bringing these insights to bear on the contemporary situation in Italy, they argued that the post-WWII wave of capitalist rebuilding, especially in the industrial belt of the Po Valley, was not only based on the pitting of large numbers of young workers from southern Italy against northern workers but had gestated a new “mass worker” akin to those organized by the Wobblies in the United States in the early 20th Century and to that working class formed in the Fordist mass-production factories of the 1920s and 1930s. In other words, the pattern of capitalist development that Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) — patron saint of orthodox Italian communism — had identified as being a uniquely American phenomenon was being imported into Italy and was being used against Italian workers just as it had been used against American ones.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Only this time, a whole new set of Marxist concepts were emerging both from close study of

worker struggles and from reinterpretations of Marx's own works to understand the class dynamics of that development.

The first of the new journals to have a substantial impact was *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks) whose first issue in 1961 included a collection of documents on class struggles in FIAT by Alquati and a path-breaking theoretical piece by Panzieri. "The capitalist use of the machine" returned to Marx's analysis of "machinery and modern industry" — Chapter 15 of Volume I of *Capital* — to refocus attention on how machinery was used by capitalists not just to raise productivity — part of the rationale of the left parties and their unions for collaborating with capitalist development — but also to undermine workers' self-organization and power. That analysis explained both rank & file wildcats against the efforts of corporate bosses to introduce Fordist methods into the plants and their refusal to follow the dictates of union bureaucrats to cooperate with such changes.⁽⁵⁰⁾ This amounted to a renovated Marxist theory of technological change in class terms that identified opposed class interests and drew organizational conclusions.⁽⁵¹⁾

In issue after issue of *Quaderni Rossi* its pages were filled with both empirical work and theoretical innovations. Panzieri's piece on the capitalist use of the machine was soon followed in 1962 by Mario Tronti's "Factory and Society" that argued how "the pressure of labor-power is capable of forcing capital to modify its own internal composition, intervening within capital as essential component of capitalist development" — workers' struggles drive capitalist development. Moreover, that pressure forces capital to colonize "the whole of society" such that it comes to exist "as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society."⁽⁵²⁾ This analysis Tronti deepened in the third issue of *Quaderni Rossi* with an essay on "Capitalist Planning"

that argued that business was driven to ever more comprehensive planning by the resistance and struggles of workers.(53) The old orthodox dichotomy of capitalist “despotism” on the shop floor and capitalist “anarchy” in the social division of labor is dissolved as planning is extended ever more widely and capitalist society becomes a gigantic “social factory.”(54) In the process, all traditional distinctions between economic and political power disappear. That article was complemented by Panzieri’s “Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital,” in the fourth issue of *Quaderni Rossi*.(55) In short, these Italian Marxists, drawing on their studies of actual workers’ struggles and detailed re-readings of Marx in the light of those studies, were elaborating what amounted to a revolutionary theoretical grounding of workers’ autonomy. Tronti would go on, in essays such as “The Strategy of Refusal” and “Struggle Against Labor”, to identify and articulate how the dynamics of workers’ struggles had led beyond the traditional skilled workers’ demand to take control of their tools to contemporary demands of unskilled “mass workers” on assembly lines for less work, period, i.e., not just the refusal of capitalist imposed work but of work as the only focus and preoccupation of life. This historical shift was also documented by Sergio Bologna in his “Class Composition and the Theory of the Workers’ Party in the German Workers’ Council Movement” (1967) and much later in “The Theory and History of the Mass Worker in Italy”, (1987).(56) *Quaderni Rossi* (1961-66) was soon accompanied or followed by other organizational efforts and other publications, e.g., *Quaderni Piacentini* (1962-1984), *Classe Operaia* (1963-67), *La Classe* (1967-68), *Potere Operaio* (1969-74), and *Lotta Continua* (1969-76).

What of all this was known to the editors of *Zerowork*? It varied. This whole new wave of innovative Italian Marxist thinking was well

known to the Italian members of the Zerowork collective: Paolo Carpi gnano, Mario Montano and Bruno Ramirez and corresponding editor Ferruccio Gambino. The ideas were also well known to the other corresponding editor John Merrington who had studied in Italy and, along with Ed Emery, translated many texts. Emery (later Red Notes) and Jim Kaplan (later Radical America) went to Italy after the explosive Hot Autumn of 1969 to talk to people and gather documents; one result was the pamphlet *Italy: New Tactics and Organization* produced by Emery in 1971 — whose circulation nourished the development of Big Flame and the struggles by autoworkers in England.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Those translations were discussed in multiple study groups, including one organized by Merrington and Emery that included, among others, future Zerowork editor Peter Linebaugh.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the years before the Zerowork collective was formed, both Mario Montano and Bruno Ramirez contributed translations of key workerist texts to the American journals *Telos* and *Radical America*. Other translations were done by individuals interested or involved in this or that wing of the evolving struggles in Italy. Most translations were either from *Lotta Continua* (LC) or *Potere Operaio* (PO). Among them were “Italy 1969-1970 Wave of Struggles” by Ferruccio Gambino, “Organizing for Workers’ Power” by Andriano Sofri and “Class Struggle and European Unity” by Guido Viale.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Several of these translations were compiled and published in *Radical America* in 1971 and 1973.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Some were published as pamphlets and circulated by various groups in the U.S. and Canada. These translations — along with word-of-mouth accounts by their Italian comrades — provided the primary window into Italian developments for those in the Zerowork collective who did not read the language. All these

materials can be considered more or less significant inputs into the thinking of everyone in the collective. (More detail is included in the biographical sketches of the various individuals.)

From Struggles of the Waged to those of the Unwaged

Alongside these primary roots of the thinking that went into the composition of Zerowork — some quite old — I want to pay special attention to the emergence from relative obscurity of what might be called an aerial root — because once above ground, it flourished in the light of day and then became a major component of the root architecture of the first issue of Zerowork — the analysis of class struggle in the various domains of the production and reproduction of labor power. Awareness of such struggles was never completely absent among the groups already mentioned but in terms of the amount of attention devoted to these domains, for a long time they were given relatively short shrift. This seems to have been the case across all those groups sketched above.

In the period from the 1940s through the 1960s, from the earliest work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency through Correspondence and Facing Reality to Dunayevskaya's group News & Letters, I have only been able to find bits and pieces of writings dealing directly with domains such as the home and housework or school and schoolwork. In Europe the more or less parallel workerist focus on waged factory labor — running from Socialism ou Barbarie through Quaderni Rossi to Potere Operaio — also involved a relative neglect of the labor of reproduction — until a women's backlash began to properly readdress the situation in the early 1970s.

Housework and the Struggle against It

With respect to housework — traditionally understood as a domain of women's work — relatively little was written or published about the struggles of women qua unwaged houseworkers. In *The Invading Socialist Society* (1947) that C. L. R. James called “the fundamental document of the Johnson-Forest Tendency” — where it set out its differences with both Trotsky and other Trotskyists — there is nothing at all on women or the work of reproducing labor power. In *The American Worker* (1947) Singer only devoted a couple of pages to the ways in which workers' harsh life in the factory haunted their life at home and only a couple of lines to how it added to the housework burdens of their spouses. In Lee's analysis, while she does not “deny the importance of women struggling as women for emancipation”, she focused on “worker's activity in production”, neglected labor in the home and argued that the emancipation of women could only come through a “revolution in the mode of production.”(60) In *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950), the chapter devoted to their analysis of the class struggle, including “the mode of labor in the United States” included, once again, nothing on women or the work of reproducing labor power, despite the authors' recognition of the welfare state as a new component of state capitalist social planning.

The same year, however, an unpublished, book-length manuscript by C. L. R. James, *Notes on American Civilization*, included one section on “Negroes, women and the Intellectuals” — apparently an after-thought, to “fill up certain gaps” and for the sake of rendering a “total impression of society.” In the dozen or so pages devoted to women, James sketched the growing frustration of middle-class women with the disparity between the idea of equality and the concrete inequalities of their daily lives.(61) The result: the spreading refusal by women of all those constraints upon their

self-development as human beings — including their traditional subordination to men and child rearing within families. He pointed to the refusal of increasing numbers of young women to marry and to rising divorce rates among those who do. Although such constraints and struggles were only “highly publicized” among middle-class women, he argued, they “apply with ten-fold force to the vast majority of working women or wives in the United States.”

Also that year, Raya Dunayevskaya contributed a short piece on “The Miners’ Wives” to the SWP’s newspaper *The Militant* highlighting the active roles of women during a coal miners’ strike in West Virginia. However, the focus of that article was on the women’s support for the men’s strike. The only reference to housework was an account of a threat by the women to make their men “build fires, cook their own food, wash their own clothes, clean the house and hire baby sitters” if they returned to work without a contract.(62)

Two years later, in 1952, James encouraged Selma Weinstein (né Deitch, later James) — a single mother — and Filomena Daddario to write about the situation and struggles of women. The result was an essay titled *A Woman’s Place* — published with the pseudonyms “Mrs. Marie Brant” (James) and “Mrs. Ellen Santori” (Daddario) — that described the work of both stay-at-home housewives and those who also worked for a wage, the problems faced by women in both situations and their struggles to deal with them. A “woman’s place,” they argued, was less and less in the home and increasingly wherever women had the power to go.(63) The essay was published first in *Correspondence* and then as a pamphlet in 1953. The next year, in 1954, Weinstein wrote a regular column about issues specific to women for each issue of *Correspondence*’s biweekly.(64)

Early in 1953 Raya Dunayevskaya drafted an essay — that remained unpublished — that included a few pages on women’s struggles. In some ways, the analysis paralleled James’ in his earlier unpublished manuscript, even using some of the same language. The major difference was the inclusion in her essay of a discussion of how the continuation of wartime roles of women in the Workers’ Party was challenged by men after the war and how those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency defended those roles, but were still limited in their ability to move beyond old political categories and frames of references. Similar problems surfaced, she wrote, when the JFT rejoined the SWP and discovered that while many women “occupied the same subordinate position that women did in bourgeois society — they worked to support their men” — even the women in “leadership” positions shared the male leaders’ sense of superiority over rank and file members. The very limited analysis in both unpublished manuscripts and published articles indicates how little attention, study and thought they were devoting to struggles against the work of reproducing labor power — especially if these few scattered pages are juxtaposed to, say, Simon de Beauvoir’s 800 page, two volume *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) published in 1949.

(65) According to the transcript of a talk given by Dunayevskaya in 1974, she was not only familiar with the book in the 1950s but discussed her reading of it with Black factory women — especially her conclusion that de Beauvoir thought that men must free women.

(66) Yet despite her critique I have found no evidence of any effort in those years to produce a parallel study analyzing women’s work in the sphere of reproduction or to demonstrate the autonomous struggles of women against it.(67)

In 1958, *Facing Reality* did include a few paragraphs on women and their struggles for real equality — beyond whatever formal

equalities, e.g., the vote, they had won up to that point. After noting “the handicaps of child-bearing and child-rearing in a competitive society”, the existence of a “colossal struggle for the establishment of truly human relations between men and women”, and rising divorce rates among “the professional classes”, the authors argued that “the real battle for new relations between the sexes is being fought above all in the American working class”. There, after the experience of waged labor during WWII, women “have no intention of once more becoming an adjunct to the male wage earner.” They conclude:

In the age-long struggles of human beings to remold their world nearer to their heart’s desire, rarely have such heroic efforts, such courage, such resource, such ingenuity been shown as in these efforts of American working women to live a complete life, a life corresponding to the technical achievements and social relations of their highly-developed society. As long as official society lasts, they cannot win a complete victory, but positions have been gained and if some have been lost, many have been held. This, one of the greatest social struggles of our time, goes unrecorded!(68)

Unfortunately, from all evidence, little more about those struggles was either studied or recorded by the members of Facing Reality over the next decade.(69)

A special issue of *Radical America* on women, published in 1970, signaled the rising power of a new generation of feminists to change the agenda of “the movement” more generally. As the decade unfolded not only would some women draw on, and criticize, the traditions I have described but they would deepen their analysis and organize themselves in new autonomous ways. Of all the moments of the “Women’s Liberation Movement” of those years, the one that

would have the most direct influence on Zerowork was, without a doubt, the Wages for Housework analysis and campaign. Whereas the writings in the 1950s about women's struggles were primarily descriptive — with the underlying Marxism mostly implicit — in the 1970s the writings of women associated with Wages for Housework explicitly drew on Marxian categories while substantially elaborating their analysis of the work of reproducing labor power and valorizing contemporary struggles against it.

The seminal piece of writing that largely framed the thinking and strategies of the Wages for Housework Campaign was Mariarosa Dalla Costa's essay "Women and the Subversion of the Community" originally written as a discussion piece for a gathering of Italian feminists in Padova in 1971. That essay, as Dalla Costa would explain later, was an attempt to synthesize the ideas and experience that had been developing among women — herself included — who had been engaged in the workerist movement in Italy, especially Potere Operaio — a network of groups that had already argued for wages for unwaged subjects like students.⁽⁷⁰⁾ A year later the Wages for Housework Campaign was launched, again in Padova, along with the formation of the International Feminist Collective. Dalla Costa's 1971 essay and the 1952 essay on "A Woman's Place" were then combined — the former translated into English and the latter into Italian — and published, first in Italy (Padova: Marsilio Editori) in March 1972 as *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale* and then in England (Bristol: Falling Wall Press) in October 1972 as *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

The basic arguments — that the essential labor of producing and reproducing human life as labor power for capital is not only vast but largely hidden because it has been unwaged and unrecognized, that without the labor of reproduction there can be no labor of

production and that the former labor should, instead, be revealed, recognized and waged — was soon elaborated by many authors in many languages as part of the International Wages for Housework Campaign. Among those elaborations, the ones familiar to most of the men in the Zerowork collective — besides *The Power of Women* and the *Subversion of the Community* — included the following: Selma James, “Women, the Unions and Work,” (1972), Selma James, “Sex, Race and Working Class Power,” (1974), Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (1975), Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counterplanning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework, A Perspective on Capital and the Left*, (1975) and the collection Wendy Edmond & Suzie Fleming (eds) *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework & the Wages Due*, (1975).(71)

There were, however, certain theoretical formulations in these Wages for Housework publications — beginning with Mariarosa’s seminal essay — that did not sit well with some otherwise sympathetic comrades. I will illustrate with just one example, important given the political genealogy sketched above, that reveals how the thinking of those in this history was evolving. When Selma James sent a copy of Mariarosa’s essay to Marty Glaberman in 1972, he responded with a detailed critique of what he felt were the essay’s main shortcomings: the relationship between unpaid domestic labor and surplus value and, closely related, the definition of the working class or proletariat.(72)

With respect to what he saw as the first shortcoming, Glaberman objected to the assertion that “domestic work not only produces use values but has an essential function in the production of surplus value”. “Unpaid labor,” he countered, “creates neither value nor surplus value.” Marx’s “definition of value, exchange-value, etc”, he went on, “leaves no room for unpaid labor.” His objection

foreshadowed that of many others as the Wages for Housework movement set off a widespread debate among Marxists and feminists about how to analyze domestic labor. How James responded to his critique, I don't know, but clearly Glaberman's objection lay in his interpretation of Dalla Costa's argument that domestic work "has an essential function in the production of surplus value." He — and many who came after him — read those words as meaning the same thing as Marx's frequent statement that commodity-producing labor "creates" value and surplus value.⁽⁷³⁾ Neither his objection, nor the theoretical issue he raised was directly addressed in Zerowork — where Dalla Costa's work was used as one fundamental building block of the overall analysis.

What he saw as the second shortcoming — a much too broad definition of working class — was closely related to the first. If, according to him, the working class, or proletariat, must be defined narrowly as including only those waged employees of capital producing commodities for sale (and surplus value or profit) then clearly all sorts of other people — including women in the home — should not be thought of as being part of the working class even if and when their struggles against capital "have independent validity" and even "contribute to the struggle for socialism, directly or indirectly." Glaberman's position here is rooted in both his theoretical understanding of Marx and in the long-fought politics of the Johnson-Forest/Facing Reality tradition of recognizing and valorizing the autonomous struggles of blacks, women, students, etc. To reinterpret these "other" struggles as being working class would, he feared, result in abandoning all of the important distinctions he and his comrades had fought to establish. Whether he ever confronted the new concepts of class composition and political recomposition that were designed specifically to capture and appreciate precisely

those differences, and the interactions among them within the working class, I don't know.(74) At any rate, the broader definition of the working class was basic to the analysis in *Zerowork*.

Schoolwork and the Struggle against It

With respect to the analysis of students and schoolwork — designed to turn young humans into beings willing and able to work for capitalist employers — by people associated with Johnson-Forest, *Correspondence* and *Facing Reality*, I have found very little from the 1950s and not much more from the 1960s. On the one hand, there was not much of an organized student movement in the 1950s; tiny youth groups such as the Student League for Industrial Democracy were mainly preoccupied with events outside of schools.(75) On the other hand, the little attention paid to student struggles was directed not at such formal organizations but at the self-activity of regular students. One early piece, *Artie Cuts Out* (1953), was a short pamphlet containing the reflections of one high school student on his experience, which included a student strike in 1950.(76) As might be expected, the reflections are passionate but merely descriptive. The student, Arthur Bauman, sees quite clearly the repressive hierarchical structure of schools and the various ways teachers attempt to impose discipline and job training. He also describes how he, and other students, often responded: refusing the discipline or “cutting out” of a class, or of school entirely. But, there is no theoretical afterward such as the one written by Grace Lee for *The American Worker*.

In *Facing Reality* (1958) the struggles of students are only evoked in a reference to the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle* which “put on screen for the first time the jungle which is American education and relations between teacher and pupil.” Although the film (and the novel of the same name on which it was based) amounted to

a fictional elaboration of the same themes as *Artie Cuts Out* and is situated in the same New York Public school system, there is no analysis in *Facing Reality* of the student struggles portrayed. The film is merely held up, alongside *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) as a cultural mirror of the “crisis of American bourgeois society.”(77)

In the early 1960s in the United States, white students as well as black began to participate in the rapidly growing Civil Rights Movement either in their home communities or in areas of intense struggle, e.g., the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed in the wake of the 1960 Greensboro student sit-ins and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were emblematic of student activism in that period. Other than efforts at desegregation, however, these were mainly struggles outside the school system. That changed with the explosion of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley in December 1964 when 800 students occupied Sproul Hall and the governor called in over 600 police to eject and arrest the protestors. From that point on, student activists brought their struggles home to their schools and began to elaborate detailed critiques of the repressive structures of education and to demand changes in those structures to meet their needs.(78)

For the most part, however, those “New Left” critiques owed more to C. W. Mills and his analysis of the power elite than to Marx. From *Who Rules Columbia* (1968) to *Maggie’s Farm: A Radical Guide to Stanford* (1969), the emphasis of student activists was on dissecting business and state control of universities and critiquing the resulting subordination of teaching and research to corporate and government interests and programs. Central to those critiques were the absence of programs of study relevant to student concerns, linkages between university research and the War in Vietnam and

ties to corporate strategies both local and international. The former would lead to the rise of the Black student movement and the latter would link on-campus struggles with off-campus ones against the War.(79) In the 1960s the linkages between the student “New Left” and Marx were highly mediated — by Herbert Marcuse, by Eric Fromm, by Maoism and by various radical periodicals, such as *Monthly Review* (1949-), *New Left Review* (1960-), *Radical America* (1967-1999) and *Telos* (1968-). As already mentioned, the latter two journals provided occasional glimpses into the traditions being sketched here but little was reported when it came to schoolwork and student struggles.(80)

In France, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* paid little more attention to schooling and the struggles of students than *Facing Reality*. The only substantive treatment was one 1963 essay on “La jeunesse étudiante” that was published along with two documents by students on their situation.(81) By this time, of course, Castoriadis had broken with Marxism so the group’s earlier “workers’ inquiry” approach to understanding struggles was not adapted to the growing revolt of students.

Unfortunately, this was also true with the Situationists who, in the run-up to the great explosion of French student struggles in 1968, did pay some attention to the particularities of schooling and student activism. Probably the most important Situationist document dealing with student struggles was *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier* (1966) (*On the Poverty of Student Life*) largely written by a member of the Situationist International in collaboration with radical students at the Université de Strasbourg. Those students had gotten themselves elected to *L’Association Federative Generale*

des Etudiants de Strasbourg, local section of the social-democratic Union Nationale des étudiants de France (UNEF).(82) In a move that anticipated the widespread distribution of critical assessments of American universities to new students a few years later, e.g., *Maggie's Farm: A Radical Guide to Stanford*, they printed and distributed 10,000 copies to incoming students. Despite its instant notoriety — and widespread popularity — the essay contains more critical condemnation of student passivity and self-centeredness than it does analysis of the dynamics of students' day-to-day struggles. Where it does deal with student activism, it mainly provides a critique of existing efforts, from the Provos through "little groups of 'militants' who claim to represent the authentic Bolshevik heritage" and reformist groupuscules such as the post-Marxist after-life of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The essay's primary thrust is to call for the extension of student struggle to all of society and a rethinking of the revolutionary project in the light of Situationist analysis of the spectacle. Yet, at the same time, its roots can be seen in its repeated evocation of workers' councils and self-management (autogestion):

It is by its present organization that a new revolutionary movement will stand or fall. The final criterion of its coherence will be the compatibility of its actual form with its essential project — the international and absolute power of Workers' Councils as foreshadowed by the proletarian revolutions of the last hundred years. . . . "All Power to the Soviets" is still the slogan, but this time without the Bolshevik afterthoughts. The proletariat can only play the game of revolution if the stakes are the whole world, for the only possible form of workers' power — generalized and complete self-management . . . "Workers' control must be the means and the end of the struggle: it is at once the goal of that struggle and its adequate form."

Their concept of self-management, however, was not a concept of merely taking control of the means of production to eliminate the alienation associated with capitalist control and replacing it with non-alienated work as true human being. On the contrary, their self-management would abolish the market, commodities and work as a separate domain of domination.

With self-management ends one of the fundamental splits in modern society — between a labor which becomes increasingly reified and a “leisure” consumed in passivity. The death of the commodity naturally means the suppression of work and its replacement by a new type of free activity. . . it is work itself which must be called in question . . . no strategy short of the abolition of work will do. It is only beyond the contradiction of use-value and exchange-value that history begins, that men make their activity an object of their will and their consciousness, and see themselves in the world they have created.

When student struggles — alongside those of 10 million French workers — did explode in May 1968, many themes of the Situationist analysis could be heard in the student assemblies and read in graffiti, spray-painted and stenciled on the walls of Paris and other hotspots of the uprising. The abolition of work would be the primary remnant of those ideas that would find its way into *Zerowork* #1.

At the time, these events — and the roll of students in the mass occupations — were being watched and analyzed by workerists in Italy. There too the 1960s saw an explosion of student struggles, but how those closely associated with workerism tended to view the struggles of students varied across space and time.(83) Sergio Bologna and Giaro Daghini, for instance, compiled and published “Maggio ‘68 in Francia” in *Quaderni Piacentini* where they credited

students with playing an important role in spurring many workers into action.(84) On the other hand, workerism's focus on waged worker struggles led some to be initially dismissive of student activism as the "play" of the children of the middle class — who made up the bulk of students in the universities. The preoccupation of many of those students with such foreign struggles as those in Vietnam, the Cultural Revolution in China, guerrilla warfare in the "Third World" or uprisings in American black ghettos were largely secondary to the interests of most workerists. The Center-Left parties sought to subsume student activism within carefully circumscribed "youth" organizations of their own. But as student struggles spread beyond universities into secondary schools and the Movimento Studentesco began to elaborate its own autonomous analyses and strategies, it began to be taken more seriously. Both the workerists and many of the student leaders, some influenced by workerism, increasingly focused on the strategic political question of the best ways to bring student struggles and those of other social sectors — especially waged workers — together. One approach, not surprisingly, was to argue that student struggles must be subordinated to those of waged workers. The rationale lay in seeing students as future workers and finding ways to overcome the ideological role of the school — the ways in which it functions to condition its inmates into accepting the capitalist organization of society.(85) Another approach built on efforts within the student movement to widen accessibility to education, especially higher education, beyond the middle class to the children of blue collar workers. The latter's financial needs fueled demands for more stipends/scholarships; the search for links with the workers' movement led to those demands being mutated into demands for wages for students, or even "a general salary to all young people under age 18".(86) Such efforts to bring student and waged

worker struggles together would contribute to the formation of Lotta Continua (1969-1976).

Intersecting with the analysis of the student movement was an emerging awareness that despite Marx's analysis in the "Fragment on Machines", not all labor was being deskilled and reduced to "machine tending." On the contrary, capitalist industrial development also required and produced skilled technical labor power at many levels of production — some of which was being trained in schools. What some saw as the increasing importance of such labor power — despite countertendencies toward ever finer divisions of technical labor — gave increased importance to the struggles of students — those very skilled technical laborers-in-training. Other than various invocations of the authoritarian methods through which such training was being organized, there was relatively little effort to extend the methods of the "workers' inquiry" into schools, at any level.(87) Always students were analyzed as something separate and different from workers. In this the ideas of Italian workerists, in this period, paralleled those of Facing Reality — as enunciated, for example, by Martin Glaberman in his critique of how the Wages for Housework analysis led to an unacceptable broadening of definition of working class.(88)

However, Mariarosa Dalla Costa's "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (1971) not only provided theoretical grounding for the Wages for Housework Campaign but her inclusion of analyses of schooling and the struggles of unwaged students against it also elaborated a Marxian logic to seeing those battles as integral elements of the overall class struggle. Not only did she identify ideological aspects of schooling, e.g. the "conditioning [of] students against 'crime'", but she also highlighted how the imposition of discipline and hierarchy (grades and selection) aims at preparing

students for later employment. Moreover, she identifies struggles against these various mechanisms of domination undertaken by students at all levels. Condensed within a few pages is a more succinct Marxian analysis of schoolwork and the struggle against it than in previous writings that touched on this subject in the history being sketched here. From the problematic of the relationship of students to workers, she moved the discussion to that of students as workers. This change in theoretical perspective moved the issue of student income (stipends/scholarships/wages) from a means for blue-collar children to gain access to education to putting the struggles of students on the same footing as that of other workers — struggles over wage-work deals and over the conditions of work.

Not surprisingly, this kind of analysis was soon being applied by students themselves to their own struggles. In 1974 the London-based Power of Women newsletter published — very much in the old style of *Artie Cuts Out* — an interview with students who were circulating a petition for wages for students. A year later, students at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst — including one member of the Zerowork collective — published a pamphlet titled *Wages for Students* that laid out an analysis of how students' unwaged schoolwork served to produce their own labor power and demanded payment from capital for that work.(89) Some of that analysis was incorporated into George Caffentzis' article "Throwing Away the Ladder" in the first issue of *Zerowork*.

Peasants and their Struggles

With respect to peasants, I feel it necessary to preface my account of how they have come to be counted among the "unwaged" by some people in the history presented here and how their work has come to be seen as contributing to the reproduction of labor

power with a few remarks on the difficulties of the very category of “peasant”. Today anthropologists and sociologists apply the label “peasants” to a wide variety of peoples living in rural areas with incredibly diverse patterns of work, life and struggle. The roles such people play in contemporary capitalism differ markedly all over the world. Generally speaking, the category “peasant” refers to agrarian folk who “work the land”, that is to say, they engage in agricultural activities of various sorts. But not all who work the land are considered peasants. American family farmers, for example, almost never refer to themselves, nor are they referred to by others, as “peasants”. The waged employees of agribusiness corporations engaged in factory farming are also never classified as peasants. In Europe, on the other hand, many family farmers do call themselves peasants, are so categorized by those who study them and organize themselves as such.

Some peasants, like family farmers, own their land (even if a bank holds a mortgage), work it, consume part of their produce and sell the rest in markets, local, regional, national or international. Others have access to land they can work only through some form of land tenure — the forms of which differ almost endlessly around the world. Some, so-called “landless peasants” have no access at all but work the land of others, often for a wage — whether in kind or in money. In each of these varied situations, the roles played by individuals often differ according to gender and age. Perhaps the most common condition of peasants, however, is a complexity of roles that defies easy classification. Those with direct access may devote themselves mainly to farming their own land during periods of planting and harvesting, but when time allows, they may engage in artisanal crafting for the market or find waged jobs on others’ lands, or even off the land in villages, towns, cities or large-scale

infrastructure projects, e.g., dam building and hydroelectric power plant construction. Thus, when we look at the situation of peasants around the world we find a varied mix of subsistence agriculture, production for the market and engagement in labor markets.

Whether the roles of individual peasants are few or many, in most cases they can only be properly understood within the context of the communities within which those individuals live. This is most obvious in the case of indigenous communities that have preserved substantial elements of their pre-colonial cultures and languages down through the years sufficiently to clearly differentiate them from other communities — including whatever dominant culture and language have been imposed on them by outside forces. All this often obtains even when rural enclosures have stripped peasants of their land and driven many into cities. There, they may seek waged jobs, or they may engage in those self-activities associated with the so-called “informal sector” — while still, for at least a generation and sometime longer, retaining ties — of family and friends, of culture, of language — to their communities of origin and longings for a return to the land.

Inevitably, the variety and complexity of peasant situations have gestated diverse degrees and forms of struggle. Given their attachment to the land, struggles for land reform have been common — from demands for formal legal redistribution to direct land seizures. But so have efforts to raise wages, among the rural landless where enclosure has displaced large numbers and limited mechanization has not undercut the demand for their labor and among those who have found waged jobs in urban areas and been able to organize with others. Peasants producing mainly for the market have also fought for higher prices for their output, or against government policies that have raised input prices — say for irrigation

water and fertilizer — while holding down the prices of farm products.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Even where peasants have been so repressed that their possibilities of overt action have been limited, they have had recourse to a wide variety of covert struggles.⁽⁹¹⁾ One thing is certain, the all too common, pejorative views of peasants as a quiescent mass of ignorant drudges who put up with their lot, generation after generation, is false. Such views were most spectacularly falsified during the most massive revolutionary upheavals in the 20th Century: the Mexican revolution of 1910-20, the Russian revolutions of 1905-1907 and 1917 and the Chinese revolution of roughly 1920 to 1949. Each of those great events depended far more upon the uprising of peasants — either recent rural-urban migrants to newly built factories or those still toiling in the countryside — than on the actions of any well-organized political party. Beyond these massive upheavals there have been any number of other violent, peasant-led revolts as well as widespread peasant support for non-violent change — as in the struggle for independence in colonial India.

Despite the diversity, persistence and frequently the intensity of peasant struggles, Marxists have long been either indifferent to, or critical of peasant struggles. The indifference has derived primarily from an analysis that took the fate of English peasants — subjected by enclosure to the labor market or to the acceptance of tenuous tenancy on great landed estates — analyzed by Marx as “primitive accumulation” as their primary point of reference. Such “proletarianization of the peasantry” has long been viewed by many Marxists as so inevitable as to render preoccupation with their struggles a waste of time.

This neglect is traceable not only to Marx’s analysis of the impact of primitive accumulation on English peasants but also to his views of peasants elsewhere. Among the best known and most frequently

referenced of those views was his brief analysis of the French peasantry included in his 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852) dealing with the final defeat of the revolution of 1848. In that essay he characterized French peasants as constituting a class “in-itself” in so far as they had many commonalities of situation and shared experiences of exploitation. They were not, however, in his view, able to constitute themselves as a class “for-itself” by acting together in a concerted manner in their collective self-interests — and thus were easily recruited and utilized against the urban waged workers that he believed, however weak at that time, were progressing toward higher levels of self-organization and revolutionary action.(92)

Less well known, but also contributing to the tendency of Marxists to neglect peasant struggles was Friedrich Engels’ book *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850). While Engels celebrated the peasants, miners, soldiers and clerics who rose up in 1525 against enclosure, taxation and repressive authority and who conceived egalitarian “communist” alternatives, as an anticipation of the eventual transcendence of capitalism, he also argued that their failure was inevitable given their limited ability to act in concert. Following in Engels’ footsteps was Karl Kautsky, who concluded in his *On the Agrarian Question* (1899) that German peasants at the end of the 19th Century were no more capable of self-organization as a class than those of 350 years earlier and were, moreover, doomed to disappear, disintegrating into a few big capitalist farmers and dispossessed waged workers.(93)

These views of the limited ability of peasants for self-organization and struggle were taken up by Russian Marxists in their debates with Populists who were, on the contrary, much more optimistic about the potential of peasant revolt to transform the existing social order. Despite Marx having come down on the side

of the Populists — something kept hidden by Soviet authorities for decades — the Bolsheviks embraced his earlier skepticism.(94) Exemplary among pre-1917 Bolshevik attitudes toward the peasantry was Lenin's quite serious effort to understand the development of agriculture in Russia. In a manner similar to Kautsky's, he tracked down and examined as much statistical evidence as he could find. But his focus was on the degree of recognizably capitalist forms of agriculture and the proletarianization of the peasantry. Prior to 1917, he consistently supported peasant struggles demanding the redistribution of land because, he argued, it would hasten the development of capitalism — not any post-capitalist form of social organization.(95) Once in power he and the Bolshevik Party leadership moved as quickly as possible to bring the rebellion of both urban and rural peasants under control and reestablish the Czarist practice of exploiting the peasantry to fund rapid industrialization. (96) Much the same story unfolded in China where once Mao Tse-tung discovered that peasant revolution was underway in Hunan in 1927, he too moved as fast as possible to gain leadership and control. There too, once victories over the Japanese and the Kuomintang were achieved in 1945 and 1949, the Chinese Communist Party rejected peasant demands for the immediate implementation of the communist rule of “to each according to their needs” and, like the Soviets, institutionalized the extraction of peasant surpluses for purposes of industrialization.(97)

Against this background, the attitudes towards and positions on peasants of those Marxists whose influence on Zerowork I have been tracing have been decidedly mixed.

In the case of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, C. L. R. James' early work of the 1930s, on the Haitian Revolution and in support of Pan Africanism demonstrated a clear awareness that struggles against

colonialism involved unwaged slaves and peasants as well as waged workers.(98) However, in his best-known work, *The Black Jacobins*, on the 1791-1803 slave revolt in Haiti, James saw those slaves not as peasants but rather, because of the way they were organized, as akin to the modern proletariat.

The slaves worked the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge factories [sic] which covered the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence. . .(99)

In his writings about anti-colonial struggles in Africa, he recognized how enclosures were used to drive peasants from their lands and the various methods used by colonial powers to force the resulting landless into wage labor. He also highlighted the many revolts against colonial rule, including revolts by peasants — sometimes in their own interests, e.g., protesting low prices for their products or high taxes, sometimes in support of striking waged workers. “What the authorities fear most,” he wrote, “is a combination of the workers in the towns and the peasants in the interior.” Yet, at the same time, he insisted that the failures of those revolts lay in the limitations of the rebels’ ability to organize, and those limitations, in turn, derived primarily from their lack of education. James’s fundamental point of reference in this regard, were not any close acquaintance or study of actual self-activity among peasants, but rather his embrace of Lenin’s last statements in the year before his death in 1924 calling for educating the mass of Soviet peasants so they could be participants — under Bolshevik guidance — in the building of socialism.(100) This judgment would continue to shape James’ views on peasant struggle in the post-colonial world of the 1950s and 1960s even after he had broken with the Leninist

concept of the vanguard party.(101) Although James recognized the autonomous power of peasants to struggle in their own interests, he retained that skepticism of their ability to organize effectively that ran from Marx and Engels right through the whole history of Marxist orthodoxy.

Although such skepticism certainly haunted James and Dunayevskaya's analysis of the Soviet Union as state capitalism, it did not preclude their appreciation of the continuing resistance of Russian peasants to Stalinist exploitation. This was especially true with Dunayevskaya's writings. Being Russian and able to read Soviet documents, she not only provided most of the Tendency's evidence of the capitalist character of the Soviet Union but also most of their commentary on the struggles of Russian peasants. In a January 1943 article in *The New Internationalist*, she traced the processes of collectivization and peasant resistance to it — resistance that forced the state to allow free markets for [non-collectivized] peasant output.(102) She also noted how variations in access to inputs and to official output markets led to enormous differences in collective farm income: millionaires vs paupers. Finally, she showed how mechanization, refusal to move to the factory and low levels of peasant work created large scale hidden unemployment in the countryside that the state began to tap, by force. Fifteen years later *Marxism and Freedom*, published in 1958, contained a chapter on “Russian State Capitalism vs Workers’ Revolt” that reiterated her previous analyses, including a highlighting not only of worker resistance in factories but of peasant resistance in the countryside — including such extreme measures as the slaughter of animals to prevent their appropriation by the state. She argued that the extent of repression (death penalties, forced labor camps, etc.) measured the extent of resistance.

That same year James, Lee and Chaulieu's discussion of the Hungarian workers' councils in *Facing Reality* argued that the councils were able to overcome traditional divisions, such as those between technicians and the manual workers who invited them into the councils, and those between workers and peasants who supported them.(103) They did not, however, lay out any analysis of existing autonomous struggles of peasants to explain that support.

The very limited knowledge of peasant reality of those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Correspondence, *Facing Reality* and News & Letters groups, it seems to me, contributed to their retention of Marxism's long-standing skepticism about the potentialities of peasant autonomy. At the same time, their ignorance was understandable. In the first place, the primary areas of their political activity, and therefore their attention to workers' struggles, were located in the industrial heartland of the United States, especially Detroit, (and, eventually, for James in England). Their very "workerist" orientation kept them, for the most part, far from much contact with, or analysis of, rural struggles in those countries or in the Third World. A brief sojourn among sharecroppers in Missouri (1941), James' short-lived contribution-at-a-distance to the Worker and Farmers' Party in Trinidad (1965-66) and short visits in West Africa (1967-68) — where he hobnobbed with elected officials or lectured university students — were no substitutes for close and sustained study of peasant lives and struggles.(104) Overwhelmingly their attention and political work was always focused on the struggles of waged industrial workers. In the second place, despite their close study of Marx's original texts, they were, as far as I have been able to discover, unaware for many years of his letters to Zasulich with their embrace of Populist hopes for the peasant mir as a possible "fulcrum for the social regeneration of Russia."(105)

This was also largely true for those related European organizations discussed above, e.g., *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Italian workerists. In the six issues of *Quaderni rossi*, examples illuminating theoretical pieces were almost always drawn from manufacturing and only two articles dealt with either agriculture or agrarian reform — neither of which reflected the kind of “workers’ inquiry” research being carried out in factories.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ In both France and Italy, although there was clear awareness that to a considerable degree post-WWII economic recovery and industrial modernization was based on labor recently recruited from rural areas, either at home or abroad, relatively little attention was paid to the peasants involved with such rural-urban migration. An exception in Italy was the Danilo Montaldi’s *Milano, Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati* (1960).

This changed, somewhat, as the 1960s progressed, as anti-colonial struggles became post-colonial, anti-neocolonial ones and were met with counterinsurgency violence. The spread of “Third worldism” — that tendency of young militants in North America and Europe to look for inspiration abroad, especially in the Cuban Revolution, the example of Che Guevara, the war for Vietnamese independence and the writings of Mao Tse-tung — made it politically impossible for those who had been preoccupied with the struggles of waged industrial workers to continue to neglect peasant struggles. Still, on the whole, relatively little attention was spared for those struggles and certainly there was little of the intense and detailed study characteristic of the “workers’ inquiry” approach to analyzing class composition that had been applied to the class war in industrial settings. Even when the *Materiali Marxisti* group in Padua turned its attentions to those areas from which those industrial workers had come, their preoccupation was primarily with State policies, e.g., Ferrarri Bravo and Serafini’s book on the Italian South, or

mezzogiorno. (107) It was also true when they composed and assembled a collection of essays on the “multinational worker” — directly addressing the role of immigrant labor, the focus was mainly on the roles and struggles of that labor in Italian industry. Only three essays in the collection *L’operaio multinazionale in Europa* (1974) — one on the struggles by workers in and from the Maghreb, one on those in Yugoslavia, and one that examined the struggles of women in the frequently peasant communities from which the immigrants had come, treated the struggles at home that contributed to workers’ decisions to immigrate.(108)

Incipient Differences

It should go without saying, but I’m going to say it anyway, that the members of the Zerowork collective brought to bear in their thinking and discussions all kinds of other intellectual and political influences beyond those sketched above. As the brief biographies of each will indicate, those individuals came from diverse intellectual and political backgrounds and thus brought with them to this collective project unique experiences and ideas appropriated from years of study in many fields and of all kinds of literature. To adapt something Marty Glaberman once wrote about George Rawick, these folks “knew a lot of stuff — a lot more than was involved in their academic specialties. They understood a lot of stuff. Knowledge is not simply the accumulation of facts; it is understanding relationships, causes, connections.”(109) The diversity of backgrounds and knowledge made for an intriguing and enriching series of encounters from which, I believe, everyone involved felt himself to have benefited enormously. This despite, and perhaps partly because of, differences amidst many shared complementarities.

Among those differences I want to evoke just two — both of which eventually contributed to splits in the group and people taking different, though still related, political paths. The first concerned the interpretations of trends in the character of class relationships emerging from the cycle of struggle that had thrown the post-WWII capitalist system into crisis. The second concerned the organizational implications drawn from those interpretations.

With respect to the emerging trends in the character of class relationships there were two tendencies. One emphasized the how capitalist recourse to the relative surplus value strategy of substituting constant capital for labor, i.e., raising the organic composition of capital, in response to workers' demands for more benefits and less work had been undermining the capitalist ability to impose work itself. This line of thinking drew upon three sources — two empirical and one theoretical. The two empirical supports were the rapid development and generalization of automation during the Keynesian period and the rising levels of unemployment that came with the recessions of 1969-70 and 1973-75. While the generation of unemployment by the spread of automation in manufacturing had been, to a substantial degree, offset by the rapid expansion of the service sector of the economy, automation was also spreading there as well. What mainstream economists called structural unemployment and Marx called “the stagnant” part of the reserve army of labor seemed to be growing. The theoretical support was contained not only in Marx's analysis of relative surplus value in Vol. I of *Capital*, but also in the “fragment on machines” in the *Grundrisse* that had been receiving more and more attention, especially in Europe where the unemployment was worse than in the United States.

The “fragment on machines” was receiving a lot of attention because in it Marx pointed to a logical outcome of the capitalist

strategy of repeatedly substituting machines for living labor in such a manner as to subordinate the latter to the former.(110) The result, Marx wrote, is that the worker

... steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation it is neither the direct human labor he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body — it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth. The theft of alien labor time, on which present wealth is based, appears as a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value.(111)

In other words, the capitalist strategy of investing more and more in fixed capital, in machines, marginalizes labor in sector after sector, gradually reducing the overall ability of capital to maintain social order through the imposition of work. This becomes more and more obvious as Marx goes on, in this fragment, to discuss the replacement of labor time by ever greater amounts, of potential free or disposable time “for society generally and each of its members”. This gave one sense to the concept of “zero work” — the approximate end-point toward which the class struggle is driving social development within capitalism. The analysis of this fragment — quoted at greater length than I have done here — is the focus of the last section of Mario Montano’s contribution “Notes on the International Crisis” in the first issue of *Zerowork*.(112)

At the same time, both within Montano's article and in other contributions to *Zerowork #1*, we can find an emphasis on a domain of work beyond that accounted for in unemployment statistics or in Marx's "fragment" — namely all those kinds of unwaged work that, because it is not paid for directly, is hidden from the usual measurements. For example, Caffentzis' piece on class struggles in education emphasizes that alongside the waged work of administrators and professors toil students. Some, like Artie Bauman, resist; others knuckle under and do as instructed. Either way, the vast majority are unwaged. As with housework, capital has done its best to organize schoolwork for the purpose of producing labor power — whether that labor power will eventually be employed and waged, or not. Of course, where work is imposed, resistance arises and Caffentzis emphasizes how student struggles have often undermined that imposition, forcing capital to abandon some strategies and adopt others. But the overall thrust of his arguments highlights a whole sphere of unwaged work that capital has sought to expand even as the substitution of machines for labor in industry has limited its ability to impose waged work.⁽¹¹³⁾ Parallel arguments are made in several other articles. Carpignano analyses struggles against capital's efforts to use welfare to "unionize" and manage the unwaged in poor neighborhoods. Ramirez examines urban refusal of price increases that impose more unwaged work. Cleaver studies the role of the unwaged in mining communities in the support of strikes and other miner actions. In all four cases, the authors draw attention to domains of work — and domains of struggle — that lie outside Marx's analysis of industrial development and the consequences for waged labor.

With respect to the organizational implications of the analysis in *Zerowork*, the key issue turned on the *Wages for Housework*

collectives being autonomous women's projects. All the men in the Zerowork collective embraced the analysis of the centrality of unwaged labor to the reproduction of capital and therefore the importance of the struggles of the unwaged. But, what were the organizational implications of autonomous women's groups for the political activities of men? Should men craft their own agendas? Did it make sense to think in terms of autonomous organizations of men? Or, should men dedicate themselves to the support of the women's groups? Were there still forms of political organizing where men and women could work together? This issue had emerged as a general one with the new wave of feminism that grew out of the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s — and a wide variety of responses had been, and were being, given. For the men who came together to craft Zerowork, that collective crafting was itself an initial answer to the organizational question. It would not, however, be a final one. Almost as soon as the first issue of Zerowork was published, this organizational question began to be addressed directly. How the debates around this question unfolded and what they led to is taken up in the sketch of period between the publication of the first and second issues of Zerowork.

Brief Biographies of the Editors of Zerowork #1 (1975)

The length of the sketches that follow, and the amount of detail about each individual's trajectory, varies considerably. This is due less to the length or degree of their involvement in politics than to available information. What I have been able to recount here has depended largely on the degree to which each individual has left a written record of his activities and the degree to which each has contributed his memories to this project. In two cases — those of

Leoncio Schaedel and Peter Taylor — I have, so far, been unable to contact them.

George Caffentzis (1945 -): Son of Greek immigrants who lived and worked in Brooklyn, New York — but with an extended, and oft visited family in Greece — George studied philosophy and physics at Antioch College (1962-65) in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he was involved in efforts to defend Cuba and in the Civil Rights Movement. (114) He then studied at City College of New York (CUNY) where he completed his undergraduate degree in philosophy in 1968. While pursuing graduate study at Princeton University, he was involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement and in challenging mainstream economic doctrine.

At Princeton, with two other students, Marc Linder and Julius Sensat, George prepared chapter-by-chapter critiques of Paul Samuelson's iconic textbook *Economics*, to provide materials for a "counter-course". In the process, they also undertook a thorough study of Marx's *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*. Those critiques were eventually revised and published by Linder as *Anti-Samuelson*, first in Germany (1974)(115) in four volumes and then in the United States, in an abridged, two-volume edition, by Urizen Books (1977), albeit without George being listed as an author. He withdrew from the publishing project due to theoretical and political differences.(116)

George went on to obtain his Ph.D. in the Philosophy of Science from Princeton and to teach philosophy first at Haverford College (1971-72) and then at Brooklyn College of CUNY (1973-78) during the period of his participation in the Zerowork collective.(117)

One of the founders of Zerowork, George took part in the meeting — at Silvia Federici's home — that launched the project in

the Spring of 1974. Among those present who would take an active part in the project were George, Bruno Ramirez, Mario Montano, Paolo Carpignano and Leoncio Schaedel. Also present were Judy Ramirez, Selma James, her son Sam Weinstein and George Rawick. The Zerowork collective was made up of men because the women present — including Silvia, Selma and Judy — were involved in founding autonomous Wages for Housework (WfH) groups for women in various cities, including New York City and Toronto.

Complementing the Zerowork project — which was focused on the creation and circulation of the journal — some of the men were also involved with separate political groups to organize other kinds of political actions. In New York, an Income Without Work Committee mutated into New York Struggle Against Work and in Toronto a Struggle Against Work Collective was founded when the women in the New Tendency left to form a Wages for Housework Committee. George took part in the former; Bruno Ramirez took part in the latter.(118) In both cases, the men in these groups faced the political issue of the relation of their struggles to those of women in the WfH movement. Because all of these men basically agreed with the WfH analysis of the central importance of unwaged labor in producing and reproducing labor power (and thus capital), and agreed that only through autonomous organization could women be certain that the importance of that unwaged labor, and the struggles associated with it, would not be marginalized, then the obvious question was “What kinds of struggle are appropriate for men?”

The thinking and debates this question provoked can be found in several documents produced by the two groups in Toronto and New York City.(119) Two different views emerged. One view argued that because within the waged/unwaged hierarchy imposed by capital, the

struggles of the unwaged, e.g., housewives, are necessarily beneficial to the waged, e.g., men, because any increase in the power of the former would make them less liable to being used against the latter, thus strengthening the working class as a whole. The waged should, therefore, subordinate their struggles to those of the unwaged. The other view argued that while increasing the power of the unwaged was essential to increasing the power of the working class as a whole, there was still space for men to act on their own. For a while, within both groups, these differing perspectives were discussed, evaluated and debated — at the same time that participants engaged in various kinds of political action.

In the midst of the above struggles in New York City, and during the preparation of the first issue of *Zerowork*, George also collaborated with some students studying “radical” economics in the Graduate Program of Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. They wrote and published a critique of education as work-for-capital: a pamphlet titled *Wages for Students*. Among those students were two Americans, Leoncio Schaedel (see below) and John Willshire (who would later join *Midnight Notes*). Drawing on the theoretical framework of WfH, the pamphlet analyzed schoolwork as work-for-capital because it is primarily structured to impose work discipline for the benefit of future employers. The essay critiqued the usual arguments by economists that education is both a consumption good and a good investment. The former was labeled patently false because schoolwork is work and gets in the way of consumption. The second was no longer true on a personal level because high unemployment in the 1970s made future payoffs less likely. Another critique — prompted by and aimed at their own professors — targeted the Left’s support for more education (more work) — in the name of raising social and political consciousness — as merely

forwarding capital's agenda. Pointing to how student wagelessness put a burden on parents and/or forced them to add waged jobs to their unwaged schoolwork, the essay argued that regular students should be paid by capital much as some corporations pay for employee training, or ROTC pays for schooling. Many of the ideas elaborated in their pamphlet were incorporated into George's contribution to *Zerowork #1*: "Throwing Away the Ladder: The Universities in the Crisis".

Paolo Carpinano: An Italian, Paolo spent a year in the U.S. in 1965, studying at Wesleyan University and then returned to Italy in 1966 to continue his studies at the University of Rome. At the university he studied Marxism with Lucio Colletti (1924-2001) and sociology with Franco Ferrarotti (1926 -).(120) At the same time and on his own, Paolo was reading Mario Tronti's *Operai e Capitale* — that generated, he says, "a fundamental theoretical turning point" — and was deeply involved in the Italian New Left beginning with the group that had published *Classe Operaia*.(121) Although they had stopped publishing the paper, Paolo worked with Alberto Asor Rosa (1933 -) and Franco Piperno (1943 -) and contributed to journals like *Classe e Stato* and *La Classe*.(122) In those circles he met Ferruccio Gambino, Sergio Bologna, Toni Negri, Mariarosa Dalla Costa "and many others." "And then came 1968," Paolo has written, "no need to dwell on it, it was the experience of a lifetime. I was active in the student-workers committee, participated in the creation of *Potere Operaio*, and in all the struggles up to the Hot Autumn of '69."(123)

Shortly thereafter Paolo finished his dissertation, graduated, married an American woman and immigrated to the United States to teach Italian Culture, Sociology and Mass Media at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of CUNY. In the United States he

reconnected with Mario Montano (see below) who introduced him to Silvia Federici. Through Ferruccio Gambino's contacts he also met George Rawick and visited Martin Glaberman and John Watson of DRUM in Detroit.(124) According to Paolo, given the central role of the struggles of autoworkers at Fiat in the development of workerism,

“Detroit was a natural destination for anybody with a workerist perspective and anybody who talked about workers' self-activity had to be our comrade. We had heard of DRUM, FRUM, etc, and when John Watson visited Torino to observe the struggles at FIAT, he claimed to find himself at home. The axis Torino-Detroit was essential to the mythology of the time.”(125)

According to Paolo, despite being familiar with Montaldi's *Autobiografie della leggera* as part of his sociology studies, neither he nor other young militants in his circle were aware of the lineage I've traced above from Johnson-Forest Tendency through Socialisme ou Barbarie to Montaldi, conricerca, and Panzieri-Alquati. He did not, for example, discover C. L. R. James until “much later.” In Italy, as in the U.S., it seems that knowledge of these linkages — and the evolution of ideas associated with them — were poorly passed down through the changing generations of activists. One more reason for this website.

A draft of what would be his 1975 contribution to *Zerowork* #1 — “U.S. Class Composition in the 1960s” — was picked up, translated and published as “Note su classe operaia e capitale in America negli anni sessanta,” in S. Bologna, P. Carpi gnano and A. Negri, *Crisi e Organizzazione Operaia*, (Sept. 1974).(126) Shortly before *Zerowork* #1 came out, at the invitation of Franco Ferrarotti, Paolo also wrote some articles for (em)La Critica Sociologica, one

of which was “Unemployment: Made in the USA,” for the Autumn 1975 issue.(127) Shortly after Zerowork #1 appeared, Paolo also contributed “Immigrazione e degradazione: mercato del lavoro e ideologie della class operaia americana durante la ‘Progressive Era’,” to the collaboration G. Bock, P. Carpignano e B. Ramirez, La formazione dell’operaio massa negli USA 1898/1922 (1976).(128)

William (Bill) Cleaver (1952 -): An American, Bill was the son of middle class, but liberal democrat parents, both of whom were born and raised in the South but had graduated from Rice Institute in Houston, Texas. With his ex-fighter pilot father — who had served in the Army Air Corps during WWII — stationed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, Ohio he grew up in a conservative rural area. He was involved in student activism early, starting in high school in 1968 with a successful upstate effort to get 2,300 children school lunches and participation in the Presidential campaign of Eugene McCarthy. He published an independent student newspaper in high school in 1969-70 that was quickly banned but circulated underground. He later studied Politics and History at the Bowling Green State University and then finished his undergraduate degree at Ohio University in Athens, not far from the West Virginia border. During his time as a student in Southeastern Ohio he developed connections with social movements in Appalachia. He worked on several electoral campaigns by political progressives, including those of James Abourezk in South Dakota, George McGovern in 1972 and Toby Moffitt in Connecticut in 1974. That same year, he abandoned electoral politics for union organizing in New York City where he also he joined the Zerowork collective and contributed an article on “Wildcats in the Appalachian Coal Fields” to the first issue. In 1976 he returned to Appalachia where he worked and taught for several years.

Peter Linebaugh: An American who studied at Swathmore and Columbia, Peter was a student of E. P. Thompson, receiving his Ph.D. in British history from the University of Warwick in 1975. Peter has written that he met Thompson in 1968 in New York City — a meeting that led him to move to London in 1969 where he joined a group of scholars, brought together by Thompson, to study the relationship between crime and the working class.(129) While living in London he joined John Merrington (see below) — who had studied in Italy and introduced Gramsci to English readers — in forming a Capital study group (1969-70) that met every Sunday for a year and a half. This group, which became known as the Offord Road Group because of the locale of its meetings, also included Clement Maharaj, a close associate of C. L. R. James, Geoff Kaye, an economist, Stefan Feuchtwanger, an anthropologist, Fei-ling Blackburn, associate of New Left Review, Bethia Waterman, an American feminist, and occasionally Selma James (wife of C. L. R. James) who, according to Peter's account, "was testing the ideas of Mariarosa Dalla Costa by treating Geoff Kaye . . . as a whetstone to sharpen her own forensic wit."(130) Clement and Selma, of course, also brought to those discussions familiarity C. L. R. James' work and that of the Johnson-Forest Tendency and Facing Reality more generally. The participants in those meetings discussed a wide variety of material, including not only Capital and writings by Dalla Costa but also other Italian writings that were summarized, or translated in their entirety, by John Merrington and Ed Emery. Those writings included essays by Romano Alquati, Mario Tronti, Raniero Panzieri and other influential figures in Italian operaismo, or workerism, from Quaderni Rossi to Potere Operaio and Lotta Continua.

When Peter returned to the United States he taught at Franconia College where in 1972 he published a pamphlet that combined a

chapter of James Bogg's *The American Revolution* (1963) with Guido Baldi, "Theses on the Mass Worker and Capital" — an essay published that same year in *Radical America* that synthesized much of the Italian theory that he had been analyzing and discussing in London.⁽¹³¹⁾ The author of the "Theses", Guido Baldi, was actually a pseudonym for two Italians living in New York City: Silvia Federici, an important figure in the Wages for Housework Campaign and Mario Montano (see below) — both of whom had previously worked on the journal *Telos*. Within a year, Peter organized a meeting with Silvia and Mario to discuss the possibilities of publishing a collection of English translations of important Italian texts.

By that time Peter had begun teaching in the New Hampshire State Prison and had written and published an account of struggles and repression in that institution. That same year he joined with "prisoners, ex-cons and their supporters" to form the New England Prisoner's Association (NEPA) and, along with Gene Mason and Monty Neill (later a member of *Midnight Notes*) edited *NEPA News: The Voice of the New England Prisoners' Association* for the next two years. In all of this Peter was bringing his work on crime and the working class in the 18th Century and his study of Marx and Italian autonomist theory and practice to bear on the on-going, contemporary struggles within and around prisons in the United States. All of this Peter also brought to his collaboration in the formation and development of the Zerowork collective that began in 1974.

Besides participating in the inevitable discussions involved in all such collaborations, Peter's contribution to Zerowork #1 was three-fold: first, he co-authored, along with Bruno Ramirez, "Crisis in the Auto Sector", second, he drew his good friend John Merrington along as a corresponding editor (see below) and third, he took on

primary responsibility for editing, designing, laying-out and printing of the journal.

Mario Montano (1943 -): An Italian like Paolo, Mario studied in Rome with Franco Ferrarotti and Lucio Colletti. Mario wrote his dissertation on Galvano Della Volpe (1895-1968) with whom Colletti had studied at the University of Messina.⁽¹³²⁾ Mario was also involved with the Italian workerist movement but became disillusioned after one of its major theoreticians — Mario Tronti — abandoned extraparlimentary politics and returned to the PCI. Mario traveled to the U.S., arriving in October 1967, “just days,” he remembers, “before Che Guevara was killed.” He came to the U.S. in search, Silvia Federici recalls, of a “new political experience.” He found it first by obtaining a fellowship to do graduate work in Sociology at Brandeis University where he studied with Kurt H. Wolff (1912-2003). Along with Stuart Kaplan and Paul Buhle, he served for a couple of years on the editorial board of *Radical America*. He found a job teaching sociology at Clark University (1969-1972), but was, he says, “fired for being a Marxist”. No matter, he was soon hired “for that very same reason” to teach Political Studies at Adelphi University in Garden City, Long Island, from 1972 to 1976. Mario also linked up with the folks at *Telos* — which included Silvia with whom he became close friends. The editors of *Telos* were dedicated to bringing hitherto untranslated European critical writing to an Anglophone audience, so they published Mario’s “On the Methodology of Determinate Abstractions: Essay on Galvano della Volpe” in 1971 and later a spin-off of Silvia’s dissertation: “Notes on Lukács’s Aesthetics” in 1972.⁽¹³³⁾ As mentioned above, Mario collaborated with Silvia to compose an essay — which they published in *Radical America* under the pseudonym of “Guido Baldi” in 1972. Mario had already, Silvia recalls, introduced

her to the “refusal of work” perspective of Italian workerism and it was during their collaboration on that essay that he also shared with her Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s recently composed, seminal essay “Women and the Subversion of the Community” — a sharing that would lead Silvia to Padova in July 1972 and to collaboration with Mariarosa in the formation of the International Feminist Collective and launching the Wages for Housework movement.(134) As also mentioned above, Mario traveled North with Silvia, Paolo and Bruno Ramirez to meet with Peter Linebaugh and Monty Neil to discuss the possibilities of an “Italian collection.”

When the Zerowork collective was formed in the spring of 1974 Mario joined in that collaboration, ultimately contributing “Notes on the International Crisis” to the first issue.

Bruno Ramirez: An Italian, after two years of study at the University of Rome (1963-65), Bruno crossed the Atlantic on a scholarship to study first in the United States at Shelton College (1965-67) and then in Canada, first at the University of Guelph (1968-69) and then at the University of Toronto where he completed his Ph. D in 1975.(135) Bruno came to North America from Catania, Sicily, he recounts, out of a curiosity fed both by American movies and by interactions with U.S. sailors who he met through his church — a Waldensian Protestant church whose progressive socio-political practices were important in his own politicization and interest in workerist politics in Italy.(136) That background, together with his experiences in the U.S. where he studied for three years in the midst of “the movement”, explains, he suggests, why he wrote his dissertation on working class struggles in the US.(137)

Arriving in Toronto from Guelph, Bruno and his wife were soon involved in two political projects. First, with some of his new

colleagues he formed a Marxist study group — focusing mainly on Capital, the Grundrisse and some writings by Gramsci. Second, they met Peter Taylor (see below) and others in the New Tendency (NT), a group that was formed by politically active Leftists who had become dissatisfied with party politics (both social democratic and Leninist) and the behavior of labor unions.(138) The most active members of the NT seem to have been in Toronto and Windsor, Ontario.(139) In Toronto, the group included students and workers in the Canadian Post Office, while in Windsor, participants in the NT group — the Labour Centre — were active in auto plants but also with students (including high school students and gays.(140) In both cases they were actively involved in on-going struggles and were influenced, in part, by autonomous struggles in the United States, Britain and Italy. Both the character of those struggles and the writings that emerged from them were discussed within the group — which undertook, as part of its political work, to circulate some of the ideas and writings from those areas. In the case of the United States their primary interest was with the work of C. L. R. James and Marty Glaberman — major figures in the Johnson-Forest Tendency (1945-1955) and its offshoot Facing Reality (1955-1970) — and also with that of Selma James, wife of C. L. R. and one of the founders of the Wages for Housework movement. Many of the ideas were already familiar to Bruno, but materials from Italy also came to the NT through Britain.(141) NT members read and circulated Italian material already translated and circulated by the British Group Big Flame (1974-1984) (142) and the Rising Free bookshop,(143) , e.g., A. Sofri's "Organizing for Workers' Power" (1969), "Italy: New Tactics and Organization" (1971) and "Autonomous Struggles and the Capitalist Crisis (1972). All of these were written by major figures in Lotta Continua in Italy. They were circulated as pamphlets and included introductions discussing the relevance of the analysis to the situation

in Canada. Such discussions also provided Bruno with opportunities to discuss his own research on U.S. workers' struggles and to get feedback from activist comrades.

At an international conference organized by Telos at SUNY-Buffalo in November 1971, Bruno met Silvia Federici and the first of those who would become his comrades in the Zerowork project — Mario Montano.(144) He was quickly recruited to write a review of the latest addition to the *Materiali Marxisti* collection — *Operaio e Stato* (1972) — and to translate Sergio Bologna's contribution to that volume, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party".(145) At the Telos conference Bruno also met militants from Lotta Continua (LC) — a meeting that led to further contact with members of that group, including Guido Viale — and folks from Radical America — for which he (and his wife Judy) did translations of LC and other Italian workerist materials.(146) Subsequently, Bruno often stayed at Silvia's place in Brooklyn during his trips to New York City to do archival research for his dissertation. Thus began what he calls an "informal network" through which he also met George and Paolo. These connections, in turn, led to his meeting militants in *Potere Operaio*, including Ferruccio Gambino and others in the *Collectivo di Scienze politiche* at the University of Padova.(147)

The period 1973-1974 proved to be a turning point for Bruno in at least two senses. On the one hand, a 1973 visit to Toronto and presentations there by Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa had a profound impact on those involved in the New Tendency.(148) Not only did many embrace the Wages for Housework perspective but that embrace resulted in the effective dissolution of the group. Most of the women (including Judy) left the organization to form branches of Wages for Housework. This, in turn, led Bruno and other men in Toronto (including Peter Taylor and Tim Grant) to form a new, all-

male political group: the Struggle Against Work Collective (SAWC). (149) On the other hand, Bruno and Judy were among those gathered at Silvia's home in Brooklyn who decided to launch Zerowork as a collective project to produce a journal by that name aimed at introducing to a broader audience many of the ideas and politics they had all been working with. This sequence of events in Toronto paralleled similar ones in New York City (see Caffentzis above).

The dissolution of the New Tendency was analyzed in a statement issued by the SAWC in March of 1975 — signed by Bruno and five others.(150) The “basic error” according to that analysis was that despite having rejected Leninist vanguardism, the members of the group still saw themselves and their past struggles as “outside” the working class, and therefore needing to “join” the working class, but still as “organizers”. At the same time, the SAWC statement juxtaposed their analysis and politics to those of Out of the Driver's Seat and spelled out how their political perspective and approaches to political work had changed.

Bruno's participation in the Zerowork collective, besides taking part in discussions, produced two written contributions to the first issue. First, drawing on his experience in the NT and the experience of his NT comrades in Windsor, he joined with Peter Linebaugh in writing a piece on “Crisis in the Auto Sector”. Second, as mentioned above, he also composed “The Working Class Struggle against the Crisis: Self-Reduction of prices in Italy.”

Leoncio Schaedel: An American, recently returned from Chile, Leoncio was studying in the Graduate program in political economy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is the son of anthropologist Richard Paul Schaedel (1920-2005) and had been in Chile at the time of the coup against Salvador Allende in 1973. He

escaped back to the United States where he met George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici in New York City. At UMass, he, John Willshire and several other students discovered that the “radical” faculty of the department of economics not only imposed even more work than their mainstream counterparts but were intolerant of views that contradicted their own. This led to the collective composition — in collaboration with George Caffentzis — and publishing of the pamphlet *Wages for Students* that applied a *Wages for Housework* analysis to education, critiquing the imposition of school work in capitalism and demanding to be paid for that work. The pamphlet — which they produced and began to distribute in the fall of 1975 — was cleverly designed, in size, shape and cover to look like student “blue books” used for examinations. The pamphlet and their efforts to circulate it to high school and college students was reported in the March 2, 1976 issue of the student newspaper of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, *Mass Media*. Leo — who had by that time become fed up enough with the economics department to drop out — was quoted as saying, “The university (UMass) serves as a pool of cheap labor. That’s why the university is stuck here in Amherst. . . .It’s very important for the economy of Western Massachusetts, a ‘pool of cheap labor.’”(151)

Peter Taylor: A Canadian who, before participating in the Zerowork collective, was previously involved in the New Tendency (see above). At the 1973 NT conference in Windsor, Ontario, undoubtedly influenced by the emergence of “all women” *Wages for Housework* groups, he was one of the coordinators of a workshop for “all men” for which a series of questions were prepared to get men to think about the particularity of their position within the working class. Peter was one of those working in the Canadian Post Office.(152) He wrote “Working — and Not Working — at the Post

Office”, a detailed autobiographical essay that recounted his struggles on the job and their impact on his life outside his official working days (and nights). That essay was turned into an illustrated pamphlet in 1974. A version was also published in Walter Johnson (ed) *Working in Canada*, Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1975, pp. 15-31. When the women in the NT left to form the Toronto Wages for Housework, Peter joined Bruno and others in forming the Struggle Against Work Collective.

Ferruccio Gambino: An Italian, son of wine growers in the northwestern foothills of the Apennines, Ferruccio was introduced to Marx and Lukàcs in junior high school (ginnasio) and the socialist tradition in high school (liceo classico). Like so many, he was critical of, and never joined, the PCI or the Socialist Party as a result of their responses to the Hungarian insurrection in 1956.(153) After graduating from high school with few resources, he moved to Milan joining other low-income students in a dormitory — that proved to be a hotbed of political discussion and radicalization.(154) In 1963, a friend in Turin sent him a copy of the first issue of *Quaderni Rossi*. The next year he collaborated with a group that split from QR and launched a separate journal *Classe Operaia*. Later a meeting with Sergio Bologna — a member of *Classe Operaia* — led to introductions to other comrades in Milan, e.g., Mauro Gobbini. From this period on, Ferruccio was active in workerist circles in Italy.

His desire to visit the United States and to have access to the English language literature on the history of class struggle, coupled with a travel grant, brought Ferruccio to New York City in the Fall of 1966. There he made the acquaintance of Murray Bookchin (1921-2006) — an anarchist who had come out of the United Auto Workers, factory struggles, Trotskyism and the anti-nuclear weapons movement to confront the ecological crises being caused by

capitalism.(155) Long conversations with Bookchin about Marxism and his “ecologismo”, Ferruccio would write, “showed me new horizons”.

It was during this trip to the US that Ferruccio accepted an invitation to visit Detroit by the Facing Reality folks — including George Rawick, Marty and Jessie Glaberman — finding them all intensely occupied: George was researching and writing on slavery, Marty on autoworker struggles and Jessie was very active as a Marxist feminist. Subsequently, in the Spring of 1967, George traveled to New York City, a visit from which Ferruccio says he extracted what amounted to a two-week, intensive seminar on American labor history and politics. That summer Ferruccio spent 40 days on the road touring by bus as much of the US as he could manage, before returning to Italy in September.

In the fall, at the suggestion of Sergio Bologna, Ferruccio applied for and obtained a scholarship to study at the Istituto di Scienze politiche at the University of Padua where he met Antonio Negri and Massimo Cacciari for the first time, joining their circle of political research. For the next three years he divided his time and energy between Milan and Padua in a period of intense study, building on what he learned in both Italy and the United States. In 1967 he organized a December seminar in Padua that brought George Rawick from the United States to sit down with Ferruccio, Sergio Bologna, Mauro Gobbi, Toni Negri and Luciano Ferrari Bravo to discuss workers’ struggles in the first decades of the 20th Century and their impact on changes in the form of the State. The essays prepared for this encounter would individually and collectively elaborate a whole series of ideas fundamental to the development of the extraparlamentarian Left. Ferruccio’s contribution to this discussion was a class analysis of the confrontation between the Ford Motor

company's "Fordist" organization of production and the British working class.(156) All of the essays were subsequently compiled by Sergio and Toni and eventually published by Feltrinelli in 1972 as *Operai e stato* — the book reviewed by Bruno Ramirez in *Telos* and whose ideas were synthesized by Silvia Federici and Mario Montano (as "Guido Baldi") in *Radical America*. (see above)

In the years that followed, Ferruccio took part in the development of the extra-parliamentary left in Italy while teaching at the Institute of Political and Social Science at the University of Padua. He not only served as "corresponding editor" of *Zerowork* #1, but through frequent travels in Europe and to the United States circulated news and ideas throughout much of the network of comrades within which the *Zerowork* collective was active.

John Merrington (1940-1996): An Englishman, born in Pakistan, son of a colonial engineer, John was dutifully tracked into Britain's elite educational institutions, first Bradfield College in Berkshire County — a public school whose alumni have included plenty of high-ranking government bureaucrats and conservative politicians — and then Balliol College at the University of Oxford — England's oldest and one of its most prestigious universities.(157) At Bradfield, John began his rejection of the well-trodden road to power and at Balliol he turned his attention to those of below by studying with the Marxist, bottom-up English historian Christopher Hill (1912-2003), perhaps best known for his book *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (1972).

In 1964 John studied Gramsci in Rome, critiqued him, came home and wrote "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism," for the *Socialist Register* (1968). He then moved on to explore Italian workerism and, along with Ed Emery, to translate key texts

from the Italian and get them into the hands of various groups of militants, e.g., Big Flame activists in the Ford auto plants. Dealing with the theoretical works of Italian workerists required close study of Marx, so John and Ed formed a Capital study group (1969-70) that included, among others, Peter Linebaugh and Selma James. (see Linebaugh bio above and his obituary for John) James' presence, as might well be imagined, guaranteed that those brief passages in Capital that dealt with the reproduction of labor power came under close scrutiny and arguments began over what he might have said, had he probed the issue more deeply — and what one might say, given that he didn't. With Peter and John both researching crime and policing in the 18th Century, they were open to expanding the concept of the working class to include the unwaged. How was a matter of fierce debate.

By 1973 John was actively engaged with Big Flame in the Ford plants and he and Ed were churning out translations from Lotta Continua, some from Potere Operaio and as many as possible of the key theoretical texts within Italian workerism. When the Zerowork collective was formed in 1974, Peter Linebaugh drew John into discussions about the essays being prepared for the first issue. Both enthusiastic and critical, John also sought, once that issue appeared, to distribute it in England and to provoke discussion among activists — just as he and Ed had been doing with their translations. Having gotten a job teaching at Middlesex Polytechnic he also sought to call attention to the journal and the ideas in it among the Marxist academics affiliated with the Conference of Socialist Economists.

Notes

1 The stories of these struggles were partially told in essays written by members of the Zerowork collective. Peter Taylor wrote the pamphlet *Working — and not working — at the Post Office* in 1974 and later contributed the article “‘The Sons of Bitches Just Won’t Work’ Postal Workers Against the State” to *Zerowork* #1. Philip Mattera (with Donna Demac) would prepare the pamphlet *Developing and Underdeveloping New York: the “Fiscal Crisis” and a Strategy for Fighting Austerity* in 1976 that would later appear in a revised form in *Zerowork* #2, 1977.

2 The relevance of our study of the New York City fiscal crisis — especially of the attack on workers’ pensions — would seem particularly relevant today in the case of Detroit where battles have been shaping up over just this issue.

3 This is a synopsis of the analysis of the character of the international crisis of Keynesian or Fordist capitalist crisis laid out in both the first and second issue of *Zerowork*. Although only some of the articles deal directly with the crises mentioned the analysis is fundamental to all of them.

4 The history of Marxist “crisis theory” has not been unitary but, since the time of the 2nd International (1898-1914) has been fraught with controversies over the interpretation both of the supposed “laws of motion” and how they generate crises, e.g., theorists of “underconsumptionism” have clashed with those of “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall”. The early 1970s saw what we felt was a very unsatisfying rerun of all the old debates.

5 While we recognized that real movement involves both the abolition of “the present state of things” and the crafting of alternative social relationships, it must be said that little of the time

and energy we put into the creation of Zerowork dealt with the positive content of the struggles we identified as being at the heart of the crises that generated the whole project.

6 See, for example, his chapter on “The Original Affluent Society,” in Marshall Shalins’ *Stone Age Economics*, New York: Aldine, 1974.

7 The classic work is Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the English Working Class* published in German in 1845, translated and published in English in 1887.

8 “Speeches at Elberfeld” (February 8 and 15, 1945) in Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 4, New York: International Publishers, 1975, pp. 243-251 and 256-264. Engels pointed to such work as police protection of capitalist property and military jobs necessary to colonial expansion and imperialist wars. This kind of thinking has been recurrent.

9 It was in Chapter 15 of Volume I of *Capital*, dealing with “machinery and modern industry” that Marx evoked those dreams of Aristotle referenced in the General Introduction to this website.

10 In their theory, limiting worker wage increases to the marginal product of labor guaranteed the distribution of the marginal product of capital to capitalist employers. In this way neoclassical theory reproduced the assumption of classical political economy that both labor and capital were productive and deserved the fruits of their respective productivity. For Marx, this was, at best, an engineering point of view — certainly both workers and machines played a role in production — but ignored the essential passivity of inanimate machinery (and raw materials) whose “productivity” was entirely dependent on labor. He, on the other hand, crafted a theory that

analyzed every aspect of capitalist society in terms of its central social characteristic: imposed labor.

11 Less optimistic critics of both the modernist ideology of progress and of actual technological change within capitalism have pointed to the misery hidden by the ideology and to the negative effects of many technological changes on both humans and nature more generally. Two frequently cited, possible limits to productivity growth are 1) the exhaustion of those energy sources on which the proliferation of machine production has been based, and 2) the associated poisoning of the earth's ecology by capitalist industry to the point of dramatically reducing the very sustainability of human life.

12 David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*, New York: Verso, 1989.

13 In only two of the seven articles in the first issue are theoretical roots significantly acknowledged, and then, only in footnotes. Mario Montano and George Caffentzis cite work by Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa of the Wages for Housework Campaign. Mario also sites one article by Antonio Negri. Peter Taylor, in one footnote, credits Negri with the first use of an expression "the technological path to repression." As will become apparent this was scant reference to the literatures and ideas that informed the thinking in Zerowork.

14 One such complaint was leveled by Marty Glaberman whose work, and those of his comrades, had — as will be made explicit below — been among the sources of the analysis laid out in Zerowork. At the same time, whatever the shortcomings of the exposition of Zerowork, its authors were hardly the first of their

lineage to be rebuked for being less than forthcoming about their roots. Looking back at C. L. R. James (see below) and the influence of his circle on workers in the 1950s, Dan Georgakas wrote “There was little attempt to present his ideas in a systematic manner. Nor was there any effort to explain how News and Letters, Correspondence, Facing Reality, et. al., had evolved out of Trotskyist politics. Such information surfaced in personal conversations with individuals or as background on specific issues.” ”Young Detroit Radicals: 1955-65” Urgent Tasks 12, Summer 1981, pp. 89-94. Reprinted in C.L.R. James: His Life and Work (Paul Buhle ed) New York: Allison & Busby, 1986, pp. 185-194.

15 Special mention and recognition should be given to libcom.org which has done great work — within the context of a much broader project — in gathering and making available what is probably the most extensive digital collection of material relevant to Zerowork to date. Indeed there is substantial overlap between what can be found there and what I provide here — in a somewhat more interwoven manner geared to this particular project. Overlap in cyberspace, however, is not wasted effort, but rather the creation of more gateways to our digital commons.

16 More on this research will be detailed in the historical sketch section on “Background: from Zerowork #1 to Zerowork #2.”

17 On some similarities between the work of Kropotkin and various Marxists mentioned below see: H. Cleaver, “Kropotkin, Self-Valorization and the Crisis of Marxism” in Anarchist Studies (UK), 1993. Originally written in 1992 for a Kropotkin conference in Russia, this essay compares Kropotkin’s work on the future in the present and that of autonomist Marxists on self-valorization. For overviews of the Council Communists see: Peter Rachleff, Marxism

and Council Communism, Brooklyn: The Revisionist Press, 1976.
Chapter VIII: “Council Communist Theory,” and Mark Shipway,
“Council Communism,” in M. Rubel and J. Crump (eds), *Non-market
Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York: St.
Martin’s Press, 1987, pp. 104-126.

18 The conflicts between those who call themselves anarchists
and those who call themselves Marxists have ranged from theoretical
differences to armed conflict. While the theoretical differences date
from Marx’s arguments with Bakunin, the armed conflicts date
from the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik crushing of the
Ukrainian and Kronstadt anarchists. Others, such as Kropotkin,
were silenced, often exiled. There is a huge literature of Marxists
attacking anarchists and *visa versa*. There is a much smaller literature
of those who have recognized and emphasized similarities. Perhaps
best known among those contributing to the latter is the Councilist
and Marx scholar Maximilien Rubel. See his “Marx, Théoreticien de
anarchisme,” *L’Europe en formation*, no 163-164, octobre-novembre
1973, reproduced in *Marx, critique du Marxisme*, Paris: Petite
Biblioteque Payot, 1974; also in English.

19 Among the Council Communists, Paul Mattick has published
the most work on crisis — drawing heavily on the work of Henryk
Grossman (1881-1950). See Mattick, “The Permanent Crisis:
Henryk Grossman’s Interpretation of Marx’s Theory of Capital
Accumulation,” *International Council Correspondence*, No. 2,
October 1934, *Marx and Keynes: The limits of the Mixed Economy*,
Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969 and *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory*,
White Plains: M.E. Sharpe, 1981. In turn, see Grossman’s “The
Theory of Economic Crisis” *Bulletin International de l’Académie
Polonaise des Sciences et des Lettres. Classe de Philologie. Classe
d’Histoire et de Philosophie. I Partie. Les Années 1919, 1920, 1922*,

Kraków, pp. 285-290, in English and his *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System: Being also a theory of Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 1992, originally *Das Akkumulations — und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems (Zugleich eine Krisentheorie)*, (Hirschfeld, Leipzig, 1929) translated and abridged in English.

20 See his “The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism” (1934) in which he critiques Grossman. *Socialisme et Barbarie* (see below) did have some limited dialogue with Pannekoek.

21 C. L. R. James — Cyril Lionel Robert James — came to the United States from Trinidad but was eventually deported and lived the rest of his life in London. Raya Dunayevskaya was a name adopted, and retained for the rest of her life, by Rae Spiegel, a Russian who immigrated to the United States, worked for a while (1937-38) as Trotsky’s secretary in Mexico, then returned to the US. There is a considerable literature by and about these two people — their collaboration in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and Correspondence, differences, subsequent splits and separate organizations.

22 See, especially Chapter I of *Facing Reality* (1958), op. cit., on “The Workers Councils” in Hungary and Poland.

23 Letter from Martin Glaberman to Harry Cleaver, April 14, 1989.

24 James recognition of and struggle for the acceptance of Black autonomy is often traced to in his early experience as player and commentator on cricket, first in Trinidad and later in England where he saw racial and colonial conflicts playing out on the field. Among his important writings that document his thinking on Black

struggles are: *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies*, Nelson: Lances, 1932, *Documents on the Negro Struggle* (including discussions with Trotsky), 1933 and 1939, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1938, *A History of Negro Revolt*, London, 1938, "Why Negroes should oppose the war" in *Socialist Appeal*, Sept 6 – Oct 3, 1939, *Negro Americans and American Politics*, Detroit, 1956, "Black Power: Its Past, Today and the Way Ahead," 1969.

25 Among the Stalinists critiqued by the JFT were not only Russians such as Eugen Varga and L.A. Leontiev (head of the Marx-Lenin Institute) but also Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy — especially his *Theory of Capitalist Development* (1942) where he attacked Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Among the Trotskyists, their primary targets were "Pablo" (Michel Raptis) and "Germain" (Ernest Mandel). Although within the framework of these sectarian debates, they took on no mainstream economists per se, the figure of John Maynard Keynes loomed in the background as the foremost mainstream theorist of aggregate demand and crises associated with its inadequacy. Sweezy, it is worth noting, had been a student of Alvin Hansen one of the foremost popularizers of Keynesian analysis in the United States.

26 They quite explicitly linked their concept of state capitalism to Lenin's — which he had applied to both German capitalism and the early organization of accumulation by the Bolsheviks in the USSR.

27 See: C.L.R. James, "Resolution on the Russian Question," submitted to the Second Workers' Party National Convention in September 1941, F. Forest (R. Dunayevskaya), "An Analysis of Russian Economy," Part I: 3 articles in the *New International* (Dec

1942, Jan. 1943 and Feb.43), and F. Forest (R. Dunayevskaya), “The Nature of the Russian Economy: A Contribution on the Discussion on Russia,” Part II: 2 articles in the New International (Dec.1946 and Jan.1947) — all of which lay the foundation for the analysis in *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950). The emphasis on workers’ struggles and their characterization of the Soviet System as “state capitalist” was shared by the Council Communists who had, much earlier, pointed to Bolshevik efforts to corral autonomous worker initiatives

28 This analysis of state capitalism and workers’ struggles in the USSR and Eastern Europe although not addressed directly in *Zerowork #1* was more or less taken for granted by the members of the collective. It would become explicit in two articles in *Zerowork #2* — Donna Demac and Phil Mattera’s piece on Vietnam and Harry Cleaver’s on food crises.

29 Despite the similarities, in tracing the genesis of *Zerowork*, I have found far more direct connections with *Facing Reality* than with *News & Letters*. As a result there are many fewer reference in this historical sketch to the writings and activities of the latter group.

30 Within the United States, perhaps the most influential writing-off of the American working class in the 1950s and 1960s was by *Monthly Review* — the magazine and the press — that focused its attentions, and thus that of many others, on imperialism and struggles in the Third World without connecting them to those in American work places.

31 George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, New York: Praeger, 1973.

32 The article is George Rawick, “Working Class Self-Activity”, *Radical America*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March-April 1969, pp. 23-31. Rumor has it that more copies of Italian translations of Rawick’s book on slavery were bought by housewives in Italy — who could directly relate to the struggles of slaves — than were purchased in all of the United States.

33 Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.

34 Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Allen Lane, 1991.

35 Claude Montal was the pseudonym of Claude Lefort (1924-2010), a student of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), the famous phenomenological philosopher. Among other contributors to *Socialisme ou Barbarie* were Henri Simon, Jean-François Lyotard and, briefly, Guy Debord, founder of the Situationist International.

36 Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 65.

37 He made this claim in a 1992 lecture, which along with follow-up questions and answers, was published first as “C.L.R. James and the Fate of Marxism” in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds) *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, and later in Cornelius Castoriadis, *Postscript on Insignificance*, available online at <http://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf>. Philippe Gottraux, in his book on *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, quotes a 1962 account by Castoriadis of this relationship in which he relates Lee’s six month visit to Paris in 1948. “Cette rencontre, et la collaboration quotidienne que notre tendance alors

dans le PCI a eu avec Ria a été extrêmement féconde; elle a permis aux deux parties d'enrichir et d'approfondir leurs idées et elle a établi des liens qui, s'ils se sont parfois distendus par la suite, ne se sont jamais rompus." See Gottraux, *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Un engagement politique et intellectuel dans la France de l'après-guerre*, Lausanne: Editions Payot, 1997, p.243.

38 For brief sketches of the history of the group, the journal, and the changing views of its contributors, see Marcel van der Linden, "Socialisme ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949-1965)", *Left History*, 5.1, 1997. (Online at <http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/lindsob.htm>), Andre Liebich, "Socialism ou Barbarie, a Radical Critique of Bureaucracy," *Our Generation*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall 1977, pp. 55-62. For more in-depth information see, Philippe Gottraux, *op. cit.* and Stephen Hastings-King, *Looking for the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing*, Boston: Brill, 2014. NB: reviewing Gottraux's book in *Left History* (6.2, 1999, pp. 179-182), van der Linden corrects an error in his earlier article, wherein he confused Grace Lee with Raya Dunayevskaya as maintaining contact with SoB in the late 1950s.

39 A translation of this introduction, along with much more extremely useful historical material about the use of Marx's "Workers' Inquiry" was recently published (9/2013) in the third issue of the on-line Viewpoint Magazine. A recent issue, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2014, of *emphemera: theory & politics in organization* is also devoted to "The Politics of Workers' Inquiry".

40 Although he would later protest the inclusion of his name — because he apparently felt the publication was premature, not all problems having been worked out — Castoriadis was listed as joint author under his pseudonym Pierre Chaulieu.

41 The SoB analysis of the USSR focused on the management of a state capitalism by a bureaucratic elite.

42 Vivier's reports appeared in several issues of SoB, beginning with #11 November-December 1952. Mothé's reports first appeared in issue #13, January-March 1954, with a report on a strike at Renault but continued, periodically, throughout the whole history of the journal. Along the way Mothé dealt with strikes, day-to-day struggles, worker-union conflicts, worker reactions to the Hungarian Revolution, a new generation of young workers and local-immigrant worker relations. Mothé was a pseudonym for Jacques Gautrat and was, like Marty Glaberman on the other side of the Atlantic, an autoworker. He published *Journal d'un ouvrier*, 1956-1958, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1959 and later *Militant Chez Renault*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965.

43 In the U.S. shop floor struggles challenged what the bosses called "managerial prerogatives" — namely the right to complete control over the organization of work. This authoritarian attitude led to managers refusing to even consider improvements in production practices proposed by workers — proposed to make their work more efficient and safer (and thus raising productivity while protecting themselves). The results were two-fold: first, the harnessing of workers' struggles was limited primarily to tying wage and benefit increases to productivity and second, American corporate managers lagged far, far behind their Japanese counterparts who would develop incentive programs to harness worker productivity-enhancing creativity. That more sophisticated harnessing at the point of production would eventually give them a considerable competitive advantage over U.S. manufacturers — an advantage that would dramatically facilitate the Toyoto invasion of the American market in 1965.

44 This insight into the capitalist harnessing of working class power to raise wages foreshadowed Antonio Negri's later argument along the same lines, seeing it as fundamental to capital's post-war Keynesian strategies. While Negri's "John M. Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State in 1929," published in the first issue of the Italian workerist journal *Contropiano* in 1968 was known to some in the Zerowork collective, Castoriadis' earlier article was not — at least as far as I have been able to determine.

45 Montaldi was a life-long political activist from Cremona whose dissatisfaction with the CPI led to multiple connections with other groups, including the French, and the creation of the independent organization Gruppo di Unità Proletaria in 1957. His translation of *The American Worker* was published serially in *Battaglia Comunista* in 1954-55. His translation of Mothe's *Journal d'un ouvrier* appeared in 1960 as *Diario di un operaio*, 1956-59, Torino: Einaudi and included Mothe's text, an introduction by Montaldi and various reactions to the text by, among others, Romano Alquati and Francesco Coppelotti. That year also saw the publication of Montaldi's first book *Milano, Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati*, written in collaboration with Franco Alasia and based on carrying out a workers' inquiry with immigrant workers — a part of the working class little studied in Italy at that time. A much more detailed and comprehensive introduction to the development of the Italian work that I barely sketch here can be found in Steve Wright's book *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.

46 The well-known turning point at which rank & file anger exploded was the July 1962 Piazza Statuto attack on the offices of the UIL in Turin. The FIAT workers were furious that the union

bureaucrats had signed an agreement with management without consulting them, thus undermining their strike.

47 Marx's *A Workers' Inquiry* first appeared in France in 1880 and consisted of 100 questions that he thought should be asked of workers to reveal their concrete situation. His purpose was to pressure the French state to follow the example set by the English government whose factory inspectors had done so much to reveal the shocking conditions in which workers lived in that country — and whose reports contributed so much to legislation that improved workers' lives. Only the workers, Marx wrote, "can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer, and that only they, and not saviors sent by Providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills to which they are a prey." The *Inquiry* was first published in the United States in the December 1938 issue of the *New Internationalist*, pp. 379-381. The bulk of *Quaderni rossi* 5 was devoted to contributions to a 1964 seminar on the "Socialist use of the Workers' Inquiry".

48 Alquati has been quoted as denying being the inventor of *conricerca*, "Political militants have always done *conricerca*. We would go in front of the factory and speak with workers; there cannot be organization otherwise." But for Alquati and Panzieri, and others who took up this task, how one spoke, what one said and what came out of the discussion were fundamental issues to be refined, not formulas given. See, for example, Panzieri's essay "Socialist Uses of Workers' Inquiry" that not only defends the usefulness of sociological methods for workers' struggles, but discusses how such use differs from sociological methodologies developed to enhance capital's control. Originally published in *Spontaneità e organizzazione*. Gli anni dei "Quaderni rossi" 1959-1964, a collection

of Panzieri's writings edited by S. Merli for BFS Edizioni, Pisa 1994. The quote from Alquati is from Gigi Roggero's obituary.

49 For Gramsci's analysis see "Americanism and Fordism" (1934) in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers, 1971.

50 See Raniero Panzieri "Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo," *Quaderni rossi*, no. 1, 1961, reprinted in R. Panzieri, *La Ripresa del Marxismo Leninismo in Italia*, Sapere Ed. 1975, and published in English as "The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Versus the 'Objectivists,'" in Phil Slater (ed) *Outlines of a Critique of Technology*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1980.

51 All too often Marxist theories of technological change have seen it as driven by "competition" between capitalists — without seeing how competition between capitalists has been based on that between bosses and workers. The capitalists with the best control over their workers are the ones most likely to win out over their corporate competitors. See: my short essay on this point.

52 Mario Tronti, "La fabbrica e la società", *Quaderni rossi* 2, giugno 1962, pp. 1-31.

53 Mario Tronti, "Il piano del capitale", *Quaderni rossi*, 3, , pp. 44-73, reprinted in Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale*, Turin: Einaudi, 1966, 1971, pp. 267-311, and published in English as "Social Capital" *Telos*, #17, Fall 1973, pp. 98-121.

54 That dichotomy was rooted in Marx's own historically limited analysis of capitalism in mid-19th Century. See Chapter 14 on the division of labor in Volume I of *Capital*.

55 Raniero Panzieri, "Plusvalore e pianificazione: Appunti di lettura del Capitale," Quaderni rossi 4, pp. 257-288. In English: "Surplus value and planning: notes on the reading of Capital," The Labour Process & Class Strategies, CSE Pamphlet no. 1, London: Stage 1, 1976, pp. 4-25.

56 "Composizione di classe e teoria del partito alle origini del movimento consiliare," op. cit. "The Theory and History of the Mass Worker in Italy" was translated from the German and published in an abridged form in Common Sense Nos. 11 & 12, The original German was published over three issues of 1999-Zeitschrift fur Sozialgeschichte des 20 and 21 Jahrhunderts.

57 Big Flame ex-members describe the group as "a Revolutionary Socialist Feminist organization with a working class orientation." They have created an extensive web space containing a great deal of information about the group, including publications, its activities and debates (both internal and with others).

58 Ferruccio Gambino, ""Italy 1969-1970 Wave of Struggles", Potere Operaio, No. 27, June 27-July 3, 1970. Andriano Sofri, "Organizing for Workers' Power" and Guido Viale, "Class Struggle and European Unity," Lotta Continua, November 7 & 8, 1972.

59 Radical America, Vol. 5 No. 5, September-October 1971 and Vol. 7, No. 2, March-April 1973

60 See the section on "The Emancipation of Women", p. 60-61.

61 First, it is unclear exactly when these pages were written. It may have been in 1950 when the manuscript as a whole was first composed, or it may have been in 1956 when, apparently, members of Correspondence returned to the manuscript with the aim (unrealized) of completing it for publication. Second, the authorship

of these pages of American Civilization seems to be in dispute. On the one hand, when the entire manuscript was finally published in 1993, both the editors of the book and James' literary executor wrote commentaries attributing the entire manuscript to C. L. R. James — with some unidentified input from other members of Correspondence. On the other hand, in 1970 when *Radical America* published a special issue on women's struggles, excerpts from the section on women were included as the lead article with Selma James listed as author. See: Selma James, "The American Family: Decay and Rebirth" *Radical America*, Vol. IV, no. 2, February, 1970. Given her subsequent writings on women it seems quite possible that she either wrote the passage or had input into James' writing of it. Interestingly, in her recent collection of her writings she choose not to include this text. Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning, A Selection of Writings, 1952-2011*, New York: PM Press, 2012.

62 F. Forest, "The Miner's Wives," *The Militant*, 1950, reprinted in Raya Dunayevskaya, *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution: Reaching for the Future*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985, pp. 29-30.

63 Ever since, as far as I have been able to determine, Selma James has claimed sole credit for *A Woman's Place*. Grace Lee Boggs has written that "CLR encouraged [Selma] to write the pamphlet *A Woman's Place* with Filomena [Daddario]." Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 62.

64 Three of her columns from *Correspondence* are included in Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning*, op. cit, pp. 32-38.

65 *Le Deuxième Sexe* was first translated into English and published in 1953.

66 See Raya Dunayevskaya, “The Grundrisse and Women’s Liberation” (1974) included in Raya Dunayevskaya, *Women’s Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution: Reaching for the Future*, op. cit., 5, pp. 186-187.

67 Years later, in the 1970s, Dunayevskaya would repeatedly critique de Beauvoir for her Existentialism and for her failure to recognize and discuss various women’s struggles, from the Paris Commune to those of the 1940s and 1950s, and for her misreading of the 1844 Manuscripts. See the collection *Women’s Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution*, *ibid.*

68 *Facing Reality*, op. cit., pp. 73-75.

69 A caveat: so far this history has not benefited from detailed examination of the Martin and Jessie Glaberman archives at Wayne State University. Once I am able to get to and explore those archives some revisions are likely.

70 Mariarosa’s account of the genesis the essay “Women and the Subversion of the Community” and her attempt to set the record straight can be found in two places. First, her intervention “The Door to the Garden” at the 2002 launch of *Futuro anteriore* and second, her statement on Selma James’ attempted usurpation of credit for the essay in her introduction to the collection of her own writings *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning*, op. cit.). “The political categories I was using in my analysis were those developed by Workerism: the strategic character of the wage struggle, the refusal of work, and the social factory. Consequently, it is not surprising that these categories are found in the article in question.”

71 “Women, the Unions and Work” was published by the Notting Hill (London) Women’s Liberation Workshop as a pamphlet. “Sex, Race and Working Class Power” was first published in the January 1974 issue of *Race Today* and later as the core essay — accompanied by many commentaries — in the pamphlet *Sex, Race and Class* by Falling Wall Press in 1975. *Wages Against Housework* was published by the Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, while *Counterplanning from the Kitchen* was published by New York Wages for Housework and Falling Wall Press.

72 Marty Glaberman to Selma James, March 25, 1972.

73 Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, Mariarosa’s words need not be understood in this manner. They can be understood as meaning that any unpaid domestic work that contributes to the production and reproduction of labor power has the effect of reducing the cost of that labor power to capital and thereby increasing whatever surplus value is realized through its employment. This is perfectly compatible with Marx’s theory and does not require any vast reinterpretation as Glaberman feared.

74 Those concepts were explicitly mentioned and employed in the first issue of *Zerowork*, but not, as far as I know, examined or critiqued by Glaberman — who did critique other aspects of the journal. Glaberman’s final critique, in his letter to Selma, was peculiar. Basically, he asserted that Mariarosa’s analysis was one she (and presumably the rest of *Wages for Housework*) was bringing to women from outside their own experience. Yet, as I have mentioned, Selma’s own work — with which Glaberman was presumably familiar — dating back at least to 1952 had demonstrated how women had been struggling around precisely the issues being raised in Mariarosa’s

essay, long before she analyzed those struggles through the use of Marxian concepts.

75 See Andre Schiffrin, "The Student Movement in the 1950's: A reminiscence," *Radical America*, Vol. II, No. 3, May-June 1968.

76 *Artie Cuts Out*, by Arthur Bauman as told to Paul Wallis, New York: Jaguar Press, 1953. This character of this pamphlet — the words of a student recorded by a member of Correspondence — paralleled in format, the group's efforts to make heard the voices of workers who were unlikely to write up their own stories of struggle. A brief sketch of the evolution of such efforts is given by Marty Glaberman in his introduction to C. L. R. James, *Marxism for Our Times: C. L. R. James on Revolutionary Organization*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999, pp. xviii-xix.

77 C. L. R. James, Grace C. Lee and Pierre Chaulieu, *Facing Reality: The New Society...Where to look for it, How to bring it closer, A statement for our time*, Detroit: Correspondence Publishing Company, 1958, p. 60. Also in the reprint of Bewick Editions, 1974, p. 60. The same neglect of schoolwork and student struggles in the 1950s appears to have also been the case with *News & Letters*, the organization formed by Raya Dunayevskaya and her followers when they left Correspondence in 1955.

78 See: the report by graduate students on the situation at Berkeley.

79 In 1969 C. L. R. James gave a talk on "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student" in which he critiqued both the position of some Black scholars, e.g., the economist W.A. Lewis, and the notion of Black Studies as a separate field. James mocked Lewis' attack on Black Studies and his argument that Black students should follow standard courses of study and seek positions as high up the power

hierarchy as they could reach — which would mean accepting both the structure of an educational system designed to meet the needs of capitalism and the existing system of decision-making and power. (This was, of course, what Lewis had done, becoming an important contributor to capitalist development strategies for the Third World.) On the other hand, James argued that while it was important for Black students to study the history of Black struggles, those could only be understood within the dynamics of class struggles within the capitalist system as a whole — something he had demonstrated in *The Black Jacobins* and many other writings. Absent from his comments was any critique of the educational structures within which the advocates of Black Studies sought to carve out space for themselves or the implications of the acceptance of those inevitably hierarchical structures for the relations between teachers and students or the pressures the former would be forced to impose on the latter. Comparing this talk with the pamphlet *Wages for Students* (see below) makes clear what was missing, and had been missing, pretty much since *Artie Cuts Out*. His talk is reprinted in Anna Grimshaw (ed), *The C. L. R. James Reader*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 390-404.

80 The May-June 1968 Issue of *Radical America* (Vol. II, No. 3) on “The New Left” contained two articles with information on student political groups: James P. O’Brien’s piece on “The Early Days of the New Left,” and Andre Schiffrin’s “The Student Movement of the 1950’s: A Reminiscence”, but neither contained an analysis of either schoolwork or student resistance to it. When *Radical America* reprinted essays by C. L. R. James and his comrades, or Telos reprinted translations of Italian New Leftists, the texts chosen never included analyses of schoolwork or student struggles.

81 Claude Martin, “La jeunesse étudiante”, Richard Dechamp, “La vie de l’étudiant” and Dionys Gautier “La situation de l’étudiant” *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 34, Vol. IV (14e année) Mars-Mai 1963, pp. 44-62.

82 The genesis of this document and the role of Mustapha Khayati in its writing was spelled out by the SI in response to misrepresentations of their role in the wake of the juridical repression that followed the distribution of the pamphlet. See: “Nos buts et nos méthodes dans le scandale de Strasbourg,” *internationale situationniste*, Numéro 11, Octobre 1967, pp. 23-31. In English: (“Our Goals and Methods in the Strasbourg Scandal,”)

83 This extremely brief summary of the evolution of workerist evaluations of the student struggles in Italy can be greatly enriched by reading Chapter 4 “New Social Subjects” of Steve Wright’s *Storming Heaven*, op. cit. and the materials he references.

84 Sergio Bologna e Giairo Daghini, “Maggio ‘68 in Francia,” *Quaderni Piacentini*, anno VII, n. 35, luglio 1968, pp. 2-41.

85 See for example, Luigi Bobbio and Guido Viale, “Student Political Organization,” *International Socialist Journal*, Year 5, no. 26-27, July 1968, pp. 220-231.

86 These demands for wider access to education and for increased funding for those with difficulty affording it was common on both sides of the Atlantic. The mutation of demands for scholarships into demands for wages, however, happened much faster and spread much wider in Europe than in the United States. The demand for Wages for Students articulated by some students in Massachusetts (see below) never spread very far from its limited beginnings. This remained true despite the inevitable upsurge in

“economic” student struggles in the 1970s as capital counterattacked “the movement”, slashing financial aid and shifting from grants to loans.

87 Eventually such efforts would be made. See: Alquati, Romano “Università, Formazione della Forza Lavoro Intellettuale, Terziarizzazione,” in Roberta Tomassini, *Studenti e Composizione di classe*, Milano: edizioni aut-aut, 1977, pp. 12-76. (Originally written in maggio 1976)

88 This difficulty is apparent in Alberto Asor Rosa’s 1968 article about the Italian student movement titled “A Separate Branch of the Working Class”, *International Socialist Journal*, Year 5, no. 26-27, July 1968, pp. 191-200. The text of the article belies its title; students are not treated as a “branch” of the working class, but as a wholly separate sector whose relationship to “the working class movement” is a central problem. It is also apparent in Vittorio Rieser’s article “On Goals and Strategy” in the same issue.

89 See the biographical sketches of Leoncio Schaedel and George Caffentzis below.

90 The policy of holding down agricultural prices while allowing input prices to rise has been termed a “scissors strategy” for exploiting farmers and peasants and became infamous in the Soviet Union as a complement to collectivization. Both the “scissors” and collectivization continued the Czarist practice of extracting the maximal feasible surplus from the countryside to finance industrialization. The same policy has been used elsewhere, from the United States in the 19th Century where it gave rise to the populist movement, to India under Indira Gandhi in the 1970s where it provoked poor harijan peasants to harvest — illegally and often at

night — the crops of wealthier local strongmen — who retaliated with their own goons or by calling in the police.

91 Anthropologists, e.g., James C. Scott, bottom-up historians, e.g., Edward Thompson and Rodney Hilton, and subaltern historians, e.g., Ranajit Guha, have all documented, in various countries and in various periods of history, the utilization by peasants of what Scott has called “the weapons of the weak” — covert forms of struggle elaborated where overt resistance has been viciously repressed. See Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (1976), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), Edward Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Hilton’s *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (1975) and Guha’s *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983).

92 It is of some interest, as Peter Linebaugh has pointed out, that Marx’s very first writing on economic conflicts dealt with state criminalization of the peasant tradition of gathering wood from forests. This attack on a non-wage source of income, Linebaugh argues, was not an act of “primitive accumulation” but one designed to impose the wage form on a recalcitrant peasantry already being exploited by capital. Peter Linebaugh, “Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood and Working Class Composition,” *Crime and Social Justice*, Fall-Winter 1976.

93 Kautsky’s *Die Agrarfrage: Eine Uebersicht über die Tendenzen der modernen Landwirtschaft und die Agrarpolitik* u. s. w., Stuttgart: Dietz, 1899, that Lenin called “the most important event in present day economic literature since the third volume of *Capital*”, has never been translated into English but is available in French as *La*

Question Agraire: Etude sur les Tendences de l'Agriculture Moderne, Paris: V. Giard & E. Briere, 1900, reprinted by Francois Maspero in 1970 and Nabu Press in 2010.

94 Marx's responses to the debates in Russia were contained, primarily, in letters written to Vera Zasulich who had asked for his views. Those letters and critical essays on their implications have been collected in Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.

95 Given the size and importance of agriculture and of the peasantry that worked the land in Russia, Lenin devoted a great deal of effort not only into understanding the degree to which capitalist relationships were emerging in the countryside, but in critiquing the political proposals of other parties for various policies affecting the peasantry. Beyond the study of Marx and Kautsky's work on the development of capitalist agriculture in England and Germany, he also undertook his own serious studies of the development of capitalism in both American and Russian agriculture — primarily as revealed by available statistics. What was missing in his studies was any substantial effort to grasp peasant struggles from either the peasant point of view, or from intimate familiarity with the social and political dynamics of their self-organization. Lenin neither had, nor conceived the need for, a “workers’ inquiry” appropriate to the revealing of the situation and internal dynamics of peasant struggles. For a useful annotated bibliography of Lenin's writings, see Amalendu Guha, “Lenin on the Agrarian Question”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, No. 9, April 1977, pp. 61-80.

96 This was the outcome of the famous debate over paths to “socialist” industrialization in the Soviet Union. As it evolved, the

Soviet State basically adopted the position of Evgenii Alexeyevich Preobrazhensky who argued that the fastest path to the development of industry was “primitive socialist accumulation” — namely the maximal extraction of surplus from the peasantry and its induction into waged factory labor. See his *New Economics* (1926).

97 The reference here is to the Wuchang Resolution imposing the alternative, very capitalist, rule: “to each according to his work.”

98 James’ most famous work — *The Black Jacobins* — deals with primarily with slaves. His *History of Negro Revolt*, op. cit., focuses on the struggles of waged workers and peasants in colonies of the 20th Century.

99 These are the opening lines of Chapter IV, “The San Domingo Masses Begin” of C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, op. cit.

100 This skepticism must also be juxtaposed to James and his comrades’ enthusiasm for the demonstrated ability of Russian urban workers to form factory committees and soviets during periods of revolutionary upheaval. These very different assessments completely ignored how the labor force in Russian factories and cities was almost entirely made up of first, or at most, second generation peasants, and how these autonomous urban feats of self-organization resembled the village mir or peasant commune.

101 His continuing reverence for Lenin’s views on this subject were spelled out in greatest detail in the essay “Lenin and the Problem” written for a political journal in Ghana in 1964. (Included in C. L. R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1977, pp. 189-213.) In that article, he focused on Lenin’s critique of Soviet government practices and his call for

educating the peasantry to facilitate the development of cooperatives as the path to socialism. This embrace apparently continued on into the 1970s — as indicated by an essay on Nigeria summarized in Anna Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive: A Reader's Guide*, New York: The C.L.R. James Institute, 1991, p. 42. His admiration of Lenin's call for cooperatives as the most effective means for peasants to organize, undoubtedly influenced his enthusiasm for Nyerere's embrace of Ujamaa (Swahili for "familyhood") — a rural path to socialism based on bringing the rural population together in small villages to undertake collective agriculture.

102 F. Forest (R. Dunayevskaya), "An Analysis of Russian Economy," Part I: 3 articles in *The New International* (December 1942, January 1943 and February 1943) These articles, along with two others were reprinted by *News and Letters* in 1973 as a pamphlet: *The Original Historical Analysis: Russia as State-capitalist Society*.

103 C. L. R. James, Grace C. Lee, and Pierre Chaulieu, "The Workers' Councils: Hungary," in *Facing Reality*, op. cit.

104 On James' experience in Missouri in 1941 — when he was a member of the Workers' Party — as a pamphleteer recording and recounting a sharecroppers' strike, see his articles in *Labor Action* published in September and October 1941, republished in Scott McLemee (ed) *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question"*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999, pp. 22-34. However limited, James' investigation of the sharecroppers' background — reported in three short articles — seems to have been the single, direct, on-the-ground study of the struggles of rural workers carried out by anyone in the Johnson-Forest — Correspondence — *Facing Reality* — *News & Letters* groups during the 1940s and 1950s. Also: Paul Buhle, C. L. R. James, *The Artist as Revolutionary*, New York: Verso, 1988, pp.

82-83 and documents VII.43-VII.45 in Anna Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive: A Reader's Guide*, op.cit., pp. 56-57. James had known Nkrumah since the latter was a student in Pennsylvania and had been something of a mentor to him before he became a leader of the struggle for independence in the Gold Coast and elected president of independent Ghana. See: Chapter 5 of Paul Buhle's *C.L.R. James, the Artist as Revolutionary*, op. cit., and *C.L.R. James, Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, op .cit. An exception to their focus on urban factory struggles was the JFT's interest in the miners' strike of 1949-1950. Although the vast majority of mines and miner communities are located in rural areas, the strike was very much an industrial one in which a central issue was automation — just as in the auto factories of Detroit. Many years later, *New & Letters* would publish a pamphlet on that strike that gives an account of their interest and analysis. See: *The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.*, Chicago: *News & Letters*, 1984.

105 Once drawn into the debate between the Populists and the “Marxists” who were using his writings on England to dismiss the importance of peasant struggles, Marx had to learn Russian to study the conflicting positions. Dunayevskaya already knew Russian but she neither knew Marx's writings on the debate nor carried out a parallel investigation of her own. Only much later, when Marx's letters — and his other “ethnographic studies” finally became widely known did she begin to take them into account. See: Chapter XII in *Raya Dunayevskaya, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1982. Had she discovered them earlier, it is easy to imagine that she would have provided a first translation — as she did with the passages on “estranged labor” in the 1844 Manuscripts. One can only

imagine the effect such discovery and translation might have had on her and James' analysis of peasant struggle in the 1940s and 1950s.

106 G. Fofi's "Agricoltura" in issue #3 and Mario Miegge's "Riforma agraria e lotta contadina nella Marsica", issue #6.

107 Luciano Ferrari Bravo (1940-2000) e Alessandro Serafini (1942-1991), *Stato e sottosviluppo: Il caso del Mezzogiorno italiano*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1972.

108 Franca Cipriani, "Proletariato del Maghreb e capitale europeo," Marco Dogo, "Jugoslavia, un paese d'emigrazione" and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Riproduzione e emigrazione" in A. Serafini, et al, *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa*, Materiali Marxisti 4, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974, pp. 77-108, 181-196 and 207-242 respectively. Dalla Costa's essay was translated into English, and was intended to be included in *Zerowork #3* and is now available on this website.

109 Martin Glaberman, "George P. Rawick: Socialist Historian," *Against the Current*, May-June 1991, p. 9.

110 The "fragment" was published in *Quaderni rossi* 4, pp. 289-300.

111 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, The Marx Pelican Library, p. 705. The "Fragment on Machine is usually defined as pp. 699-712.

112 Latent in debates within the Zerowork collective over the relative importance of capital's growing difficulties in imposing waged work was a theoretical issue that would eventually surface and on which participants would take quite different positions: whether the ever greater substitution of machinery for labor renders Marx's labor theory of value irrelevant.

113 In Caffentz's article "Throwing Away the Ladder," the ladder to be "thrown away" by workers' struggles was the "training ladder", i.e., schooling geared to the production of labor power. Another ladder that was being thrown away, this time by capital, was the "career ladder": long term jobs with rising wages and benefits as one "climbed up" step by step. In its place were proliferating short term, lower waged, precarious jobs and the increased unwaged work associated with repeated job search, returning to school for a new "training footstool", and all the affective labor associated with increased anxiety occasioned by the uncertainty associated with these conditions.

114 Arriving at Antioch College in the Fall of 1962, both George and Harry Cleaver — who joined the Zerowork collective after the first issue (see Background: "From Zerowork #1 to Zerowork #2") — were witnesses to the Cuban Missile Crisis that unfolded over nearly two weeks that October. George joined a few dozen other Antiochians to protest — at Wright Patterson Air Force Base — the threatened nuclear war. Subsequently, in March 1964, both were also involved in the protests against Yellow Springs, Ohio, barber Lewis Gegner's refusal to serve Blacks. Along with over a hundred other students from Antioch and nearby traditional Black colleges, they were arrested and jailed during the protests. Some of what follows is drawn from an extended interview with George undertaken by the Greek anti-authoritarian/communist group Ta Paidia Tis Galarias (TPTG) or The Children of the Galley, published in the November 2001 issue of their journal of the same name. An English translation is available.

115 Marc Linder, Unter Mitarbeit von Julius Sensat und George Caffentz, Der Anti-Samuelson: Kritik eines repräsentativen

Lehrbuchs der bürgerlichen Ökonomie, Band 1-4, Mit einem Vorwort von Elmar Altavater, Gaiganz: Politladen Erlangen, 1974.

116 Marc Linder and Julius Sensat, *The Anti-Samuelson. Volume One. Macroeconomics: basic problems of the capitalist economy*, New York: Urizen Books, 1977 and Marc Linder and Julius Sensat. *The Anti-Samuelson. Volume Two. Microeconomics: basic problems of the capitalist economy*. New York: Urizen Books, 1977. The full texts of volumes I and II are now available on-line. Even a skim of the introduction to the first volume will make clear the political and theoretical differences with the orientation of *Zerowork*. George did publish, with Julius Sensat, a small part of their work: “A Critique of Utility Theory,” in *Science & Society*, Summer 1975.

117 George’s dissertation was “Does Quantum Mechanics Necessitate a Revolution in Logical Theory?”

118 The New York Struggle Against Work group (preceded by the short-lived Income Without Work Committee) included some men in personal relationships with women in the Wages for Housework movement, some who were not. Among the former were George and Larry Cox. Among the latter were Harry Cleaver and Philip Mattera. For more detailed history of the Toronto group see the section on Bruno Ramirez below.

119 From the Toronto group, in the period leading up to the publication of *Zerowork*, I have been able to locate only one document: SAWC, “A Statement on the Dissolution of the New Tendency,” March 1975. Discussions of these questions in these two groups would lead to further publications in 1976. (See “Background: From *Zerowork* #1 to *Zerowork* #2.”)

120 At that time, Colletti was a fierce critic of the Gramscian Marxism that was used by the Italian Communist Party (or Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) in the post-WWII period to justify its collaboration with Italian capitalism. Ferraroti was, and may still be, Paolo has affirmed, “the most prominent Italian sociologist.” Of some interest is that Ferraroti wrote his own dissertation on Veblen and among the books he had written by the time Paolo was studying with him were ones on industrial sociology in America and in Europe and others on autonomous syndicalism, worker protests and sociology as participation.

121 Classe Operaio had published parts of *Operai e Capitale* and Paolo says that even though by that time Tronti had returned to the PCI — much to the disappointment of many — he was still “very forthcoming and accessible to us young militants.”

122 Literary critic, professor and novelist, Asor Rosa collaborated with the workerist journals *Quaderni rossi*, *Classe Operaia*, and *Contropiano*. Franco Piperno, political activist and physicist, was a well-known leader of the student movement in Rome and one of the founders of *Potere Operaio*.

123 Personal correspondence.

124 DRUM = Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement. Initially aimed at reforming the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union, DRUM was created by black workers who had come to form a majority of the workers in their plants but had little representation at the level of the union bureaucracy. John Watson was a member of DRUM and editor of an associated newspaper *The Inner City Voice*. See Marty Glaberman’s 1969 article on DRUM and the current wiki. The rise of DRUM led to similar organizations elsewhere in the industry, e.g., FRUM = Ford Revolutionary Union Movement.

125 Personal correspondence.

126 The Collectivo that oversaw that collection, and several other collaborations in the *Materiali Marxisti* series published by Feltrinelli, was one organizational effort by those at the Università di Padova gathered, more or less tightly, around Antonio Negri — a major figure in Italian workerism and the one who has been most successful in getting his many writings translated and published in English.

127 That article was translated and published as “Chomage: Made in USA,” in the French autonomist journal *Camarades*, No. 2, Summer 1976, pp. 20-24.

128 G. Bock, P. Carpignano e B. Ramirez, *La formazione dell'operaio massa negli USA 1898/1922*, *Materiali Marxisti* 10, a cura del Collectivo di Scienze politiche di Padova, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976, pp. 189-238.

129 That collaboration led to the publication of E. P. Thompson, Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule and Cal Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in 18th Century England*, London: Pantheon, 1976.

130 This account of the Offord Road Group comes primarily from “Sketching the Genesis of Zerowork”, a talk given at the May Day Rooms of the Marx Memorial Library in January 2013 where Peter was depositing a first collection of materials with that archive. In a 1995 letter critiquing the inaccuracies in *Rendezvous of Victory* — a collection of C. L. R. James' writings, Marty Glaberman describes Selma in the following manner: “She was his secretary, collaborator and financial support in most of the years after the forties. . . . She was the primary influence on him and the organization in relation to the ‘woman question’.” In a 1996 review

of Ken Worcester's biography of James, Marty pointed out that Selma's maiden name was Deitch, not Weinstein — the name of her first husband.

131 James Boggs, a black worker originally from Alabama, had been, along with his wife Grace Lee Boggs, a member of Facing Reality. After he and his wife left Facing Reality in 1963, he published *The American Worker: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, that detailed, analyzed and drew lessons from his own experience of work and struggle in Detroit auto factories. "Theses on the Mass Worker and Capital" *Radical America*, Vol. 6, No. 3, May-June 1972.

132 Colletti was heavily influenced by Della Volpe and was often considered his intellectual successor.

133 Mario Montano, "On the Methodology of Determinate Abstractions: Essay on Galvano della Volpe" in *Telos* 7 (1971), pp. 30-49. Silvia Federici, "Notes on Lukács's Aesthetics" in *Telos* 11 (1972), pp. 141-151. Silvia had previously written several reviews of French and Vietnamese writings for *Telos* and translated a piece by Salvatore Veca, "Value, Labor and the Critique of Political Economy," *Telos* 9 (1971), pp. 48-64.

134 Mario Tronti's 1966 essay "Lotta contro il lavoro," was translated and published as "Struggle against Labor" in the same issue of *Radical America* (Vol. 6, No. 1, May-June 1972, pp. 22-25) as their Guido Baldi synthesis. Because the origins and authorship of "Women and the Subversion of the Community" has been falsified by Selma James in her introduction to the recently published collection of her essays, *Sex, Race and Class — the Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings 1952–2011* (PM Press, 2012), Mariarosa's reluctant response — aimed at setting the record straight — is made available here.

135 At Shelton College Bruno completed a BA in History and at the University of Guelph, an MA in History. His dissertation is available on-line: Bruno Ramirez, *Collective Bargaining and the Politics of Industrial Relations in the Progressive Era, 1898-1916*, Dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto (Canada) 1975. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. NK32876) Much, although not all, of what follows comes from a very detailed and thoughtful autobiographical piece that Bruno wrote for the December 1999 issue of the *Journal of American History*.

136 His church, Bruno says, had a very active youth movement and many of its leaders went on to join the extraparliamentary Left, especially Lotta Continua.

137 His dissertation was later revised and published as Bruno Ramirez, *When Workers Fight: The Politics of Industrial Relations in the Progressive Era*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978.

138 These included, among others, members of New Democratic Youth (the youth wing of the New Democratic Party).

139 Much of what is said here about the NT is based on research carried out by Gary Kinsman who has been researching the history of the NT and associated groups.

140 Windsor is located immediately across the Detroit River from that city and was long its Canadian counterpart — in the sense of being the location of major automobile plants. In Windsor the primary focal point of those organizing outside of political parties and existing labor unions in the early and mid-1970s was the Windsor Labour Centre. Among the activists there were apparently many factions but two are notable: the Out of the Driver's Seat group and

the Auto Workers' Group (both had autoworker members). The Out of Driver's Seat (ODS) group drew part of their ideas from C. L. R. James, Marty Glaberman and Facing Reality more generally. (Although Facing Reality — for many years basically a Detroit-based organization — was dissolved in 1970, Marty Glaberman (1918-2001) continued to publish and circulate pieces the group had produced through Bewick Publications.) Some insights into the group can be gleaned from their discussion paper "Out of the Driver's Seat: Marxism in North America Today, The Windsor Labour Centre", which was written in 1974 as other factions withdrew from the Centre leaving ODS in charge. It outlines the group's experience intervening in student, gay, women, blue-collar and white-collar worker struggles, perceived mistakes and lessons drawn. Those lessons included the rejection of any kind of vanguardism and the very Correspondence-like search for ways to give workers the opportunity to articulate and discuss their own ideas.

141 This is true in a double sense. On the one hand there was the circulation of Italian material described below. On the other hand, Italian feminist thought, especially that of Mariarosa Dalla Costa, came to Canada through what was undoubtedly the most widely read and influential publication of the Wages for Housework movement *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, October 1972.

142 Big Flame ex-members describe the group as "a Revolutionary Socialist Feminist organization with a working class orientation." They have created an extensive web space containing a great deal of information about the group, including publications, its activities and debates (both internal and with others).

143 Rising Free was an anarchist bookshop in London. According to the Radical bookshop History Project, Rising free was located first at 197 Kings Cross Road, WC1 and later at 182 Upper Street, Islington, N1 and operated from 1974 to 1981.

144 Bruno wrote an account of this conference that was published in *La Critica Sociologica*, No. 20, inverno 1971-72, pp. 190-197. His account was mainly aimed at giving Italian readers a sense of the theoretical and organizational state of the “radical American Left” at that point in history.

145 S. Bologna, et al., *Operai e stato: Lotte operaie e riforma dello stato capitalistico tra rivoluzione d'Ottobre e New Deal*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1972. Bologna's contribution was “Composizione di classe e teoria del partito alle origini del movimento consiliare,” which, along with Bruno's review of the book, appeared in *Telos* as “Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers' Council Movement,” #13, Fall 1972.

146 For the special *Radical America* issue on Italian struggles (March-April 1973), Bruno and Judy translated “Against the State as Boss” by the Autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo workers and Bruno interviewed and wrote up an interview with Lotta Continua leader Guido Viale, some of whose writings had been studied by the members of NT. A year later Bruno and Judy translated Guido Viale's “Class Struggle and European Unity” for the November-December 1974 issue of *Radical America*.

147 These connections would lead to collaboration with Paolo and Gisela Bock in preparing *La formazione dell'operaio massa negli USA 1898/1922*, *Materiali Marxisti* 10, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976. Bruno's contribution to that volume was the lead article “Lotte operaie e strategia del capitale: 1898-1905”, pp. 7-54, that drew on

his dissertation research. He was able to spend time in Padua with Ferruccio while working with the translator of his article.

148 Bruno's wife, Judy, was active in organizing this visit — part of a larger Canadian tour that “culminated in a keynote address by James at the Montreal Feminist Symposium ‘where 800 women passed a resolution demanding wages for housework for all women from the state.’” Majorie Griffin Cohen and Ruth Roach Pierson, *Canadian Women's Issues: Vol. II: Bold Visions*, Toronto: Lorimer, 1995, p. 10.

149 On the other hand, although a few women from the NT organized a short-lived Wages for Housework group in Windsor, the women in Out of the Driver's Seat rejected the Wages for Housework analysis — and its separatist approach to organization — and remained in the former group until it began to wither away in the late 1970s.

150 SAWC, “Statement on the Dissolution of the New Tendency”, March 1975. The signers of the statement were: Bruno, Peter Taylor, John Huot, Tim Grant, John Ford and David Kidd.

151 This article can be found in the online archives of Mass Media. A year earlier on March 11, 1975, Mass Media had carried a story analyzing the analysis presented by “seven women from Italy, England, Germany and the US . . . to explain wages for housework to Boston women.”

152 Another member who worked at the post office, according to Gary Kinsman, was John Huot.

153 I have drawn much of what follows from “Intervista a Ferruccio Gambino, 10 Giugno 2001”, in which Ferruccio sketches

his political development, and from personal correspondence that refined some of the information contained in that interview.

154 La Casa dello studente di viale Romagna

155 Bookchin's work in this area was path-breaking. Both his book *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962) — which came out about the same time as Rachel Carson's better known, and less radical, *Silent Spring* (1962) — and his "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" (1964) was an early statement on a subject that would eventually become an essential discussion among Marxists and Anarchists struggling to get beyond capitalism.

156 "Ford Britannica. Formazione di una classe operaia". This essay was summarized in English, illustrated with relevant materials, and published in London as the first issue of *Red Notes: Workers' Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain*, Pamphlet No. 1, Red Notes, London, 1976. Appendices to this English translation outline many of the key concepts in a manner reminiscent of the "Guido Baldi" essay in *Radical America*.

157 This sketch is a poor substitute for Peter Linebaugh's beautiful tribute to John — "Gone to Glory". Read it for a much better sense of the man. The Wikipedia entry for Bradfield College includes a very long and very revealing list of its illustrious ruling class alumni. For those unfamiliar with the term, in England "public schools" are actually elite private secondary schools — often boarding schools. Such schools were the progenitors of what in the United States are known as "Prep schools", i.e., elite schools that prepare kids for entrance to elite universities. For example, John F. Kennedy and Sargent Shriver both studied at Canterbury School in Connecticut before moving on to Harvard and Yale. In Peter Linebaugh's tribute to John he quotes him as saying that the portrayal

in the 1968 film *If* of a public school and of the revolt against it reflected well his own experience. The film ends with a handful of rebellious students firing retrieved WWII weapons from the rooftops at the attendees of a Founders' Day ceremony.

Introduction

Original Flyer synopsis:

"Gone is the time when "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay" was the slogan around which the working class movement rallied. The directness of the working class attack has shattered the apparently sophisticated distinction between qualitative and quantitative demands. The leading edge of working class political strategy is the straight forward imposition of higher income regardless of productivity. This appropriation of wealth has taken many forms: demands for higher wages, for greater welfare benefits, rent strikes, subway gate crashing, and all the various types of direct appropriation that, in capital's justice, go under the label "crimes against property." The intensity and dimensions of these struggles demonstrate that the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the working class expresses its autonomy from capital. The magnitude of the struggle is best measured by the magnitude of the present crisis."

The present capitalist crisis has made the problem of working class revolutionary organization more urgent. But any discussion of revolutionary action must be based upon an analysis of the present relation of the working class to capital. The first issue of *Zerowork* takes up this task.

This historical crisis of capital is the product of a cycle of struggles, waged in North America and internationally, between the working class and capital. This is our starting point. There is nothing simple or mysterious about a cycle of struggle. The class struggle has many circuits, sectors, internal divisions and contradictions, but it is neither a mystical unity nor a chaotic mess. The articles in this issue describe the circulation and development of struggle through the different sectors of the working class that have culminated in the present crisis.

All capitalist crises may well look alike in the spectacles of economists. From the viewpoint of working class organization, however, there is a vast difference between 1929 and 1975. It is the difference in the changed role of the working class in the determination of the capitalist crisis. Unless this difference is grasped we will fail to identify the present source of working class power and be condemned therefore to the repetition of old nostrums and discredited strategies.

Capitalism is not always and eternally the same, nor are the revolutionary potentialities of the working class. In order to clarify the novelty of these contemporary relations of class power, we may pick out three main stages of struggle over the last century, each characterized by a different class relation and producing different types of crises.

The first is the period of the “anarchy of production.” Recurrent capitalist crises and restructuration were aimed at reproducing the reserve army of labor in order to depreciate the value of labor power and maintain the “proper” ratio between necessary and surplus labor. The possibility of “free market” control ended internationally with the Great Depression when a new relation with the working class was forged: the Keynesian era, whereas formerly wages rose and fell in spasmodic movements, in the Keynesian era the power of the working class was expressed in constantly increasing wage levels. The wage was taken, therefore, by capital as the pivot of the economy: development was geared to the expansion of demand. The consumer goods industry (primarily the automobile sector) consequently set the pace for growth. What was lost in the rigidity wages was recaptured by inflation. The recessions of the 1950s were used as tools for the “fine tuning” of working class consumption and for moderating wage demands. Crisis kept the equilibrium between wage demands and inflation levels. “Fine-tuning” required new institutional arrangements. Working class organizations, the trade unions, were recognized as the sole bargaining agent of working class demands and the attempt was made to integrate them as a force for capitalist development.

The present crisis is neither a Keynesian recession nor a return to those of the “anarchy of production.” *This crisis opens a new stage in the class relation.* It marks capital’s recognition that the control of the working class through Keynesian methods has proved illusory: in fact those methods provided an occasion for the largest generalization of the wage struggle. Planned crisis is now the capitalist long term strategy. The present crisis is not the end of a business cycle. It is the end of an age.

Why was capital forced into this situation?

The political strategy of the working class in the last cycle of struggles upset the Keynesian plan for development. It is in this cycle that the struggle for income through work changes to a struggle for income independent of work. The working class strategy for full employment that had provoked the Keynesian solution of the 1930s became in the last cycle of struggle a general strategy of the refusal of work. The strategy that pits income against work is the main characteristic of struggle in all the articulations of the social factory. The transformation marks a new level of working class power and must be the starting point of any revolutionary organization. The strategy of refusal of work overturns previous conceptions of where the power of the working class lies and junks all the organizational formulae appropriate to the previous phases of the class relation.

We put these conclusions forward on the basis of a class analysis of the cycle of the 1960s and early 1970s. Only on the basis of such an analysis can organizational proposals be made or strategic conclusions drawn. Capital is a class relation, and as such it admits only two ways of approach: either the capitalist viewpoint or the viewpoint of the working class. In theory as in struggle, no middle ground is given.

From the capitalist viewpoint every crisis appears to be the outcome of a mysterious network of economic “laws” and relations moving and developing with a life of its own. Capital pictures itself as a completely self-enclosed, self-guiding system. It might not always work right, but its “flaws” are internal as are its “cures.” From its vantage point the working class appears only as a product of capital’s motion and structure, as one variable among many that capitalist planning must calibrate and put in motion. Capital, on pain

of extinction, must continually re-establish its control in the face of working class initiative in order to force the working class to become a simple “factor of production.”

Our class analysis proceeds from the opposite viewpoint, that of the working class. As a class relation, capital is first of all a power struggle. Capital’s “flaws” are not internal to it and nor is the crisis: they are determined by the dynamics of working class struggle. To be understood, that dynamics and cycle of struggle requires an analysis that must operate at four, interconnected and necessary levels.

First is the analysis of the struggles themselves: their content, their direction, how they develop and how they circulate. It is not an investigation of occupational stratification nor of employment and unemployment. We don’t look at the structure of the workforce as determined by the capitalist organization of production. On the contrary, we study the forms by which workers can bypass the technical constrictions of production and affirm themselves as a class with political power.

Second, we study the dynamics of the different sectors of the working class: the way these sectors affect each other and thus the relation of the working class with capital. Differences among sectors are primarily differences in power to struggle and organize. These differences are expressed most fundamentally in the hierarchy of wages, in particular, as the Wages for Housework movement has shown, in the division between the waged and the wage-less. Capital rules by division. The key to capitalist accumulation is the constant creation and reproduction of the division between the waged and the unwaged parts of the class. The Left has perpetuated and intensified this division to the extent that it still identifies the working class with the “producers” or with the waged. But for us, as Marx long ago,

the working class is defined by its struggle against capital and not by its productive function.

Third, we consider the relation between the working class and “official” organizations that is, the trade unions, the “workers’ parties” welfare organizations, etc. We should never identify the working class with its organizations. Indeed, much of the working class struggle producing the present crisis arose outside or against these very organizations. But by the same token one cannot follow the ideological line “class purity” that analyzes struggle entirely independent of these organizations. Whether a particular organization advances the interests of the working class or not, it plays a role in the relationship between the working class and capital.

Fourth, all these aspects have to be related to the capitalist initiative in terms of general social planning, investment, technological innovations, employment and to the institutional setting of capitalist society. It is in this relationship between the dynamic of working class struggle and institutional changes that the analysis of class recomposition reaches its most significant level, because it brings to the fore the power of the working class to transform capitalism.

Through these interdependent levels of class analysis we can understand the relation between the working class and capital. They enable us to specify the *composition of the working class*. At the same time such an analysis allows us to see how the working class changes that relation and reconstructs its composition at a greater level of power, that is, in its *political recomposition*. By “political recomposition” we mean the level of unity and homogeneity that the working class reaches during a cycle of struggle in the process of going from one composition to another. Essentially, it involves the overthrow of

capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between different sectors of the class, and an expansion of the boundaries of what the “working class” comes to include.

The articles in the first issue of *Zero work* give a historical outline of the political recomposition in and among different sectors of the working class. Our analysis starts with the process of working class repression and technological reconversion that made up in the 1950s capital’s response to the cycle of struggles that culminated in the immediate post-war years. It then shows how the working class regained the initiative in the 1960S. Each article demonstrates how the struggle of both the waged and the unwaged parts of the class thwarted the fundamental tool of accumulation, the division between the waged and the wage-less. Those struggles against capital show a unity of demand, more money, less work, and not an organizational unity. Their power brought to a close the Keynesian era. *Thus it is the political recomposition of the waged and the unwaged that imposes the crisis on capital.*

Further, these articles show how the struggle has obliterated any distinction between politics and economics, the distinction that in previous phases dominated conceptions of revolutionary organization. The struggles leading to the Keynesian era materially destroyed the separation between the state and the “economic infrastructure.” The political nature of capitalism is not “unveiled” by the “exposure” of political institutions. All the elements of capitalist society are based upon the essential relation of command that capital seeks to impose on the working class. The wage relationship is not a mere “economic” relation. It is above all an expression of the power conquered by the working class and cannot be dismissed as a “reformist” struggle. The “labor markets” as well as the so-

called political institutions, the kitchen and the assembly line, are all determined by the power relation materialized in the wage.

Everywhere, this is evident today. Gone is the time when “a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay” was the slogan around which the working class movement rallied. The crudeness of the working class attack has shattered the apparently sophisticated distinction between qualitative and quantitative demands. The straight-forward imposition of higher income regardless of productivity has been the leading edge of working class political strategy. This appropriation of wealth on the part of the working class has taken many forms; demands for higher wages, for greater welfare benefits, rent strikes, subway strikes, and all the various types of direct appropriation that, under capital’s justice, go under the label “crimes against property.” The intensity and dimensions of these struggles demonstrate that the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the class recomposed itself and expressed its political autonomy from capital. The magnitude of the struggle is best measured by the magnitude of the present crisis. Capital’s response could not avoid the terrain of Confrontation laid down by the working class. It is for this reason that the resent capitalist strategy is characterized by a strenuous effort to sever its “dependency on workers.” We interpret the macroscopic changes that the recent “oil crisis” has brought about in this way. Neither a scramble over natural resources nor the product of rapacious corporations nor the narrow-mindedness of nationalist governments, it is rather a specific international strategy aimed at charting a new course of accumulation. The energy multinationals have become the leading force in this process precisely because of their capital intensive production and their relative freedom from labor problems. At the same time capital will not get

rid of work, on the contrary, its political necessity is more apparent than ever as the fundamental form of control over the working class.

The contemporary Left sees the crisis from the point of view of economists, that is, from the viewpoint of capital. The Left is basically *for* work. It cannot grasp either in theory or practice that the working class struggle *against* work is the source of the crisis and the starting point of organization. Hence the Leftist image of the crisis is still mired in the Paleo-Marxist view that sees the crisis as the product of capital's lack of planning of production. The "anarchy of production" is an external irrationality of the capitalist mode of production that dooms it to crises of inter-capitalist competition and imperialist wars. For the Left the working class could not have brought about the crisis; it is rather an innocent victim of the internal contradictions of capital, a subordinate element in a contradictory whole. This is why the Left is preoccupied with the *defense* of the working class.

Our analysis of the crisis implies a rejection of the basic proposal of the Left: socialism. We must rid ourselves of old terminology that has no application to the present level of class confrontation. The first on the list is "socialism" which at the present moment can mean only one of two dubious things. Either, as the ideology of the libertarian Left, it finds in small-scale production the solution to the "degradation of work," or it is a capitalist strategy of economic planning. In the first respect socialism is romantic and quaintly useless. In the second respect, however, socialism means primarily disciplining the working class. (The socialist countries are already playing the second role in the international context by inviting capital investments from strike-ridden countries, e.g., GM in Poland or Fiat in the Soviet Union.) In both cases the demand for socialism clashes with the working class demands against work.

The present task is not a matter of developing new versions of an automated 21st Century Utopia. The practical and theoretical challenge 5 to build a society where the creation of wealth does not contradict the autonomy of the working class and its refusal of work. This challenge cannot be met unless we re-define, and not avoid, those classic questions that our tradition has bequeathed us as relics, the questions of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” and “the seizure of power.”

U.S. Class Composition in the Sixties

Capital's "New: Dimensions":

The Kennedy Initiative

Paolo Carpi gnano

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"Welfare struggles could no longer be seen in terms of "war on poverty." The Johnson Administration itself had already realized that at the heart of the problem was the urgent need to control social movements before these found political outlets. Its answer, however, was to create an infrastructure of social services in the hope of containing social insubordination by providing opportunity for productive activities. At the root of this policy was the idea that the problem was transitory. In the long run, economic development would absorb these marginal areas. Education, training programs, social promotion would facilitate the transition. The poverty agencies actually created more problems than they solved. Step by step, the welfare system lost all its paternalist functions and became a means of acquiring income. The Nixon social scientists discovered the problem of dependency. Social struggles have identified the state as the bargaining agent from which to demand income. The members of a typical welfare family can not simply "be helped to help themselves." They demand from the state the guarantee of a stable income. An income now, this is the objective around which struggles have developed. It was the anti-puritan demand of wanting to be dependent that provoked the welfare crisis."

The year 1959 ends the Fifties in more ways than one. One phase of the initiative of American capital comes to an end and a new one that will characterize a large part of the Sixties in the United States begins.

Not only does the 1960 election result in the switch from a Republican to a Democratic administration, but a new set of choices are opened up in terms of institutions and political economy, that imply a new phase in the relationship between capital and the working class. The event that precipitated this change was the big steel strike of 1959.

After the great working class struggles of the Thirties and Forties, the capitalist offensive took the form of industrial decentralization, ghettoization, and direct union repression through the Taft-Hartley Act. These measures, however, did not eliminate working class initiative nor did they overcome working class reaction to attempts to harness its struggle. The wildcat movement that developed in the automobile sector between 1953 and 1955, defeated Walter Reuther's attempt to establish a bargaining truce by accepting a five year contract. Throughout the entire decade factory struggles took place not only around work conditions but also in defiance of established union leadership. The spreading of cost-push inflation theories and the renewed popularity of the stagnationist analysis of the thirties reflected capitalist awareness of the situation of endemic conflict that existed throughout the fifties. In 1959 capitalist initiative had to come to terms with the "paradoxes" of the previous decade: inflation that could not be controlled and one of the lowest rates of economic development in the capitalist world.¹ In 1959, the one hundred and sixteen day long strike of the steel workers convinced American capital that it was time to start on a new course. The old methods

were no longer working. During the bargaining, management proposed freezing wage increases for a year and pushed for the introduction of statutory rules to limit wildcats and slowdowns. But the strike defeated such a proposal.²

It became clear that, at the factory level, the capitalists could not win and were running the risk of protracting indefinitely a vicious cycle of permanent conflict within a context of economic stagnation. The only way out was to establish a new relationship of forces at a global level and to contain the class relationship within the limits of a process of economic development. Some time later in announcing the “New Dimension of Political Economy”, Walter Heller would say: “Gone is the countercyclical syndrome of the 1950’s. Policy emphasis had to be redirected from a *corrective* orientation geared to the dynamics of the cycle, to a *propulsive* orientation geared to the dynamics and promise of growth.”³

On the whole, J.F. Kennedy’s electoral campaign was not characterized by any specific theme or any concrete proposal.⁴ Rather, it was centered around a single, extremely vague slogan which was repeated in every speech: “It is time to get this country moving again”. But he was very concrete when he spoke at a steel workers convention against a proposed thirty-two hour week: “The Communist challenge requires this nation to meet its unemployment problems by creating abundance rather than rationing scarcity”. The long term strategy was beginning to unfold. The working class insurgency was to be controlled by transforming it into the motor force of a process of general economic development. However this could take place on only one condition, i.e. that the state

2 George McManus, *The Inside Story of Steel Wages and Prices*, 1967.

3 Walter Heller, *New Dimensions of Political Economy*, 1966, p. 62.

4 Theodore Soresen, *Kennedy*, 1965.

intervene more directly in the management and stabilization of class relationships. Within this framework, the New Economy and the institutional reforms of the “Kennedy era” came into being.

It was not long before the practice of direct state intervention in collective bargaining got underway, determined to block the development of workers struggles at all costs. For the first time, except during the war, a railway strike was blocked with a law that imposed compulsory arbitration. For the first time since 1954, the steel workers were forced to accept a settlement without a strike. The contract which allowed for no wage increase was reached through the direct intervention of the government. The same day that Kennedy was acting tough with the big steel bosses in the famous controversy about the price increases, the Taft-Hartley Act was imposed on the West Coast maritime unions. Labor secretary Goldberg was right when he proclaimed that: “Labor and management will both be making a mistake if they believe that the Kennedy administration is going to be pro-labor”.

Kennedy’s objective in these disputes was to establish the power of the executive in determining the relationship of forces between the classes and in the last analysis to guarantee the stability of this relationship by preventing the spread of working class struggle. To accomplish this task however, it was not enough for the government to be a third party in collective bargaining. Its political role could be successful only if the state also undertook the technical management of economic development. As far as the structure of the government was concerned, certain institutions that had been in existence since the Employment Act of 1946 had to be revitalized. The Council of Economic Advisers for example, was reactivated as an effective institution of economic planning. But more importantly the “fact that the federal government has an overwhelming responsibility in

regard to the stability and the development of the economy” had to be recognized.⁵

The Keynesian measures of the Kennedy administration are well known. The basic concepts of the New Economy are an updated version of the Keynesian theory of aggregate demand. Terms such as “tax drag”, “GNP gap” and “monetary twist” became part of the current economic vocabulary. But behind the various fiscal and monetary measures to increase demand there was a definite political reality. Development was a means to maintain equilibrium in class relationships. Le, economic development to guarantee power. “In the Alice in Wonderland economics of growth, it has been observed, it is essential to run as fast as one can, just to stay where one is”.⁶

The income policy proposal and the guidelines contained in the 1962 Economic Report to the President epitomize the idea of balanced development. On one hand, wage increases are permitted and used to propel the development process. On the other, it is necessary to “bring home the idea that wages are not simply purchasing power, but costs.”⁷

In underlining the innovative aspects of the Kennedy economy’s usage of Keynes, economists have stressed “qualitative” elements and in particular “supply policy”, namely training programs and the whole manpower policy.

Although manpower policies were part of the new practice of economic planning (at least in terms of forecasting manpower needs⁸), at this stage, however, they were totally subordinated to the

5 W. Heller, op. cit. p. 45.

6 George Lekachman, *The Age of Keynes*, 1968, p. 208.

7 W. Heller, op. cit. p. 44.

8 Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism*, 1968, p. 186.

needs of economic growth. The manpower problem was still seen only in terms of global employment or unemployment. Both the training programs and the “war on poverty” programs were looked at from the perspective of *adjusting* certain peripheral elements to the central needs of economic growth. It was assumed that once these preliminary obstacles were eliminated, the economy would move to a stage of “pure growth”.⁹

But at this point economic theory passes into the realm of pure ideology.

“The Negro Problem” and the Dynamics of Class Recomposition

In a lecture at Harvard in 1966, Walter Heller, the well known architect of the Kennedy economy, triumphally announced that: “Economics has come of age in the 1960’s. Two presidents have recognized and drawn on modern economics as a source of national strength and presidential power. Their willingness to use, for the first time, the full range of modern economic tools underlies the unbroken U. S. expansion that in its first five years created over 7 million jobs, doubled profits, increased the nation’s real output by a third, and closed the \$50 billion gap between actual and potential production that plagued the American economy in 1961”.¹⁰

From a strictly economic point of view he was right. From the same point of view, however, it was impossible then to forecast the crisis that the economic theory of the boom was about to encounter in a few years. But, by simply looking around, it was clear that these figures were telling nothing about the power relationship between

9 *Perspectives on Economic Growth*, ed. W. Heller, 1968.

10 W. Heller. *op. cit.*

classes. The “victory” over unemployment had left behind at least one unsolved matter: “the negro problem”. A solution could not be found by merely implementing the law or through the traditional channels of civil rights ideology. The problem was political and consisted in the growth of a new black mass movement.

In the light of subsequent events, the period from the Birmingham demonstration (1963) to the Watts revolt appears as the prehistory of the movement. Already in this phase some distinctive traits started to develop and indicated that a mass movement was in the offing. “Birmingham marked the entry of the Negro poor into the protest movement; this is its most important consequence”.¹¹ The revolts in Birmingham, Savannah and Charleston, marked the dimensions that the movement had already reached. Open violence was not a new element (even though in Jacksonville the Molotov is used for the first time); new was the fact that the attack was unmistakably directed against the police.¹²

By the time the revolt spread to the big cities, starting with Watts, another new aspect became apparent, i.e. the end of the leading role of the Civil Rights Movement.

The immediate reason for its loss of control was the difficulty of coping with the sudden and partly unforeseeable expansion of the movement and its unpredictable direction, at least in this phase. A more fundamental, “structural” reason was that the “negro” of the 1960’s was a different sociological figure, with needs and demands that went beyond the mere cry for legal justice. The figures of this sociological transformation have been studied extensively: the revolution in agricultural production that, in the span of a couple of

11 Charles Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, 1974, p. 143.

12 Frances Fox Piven and R. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 1972.

decades, expelled 20 million people from that sector; the emigration, between 1940 and 1966, of almost 4 million blacks from the Southern states; the concentration of half of the black population of the U.S. in the Northern cities.¹³ The poles of attraction for the black work force consisted of the assemblylines and the service sector of the big cities. Its prevalent life condition was the ghetto.

By 1969, in the major urban concentrations (over 1 million inhabitants) one of every four inhabitants was black. On the assembly-lines in Detroit the majority of the workers were black. It was at this point that the Civil Rights Movement lost its historical function. "While the Civil Rights Movement and the heroic efforts associated with it were necessary to break the official legality of segregation, it should be recognized that in a sense this particular form of racism was already obsolete, as its base in an exploitative system of production had drastically changed."¹⁴ The question was no longer that of making sectors of the black middle class a part of "the system". The movement demanded a strategy and a leadership with a working class perspective. At the beginning of the Sixties, the most notable legal successes of the Civil Rights Movement ironically also marked its death.

Not only did the black movement transform itself but the capitalist initiative and the government in particular were also moving toward a new solution of the problem. In fact, *the encounter between the black and capitalist initiative opened a phase of working class struggles which was to characterize the second half of the Sixties.* Johnson's "Great Society" was at hand.

13 Ibid.

14 Harold Baron, "The Demand for Black Labor", *Radical America*, Vol 5, 2.

For some time before, the attention of those who were dealing with the “negro problem” had already moved away from the traditional Civil Rights’ approach and had focused on the relationship between blacks and work. The problem, it was argued, was to stabilize this relationship. “Jobs are the fulcrum on which a strengthening of the family, and through the family of the Negro’s role in American society ultimately rests”.¹⁵ A legally established equality of opportunity would not be enough to make blacks part of the system if not accompanied by their insertion in the relationship of production. As sociology informs us, the institution of work is a source of social stability and respect for authority, precisely what blacks are lacking. At this stage, however, the relationship of blacks to work was still seen in terms of the “new dimensions” of the Kennedy economy, that is to say in terms of global employment. The solution was sought therefore within a project of economic growth which provided wider job opportunities. Needless to say, once the black revolts had exploded and the movement had grown, the debate in the administration centered around specific proposals of a political nature.

The famous Moynihan Report and the ensuing controversy on the subject of the black family cannot be understood outside the climate that the Watts uprising created. On the part of the government there was not only a clear awareness of the failure of the Civil Rights Movement, but also a widespread sentiment that the “negro problem” could no longer be solved in terms of an all encompassing “war on poverty”. In fact Kennedy’s “war on poverty” (apart from its social democratic overtones and its income-distribution ideology which seemed to be so popular in those days) was no more than a program to sustain demand in line with the

15 Charles Silberman, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

general Keynesian economic policy. But now the most pressing problem for the country was to avoid being “doomed to succeeding summers of guerrilla warfare in our cities”.¹⁶ This situation called for action that went “beyond the original provision of food and clothing and money, to far more complex matters of providing *proper attitudes toward work*, reasonable expectations of success and so forth”.¹⁷

The administration decided to intervene on a large scale in the inner cities, bypassing local governments and inefficient welfare agencies.¹⁸ The result can be seen in the explosion of the welfare rolls. The data speak for themselves: in just one decade, from 1960 to 1970, there was an increase in the number of families receiving assistance of 225%! The highest increase came after 1964 and indicated the turn that welfare policies took at this point.

It has been satisfactorily shown that welfare policies have always been a cyclical answer to social disorders.¹⁹ Bearing in mind this general criterion of interpretation, three phases can be distinguished. First, a phase of expansion of welfare assistance during the New Deal, whose primary function was to counteract economic depression by stabilizing the average income and thus increasing demand. Second, a phase of containment, during the Fifties, whose aims were to maintain low wages and incomes, especially in the Southern areas, and to favor a migratory movement of blacks to the Northern regions. Finally, the “Great Society” programs whose purpose was to establish political control over the communities threatened by black revolts.

16 L. Rainwater, W. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of controversy*.

17 Ibid., p. 20.

18 Piven and Cloward, op. cit.

19 Ibid.

Under the ideology of “poor people’s participation in decision making”, several federal programs attempted to build a network of controls through the formation of a new breed of local political organizers. Their role was to guarantee the management of social pressure. In other words, it was an outright attempt to *unionize the ghetto*, so that the struggles could be channelled into a practice of collective bargaining. Sargent Shriver was right when, in 1966, he suggested that the Economic Opportunity Act was “for the poor what the National Relation Act was for the unions . . . It establishes a new relationship and new grievance procedure between the poor and the rest of society”.²⁰

The design was partly successful in the sense that it created some bargaining counterparts or agencies such as the National Welfare Rights Organization. In addition these initiatives were to produce a new generation of political cadres who were to constitute the backbone of black local reform politics in the 1970’s. More important than that, from our point of view, is the fact that these initiatives provided a very favorable terrain for the development of social struggles. The Welfare Movement was not just an aspect of capitalist initiative but primarily a mode of expression of a new cycle of working class struggle. It was the basis for the amplification and circulation of social struggle, for the homogenization of demands, and, ultimately, for the process of recomposition of the working class.

Behind the ideology of participation loomed the prospect of political power, and federal funds on many occasions actually financed revolutionary programs and radical militants. This was

20 Ibid., p. 270 “Indeed, Walter Reuther played no small role during the planning of this initiative. It was he who in 1965 coined the phrase ‘community unions.’ Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, (1969).

certainly not foreseen. Adam Yarmolinskey of the Task Force on the War on Poverty candidly conceded that “the failure of the original Task Force to anticipate the violent reaction of poor people and poor neighborhoods to the opportunity to affect their own lives through community-action programs . . . the power potential, constructive and destructive, of the poor themselves was largely overlooked²¹

It is very clear at this point that the “poor people’s struggle” had little to do with any kind of lumpenproletarian rage, as it has often been interpreted to be. A deeper analysis of these struggles will inevitably lead us to the problematic of the working class struggle in the second half of the Sixties. The moment the **welfare struggle met the factory struggle**, a new cycle of confrontation between workers and capital began.

The Separation of Income and Work

A witness of the 1967 uprising in Newark described the scene in this fashion: “The youth were again in the lead, breaking windows where the chance appeared, chanting Black Power, moving in groups through dark streets to new commercial areas. . . This was the largest demonstration of black people ever held in Newark. . . People voted with their feet to expropriate property to which they felt entitled. They were tearing up stores with the trick contracts and installment plans, the second-hand television sets going for top quality, the phony scales, the inferior meat and vegetables. A common claim was: this is owed me”.²²

More than any other image that of blacks reappropriating social wealth and “chanting Black Power”, has come to epitomize the

21 Ibid., p. 274.

22 Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark*, 1967, p. 35.

struggles of the 1960's in the U.S. For the expert of social psychiatry such an image has substituted in the American "social consciousness" the fear of recession of the 1930's and the trauma of atomic war of the 1950's. For the New Left this image often represented a revival of revolutionary folklore around the theme of the revenge of oppressed and dispossessed masses.

It is hard to separate the analysis of the black movement from the ideologies which have surrounded it, or also to speak about a homogeneous and unified black political movement. The umbrella of Black Power has covered many different experiences, often contrasting in practice and goals. From the participatory reformism of CORE with its slogan "black power means black business", to the Black Panthers' sophisticated debate over the forms of armed struggle; from Eldridge Cleaver's lumpenproletarian and anti-colonial struggle, to the practice of local government and electoral politics. Stokely Carmichael's ambiguous definition of Black Power is a good example of the continuous fluctuation between revolutionary rhetoric and practical reformism which has characterized the whole history of the movement.²³

Richard Nixon, then a candidate for the presidency, was not too far from the truth when, while announcing his program of "Black Capitalism" he suggested that "much of black militant talk these days is actually in terms far closer to the doctrines of free enterprise than to those of the welfarist thirties-terms of 'pride', 'ownership', 'private enterprise', 'capital', 'self-respect' . . . This is precisely what the federal central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward black ownership, for from this can flow the rest-black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and yes, black power,

in the best, the constructive sense of that often misapplied term”.²⁴ Although it points out the ideological confusion of some of its leaders, Nixon’s rhetoric cannot obscure the social reality of the black movement. It would be wrong to look at the black movement only in terms of its barely surfacing ideology or its partial attempt to deal with electoral politics.

Setting aside revolutionary myths and reformist ideologies, the black movement was much more than just another component of the class reality of the 1960’s. Its central role far outweighed its actual dimension and organizational consistency. In commenting on the traditional term “ethnic minority” which had been applied to black people, James Boggs observed that “In politics what matters is not numbers as such but rather the strategic position of your forces”.²⁵ From this point of view, it is not difficult to see that the present cycle of working class struggle started in the streets of black ghettos and that the black movement provided its contents and often its leadership. In what sense?

The key to the problem is the transformation into working class that black labor-power underwent during the Sixties. We are not referring here to the structural changes that brought waves of black immigrants from the South to the assembly lines of the automobile factories or to the services sector of the large urban concentrations. Nor are we concerned with the sociological problem of territorial or occupational mobility. Rather the fundamental fact in understanding the class dynamic of this period is that, what was previously reserve labor-power in the Sixties became an *active subject of struggle over income*. *From the struggle for work they moved to the struggle against work.*

24 Quoted in Ibid. p. 229.

25 James Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 1970.

This phenomenon does not necessarily imply that blacks entered a stable work relationship. On the contrary, the promises of the Kennedy economy were never fulfilled and the problem of black unemployment remained unsolved. The novelty is in the very fact that, around the issue of income the black movement succeeded in connecting those in the factory with those kept out of it. Reappropriation of wealth in the community and struggle over wages within the factory were but two sides of the same struggle for higher income which was waged *independently and irrespective of any work relationship*. The relationship between income and work was totally severed.

The black struggles demonstrated that the wageless were part of the working class. They unveiled the factory-like organization of society where ghettos, unemployment and poverty were not a byproduct of the system nor a transitory malfunction, but a necessary element in the social reproduction of capital. Most importantly, they brought working class struggle to the society at large, and at that level they forced its recomposition. By recomposition we do not mean only the extension and the massification of the struggle but primarily the homogenization of its subjective contents. In this sense these struggles connected welfare, reappropriation, and armed struggle with the factory. To use traditional terms, they united the factory and the community.

For these reasons the contents brought forward by the black movement circulated very rapidly, particularly in 1968-69. They were carried to sectors which had been previously considered marginal and excluded from the cycles of working class struggles per se, i.e. students, prisoners, and women.

The contents of the black movement were often reflected among students in an ideological form which is too well known to require recapitulation here.

At the base of the prison reform movement of the early Seventies lies the cycle of prison rebellions that started in the late Sixties. In these the political organization of black prisoners both played the leading role and provoked organizational allies in other parts of the prison population. When it is remembered that the capitalist initiative set in motion by the War on Poverty began as an attack on juvenile delinquency designed to remove social “bottlenecks in the process of citizen building,” we see that the prison rebellions belong to the same working class offensive. The chickens come home to roost.

For women the black movement has been much more than just a cultural antecedent. In the relationship that blacks were able to establish between wage earners and wageless, women could subjectively identify the relationship that existed between factory work, office work and housework. This analysis of their material conditions was conducive to the formation of an autonomous feminist strategy. In particular, the welfare problem provided a concrete relationship between the general struggle over income and the specific struggle of women, where the two coincided.

There is another reason why the welfare struggle was a central element of working class subjectivity and relevant to working class recomposition. The relationship that exists, or rather that capitalists try to establish, between productivity and workers’ remuneration loses any meaning when it comes to welfare payments. *Ultimately, these depend only on the intensity and determination of the struggle.* This is the single most significant element in this cycle of struggles. In it

lies the origin of the working class refusal to accept the traditional role of the unions as the institutional guarantors of the link between productivity and wages. Here is also the reason for the persistence of the struggle even during the economic crisis which the capitalists unleashed to reestablish order among the variables of the system.

The Circulation of Working Class Autonomy

From society to factory, from the ghettos to the assembly lines, a macroscopic datum can exemplify the reality of this process of class recomposition. For the first time, at the end of the Sixties, a growth of the welfare rolls corresponds to an increase in unemployment.²⁶ This had never happened before. For the first time, unemployment did not work to curtail the struggle by creating a reserve pool of labor-power. The struggle was not stopped but merely transferred to another sector. If not over wages in the factory, it was over welfare payments in the community and vice versa. The circuit is complete.

It comes as no surprise therefore to find blacks in a position of leadership in the plants during the 1968-69 conflicts. Many of the leaders on the assembly lines had their first political experiences in the Detroit ghetto revolt of 1967. In many ways the experience of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is indicative of the working class subjectivity of the whole cycle.²⁷ It is among these black vanguards that the condition of blacks in its entirety is understood from an unequivocal working class perspective, and that on this basis the organizational practice is oriented.

The large mass of black workers embody all the characteristics of unskilled workers. They are very mobile, one day employed at

26 Piven and Cloward, op. cit. p. 341.

27 *Radical America*, special issue on Black Labor, March-April 1971.

the assembly line and the next day unemployed in the ghetto. They struggle interchangeably for wages and for welfare payments; they have no attachment to work, on the contrary they refuse the work discipline whether imposed by the speed of the assembly line, by the foreman or by the union representative. They see their income not as a reward for their productivity but as a means to satisfy their needs. They have learned that the only determinant of their income is their own capability to organize and lead the struggle.

The DRUM, FRUM, ELRUM were the initial forms of organization. They were plant organizations and purposely and exclusively black. They *had* to be all black because they *wanted* to be autonomous. The old social democratic slogan “Black and white unite and fight” no longer served the purpose. It didn’t even save the face of the unions. At that point what counted was not vague solidarity but concrete leadership of the struggle. And once this began on a new basis and for new objectives, it provided the ground for unity. The “extremist” demands (large wage increases and drastic reduction of work time) brought forward by these groups summarize quite well the new quality of the struggle. These demands best exemplify what can be called *workers’ autonomy*. Autonomy means that the struggles are waged outside and often against the unions and that the objectives of the struggles are themselves autonomous. The size and the quality of the demands are measured only in terms of the workers’ own needs and are ultimately aimed at achieving a subjective recomposition of the working class.

1967 is not just the year of the Newark and Detroit revolts. It is also the year that marks the resumption of factory insubordination. Not by chance these two facts coincide chronologically. In fact 1967 opens the most recent cycle of working class struggle. Let us compare a few data. The number of days lost in work stoppages

during 1967 is 42 million, the highest since 1959 and double the figure in 1966. From 1966 on there is a constant rise. Difficult years on the bargaining front had been predicted for some time. The times when Kennedy could brag about his achievements in fostering labor peace after a long period of labor unrest, were long gone by the middle of the Sixties. In November 1966, *Fortune*, in an article entitled "Labor's Rebellious Rank and File", observed that workers' pressure on union leadership had started to turn into open rebellion.²⁸

What was the labor truce of the previous years based on, and what was the origin of the present insubordination? Collective bargaining and the contracts that followed were all centered around the issue of fringe benefits and totally neglected the question of hourly wages. The result of this policy was that in 1966, fringe benefits averaged over 25% the cost of cash wages. Union leadership seemed confident in the promises laid out in Kennedy's economics and consequently put no provision against inflation in the longterm contracts. Instead they focused on job security, early retirement plans, job reclassification schemes and the like, with the result that real wages started to decline.

The wave of strikes in 1967 demonstrated that the fear of rank and file rebellion was not without foundation. From the General Motors wildcat strikes to the massive transportation strikes, workers manifested their unwillingness to accept a de facto reduction in their wages, even if that meant bypassing the union leadership. Moreover, the outbreak of strikes did not just call into question outdated bargaining procedures and sell-out contracts. At stake was government policy itself which the Council of Economic Advisers firmly stated at the beginning of the year: "The only valid and

28 Murray J. Gart, "Labor's Rebellions Rank and File". *Fortune*, Nov. 1966.

non-inflationary standard for wages advances is the productivity principle”.²⁹ President Johnson himself appealed to unions and workers to maintain at all costs a stable relationship between wages and productivity. By 1967 the Kennedy-Goldberg guidelines collapsed, demolished by the workers’ struggle. At this stage workers’ autonomy was starting to make headway.

Rather than describe single struggles, we will try to underline some general characteristics of the cycle as a whole. An extraordinary element was the broadened scope of the conflict and the degree of participation in the struggles. During 1968 and 1969, the statistical curve of days lost in stoppages does not show signs of slackening. Instead, in 1970, it reaches a peak at 66,400,000 comparable to the 69 million of 1959 (the highest level since 1949). But there is an important difference. While in 1959 the number of workers involved in stoppages was only 1,800,000, in 1970, the same figure is 3,305,000.

These simple data indicate that larger sectors of the working class were involved in the struggle in 1970. This does not tell the whole story however, since these data do not disclose the social level of the struggle. Welfare played an essential role in the process of recomposition of the working class. Integral to this process were for example the struggles against increased transportation fares (in New York in 1970 groups of passengers collectively jumped subway gates in protest of the new fare); the rent strikes which often lead to direct armed confrontation with the police, and the more recent meat boycott (although initially supported and sponsored by the Administration with the false perspective of keeping the meat prices down, it rapidly “degenerated” in a struggle waged by neighborhood

organizations against both the supermarkets and the rising costs of living).

Even at the level of the plant the figures above do not provide a full picture of workers' insubordination. There are forms of struggle that, although they do not imply direct confrontation as in the case of strikes and stoppages, are no less symptomatic of a continuous workers' refusal of the capitalist organization of work. Passive resistance such for example often foreshadow open conflict. Very high levels of absenteeism accompanied this entire cycle. In automobile factories, it was necessary to hire part-time workers on Mondays and Fridays in order to guarantee continuity of production. In 1970, H. Roche, president of GM, openly accused workers of betraying management and the public with their growing absenteeism, continuous stoppages and lack of cooperation. A "position paper" produced by GM during the 1970 contract negotiations, stated that "discipline had broken down in auto factories, and plant managers observed alarming increase in tardiness, loitering, failure to follow instructions, and abuse of employee facilities. Production schedules were disrupted repeatedly by crisis situations and strikes, while careless workmanship appeared to be increasing".³⁰

More than the increased numerical participation, the novelty of this phase lies in the introduction to the struggle of larger and larger strata of the tertiary sector. As a result the "theory of the middle class", one of the most cherished tenets of American sociology, begins to show its limitations. The traditional, descriptive concept of working class has to give way to a more appropriate definition based on the practice of circulation and homogenization of the struggle.

30 Emma Rothschild, *Paradise Lost*, 1973, p. 125 See also "The Crisis of the Auto Sector, below pp.

Teachers for instance, used to be a professional category which was deeply imbued with a “public service” ideology. The education boom of the 1950’s and 1960’s, however, dissipated any professional illusion and revealed the wage-earner status of teachers and their subordination to the needs of capitalist reproduction. (This is especially true for elementary and high school teachers whose salaries are often inferior to those of factory workers). The teachers’ struggles of the Sixties demonstrated a subjective awareness of their status. In 1968 alone there were 88 strikes. The most notorious took place in New York and manifested both the potentialities and the contradictions of the struggle. The big Newark strike, three years later, left no room for doubt as to which were the opposing sides. On one side, black and white teachers fought decisively to impose their need for higher wages. On the other side, hiding behind the rhetoric of community needs, were the corporate interests which were then promoting “black capitalism” in response to the 1967 ghetto uprising. In 1972 and 1973, these struggles reached their highest levels in Chicago, St. Louis and most of all in Philadelphia with an unprecedented mass participation and militancy (774 arrests in three days).

In some instances struggles outside the factory became a model in form and content, for all kind of struggles. A case in point was the 1970 postal workers where workers all over the country paralyzed the postal system with an “illegal” strike against the federal government forcing it to use federal troops to move the mail. The struggle was waged not only against the federal government but also against labor unions whose mediating role was totally rejected. Workers’ assemblies disavowed union leaders and set up, particularly in New York, autonomous committees. All these highly publicized facts had a great impact on the struggles that followed.

Since the Fifties the ratio of union membership to the total work force steadily diminished and in recent years has stabilized at 23%. In the Sixties, union membership, in absolute terms, increased from 17 million to 19 million due to the unionization of new and growing sectors of the labor force such as state and municipal employees, teachers, service workers, etc. Those who forecast a resurgence of American unionism point to such unions as the American Federation of Government Employees, State and County Municipal Workers, to Teachers Federations etc.³¹ These unions in general represent the most progressive, socialdemocratic, wing of the labor movement, and thus constitute one of the best hopes of liberals.

The relationship between leadership and rank and file, however, is very volatile in these sectors since membership in these unions is much less tied to professional consciousness than was the case for the early industrial unions. For this reason unions are *used* as a means to organize and spread the struggle, but are easily bypassed when the circumstances require.

This brief survey of the most significant struggles of this cycle poses a central problem of the present phase, i.e. the question of the relationship between working class and unions. Not only could it be said that rapport has been deteriorating but in many instances there has been an open rift. Never before have unions been the object of such criticism. In 1968, more than 30% of the contracts, an unprecedented figure, were rejected by the rank and file. In September 1973, UAW skilled workers for the first time in the history of this union, voted down the contract previously agreed upon by union and management. The more the struggle brings out the particular interests of the working class, i.e. the refusal of the

31 Brendan and Patricia Cayo Sexton, "Labor's Decade-Maybe", *Dissent*, Aug 71.

capitalist organization of work, the more unions appear as mediators of class interests. The more the struggle over income is accentuated, the more unions reveal their institutional role of tying wages to productivity, and the more the unions appear to workers as an institution of capitalist society. Their function is more to harmonize workers and capital than to express the real political needs of the working class. The celebrated episode of Lordstown and the wildcats in the summer of 1973, can be analyzed from this perspective. The dynamics of these struggles are totally independent of any union planning. In Lordstown workers imposed a renegotiation of the contract already agreed upon by the UAW and GM, while at Chrysler and Ford, wildcats anticipated and in part determined the outcome of the contract. These struggles cannot be considered any longer as a "rebellion" among the membership. In their form and contents they already represent an alternative. The events at Lordstown have spurred an unending literature on workers' dissatisfaction and "alienation". Bourgeois sociologists have suddenly discovered "blue collars blues" and the "Lordstown syndrome" and are pouring out recipes to cure this "illness". But workers dissatisfaction with work is not a psychological attitude. Lordstown is the latest example, perhaps the most striking, of a trend that has characterized the entire *cycle*. *Refusal to work* is the present connotation of working class self-activity. It is the element which defines class relationship in an advanced capitalist country. It must necessarily be the content of any organizational proposal.

Capital's Counter-Attack: "Guaranteed Income and Social Efficiency"

A recent radical interpretation of American capitalist initiative explained Nixon's policies as an attempt to respond to

the repercussions of the Vietnam war.³² The war expenditure “overheated” the economy and Johnson’s government was unable to control inflation because of popular opposition to tax increases. Consequently, Nixon had to resort to recession in order to bring the economy under control. At the same time inflation produced a decrease in real wages and therefore a revival of wage demands. To sum up this argument: it was the “popular opposition” to the financing of the Vietnam war that made the economy unmanageable and led to the Nixon’s government of repression.

The interpretation appears to be, to say the least, incomplete. This is not to say that the international role of the US and the integration of international capitalist markets should not be studied and analyzed in detail. Our decision to emphasize capital-labour relations within the US has both a polemical and methodological purpose. In the abovementioned interpretation, ideology precedes the analysis of facts. It starts from a value judgment on the amorality of the war, singling out those forces that conducted the opposition to the war, and from there derives the rest of the analysis. How ideological this viewpoint is, is demonstrated by the fact that a great distinction is made between the protest against the war and the workers’ struggle for higher wages, which is considered economist and reformist. Actually from capital’s point of view, Vietnam only becomes a ruinous enterprise when the opposition represented by the peace movement coincides with the particular working class struggles over income (not to mention Vietcong military victories).

Moreover, struggles over wages are not just a “result” of inflation. If wages are strictly dependent on capitalist economic cycles, why didn’t they “respond” to the recession as they had always

32 F. Ackerman, A. McEwan, “Inflation, Recession and Crisis,” *Review of Radical Political Economy*, Aug. 1972.

done? If the struggle is provoked only by a decrease in real wages, why were other economic mechanisms such as economic crisis or unemployment unsuccessful in re-establishing equilibrium on the wage front? In fact one of the most striking features of the present cycle is that wages have not ceased to increase even in the presence of an economic crisis. During the 1969 recession, wages increased from 6% to 7%. In previous recessions, wages have always markedly decreased: from 8% to 0.4% in 1948; from 6% to 3.3% in 1954; from 5.4% to 3.3% in 1957-58; and from 4.3% to 1.3% in 1960-61. The reasons for this change have already been investigated: at the foundations of this cycle a macroscopic process of recomposition of the working class imposed certain fixed options on capital. Not by chance has capital's attention focused on increasing wages. If it were a matter of overheating or common inflation, they had the tools (at least theoretically) to control the economic mechanism. But now capital has to face new phenomena and economists are not ashamed to openly admit it. Commenting on the incredible performance of wages, Arthur Burns admitted that "The rules of economics are not working in quite the same way they used to." What was shocking to the economists as *Fortune* was to comment later, was not that the recession occurred but that "it proved so appallingly ineffectual."³³ As Paul McCracken put it, "there may be some fundamental and pervasive and deeper phenomenon of social dynamics at work here, the nature of which we may not yet fully understand."

To put the blame on increased union strength at the bargaining table and look towards a new balance of power among democratic institutions was not enough. The nature of the new social dynamic and "the new rigidity in our economic structure . . . is *not so much*

33 C.J. Loomis, "The New Questions about U.S. Economy", *Fortune*, Jan. 1974.

an increase in the relative power of unions as in the power of labor as a whole. “³⁴ Only this direct confrontation between working class and capitalist organisation of work can explain the origin of Nixon’s New Economic Policy. “By August 15, it seems clear, a majority of businessmen-and a majority of economists too-had decided that the rules of economics had best be suspended until someone could figure out why they were not working.”³⁵ Only from the perspective of this “*suspension*” can one interpret the N.E.P., the wage freeze, the Pay Board (the new agency formed by business, government and unions to monitor the freeze), in short, the whole structure of the Nixonian state, the state of the crisis.

Nixon’s electoral platform was practically non-existent and lacked both a strategic perspective and a long term program. Nixon’s pragmatism was not an accidental characteristic of his new Administration but a real requirement of the political moment. Nixon is the embodiment of capital’s tactics. The element of continuity in his administration, granted all its profound contradictions and uncertainties, is to be found in its adherence to practical politics, i.e. in its attempt to contain working class insurgency in order to provide a background for the resumption of capitalist initiatives on a new long term basis. For Nixon to “suspend” the rules of economics meant to adapt state institutions to the urgent need to disrupt working class recomposition. It meant direct state intervention in the matter of class composition and not merely guaranteeing, as it has until that moment, a macroeconomic equilibrium between growth and employment.

34 L. Bewman, “The Emerging Debate about Inflation”, *Fortune*, March 1972.

35 Ibid., p. 51

For this reason Nixon's policy had to follow the same path that the struggles had taken, starting with the famous question of welfare which had proved to be a total failure from a capitalist point of view. First of all the legacy of Johnson's Great Society had to be wiped out. Those measures and those agencies were already obsolete, not so much because they did not accomplish the goals for which they were created, but because, as pointed out above, they became a means for financing and organising social struggles. H. G. Philips, acting Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, assessed the failures of that agency: "Some programs were premised on a belief that the problems of poverty are political rather than economic." Federal money was used to provide, in his words, "patronage for local cadres of political activists." The Legal Service Programme, for example, went beyond its intended purpose. "Some of these lawyers who are paid with federal funds have taken the view that their mission is to change the fabric of society through law reform. They have brought class-action suits challenges to constitutionality of laws, suits to put more people on welfare. They have organised rent strikes, aided political action groups. They have organised prison inmates, helped peace organisations and the gay Liberation Movement, and have represented ineligible clients. All *this is not helping the poor it is purely political*."³⁶ The first thing to do, therefore, was to cut funds, and to dismantle or cut back anti-poverty agencies.

Even more important was finding a new global solution to the problems that the welfare explosion had created. The encounter

36 *U.S. News*, March 5, 1973, p. 13, (our emphasis) These lawyers were only tools (often cumbersome ones) of the autonomous forces that for a time they were permitted to represent. The legal victories gained with the criminal and penal code for example owed as much to the struggles of jail-house lawyers as they did to the work of federally funded attorneys.

between the conservative politics of a Republican administration and the liberal orientation of the social sciences, produced a new “social philosophy”. Although its proposal created a great deal of controversy, they still remain very important for understanding where capitalist “social planning” is headed.

Welfare struggles made it impossible to continue with the same policy. A new way to handle the matter was required because of the radically changed nature of the problem. What had happened that made Johnson’s assistance plans impractical? There was no doubt that the situation could not longer be seen in terms of “war on poverty”. The Johnson Administration itself had already realised that at the heart of the problem was the urgent need to control social movements before these found political outlets. Its answer, however, was to create an infrastructure of social services in the hope of containing social insubordination by providing opportunity for productive activities. At the root of this policy was the idea that the problem was transitory. In the long run, economic development would absorb these marginal areas. Education, training programs, social promotion would facilitate the transition. Since these agencies did not serve the purpose of containing, of “unionizing”, this social sector, they failed in their immediate objective. They actually created more problems than they solved. Step by step, the welfare system lost all its paternalist functions and became a *means of acquiring income*. “Across the nation it had become a general rule that as poverty declined, welfare dependency increased.”³⁷ This is the key that Nixon’s social scientists discovered. It was not *poverty* any more, it was a problem of *dependency*.

Social struggles have identified the state as the bargaining agent from which to demand income. The members of a typical welfare

37 D.P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, 1973, p. 35.

family can not simply “be helped to help themselves.” They *demand* from the state the guarantee of a stable income. For many, to be on welfare is not just a step in the direction of obtaining a wage; it is an income *now, and without having to work*. This is the objective around which struggles have developed. It was the anti-puritan demand of *wanting* to be dependent, that provoked the welfare crisis. Moynihan’s perception of the problem leaves no doubt as to the reasons for a massive intervention in the welfare sector: “Welfare dependency became a ‘crisis’ in the mid1960s not because it was consuming large amounts of money, or involved large numbers of people. The amount of money was trivial, and the numbers not that large. Welfare had to be defined as a crisis because of the rate at which the rolls commence to grow. ‘The heart of it,’ Robert L. Bartley writes, ‘is that such growth has powerful overtones of social disintegration.’”³⁸

Nixon accepted the challenge set forth by the struggle. Putting aside Johnson’s utopias, he confronted the problem on its own terms. An “income strategy” began to take shape in the proposal to Congress of a guaranteed income, the Family Assistance Plan (FAP).

In practice and in theory, the issue was not new for American capitalism. During the Fifties, for example, a guaranteed wage proposal appeared in the Steel Workers and UAW platforms. These plans consisted of certain unemployment benefits and were eventually approved elsewhere (as in the case of the longshoremen). But the guaranteed wage was no more than a form of unemployment insurance and, in any case, was applicable only to the more unionised sectors and tied to existing wage levels.

After the debate on automation and the resulting fear of its negative effects on employment, the idea, this time of a guaranteed

income, surfaced again. Nevertheless the proposal put forward at the beginning of the Sixties remained very abstract in that they were linked either to post-industrial utopian society or to social democratic incomedistribution ideologies.³⁹ (It was not by chance that these ideologies reappeared in the McGovern campaign and were definitively defeated.)

Nixon's FAP is a different story altogether. In its basic form the idea was borrowed from the concept of a "negative income tax" elaborated in the Forties by the conservative economist Milton Friedman. A person pays the state in accordance with the amount of income he/she has. If income is below a certain level, the state pays a tax, so to speak, to raise income to that level. The principle is seemingly quite elementary but hides a very definite strategy. The mechanisms by which these negative taxes are distributed provide an incentive to work. Working does not exclude the possibility of receiving state support which decreases gradually as income decreases. To make a long story short, with this system a subsistence level can be reached only if one combines income from working with the state's negative tax. In its original conception the system was supposed to provide an automatic mechanism for keeping free market forces in balance (it was conceived explicitly as a critique of Roosevelt's welfarism). For Nixon's strategists, it is not this aspect that counts but rather that the negative income tax could become a *strategy for social planning*.

First, this system eliminates the bureaucratic service apparatus which, as we have seen, ended up aiding the struggle. The new system has the advantage of being impersonal and therefore less political. Secondly, it establishes a more direct relationship between income and work. The debate on the amount of the negative income tax is

39

The Guaranteed Income, ed. by R. Theobald, Doubleday, 1967.

a crucial one. The ceiling has to be low enough so that it does not provide a feasible alternative to working. This was the principal defect of the welfare system which only sparked the explosion of welfare rolls. Critics have charged that the FAP would substitute welfare with “workfare”. This aspect cannot be underestimated. Obviously the plan is not designed to establish a relationship between income and productivity, but it does forge a direct link between income and work. It should be stressed that work means *any kind of work* and the social discipline that work implies. According to the good old theory, digging holes and filling them up again helps to cool down revolutionary passion. (The great majority of recipients will increase the ranks of the underemployed, already a large part of the labour force in certain areas such as New York.) Finally and most important of all, whether or not this system succeeds in forcing people to work, its ultimate objective is to stabilize a given sector within a specific social hierarchy.

Since the struggle forced the state to deal with the demand of a guaranteed income, the State responds by attempting to control and reshape the demand of making it *a form of wages* within a well-defined wage hierarchy. Once welfare struggles manifest their working class nature, capital is forced to acknowledge them and place the welfare sector within the stratification of work. This does not necessarily imply that it becomes a part of the laborprocess. It does mean, however, that it is organised *from the work viewpoint*, i.e. from the viewpoint of a rigid working class stratification.

As a wage disengaged from productivity or, in some cases, from work, the guaranteed income is determined only by the necessity of political control over working class recomposition. Paradoxically, guaranteed income becomes a means of regulating the labor market. There is nothing left of the income distribution experiments of

the KennedyJohnson era. Nixon's design is realistically aimed at dismembering the political homogeneity of the working class. His project, although temporarily defeated by Congress, is bound to reappear, perhaps under a Democratic administration.

"Industrial Efficiency" and the Union

Nixon's guaranteed income is an overt attempt to isolate the different social sectors that were recomposed by the struggles and makes the communication between factories and communities more difficult.

However, for this strategy to be effective, it must apply to the whole gamut of factory struggles and push back the wage explosion around which they concentrated.

Nixon's initiative on this front has two immediate objectives: to defeat the wages attack, and to reassert union control over the workers. These two are not at all contradictory. The first step in this initiative has been to apply some "traditional" but always effective measures, such as an increase in unemployment. According to official statistics, unemployment reached 6.5% in 1972. The most affected areas were those where the struggle had been most intense; Detroit, Cleveland, etc., were listed as depressed areas. Among blacks and young workers the rate doubled. For young blacks it reached 50%.

At the factory level the attack takes the form of an intensification of work. The short-term capitalist strategy does not foresee a technological dismemberment of the work force. Kennedy's rhetoric notwithstanding, no major technological leap occurred during the Sixties. The 1973 data indicate that only 33% of U.S. machine tools

are less than 10 years old, the lowest level since the 30% of 1940, that followed after 10 years of depression.⁴⁰

The increase in productivity in the Nixonian phase is obtained through stricter work discipline, increase overtime, and intensification of speed-up. It is not by chance that the Lordstown struggles and those in Detroit in the summer of 1973 focused on these themes. In Lordstown, General Motors claimed to have the fastest assembly line in the world and in Detroit people were working 12 hours a day including Saturdays.⁴¹

More than unemployment and factory repression, the most relevant aspect of the Nixon Administration are the institutional transformations. Nixon's New Economic Policy launched on August 15, included the institution of a wage freeze, and a Pay Board in charge of implementing it. The economic editorials commented at that time that Nixon had suddenly turned Keynesian. In fact, his program has nothing to do with the income policy of the early Sixties. In theory and in practice, the income policy approach has been surpassed by events. It is no longer possible to conceive of a process of economic growth which can maintain a stable relationship between social productivity and wages, and an equilibrium between different productive sectors. The actual outcome of the Keynesian policies of the Sixties has been to foster working class recomposition. They have sparked off an international cycle of class struggle of enormous proportions, and in so doing have provoked a stasis in capital's accumulation.

The new capitalist strategy entails, a dis-equilibrium among productive sectors, and therefore a political dismemberment of the

40 *BusinessWeek*, Nov. 10, 1973, p. 43.

41 E. Rothschild op. cit.

working class. Capital is forced to place foremost certain leading economic sectors to the disadvantage of others, even if this means economic instability, as long as it can preserve the necessary level of accumulation at an international level.⁴²

Under these circumstances, rigid guidelines for wage increases are useless. The Pay Board enforced only formally the productive guidelines. In reality, it managed collective bargaining, sector by sector, according to which sector presented a more favorable relationship of forces. This is what the freeze was all about.

Yet, it would be impossible to understand the Pay Board and the institutional changes without examining the new role that unions play.

Once the relationship between wages and productivity is severed, the unions, whose task was to guarantee this relationship, lose their traditional role in the system. Unions can no longer constitute a side of the balance of power within a dynamic equilibrium of institutional forces. Their relationship with the state cannot even exist in terms of “collaboration” towards the maintenance of social peace. Unions must become part of the state; they must take part in government. They must “govern” the working class.

This explains the creation of the Pay Board and the Labor-Management Committees during different phases of the NEP. Wage controls are not guaranteed by general guidelines but by the institutional relationship between unions and government, by the de facto entry of the unions into the government.

42 While this article was written the “oil crisis” was unfolding. Although no direct analysis of it is made in these pages, the continuity between Nixon’s restructuration of the economy and the subsequent international crisis should be apparent. See below, pp.

This new arrangement provides for an extreme flexibility in bargaining procedures, allowing a wide range of options in each individual settlement and at the same time enforcing the differences among sectors.

The new role that Union have in the State obviously requires a certain amount of internal adjustment with changes in their organization and relationship to the working class. Some “backwardness” which in the past slowed down bargaining procedures has to be eliminated. One of the major difficulties consists in the extreme decentralisation of the labor movement. This facilitates autonomous actions on the part of the locals, often in contradiction with the policy of the International unions.

Union reforms will entail a greater intervention of the Internationals in local bargaining and “improved” ratification procedures in order that contracts not be as easily voted down by the rank and file as in the past. In short, this will require the greater “autonomy” of union leadership from day-to-day grievances, a great professionalisation of union leaders, and the usage of more advanced techniques in order to maximize efficiency. Unions must be able to function like business enterprises in all respects.⁴³

In conclusion, the progressive cleavage between working class and unions is due to both workers’ dissatisfaction and the new “managerial” requirements of unions’ role. Furthermore, labor must reconsider the contents of its new tasks and strategy. Before this question can be answered, another aspect of the present capitalist reorganization remains to be examined.

During the Kennedy-Johnson era, while economic policies were being modelled after Keynesian macroeconomics, sociological

ideologies were trying to prove their credibility in the first experiments with social policy. For the first time, sociology was accepted as a viable tool for analysis and State intervention in social planning. Moynihan's career as a government functionary is a case in point. Social sciences tried to tackle the problems of poverty, unemployment, crime, and, most of all, ethnic and racial conflict. Their task was to find ways, if not to eliminate, at least to control, social conflict. Even in this case, however, sociology took for granted the possibility of adapting social composition to economic growth. The ideological character of these premises was highlighted by the social struggles which defeated the project of the "new economics" at its very foundations. Sociology was in turn forced to abandon global synthesis and relegate the race question to "benign neglect". During the present phase, the *sociology of work* becomes the center of attention. The emphasis put on the organization of work is not merely an answer to the problems created by the "Lordstown syndrome", an often recurring complaint about workers' lack of motivation and boredom. The sociology of work provides a new approach to the more general problems of social organisation. The perspective of industrial organisation is closer to the present capitalist needs of social planning than the previous, descriptive analyses of the sociology of classes.

The sociology of work has always been prescriptive in character, to serve the needs of factory management and therefore always less prone to "sociological imagination". Most of all, the methodology of the sociology of work corresponds to the present capitalist thrust to intervene directly in the social milieu in a planned way, whether to control the welfare system, to re-organize the educational system, to regulate the labor market, or to transform the nature of work on the assembly line.

Economic development does not automatically produce an adequate social composition. The reverse is true. A certain class composition is now an essential prerequisite for development and therefore must be planned and organised.

At a factory level, the new sociology criticizes the “human relations” approach as a poor substitute for Taylorism. The “human relations” theory grew out of the ideological premise that it is enough to give workers “better” treatment and create a social system inside the factory. The shortcomings of this theory are that it supposes that the workers can adjust to machines once the environment is transformed, and does not consider the work process itself. This approach has been so inadequate that in many cases it has been replaced by an updated version of Fordism. (The GM Vega plant in Lordstown is precisely that.) At least Fordism guarantees an increase in productivity, if not in the satisfaction of the workers.

The only possible alternative to Taylorism and “human relations” “must arise from the assumption that it is insufficient to adjust either people to technology or technology to people. It is necessary to consider both the social needs of the workers and the task to be performed.”⁴⁴

A step in the right direction consists of going beyond the present techniques of “job enrichment”, “job enlargement”, “job rotation”, etc., since they represent only limited solutions. They are concerned only with the horizontal structure of work and leave out the vertical hierarchy of industrial enterprise, and thus the global organisation of work. Every work place has to become an “experiment in design”. Autonomous work groups, integrated functions, self-government, job

mobility, rewards for learning, wages linked to workers' ability rather than to their jobs, are few a of the possibilities to be explored.

There is no doubt that many of the solutions proposed by the advocates of "job design" are utopian. But an underlying trend is evident: the necessity for *total experimentation*. There is no longer a stable relationship between the worker and his job. He is not defined any more by the specific function he performs. Nor is the division of tasks defined by the technological division of labor.

The "job design" theory incorporates the lessons taught by the working class struggle. The technological division of the working class has not been a barrier for its recomposition. The organisation of work cannot therefore be determined once and for all, but must be extremely elastic and open to fast and continuous readjustments.

In the last analysis, the organisation of work becomes a political matter, determined solely by the relationship of forces at any given point in time.

For these reasons it becomes clear that the organisation of work is not the prerogative of individual management. The proponents of "job design" are well aware of that as they talk about "social efficiency" and not just "industrial efficiency".⁴⁵ In addition to management, the State and the unions have a fundamental role in the design of jobs.

The State has the task of promoting full employment not merely by means of fiscal and monetary measures, but through federal and local programs which regulate the labor market and plan the relationship between technological development and the quality of labor supply.

45 Ibid. p. 23.

The union's role is to guarantee the political conditions for experimentation. The new contents of the unions' policies and the meaning of the political organisation of work now became clear.

Since the stratification of the working class does not follow technological lines for the reasons mentioned above, unions become the only guarantee for stability and an integral part of any project of job design.

Capital's answer to the progressive, homogenization of work is the institutionalization of change in the working conditions. The participation of labor in work design is to maintain political control over the working class. Labor's "government" of the workers thus covers the full range, from the State to the factory. An immediate consequence of all this is the crisis of one of the fundamental tenets of the New Left.

According to its proponents, a Workers' Control strategy entails a "qualitative" shift in the nature of workers' demands from wages to working conditions. However, the new unions' interest in the conditions of work, far from being revolutionary, reflects the new needs of the capitalist organization of work.

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Notes On The International Crisis

Mario Montano

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"When looking at capital's project for the international crisis, one aspect is immediately clear: from its perspective the crisis is a long-term undertaking. It is not a temporary recession to cure inflation and re-establish capital's "animal spirits." It is the imposition of long-term austerity for the purpose of enforcing work with the maximum feasible violence. Consider the "food crisis." It takes a most rigorous planning to turn a potential abundance of food into such fine-tuned food scarcities as are necessary for the political control of the working class. Capital makes use of everything and everyone to limit the food supply: from "feudal landlords" and "corrupt leaders" in the "Third World" to federally organized "setting aside" practices; from detente with Russia, to the highly sophisticated market manipulations of the energy/food multinationals. In these ways, capital manages to keep up a marginal situation extending into the future in which anything, from market transactions to changes in the weather, may precipitate mass starvation. Planned scarcities allow for diplomacy by "triage," or, to use a favorite euphemism, "letting nature take its toll." At its historically highest level of development, capital re-discovers "nature" as starvation, as death coming from shifting monsoons."

When looking at capital's project for the international crisis, one aspect is immediately clear: from its perspective, the crisis is a *long-term* undertaking. It is not a temporary recession to cure inflation and reestablish capital's "animal spirits." It is the imposition of a *long-term austerity for the purpose of enforcing work* with the maximum feasible violence. While this violence includes lower standards of living, increased unemployment and speed-up for the working class internationally, the tactics of such enforcement of work are adapted to local conditions. So we have a ghettoization of the labor force and "workfare" in industrial countries, working-class genocide in Chile, mass starvation of proletarians in India, etc.

Capital's need to attack with such multinational violence is just a sign of the tremendous power that the working class has commanded in its international political re-composition. By assuming the crisis as a longterm strategy, capital reflects awareness that what is at stake is the historical re-assertion of work as a condition of income, and therefore the secular defeat of an international working class that is separating income from work.

Historically, the working class has imposed "full employment" and has then used it to launch its wage struggles and so further attack the power of capital. If the struggles of the U.S. unemployed in the Thirties forced an end to the usage of devastating levels of mass unemployment and deflation to control wage rates, the wage struggles of the Sixties showed that "full employment" is also politically unmanageable. In the cycle of struggles that begins in the mid-Sixties, the working class has defeated the two major capitalist strategies for control: "technological" control of the class as *labor power*, i.e., explicit use of technology to repress the class struggle and confinement of the working class to the role of a variable in the interplay of supply and demand, and "economic" control of the

class as *internal demand*, i.e., the attempt to use the working class wage struggle as the mainspring of economic development. The working class has attacked at both levels, at the point of production through low productivity, absenteeism, etc., and in circulation, through uncontrollable wage demands, in a generalized strategy against work and for income, that is, for *income against work*.

The Working-Class Struggle and the Crisis

The crisis is *imposed* on capital by the parallel, contemporary and cumulative wage struggles of both the waged and unwaged, internationally. This is what is meant by “international political re-composition of the working class.” Throughout the widest international circulation of the wage struggle in the Sixties, the working class has broken down the precarious link between wages and productivity and has cut deeply into profit margins, thus shaking the roots of capital’s command, as *command over labor*. Capital’s power to enforce work has diminished, and the working class power to work less has increased.

These struggles for more money and less work, working class rejection of incomes policies, absenteeism, lowered social productivity, sabotage, welfare struggles, urban insurrections have been autonomous struggles, carried on by the direct initiative of those involved in them, whether through existing political organizations, if these organizations - Government agencies, trade unions, “workers’ parties” - could be used, or through new organizational solutions. *Everywhere the mass wage offensive has been productive of self-organization*, including mass direct action, the political use of mass violence, and the explicit organization of armed struggle in the community against the factory and the State. Everywhere the same political characteristics of the wage struggle have emerged:

in advanced England, backward Portugal, dependent Argentina, reformist Chile, and socialist China. At the same time that the waged working class has used “full employment”, antiFascism, Peron, Allende and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution for its wage initiative, the masses of the unwaged the world over have intensified their pressure, forcing the opening of entirely new wage fronts. It is the immense income demand of the unwaged that has produced local growth and plans for economic development in Libya, Algeria, Iran, Venezuela, Indonesia, Nigeria. Decades of national liberation struggles have incubated an explosive unwaged, unsatisfied, uncontrolled working-class demand in what was once called the “Third World.”

Internationally as well as domestically, capital has been confronted on both sides at once, by development and by under-development, by the waged and by the wageless. The culmination of the wage struggle, coupled by the explicit attack on capital’s command leaves capital no choice but to accept the crisis and to try to make it backfire on the working class.⁴⁶

46 The political sources for the analysis of the wageless for this article are to be found in: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, 1972; Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*, Falling Wall Press, 1975; Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, Falling Wall Press, 1975. Many of the ideas in this article were first published in Antonio Negri, “Tesi sulla crisi,” in S. Bologna, P. Carpignano, A. Negri, *Crisi e organizzazione operai*, Feltrinelli, 1974; Ferruccio Gambino, “Terrorismo anti-operaio: i nemici sono qui,” *Potere Operaio*, December 1973; and S. Bologna, “Questini di methodo per l’analisi dell piano chimico,” *Quadrini Piacentini*.

At the international level, the *cycle of struggles of the U. S. working class* remains the main reference point, not simply because of the strategic position and strength of the U. S. working class, but because the U.S. cycle has shown the highest *wage re-composition of a multinational working class*. In this sense, the U.S. cycle interprets and expresses more clearly the political quality of the international cycle as a whole: the recomposition of the waged and the unwaged.⁴⁷ Political recomposition of the working class meant a *wage explosion and a welfare explosion at once* that a traditional recession (1969-1970) could not even begin to contain. During the Nixon recession unemployment, welfare *and* wage rates rose while profits fell. By mid-1971 it was clear that the good old medicine no longer worked.

It is crucial to see that in this cycle of struggles capital's political problems do not stem only from what was *traditionally* considered as the wage front. Surely the relation between capital and the working class is not measured only on Fridays, since the struggle is over more than the paycheck. It takes on many forms; absenteeism, lower productivity, uses and abuses of the union structure (e.g., "cheating" on health benefits), pilfering and cargo theft, and the infinite degrees of sabotage ("counterplanning on the shop floor"). But even more importantly the struggle is not limited to the assembly line, the dock or the highway; it is equally expressed in the community. From Welfare struggles to rent strikes, from criminal activities such as shoplifting and robbery to direct appropriation attacks on supermarkets, from squatters to food price boycotts, we see the opening of a whole spectrum of working class struggles for wealth. The existence of these two levels of the class struggle (the factory and the community, the waged and the unwaged) is nothing new or

47 See Paulo Carpignano, Working Class Composition in the Sixties, this issue of Zerowork.

peculiar to this cycle of struggles. What is new is the force each side has achieved and the rapid circulation between them that made any recession-unemployment-wage-cut sequence impossible.

Thus in this cycle of struggles each of capital's wage strategies was overturned. The attempt to link wages with productivity in the factory was met by demands for more money and less work. The attempt to link income with work met the welfare struggles. The attempt to enforce wageless work on certain sectors of the class was undermined by the organized emergence of wage demands of women, youth, G.I.'s, and prisoners.

Sociologists begin to worry. They see a "revolution of rising entitlements." The working class cares not for equality of opportunity. "What is now being demanded *is equality of result - an equal outcome for all.*

The U.S. cycle exemplifies the international cycle only because the U.S. is the tip of an iceberg. At the international level, the working-class attack of the Sixties has completely turned around the world order first outlined at Bretton Woods. There, post-war development was relaunched on the basis of a) an intercapitalist agreement over a new redistribution of the traditional areas of imperialism and underdevelopment, and b) an historical experiment in "full employment," reformism for the working class of Europe and Japan, financed by U.S. budget deficits and managed by social democracy and the C.I.A.

In this way, the post-war strategy took the shape of international planning and management of the contradiction between development and underdevelopment. Within development, then the U.S.-Europe-Japan gaps would guarantee that the 1933-1946 power of attack of the North American working class would not be generalized to

the entire “advanced area.” It is precisely on such differences in the composition of capital that the multinationals began to move in the Fifties.

The Bretton Woods system reached a crisis when the international struggles made it plain that the entire setup *no longer afforded any margins*. As strategies for the containment of the working class, both development and underdevelopment have failed. In the U.S., Europe and Japan, development as shown itself as Watts, May 1968 in France, Italy’s Hot Autumn, Japan’s Spring Offensive, etc. “Full employment” has been turned into working-class revolution. (By 1974, the U.S. Europe-Japan wage gaps have practically closed. For Europe- and Japan-based multinationals, it may now be more convenient to invest directly in the U.S.) In the “Third World,” as we have seen, underdevelopment has failed to curb the wage struggle of the waged working class and the income demand of the unwaged.

Capital’s Response

Capital’s response to the international working-class attack can be described through the economic policy of the U.S. We can take August 15, 1971 as the beginning of capital’s counter-offensive, when the U.S. Government, in a sudden tactical shift, *assumed the initiative* in the crisis imposed by the working class.

That traditional recession has been ineffective in curbing wages must be shown as an international characteristic of the wage struggles at least since 1969. In 1969 and 1970, it became apparent that the international wage offensive was proceeding unchecked by slowdowns and recessions.

Arnold Weber, one of the protagonists of the wage-price freeze and Executive Director of the Cost of Living Council, gives a lucid account of the domestic political background of August 15.

By the end of 1970 the average first-year increase in newly negotiated collective bargaining contracts was in excess of 8 percent. But the bright spot did not appear. Collective bargaining developments in 1971 indicated that little relief was in prospect. The settlement in the can industry in the spring of 1971 became a target in aluminum and steel, resulting in first-year settlements calling for an estimated 16 percent hike in compensation costs. The prolonged work rule dispute in the railroad industry ground to an expensive, if not constructive, conclusion which permitted wages to increase over 40 percent over the 42 months beginning January 1, 1970. In the second quarter of 1971, the average first-year increase for major collective bargaining settlements was 10 percent... Thus in the summer of 1971 the measures of economic activity stood in painful proximity. Price trends were mixed, and vigorous pressures were still exerted on costs by sizable wage increases. Deflationary measures to deal with the situation were unfeasible or politically perilous. The budget for the fiscal year 1971 showed a deficit increase in excess of \$20 billion, at the same time that the money supply was increasing at a prodigious rate, partly in response to nudging by the Administration. Any strenuous effort to change these developments ran the risk of increasing unemployment to unacceptable levels in terms of political and national economic requirements... Any disposition to be "tough" was mitigated by the experience in the Fall of 1970 when the extended strike in the automobile industry appeared to have dealt a setback to efforts to restore a high level of economic expansion... With one great step, the Administration could dissipate the political pressures at home while seizing the initiative

with its economic partners abroad. The proximate developments were the steady deterioration of the balance of payments and the attack on the dollar in international money markets... On the domestic scene, the basic steel producers and the United Steelworkers of America on August 1 reached a new labor agreement calling for an immediate increase of 15 percent in wage and fringe benefits, an indicator that cost-push pressure had not abated.⁷

There was but one solution, to undertake the crisis as a long-term strategy, that is, to pass *from cyclical recession to historical crisis*: by explicitly attacking the European and Japanese working class (the 10 percent surcharge on imports that passes for inter-imperialist competition) and by generalizing a Government imposed anti-working-class attack at home (the wage freeze). Behind the 10% surcharge and the 5% wage ceiling of August 15 stood the atomic submarines and the National Guard. There was no rationalization for suddenly forcing a change in the exchange ratios among nations and within the international capital-wage relation besides the consideration that the new ratios established more favorable relations of power.

We now know that the measures of August 15 were too weak. By 1973 it became clear that capital had again underestimated the impact of the international class initiative. The working class was not blackmailed. In fact, the international boom of 1972-1973 provided an occasion for relaunching the wage initiative (March 1973 FIAT occupation in Turin, the Philadelphia teachers' strike, the summer wildcats in West Germany, the Jefferson Avenue assault in Detroit, the revival of struggle at English Fords, the Carletonville riots of South African miners, etc.)

Up until the late Sixties capital succeeded in making use of the international intercapitalist gaps to control the wage struggles.

Historically, the Western economies have been *out of step*. One or two countries, usually the U.S., West Germany, or both, would lead a business expansion or decline, and the other countries would follow a year or more later. As *long as demand remained weak* in one or more major industrialized nations, world resources and production capacity would not be strained.

But the international attack of the working class in the late Sixties is reflected in the *international synchronization of the economic cycle* in the Seventies. In the words of a business economist, “the steady rise in per capita income has changed consumption patterns in most industrialized countries, making demand-management policies more difficult to implement.” The working class has forced unified business cycles and has then used the international boom to generalize the wage struggle.

The second dollar devaluation and the energy crisis *had to* follow. It was capital’s needed strategic adjustment: double-digit inflation, stagflation, in short, deepening the crisis. The well-timed wheat sale to Russia set the stage for the creation of *shortages* in 1973, its agricultural prices suddenly became bargains on the world market. The surge of foreign demand into the U.S. market touched off an inflationary explosion of food and feed prices, at the very same time inflation was also being fueled by the price leap for imports. Later in the same year the Yom Kipper War, financed on both sides by the same capital and managed by detente, and the “Arab” embargo triggered a fourfold increase in the price of oil.

This set the scenario for a new phase in the anti-working-class attack: “uncontrollable” inflation, multinational management of shortages, Kissinger’s politics of starvation and diplomacy of war.

The Crisis from the Viewpoint of Capital

Capital understands the crisis as a *crisis of its command over labor*. In the very way capital chooses to describe the crisis, it focuses on productivity. The capitalist “scenario for survival” is littered with phrases like: “coping with shortages,” “finding capital” and “living with inflation” in the midst of the “breakdown of financial markets.” But each of these has proven to be a consequence of the wage/productivity struggle of the working class.

Let us consider the *shortages* first. The fact that shortages reflect a great deal more than “excess demand” has become economic commonplace. For Allan Greenspan, “the wage escalation of the 1960’s reduced the rate at which managers were willing to run productive facilities. It became more costly to put men on overtime.” Older plants once devoted to the production of basic materials were made uneconomic by high wage rates.

In steel, nonferrous metal, industrial chemicals, paper, rubber and cement, there was not much left of “animal spirits” after the cost-push inflation that closed out the 1960’s and the recession that opened the 1970’s. Even after the recession, profits in most of these industries were lower than they had been since 1966 - lower in *current* dollars, unadjusted for inflation.

Major materials shortages were sure to follow and they did.

Second, the class struggle has scared capital away from “entrepreneurial” investment toward “managerial” investment. In the Keynesian concept of “entrepreneurial investment”, additional investment means additional employment. Keynes, however, was writing during the Great Depression when labor was cheap. In this era of wage inflation, the relationship between capital investment

and employment has been maintained, but it has been increasingly channelled into projects that economize on labor.

With managerial investment, additional investment does not mean additional employment, but additional savings on labor. In 1969, for example, steel companies in the U.S. reported 64% of plant and equipment expenditure devoted to expansion and 36% to modernization. By 1973 the proportions were reversed: 28% for expansion and 72% for modernization. Capital shies away from living labor, but to do so it needs more capital. Capital is needed to offset rising labor costs, to increase productivity, to reduce the labor content of products, to do away with labor by making it more and more productive. Thus “finding capital” becomes the first imperative in the crisis. Capital needs are immense, on a scale never previously approached, at precisely the moment when the entire capital-raising network appears in a critical condition, squeezed between falling rate of profit and inflated interest rates.

The capitalist viewpoint, however, does not see “finding capital” as a simple technical problem. It sees it as a two fold political one. First as a problem of production which involves the imposition of increasing productivity and securing a satisfactory rate of profit. Second as a problem of the market and pricing which involves manipulating inflation as a source of capitalist accumulation. But these two problems merge into one when it is seen that inflation can only provide capital insofar as it is a means for imposing a stricter wage-productivity link on a social level. “We have no alternative but to attack the rate of inflation by increasing our productivity.”

There is only one long term solution to the challenge of costpush inflation: increased productivity. If labor’s real wages are to keep rising, then labor’s output per hour must rise by the same amount...

In the second half of the Seventies, the U.S. must come to grips with the necessity of increasing productivity - not just an inch at a time, but a real quantum jump. *It must somewhat breakdown the restrictive work rules and practices that limit labor's output.*

The purpose of the capitalist strategy is to tilt the relationship between unpaid and paid labor, between capital and wage, back to a position that forcibly re-establishes the pre-eminence of unpaid over paid labor. We will see in the following sections how the “energy crisis” uniquely meets the requirements of capital’s strategy for the crisis. (1) The energy crisis reduces total employment; (2) it increases the threat of unemployment, both generally and in selected sectors (e.g., auto); (3) it allows capital to be accumulated *en masse* through huge price increases in those very sectors (energy and food) that are dominated by the most powerful capitalists, the U.S.-based multinationals.

Not surprisingly, *inflation*, the third part of the capitalist scenario, is an occasion for much ideology. Demand-pull inflation is said to be caused by imperialism and war while cost-push inflation is associated with labor struggles at home. Thus for Keynesian liberals and neoMarxists alike, the dynamics of inflation coincide with the cycles of imperialist wars while for Wall Street conservatives, wage-push is the universal source of inflation. In the Lekachman-Sweezy interpretation, the empire and its wars explain everything: the inflationary boom of the Sixties is the result of military spending; the 1969-1971 recession is due to a drop in defense contracts; and so on. While for Harvard’s Haberler in 1972, wage push is an undeniable fact. It is overt when wages rise under conditions of unemployment because that clearly could not happen if there were competition in the labor market. It is not so clear, but it must be assumed a fortiori to exist, under conditions of high employment, because if unions

are able to push up wages when unemployment is unprecedentedly high or rising, they are in an even better position to do so when unemployment is low and falling. It follows that even in clear cases of demand inflation it must be assumed that aggressive labor unions intensify and reinforce the demand pull by wage push.

The current interpretation by capital and the Left describe the inflation process as one which assumes the form of a two stage cycle. In the first stage, imperial and military Government requirements generate demand-pull inflation. In the second stage, workers, reacting to the threat of inflation begin to anticipate price rises in their wage demands, in this way producing cost-push inflation. As always, the beginning is “the war”, the struggle for independence of “Third World” nations. In the end, the North-American working class is “forced” to enter the scene and put up a “defensive” wage struggle.

From the working-class viewpoint, we are not particularly interested in reconstructing the empirical dynamics of the inflation process, whether demand-pull or cost-push. We understand demand pull and cost push as simply two sides of the same “full employment” coin. We are interested in inflation exclusively for what it reveals about the class relationship. Inflation is the sign of working-class struggle in the capitalist cycle. Since the Great Depression, inflation has been systematically used to contain the wage initiative of the working class. The “monetary illusion” is the main focus of the Keynesian acceptance of demand as the basis for economic development. Once capital has come to accept the working-class wage demand, it must regulate it. It must transform the working-class wage attack into a manageable internal demand. But, in its struggles since the New Deal, the working class has enthusiastically used “full employment” as a condition for generalizing and sharpening the wage struggle.

The working class imposed “full employment” strategies on capital and then used them to overturn the power relationship between itself and capital. In the Sixties the wage demands of the traditional sectors of the working class became explosive *and* they detonated income demands in the social factory. Capital, therefore, had to respond with *both* full employment and the Great Society programs. When the wage/welfare struggles in the U.S. met the international relaunching of the wage struggle, at that point, under the pressure of international attack, inflation might well have gotten “out of hand.” The fine-tuned “new inflation” of the New Economics had given way to the “runaway inflation” of the crisis. Inflation got out of control when capital was no longer able to contain the wage struggle through anti-cyclical fiscal and monetary manipulation, i.e., through traditional planned recession. For what had gotten “out of hand” was the wage demand of the working class. At that point, the passage from cyclical recession to historical crisis that we have described was the only alternative open to capital.

We have seen that shortages and inflation are first forced on capital by working-class struggle. In the crisis, capital tries to regain the initiative by taking on shortages and inflation together, i.e., by *causing inflation through the production of shortages*, particularly in energy and food.

From the capitalist perspective, energy is recognized as the *fundamental technological tool for the international control of the working class*. First of all, it is a *replacement for labor*. Since the War, capital has increasingly dealt with the working class on a daily basis by replacing labor with energy. Rapidly rising labor costs have met steady oil prices. As a result, by 1970 the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy used 66% more energy but only 35% more labor than in 1958. In its immediate application to the process of production,

energy frees capital from labor. It follows that control over the availability and price of energy means control over the technological conditions of class struggle internationally and also control over economic development.

The cost of energy, moreover, plays an essential part in determining the international structure of *demand*. High-energy industries will raise their prices first. As a result, consumer spending will drop first in those very sectors that make up the bulk of working-class demand: fuel oil, household appliances, motor vehicles, gasoline, cleaning products, knitted goods, drugs, etc. Higher oil prices raise the profits of the energy multinationals as they hurt the demand of consumers.

This transfer of income could be painful. The oil industry uses much less labor and more capital than do most other industries. And so the transferred income will benefit mainly profit recipients rather than wage earners ...Thus higher oil prices imply *more savings and less consumption*.

In this way the energy multinationals, through their control over supplies and their virtual independence from labor, take leadership in the accumulation of capital and in the international political control over the working class.

The Energy Crisis

The present identity of interests between multinationals and OPEC rulers is revealed by the price hikes and embargo following the Yom Kippur War. For capital accumulation by OPEC is also capital accumulation by the Seven Sisters. Thus prices in the world market are allowed to dictate price levels in the U.S. even though the U.S. is two-thirds selfsufficient in oil. The profits of OPEC countries

and of the oil companies can *together* finance the enormous capital spending projected for the years ahead.

It has always been clear that in the long term reinvestment of the oil funds both in OPEC and in the oil-consuming countries is the only solution. For the multinational experts of *Foreign Affairs*, the crisis represents “a great opportunity.”

Paradoxically, there is a great opportunity which lies beneath the surface of this immense “recycling” problem. In essence, the world today is starved for capital. Greater investment not only in the OPEC countries but everywhere is an essential condition for the enlargement of output and lowering of real costs that offer the most effective counterforce to persistent world-wide inflation. In this situation, *consumer payment for high-priced oil in the importing countries represents* a diversion from other forms of consumption, in effect *a form of forced savings*, with the proceeds of these payments becoming, at least in part, investible funds in the hands of the OPEC countries. If the OPEC countries, in turn, had the proper outlets and were ready to employ their investible funds, they could make a crucial contribution to the capital formation that the world so urgently needs.

But in the short term, capital faces certain problems: a breakdown of the stock market and a balance-of-payments deficit for oil-consuming countries.

Consider the stock market. As an institution, the stock market can only survive under two conditions: low interest rates and stable or growing rates of return on invested capital. As we have seen, the class struggle of the Sixties has imposed inflation-high interest rates and a falling rate of return. A recent re-appraisal of the trend of the rate of return shows that “the ‘genuine’ after-tax return on invested

capital of nonfinancial corporations has been downward since 1965... It fell from 10% in 1965 to 5.4% in 1973... The downward trend continues.” The decline of the stock market becomes all the more visible as it fails to recycle the OPEC surplus funds. The widely noted OPEC strategy of short-term deposits is imposed by the realities of the money markets, in particular by the increasing depreciation of stock. For capital, the recycling question is not a specifically financial question at all. It is part of a general political problem of reversing the downward trend in profits, or how to guarantee a satisfactory return on investment. In the words of a Harvard economist, the declining rate of return stands the whole question of a capital shortage on its head... It is no longer a question of whether businessmen will have enough savings to invest, but rather of *whether they will want to invest*.

Under such conditions of uncertainty, says a Wall Street man, “investors are no longer willing to invest their savings in securities and the nation’s capital-raising machinery is gradually dissolving... This foreshadows the end of the free-enterprise capitalistic system as we have known it.”

Capital has moved in the crisis to a completely *closed circuit* outside the market. Corporations will have to rely on a combination of internal financing and loans from the banking system. “Recycling” must occur through the banks and government-to-government transactions. This is then the meaning of the energy crisis: capital *escapes* from those sectors of investment and those geographical areas where the wage struggle has taken its toll on accumulation. Through inflation, it transforms working class income from the U.S, Western Europe and Japan into oil profits and OPEC “surplus” funds. This transformation implies, among other things, an increased independence of capital from the money markets and a greater

political concentration of capital in multinational hands. In a sense, this flight of capital is simply a *tactical retreat*; a precondition for a new world-wide wave of multinational investment.

This identity of interests between the U.S. and OPEC countries goes way back. In 1950 the State Department, in collaboration with the Treasury Department, granted the oil companies substantial foreign tax credit. This tax credit put a premium on the interest of oil companies in multinational operations at the same time that it increased the share going to the Governments of oil producing countries.

The price of oil, in the meantime, was kept stable. On the availability and stability of “cheap oil,” capital built its control over the working class both domestically and internationally since World War II. In the U.S., a whole phase of capitalist initiative, based on the auto industry, the interstate highway network, urban planning, etc., was based on “cheap oil.” In Europe, post-war economic development subsidized by the U.S. government created a market for oil that the Seven Sisters were quick to penetrate, expanding their share in it fivefold between 1955 and 1970. By the Sixties, oil controlled economic development everywhere. By 1971 it had become the “oil weapon.”

The price hike of the Teheran agreement (1971), jointly imposed by OPEC members and the U.S. State Department, dealt a first preliminary blow to the working class in Europe and Japan. In 1973, the Yom Kippur War marked the beginning of a new multinational anti-workingclass offensive led by the U.S. It caused simultaneously an intensification of the attack on Western Europe and Japan, an escalation of an anti-working-class attack in the U.S. and starvation in selected parts of the “Third World”.

In 1973, the bulk of the Seven Sisters' profits came from sales to Europe and Japan. At the end of the year, *The Wall Street Journal* could editorialize with satisfaction:

It seems like just the other day everyone was worried that Japan was going to buy up the rest of the world at the same time it was burying it in Toyotas and Sonys... Doomsayers here and abroad were concluding that for the U.S. the party was over... The Arab oil squeeze has changed all this... The oil embargo stripped Japan of its aura of industrial invincibility... Even when the oil embargo ends, the higher prices will remain and no doubt advance. Every increase further changes the terms of trade to the disadvantage of Japan and Western Europe.

By 1974, however, the oil weapon was turned against the North American working class and big profits were squeezed out of the U.S. market.

Behind the ritualistic position of diplomatic adversaries that the U.S. and OPEC countries necessarily entertain during international bargaining sessions, stands their Holy Alliance. OPEC rulers can maintain their earnings and thus their own power only if oil demand or oil prices strengthen in the years ahead. As far as the surplus funds are concerned, "We don't have to beg them to invest in oil-consuming countries," says a Federal Reserve System economist, "They have no choice."

The U.S. and the multinationals also need OPEC as a major market for goods and as a main source for loans. In 1974, total OPEC imports were up 50 percent. The considerable expenditures on the infrastructures and internal development programs undertaken by the OPEC rulers will have the effect of strengthening consumers' markets in the more populated OPEC countries. Finally, "whether

the U.S. faces a credit crunch later this year (1975) and an aborted economic recovery may depend on persuading OPEC countries to help finance the enormous budget deficit." Saudi Arabia's Minister of Finance has said: "We feel our responsibility to the whole world." While a Wall Street consultant recently reminded his clients, "they (the Arabs) haven't done anything silly."

However, it is class struggle -working class struggle in industrialized countries and the wage pressure of the unwaged in the OPEC countries - not "imperialism" or "monopoly capital" that has brought this alliance into being. Where the class struggle, and the class struggle in the OPEC countries in particular, might eventually bring this alliance, is a different question.

For the Holy Alliance, the problem is not at all the high price of oil. High oil prices, as Kissinger has recently explained, are in everyone's interest. The important question *is control over development*, control over who is going to develop and so *control the movements of the working class*.

We can begin to glimpse something of the new class dynamics inside OPEC. The more populous members - Iran, Algeria - are under powerful wage/demand pressure. Given that their collective surplus funds have fallen from \$27 billion in 1973 to \$4 billion in 1974, the World Bank's latest estimate is that by the end of the Seventies, they will spend everything they will earn on internal development. But what kind of "internal development"?

The forms of struggle arising in the Mid-East will determine the course of development, and it would be rash to delimit them at this point. However, it must be clear that the "Palestinian Question," the Arabian importation of masses of labor power from Africa and Asia, and Persian "industrialization" represent a dynamics of class struggle

that belongs to the present crisis and neither to a “pre-industrial past” nor to a mere repetition of previous struggles in the West. It is not inevitable that the assembly line will be dismantled in Detroit and whisked in Bandar Abbas. That will depend upon the level and kind of class struggle the Arab and immigrant proletariat determine. Indeed, there are indications that laborless oil and petrochemicals will constitute the leading growth sectors in countries like Iran as well as in the most “developed” areas. In that case, the new “model of development” would be *the crisis*.

The higher price of oil attacks the working class as a whole; this general attack on the class is founded on a discriminatory attack on the “marginals” or on low-waged and unwaged workers. Clearly, this kind of inflation indicates the end of the Keynesian era. In the crisis, it becomes a means of reducing the total wage and of selectively repressing the working class, whereas previously inflation was used as a means of managing demand, correlating wages with productivity and so producing economic development.

But along with the passing of Keynesian inflation goes Keynesian *unemployment*. This is indicated statistically by the higher rates of unemployment in the “advanced” capitalist countries, but the quantities hide the selectivity and its planned duration. Unemployment is not to be used as a transitory device to temper wage demands within specific sectors rather what is at stake is the *destruction and re-ordering of sectors*. Unemployment becomes the tool of restructuring by cutting and freezing out specific working-class vanguards defined, by capital, either occupationally (autoworkers, construction workers), racially (blacks), sexually (women), or by age (young). Through unemployment capital must teach a lesson to the protagonist of urban insurrection and of factory and welfare insubordination. Unemployment must also punish feminism,

the insubordination and the wage struggle of women; it tries to push women back into the family, that is, into wagelessness. Finally, unemployment must restrain the young who have learned insubordination in school and in the army and have used part-time work and the “youth culture” to struggle against work.

But this sectorial destruction involves the “freezing” of whole blocks of the working class. It is politically impossible to do this in the good old way of beggary and starvation, rather it must be tactically managed with anxious care. So we have a whole new constellation of unemployment insurance, food stamps, mortgage loans, public jobs and workfare for the “new poor”.

Let us now sum up capital’s analysis of the crisis. Its strategic perspective appears to be dominated by the need-to impose (more) work, to increase productivity, to re-establish the supremacy of dead labor or accumulated capital over living labor and so over the working class. The capitalist line of thinking is classically simple: a) capital fails to command (enough) labor. This means that b) more capital is needed to command labor. Therefore, c) more labor must be squeezed out of production. The capitalist mind is aware that this sequence is ultimately a vicious circle. Hence its outburst of despair over survival and the revival of a stagnationist mood among political economists.

Supply Management and the Crisis of Auto

Supply management, or the controlling of inflation through international commodity shortages, represents capital’s departure from a directly political level of confrontation that the working class has assumed. It appears, at the outset, not as a confrontation between the working class and the State as demand management

did; but, in effect, as a contradiction within the working class. So it is presented as a contradiction between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped” world, between excessive consumption and excessive procreation in a zero growth, depleted and impoverished planet.

In fact, the crisis of demand management highlights the *end of an era* in the class relation. One could call it the *era of auto*, the *age of Keynes*, when the control of the working class was based on mass production, on the *assembly line*, and the parallel acceptance of *working-class demand* as the stimulus for economic development. The age of Keynes necessitated a new role for the trade-union, as the official mediator of class struggle and direct controller of the working class, and a new role for the State, as planner of the class relationship, protagonist of capital’s general initiative and manager of the cycle. Above all, the era of auto witnessed the theoretical and practical discovery of the *cycle as the new form of the relationship between capital and the working class*.

The four decades between the beginning of the New Deal and the energy crisis have openly shown that the economic cycle is a cycle pushed by the wage struggle, mediated by the trade-unions and fine-tuned by the State. Again and again, the world over, the working class has used the cycle as an occasion for generalizing and internationalizing the wage struggle. Again and again, the world over, assembly-line workers and mass workers have been in the forefront of the wage attack. Demand management and the assembly line - together they were to guarantee economic development. Instead, they have unleashed a formidable class struggle.

In the crisis, demand management by national Governments gives way to supply management by multinational corporations, while assembly line production enters its last historical phase.

Capital has had troubles with the assembly line and with mass workers ever since it first started using them. In the U.S. each major cycle of working-class struggle has been followed by a renewed capitalist attempt to isolate the assemblers by a wave of “runaway shops” in textiles, electronics, auto, steel, etc. After the sitdowns of 1937, after the post-war strike peak of 1946, then again during the second half of the Sixties, capital engaged in successive waves of industrial investment abroad, i.e., it intensified the export of production jobs overseas while focusing on the development of the “service sector” at home. In the short term, the multinationalization of the factory and of the assembly line seemed an adequate solution. In the long term, of course, it only relaunched the problem world-wide.

The sustained world-wide wage attack that the working class has carried out between 1967 and today has been, in part, based on the initiative of the assemblers and, in particular, the autoworkers. By the early Seventies, autoworkers were on the attack everywhere, in Detroit, Tokyo and Turin as much as in Barcelona and in Villa Constitución. They were on the attack not only where capital has brought the “third world” to the factory, as in the case of “guest workers” in Germany and France but also where it has brought the factory to the “third world”, as in Argentina and in Spain. This is an important fact, for it obviously demonstrates that the process of the international re-composition of the working class (of which the tendential homogenization of wage levels is only one result) has undercut capital’s strategy at its very roots. Capital is quickly running out of places to run away, and the working class is still on

the offensive. What follows then is the only solution: the crisis of auto, of labor-intensive production, that is, the de-mobilization of autoworkers, of assemblers, of production workers at large.

In the crisis, capital comes to accept that the working-class struggle has rendered labor-intensive industry obsolete in its role as accumulator of capital. To the historical crisis of labor-intensive production, corresponds a tremendous development for capital-intensive industry, particularly the energy multinationals, where capital has obtained extreme concentration, complete control over supply and virtual nondependence on labor. With one move, the energy crisis marked the beginning of the auto crisis on the one hand and produced stepped-up accumulation for oil and petrochemicals, etc., on the other. This is the only real “technological leap” of the crisis: no growth, recession and restructuration for troubled labor-intensive sectors; quantum-leap growth and leadership in accumulation for energy-intensive sectors and for energy itself.

The crisis of auto represents the end of an era in the class relation not the simple obsolescence of the car. Cars will still be produced. Some “Third World” countries will be playing a role in automotive production. G.M. has just started production Teheran, while FIAT has been building its new pole of development in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. But the organization of production will be different as is made clear elsewhere in this issue.

Capital's Multinational Strategy

The general form of capital's initiative today is *disequilibrium*. Capital must attempt to transform a crisis imposed by the working class attack against profit into a re-structuration of its own circulation through disequilibriums. Capital's objective becomes a fragmentation

of the working class on which a new capital re-composition can be based. It must depart from wherever it has met the class struggle and concentrate on new and different possibilities of control of the working class. It must attempt to *separate* the struggles of the international working class and to play development and underdevelopment against each other. That is, capital must respond *multinationally* to an *international* working class.

These are the opposing movements of the class struggle today: the international political homogenization of the working class *versus* the multinationalization of capital. The working-class struggle constantly overcomes national differences; multinational capital coordinates them internationally. In fact, the multinational corporation is *based on* the national difference, on the economic and political exploitation of the national difference throughout the international articulation of the world's labor and commodities markets. Thus the national difference is no paleocapitalist heritage; it is a primary tool for the control of the working class at its historically highest level of political re-composition.

Of course, this holds true for any determination of the national difference: sex, race, ethnicity, etc. "Racism" is a thing of the future. Mass migration, ghettoization, systematic discrimination are "advanced capitalist" tools, not leftovers from a mythical pre-capitalist stage. Even in this, the U.S. shows its role of historical vanguard. Europe is now facing its own "race problem," that is, mass production firmly in the hands of racial ghetto dwellers; while Canada rushes to put a lid on the immigration of non-whites. In the "Third World", poles of development are creating and corroborating new dynamics of racial segmentation. Oil money has already started a whirlpool of fresh multinational labor power in the Mid-East in

general and in Saudi Arabia in particular; further the key to class composition in Africa is racially defined migratory labor.

This is why the problem of the nature of “imperialism” (whether “pillage of the Third World” or “stage of economic development”) is a false problem. The new multinational imperialism as such is neither for underdevelopment nor for development, neither for “Fascism” nor for “democracy.” It is for *both* at the same time: for Fascism in Chile and for “democracy” in Greece. As general capitalist strategies, both underdevelopment and development have failed. For capitals’ multinational initiative the question now is how to directly oppose development and underdevelopment against each other, *how to make underdevelopment work completely inside development*, how to multinationally re-impose the contradiction between development and underdevelopment as a *contradiction within the working class*. What that means today is a worldwide increase and internationalization of underdevelopment. Thus, with regard to the traditional areas of Development and Underdevelopment, we witness two opposing dynamics: underdevelopment of Development (the “Latin-Americanization” of the U.S., Britain, and Japan) and a development of Underdevelopment, which includes both a new wave of development (e.g., Iran) and increased underdevelopment (e.g., India). The dynamics of managed food and energy “markets” reflects this strategy of disaggregation most clearly, for example when Iran and India must compete for fertilizer and wheat within U.S. planned multinational shortages.

Like development and underdevelopment, “democracy” and “fascism” are assumed by Capital not as opposing capitalist strategies (for as such they have both proved inadequate), but as *tactical weapons*. The countries in which the class struggle has developed the furthest have shown this aspect more clearly. In Chile, for example, capital

has made use of the Christian Democrats-U.P.-Army *sequence* for the control of the working class. Greece has shown the other face of the process: politically defeated military rule giving way to experiments in a “civilian” or “mixed” control over the working class. Argentina has expressed the whole movement as a continuous passage of initiative from civilian to military rule and then back again, a most obvious sign of the ungovernability of the working class. In this respect, the Portuguese situation has gone even further, toward the dialectical identity of civilian and military rule, with the Army at the Ministry of Interior and the Communist Party at the Ministry of Labor.

Under the attack of the working class, the traditional political differences in the democratic “body politic” disappear, and the function of the “body politic” as a whole becomes purely repressive: to impose work on the working class by whatever means necessary, whether by democracy, Fascism or Socialism. National-Emergency governments, last-minute attempts to contain the working-class explosion spring up everywhere, with the Army already overseeing the political process. In the crisis, the working class directly clashes with the political system *as* such. The entire political system, from the C.P. to the Army, is completely hostile; it is capital. The struggle is between the political system’s enforcement of work and the working-class struggle against work.

“Food is a weapon,” says the U. S. Secretary of Agriculture. “It is now one of our principal tools in our negotiating kit,” echoes the C.I.A. Only days after President Ford approved the sale of 2.2 million tons of wheat to the Soviet Union..., Kissinger told Indian officials that the U.S. would be able to supply about 500,000 tons of grain at reduced prices in the next months to help meet the Indian crisis. India needs at least seven million tons to overcome her deficit.

As the single most important component, or the core of working-class consumption the world over, food plays a central role in capital's international attack. The lower the income, the higher the portion of it that must be spent on food. At the lowest level, and the lowest level is a *mass* level, one's entire income buys malnutrition and starvation.

Where increased underdevelopment is chosen as the local form of multinational rule (for example, India and Bangladesh), hunger and absolute deprivation become the essential tools of control. Workers who do not eat enough cannot earn enough to feed themselves. Where increased underdevelopment is chosen, the food crisis means control of the hungry through the food dole, i.e. planned malnutrition, mass migration backed by force, concentration/ relocation camps, etc. Today, one third of the urban population in the "underdeveloped world lives in "slums and squatters' settlements." By 1980, that proportion will rise to two thirds. The *new city slum* in Asia, Africa and Latin America is and will increasingly be a major protagonist in the class confrontation. For capital, the slum is a means for doling out controlled sub-survival. For the working class, it is a possibility of income, a new mass level in the wage struggle. The United Nations is piously striking a warning. Squatters' settlements are new areas created by their own inhabitants to protect themselves and mobilize minimal resources. The occupants of shantytowns at the outskirts of big cities are *united in common cause*. Initially, they can only afford a primitive shelter, but they may quickly press for higher living standards, schools, and health care.

For the working class in the developed countries, the food crisis means that it is required to "share the burden" of feeding the "Third World," by eating less and by paying more for food. The starvation of underdevelopment is pitted against the living standards of the working class in the metropolis. Within the metropolis, food operates

with the same mechanism of division as it does internationally: lower-income consumers pay more for their food than higher-income consumers. Hunger, starvation become absolute terms of reference for the working class internationally. The absolute deprivation of the Chilean working class since the military coup must teach something to the working class everywhere.

It takes a most rigorous *planning* to turn a potential abundance of food into such fine-tuned food scarcities as are necessary for the political control of the working class. Capital makes use of everything and everybody to limit the food supply: from “feudal landlords” and “corrupt leaders” in the “Third World,” to federally ordered “setting aside” practices; from detente with Russia to the highly sophisticated market manipulations of the energy/food multinationals.

Less than two weeks after the deal (the 1972 wheat sale to Russia) was consummated . . . Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz announced that during the 1973 wheat-crop year farmers would be required to “set aside” the maximum acreage authorized bylaw.’ In these ways, capital manages to keep up a marginal situation extending into the future in which *anything*, from market transactions to changes in the weather may precipitate mass starvation. Planned scarcities allow for diplomacy by “triage,” or, to use a favorite euphemism, “let nature take its toll.” At its historically highest level of development, capital rediscovers “Nature” as starvation, as death coming from shifting monsoons.

The Crisis of Economic Theory

The separation of the working class and production is the culmination of capital’s long-term progressive attempt to free itself from labor, but in order to do away with labor capital must make it

more and more productive. "The increase in the productive force of labor and the greatest possible negation of necessary labor is the *necessary tendency of capital*." The fundamental mechanisms of the capitalist relation (the extraction of relative surplus value, the falling rate of profit, etc.) are bound up with this, for it is the capitalist tendency *par excellence*.

In the crisis, however, capital begins to test a *new level* in the development of this tendency: the production of wealth without labor. We see this most obviously in two fundamental sectors of the crisis: oil and food. The cost of producing a barrel of oil is a little over a dime; so stripped of profits, royalties and taxes, oil is virtually *free*. On the other hand, U. S. *agriculture*, the most powerful producer, the one upon which the entire world food situation has come to depend, employs only a minute fraction of the North American labor force. Capital has come to achieve laborless production in precisely those sectors which are essential for controlling the working class: energy and food. Capital needs a free hand in wielding its weapons. It follows that no autonomy of labor can be allowed in such crucial sectors.

This new level in the development of the "necessary tendency" of capital - the production of wealth without labor, itself the result of a dynamics of the class struggle that Marx analyzed - has remained completely beyond the reach of the Marxists tradition and of neo-Marxist today, whether of a Social-Democratic, Bolshevik, or "libertarian" variety. True, there has been a "rediscovery of Marx" within the setting of the crisis and the breakdown of economic theory, but the Marx that parts of capital and the Left have discovered is Marx the *economist* of the falling rate of profit and the labor theory of value. Capital's understanding of the crisis is based on the recognition of a dramatically falling rate of profit, whereas

capital's strategy for the crisis is firmly grounded on a labor theory of value. Has capital finally turned Marxist? *Apparently* it has. The class struggle has done away with any dreams of equilibrium and development. It has dispensed with Say, with Schumpeter, and with Keynes. For capital the only economist with enough hold on the class struggle is Marx. Really, Marx is the only "economist" who never forgets the class struggle within the context of the labor theory of value. Thus the "new" Marx is only a continuation of a "Marxism" concerned with a more progressive *management of labor*, i.e., with the imposition or self-imposition of work, through the trade unions, collectivization, or "self-management of production."

Whereas "Marxists" project labor as an eternal human necessity and are fond of *planning work* by Socialist means - whether "from above" or "from below" - the capitalist *reality* is already beyond work. It is with this recognition that we find the Marx, of the working class viewpoint. For what we are witnessing is nothing less than the abolition of productive work within the capitalist mode of production itself. This new step, missed as it is by contemporary "marxists," is in fact anticipated in Marx's own analysis of the necessary tendency of capital.

Because of the insights they afford into today's class situation, we will quote at great length from Notebooks VI and VII of the *Grundrisse*, and will then briefly emphasize some of the points. Let us start from the definition of the 'necessary tendency' we have already quoted, and proceed from there.

The increase of the productive forces of labor and the greatest possible negation of necessary labor is the *necessary tendency of capital*... The transformation of the means of labor into machinery is the realization of this tendency ... In machinery, objectified labor itself

appears not only in the form of product or of the product employed as a means of labor, but in the form of the force of production itself... [With machinery] the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the *general productive forces of the social brain*, is... *absorbed into capital*, as opposed to labor, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of *fixed capital*, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper...

Further, in so far, as machinery develops with the accumulation of society's *science*, of productive forces generally, *general social labor presents itself not in labor but in capital*. The productive force of society is measured *infixed capital*... [T]he transformation of the production process from the simple labor process into a scientific process, which subjugates the forces of nature and compels them to work in the service of human needs, appears as a quality of *fixed capital*.. Thus all powers of labor are transposed into powers of capital.

[T]o the degree that large industry develops, the *creation of real wealth comes to depend* less on labor time and on the amount of labor employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labor time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labor time spent on their production, but depends rather *on the general state of science* and on the *progress of technology*, or the application of this science to production... *Agriculture*, e.g., becomes merely the application of the science of material metabolism... Real wealth manifests itself in the monstrous disproportion between the labor time applied, and its product... [The] worker steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation it is neither the direct human labor he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and its mastery over it by virtue

of his presence as a social body - it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the foundation-stone of production and of wealth. The theft of alien labor time, on which the present wealth is based, appears as a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. *As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labor of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labor of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labor time so as to posit surplus labor, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created for all of them. Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labor time to a minimum, while it posits labor time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth... On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labor time employed in it. On the other side, it wants to use labor time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value.'*

The creation of a large quantity of disposable time apart from necessary labor time for society generally and each of its members..., this creation of not-labor time appears in the stage of capital, as of all

earlier ones, as not-labor time, free time, for a few. What capital adds is that it increases the surplus labor of the mass by all the means of art and science, because its wealth consists directly in the appropriation of surplus labor time... It is thus, despite itself, instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce the labor time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum, and thus to free everyone's time for their own development. But its tendency is always, on the one side, *to create disposable time, on the other to convert it into surplus labor* ...⁴² The more this contradiction develops, the more does it become evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labor, but that the *mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labor*. Once they have done so -and *disposable time* thereby ceases to have an *antithetical* existence -then, on one side, necessary labor time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, *disposable time* will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time.

Let us sum up the essential points of Marx's analysis.

With the development of machinery and the application of science to production, the productive powers of society appear embodied not in labor, but in capital, namely in fixed capital. In so far as machinery develops with the accumulation of science, general *social labor presents itself not in labor but in capital*. "[A]ll powers of labor are transposed into powers of capital."

The creation of real wealth comes to depend increasingly less on labor and labor time and increasingly more on the general state of science. *Science becomes immediately productive*. Real wealth manifests itself in the “monstruous disproportion” between labor time and products. The development of large industry turns the proportion between necessary labor and surplus value (i.e. the degree of productivity of necessary labor) into a relationship devoid of significance because of how tiny necessary labor has become compared to the huge mass of accumulated dead labor employed in production. The new qualitative leap in the historical development of the capitalist mode of production is not only a further reduction of necessary labor time (i.e., a further increase in the productivity of labor); it is above all a radical devaluation of labor time as an essential component of the process of production. In the Tendency, capital is pushed *beyond value*. Once labor ceases to be the wellspring of wealth, value ceases to be the mediation of use-values. With a radical revaluation of labor corresponds the suppression of the law of value and then any relationship between value and price is severed.

Thus capital necessarily moves toward the “non-labor” of the mass, the reduction of the necessary labor of society to a diminishing minimum and so a new productive arrangement in which wealth is no longer measured by labor time but by disposable time, no longer by the yardstick of capital but by the yardstick of the working class. “Capital works towards its own dissolution as the force dominating production.”

This movement toward the dissolution of capital, however, is a contradictory process. Capital itself is, in fact, the moving contradiction: while on one side it reduces labor time to a minimum on the other it wants to use labor time as the sole measure of wealth.

That is, the very moment capital does away with labor *in production*, it attempts to impose labor again as *a form of control of the working class*.

Let us leave the question of what Marx “really meant” aside for Marxologists to consider. We are interested in how the “necessary tendency” is specified in the class relation we are living in. *In the crisis*, this tendency reaches its highest peak, and the production of wealth without labor is recognized as the *dominant mode of production*. The working class perspective of *no work*, then is neither a Communist utopia nor a capitalist tendency. It is simply the new basis of material production.

As we have seen, however, capital turns such amazing new productivity into a multinational *redistribution of scarcity*; this scarcity is then used to *enforce work* on the class. This is the basic contradiction in the class relation today: on the one hand, laborless production liberating capital from labor as a value-producing activity; on the other hand, enforcement of work as an instrument of political control. This is the reason for the tremendous emphasis that the capitalist perspective places on *more work* as the way out of the crisis. It is not at all a question of capital’s “false consciousness”: more work is absolutely crucial for any capitalist “solution” of the crisis. But what is “work”, then, when it is no longer productive activity?

It is imposition of political control in its purest form: forced activity for the working class and re-affirmation of capital’s power as control over the class. When the productive appearance and economic justification of labor are taken away what is left is the general political characteristic of the capitalist relation, defined by Marx (with regard to factory work) as “*regimentation,... discipline, regularity, and posited dependence ... on capital*.”⁴⁵ In a word, what is left is the exercise of capital’s command as the power to control the

political behavior of the class and so to contain the anti-capitalist struggle. The economists are right when they are asking for more work. This is precisely what capital needs: more control over the working-class struggle.

Capital's doing away with labor, or the separation of working class and production, is not the result of any abstract "scientific progress." On the contrary, it is a result of the struggle of the working class. This is why the capitalist outcome of the "necessary tendency" can not be full "automation" (capital's long-standing dream of ultimate technological achievement), but it must be the imposition of work which is the assertion of capital's control over the class through the crisis.

Crisis in the Auto Sector

Peter Linebaugh & Bruno Ramirez

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"To conclude with Chrysler's offer in Britain is justified only because its crisis shows again how the capitalist project can be ten times more daring than the 'utopian' planning of the Left. In Britain the Chrysler workers told management to stick to their offer and demanded more money instead. Money, no longer the "defensive economic" demand of social democratic ancient history, is power. It was the demand that catapulted the international cycle of struggle ten years or so ago. Chrysler's offer of profit-and management sharing is a desperate attempt to maintain the illusory separation between power or politics and cash or economics."

The current auto crisis has its most immediate roots in the type of control that auto producers sought to impose on their workforce during the last decade. Fundamentally, the crisis reflects an impasse in the relations of power between capital and the working class, an impasse which in recent years has been made more visible by the ongoing upsurge of autoworkers' struggles. Clearly, the expansion that the auto industry experienced internationally during the Sixties rested on a number of factors that were not destined to last.⁴⁸

One such element was auto capital's remarkable mobility on an international level in search of geographical areas which not only would provide cheap and fresh sources of labor power but would also guarantee the stability of accumulation. Another element, particularly in the industrialized areas, was auto capital's access to fresh supplies of labor power whose characteristics made it prone, at least in the short run, to high levels of exploitation.

In Europe during the Sixties immigrant labor performed this function of expansion for the auto industry. As the *Economist's Intelligence Unit* (second report) explains,

The plentiful supply of relatively undemanding labour, young and hard working, has favoured a degree of economic development that would not have been possible without them. They have increased productivity by removing labour bottlenecks and have encouraged capital investment by being more prepared to work night shifts. They have kept wage levels from rising too fast and at the same time have

48 We have found the following books useful. William Serrin, *The Company and the Union* (1973), Emma Rothschild, *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto-Industrial Age* (1974), Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit I do mind Dying* (1975), Huw Beynon, *Working for Ford* (1973), and John Mathews, *Ford Strike: The Workers' Story* (1972).

enabled European workers to move into higher skilled jobs. They have been less demanding on the social services because of their age structure and have been prepared because of their mobility to move in and out of short-life jobs.

While we cannot say that the struggles of autoworkers *everywhere* in the Sixties operated as the mass working class vanguard, organizing and unifying struggles in other sectors, nevertheless to one degree or another in different national settings the manpower planning that led to the exploitation of fresh labor power in autos quickly backfired detonating struggles which bypassed capital's development plans and established an international cycle of struggle. Iberian, Arabic, African, and Yugoslavian workers at Billancourt broke the impasse of union/skilled-mechanics control established in the French auto industry after 1968. Mediterranean and Finnish migrant workers imposed the deadlock in Sweden's auto industry that capital sought to escape in its "worker's self-management" project. At Fiat Mirafiori and at Alfa Romeo in Milan the Hot Autumn (1969) found its material basis in the labor migration from the South. West Indian, Pakistani, and Indian workers in British Fords have provided a basis for the renewal of struggle following the defeats (1971) in the English motor industry over grading standards, manning levels, and measured day work.

In North America manpower policies in the auto industry were not as clear cut, but the correlation between productive expansion and exploitation of new labor supplies was equally operative. For the tens of thousands of youth, blacks, and women who throughout the 1960s flocked into the auto industry, getting a job in a car plant meant in many cases entering for the first time a stable wage relation. It was a forced route to put an end to their state of wagelessness and its price was extremely high, first for the workers and later

for capital. This political dynamics — i.e. a wage relationship in exchange for intense exploitation — lies at the root of the attitudes of these workers toward work and of the content of their struggles. What capital had characterized as “undemanding and hard-working labor,” would soon reveal its quality of insubordination and refusal, increasingly taking the form of a class strategy for more money and less work, for less productivity and more income. The wage ceased to be a relation of exchange and became a lever of power. At first imposed by capital as a necessary condition of accumulation, the wage relation was overturned by workers into a material basis which allowed them to struggle against work and productivity. In the United States the combination of fresh labor power in the auto factories (“niggermation”) and the formation of concentrated labor reserves (“the Inner City”) found its political expressions in the municipal insurrections on the one hand (Detroit 1967, etc.) and the organization of an autonomous struggle in the plants (DRUM, FRUM, etc. 1967-1969) on the other.

In a very real sense, the struggles of black auto workers in Detroit have much in common with the struggles led by young immigrant workers in Turin or Cologne. Their subversion of the wage relationship has been the overwhelming expression of their refusal to accept auto capital’s despotic control, and has clearly revealed the international dimension of this cycle of class confrontation.

Throughout the late Sixties and the early Seventies the relations of power between capital and workers in both North America and in Europe pivot around this class dynamics — a dynamics which is not broken by the periodic contractual solutions which capital seeks to force upon it. It will be the crisis of 1974 which will provide capital with the means to impose a solution through the strategy of mass layoffs and terrorism.

Capital's Characterization of the Crisis

“We stand on the brink of an historic crisis for American capitalism, and the brink is crumbling.” Thus announced the chairman of the board of Merrill, Lynch, Pierce, Fenner, and Smith to President Ford’s Financial Summit Conference on Inflation of September 1974. George Bach told the same conference that “although special developments like the recent food and energy crises may temporarily dominate price movements, the fundamental cause of inflation in the U.S. (and most other major industrial countries) is ‘excess income claims.’” It is a fact that all capitalist planners recognize. The *International Economic Report of the President* (February 1974) made it clear that neither the basic material shortages nor the food crisis were primary causes of the crisis: it is one of “excess demand over supply.”⁴⁹

In classic terms we might say that the crisis is characterized by an unprecedented decline in the rate of exploitation, and this, like “under-consumption” and “over-production,” is obvious in the auto sector as it is always an aspect of the appearance of crisis. Two aspects of the current crisis, however, are worth emphasizing. First, the worsening drop in social productivity is accompanied by the continual rise of income demands. Second, a corollary to the first, the traditional mechanisms of global and national planning are no longer

49 In addition to the works cited in the text, this section relies on material supplied in *Business Week* (5 October 1974); National Commission on Productivity, 2nd *Annual Report* (1973); *The Michigan State Economic Record* (November-December 1974); Edward Gramlich, “The Distributional Effects of Higher Unemployment,” *American Economic Review* (September 1973); and Arthur Okun, “Unemployment and Output in 1974,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (1974).

adequate to assure accumulation as they were during the Keynesian recessions of 1957/58, 1960/61, and 1969/70.

The failure of traditional mechanisms (fiscal policy, monetary policy, and incomes policy) was reflected through 1974 by the disruptions of traditional relationships. Unemployment and output failed to maintain their expected ratio as real GNP dropped more sharply than employment. The question that troubled economists was not why employment held up but why it didn't plummet. Neither average weekly hours worked nor the size of the social labor force explained the discrepancy. During the first two quarters of 1974 the unexpected mildness of unemployment was attributed directly to the decline in productivity. At the same time the six year plateau of average percentage wage increases (6% per annum) jumped to 9.6% in the second quarter of 1974.

"As a consequence of the highly structured and institutionalized nature of the labor market, wages respond with a relatively long lag to their economic determinants," said Michael Wachter in *The Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 2 (1974). Workers power is revealed in "The nonlinear response of wages to unemployment." The workers' struggle ceased to appear merely as a factor of demand management, guaranteeing development. Raising its head among the councils of economic planners, its voice becomes inexplicable to them. One of Ford's advisors characterized the demand for income as a "divine right." The decline in American social productivity has attributed to what a former head of the Conference Board could only call "intangible forces."

The capitalist solution to this power was clear at least in principle: more work and less money. This was the advice of Gaylord Freeman (First National Bank of Chicago). In the face of inflation and

stagnation planning must be designed to “1. stimulate productivity and 2. moderate consumption.” Arthur Okun says the same: “you have to push the economy down far enough to create enough idle labor and enough idle capital to hold down prices and wages.” Within this necessity the moment is fraught with opportunity and danger. “While few doubt,” another economist told us, “that a sufficiently long period of high unemployment will eventually dampen inflation, many fear the social consequences.”

A sixth of U.S. jobs, a sixth of GNP, a sixth of every retail dollar is locked in the auto industry. A fifth of American steel, a third of zinc, a tenth of aluminum, two-thirds of rubber is tied to autos. The auto industry and its suppliers have integrated within a single circuit the social division of labor. Organized as a working class in the struggle against capital, it has thrown the “auto sector” into crisis. On the surface the crisis appears as a problem of the market. The demand market is disturbed by changing purchase patterns that dislocate long term growth. The supply market is upset as the balance of forces between Detroit and its suppliers (oil on one hand, parts suppliers on the other) shifts in favor of the latter. Federal environmental safety and pollution standards interrupt pricing and profit expectations. Or, the crisis appears as an historical irrationality of social planning that has produced an infrastructure of bad air, bad cities, and bad country: a Paradise Lost.⁵⁰ In fact, it is a crisis of capital and this is but an expression of a strategic leap in workers’ struggle.

50 This for example is the point of view of Emma Rothschild in *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto-Industrial Age* (1974).

Two Responses to Working Class Power

1. The Imposition of Productivity by "Global Flows"

The most spectacular route that auto capital has found in its search for the re-establishment of the wage/ productivity relation is at the international level. By the late Sixties this had become dazzling in its possibilities. Auto executives spoke of "the Latin American market," "the Pacific market," and with growing confidence of "the socialist market." Here they saw accumulation without the limitations imposed by the power of the American or European working class. Seeking to escape those limitations they sought to manipulate forms of struggle at an international level that could propel development at a national level. It is within this perspective, not that of the organizational novelty of the 'multinational corporation' nor that of its financial supersession of the nation-state, that the problem of "global reach" should be seen.⁵¹ By 1972 the international deployment of capital is characterized by accommodation to the most varied of political settings and by the international integration of production outside of the traditional market.

Perhaps nowhere is this illustrated as well as in Latin America. Though its plants are under military protection and "instability" threatens the future, Ford is able to maintain a 37% rate of profit in

51 We refer to Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller, *Global Reach: the Power of the Multinational Corporations* (1975). This section relies on information contained in the annual reports of General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. Here as elsewhere the industry's *Automotive Age* is more informative than the Union's solidarity. *Fortune* (November 1974) contains important articles on capitalist accumulation in the Soviet Union. *Motor Business*, a publication of the Economist Intelligence Unit, maintains an international perspective.

Argentina. The Brazilian path to development has been spearheaded by autos. "The automotive industry [having] managed to overcome the political difficulties of the early 1960s," as the Economist Intelligence Unit reported, output has increased since 1966 at an average rate of 20% per annum. In 1971 GM earmarked \$1.1 billion for investment in operations for N. E. Brazil. GM production increased by 24% in 1974 over 1973. VW, the leader of Brazilian auto production, had by 1974 transferred its engine and transmission operations, even for the German market, to Brazil. In September 1974 *Automotive News* reported the rumour that VW intended to transfer its entire German market production to Brazil. *Business Latin America*, the "Weekly Report to Managers of Latin American Operations," reported that the rate of return on investment (ROI) was higher in 1974 in Latin America than in any place in the world.

A low ROI is the form in which the crisis of Soviet growth appears to its planners. Thus last year Brezhnev rapped the knuckles of Soviet industrialists for the "ever lower rate of return on investment." Technological imports and detente is their response to the "factor productivity losses" of the late Sixties and early Seventies. Togliatti exchanged a Fiat built factory for a Russian built city. The Kama river truck plant, a \$4 billion facility with a \$1 billion city, follows the same pattern: Russian *planned variable capital* and Western *planned constant capital*. U.S. foundry designs, furnaces, vats, gear-making machines; German forge presses and transmission machinery; French welding and paint lines; Italian conveyor systems; Japanese press lines: thus international capital organizes the under-employed agricultural workers of the Tartar plains. Already, in the inflation of imported components the Russians begin to import the Western crisis: the opportunity for each is that through detente and the crisis accumulation can be re-established.

The organization of fresh labor power (Tartar plainsmen, Brazilian Indians) can no longer be approached merely as the exploitation of the “Third World.” The threefold division of the world is long obsolete. On the one hand Agnelli plans in response to the removal of \$60 billion from the industrial circuit of the West to the Mid-East, and on the other hand, the *Economist* speaks of the “Latin Americanization” of Europe and “Banana Republicanitis” in America.

Spain illustrates the extraordinary rapidity with which capital can respond to the struggles within a particular political setting. In the early Seventies Spain was Ford’s weapon against Britain: straighten out “industrial relations,” Henry Ford told Edward Heath, or we move to Spain. And indeed construction began for a stamping and assembly plant in Valencia for operation in 1976. However, capital soon learned that raw Spanish labor power is one thing in North European factories and quite another in Spain. Mini-strikes, slow-downs, and sit-ins attacked accumulation throughout 1973 and 1974. Arson shut down production in Leyland’s plant in Pamplona and at Renault’s plant in Valladolid. By the summer of 1974 the *Economist* reported that the “outlook for labour relations is not sunny.” At the end of the year *Automotive News* said that Ford and GM were “having second thoughts” about Spain. While in Britain it was rumored that the Shah of Iran wanted to buy Leylands (something the government had to do eventually), Leylands’ negotiations to sell its Spanish subsidiaries to GM collapsed. Fiat, established longest in Spain, attempted in ‘74 to retool its Barcelona plants for higher productivity while simultaneously importing North African labor. This strategy, the basis of the north European boom of the Sixties, now has limited prospects.

A certain naïveté of capitalist planning in the Sixties has passed. *Business Europe*, the “Weekly Report to Managers of European Operations,” at the end of 1974 featured an article “How to Assess Developing Areas.” It advised: 1) “make generous allowances for absenteeism” and 2) “be realistic about local productivity levels.”

Capital can no longer count on new labor power in “less developed countries”: it can attempt at the international level to manipulate various national working classes. Within a couple of years it learns that Spain cannot be auto’s window to North Africa and the Mid-East.

Of Ford’s and Fiat’s European operations Turkey suffered the least in 1974. GM announced agreement in Iran in 1973 for the establishment of distribution and assembly plants in Teheran. Production began in 1974. GM production in Saudi Arabia is scheduled to commence in 1976. Assembly plants in Zaire have begun operating. The flexibility of auto’s international planning cannot be anticipated from the appearance of particular regimes. In “industrial” South Africa for example there are “deep rooted problems in shortages of white skilled labor.” Non-white workers at low wages “are far from being cheap labour when productivity (and mistakes) are taken into account.” Increased income and productivity for non-white workers, this is “the cross roads at which the whole South African economy now stands,” according to the Economist’s Intelligence Unit.

One response in the crisis, then, has been this attempt to re-establish an adequate level of accumulation by the deployment of capital in space. The second is the reorganization of capital in time.

2. Job "Revolutions" and the Technological Imposition of Productivity

"The rising costs due to the levels of absenteeism, labor turnover, wasteful work practices and sabotage," the heritage of the working class offensive of 1964-69 as described by the National Commission on Productivity, has resulted in a growth in output per man hour in manufacturing in the U.S. that is lower (1971-1972) than that in Japan, France, Germany or Britain. The Nixon Commission on Productivity, the Nixon 1971 Labor Day address, the 1972 Kennedy subcommittee on "workers' alienation" make it clear that the "quality-of-work" discussion is the ideological representation of capital's desire to seek a larger room of maneuver for the intensification of labor.⁵²

The attempt to re-impose the wage/productivity relation through job design and the intensification of the working day has taken two forms. One of these is represented by Lordstown under GMAD management and another is Sweden's Saab and Volvo modular production units. Each of these forms not only represent solutions to the same international "bottleneck" but attempt via the increased "organic composition" of capital to establish discipline by intensifying work.

Amid some quarters of the "left" each of these two tactics of a single strategy takes on the appearance of the "capitalist problem"

52 Harry Baker, "Job Enrichment and Job Satisfaction," *Personnel Practice Bulletin* (June 1974); N.V. Philips's Psychological Department, "The Influence of Assembly Line Organization on Output, Quality and Morale," *Occupational Psychology* (1964); and "Job Redesign on the Assembly Line: Farewell to Blue-Collar Blues?" *Organizational Dynamics* (fall 1973) have been useful from the point of view of describing capitalist planning

and the “socialist solution.” Alienated labor on the assembly line finds its answer in workers’ control of production.⁵³ While the technological imposition of productivity only intensified the struggle in North America (as we shall see) its Swedish variation was an unprecedented, expensive, response to an unprecedented problem, and as such it is unlikely to be generalized. Nevertheless, it is important that it be clarified if only to remove any lingering mystifications that it is still able to produce.

Pehr Gyllenhamar, Volvo’s director, summed up the crisis of the Swedish auto industry during the late Sixties as “nothing less than the probability that most people would refuse to work at all.” One third of Volvo’s payroll had to be recruited annually. By 1969 turnover reached 52%. One seventh of the workforce was carried as a reserve against unannounced absenteeism. Manpower policy alone was insufficient to the crisis. 80% of Saab’s workers at its engine plant were women. 60% of the workers in the industry as a whole were Finnish or Yugoslav. Yet “absenteeism with pay,” as Gyllenhamar bitterly remarked, was the working class answer. The companies were forced to a deeper strategic answer.

The de-fractionalization of work whose ideological garb — job enrichment, job rotation, modular production — has provided the dress not only of countless personnel schools but of sections of the

53 S. Aronowitz, *False promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (1973) is the clearest elaboration of this viewpoint. “Young auto workers have neither challenged the object of their labor (the production of cars), nor have they transcended the inevitability of submitting to the old methods of production” (p. 409). In fact, the latter has become a minor part of the *capitalist* project during the crisis precisely because of the previous *success* of the auto workers’ assault on productivity

“left,” was gradually imposed in salient sites of production. Workers’ power based on the long assembly line (mechanical cooperation) was removed by the installation of shorter lines guaranteeing that the flow of production could be maintained despite breakdowns or interruptions. Group piece work at the Lunbyverken truck assembly plant with some group flexibility in the determination of production standards has been established. Variations in the average speed of groups of workers (“balancing losses”) and variations in the average speed of the individual worker (“system losses”) are reduced by the shorter lines, separated by buffer stock areas, and group payments methods. Workers’ informal organization became the basis of the capitalist re-organization of work to reproduce the value relation within the labor process. The counter planning on the shop floor of the Sixties becomes capitalist planning of exploitation in the Seventies.

The great expense of this strategy was long a drawback to its implementation. At Volvo’s Kalmar assembly plant, the largest and most daring commitment of capital, plant construction under the modular production design is estimated to cost 10% more than conventional design. 90% of all tasks will be automated.

The second variation of the technological imposition of productivity is in part the history of working class struggles in North America during the last three or four years.

The Power Relation As Refracted in the ‘73 “Auto Talks”

Despotism in the market and anarchy in the plant, the inversion of the traditional capitalist relationship, summarizes the industry’s problem during the early Seventies and expresses in part an aspect of victories obtained by the class during the Sixties. George Morris,

director of GM's Labor Relations Department, attempted to bring despotism back to the factory. Arguing in 1971 against an incomes policy on the grounds that it would eliminate "management's responsibility to manage," he restated the relation between income and work in the context of industrial bargaining. "The more control there is from the outside on wages and economic matters," he wrote, "the more pressure there is from the union on all the other issues."⁵⁴

In 1970 faced with 2500 non-wage demands by the international union and 39,000 demands by locals, a victorious settlement on overtime, productivity, and the maintenance of "efficiency and discipline" presupposed freedom in wage bargaining. The contract of that year contained a provision of the first importance to GM. "We insisted that an organized effort be made to improve employee job attitudes and reduce absenteeism, which in our industry has doubled in the past nine years." An "orientation" program, jointly administered by the union and management, was introduced to encourage attendance and quality workmanship. Here is a first step in the introduction of the Union within the strategy against the workers' refusal to work.

No longer merely the institutional organ of variable capital the company is forced to invite the union to join it in the direct management of the enterprise. This becomes the cornerstone of GM's position in the 1973 negotiations. Its statement to the Union

54 George Morris, "Controls or Collective Bargaining—Restrictions and Realities," The Conference Board 1971. See also General Motors Statement to the UAW, 26 July 1973; the "GM Personnel Development Bulletin," 3 February 1972; and GM Oldsmobile Division, "Absenteeism and Turnover: Control Program Report" (November 1971).

(26 July 1973), even before the summer and fall wildcats, is extremely important:

The mutuality of interest between the employee, the UAW and General Motors is more apparent as we enter these 1973 negotiations than at any time since the beginning of our collective bargaining relationship in 1937.

The rest of the statement spells out that “mutuality” and provides the specific terrain upon which the struggle had been fought in the previous years. It is expressed in a terminology that need not be “spelled out” but only inverted in order to see the class accomplishments in the collective refusal.

First, it complains of “restrictive practices” against changes in equipment and technology, practices organized at the local level. Between 1963 and 1972 the number of written grievances doubled from 138,000 to 264,000. These must be settled without “disruptions” of the “production process.” The workers’ use of “other forums” for settling grievances must end and union control established. Committeemen must take an active role with supervisory personnel in grievance settlement at the moment the complaint is made. Second and Third step grievance meetings must be held more regularly.

Second, two issues of union representation must be settled. Union work centers (provided since the 1967 contract) have been used “by unauthorized persons for improper purposes.” The liberalization of representation, high wages to committeemen, increases in representation time, and an increase of representatives, all allowed since 1970, have failed to reduce grievances or to expedite their settlement.

Third, disputes about production standards, the collapse of efficiency of operations, and the disintegration of quality threaten to destroy both union control and company power. In “certain plants” disruptions have caused “deterioration of collective bargaining” and “virtual breakdown of the grievance procedure.”

Fourth, neither the company nor the union benefit from the turnover rate. Only their cooperation can discipline the “transients who float from job to job.” A longer probationary period and a greater differential between the “hiring rate” and the “job rate” can attack this problem.

Fifth, the workers’ use of the social wage has become a method of generalizing the refusal to work and an attack on wage-planned discipline. “Increased utilization” of HSMD (Hospital-Surgical-Medical-Drug) benefits is a “serious and growing problem.” Costs between 1970 and 1972 have increased by 29%. The duplication between company benefits and state compensation has resulted in the provision of an income without work and an income during retirement that is greater than the income of working years. 52% of contested claims in Michigan involve retirees. 75% of voluntary retirees in Michigan also filed for workmen’s compensation. The increase of allegations of accidents and injury, as well as the payment of benefits to “employees who are well enough to work,” has spread the workers’ enforced separation between income and production to the older, traditional sections of the class.

The invitation to the union to join with the company in the reestablishment of their joint control, “the mutuality of interest,” came after the company’s unilateral failure to establish ‘the despotism of the workshop’ or management’s responsibility to manage.

The GM Absenteeism/Turnover Task Force (1969-1972) was a failure. Absenteeism cost the company \$50 million in fringe benefits alone. Turnover, at a conservative estimate, cost the company \$29 million, "Social attitudes," tax exemptions, the increase of accident benefits, the increasing number of women employed, "job hopping," different values, "refusal of hard work," medical restrictions, the straightjacketing of the foreman's flexibility in "manpower assignments," these produced the crisis. The response was twofold and a twofold failure.

In pilot programs the company tries to manipulate workers' collectivity and then to individualize workers. Sensitivity groups and rap sessions, organized as PRIDE ("Personal Responsibility in Defect Elimination"), were successful among Oldsmobile workers only insofar as workers participating in the program could get paid for rapping and "sensitizing" but not working. "The importance of treating the new hire as an individual" resulted in SPEC ("Supervisors Personal Employee contact"). The "Buddy System" was successful in reducing absenteeism and turnover among probationary hires but at the prohibitive cost of assigning one supervisor to every new worker.

"To end managing by fear," this is the *Wall Street Journal's* formulation of the policy of Gene Cafiero, a Chrysler executive. In the fall of 1972 at Dodge Main in Hamtramck he introduced in the trim department "planned absenteeism," a pilot group of 350 workers were allowed to take a day off without penalty if it was cleared in advance with the foreman. At the Eldon Avenue axle plant 2,700 workers were regrouped into three independent units in order to "create the environment" of three small plants. Chrysler's 1969 turnover rate was 47%; its absenteeism 8%. If new environments or planned absenteeism renewed Chrysler's control Cafiero failed to tell the *Wall Street Journal*. It was within the context of these failures

that the congruence between the Union's demand "to have a greater say in production" and the Company's "responsibility to manage" was discovered. The '73 wildcats was the workers' answer, an answer that almost put Chrysler under, that more seriously than ever before undermined the union's position, and that resulted in the workers' capture of a principle salient of auto production in Detroit.

The '73 Wildcats

1. Background

The July seizure of the Jefferson Avenue electrical control booth, the August Chrysler forge stoppages, and the August sit-in at the Mack Avenue stamping plant were preceded by an incremental series of working class assaults against the union and the company well before the contract negotiations began. Thus in April Toledo Jeep was struck over "local issues." 4000 workers wildcatted at GM's Lakewood, Georgia, assembly plant over "production standards" during the late spring. In early June the Ford plant at Mahwah was faced with mounting militance and the first of the "heat" walkouts. Overtime protests mounted at GM's Fremont plant, and at Lordstown wildcatting and mass picketing threatened the Union's precarious position. In March Jefferson Avenue was closed for three days in strikes over disciplinary layoffs.⁵⁵

55 In addition to the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *Detroit Free Press* which relative to their usual practise gave the wildcats a broad coverage, the newspapers of militants were fundamental for news of that summer: *Challenge*, *The Call*, and *Workers' Vanguard*. Jack Weinberg, *Detroit Auto-Uprising 1973* is also important.

Of course many of the stoppages that occurred in August and September were anticipated by the Company. A.F. Link of Chrysler's Profit and Investment, Analysis Department, wrote, "industry, through production standard techniques, generally plans for reduced efficiency in certain operations such as foundries during summer months." However, the '73 walkouts were complicated by other elements beyond anticipated production planning: with mounting orders and a record year of sales any interruption of the circuit of productive capital struck immediately at sales and turnover. The one-day Pennsylvania Central strike, the Canadian railworkers strike, and the plastic and petroleum-derived parts shortages were as serious as the stoppages, at least from the point of view of the circuit of productive capital.

However, the political threat to power relations within that circuit extended beyond the loss (in Chrysler's case) of 135,000 cars and trucks. For the first time the class struggle in autos was militarized outside the plants with the Union providing the advance guard of capital.

2. The Jefferson Avenue Assault

On 24 July 1973 Ike Shorter and Larry Carter, two spot welders, locked themselves in the wire cage housing of the main power switch that controlled the welding assembly line. 5000 workers were idled. They demanded amnesty for themselves and the immediate discharge of Tom Woolsey, a racist supervisor. Shorter and Carter could not be forcibly removed as workers from the department mobilized in a surrounding cordon.

Some months earlier Woolsey was assigned to the spot welding section to tighten discipline and speed up production. The feeder line

in the section was running at an average of 100 jobs per day behind the scheduled rate. Woolsey was well-known as a militant cadre in the productivity drive that started in 1972. At that time plant-wide line speed increased from 56.5 jobs per hour to 65.5 while manpower increased from 5400 to 5900. In the arithmetic of productivity this meant a speed-up of 7% (production up 16%, manpower up 9%) which was translated into a loss of four seconds per worker per job. Everyone was put in the hole.

Individual rebels against this got the I-T-D treatment: interview, threat, and discipline. Post-Christmas disciplinary firings were answered by walkout in the motor line department. The Local and the International ended the four day strike with Woolsey's help as finger-man. Weeks later the second shift in the metal shop sat down and refused to work. Woolsey was sent to the metal shop. In the summer, when he was sent to the welding line, Carter and Shorter replied.

Within hours Chrysler capitulated to the demands. Carter and Shorter were re-instated. Woolsey was fired.

The industry and the union were shocked. Ford reprimanded its sister company: "We believe very strongly there is no virtue in rewarding a resort to self-help." Fraser told Chrysler: "if you surrender to this type of blackmail there is no end to it." Within days the Union announced (what had been suspected for months) that it had chosen Chrysler for its '73 target company. In the months ahead the union will scramble madly to regain control over the auto workers, for what was unprecedented by the Shorter/ Carter incident was the Company's decision to deal without Union mediation of the struggle: management's responsibility to manage supersedes the union's management of the struggle.

3. The Lynch Road Forge Plant Walkout

On 7 August 1973 the midnight shift refused to work starting a six day walkout. Record 'profits and record production in 1973 meant continuous operation at three shifts a day, seven days a week for six months at the Forge Plant. Accidents increased. Repair and maintenance work was kept to a minimum. Wiring remained uninsulated. Oil slicks developed into puddles throughout the plant floor. Overhead cranes broke down spilling steel loads onto walkways. The local union contained the grievance problem by refusing to write them up.

At Lynch Road 1500 workers were out threatening the layoff of 40,000 other Chrysler workers. In the second week of August only the combined efforts of a Federal Court Injunction, the mobilization of the Local union, and the direct intervention of Doug Fraser brought the forge workers back to work.

4. The Mack Avenue Sit-In.

On 14 August Bill Gilbreth sat down on the line of the welding department at the Mack Avenue stamping plant. The entire department was mobilized by the action against the plant guards and then against the police. Chrysler decided to shut down the entire plant, even though 90% of the plant could have remained open (heterogeneous cooperation). The shut down was a political response designed to isolate the department and to prevent the circulation of the struggle.

At the Mack Avenue, as at Lynch Road and Jefferson Avenue, the struggle must be placed within the history of struggles since the 1972 productivity offensive. Since that time plant conditions deteriorated in direct relation to productivity drives. The press room was forced

on a seven day schedule. Others were on a six day week with long hours. The presses leaked oil. The roof leaked. Hi-lows drove with faulty brakes. Scrap accumulated in the aisles. The high-pressure air-lines screeched through the plant as leaks were left unrepaired. In late '72 when a die setter was killed by a bolster plate blowing loose cutting off his head, the flash point was provided that set up an unofficial safety committee. On 7 June 1973 a walkout of the second shift in the press room protested the conditions that removed two fingers from a woman working a bad press. On 10 August, four days before the sit-in, workers organized pickets around the Local Union Hall.

The occupation of the framing department, the result of Chrysler's decision to close the plant, was easily cleared by a neat and efficient police operation. But the Union, its credibility already seriously weakened, needed a show of strength and above all to re-establish its position over the struggle.

5. The Union's Terrorization of the Struggle.

To prevent mass picketing, the intensification of the struggle, and its extension through the industry, Fraser and Mazey personally lead a thousand "loyal unionists" (characterized by militants and the press as "goons," "gestapo," and "Klanners") in squads of flying pickets throughout Detroit. Pickets and militants were terrorized at plant gates throughout the twenty-two Chrysler Detroit plants. Here is the militance of the Thirties brought to life in the Seventies. Strategy and tactics are identical, only the object of struggle has changed.

Despite this historical show of force the movement rapidly spread. One quarter of GM plants were closed in August and September. Three of fifteen Ford assembly plants closed in August.

Walkouts shut down three American Motors plants. Warren truck, Dodge Main, and Windsor car, truck, and engine all closed. To be sure it coincided with changeover, but during this boom year the struggle was no longer contained within “production standard technique planning.”

Militants during the summer sought and found a practice that transcended the limitations of the ‘union opposition caucus.’ As Shorter said, “sometimes we’ll use the union, sometimes we won’t.” But even the traditional Union opposition, or at least its social base within the skilled trades, found new strength in the general summer mobilization. The “skilled trades problem” brought to the surface the second overt form of militarized struggle. When Local 160 (the technical center local) and the skilled trades of the River Rouge complex failed to ratify the ‘73 contract the Union had no choice but to renege on the 1967 agreement giving them veto rights and to bring out pistols to enforce a new vote. They were excluded from the early retirement benefits negotiated in the contract. Their position was further eroded by the ‘secret letters of understanding’ between the union and the companies that permitted sub-contracting and unlimited ‘up-grading,’ in cases where skilled tradesmen refused overtime. Indeed the much touted limitations on overtime were in fact attacks upon workers’ collectivity, “voluntary overtime” being permitted only “separately and individually, without collusion, conspiracy or agreement with, or the influence of, any other employee or the Union.”

The skilled trades massively rejected the contract. This was the first time in the history of the UAW that this had happened, a contract rejected at ratification. The Union of course sought to impose its will in a re-vote. When an official of Local 600 drew a

pistol against a Dearborn millwright, Canadian TV recorded for the world this new union violence against the working class.

Violence itself was not new. With 65 deaths a day in the American auto plants, violence during the Sixties was mainly a question of the violence of technology. But the growing armament of both the working class and the union *within* the plant is new. Pistols were brandished at the meeting between the International and the local leadership at River Rouge. The president of a Michigan Casting Center Local shot a militant during a re-vote. The International established control over the St. Louis local after a show of arms. Walter Reuther's picture was torn from the wall at a local Michigan union hall. The locks were smashed at Solidarity House in an attempt to gain entrance. The submerged guerrilla warfare present in the plants broke out in the open during the summer of '73. A tool and die maker told the *New York Times*: "Before they tied us up with rope. Now they tie us up with chains. It's a dictatorship. Forty years ago you could lead people around by the nose. You can't do it anymore." He was referring to the Union.

Ever since the secession threats by the Skilled Tradesmen during the 1955 settlement, the Union had continually attempted to appease their demands. Union thinking was especially concerned with this because it had become clear that the basis of Union growth in the future would have to depend on its ability to organize not just the traditional skilled metal workers but the growing ranks of engineers, technicians, and office workers. Indeed, the union in '73/'74 won several small machine and plant design workers in enterprises. The President of one of these, Solar Engineering, an independent Michigan company of auto product and machine design, welcomed the unionization of designers and draftmen. The higher costs would result in increased competitiveness and the improvement of design

quality. The presence of the Union, he told *Automotive News*, will improve “flow” among shop services and stabilize the high turnover of manpower.

The outburst of autonomous struggle, the collapse of union authority in mediation, its attempt to regain control by terror, and the transformation of traditional opposition centers these were the events that immediately preceded the “crisis” of 1974, its speed-ups and lay-offs at the plant, its inflation and uncertainty at the social level.

The Crisis and the Momentum Struggle in '74

1. A Chronology of Strikes

The failure of both inflation and unemployment to reduce work stoppages during the first ten months of 1974 is made clear by comparing them to similar figures over 1973. The number of stoppages increased by 8%. The number of workers involved increased by 48%. The number of man days idle increased by 88%. Indeed the number of workers involved in stoppages in 1974 had in its first ten months already begun to approach the annual number for the years, 1967-1971, the highest cycle of stoppages, excepting 1946, in postwar history.

An external chronology of strikes during 1974, though necessarily incomplete, is an adequate representation of the fact that the economists’ “lags” and “nonlinear responses” are only capital’s tags indicating that workers’ power has burst through the stop-go syndrome and Keynesian management. A partial list follows:

March	New Haven, Michigan	wildcat at foundry against local contract, racism, and speed-up
25 March	Warner Gear	strike slowing national truck production
5 April	St. Louis	“sick out” at GMAD Corvette against speed-up
April	Cleveland	Black and Puerto Rican workers respond to lay-offs by laying off machines at turret lathe plant
April	Kansas City	GM Leeds Plant, Chevrolet, local strike over local grievances
13 May	Detroit	Fisher Body Fleetwood struck closing Cadillac and Oldsmobile as production schedules increase
May	Kansas City	Ditto
June	Chicago	Stamping plant struck over 1000 grievances about speed-up, lay-offs, discipline, and safety
June	Kalamazoo	Checker Motors struck
11 June	Warren, Michigan	Wildcat at Dodge truck
28 June	St. Louis	GM Corvette struck
12 July	Lordstown	6 week strike begins over 11,000 grievances
August	Budd Kitchenor	1,600 wildcat for 3 days at body and wheel component plant
August	Cleveland	Junking, shipping and sabotage greet speed-up at stamping plant
1 August	Wanwatosha, Wisconsin	Briggs & Stratton, auto machine tool plant, struck over local contract
6 September	St. Louis	End of 9 week GMAD strike
16 September	Kenosha, Wisconsin	17,000 American Motors workers strike through month
September	Milwaukee	A.O.Smith, auto and truck frames, struck, closing Jefferson Avenue

23 September	Franklin, Indiana	Arvin Industries struck, makes of tailpipes, mufflers, catalytic converters, interrupts production at 3 Chrysler assembly plants and 3 Ford plants
26 September	Anderson, Indiana	4 day strike at GM Delco, producers of starters, ignitions, and generators
28 September	Gary, Indiana	Slowdown and sitdown at Ford Galaxy
29 September	Oakland, Fremont	Woman workers sue GM for discriminatory lay-offs
30 September	Oakland	Wildcats protesting overtime
4 October	Long Island City	Wildcat against Standard Motors
October	Framingham, Massachusetts	GM Buick and Oldsmobile assembly struck

Clearly, the empiricism of the struggle based on the Union's *Solidarity* or the industry's *Automotive News* barely scratches the surface of the breadth of struggles through the North American plants.⁵⁶ Reports of militants in Windsor, Oakville, Cleveland, St. Louis, make it clear that much of workers' subversion of productivity occurred on a departmental basis whose appearance in broken production quotas at the plant level the industries conceal from public accounting. Globally, the struggle appears simply as "crisis", and as such is interpreted as a problem of markets or "demand." A brief discussion of some individual strikes makes it clear that the workers' infiltration against productivity belongs to a struggle to which the crisis is

56 In addition, *The Newsletter* (Toronto, April 1974), *Network: Voice of UAW Militants*, number 1 & 2 (1975), and the pamphlet, *Wildcat: Dodge Truck June 1974* are not only informative but part of the on-going struggle.

an answer. It continues to remain unresponsive to both Union management and government planning.

Some Particular Strikes

At Dodge Truck in Warren, Michigan, 6000 wildcatted for four days, 10-14 June 1974. Demands were not formulated until the third day of the strike. They asked for “everything.” One worker said, “I just don’t want to *work*.” The separation between income and productivity, enforced by the struggle, could not have been clearer.

The wildcat was preceded by a sick-out on the 31 May when the second shift metal shop phoned in sick. This, and the strike, must be set against the background of the productivity drive begun in 1972 and the changed character of the workforce at Warren. Its second shift became younger, more 19-22 year olds, more Viet Vets with a history of fragging their officers behind them, more women and more blacks. During the ‘73 negotiations this working class rejected the contract, but Local 140 threatened to call a Christmas strike and that put the lid on the contract centered strike. Against the passivity of the Local, the workers replied with absenteeism, sabotage, running junk and violence against the foremen. Local 140 had undergone a change in leadership the previous year; the white bureaucrat, Mahaliek, was replaced by “black, fast-talking Willie Stoval.” Yet it is Willie Stoval who in June 1974 lines up with the police to finger the “leaders” of the wildcat strike. Willie Stoval calls the police to organize the ejection of the workers from their Union Hall.

On 17 October 1974 at GM Corvette in St. Louis the workers on final trim sat down and refused to work because their pay check did not include “show-up” time for the previous Wednesday when the Company called them to work and then dismissed them. In twenty

minutes the management capitulated and the checks were adjusted to meet the workers' demand. Nate Mosely a militant at the plant was fired. The workers responded with what the company termed "bad morale" or the shipping of work, and running junk, which lost the company \$1.2 million over the year. The plant's reject area overflowed and Mosley's firing was changed to a temporary disciplinary lay-off.

The extraordinary swiftness of both these victories has to be seen against the accumulated failures of the Union-led struggle at the plant.

As a result of the 1970 contract GM consolidated its Chevy assembly and Fisher Body divisions creating the General Motors Assembly Division (GMAD). The separate divisions allowed far more relative independence to local strikes and organization. It was these local strikes that had been the single greatest obstacle to productivity in GM. Throughout GMAD the results of the new organization quickly materialized. At Norwood, Lordstown, and St. Louis grievances accumulate, the local leadership is put in crisis, and speed-ups and lay-offs occur with little resistance. At St. Louis the same production is maintained after laying off 1000 of the 9200 workforce. The crisis at the locals takes the form either of direct intervention by the International threatening to place the local under trusteeship or in long strikes (as at Lordstown or Norwood) without international backing.

In 1972 when the Union announced its "Apache strategy" it called for a decentralized struggle, staggering the attack on GMAD with mini-strikes, at a time when militants in the locals called for a unified massive strike against the division. Where GM wins centralization, on its side the Union calls for decentralized struggle.

12,300 grievances piled up at St. Louis by 1972. By the end of 1973, 1500 fewer workers than in 1971 produced the same number of cars. GMAD's productivity drive was accompanied by a political personnel policy that sought to divide the night and day shifts by race, by the selective favoring of overtime, short-time, and speed-ups. In April 1974 GMAD attempted a line speed of 25% greater than the day before. A couple of days later the second shift called in sick. In June with 18,000 unresolved grievances the local membership called for a strike. The International crushed the strike, though it went on for weeks. A long strike as those at Norwood and Lordstown a couple of years before would, the Union expected, discipline the local. When the Zone Committeemen, Willie Morganfield, and Irving Bluestone are sent to St. Louis at the end of August they settle the strike without getting anything. Morganfield draws a pistol against Nate Mosely the local leader. The International leaders don't dare use the union hall but instead settle the strike at a downtown motel. The independence of the local, however, was not crushed: the October 17 sit-down dispelled any illusion that the International had regained its authority over the class.

Neither the Warren strike nor the St. Louis strike were atypical: similar accounts might be found in the 1974 history of struggle at Windsor Chrysler, Ford Oakville, Chevy Gear & Axle, and doubtless throughout the industry. The "auto crisis" of overtime/lay-off is international.

Income/Layoff Policy Within the International Perspective

A key aspect of the auto crisis is the political initiative that capital has taken to modify the wage relationship through the policy of massive layoffs.

In North America, thanks to the existence of the SUB mechanism, the current waves of layoffs have not involved thus far any major change in the automakers' wage policies. What is significant in fact is the extent to which the SUB mechanism which was originally designed to cope with minor restructurations related to model changes has so far lent itself to a major process of restructuration in the crisis. In countries where similar mechanisms were lacking, automakers have resorted to policies involving substantial changes in the wage relation. In France, Italy, and Germany the outline of this strategy has become clear: ensure a certain degree of stability of income for the workers as a cover to restructuring policies aimed at obtaining the highest mobility of labor.

What characterizes these layoff policies is their short term aspect. In Italy, Fiat and Alfa Romeo have reached lay-off agreements with the trade unions covering most of the 1975 period. In Germany, VW guarantees the equivalent of one year's pay to workers who agree to be laid off indefinitely. In France the October 1974 agreement between the Industrialist's Association, the Trade Unions, and the Government entitles workers who are laid off on account of industrial reconversion to get up to one year of pay.

What further characterizes these layoffs is the combination of wage and manpower policies that they embody. Thus:

Manpower side:

—reduction of employment levels

* Fiat, by stopping new hirings, has reduced throughout 1974, its workforce by 20,000

* In Germany where the annual rate of turnover in the auto sector is quite high due to the transient character of many auto workers, the separation allowance policy will allow the auto companies to control this process by programming the mass resignation of a substantial section of their work-force.

* At Fiat, the recent agreement on layoff pay entitles the company to transfer workers not just from one plant to another, but also from one sector to another, from one geographical area to another. Given the material hardship that transferred workers encounter, this policy amounts in effect to a 'forced resignation.'

* Recent estimates show that in 1974 European car manufacturers reduced their work-force by 9%, and predict that the reduction for 1975 will be around 13%.

Wage Side:

—The resort to a 'temporary guaranteed income' has the effect of softening the impact of capital's attack on the terrain of wages. — The policy involves a deeper integration of the State and capital

* In France, although the funds for the layoff pay come almost totally from the companies, the intervention of the state has made the policy possible by paying a contribution of 1.71 billion francs—an amount that will cover the first year of operation.

* This integration is more clearly visible in Italy where not only layoff pay funds come from the state (2/ 3's of it), but also the union have a direct role in the management of this policy (they codetermine how many days of layoff the company must resort to, on the basis of inventory levels, and are responsible for providing the "extraordinary labor force" which the company deems necessary to work during layoff days.)

Layoff/ pay policies are therefore the tools capital is using to discipline autoworkers' struggles. It allows capital to maintain the wage relationship within politically tolerable limits, and at the same time push through a major process of restructuration, whose short-term goals are:

- a) reduction of the domestic production base
- b) the forcing of a major increase in the mobility of labor—inside the plants, within the industry, and in the labor market generally.
- c) increase of labor productivity, through the terror of “losing the job”.
- d) undermine the practice of “paid absenteeism.”

In North America the indications are already apparent that these goals are being effected only with difficulty. The SUB cushion is in tatters. In Michigan the State Police guard unemployment offices. The union-organized marches for “More Jobs” is met by workers' cynicism (UAW) or disruptions (AFL-CIO). What can we say in conclusion?

End of the Line

The continuing momentum of workers' struggles through '73 /'74 have shown the weakness of the speed-up and layoff policy in reestablishing accumulation at an acceptable level.

In North America, perhaps the most significant development of this period is the weakening position of the Union in its mediation of the struggle. There are external 'political' signs of this in the growth of opposition caucuses within the International, the emergence of “rank and-file” organizations on the plant level, and the proliferation

of the “Left” within the plants (calling, as often as not, for the rationalization of the crisis—save jobs, spread the GNP, form “unemployment committees”). More symptomatic is the reaction of the industry which is now willing to circumvent the Union’s mediation of the struggle since it has become obvious that the Union can no longer rely on even its ‘historical’ authority. Most serious is the arming of the struggle, within the plants and by the Union.

In North American plants wage and manpower planning attempts to re-establish the income/ productivity relation. Militants—blacks, women, hippies—are laid off or removed from the line, and probies, some fifteen years old, are sent on the line. With no rights to call committeemen, working at 85c an hour less pay, ready for job rotation—this is a last effort to regain control of workers’ power in production. It is doubtful whether the manipulation of the sociology of the work force can overcome the crisis: it backfired in 1970/ 71. In June 1975 The *Detroit Free Press* reported that “both the company and UAW officials are surprised by the paradox of relatively high absenteeism at a time when most workers, nervous about the future seemingly would be working every hour they could.”

The Economist is fond of asking “When will Detroit start closing Britain Down?” and *Business Week* asks “Has Detroit Learned Its Lesson?” The question is no longer the Blue Collar Blues or experimentation in the technical organization of work. Doubt and uncertainty characterize all aspects of capital’s relation to the working class as it struggles to regain its command. Everything from the wage (amount of reserves in the SUB fund, the size of the Automatic Short Week payments, medical benefits, Food Stamps) to lay-offs (temporary, permanent? & what department? what division?) even the site of struggle in the auto industry itself is in doubt. This may be the panic that the enemy seeks to provoke prior to combat or it may

be an actual reflection of the disarray in the strategic headquarters of capitalist planning. Despite the atmosphere of uncertainty, some elements are clear.

Capital must integrate its institutional components—the firm, the union, and the state—in order to determine both the terms of struggle and the site of struggle. The income/layoff policy is designed to reestablish the job as the terrain of contention hoping that the demand for work can be separated from the demand for money. After one year it appears clear that this strategy cannot be accomplished by traditional means. This is why the problem of social command must be presented as the problem of “law and order” and “crime in the streets,” and not only as a problem of jobs and unemployment.

Preparing for the next war on the basis of the lessons from its previous defeat, capital poses the question of the removal of a site of struggle. When will Jefferson Avenue close down? In January, in June, or next year? When will Chrysler go under? When Detroit? Union planning of the struggle seeks to rationalize transportation, that is, it plans for mass transit and small clean cars.⁵⁷ The latter, on the vanguard of the productivity attack in the last four years, precisely means the intensification of work throughout the North American industry. “Mass transit,” whether or not it is developed by existing corporations, will mean the reorganization not only of exploitation in the plant but the removal of the city as a terrain of struggle: there can be no repetition of the insurrections of the Sixties. “Mass transit” of course still sits in the attaché case of the urban planners, and other tools must be brought to play. In Hamtramck urban

57 Aronowitz (p. 428) finds the failure of auto workers to engage in this type of social planning evidence of the “defensive”, “non-revolutionary” character of their struggle.

renewal means the relocation of the black working class vanguard. To effect this more than three-quarters of Federal funds “shared” with the city last year are remitted to the police corps.

While it would be foolish to attempt to describe a timetable for the removal of the working class from the powerful salient it conquered in the Sixties, the assembly line of big autos and its neighboring Inner City, it is clear that not only is something like this envisaged in long-range terms but that the first steps have already been taken to put it into effect. Flexibility of plant location, freedom of plant restructuration, massive labor relocations, the erosion of the city as workers’ terrain, a “union say” in “management’s responsibility to manage,” here already is capital’s attempt to both maintain its power and recapture its hold on a working class that has extended its room of maneuver within and against it.

Industry’s plans must be seen internationally. Of course horizontal and vertical integration are intensified throughout the world and concentration and centralization of firms accelerate within national frameworks. State planning of social capital, “socialism in the auto industry,” is afoot throughout Europe, clear for a number of years in France and Germany, now also in Italy, in Britain where the Labour government must underwrite Leylands, and even in Sweden whose government controls an increasing number of Saab and Volvo shares. Each process doubtless is considered by the American industry for home. In board rooms throughout the world attention is on Chrysler, and not because it is once again sending panic through auto’s financiers or that it may be ripe for plucking. As the weakest, Chrysler loses least in the experimentation that is necessary for the industry as a whole if it is to recapture its position. At Chrysler foreign and domestic operations are united under the authority of a single vice president, that for “planning and development.” The

international division of component manufacture for American assembly, an international factory, has been forced on Chrysler. The *New York Times* writes, "When future products are considered, therefore, the resources and products of Chrysler's worldwide operations will be analyzed to come up with the most economic package." Ford Europe has practiced a policy of double sourcing for several years now, allowing it to circumvent bottlenecks created by faulty "industrial relations" at one component source by having recourse to another. In the Pacific Ford wishes to generalize this strategy in its policy of "regional complementation."

Chrysler's flexibility in the manipulation of international struggles is greatest exactly because it has least to lose. Its recent initiative (June 1975) in Britain is a case in point. It was not the Ryder Report on British Leylands with its coy glance over one shoulder at the workers' control people and its face of determination over the other at "inefficient management practices" that pioneered the Labour government's hesitant steps to "industrial democracy" and the integration of the shop stewards' into management planning: it was Chrysler, "the American multinational giant," that offered profit sharing, joint steward-management control, industrial democracy, and the rest.

To conclude with Chrysler's offer in Britain is justified only because it illustrates again how the capitalist project can be ten times more daring than the 'utopian' planning of the Left. In Britain however the Chrysler workers told management to stick their offer and demanded more money instead. Money, no longer the "defensive economic" demand of social democratic ancient history, is power. It was the demand that catapulted the international cycle of struggle ten years or so ago. Chrysler's offer of profit-and-management sharing is a desperate attempt to maintain the illusory separation between

power or politics and cash or economics. The disappearance of this separation allows the question of revolutionary organization to be posed once again.

The Sons Of Bitches Just Won't Work:

Postal Workers against The State

Peter Taylor

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"1965 marks the turning point in the history of workers' struggles in the Canadian postal system. From that point onwards, workers' insubordination has mounted steadily, and now constitutes a major challenge to capital's authority. In reaction, the Canadian State is spending more than \$900 million on the introduction of automatic sorting machines. More than simply regaining ground lost to postal workers in terms of wages and productivity, the State is calling on science to "develop" the technical organization of the work process in order to decompose an increasingly unified workforce. At about 5:00 AM on Nov. 26, 1974, after most of the mail for the city had been cleared, a fire broke out in the main Terminal. No one was injured and no unemployment or other social assistance cheques were lost, but before it was put out, the blaze had destroyed half the main Terminal causing over \$1.5 million damage. One worker from another part of the building, who stopped work when smoke was sucked through the ventilation system, described the reaction of most employees this way: 'We were standing there watching the firemen fight the fire — and we were all cheering for the fire!'"

1965 marks the turning point in the history of workers' struggles in the Canadian postal system. From that point onwards, workers' insubordination has mounted steadily, and now constitutes a major challenge to capital's authority. With business and the State relying heavily on the mail system for the circulation of capital, this militancy has placed postal workers in a leading position in the quickening work-place struggle going on throughout the country. In reaction, the Canadian State is spending more than \$900 million on the introduction of automatic sorting machines. More than simply regaining ground lost to postal workers in terms of wages and productivity, the State is calling on science to "develop" the technical organization of the work process in order to decompose an increasingly unified workforce.

Taken by itself, however, the automation program will not allow the State to re-impose control. Not only have postal workers repeatedly challenged, and beaten, the State over the last ten years — particularly by engaging in illegal strikes — but they have also appropriated those forms of struggle developed primarily by assembly-line and other mass workers. Absenteeism, turnover, sabotage, and wildcats, have all been used by postal workers to establish their autonomy from capital. Acting on their needs for more money and less work — for more power against capital — they have thrown the postal system into crisis. The depth of this crisis can be seen in the desperation of the Postmaster General. Claiming recently that the "sons of bitches just won't work" he has threatened to "close the Montreal Post Office for several months to get rid of militants and slackers". And with other Post Office spokesmen predicting delays in mail delivery for at least another year, struggles by postal workers will continue to deepen the crisis at the Post Office and be a significant reference point for the rest of the Canadian working class.

The Centrality of Skill in the Traditional Post Office.

In all postal systems, the central operation is that of sorting mail. Consisting essentially of redirecting individual pieces of mail according to the handwritten or typed address, this task requires a unique skill, and, as a result, has formed the core of the organization of work at the Post Office. Traditionally—until the late Sixties for Canada—the postal system utilized the male, skilled, manual sorter, or postal clerk, to perform this function. In turn, the skilled clerks used the possession of this skill to establish themselves as the most powerful group of postal workers. First, this skill, which was based on the ability to recall correctly and quickly the location of some 10,000 points of distribution, gave them direct control over the speed of work, unlike, say, workers on an assembly-line whose work speed is dictated by a machine. Furthermore, since this ability was acquired only by working three or four months at a Post Office run “school”, management could not readily use scabs during any strike or slowdown.

Historically, the power of the skilled sorters has been demonstrated most clearly by their position at the top of a hierarchy of wages. Due to the centrality of their skill, the level of their wages functioned, until very recently, as the reference point for all other classifications of postal workers. For example, when truck drivers who had previously moved mail between postal stations for private contractors, were made Post Office employees, their job was classified as “unskilled”. As a result, their wages, which had been on par with other truckers, were reduced drastically to bring them in line with those of other “unskilled” postal workers. (This was the background to the struggle of the Lapalme drivers in Montreal, and the wildcats by drivers in Toronto during the fall of 1972.)

The power of the postal clerks was also reflected in their central role in the trade union organization of postal workers. The first union at the Post Office was a skilled sorter's union. Formed in 1911, this union was affiliated with the Trades and Labour Congress — a federation of predominantly skilled workers' unions. Since then, although the unskilled “inside” workers joined the clerks in 1928, the union has consistently represented the special interests of skilled sorters, both by the emphasis placed on the defense of the classification system, and by the election of clerks to positions of regional and national leadership. The semi-skilled “outside” workers reacted against this domination by refusing to join the skilled sorters' union, and instead formed and have maintained their own union organization. In short, the possession of this skill by certain postal workers allowed them to establish a definite form of control over their immediate work situation, both in terms of the organization of work and the organization of wages.

At the same time, however, this power of the skilled clerks was operating in the interest of capital's rule. Precisely because their source of power was the special skill needed by the postal system, postal clerks were directly tied to their work. Thus, rather than challenging the role within the mail system which capital had assigned to them, the skilled sorters maintained their power—in terms of both wages and union organization—by accepting the responsibility for its operation. As was the case for other skilled workers, this responsibility for production resulted in postal clerks having a “producer's consciousness”, i.e., an understanding that their power depended on their ability to perform their work. This identification of the clerks with their work was reinforced by the individual nature of their jobs. For example, contests were frequently

held for the purpose of determining who was the “best sorter”. The possession of this skill by the clerks also furthered capital’s control by separating them from the “unskilled” workers, thus preventing a unified workforce. As a result, postal workers not only refrained from engaging in large strikes, but, more importantly, in their daily job performance they exhibited a marked commitment to “getting the mail out.”

Their lack of militancy was also sustained by other factors which, until the Sixties allowed the Post Office to operate with little concern for its efficiency. First among these factors was their security of income. With the volume of mail constantly rising, postal workers, like other government service employees, had been guaranteed steady employment — as long as they performed their jobs satisfactorily. Job security also represented an alternative to the high wages won by workers in the manufacturing and resource sectors, whose high income was often reduced by the fluctuations of the business cycle.

Reinforcing job security as a conservative force was the “white-collar” status of letter sorting. Deriving from the relative cleanliness of the job and the “financial” rather than “industrial” nature of mail itself, postal work was considered an “office job”. Shirt-and-tie was the rule for all employees, and even today it is still possible to find long-time employees appearing for work dressed like supervisors. Closely tied in with this, were two factors which helped to foster the notion of “public service”. First, that personal letters and cards formed a much higher percentage of mail volumes; second, there was a more direct personal relation between the letter carrier and the tenant or homeowner.

Finally, there existed a set of federal laws designed to maintain the subordination of postal workers. All forms of industrial action

— work stoppages, slowdowns — were expressly prohibited. Furthermore, management thoroughly dominated those limited avenues for collective bargaining which did exist. Directly stemming from postal workers' lack of power with respect to the State, these laws formally institutionalized this relation of forces.

Taken together, the skilled nature of the work, the security of income, and the harsh legal sanctions, resulted in a dedicated and disciplined workforce. Postal workers, who saw their role as that of “serving the public”, took as their own the slogan “the mail must go through”. For capital, of course, this “responsible behaviour”, which meant the moderation of demands on the part of postal workers, was crucial because it kept costs, in the form of wages, ‘relatively low. Low costs and high quality work enabled the Post Office to operate very efficiently on a day-to-day basis. With this high level of productivity the government managed to balance the Post Office budget every year until 1965. Precisely because the manual sorting system was operating smoothly, the State was able to avoid costly expenditures for mechanization and plant renovations. In contrast to other workers — notably manufacturing and mining workers, as well as office workers — who were subject to the introduction of whole systems of increasingly demanding automated machines, the postal worker found the technology of his job remaining unchanged.

1965: The Opening Round in the Current Cycle of Struggle

Following the recessions of 1958 and 1960-61, capital in Canada entered a period of rapid expansion. With working class resistance effectively reduced by these recessions — real per capita income fell between 1957 and 1959; unemployment reached 7.7% in 1961 — capital expanded by exploiting this weakness. Thus, between 1961 and 1965 output per worker was forced up over 14%. Over the

same period, strike activity fell below .09% of total working time — the lowest level in over 25 years. As a result, wage settlements in Canada lagged behind those in other countries, and in 1964 profits accounted for 15.3% of the GNP —an eight year high. The next year saw unemployment drop below 4% for the first time in more than a decade, despite a rapid growth in the labour force, and new records were also set in gross national product, and in investment and export levels.⁵⁸

For the postal system this growth in economic activity created a sizeable increase in the volume of mail. Reflecting the increasing use of business of the mail system, the number of pieces of mail processed rose by over 12% from 1962 to 1965. Faced with this growing pile of mail—over nine million pieces a day by 1965 — the government needed to bolster productivity in order to contain labour costs. To this end it created lower paying, unskilled, part-time jobs and hired women, who because they came from unpaid, full-time jobs as housewives, lacked the power to refuse these lower wages. Furthermore, management began to use “casual” workers, i.e., temporary workers who received lower wages, no benefits, were completely subject to lay-offs at management’s discretion, and were outside the union. Since both “part-timers” and “casuals” lacked the power of the full-time workers, management was able to extract a greater output even as it paid them lower wages.

The introduction of unskilled sorters also allowed management to increase its pressure on the full-time skilled sorter. Arguing that the unskilled workers were sorting more quickly, and threatening to increase the number of “part-timers” and “casuals”, management forced up the full-time clerk’s output by over 3% between 1962

and 1965. As a direct result of this speed-up and the related introduction of the unskilled sorters, postal clerks began to break their identification with their work. Not only were they no longer solely responsible for the key operation of the mail system; but, with management threatening to use more unskilled sorters, it was also clear that their position within the Post Office hierarchy was no longer secure. Furthermore, their wages, which had always been below those of workers outside the Post Office, were deteriorating even more. Thus by 1965, the *Vancouver Sun* could report that “postmen on the west coast received \$3,000 per annum less than firemen or policemen of comparable seniority and \$2,000 less than common labour employed by the city”.⁵⁹

Over the same period, prices were steadily rising from the no-increase registered in 1961, and by 1965 inflation had reached 3%. As a result, there was a resurgence of strike activity. Auto workers in Oshawa, Oakville, and Windsor, machinists in Montreal, and construction workers in Toronto held massive strikes accounting for more than 3/4 of a million striker-days. Encouraged by this sharp outbreak in militancy, postal workers put forward a demand for a \$660 wage increase in July 1965.

The government, making the first of a series of blunders, responded by offering only \$300-\$360. Dissatisfaction among the workers was widespread, but the two major postal unions tried to restrain workers by warning them that walkouts would be unauthorized and illegal. The response was immediate: wildcat strikes broke out in Montreal and Vancouver. In short order postal workers in Toronto, along with workers across the country, joined in. At this point Post Office authorities were forced to place an embargo on all 2nd, 3rd, and 4th class mail.

Caught off balance by the workers' militancy, the government's reaction was confused. There were pleas from the Prime Minister asking workers to return; warnings from the Revenue Minister that the demands would not be granted through illegal action; and praise for the unions' "responsibility". None of these, including injunctions against workers in Montreal and Vancouver, were successful however, and by the third day the illegal wildcat was 100% effective in the major financial centers. At the same time, the unions continued to maintain negotiations with the government and it wasn't until the 11th day of the strike that they officially endorsed the strike. In response, the government announced it was considering 1) the dismissal of the 4,100 striking postal workers in Montreal, 2) special legislation to end the walkout, and 3) the use of the army to move the mail. In turn, this escalation brought a pledge of "full support" for the cause of postal workers from the Canadian Labour Congress.

The government, apparently unprepared for the widespread support gained by the illegal strike, then made a major concession. They increased their wage offer to \$510-\$550, and agreed to investigate Post Office work rules and working conditions. Workers' opposition to this proposal was widespread, and in Montreal they overwhelmingly voted it down. Across the nation as a whole, however, the majority favoured a return to work. After gaining a few more concessions, some work was resumed on Aug. 7, and by Aug. 9, three weeks after it had started, the postal wildcat was over. 12, 250 postal workers had taken on both the government and "their" union, and they had won. By showing determination and militancy, they had scored a resounding victory whose effect extended well beyond their substantial wage gain (over 12%) and as such established postal workers as a vanguard for the current wave of factory struggles.

First and foremost, the 1965 postal strike functioned as a reference point by demonstrating the critical dependence of capital on the mail system. Traditionally, business, which accounts for well over three-quarters of all mail processed, has relied heavily on the mail system for its cash flow. Then in the mid-Sixties with the rapid expansion of short-term credit through the use of credit cards, the mail system became an even more crucial link in the circuit of capital. As a result, even brief interruptions in mail service severely damage business. In 1974, for example, a Bank of Canada spokesman blamed the two-week wildcat for driving short-term rates up to 11.13% by “disrupting the delivery of payments through the mail”.⁶⁰ The best summary of this dependence of capital on the postal system appears in an ad for a postage meter company; it simply states: “The faster the mail goes out, the faster the money moves in”.

Secondly, struggles by postal workers function as a reference point because of the highly visible character of interruptions in the mail service. Unlike strikes by mining or manufacturing workers which in Canada tend to be isolated in industrial communities located away from the major cities, work stoppages by postal workers affect everyone. Thus, even one-day walkouts have a mass impact — often grabbing headlines in the process.

The significance of struggles by postal workers also flows from their position as federal employees. As government employees, they are forced to confront the State, not merely as the representative and guardian of the “public interest”, but also as their employer who directly commands their own labour power. Or more precisely, they can see that the effort of the State to ensure the continued reproduction of capitalist society depend directly on its enforcement of work-discipline on the shop-floor. The willingness of postal

workers to engage in *illegal* strikes — 26 of the last 27 stoppages have been illegal — is a direct result. After all, laws ordering them back to work are simply other, more heavy-handed attempts on the part of the employer to enforce the work process.

Being federal employees is of added significance because it establishes a material link between workers scattered throughout the country. In Canada, where the working class is divided geographically into 5 distinct, very large regions, this linkage provided by the State's organization has proved to be crucial in spreading struggles. For example, in 1965 the nation-wide strike by postal workers helped to generalize, and thereby strengthen, a growing strike wave which had been concentrated primarily in Ontario and Quebec.

At the national level, the vanguard position established by postal workers through their 1965 strike was confirmed by the reaction of the State: it immediately began the preparation of legislation granting full collective bargaining to all federal workers. Previously there had been only limited avenues for the peaceful resolution of grievances and the negotiations of contracts. Now, after postal workers had dramatically broken with their "civil-servant" tradition, it became imperative that labour-management relations be formalized by bringing into play the full weight of State regulations surrounding collective bargaining. This requirement on the part of the State was forcefully underlined by federal workers' struggles which took place the following year. Thus in the spring of 1967 the Canadian State enacted the *Public Service Staff Relation Act*, thereby legalizing the strike weapon for some 200,000 State workers.

But while the central position occupied by postal workers in capital's organizations of society has allowed them to play a leading role at the national level, the power of postal workers has been

consolidated through the daily struggles on the shop-floor. The 1965 strike had thrown the Post Office into crisis. By winning a wage increase in excess of 12% postal workers had broken the link between wages and productivity. In response, the State, which desperately needed to re-establish this link, launched a series of attacks aimed at increasing the amount of work done — at extracting a greater amount of surplus value. Postal workers, however, were not about to submit to this increased exploitation. On the contrary, having just gained some autonomy from capital, they were now better prepared to act on their need for more money and less work. As a result, postal workers and the State became locked in an increasingly bitter struggle.

The immediate result of the increased power that derived from the victorious 1965 strike was increased resistance on the shop-floor. With a defeat of the State now under their belts, postal workers were not going to be pushed around by a bunch of supervisors. Thus management, whose goal could be simply stated as *increased productivity*, found its implementation next to impossible. The key element in the resistance of postal workers was the clerk's possession of the skill needed to keep the mail system going, and the accompanying control over the work process which that gave them. Productivity counts, counselings, and other forms of harassment, which had raised output prior to the 1965 strike, now had the reverse effect. No longer intimidated by these attacks, postal workers saw them clearly as provocations and thus used their control over production to slow the process down. Soon it became obvious to management that if they were to increase the work done they had to break the power of the skilled clerk.

Their first attempt, however, completely misread the strengths of postal workers. Consisting of two prongs, this attack attempted first

to undermine the control of the skilled sorter by increasing the use of unskilled, but still manual, sortation techniques. Secondly, drawing on their success with the part-timers, they increased the number of women and young workers in full-time positions. Their hope was that these workers would be easier to control owing to their lack of experience with factory struggles. In actuality, this attempt backfired. Rather than increasing production, this strategy actually gave more power to the workers and thus only served to intensify the struggle.

The major miscalculation was their assessment of the on-the-job performance of women and young workers. Unlike their peers of even a decade earlier, young workers by the mid-Sixties possessed a “significant amount of economic freedom”.⁶¹ Rooted in part in the “affluence” gained by the working class since the Second World War, this power of the young workers has resulted in “high job expectations” and a “weak attachment to the labour force”.⁶² Strengthened by the struggles of blacks, students, and women against their particular social function, these young workers have formed a “new class of worker” whose main characteristic is a refusal to accept the tyrannical discipline of waged work as a condition of life.⁶³

At the Post Office, this rebelliousness was made all the more successful by a work process which, unlike that in the more common automated or mechanized plant, lacked a system of machine-imposed controls. Trying to run a mail system which relied on the willingness to work out of a sense of “duty”, on the identification with work

61 Maxwell, J., ed., *Restructuring the Incentive System*, C. D. Howe Research Institute, Montreal, 1974, p. 157.

62 Maxwell, J., op. cit. p. 69.

63 For a discussion of this “new class of worker” and their affect on unemployment patterns, see B. Goldman, “The Changing Nature of Unemployment in Canada” in Maxwell, J., op. cit. p. 59-102.

as the “way to get ahead”, the Post Office management found itself unprepared to handle the insubordination of these mass workers. Over the last 8-10 years, as their number has increased, the refusal of these workers — expressed through absenteeism, turnover, sabotage — has come to dominate the struggle at the Post Office.

The power of the postal workers also grew as a result of the other prong of management’s plan. Through the increased use of unskilled sortation, management not only undermined the division between skilled and unskilled workers, but also eroded the skilled sorters’ identification with their work. Increasingly therefore, the job was looked upon purely as a source of money. At the same time, this unskilled sortation (which separated mail alphabetically rather than geographically) still left the actual movement of mail in the hands of postal workers. Thus, although letters could be sorted more quickly in this simplified process, the system still depended on the workers to set the pace. Certainly the supervisors were quick to harass any worker who was “too slow”, but now, with the commitment to work greatly diminished, they found it necessary to push harder and harder. In turn, this increased pressure only served to stimulate further acts of resistance by all categories of postal workers. Taken together, these changes, in both the composition of the workforce and in the system of mail sortation, consolidated the strength of postal workers.

Over the same period, the increasing power of postal workers caused a sharpening of the struggle over working conditions. Previous to the 1965 walkout, management, feeling no pressure from the workers, had refrained from making necessary renovations. Then, as part of the strike settlement, they had been forced to agree to make an investigation into the deteriorating working conditions. The report which followed supported the workers’ grievances, and listed some 300 needed improvements, including the installation of

new washroom and cafeteria facilities in many Post Offices. But, because the government was reluctant to spend any more money on postal workers, the correction of these conditions was slow to follow. By 1968 only half the recommendations had been acted on, and that summer, postal workers, angered by the stinginess of the government, made their second national strike.

Again, as in 1965, this mail strike was a reference point for the rest of the working class. Involving 24,000 postal workers (14,000 “inside” workers, 10,000 “outside” workers), this strike was the largest and most widespread of those which took place in 1968. More importantly, it was also the first strike under the new legislation which made strikes by State workers legal. Thus postal workers, whose previous strike had provoked this legislation, were now setting the pace for other federal workers whose contracts were also being negotiated. As the *Globe & Mail* headlined during the strike: “165,000 civil servants eye postal offer”.

By 1968, the government was much more determined to avoid the disaster of the 1965 strike. By holding the line with postal workers, the State planned to contain the wage demands of all federal workers, and if possible, discredit the strike weapon. This strike also found the unions much better prepared than in 1965, when they had been outflanked by a militant rank and file. In accordance with the new legislation, they had been re-organized so that the “inside” workers’ union and the letter carriers’ union carried on joint negotiations with the government. By allowing each union executive to blame the other for any lack of progress, this arrangement served to defuse the workers’ militancy. Furthermore, the old, discredited leadership had been replaced by local officials who had been prominent in the 1965 strike.

Throughout the negotiations the government refused to make an offer. Then the unions, whose initial demand of 30% over one year was still on the table, finally set July 18 as the strike date. The government waited until July 17 before making its move. First, it began the planned embargo on all mail and second, it put forward an offer of 6%. Predictably, this was rejected on the spot by the union negotiators. The offer had deliberately been made too late to stop the strike. It appeared that the government was counting on an extended strike to soften up postal workers.

The next day the strike began on schedule as postal workers across the country walked out. Immediately business set up a howl. Claiming that they (and the “public”) were being irreparably damaged, their only solution was for the government to legislate postal workers back to work *and* then to outlaw all further strikes by federal workers. The government meanwhile was playing a waiting game, and their next move only came 2 weeks later when they offered 19% over 38 months. Representing simply a longer version of the initial offer, the unions turned it down and the strike went into its third week. Calling on the government to intervene “in the public interest” more business and government leaders spoke out against the strike. Five days later the Prime Minister, apparently bowing to this pressure, let it be known that he was considering asking the cabinet to intervene, unless substantial progress was made. That night the Post Office made its third offer: 15.1% over 26 months. Although it represented only a marginal improvement over the first offer, union negotiators, with the Prime Minister’s threat ringing in their ears, found it acceptable. The reaction of the workers, who by this time had lost three weeks pay, was less favourable. But after a number of very heated meetings during which the union leaders recalled their militance in the 1965 strike, they were able to convince the workers it

was the best possible settlement. Consequently, although the vote was “very close”, work resumed on Aug. 8.

The results of this strike clearly favoured the State. The wage demand of postal workers had been contained, thereby setting an upper limit for all State workers — a limit which was not broken. By refusing to budge from its initial position, while threatening to use its legislative power to impose a settlement, the government had scored a victory at the bargaining table. In the process, it was able to successfully make use of the union structure. First, by maintaining a hard line it allowed the lack of strike pay, together with three weeks’ lost pay, to undermine the workers’ bargaining position. Secondly, the government used the union leaders to convince the workers that the settlement was acceptable — something which the government by itself could not have done.

But while the State had managed to “hold the line” during this particular skirmish, through the very act of striking, postal workers had dramatized their mounting struggle against work. By taking a three-week “holiday” during the prime holiday period, they had completely disrupted the mail service, thus preventing the State from maintaining a vital function. For capital, therefore, its long-term goal remained unreached: much more than just a favourable strike settlement was needed if it was to succeed in moving the mail “efficiently”, i.e., if it was to increase the ratio of work done to wages paid.

Automation: “The Technological Path to Repression”

Fed by the increasing disaffection of the skilled workers and the introduction of the mass worker, the State faced an increasingly effective shop-floor struggle, which stated succinctly consisted of

getting as much as possible for the least possible work. For example, the practice of gaining time off for breaks, etc., by slowing down, or “dogging it”, was enjoying increasing success. Developed most by skilled workers, this form of struggle was spreading to include all other categories of workers as well. Along with it, absenteeism and turnover were rising steadily to produce a less and less stable workforce and higher labour costs.

For capital, of course, all this meant an increasingly “inefficient” mail system. Between 1965 and 1968 mail volume rose by 8% while output per worker fell by 8%. As a result management was forced to increase the workforce by more than 15%. Each increase, of course, only served to institutionalize a new lower rate of production. In turn, this new rate became the level from which postal workers slowed down even further.

Traditionally management would have used two weapons, i.e., firings and increased harassment, to break this declining “productivity spiral”. At the Post Office, however, precisely because of the dependence of the system on the skill which the workers possessed, these weapons were too costly. Firings on a large scale were out, not only because over 3-4 months training had been invested in each worker, but also because it would have taken that long to train a new workforce — during which time business needed its mail. Furthermore, management, facing a shortage of labour, needed every worker they could get. The control over the work process also meant that the workers responded to all forms of shop-floor harassment by simply intensifying the “productivity spiral”. Consequently, by 1972 output per worker was a full 12.5% lower than it had been in 1965.⁶⁴

64 From a speech delivered by the Postmaster General to the Vancouver Board of Trade in April, 1972. Quoted in “Workers’ Struggles in Advance Capitalism: The Post Office”, *The Newsletter*, #3, Toronto, 1973, p. 45.

On the one hand, therefore, postal workers were drastically reducing the amount of work they were forced to do. On the other hand, they were also successfully increasing the amount of money they received. On the strength of their struggles during the three years from 1965 to 1968 they made a wage gain of 18%, discounting inflation; in contrast, they made only a 14% increase over the preceding six years (from 1958-64). As more workers made more money, labour costs accounted for an ever increasing share of the total Post Office budget. Thus, by 1969, postal workers were imposing on the State *decreasing productivity along with large wage increases as conditions for the continued operation of the postal system.*

Taken overall, the gains made by postal workers -were reflected in the deteriorating financial position of the Post Office. From its first budget deficit of \$34 million, recorded in 1965, the Post Office moved steadily further into the red, reaching a figure of \$88 million by 1969. At the same time, business was increasing its reliance on the mail system. Spurred on by a rapid increase in the bulk mailings — billings, advertisements, etc., — needed to maintain their financial position, the volume of mail has doubled since 1967. Business mail now accounts for 85% of the 20 million pieces processed each day. As a consequence of this growth, postal operations became increasingly *centralized* in the major financial centers of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

The priority given by the Post Office to the needs of business can be seen in the decisions made in the late Sixties to institute a host of special programs — notably the “guaranteed next-day delivery” — while at the same time eliminating the “non-essential” Saturday delivery in the urban centers. But while these changes clearly favoured business, they did nothing to challenge capital’s major obstacle: the shop-floor struggle against work by postal workers.

By the fall of 1969 the government was finally forced to admit that its long-term goal the restoration of “profitability” through the suppression of this struggle would require a fundamental re-organization of the work process. In November of that year the Postmaster General received a report entitled *A Blueprint for Change: Canada Post Office*. It began: “We propose in this report to be blunt, because we believe that the Canada Post Office is at a crossroads in its history”.⁶⁵ And, although this particular study was concerned primarily with the re-organization of the management bureaucracy, it clearly identified the problem they faced, and in broad terms, sketched the outline of the State’s second, more concerted attack. The problem was defined variously as “strikes”, “Annual Deficits”, “rising costs, particularly labour costs”, “rising mail volumes”, “productivity rates”; in short, a mounting “inability to cope effectively with personnel problems”. Specifically, Post Office management was declared to lack the “control” necessary to ensure the “profitability” of the mail system.⁶⁶ Then after noting that this “lag in productivity can be related to the failure of the Canada Post Office ... to introduce mechanical sortation processes”, they announced that “the introduction of automation is ... essential if total annual expenditures (i.e., wages) are to be controlled and, more important, if the postal system serving the country is to consistently meet current demands”.⁶⁷

By introducing machines, the State planned to take possession of the skill of sorting away from the postal clerk, and incorporate it in a machine. In so doing, they would be eliminating the postal workers’

65 *A Blueprint for Change: Canada Post Office*, November 1969, prepared by the consulting firm of Kates, Peat, Marwick & Co. p. 1.

66 op. cit. p. 1-10.

67 op. cit. p. 23-24.

main source of power, thus inflicting a major defeat on them. First, by simply setting the speed of the machines, management could determine the production rate, and enormously increase the output per worker. These same machines would also help the supervisors enforce this higher speed; mis-sorts would be automatically rejected and the “offender” identified; a light on each machine would signal the absence of any worker; etc. In addition, the automation process would break up the informal shop-floor organization — the basic unit in the daily struggle to work less. This speed-up would also mean the more rapid deterioration of worker’s health. In Ottawa, for example, where these machines have been operating for three years, workers have complained bitterly of eye-strain, frequent head-aches, and nerve problems.

Secondly, the State planned to decrease the wages of postal workers. By claiming that the job of the machine operator, or coder, was “unskilled” when compared to that of the postal clerk, the government planned to pay the coder 75c an hour (\$1500 a year) less. Even though coders and clerks performed equivalent functions, and despite the fact that each had the same needs, by using the skilled workers’ argument that the wage rewards the possession of a skill, the Post Office hoped to reduce its deficit simply by cutting its wage bill. For the workers, this wage cut would mean a loss of power, both in the supermarket (purchasing power) and in the Post Office (ability to go on strike, take time off, etc.).

Thirdly, the government hoped to break its “dependence” on those workers who possessed the “specialized knowledge of the workings of the mail system”.⁶⁸ By replacing this skill with “skills related to keyboard operation” — i.e., skills which are held by a very large number of workers since they are required by many

68 *op. cit.* p. 133.

different jobs — the Post Office would not only eliminate the need to extensively train its workers, but it would also gain the power to discharge any worker it considered “unproductive”. For the workers, the massification of their skills, meant increasing the available competition for their jobs, therefore rendering them more vulnerable to management’s demands for more work and less money, or for increased amounts of unpaid labour needed to restore “profitability”.

Fourthly, the introduction of the machines demonstrated again the specific use that the State makes of female workers. Already it had capitalized on the fact that they perform unpaid work in the home, by forcing them into part-time work at lower wages than men. Now, particularly because women also possessed the needed “keyboard skills” — as typists, key-punch operators, etc. — management planned to hire them on as coders. Thus although they would get less money as coders than postal clerks, the State hoped that these women would be satisfied with this wage level, precisely because their other alternatives paid even less.

Technological change, as Marx had clearly seen, is *not* neutral: “It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class”.⁶⁹ Following this path — the “technological path to repression” — the Canadian State planned the automation of the postal system in order to impose a much greater level of exploitation.⁷⁰

69 Marx, *Capital*, Vol I, Chapter XV, Section 5.

70 This expression is first used by A. Negri, in *Operai e stato*, ed. S. Bologna and A. Negri, Feltrinelli editore, Milan, 1972. Quoted in a review by B. Ramirez in *Telos*, #13, Fall 1972. p. 140-147.

Certainly some resistance by postal workers was expected. As the authors of *A Blueprint for Change* remarked: “particularly from those elements of the labour force that may be most directly affected by the introduction of automation”.⁷¹ They added however that “resistance to change is of course inherent in the human being”. Although with cost reductions in letter processing of 20% in the short term (up to 40% as the whole system becomes automated), they are clear that *any resistance* to their proposed plan must be overcome. This report also stressed the speed at which these machines should be introduced. For far too long a time the government had simply commissioned studies: now, they stated, it was time to produce a definite plan of action. And this sense of urgency proved more than justified when only six months later postal workers started their third national strike in five years.

1970: The Defeat of the State's Wage guideline

By 1970 the Canadian working class had captured a greater share of social wealth than at any time since the Second World War. As part of a much larger international wave of struggles, workers in Canada, whose work-place struggle was highlighted by a 350% increase in strike-days over the period 1964-70, had driven after-tax profits down to the point where they accounted for only 9.0% of the Gross National Product. Certainly capital, through increasing inflation — it reached an annual rate of 4.6% in June 1969 — was taking in a greater amount in the community, i.e., supermarkets, housing, transportation, etc. But this gain had been more than offset by the amount it was forced to pay out in wages. Thus in 1970 capital at last directly attacked the work-place struggle.

71 *A Blueprint for Change: Canada Post Office*, loc. cit. p. 127.

Production slowed dramatically to a 2.5% rate of increase — less than half the rate recorded a year earlier. In turn, this slowdown forced the unemployment rate up until it reached a figure of 6.4% that September — a jump of almost 40% in only one year. Besides saving the wages withheld from these workers, capital was also using them, and the threat of even more unemployment, to force down the wage demands of those still employed. Furthermore, through the Prices and Incomes Commission, the State was attempting to impose voluntary acceptance of wage guidelines. Consequently, after numerous discussions with business and labour, the State announced early in the year that a guideline of 6% a year — inflation plus productivity increase — was in effect.

In this struggle, the importance of State workers again came to the fore. Having gained the right to strike in 1967, federal workers, and in particular postal workers, had made effective use of this weapon in gaining substantial wage increases which often outstripped those in private industry. Now, in the midst of a more general attack, the State planned to contain their wage gains, thereby setting a “good example” for settlements in the private sector, as well as directly saving money.

Then late that spring, after the government had successfully concluded several contracts within this limit, postal workers, whose contracts were also being negotiated, gave notice of their intention to challenge the government’s ceiling. On May 15, before the national office of the union had even set a strike date, 5000 Montreal postal workers took to the streets protesting the “slowness in negotiations” and demonstrating their refusal to accept the State’s wage limit. In the face of this show of strength, the “neutral” conciliation report itself broke the government’s ceiling and recommended an annual increase of 6.3% within a 30 month contract. For the government negotiators,

however, this concession, which would have meant a major loss of face, was unacceptable. Instead they stuck to their original offer of 5.3% per year. For the union, which had wanted a 10% annual increase all along, neither offer was adequate and so, amid threats by workers of more “premature” walkouts, it announced May 26 as the start of the third national postal strike.

In their previous national strike, postal workers had completely shut down the mail system all across the country. As a result the government had threatened to legislate them back to work, and then used this threat to force a settlement. This time, the union leaders decided to hold a “rotating strike”, i.e., selective, short-term walkouts made in turn by different groups of workers. By disrupting rather than actually stopping the flow of mail, they hoped to pressure the government while avoiding a direct clash in which they might have been outflanked by workers who defied the back to work legislation. The State also wanted to avoid a direct clash, and so it decided to let these mini-strikes, which were only delaying the mail, drag on. Thus throughout June, July and August the rotating strikes continued. Hitting first one city, then another, these strikes kept the struggle of postal workers on the front pages of newspaper for the whole summer, thus focusing widespread attention on the final settlement.

Shortly after the strike began it became clear that the State’s wage ceiling of 6% a year would fall. Postal workers had already rejected the 6.3% contained in the conciliation report, and as the strike progressed, the government’s offers slowly rose. Thus by August, as pressure from business was building up, the government was already offering more than the conciliation report’s recommendation. Then on September 7th, after some talk by government officials of introducing legislation, they raised their offer above 7% per year. The union negotiators accepted immediately and the next day, postal

workers — despite opposition in Montreal and Vancouver — ratified the successful settlement. *The State's guideline lay in shambles.*

Unable to hold the line with postal workers it was forced to abandon all plans of a wage guideline. Over the next year, other workers — particularly the 6300 Air Canada machinists who also held a “rotating” strike — followed the lead of postal workers in winning wage increases exceeding the 6% per year mark. Postal workers, by disrupting capital's attack on the work-place, had inflicted their second major defeat on the government in 5 years, and thereby, continued their vanguard role. Far more than the \$14 million in lost revenue, this victory over the guideline emphasized the need of the State to regain “control” through automation.

The 1970 strike was significant in yet another respect: it revealed the growing antagonism between the union and the rank and file in the face of the State's plan for automation. Throughout the strike the union managed to use its position as the only formal link between cities to maintain overall control, thus avoiding a repetition of its 1965 experience. But this control, rather than reflecting the allegiance of the rank and file — workers in Montreal had broken union discipline by wildcatting “prematurely”; militants in Thunder Bay seized and burnt a truck-load of mail being moved by scab carriers — actually covered an emerging difference in political strategy on the question of automation. Thus the refusal of the union leaders to call the “all-out” strike demanded by the workers was not simply due to a fear of directly confronting the laws of the State. Much more fundamentally this moderation expressed the weakness inherent in their strategic orientation towards management's plan for automation: the sectoral defense of the wage level and working conditions of the skilled postal worker.

Having based its power on the ability of the skilled clerk to control the work process, the “inside” workers’ union did not fail to recognize automation as a direct attack. As one union official put it: “If our classifications are destroyed and our work is done by machines and by Level 1’s (management proposed that coders be placed in this, the lowest-paid category) we (the skilled clerks) will have no bargaining power whatsoever. Whatever power we have is based upon our ability to control the work in the Post Office”.⁷² As a result, the union’s demands were 1) that all full-time sorters be trained for the manual sorting system, even after most knowledge sortation had been phased out; and 2) that there be job rotation for full-time sorters, so all would get a chance to work on the few skilled jobs that remained. Of critical significance, however, was the fact that, at no point, did the union question the decision of management to introduce the automatic machines. Thus, even though it accepted that the skilled clerk would no longer be required by the work process, the union hoped to artificially preserve his position. The weakness of union’s strategy was predicted on the basic assumption held by all skilled workers and their unions: wages and working conditions are a reward for a job well done. Thus, it was argued, skilled workers “deserve” the highest wages precisely because of their ability to work more productively. This argument, of course, played directly into the hands of management — since coders were unskilled, they “deserved” lower wages.

But, while the union was adopting its strategy to deal with automation, postal workers were pursuing a course which led in exactly the opposite direction. Already they were using extra-union forms of struggle — “dogging it”, absenteeism, etc. — to express

72 Quoted in “Workers’ Struggle in Advanced Capitalism: The Post Office”, *The Newsletter*, #3, p. 49.

their resistance against more work. Now, as more details about the State's automation program became public, making clear the government's desire for more productivity, the postal workers' identification with their work suffered a further blow. Consequently they increasingly relied on their own means — direct management of the shop-floor struggle — to satisfy their needs for less work, more time and more money. In the process they were directly opposing the union, which was basing its demand for the maintenance of the skilled sorter on their ability to work quickly and accurately. During the 1970 strike this conflict between postal workers and the union had for the most part been muted. Two years later, as the automation program turned the weaknesses of the union strategy into an outright failure, this conflict broke into the open.

The Consolidation of Worker's Self-Organization

By the start of the 1972 contract negotiations, the State was proceeding to implement its automation program. Construction had begun on almost all of the "mail-processing factories", and in Ottawa the first automated plant was being tested under "live mail" conditions. Management's choice of Ottawa to initiate the program was based both on the relative lack of militancy of workers there — as compared to postal workers in the larger cities — and also on the very high proportion of government mail, which was already using the new postal code required by the machines. Under these favourable conditions the State planned to iron-out all the "bugs" of the new system, while gaining a foothold against the expected resistance of postal workers in the major financial centers of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Specifically, the government wanted to test the reaction of the workers to the new machines, set

production rates, etc. as well as establish the order in the lowest paid category.

In response to this start-up, the union offered no serious resistance. Despite the lack of agreement over some major issues — notably the wage level of the coder — they refused to call for strike action, and instead told workers to wait for the “proper time”, i.e., the upcoming contract talks. But, having retreated once, the union now entered these negotiations in a very weak position.

The contract expired in March 1972 and over the summer months talks dragged on. The government negotiators, sensing the union’s lack of power, were holding firm on the two major fronts. First, they refused to increase the wage-rate for the coder. Having won a major victory by forcing the union to accept the legitimacy of a separate, lower classification, they were now insisting that the 75c / hour wage differential established in Ottawa be maintained. Second, they refused to offer more than a 56c wage increase over 33 months — a rate of 5.7% per year. To justify this low figure, they simply agreed with the union’s argument that wages are a reward for productive work and then pointed to the actions by an “irresponsible” workforce who had reduced the average output per worker by more than 12.5% since 1965. The union leaders, who had been demanding an annual increase of over 9% with only a two- year contract, found both positions unacceptable. At the same time, however, their strategy in the face of the automation program had placed them on the defensive. Already they had lost the demand for wage parity between coders and clerks, and they now found themselves unable to counter management’s arguments in favour of limiting wage increases. As a result, the union was unable to escalate the pressure on the government by breaking off negotiations and issuing a call for strike action.

As the talks dragged on, the workers held firm the shop-floor struggle. Then in the fall, fed up with the union's procrastination, the workers initiated on their own a series of wildcat strikes. Through November and December each of the major centers was struck, and in Toronto a court injunction was needed to force a resumption of work. At the same time, these wildcats remained isolated within each city. The union leaders who saw their bargaining position being undermined by these illegal actions refused to coordinate them. Although the "spontaneous" link-up that had occurred in 1965 did not repeat itself, these wildcats were successful in speeding up negotiations.

As a result, on December 18, a conciliation report recommending 18.5% over 33 months was made public. At this point, the weaknesses in the union's strategy broke through and their leadership collapsed. Not only were they unable to agree on the proposal (six negotiators voted against; four voted to accept), but after this split decision, each negotiator insisted on taking his personal position to the membership. They also postponed the rank and file vote until after the Christmas rush, depriving them of any leverage they might have had. Clearly these officials were not going to gain any more from the government. Thus, even though the proposed wage increase was well below the 7.5% rate of inflation, postal workers had no alternative but to accept the conciliation report.

For postal workers the 1972 contract was a sharp defeat. Embittered at having to bear the costs of the union's failures, they immediately moved to strengthen those daily forms of struggle which escaped the union control. One worker, who developed the practice of increasing his wages by taking money from the mail, put it bluntly: "The fucking union's not doing anything, so you have to look out for yourself". As if to announce this break, workers in Toronto

protesting the settlement went on a three-day wildcat late in January 1973, forcing the *union officials* to call in the local police to “maintain order”, and to lead a minority of workers across picket lines.

Aside from directly slowing production, or “dogging it”, most of the extra-union forms of struggle were borrowed from the unskilled, assembly-line workers. Initially these forms were developed by the mass workers to attack management’s use of machines to extract a greater amount of unpaid labour. Subsequently, with the generalization of the mass worker, these forms of struggle have been appropriated by many other groups of workers. At the Post Office, these forms have been picked up primarily by the young workers, whose numbers have increased markedly, and whose insubordination has become a constant in the productivity crisis.

From capital’s point of view, the most damaging of these forms was absenteeism, or “calling-in sick”. Acting on their needs for more time away from work, postal workers made increasing use of the 15 paid sick days per year, and by 1974 more than 1 worker in 10 was absent each shift. As well as costing millions of dollars in sick-pay, this struggle also took back money from the State by continually forcing management to hire on more workers. A variation of this form is the worker’s use of the contract clause allowing them to punch out “sick” two hours early and still get paid for a full shift. In Montreal alone, this practice gained them over a half million dollars in 1973.

Another form of the mass workers’ struggle against work — turnover — has reinforced the success of absenteeism. In contrast to the long term commitment of postal workers in earlier decades, the young mass worker of the 1970’s has increasingly refused to spend the rest of his / her life working at the Post Office. Consequently,

the quit rate climbed sharply as over 35% of those hired left within 12 months. In Toronto, turnover hit 46% in 1974 causing Post Office spokesmen to complain of a “critical labour shortage”. Needing every worker they could get, management was forced to relax the discipline on the shop-floor. This, of course, only furthered the success of other forms of struggle.

Sabotage was chief among these. The most widespread method of directly interfering with the flow of mail was mis-sorting. Running at an average rate of up to 10%, this figure always jumped anytime management tried to mount a “more work” campaign. Another method of sabotage, which from the workers’ point of view was much more lucrative, was theft from the mails. Most simply this was accomplished by pocketing the desired item — particularly cheques and credit cards. A more organized version involved changing the destination of the item by covering the original address label with another one. Using these methods postal workers in Quebec alone seized \$1.5 million in government cheques in 1973, and in Toronto a major bank spokesman claimed “thefts from the mail cost Canadian bankers millions of dollars a year and are the single biggest cause of loss”. This practice is not contained to Canada by any means. In London, England, for example, one group of 9 postal workers seized 3/4 million dollars by redirecting packages to specially rented apartments.

For the most part, however, this intensification of the shop-floor struggle was carried on far from the “public eye”. Spearheaded by the upfront refusal of the young workers, the struggle by all postal workers for more money for less work — for more power — occurred as part of the daily routine, and as such, was seldom treated as “News”. In the process of this “anonymous” struggle, however, the social relations necessary for the larger battles were created.

On the one hand, relationships between workers and management became openly antagonistic as each maneuvered to gain an advantage over the other. Where supervisors lacked “neutral” machines to help control the workforce, this relation was particularly sharp as they were forced to directly confront the workers in a manner not unlike “sergeant-majors”. On the other hand, relationships between workers were solidified as they moved to support each other by co-operating in their common struggle. Over the last three years, the power contained in this solidarity has been used to postal workers to precipitate numerous, headline-grabbing work stoppages.

In February 1974 in Toronto, for example, the four-hour suspension of a worker following his harassment by a security guard, provoked a two-hour stoppage by 50 workers which took the form of “booking-off sick”. Management escalated the struggle by firing a shop-steward and the workers responded by shutting down the Post Office altogether. The regional union officer was flown in from Ottawa to quell the “unrest” and only 24 hours later the union managed to regain control. Under union orders, the workers were forced back to work, although for over two weeks they carried on a campaign of slowdown and mis-sorting. Incidents such as these contain the seeds of workers’ self-organization which made a Montreal wildcat turn into a nation-wide, two week, illegal strike.

The peak of workers’ self-organization in the Post Office is found in Montreal. Directly supported by the larger Quebec working class movement, which in May 1972 held the largest general strike in North American history, the struggles of the Montreal postal workers have in turn helped build this power base. This has meant that with respect to other Canadian postal workers, those in Montreal have often taken the lead in rejecting inadequate settlements and in pushing for more advantageous terms. Furthermore, through their

daily shop-floor struggles they have been able to take back more from the State while working less. In the words of Andre Ouellet, the previous Postmaster General, they had created the “least productive postal centre in the whole country”.⁷³

On April 10, 1974, a group of these workers refused to work until a particular supervisor who had been harassing them for over a month was removed. They were suspended on the spot, and when a steward spoke to them in a nearby lunchroom, he was fired on the spot. Angered more than ever, these workers went to each floor of the main terminal encouraging their workmates to stop work and begin an occupation to support their demand: the lifting of all disciplinary actions. Within a couple of hours the occupation was complete as the workers chased the supervisors off the floors and seized control of the “house phones” and the Telex machine. By this time over 300 workers had been suspended, but these reprisals only strengthened their resolve.

Initially the national union council decided not to support the workers’ demand since they expected the occupation would soon collapse. To this end, McCall, the president of the “inside” workers’ union, negotiated a deal with Ouellet which left many suspensions intact. The workers, however, having learned to rely on themselves in previous struggles, continued their occupation of the Montreal Post Office, despite a court injunction which on April 12 ordered them to vacate the building. In the face of this determination, the Quebec officials realized they were in danger of losing control over the workers and as a result convinced the council to reverse its stand. With his position defeated, McCall was forced to resign. In reaction, the Postmaster General challenged the council by stating publicly

that postal workers in the rest of the country would not support the Montreal workers. At this point the national union had no choice but to call for work stoppages. Thus on April 16 postal workers across the country began to stop work by “sitting-in”. In contrast to the occupation in Montreal where workers took over the whole building, these union-directed “sit-ins” were confined to the cafeterias. The same day, the Montreal riot police — in full battle dress — entered the Post Office ending the six-day occupation. Following their eviction, over 2000 strikers held a mass meeting, thus demonstrating that, far from being beaten, they were completely determined to win their demand.

Forced by the power of the Montreal workers to call an illegal, nation-wide strike, the union officials wanted to use the strike to reestablish the position they had lost through the 1972 negotiations. No longer basing their power on the ability of the skilled worker to work productively, the union was instead seeking to use the refusal of workers to establish itself as “co-manager” of the automation program. As a result, they raised the demand of wage parity between the postal coder and the postal clerk, and used this demand to rally the support of other postal workers.

Across the country the workers’ reaction to the strike call was mixed. Unlike workers in Montreal who had initiated their own occupation, those in other centers were being asked by the union leadership to strike “on command” for two issues — wage parity for the coder, and the reinstatement of the Montreal militants — where their own interests were not clearly defined. As a result they viewed the strike primarily as an *unpaid holiday*. On this basis, the young workers, who were concentrated on the afternoon and night shifts due to the seniority system, generally supported the actions because they gained time away from work. On the other

hand, the older workers on the day shifts, who through “dogging it” did the least work in the Post Office, and who often had family responsibilities, generally opposed the “sit-ins” because of the loss in pay. After several days, with half the workers “sitting-in” and the other half working, the union decided to set up picket lines which were grudgingly respected by the day shift workers, thus making the strike 100% effective. When the union wanted to call off the strike it successfully used these workers to lead the return to work. The letter carriers — whose union had also issued a strike call — generally opposed any strike action as they stood to gain little from the strike. The only exception occurred in Vancouver where a joint shop stewards committee demanded an interim wage increase to cover inflation, thus achieving a significant degree of unity between letter carriers and young and old “inside” workers.

The State, which desperately wanted to enforce the disciplinary actions against the Montreal workers, initially reacted to the nationwide strike by taking a hard line. It took out full page ads in Canada’s 20 largest daily newspapers which blamed unnamed “elements” for the “unnecessary strike”, and Ouellet threatened to sue the union a half million dollars a day for lost revenue. But, as the illegal strike entered its second week with over 30,000 postal workers still shutting off the flow of its mail, business stepped up its pressure for a return to work —regardless of the terms. Then on April 26 the State capitulated: all disciplinary actions were dropped; no action would be taken against the union; and, a management-union committee was established to resolve the coder issue. By relying on their own power, Montreal postal workers had forced the union to take up their case, and then, with the support of other workers, they had beaten the State into submission. Emerging directly from the shop-floor struggle in Montreal, this confrontation became nation-

wide and scored a decisive victory for all workers. Celebrated by a victory march through the streets of Montreal, this success marked a new stage in the struggle between postal workers and the State.

Occurring at the same time as other important strikes by State workers — especially the illegal strike by 1,400 airport firemen — the April postal strike was an object lesson for workers throughout the country. By disregarding the “established channels” and simply refusing to work until their demands were satisfied, postal workers helped spark a growing strike movement. In 1974 — a light bargaining year — this movement cost capital 9.3 million striker-days, placing Canadian workers second only to Italian workers in time gained through strikes. Fearing a repetition of the April strikes by State workers, the government moved quickly and, in early May, all federal employees received an unprecedented, mid-contract increase of 25c an hour. As one postal worker put it: “Sure it’s a bribe, but we earned it!”

Through the militance of the April strike, postal workers also gained a new Postmaster General. Unable to contain the struggle of postal workers, Andre Ouellet found his “promising career” cut short when the State appointed Bryce Mackasey as the fourth Postmaster General since 1965. Describing his new job as “making a good Post Office”, Mackasey and the government were hoping that his reputation as a “friend of labour” would help him to re-establish control at the Post Office.

The April strike also brought to a head the conflict between the letter carriers’ union and the “inside” workers’ union. Since 1967 they had cooperated through the Council of Postal Unions — a bureaucratic link at the top. Although there had often been tension between the two unions, until 1974 this arrangement proved

adequate. Then, as the militancy of postal workers developed it became clear that each union would have to address more specifically the workers' grievances if its control was to be maintained. During the April strike, the letter carriers, who were only indirectly affected by automation, had strongly objected to being called out simply to support the "inside workers". Thus in the summer of 1974 the Council of Postal Unions was formally dissolved.

The April strike also forced major changes in the structure of the "inside" workers' union. First, officials from Quebec moved into several positions of national importance, and Jean-Claude Parrot — the national vice-president — became the editor of the union newspaper. This change, which was based on the strength of Quebec postal workers, coincided with *the consolidation of the union as the "co-manager" of the automation program*. With the president on record as stating that "only a fool would try to stop progress",⁷⁴ the union has clearly affirmed its acceptance of the State's use of automation to impose a tighter link between wages and productivity. For example, while the union did gain wage parity for the postal coders, in exchange it abandoned its longstanding rejection of management's right to impose production quotas. No longer holding the sectoral defense of the skilled worker as its first priority, the union is now striving to obtain some direct control over the implementation of the automation program under the slogan "all postal workers must share in the benefits of automation". In the wake of the April strike the union-management "Manpower Committee", which had been established in 1972, met for the first time allowing the union to play a consultative role. More recently, the union has mounted a strong propaganda campaign aimed at acquiring the legal power to negotiate all aspects of technological change and has been singing the praises

of “workers’ control” in its publications. This stance on the part of the union is presently being echoed by the Postmaster General, who has stated that postal workers will have “the maximum degree of industrial democracy” and “a greater voice in their productivity”.⁷⁵ Intending to keep the government to its pronouncements, the union has made clear that it will make full use of workers’ insubordination to gain leverage with the State — it has already called on workers not to sort mail bearing the new postal code — in order to ensure for itself the position of “co-manager” of the automation program.

Finally, and most importantly, the April strike strengthened the workers’ daily struggle on the shop-floor. The almost total lack of identification of postal workers with their work was demonstrated during the April strike when they sang: “Hail, hail, the mail’s in there, what the hell do we care...” Having forced the State to retreat from its disciplinary actions, workers stepped up their extra-union forms of struggle to circumvent the union’s maneuvers aimed at restoring discipline on the shop-floor, as a result, the Post Office deficit for 1974 jumped to \$177.2 million.

Both the government and the union know that *this increasing refusal by postal workers has thrown into question the success of the automation program*. Undoubtedly capital still plans to automate. As Mackasey said late last year: “We have to automate We have to handle increasing volumes of mail efficiently It is imperative that the Post Office function”.⁷⁶ But the weaknesses of the automation program as a solution to the long-term productivity crisis are becoming more compelling every day.

75 From a speech delivered by the Postmaster General to the Canadian Direct Mailing Association in Toronto, May, 1975. Quoted in *The Globe & Mail*, May 15, 1975.

76 Interview published in *The Toronto Star*, Nov. 12, 1974.

In small centers such as Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Calgary the route to automation is proving “frustrating and disappointing”. Officials are grim enough to refer to it as a “failure” but insist it is not a “disaster”.⁷⁷ Absenteeism, turnover, and sabotage — weapons that postal workers have used with growing facility — are now proving their effectiveness against machine-imposed work. In Calgary, for example, the machines “are breaking down frequently” and the new processing plant is “understaffed”. Blaming a high turnover — one group of 25 young workers hired last spring as permanent employees all quit in the fall — the local postmaster has been forced to concede that mail service has gone downhill since the new plant opened.⁷⁸

A spectacular indication of how the automation program is already a few steps behind the present level of workers’ insubordination occurred in Toronto recently. At about 5:00 AM on Nov. 26, 1974, after most of the mail for the city had been cleared, a fire broke out in the main Terminal. No one was injured and no unemployment or other social assistance cheques were lost, but before it was put out, the blaze had destroyed half the main Terminal causing over \$1.5 million damage. One worker from another part of the building, who stopped work when smoke was sucked through the ventilation system, described the reaction of most employees this way: “We were standing there watching the firemen fight the fire — and we were all cheering for the fire!” Although the cause of the fire was officially ‘undetermined’, the workers benefited in a number of ways. First, they did much less work than usual for full pay, while management scurried around organizing temporary facilities. Secondly, since these makeshift quarters lacked the regular control mechanisms, “dogging it” in these areas jumped enormously. Thirdly,

77 *Financial Post*, Toronto, Jan. 18, 1975.

78 *The Globe & Mail*, Sept. 26, 1974.

over 2500 extra jobs were created for a period of time, thus spreading the work thinner.

The inadequacy of the automation program has also been demonstrated in Montreal where management won't have the help of machines for at least two years. Attacked by inflation rates above 11%, these postal workers have slowed production to the point where management has been forced to give "blanket overtime" for the past 12 months — 26 extra hours a week (18 of them at double time) *if the workers want*. And, as one worker boasted: "We now do less work in 10 hours than we used to do in 8". At the same time, postal workers across the country have strengthened their wage demands. In the current contract talks they have forced the union to adopt a program calling for a 71% wage increase, 40 hours pay for 30 hours work, \$1.50 premium for afternoon and night shifts, among other benefits.

Faced with the failure of the automation program to re-establish control over the workforce, the State is now moving to directly repress the postal workers' struggle. Under the cover of a generalized attack on workplace struggles — legal actions against strikers; State imposed settlements; State trusteeship of unions, etc. — the State has picked out postal workers for special treatment because of their leading role. In March, Mackasey threatened in the House of Commons "to close the Montreal Post Office for several months to purge the militants and slackers ... to clean out of the Post Office all those elements who draw money and are not doing an honest day's work".⁷⁹ Then in April, after claiming that "the sons of bitches just won't work" he ordered the "indefinite suspension" of 39 militants.⁸⁰

79 THE TORONTO STAR, March 14, 1975

80 THE TORONTO STAR, April 15, 1975

This shift away from merely re-organizing the work process to the use of direct force is a decisive new turn in the State's strategy against workers' insubordination. It signals the growing consolidation of a new level of workers' struggle in the State sector — a struggle not against this or that work process, but a struggle for liberation from work itself.

Wildcats In The Appalachian Coal Fields

William Cleaver

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"What does the expansion of the circuit of energy capital mean from the point of view of the working class? It is a direct response to a cycle of struggle which has outflanked the traditional institution of the management of the struggle – the union. Rumors spread about fast bucks on the Alaska pipeline and mine job notices tacked up on bulletin boards in Detroit show how the expanded circuit is attempting to manipulate labor markets, not through the traditional local pools of the reserve army of the unemployed but directly from one productive circuit to another. Along with this, capital is attempting to reimpose it's command over the working class in coal by operating 'behind their backs' by attacking them through the sphere of circulation. The institutions through which capital seeks to manage the struggle now shift to include the refrigerator, the school, and above all, the filling station."

A little blowout don't hurt nothin'. A coal miner ain't nobody until he goes on strike, then everybody's looking at him.

The 1974 coal strike and settlement were an attempt by capital to stabilize class relations in Appalachia by bringing 'labor peace' to the mines. The contract was a response to the miners' decade long wildcat movement. That movement involved not only the mineworkers but the entire class community in struggle against mine owners and operators. The contract was an attempt to end that movement by denying locals the right to strike and by designing grievance procedures that could isolate problems inside the mines before they could develop into a wildcat. The wildcat movement, however, has not only survived but developed new intensity.

The wildcat movement has survived because it has become a method of community struggle and not simply a measure of 'labor discontent' to be controlled at the point of production. The focal point of that struggle is the breakdown of the main capitalist division of the waged and unwaged. The wildcats not only brought workers out of the mines, but women, children, invalids and the unemployed out into the streets with their own demands. Because that breakdown has meant the joining of the strategies and demands of the waged and unwaged in Appalachia, wildcats have been directed against anything from corrupt local law enforcement to gasoline shortages, to substandard health care in addition to specific mine issues such as safety and job posting.

The joining of the struggles of the waged and unwaged grew, in part, out of the failure of capital's plans for Appalachia in the Sixties -the failure of the poverty programs. These programs attempted to respond to such community phenomena as 'tax revolts', 'welfarism' and 'automation unemployment', without distinguishing between

waged and unwaged sections of the community. Such a lack of distinction made it easier for those sections to end their political separation. In order to understand the terms and consequences of the failure' of the poverty programs, it is necessary to understand the broader class context out of which the contemporary wildcat movement developed.

The struggles in the coalfields over the last twentyfive years may be divided into three distinct phases. The first, from 1950 to approximately 1962, saw the formalization of a union/industry alliance as capital's response to the wage struggles of the Forties. The second phase that dominated most of the Sixties saw the reorganization of the institutions that had formerly mediated the struggle and the collapse of capital's plans for the division of different sectors of the miners. The third phase that began in 1969 has seen an abortive attempt to reestablish Union control over the working class, the expansion of the wildcat movement, and the introduction of the "energy crisis."

II.

During the Forties the Federal government was forced to intervene against militant strikers several times in order to keep coal flowing to the war and reconstruction efforts. By the end of the Forties it became clear that things had to change ("bayonets cannot mine coal," as Lewis said), or the Appalachian working class would fly out of control.

The strikes of the war years were victorious in part for occurring within a protected energy market. Government policy and ARAMCO rapidly changed this at the end of the war. ARAMCO increased its annual production of crude oil by a factor of ten between 1945 and

1950. The restructuring of international energy policy quickly made itself felt in North American market and transportation policies. Oil and gas competition brought stagnant prices. The transition from freight trains to trucks, from rails to roads, from barges to pipelines amounted to a revolution in primary goods transportation that struck the Appalachian miners “behind their backs.” “The Brutus blow of dieselization” was decisive.⁸¹

This is the background required to understand the massive attack on the miners that was codified in the 1950 National Bituminous Coal and Wage Agreement. Signed between the operators and the United Mine Workers (UMW) it marked the end of the Union’s role in representing the struggle and announced its new position as an agent for the repression of struggle. By this agreement the Union engineered a sweeping technological reorganization of coal mining that drastically curtailed the power of the miners. It cleared away miners’ opposition to the introduction of improved hauling equipment for thin seam coal, to the spread of the continuous mining machine, to new drilling and ripping equipment, and above all it guaranteed peace for the development of surface mining where the stripping shovel, the dragline and the bulldozer revolutionized productivity.

Against this, the wage structure was overhauled. Rates and differentials were simplified. Tonnage and yard payments were transferred to hourly rates. A substantial increase in individual earning was made possible by the reduction of the total payroll: between 1950 and 1960 the employment of coal miners dropped from 415,000 to 180,000. The combination of a wage and technological attack caused striking changes in productivity. Output

81 C.L. Christenson, *Economic Redevelopment in Bituminous Coal: Technological Advance in U.S. Coal Mines, 1930-1960* (1962), p. 252.

per miner increased by 100% between 1950 and 1960. Surface mines were twice as productive as shaft or slope mines. To be sure this made mining more vulnerable to interruptions and attack as it placed a premium upon continuous operation at full capacity. Only the new Health, Welfare and Retirement fund was tied directly to productivity and this meant that pensioners who retained the right to vote in union elections formed the basis of internal union power that would be used more than once to diffuse local wage demands.

A direct consequence of the success of the capitalist initiative of the Fifties was an increase in the reserve army of the unemployed both in Appalachia and in the cities that were to become the major terminals of migration:

As the mines shut down, as the farms could no longer produce a living for those who worked them, as stores closed because of loss of sales, men and families by the thousands began a flood of migration from the mountains to the cities of the North and East. Over the past decade, a hundred thousand or more persons a year moved away from the mountains to Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, Cincinnati, and other metropolitan centers where at least the possibility of jobs existed.⁸²

Mining families had to choose between unskilled jobs in the North or inadequate welfare in Appalachia.

By the early Sixties, the broad outlines of a new working class strategy began to take shape in the mining communities in the form of independent action against both the operators and the union. The first opportunity for this had been the national union's call in 1959 for a strike against operators who were not abiding by the National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement (by then amended several times.)

82 Jack Weller, *Yesterday's People* (1965), p. 21

To its evident dismay, the national leadership was to discover that the strikers of 1959 were not the strikers of 1950. Even in their violence those previous strikers had been ultimately controllable. In 1959, all hell broke loose. By the time the strike was over, the strikers had destroyed millions of dollars of property, killed several scabs, and by their actions brought multiple damage suits against the union. Growing insubordination resulted when the national union 'agreed' to allow numerous mines to go nonunion by either simple inaction or by actually withdrawing local certification. The workers' revival of the roving picket was a dramatic indication of the collapse of union management of the struggle. Other worker strategies included refusal to migrate, refusal to vote more taxes for community services, and most of all refusal to work. These, together with the demand for direct cash subsidies, provide the essential background to the new capitalist initiative represented by the war on poverty. Here is 'state intervention' upon an entirely new basis.

III.

The new capitalist strategy that initiated phase two was called the War on Poverty, and the social planning it represented was first of all an attempt to reduce militant class struggle to manageable proportions. Capital's task was to take a movement that threatened the effectiveness of collective bargaining, and which had already demonstrated the inadequacy of unionmanaged wage struggle and unionmanaged community services, and shape it to its own purpose. This attempt involved a poverty program strategy of community organization that amounted to an attempt at community unionization in the sense that its purpose was to force all sections of the working class to come together into Community Action Programs (CAPS) to bargain for a social wage. The CAPS, like the legalized labor unions

which emerged from the Thirties were to become the fundamental bargaining units of the community.

By forcing all segments of the community to bargain for a social wage, the poverty programs brought many previously unwaged sections of the community into an explicitly waged relationship. The methods by which this was accomplished were numerous. Manpower programs tied the wage to a willingness to be 'retrained' to a 'useful' skill. Matching Federal funds tied many aspects of the social wage (such as education and health care) to a willingness to vote for some kind of local tax. Much of the available funding was tied to road building, loans to local businesses, and construction of public facilities. That is, receipt of those funds was tied to a willingness to submit to capitalist development.

As the poverty programs picked up steam, the CAPS and their community organizers began to develop their full potential as managers of social pressure. Numerous 'selfhelp' programs (retraining projects, handicraft production, and so forth) 'creatively' channeled community energies into acceptable outlets. Daniel P. Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor, best characterized their function:

... the primary function of community welfare programs is to provide surrogate family services. The logic of this relationship has taken us well beyond the original provision of food, clothing, and money, to far more complex matters of *providing proper attitudes toward work*, reasonable expectations of success and so forth.⁸³

The CAPs, designed to function through the 'maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas' were intended to be the means through which residents of the areas systematically traded

83 M.S. Gordon, *Poverty in America* (1965), p. 47.

stability for an increased social wage. But what in fact happened was that the CAPS and similar programs subsidized the social struggle. Their mixing of waged and unwaged in various community development projects provided a new terrain in which the unwaged could use the newly available social wage (daycare, community kitchens, health care, 'drop in' centers, etc.) to free them from unwaged labor. The mineworker began to use aspects of the social wage (such as food stamps) to better reject the constrictions of work. And it is precisely this connection of welfare struggles and mine struggles that was to provide one of the material bases of the third phase of struggle.

The political unification of the struggles of the waged and unwaged in their demands for more money and less work laid the basis for the erosion of productivity that has characterized the last decade of struggle in the coal fields. A frustrated social worker described the breakdown in these terms:

They are crafty when it comes to receiving an income without working. An unemployed miner will inquire about which mines are operating and which are hiring when fulfilling the requirements to qualify for unemployment compensation. He astutely applies at the mine that is on limited shift operation and that has a complete complement of men. Upon being told that no jobs are available, he asks the foreman to sign his slip indicating that he has sought work and been refused. When channeled through the proper agency, this "proof" enables him to continue "rockin'" for another month. Through repetition of this procedure he is able to draw unemployment compensation until he has received maximum allowance. When he is sincere about working, benefits are computed

in cash. A paid vacation, yearround employment, and a job with a definite future are neither desired nor attractive fringe benefits.⁸⁴

As the link between wages and productivity was being severed, the union's authority began to disappear within the traditional wage struggle of the miners. When the union's unwillingness to extend its activities beyond its basic relationship with the operators became evident with the 1964 contract (Boyle's first), miners spread a wave of wildcat strikes across the coalfields. Roving pickets closed mines and some 10,000 miners took a week's vacation from the pits. This protest strike sparked the real beginning of the open rebellion against the operators that could be called the wildcat movement.

One hundred forty five 'work stoppages' erupted in 1965. Most of them were wildcats against bad working conditions, deepening poverty and lousy pensions. In August some 3000 miners walked off the job protesting the firing of one of their number. Union officials were unable to get them back to work. In September, separate walkouts in Pennsylvania developed into a wildcat that spanned three states, freed 10,000 workers and shut down 15% of the nation's coal production for a month. As roving pickets threatened to close more mines, Boyle was able to take the steam out of the strike by promising to get the workers who had been fired reinstated which he never actually attempted to do. His false promise was never forgotten.

The following year 50,000 miners walked off the job during contract talks when the BCOA attempted to dismiss Boyle's inadequate contract demands as 'too expensive.' In 1967 60,000 miners took an unofficial holiday protesting conditions in five states. Even Boyle's personal appearance could not get them back to work.

84 Rena Gazaway, *The Longest Mile* (1974), p. 238.

Later, 10,000 Pennsylvania miners walked out in support of a group trying to organize two mines owned by the Solar Fuel Company. In less than a month, 70,000 miners followed them out of the pits.

In March at Oneida, Tennessee, the headquarters of the Southern Labor Union was dynamited. Later, in 1960, 10,000 miners ignored another Boyle 'promise' to avert a strike during negotiations and walked out a week before the expiration of the contract. Ten days later 80,000 miners declared they would stay out until the 'details' of the tentative agreement were worked out. One of the clauses of the final version of that contract provided a \$120.00 Christmas bonus to any miner who had not participated in a wildcat strike during the year.

As the wildcats undermined the traditional authority of the union another aspect of the conjunction of welfare and mine struggles appeared in the demand for the subsidized treatment and elimination, along with compensation for, Black Lung disease. The West Virginia Black Lung Association, whose statewide propaganda effort and legislative lobby provoked a massive wildcat and forced a barely adequate bill through the state legislature accomplished in these successes two far more important things. First, it shifted the focus of struggle from the job site and community to the state. Secondly it successfully combined a demand for an expansion of the social wage (Black Lung benefits) with an effort to influence job site conditions that bypassed the union.

Not only was the Black Lung Movement an organizational expression of autonomy from the union, it was also a demonstration that Boyle could be openly resisted. In 1969 the strength of Jock Yablonski's challenge to Boyle arose in part out of Boyle's inability to control the rank and file and the resulting decision on the part of the operators not to place anything in the way of his campaign

drive. That Yablonski's campaign was a real reflection of the power of the struggle is indicated by the successful formation after his death by factions that had supported his candidacy of an opposition caucus within the union. This caucus, the Miners for Democracy, was sufficiently grounded in the previous cycle of struggles to offer a plausible option to the 'anarchy' of the wildcat movement. It promised that the UMW could again become a 'fighting' union firmly within the control of the rank and file.

Thus the crisis in the U.S. coal industry took several forms, only one of which is indicated by the crisis of the union. In the late Sixties, early Seventies, the welfare roles and unemployment statistics rose sharply without affecting the decline in productivity. The miners' attack on productivity is most dramatically shown by the halving of the death rate at a time of increasing levels of employment: over 1972/73 it fell from 300 to 150 miners killed. To the community organizers of the JFK/ LBJ mold, the crisis was summed up by an attitude toward work:

Because work's only purpose is earning a living, the mountaineer when unemployed has a different attitude toward unemployment insurance from the one middle class leaders envisioned when they set up such payments in the law The mountaineer; ..., sees this insurance as a legal substitute for work for the entire period that it comes to him.⁸⁵

Thus the reserve army of the unemployed was ceasing to be the threat that could guarantee acceptable levels of accumulation and productivity.

85 Weller, p. 104.

IV.

Miners' struggles in the Sixties should not be understood simply as a struggle against the mediation of the union to which the MFD 'reform' was an appropriate answer. In fact, the struggle persisted and deepened with the success of the MFD. The content of the struggle bypassed the 'reform' movement and left it to fight skirmishes on incidental terrain. The wildcat movement, the productivity decline, and absenteeism were responses to the new bases of capital's power. The only appropriate setting for this struggle is the expanded and integrated circuit of energy capital that by the end of the Sixties included the international energy network. OPEC, Alaska, Montana, and the Dakotas, as well as the Duke Power Company. Within the context of this circuit the 'rationalization' of the industry during the Sixties and the formation of an international energy policy were, as such, responses to working class power.

In the midSixties the position of coal in U. S. Industry was transformed from a group of cooperating companies to a division of the growing energy industry.

But before the early Sixties such a reorganization and rationalization of energy production and distribution would not have been possible. Before then there was no unified energy industry. Thus any rationalization into an energy industry was premised on the ordering of the affairs of the coal industry. The union/ industry alliance was able to accomplish this by: 1) rationalizing the means of dealing with labor by implementing a national contract a single means of establishing relations with the working class in coal, and 2) development of a national centralized marketing apparatus the means by which consumption patterns could be easily realigned.

During the Sixties most of the large coal companies were either acquired by oil companies or ‘captured’ by industries with an immediate need for coal (steel, railroads, utilities, etc.). Between 1962 and 1969 the share of production controlled by independent coal companies fell from 32% to 10%.⁸⁶ By 1969 thirteen companies controlled 52% of total U.S. coal production. The largest of these were able to dominate the marketing and pricing policies of the others. With market control and growing centralization it is probable that the thirteen largest companies controlled about two thirds of coal sales on the commercial market.⁸⁷ Seven of these had already diversified into coal, natural gas, shale and tar sands. Most of the others had already been significantly penetrated by oil and gas interests.

However, the simple vertical integration of the coal companies (the ‘captive’ mines) with steel, etc. is not the ‘rationalization’ of the Sixties. To speak, on the other hand, of horizontal integration (coal, gas, oil) can be equally misleading unless it is understood as lending fundamentally new international flexibility and velocity to the circuit of energy capital. Through it “social planning” of transport, fertilizers, steel and energy is made possible. This power of planning is nothing less than a new effort to establish a basis of command over the working class as a whole.

Beginning in the early Sixties, the American centralization of coal companies must be seen as a national aspect of an international process, the leading catalyst of which is the U.S. government. U.S. coal reserves are increasingly under the control of the government. Federal leased coal acreage quadrupled between 1960 and 1970 with the top ten leasors controlling 60% of the acreage. At the same time

86 David S. Freeman, *Energy: the New Era* (1974), p. 154.

87 *United Mine Workers Journal*, 1531 July 1973.

the percentage of leased Federal coal lands under production fell during the period from 13.7% to 2.4%.⁸⁸

Perhaps as important as Federal leasing policies in the reshaping of American energy policy was the passage of federal antipollution and environmental legislation. While this is not the place to provide an adequate analysis of this legislation or the movement out of which it came, there are two points to be stressed. First, and in part, it represented an attempt to socialize the militance of the coal operators. Throughout the Sixties the operators attempted to reestablish control over the working class by revolutionizing production by means of speedup in deep mines and the mechanization of strip mining. But this technological offense faced the immediate danger of open warfare against fixed capital.

In August 1968, \$800,000 worth of machinery was blown up in Bell County Kentucky. One evening in December, four months later, just across the border in Campbell County Tennessee local saboteurs dynamited nearly one million dollars in machinery belonging to the Blue Diamond Coal Company, including a diesel shovel, a railroad car, two large drills, and several trucks and bulldozers. Sabotage on a smaller scale occurs frequently; steam shovels worth between \$50,000 and \$90,000 are often found demolished. Armor piercing bullets have been fired at working bulldozers during the day and gun battles with company guards are not unknown at night.⁸⁹

In the face of a possible expansion of this violence, the technological offensive had to be coordinated via the state as a part

88 Freeman, p. 154.

89 Paul Nyden, "Coal Miners, 'Their' Union, an Capital," *Science & Society*, XXX, 2 (Summer 1970).

of regional planning. The selective restraints imposed in the name of environmental legislation became one form of accomplishing this.

Second, antipollution legislation aimed against the mining of high sulfur coal, stimulated the operators to move Westan area where the UMW had had little organizing success. The western reserves which were low in sulfur content had the added advantage that they did not have to be mined by a working class experienced in the wildcat movement of the Sixties.

The magnitude and scope of capital's counterattack in the Sixties entails the most diverse elements: antipollution legislation, the rationalization of the industry through multinational financial enterprises, the development of energy as a pole of command over the entire working class, and finally the geographical 'reorientation' of production and its international integration.

Only within this context can either the inadequacy of the reform movement or the 1974 contract be understood.

V.

By 1970, the state, through the Labor Department, the Senate, and the Federal courts began active intervention against the old union and the Miners for Democracy mounted a massive and successful organizing effort in most union districts. The disruption of production and the still increasing number of work stoppages) which in fact underestimated the man days idle and the value of lost production) could now be seen as a part of the union reform movement. This appearance, though very short lived, required that the Federal government grant substantial concessions to the MFD as it seemed to be making headway in the transformation of the 'anarchic' situation into stable though costly labor relations.

The May 1972 MFD convention nominated Arnold Miller, Harry Patrick, and Mike Trbovich to run for top union office. The convention also committed the MFD to the demands of the wildcat movement. These were: 1) the local right to strike, 2) the separation of income from productivity, 3) miner-enforced safety regulations, and 4) district autonomy. The slate and platform represented the first rank and file action in an international union election in over fifty years. On these bases the Boyle machine was swept out of office. Immediately Boyle sympathizers were purged from the national office. Pension and hospital benefits were increased. The union took the lead in the enforcement of safety regulations in the mines.

Perhaps the most dramatic action by the new leadership was the decision to support the reunification of the Brookside mine in 'Bloody Harlan County' Kentucky. But the Brookside strike of 1973 was more than a simple revival of a depression-style organizing drive. The violence and publicity surrounding the strike would have appeared as an orchestrated revival on traditional terrain of struggle had it not given sanction to the generalized wage struggle which had begun in the Sixties.

The unwaged and miners alike wanted safety committees and hospitalization benefits, they also demanded their own homes, recreational facilities, plumbing and bathtubs.

At the Pittsburgh convention in December 1973 rank and file delegates rewrote the union constitution and outlined the collective bargaining demands for the 1974 contract. Loudly rejecting pleas for a no-strike clause, the miners made several important demands clear. First, no contractual abridgement of the right to strike would be tolerated. Second, all safety rules must be rigorously enforced. Third, by combining demands for paid vacation, sick leave, a cut of two

hours from the working day, a substantial increase in the wage rate, and a cost of living allowance, as well as by voicing their resentment of the tie of the pension fund to productivity, the mine workers sought to further sever their wage rates from productivity.

From the point of view of actual struggle during this period, the demands expressed at Pittsburgh were a pale reflection of the developing movement. In the Spring of 1974 mineworkers in southern West Virginia formed the Miners' Committee to Defend the Right to Strike. This, with similar formations elsewhere, forced the Union to include the right to strike over local issues in the 1974 contract demands. The number of work stoppages in Bituminous coal mines during that year approached two thousand double the number in 1973 and nearly ten times the average number of the first half of the Sixties.

Two elements of the 1974 wildcats must be stressed. First, in the wake of the Yom Kippur war and the 'energy crisis' they presented demands for the price roll back of gasoline. The miners leveled this demand against the state a principle planner of the energy circuit. Thus it is a movement that recognized that capital now seeks to control the relationship between the community and the pit by the political manipulation of basic commodities. Secondly, these wildcats intersected with the independent truckers strike and, to a lesser extent, with the collapse of union authority in the auto strikes of that year. In both the expansion of struggle and in its new content there is a clear recognition on the part of the miners of the new basis of capitalist planning. The UMW and for that matter any organization which seeks to organize the working class simply on the basis of its nominal wages can have no role in a struggle about the *real* determinants of the wage.

Throughout 1974 Miller attempted to brand the right to strike movement as a local concern of southern West Virginia and the gasoline price rollback movement as no concern to the union at all. By August *Business Week* could speak of Miller as:

.... no longer indulging in the tough talk of a six month strike as he did last December in his first UMW convention. ... Miller and the operators are also talking seriously about modernizing a union management relationship that is probably the worst in industry At a series of district conferences, top members took great pains to try and 'reduce the members' expectations to realistic levels.⁹⁰

The real significance of the 1974 national negotiations and the contract that resulted from then resides neither in the "betrayal" of the demands of the Pittsburgh convention nor in a personal 'sellout' by Miller. The contract was designed to get the miners back to work and to remove the basis of the wildcat movement.

From this perspective the politicking of the negotiations the rejection of the first draft contract, the 'testing' and 'hardening' of Miller's personal position, the 'timely' intervention of 'informal' federal personal are of no importance in comparison to the content of the settlement. One of the first demands to be eliminated was the right to strike over local issues a hedge against court injunctions and restraining orders. One local was fined \$30,000 for striking over a life and death safety issue. All safety issues were to be arbitrated. To be sure, the contract did 'allow' individual miners to withdraw from an unsafe area, but this was a right already guaranteed by federal law. The procedure is such that if arbitration finds against the individual miner he is then subject to disciplinary action including discharge. The power of the company to fire a sick miner as a potential

hazard is expanded under the new contract. Accidents and illnesses are underreported as a result. Benefits on vacation, pensions and retirements are graduated according to seniority, amounting, in a pattern familiar in the auto industry, to a form of blackmail tying the worker to a lifetime in the mines. The rights of the Health and Safety committees were curtailed. They could no longer make unannounced spot inspections. Time limits were imposed on the initiation of grievances. The powers of the committeemen were restricted. The number and articulation of special pay categories were increased. The six hour, four shift day, and the demand for pay during safety shutdowns were lost in the general rhetoric that this was, in Millers' words, "the best contract negotiated in the history of the labor movement."

Fiftysix percent of the miners voting, but a minority of the miners eligible to vote, ratified the contract. Those who voted against the contract consisted largely of the militant base that had proved the MFD with its initial driving force. The strike over the contract should be seen as a continuation of the wildcat movement in that it provided an industrywide reference point for the elimination of differences among miners and working class communities. Indeed, the month immediately after the contract was signed saw the worst series of wildcats in the entire year.

VI.

In the first seven months of 1975 the rate of wildcatting is on the increase. Intensification of struggle in the mines and mining communities has grown out of the interlocking of those struggles. And the problems of each have become the struggles of both. The importance of this for the quality of struggle in the mines was lamented by one coal company official: "They're striking over

anything. They'll strike if they don't like the local sheriff. How can normal labormanagement relations deal with that?" Wildcats triggered by mine "labor" issues are beginning to bring broader community issues into the picture. Increasing miner participation in Mountain Community Unions and Welfare Rights Organizations is bringing a greater intensity to struggle there. Community dependence on the mines is lessened with the broadening of that struggle.

Proposals for the long term solution to labor unrest is beginning to move out of the area of simple 'labormanagement relations' and toward the direct appeasement of increased income and 'profitsharing.' Writing in 1974, Ford foundation energy researcher David Freeman proposes:

There are two environmentally satisfactory ways of enlarging coal production. One approach is to achieve increased production from existing deep and stripmine operations. To do that we must solve the problems which are creating 4¹/ day workweek in the coal industry. Unless management adopts a more safety conscious and profitsharing attitude, we face a deepening crisis in coal production. With the price coal now commands, the mines can be made safe and labor can be given more generous salaries and fringe benefits. Given labor peace in the industry, coal production can be increased some 20% over 1973 production without opening more mines."⁹¹

What does the expansion of the circuit of energy capital mean from the point of view of the working class? It is a direct response to a cycle of struggle that has outflanked the traditional institution of the management of the struggle the union. Rumors spread about fast bucks on the Alaska pipe line and mine job notices tacked up on bulletin boards in Detroit show how the expanded circuit is

attempting to manipulate labor markets not through the traditional local pools of the reserve army of the unemployed but directly from one productive circuit to another. Along with this, capital is attempting to reimpose its command over the working class in coal by operating ‘behind their backs’ by attacking them through the sphere of circulation. The institutions through which capital seeks to manage the struggle now shift to include the refrigerator, the school, and above all, the filling station.

The attempts to expand the competition for jobs by stimulating migrations *back* from the North has only served to draw many Appalachian families back to a more familiar terrain and to simply expand geographically the militance of former autoworkers. The attack on income through the sphere of circulation (inflation) is increasingly understood by miners as attempts to reduce their power by means of high mortgage rates, greater taxes (educational bonds), and soaring TVA electrical bills.

Capital’s failure to establish effective control by these methods has meant the collapse of the contract less than a year after its ratification August 1975, 80,000 miners walked off the job demanding the right to strike. The failure of the union and the operators to set up any effective working grievance procedure revived the demand for a local right to strike. The Miller administration’s role in that failure along with its continuing efforts to separate “labor” from “community” issues placed it squarely against the wildcatters. When the Miller administration tried to get the miners back to work they were greeted with catcalls, “Miller is a Scab.” The Union’s tactics in attempting to divide the strikers and its apparent support of government threats of intervention signal the final failure of the initiative to break working class autonomy by the “reform” of the union.

Throwing Away the Ladder:

The Universities in the Crisis

George Caffentzis

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"The labor market has as its unit the job which has an essential prerequisite a 'training ladder' or sequence that leads to it. The university becomes the base of these ladders instead of a place where a general upgrading of labor power is to be accomplished to be thrown out into a constantly shifting but upgraded labor market. Thus the most salient aspects of the "silent 70's" in the universities: the feudalization of the disciplines. In a period of uncertain levels of employment there has been a flocking of students to the areas where we get the greatest concentration of credentials required and are most open to a kind of apprenticeship called, ironically enough, "work-study". Discipline over students is not accomplished with the old schoolmasterish ways (grading) but through connecting in a very explicit way work in the university with waged work: the job. The "new vocationalism" is not only to be found in the community colleges but it is also in the higher levels of the system where law, medicine, psychology, business administration, because the dominate departments. The social control jobs are used as social control: control through work if there ever was any!"

Strikes, sit-ins, mass demonstrations? The stuff of the Sixties have appeared on the campuses of the U.S. in the last year. But as the media have pointed out, there is a “hardheaded” economic character to these actions. No more psychedelic guerrillas dropping pig’s blood on the college president. In its place we have “student worker strikes” in Athens, Ohio; a sit-in to protest tuition increases in Cornell; the first statewide college teacher’s strike in N.J.; strikes and demonstrations protesting the cutting of student funds and teacher firings in New York City University of N.Y. The “political” demands of the late Sixties: end university complicity with the draft and war-research, end grading and “free speech” restrictions, institutions of “alternative” courses, open admissions to all students (“end stratification”) have turned to the “economic” demands of the middle 70’s: no tuition increases, no productivity deals, no firings, wages for schoolwork. From Day-Glo politics to grey economics all in the space of four years?

Surely we cannot be satisfied with such a description of the student and faculty movements on the university campuses of the States; there are undoubtedly differences between 1965 and 1975 but they cannot be compartmentalized into a politics/ economics distinction because such a distinction invariably mystifies any analysis of class struggle in capitalist society. In this society economic relations are power relations, and so political. “All this might be right for capitalism in general”, some might say, “but there is no class struggle in the universities; university movements might *reflect* and *support* working class struggle, but. . .” Behind such an objection is the lingering distinction between economic base and ideological superstructure. Of course, the university falls on the ideology side and so it appears to be external to the basic dynamic of class struggle in capitalist society. This is not the place to discuss all that goes by

the name of “ideology” but something must be said about it since the distinction between economics and ideology can severely limit political action with respect to the university. *The Left frequently identifies the economic base with the sphere of waged labor while it reserves the category of ideology for unwaged labor.* In terms of revolutionary organization this comes down to taking the waged part of the working class as primary and effective while taking the unwaged part as secondary and, at best, supportive. But these identifications only accept the capitalist division of the working class and recapitulates the basic illusion (or ideology) of the wage!!! The wage is the most illusory relation between capital and the working class since it hides unwaged labor, i.e., the part of the working day that capital appropriates without exchange. Surely the Left has emphasized the part of the working day unwaged *inside* the factory, but it has consistently been blind to the unwaged labor *outside* it.⁹² In fact, it is exactly during the period when capital has increasingly been dependent upon appropriating unwaged labor outside the factory that the Left has not challenged capital’s power, but has indeed collaborated with it.

In the University two forms of unwaged labor for capital is appropriated:

1. the development of new “forces of production” through scientific research and what Marx called “the power of knowledge objectified”;

92 This general analysis of the wageless in capitalist society and critique of the Left owes much to the Wages For Housework movement. For seminal comments on the function of schools in the reproduction of labor power see Maria Rosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972, pp.23-25, and Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975.

2) the reproduction of labor power and so reproduction of the hierarchy of labor powers of different qualities (selection, division and stratification).

Thus capital appropriates science and education as a costless part of the cycle of its own reproduction. U.S. capital, befitting its advanced status, recognized the importance of these kinds of labor from a very early date. Thus, land grant colleges in the early nineteenth century were set up to promote agricultural research, while in the commercial and transportation center of New York City a “free” university was set up for the explicit purpose of training clerical workers and others for the local labor market in 1847. So from the nineteenth century capital recognized that the university was not merely a feudal throwback or an ideology mill.

In this article I want to sketch out the development of class struggle in American universities since 1960. I will divide it up into four parts with rough chronological limits: the Kennedy human capital strategy (1960-1965); the refusal of development (1965-1970); the “fiscal” counterattack (1970-1975); the wage struggle and the Left (1975).

1960–1965: The Human Capital Strategy

Immediately after World War II, as part of the general disarming of the working class and the “reconversion” of the economy, the G.I. bill’s education allotments brought about an increase in Federal funds into the universities. With this money came a “new type” of student given an explicit wage for school work as training for a new post-war labor market. But this experiment in manpower planning proved temporary, and so throughout the Fifties Federal funding for the universities stagnated at about one billion dollars a year. In the

decade of the Sixties there was a flood of investment by the state from one billion in 1960 to about seven billion in 1970. Why? This shift in the State investment arose in the early Kennedy years and centered around the two basic issues of the 1950's as expressed by politicians and economists of capital: growth and unemployment. Through recession cycles of the 50's there were ominous fears of stagnation due to the low rates of accumulation of domestic capital. Further, as the decade closed the unemployment rate rose gradually but steadily, especially for categories of workers that had been displaced by various forms of mechanization, most notable among them were the southern agricultural workers and miners in Appalachia. If all was going as usual for capital these "displaced" workers should have drifted into the cities and formed a fresh pool of labor power for the urban factories by lowering wages through intensified job competition as in the primitive accumulation sequence. But the usual sequence did not unfold, due to complimentary aspects of working class power. On the one side, the unionization of the dynamic industrial sectors made it difficult to employ the classical labor market competition to lower wages and increase controllability; on the other, the "surplus" workers were beginning to organize demands for income from the state, e.g., the welfare struggles. In order to describe this development in the class struggle, capitalist economists referred to this part of the working class as structurally unemployed, i.e., workers who would not fit into the "labor market" whatever the level of aggregate investment and consequently would not be transformed into labor power even in times of boom. The existence of the reserve army of the unemployed was always a fulcrum for capitalist accumulation but structural unemployment seemed to form a new and somewhat "mysterious" rigidity in the labor market eluding capital's planning. Since much of this structural unemployment was strategically concentrated in the cities by the end

of the Fifties and the early Sixties there was obvious danger or, in other words, an “urban crisis”.

What did the university have to do with the problems of growth and unemployment? The connecting link in capital's strategy was the notion of human capital. First, it was argued by the economists of the “New Frontier” that the fundamental sources of GNP growth were not the increase in population nor the investment in “physical” capital but technical changes spurred by research and development efforts (especially during the world wars) and even more importantly by the increasing education and training of the “labor force”. Thus in Dennison's influential work, titled appropriately, *The Source of Economic Growth in the US and the Alternatives Before Us*, there are a number of specious but at the time widely touted statistical arguments that purported to show that 40% of the growth rate between 1929-1956 could be attributed to the greater education of workers. Although there was the usual scholarly caution and qualification, the general consensus of the Kennedy strategists was: if increased “growth”, hence increased rates of profit and exploitation, were the order of the day, then increased investment in university both for general R&D work and the training of the working class on a mass scale must be instituted. Second, there was the question of the structurally unemployed. Here the answer lay, presumably, in the lack of fit between skilllessness or the obsolescence of the skills of those who have been “made” unemployed by increasing mechanization with the skills required by the labor market especially given the shift away from agricultural and manufacturing to service industry employment. Thus from the capitalist perspective what was required was a retraining and even more importantly a general upgrading of the “work force” to prevent massive structural unemployment in the future. In a rather late study of the matter (1965), Killingsworth concludes:

...automation and the changing pattern of consumer wants [i.e., increased demand for “services”, G.C.] have greatly increased the importance of investment in human beings as a factor in economic growth. More investment in plant and equipment without very large increases in our investment in human beings seems certain to enlarge the surplus of underdeveloped manpower needed to design, install and man modern production facilities.⁹³

“Investment in human beings,” “manpower planning” and so “human capital”—a telling phrase—is indeed the capitalist version of Marx’s even more telling one: variable capital, for what is crucial is not the humanity of the capital (a rather sentimental leftover) but its ability to increase, to a variable quantity, value. It constitutes the capitalist recognition that merely planning the level of constant capital does not automatically lead to appropriate changes in the composition of the working class. The working class does not merely follow along with the level and kind of investment, as in the Keynesian supposition, but must also be explicitly planned. And so investment in the university system got pushed through Congress as part of a more general strategy to deal with this new aspect of class struggle. Thus in class terms investment in human capital arose when capital had to begin to take into account in an explicit way the whole social circuit of capitalist society in which labor power is produced, qualified and reproduced. In this attempt to plan social capital in both its constant and variable parts, the previously “non-productive” relations and institutions of capitalist society had to be recognized as productive. The Keynesian integration of the labor unions in the process of production was only a part of a larger integration of the whole reproductive cycle of labor power which could no

longer be left to chance, the “automatic” market forces, or ideology. Consequently, the previously “costless” (for capital) and “wageless” (for the working class) work began to change its status for social capital.

But if the working class was to be restructured upon a higher gradation through the quantitative expansion of the university system, what was to serve as the necessary source of division of the class? And here the already given stratification and division of the university seemed to naturally fit in. Though the policy of investment seems now rather crude since it involved in many cases rather large block grants to universities with a gross correlation between investments and “output”, it was undoubtedly assumed that the universities’ setup of grading, testing, tracking, and discarding could do the job of selection into various skill and occupational hierarchies for the labor market. The teacher’s traditional powers of gradation of labor discipline (the “standards”) and the student’s competition for positions on the given stratification leading naturally into the labor market seemed to many to be a quasi-natural consequence of the universities existence. Thus, though the university was transformed in this period from a university to a multiversity, its structure was to both massify and divide working class youth on its way to a new labor market (student population tripled from two million to six million in the public universities between 1960 and 1970).

1965–1970: The Refusal of Development

It was exactly this ability to collect, divide and select for the labor market that failed the university structures from 1965 through 1970. The general content of the present class struggle (refusal of work) instead of being conquered by the growth of human capital was transferred to the campuses. Semester after semester, from

Berkeley to Kent State, the university structure that was to organize and integrate the “new working class” met a decisive refusal of development which, ironically enough, used the money from the very investment funds meant to turn students into human capital against this plan of development. The financial officers who were to dole out money for schoolwork got grass blown in their faces. The professors who were to guide and discipline the “talented” were forced into rap groups or ignored. The most evident defeat of the universities’ ability to stratify the student population was in the use of massive tests and grade averages that would make some students eligible for the draft if they ended on the lower end of the continuum. This occurred in the spring of 1966 and rather bluntly identified the university administration with the draft apparatus. Clearly, if the move had proved successful the student movement would have been torn apart in the intense competition to stay out of the war. But it proved to be the State’s biggest blunder, for it made the whole system of grading an object of refusal in a way that the previously ideological attacks never could. Once the “F” began to mean death in the jungle no crap about the “community of scholars” was needed to attack the grading process. Once grading showed its immediate quality as a wage in the social factory sequence of school-army-job, the struggle against it became nation-wide. Instead of the underground diffusion of discussion after Berkeley, the initial sit-in at the University of Chicago against the complicity of the university with the draft officials was followed quickly in a dozen other universities, and in the fall dozens of others continued with sit-ins, strikes and riots. Within the year the Johnson administration had to back off, but only after a national transformation of the student movement into something like an organizational network. Most emphatically for capital it became clear that the university structure had failed decisively its first large scale test in the “organization of manpower”. Indeed, it is during

the late Sixties that not only do we get the intensive sociological investigation of the “activists” with the appropriate harebrain psychological scatology, but we also get an almost frenetic search for “alternative structures” for the university by the large foundations and government agencies.

This hyperactivity on capital's part was quite justified, for what was supposed to have been one of the main stimulators of accumulation had proved completely unmanageable by 1970. Statistical surveys of the “crisis in the universities” showed widespread action not only against the school/ army link, but also on working conditions within the universities (e.g., cafeteria food, sexual restrictions, housing demands, decreased workloads) and attacks on the racial division accomplished through restricted admissions and funding policies. Further, the organizational form of the student movement proved to be both effective and mysterious for it didn't have the structure of a party or a union. Any pretention that an organization like the National Student Association could bargain with the State or individual universities was wrecked with the CIA collaboration revelations, while SDS, for all the moonshine about participatory democracy, seemed at times to have at most an honorific connection with the individual struggles (“Anytime anybody would do anything we would say it was SDS”). Indeed, in 1969 and 1970 when SDS had fallen apart the student movement began an even more explicit link up with other parts of the working class struggle in the ghettos, the army, and the prisons. So the student strike of May 1970 signaled not only the failure of the university structure as a generator of human capital but its complete breakdown in the face of an increasingly coordinated movement. It was not a matter of some previously known weak spots; on the contrary, it was significant that the strike seemed to be everywhere:

More than half the colleges and universities in the country (1350) were:

ultimately touched by protest demonstrations, involving nearly 60% of the student population – some 4,350,000 people – in every kind of institution in every state of the Union. Violent demonstrations occurred on at least 73 campuses (that was only 4% of all institutions but included roughly a third of the country's largest) and at 26 schools the demonstrations were serious, prolonged, marked by brutal clashes between students and police with tear gas, broken windows, fires, clubbings, injuries, and multiple arrests. Altogether more than 1800 people were arrested between May 1 and May 15.⁹⁴

The slaughter of students at Kent State and Jackson State showed to what extent the struggle had become generalized, for these schools had not been centers of struggle before. The grade structure collapsed everywhere, and it appeared that the only way that the university could continue was with the armed intervention of the state. Instead of the ultimate promise of a high niche in the job market, it was the gun held by a somewhat unreliable soldier that kept it together that spring. The slaughter continued into the summer in the various "youth ghettos" surrounding the universities, e.g., the killing of Rick Dowdell and Harry Rice in Lawrence, Kansas. By the fall many returned with a wide variety of plans for action and then . . . nothing. With the McGovern campaign of 1972 much of the movement had simply "disappeared" and the much touted "return of the 50's" was the feature everywhere. Why? In order to understand this we must see the nature of the organization of the student movement in the period of the refusal of development and then capital's response to it.

The fundamental limitation of the student movement proved to be its inability to put forward the question of *income* in its most general form; the inability to link up with the explicit wage struggle in the other parts of the circuit. True, there were many struggles that proved quite successful, e.g., the attack on grading has led to a general “grade inflation” persistent to this day, the attacks on authoritarianism and bureaucracy led to a visible lessening in the length and intensity of the working day in schools, working conditions improved, certain forms of hierarchical division abolished, etc. But these struggles dealt with the wage relation in a partial and still hidden way, and by doing so eased the way for the restructuring of the university. To see this limitation more clearly consider as a point of reference the development of SDS between the Port Huron Statement in 1962 and its final national convention in 1969. In its beginning and in its end SDS saw the status of student as politically tangential; the student was always in search of workers, either to lead or to follow. Indeed, SDS appears as a youth group for a nonexistent socialist party in its beginning. The early community organizing in Newark, the civil rights activities are all of apiece with the beginning of the Kennedy-Johnson emphasis upon human capital development. However, the early SDS activists could only see the universities as a center for the recruitment of a cadre of organizers and helpers of the “oppressed”. At its end, debates devolve into the questions: who is the working class and where is its revolution? One side answered as children of Baran and Sweezy: in the third world. The other side answered: in the sphere of direct production. The logic of both sides lead past the university and out: one to the underground the other to the factory with well-known consequences. What was never seen was that the struggle against capital was right where they stood. Indeed, even during the period when the name of SDS was being used as a nickname for a student movement in its struggles on the campus,

the leadership was quite hesitant to explicitly take up the demands. Thus the anti-ranking protests were begun by local elements moving independently, and were only reluctantly supported by the national SDS. But clearly it could only be by taking the effective place in the capitalist division of labor as the point of refusal that powerful struggle could be launched. And further, it could only be by taking the relation between income and work as explicit that capital's plans for restructuring could be dealt with. But what was on the agenda was not taken up, and so the movement that helped destroy the Kennedy human capital strategy could not deal with the capitalist response.

1970-1975: Fiscal Crisis & The Ladder

The capitalist response to the refusal of development of human capital was not a change in tactics but a major strategic shift from concerns of "growth and unemployment" to the imperative of reestablishing control of the working class through a more direct imposition of work. The Nixon administration clearly recognized one fundamental flaw in the previous investment policy: making a too gross correlation between overall investment and output, by the reliance upon a university structure that could not mediate student struggle. Echoes of this shift were found in the writings of a number of economists that argued that the earlier statistical work of Denison was radically off, and that "education and R&D" could not account for a large percentage of GNP; while the recession of 1970 began to indicate that the new college graduates were themselves structurally unemployed! The scene had shifted with the bodies of the dead students just beginning to decompose.

But with the end of the route of development a new strategy had to be devised. Its first step was the "fiscal" crisis of the

universities. The inability to balance the books does not indicate bad arithmetic but inability to deal with the class struggle. The financially endangered universities of 1970 and 1971 were the weak links in the previous development strategy. Nobody tried to hide this obvious fact. For example, in Earl Fl. Cheit's *The New Depression in Higher Education*, the political and the economic became identified. In 1971 he studied 41 colleges and universities and grouped them into those that "were not in financial trouble" those that "were headed for trouble" and those, woe betide them, that "were in financial trouble". Consider the qualities, in rank order, that characterize those institutions not in financial trouble:

1. Less affected by campus disorders
2. Good fit between aspiration and program
3. High community regard for them
4. Smaller student aid expenditures
5. Program defined, growth controlled
6. Lower average faculty compensation
7. Efficiency

The message is clear; those who will survive are those who do not collapse against student attack: quick to call in the police, tight control over the faculty, resistant to wage demands everywhere. Balance the budget of struggle or else. This, of course, was just a slightly later verification of what was being said by state and federal politicians: "cut appropriations until those kids want to go to school" (as the Chairman of the Michigan State House Appropriations Committee said in the whirlwind of '70). The first must was to clean house and administer the appropriate self-critique to the "gutless

administrators” described in detail in the *Campus Disorders Report*. Undoubtedly the vengeance was sweet; it was obvious enough anyway. But surely things could not be left like that, for it was not just a matter of getting rid of a few weak willed presidents and some campus activists and then return to business as usual. What had to be reintroduced was a wholly new relation between state investment, university structure and labor market with a wider restructuring of capital in the crisis, for the previous relation just could not guarantee control over the reproduction of labor power.

“Fiscal” crisis is not only punitive, like bankruptcy, but also a reshaping activity, where the immediacy of monetary power seems to have the efficacy of a natural force. In this fiscal panic there was a marked shift from state investment coming in the nature of block grants to university building or student aid offices to demanding more “accountability” from individual universities as to their allocation of state funds while putting more restrictions on the use of student aid. At the same time planning decisions were taken out of the hands of individual universities as is befitting a period of massive restructuring. After the “campus disorders”, writes Frank Newton for H.E.W.,

The trend toward regulation has been amplified by a general tendency to view agencies of government as having the prime if not sole responsibility for the enforcement of accountability throughout society. There are however two very different strategies for achieving accountability. Strengthening the tendencies toward central control aimed at rationalizing and ordering the system represents one strategy. Strengthening the incentives for self-regulation by making better information available, by increasing the choices available to students among institutions to respond to these choices is another. In part, the determination of these agencies to exercise power

more directly stems from their frustration with the intractability of the problems of higher education and the difficulty of generating a responsiveness to public needs on the part of colleges and universities.

In other words, the old university structure had to go and in its place multi-campus control boards must do the large scale planning but at the same time a fine-grained control of students must be instituted without reliance on grading, “upholding the standards”, etc. These are Mr. Newton’s two strategies mixing a fascism for administrators with a socialism for students, the faculty getting a social democratic productivity deal.

Now the reference to “strengthening the incentives for self-regulation” refers to a new relation between the student and the labor market; the gross manpower planning approaches of the Sixties had to be junked due to the general difficulties of accumulation brought on by an international wage struggle. A “revolution in falling expectations” had to be accomplished by capital and so no more could the federal government and the universities “reinforce widespread expectations that there is a direct relationship between the amount of education and the likelihood of upward mobility in status and income,” as Mr. Newton writes. Thus all the attempts to figure on the rate-of-return per year of university (how much more money you get paid throughout your life for every year you spend in the university) are now being revised downward-or are being completely abandoned. This does not mean that universities will be done away with, however; rather the university becomes part of the labor market. The labor market has as its unit the job which has an essential prerequisite a “training ladder” or sequence that leads to it. The university becomes the base of these ladders instead of a place where a general upgrading of labor power is to be accomplished to

be thrown out into a constantly shifting but upgraded labor market. Thus the most salient aspects of the “silent 70’s” in the universities: the feudalization of the disciplines. In a period of uncertain levels of employment there has been a flocking of students to the areas where we get the greatest concentration of *credentials* required and are most open to a kind of apprenticeship called, ironically enough, “work-study”. Discipline over students is not accomplished with the old schoolmasterish ways (grading) but through connecting in a very explicit way work in the university with waged work: the job. The “new vocationalism” is not only to be found in the community colleges but it is also in the higher levels of the system where law, medicine, psychology, business administration, become the dominate departments. The social control jobs are used as social control: control through work if there ever was any!

The problem of planning becomes (now in a very explicit sense) trainability. And the question that is asked everywhere is: how malleable are you? The task of the university is “matching trainable individuals with training ladders” says Mr. Lester C. Thurow.⁹⁵ One can now easily see how the shift in the relationship between state investment-university structure-labor market could have defeated the student movement of the 60’s. First, the State disappears from campus since it no more is a requirement in its strategy to guarantee a relationship of students with the army and the labor market. Second, the university structure e.g., grading, becomes increasingly insignificant as a source of control. Third, the new strategy allows for experimentation in working conditions hence we get universities

without walls, end of sexual restrictions, and in general increased “self-management”. Fourth, while explicit university racism lessens and open admissions policies become more available income turns to be the new divider. Since the student movement did not take the question of income in its most general form – wages for school-work – capital could simultaneously accede to its partial demands while using the imposition of work to silence it. Capital takes the initiative in recognizing school as work and begins to wage it on its own terms.

1974: The Wage Struggle

In the last year there has been a beginning of a student response to the shift in strategy. These university protests have had an “economic” character since their main demands have been around the “fiscal” crisis: fight budget cuts, stop tuition increases, defend student aid, etc. These protests have not been sporadic; in the spring of 1975 there was a wave of strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations with similar demands and some coordination in the Northeast.

Not accidentally various Leftist groups have recently put out pamphlets on the universities. They spell out a political perspective tying struggle in the university with the Left’s general strategy for the crisis: defend the working class against capital’s crisis-induced attacks. This perspective, unlike the strategy of SIDS in the Sixties, takes the university as an important political base, consequently as something to be *defended*. In essence, the public university must be defended from fiscal attacks because the forced entrance of “working class” to “poor” students at the end of the Sixties opened up, for the first time, the possibility of having a highly educated working class. But since education leads to the ability to make more and broader connections in your social situation, education makes you more conscious. So by laying foundations for a more educated working

class, the public universities can begin to spawn a more *conscious* working class, a working class that can begin to pay attention to the political task of “building socialism” instead of insisting upon economic demands. If the obstacle to revolution is the lack of working class *consciousness* then, surely, the Pegasus to overcome it is *education*.

Not only does this political perspective provide a defense of the university, it also has an analysis of the new university crisis. Quoting from the *Crisis at CUNY* pamphlet, put out by a collective of “socialist” teachers at the City University of New York, we find the following analysis:

. . . the capitalists cannot go on forever using the educational system to increase productivity and at the same time expect it to perpetuate and ratify existing social arrangements. The more people they educate, and the better they educate them, the harder it becomes to maintain the class, racial, and sexual inequalities that are the basis of capitalist society. Educated workers are often dangerous workers, because they learn more than they are supposed to . . . educated people had a tendency to begin asking sharper questions and demanding better answers. And better lives. . . Too many people are getting too much education, says the ruling class. This accounts for their drive to cut back on enrollment, their desire to institute tuition, and, in fact, the current “crisis” in higher education. The contradiction has gotten out of hand.⁹⁶

Thus education is inherently liberating and the capitalists are in a bind for though they need it “too much education” has been the source of “dissatisfaction” in the working class. Conclusion, they are

going to shut down the public universities and send the working class back to the unenlightened mire.

Aside from all this being rather idealistic, it does not start at the primary point. What goes on at the university is work, namely schoolwork. It is work done to prepare to do more work. Its essence is self-discipline both in a specific and a general manner. The specific aspect of being a student is the learning of certain technical skills that can lead to greater productivity in specific jobs that require these skills. The general aspect of being a student, however, is infinitely more important: being self-regulating, self-controlled, etc. For example, what good to capital is an engineer who speaks Chinese and can solve differential equations if he never shows up for work? What is crucial for capital is not merely your ability to be programmed but more important is your ability to be re-programmed. So job interviewers don't really care how much one knows specifically but rather all their subtlety is addressed to the question: how malleable are you in adapting to new job requirements, i.e., how well educated are you? Thus the problem of the Sixties for capital was not that "people who could read, could read Marx as well as management manuals", as our socialist friends allege. Rather, what alarmed capital was the effective refusal of schoolwork, the massive rejection of education. There was too little education, not too much. What was educational was the struggle against education!

However, what makes it easy for capital to impose and, *if stopped*, re-impose schoolwork is that it is *unwaged work*. Its unwaged character gives it an appearance of personal choice and its refusal an equally personal even "psychological" symptom. So, ironically, though students consider themselves, at times, the most advanced part of the working class they still belong to the ranks of unwaged workers. This unwaged status has profound consequences for the student

movement and the class struggle at this moment. First, because they are unwaged workers students can be cheaply used as workers outside schools and universities to reduce wage levels. Second, by being unwaged Capital can restructure the schools and increase intensity and productivity requirements at little cost; thus ROTC is making a comeback on the university campuses because the Armed-Forces are paying \$100 a month for trainees; and this is just a more obvious example of the possibilities of dividing the student movement for a pittance.⁹⁷

The present political problem of the student movement is not that of a student-worker alliance and so of finding a “link” with the working class, simply because students *are* workers. Nor is it that of defending the public university *as* the place for “socialist” education and “unalienated, integrated” work, for the content of the class struggle is the struggle against work for wealth. Rather it must confront the capitalist strategy of control in the university crisis which is predicated on the wagelessness of students. Students can only attack their wageless status through a demand of *wages for schoolwork*. Such an autonomous demand directly counters capital’s plans for it can halt capital’s use of students against other workers and also make it difficult to divide students against each other. Capital has used wageless school work as a ladder to success, i.e., to successful exploitation, it is time we threw it away.

97 Many passages in this last section on school work and the critique of the Left are taken from a pamphlet, *Wages for Students*, written and distributed by militants during student strikes in Massachusetts and New York in the spring of 1975.

The Working Class Struggle against the Crisis:

Self-reduction of Prices in Italy

Bruno Ramirez

Original Flyer Synopsis:

"Self-reduction is not an entirely new phenomenon in Italy. For instance, at Magliana, one of Rome's largest working class districts, some 2,000 families have been practicing self-reduction for the past two years, cutting their monthly rent payments by 50%. And this is by no means an isolated case. What is new is the way in which this practice, developed and led by housewives, has spread to other sectors of essential social consumption, such as public transit, electricity, and home heating. When viewed in the context of parallel practices – such as squatting and organized mass appropriation of groceries from supermarkets – this struggle becomes more than merely a defensive one. It becomes, as some militants have called it, a struggle for the re-appropriation of social wealth produced by the working class but unpaid by capital."

With an inflation rate of over 25%, widespread unemployment, and increasing repression, Italy's current economic crisis shows how far capital is willing to push its attack against the living conditions of the working class.

One of the distinct marks of this crisis — in Italy as well as in other capitalist countries — is the extent to which class conflict has widened, involving directly the area of social consumption. The dramatic increase in the cost of living is in fact setting off a wave of struggles dictated by the working class' need to protect their wage gains, and to ensure adequate access to essential goods and services such as food, housing, utilities, and transportation. It is no coincidence that — particularly in Italy — capital's massive move onto this terrain comes after a long cycle of factory struggles which have yielded considerable gains in wages and working conditions. It shows the coherence of capitalist strategy — a coherence which has been forced to become explicit by the organized resistance of wide sectors of the working class.

The practice of “self-reduction” — i.e., the refusal to comply with price increases of essential services — is the answer that has emerged from this terrain of struggle. The character of this struggle raises important political questions both for capital and the working class. How can this struggle be mediated and brought under control? To what extent does the brunt of this struggle fall primarily on one sector of the working class — i.e., housewives, as the central protagonists in the area of social consumption?

Self-reduction is not an entirely new phenomenon in Italy. For instance, at Magliana, one of Rome's largest working-class districts, some 2,000 families have been practicing self-reduction for the past two years, cutting their monthly rent payments by 50%. And this is

by no means an isolated case. What is new is the way in which this practice has spread to other sectors of essential social consumption, such as public transportation, electricity, and home heating.

When viewed in the context of parallel practices — such as squatting and organized mass appropriation of groceries from supermarkets — this struggle becomes more than merely a defensive one. It becomes — as some militants have called it — a struggle for the re-appropriation of social wealth produced by the working class but unpaid by capital.

Explosion of Self-Reduction Struggles

When on a Monday in August 1974, hundreds of commuting workers found out that their bus fare from Pinerolo to Turin had been increased by almost 30%, few people would have predicted that such a relatively insignificant event could provide the spark for a new wave of struggles. To those commuters, the fare increase — decided by the bus line during the two-week summer shutdowns — sounded like an act of cowardly provocation. It took only a few days to organize some action and mobilize the commuters travelling on the bus line. The following Monday the plan of action was ready. Workers set up tables near the bus terminal with signs all around saying “Refuse the fare increases!” But more importantly they issued substitute weekly bus tickets, selling them at the old price (tickets are normally bought by commuting workers on Mondays and entitled them to one week’s travel). The bus company responded by shutting down its operations, so hundreds of workers that morning did not go to work, and continued their mobilization. In the afternoon they sent a delegation to the Regional Bureau of Transportation to demand that the old fares be reinstated, and that in the meantime the

substitute bus tickets be accepted. After a few days of pressure, the Bureau ordered a suspension of the fare increase.

The spark had caught fire. Within a few days, similar events were occurring throughout the heavily industrialized region around Turin. On September 17, the Regional Authorities issued new guidelines for interurban transportation fares applicable to the 106 private bus lines operating in the region — guidelines which substantially reduced the increases already enacted or proposed by the bus lines.

The first round of self-reduction struggles had yielded its fruits. The practice however was quickly spreading to other regions of Italy, disseminating chaos in municipal and regional governments and in the trade-union bureaucracies. By the end of September, the media networks were hysterically condemning this outbreak of “civil disobedience”, and the Italian Communist Party was solemnly reminding workers that the only valid method of struggle is the strike.

The next logical step for the workers was to apply this form of struggle to other areas of social consumption. The electricity bill figures high in the budget of most working-class households, and it is to this item that the struggle suddenly turned. One could hardly think of a more politically explosive choice. For one thing, the electricity industry in Italy is nationalized and adopts rates which are applied throughout the whole country. The State would therefore become the direct target in a struggle whose potential for generalization among the working-class would be enormous. Moreover, popular sentiment against the state-controlled electricity corporation (ENEL) was at a high point because of recent increases in electricity rates at a time when the corporation had been caught in a scandal involving the financing of political parties. ENEL's policy of granting reduced

rates to industry as a form of subsidy (roughly 25% compared to domestic-use rates) also added much fuel to the fire, as it was viewed by many as a blatant act of discrimination.

The initiative came again from the heavily industrialized areas of Turin and Milan. The initial support given by local trade-unions officials, or local union bodies (such as for instance the Turin Labour Council) was very instrumental in facilitating the mobilization of workers in factories. It made it possible to utilize the organizational apparatus of the in plant workers' councils for this purpose, especially once the councils' executives had expressed their support of the struggle. In most cases, the mobilization involved setting up "self-reduction committees" whose task was to collect workers' electricity bills and issue substitute bills, often bearing the stamp of the unions. Workers would then enter the new amount, usually cut by 50%, and pay the bill.

This mobilization however, was not confined to factories. As this practice spread throughout Italy, self-reduction committees sprang up in urban neighborhoods as well as in small rural towns. In some of the large urban districts the setting up of these committees was facilitated by the prior existence of neighborhood committees with a long history of community struggles. Most of these committees are made up of delegates, a few from each block or apartment building, whose task is to mobilize their neighbors, coordinate the activities of various buildings, and make links with nearby neighborhoods and factories. The support given by ENEL workers who often refused to enforce the company's orders to disconnect electricity was also an important factor contributing to the success of the struggle. Through this combination of factory and neighborhood mobilizations, by the end of December tens of thousands of electricity bills had been

collected in each major Italian city. Turin was at the head, with about 140,000 bills collected.

Housewives – Protagonists of the Struggle Against More Housework

To a large extent the political significance of this wave of struggles lies in the territorial link-up it is providing between factories and neighborhoods. As a worker from Naples explained: “In Naples in the past we have had experiences of self-reduction of water bills, gas bills, and electricity bills; but they have always been restricted to some building or some neighborhood, and have never caught on in the factories or in the unions. But today the situation looks quite different, and offers a great political potential.” (*Lotta Continua*, October 4/74)

It is, however, in the neighborhoods that this mobilization is having its most dramatic effect, because it is often interwoven with other struggles such as squatting and self-reduction of rents. Moreover, despite the fact that often factory workers have been the spearhead of the mobilization, it is ultimately at the level of the neighborhood that the brunt of the struggle has been borne. This is where people have to face ENEL officers who come to either collect the bills or disconnect the electricity. And this is where they often have to confront the police and the fascist groups who are sent to disrupt the process of mobilization. It is this dimension of the struggle which has shown the crucial role of housewives as central protagonists. Their role stems also from other considerations. If there is one item of productive consumption which falls squarely within the work of housewives, this is electricity. The increase in the electricity bill amounts in effect either to a speed-up imposed by the State on housewives, as it forces them to perform the same amount

of housework (cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning, etc.) in a shorter time, or to extending their working day by forcing to do more work by hand.

It is obvious that capital's attack at the level of productive consumption stems from its difficulties in halting the wage increases that workers have won in the factories. Although this attack is directed against the working class as a whole, it tries to exploit the division of labor (factory waged labor versus domestic unwaged labor) on which capitalism rests, by hitting a weaker sector of the class — i.e., by squeezing more unpaid labor from housewives. To see the central role of housewives in this wave of self-reduction struggle as merely a show of solidarity toward factory struggles would be clouding a very important process with empty leftist rhetoric.

The role of housewives as central protagonists can only be understood by the fact that their material conditions of work are the immediate target of capital's attack, and hence that this struggle is in a very important sense *their* struggle against *their* increased exploitation. Only after this point has been made clear can one talk about solidarity.

In this light, the struggle to reduce substantially the monetary cost of a family's productive consumption has become very crucial for the survival of many working-class households. This is particularly true in many large urban neighborhoods, such as in Rome and Naples, where many people make their living through marginal occupations (petty trade, black marketing, prostitution, etc.). The fact that in most of these cases the wage relation between capital and the male breadwinner is either non-existent or highly unstable has produced a dynamic which escapes the trade unions' mediating mechanisms. This explains why in these cases the self-reduction practice has exhibited

a higher degree of autonomy both in its direction and in its content, allowing housewives to exercise the leadership which the terrain of these struggles confers on them. It is important to note, for instance, that in many neighborhoods the slogan was not “50% reduction” (the directive given by union officials in factory mobilizations), but rather “let’s pay the rates that bosses are charged”, which means a reduction of more than 75%.

The Trade Union’s Management of the Self-Reduction Struggles

The contrast between factory mobilizations and neighborhood mobilizations can be better grasped when one looks at the strategy pursued by the unions in order to control and channel the self-reduction struggles — a strategy which is reminiscent of their role in the 1969 wave of factory struggles.

The initial outbreak of self-reduction struggles and the workers’ use of the workers’ councils (most of which are union-controlled) forced union officials to take a position. Similarly, in many large working class neighborhoods, the Communist Party was confronted with the situation of many party militants joining the self-reduction struggles and often even using the local Party sections to help the mobilization. But while the CP leadership did not take long to condemn this practice, calling it “divisive” and a “provocation” by a few ultra-leftist groups, the situation was much more complex for the trade-union leadership.

There is no question that the role played by local union officials — many of whom are members of other Marxist organizations (e.g., PDUP-Manifesto) — was very instrumental in gaining the support of local trade union bodies, especially in the Turin and Milan areas.

But for many other union officials, the outbreak of self-reduction struggles was viewed in the context of the increasing dissatisfaction among workers with the unions' obstructionism in the development of a broad mobilization against the rising cost of living. This was clearly expressed by the Secretary of the Turin Labor Council: "What is at stake here is our relationship with the people; what is being questioned is our ability to build an alternative. In these last months the credibility of the unions has hit a low ebb . . . [in order to regain it], it is not enough to demand 50,000 or 100,000 liras for the workers; we must instead come up with alternative political solutions." (*L'Espresso*)

When this "alternative solution" started rolling, it was again the old-time Italian trade union politics. While the lower-level union leadership in the main supported this new wave of militancy — being directly confronted by this new upsurge of struggles — the national leadership was buying time, avoiding a clear-cut position. This posture was largely dictated by the necessity to maintain the shaky balance of alliances among the three national union federations, which has repeatedly been threatened by the "ungovernability" of the working-class, and consequently by the state of crisis in which all political parties are enmeshed.

This wait-and-see strategy began to pay off when the Rumor Government resigned in early October, setting off a long governmental crisis which lasted through the rest of the month. The absence of a cabinet at a time when the self-reduction movement was quickly spreading throughout the country undoubtedly had the effect of dramatizing the impact of this wave of struggles. It also contributed to giving the unions — the only institution which could conceivably control and manage the upsurge — the leverage necessary to influence the formation of the new government. In the

political formula which enabled the new Moro Government to take power at the end of October one essential ingredient was the support given by the unions — on the condition that the new Government would commit itself to a national re-negotiation of cost of living allowances. A further condition was a revised schedule of electricity rates. From now on, the autonomous, rank-and-file controlled development of the self-reduction struggles had to be stopped. The logics of class mediation and the unions' credibility vis-à-vis the government demanded it.

During the long period of negotiations between the government and the three national union federations — culminating in the agreement at the end of December — the impact of the unions' new policy vis-à-vis the self-reduction movement became evident in the factories. The overwhelming majority of workers'-councils executives ordered a stop to the mobilization. This meant that workers who wanted to continue the struggle had to do so in opposition to these union bodies. The confrontation was often fierce, showing the extent to which the unions cared more about their credibility with the government than with the workers.

At the ALFA Sud auto plant near Naples, for instance, the target of 2,500 reduced electricity bills was reached by bypassing the workers' council. At the Italsider steel plant, in Bagnoli, several workers' council executive members were forced to resign by workers because of their opposition to the mobilization.

Despite these and other successes scored by autonomous rank-and-file forces in several factories throughout Italy, it was clear that the self-reduction mobilization at the factory level had been severely affected by the imperatives of trade-union politics. To a large extent, therefore, the continuing of the struggle lay with the neighborhood

mobilizations, where the mediation of the unions was proving unworkable, and where there was a basis to resist and counter the direct repressive attacks by the State.

The new agreement over a national COLA package, which includes revised electricity rates, has marked a significant step forward in the process of the unions' integration into the capitalist state apparatus. The extension of their bargaining functions into the politically explosive area of essential consumption makes the unions a crucial partner in capitalist planning in this area. Not only do the unions co-manage the determination of wages and their distribution, *they also co-manage the way wages are used in the area of social consumption.*

In retrospect, the unions' course of action had other significant implications in terms of the dynamics of the struggle. Their involvement had the function of separating the initial autonomous links between factory and neighborhood mobilizations, and then attempting to impose a new link "from above" by co-managing along with the State the new electricity rates and their acceptance. This illustrates clearly the crucial political importance of the unions in the context of Italy's economic and political crisis; they are the only institution that can mediate between the worker as wage-earner, and the worker as consumer of essential goods and services, and thereby continue to conceal the exploitation of unwaged workers — above all housewives.

The Future of Self-Reduction Struggles

The agreement, however, has merely closed a chapter of this struggle. It has not put an end to the self-reduction practice, which, particularly in the neighborhoods, has continued practically unaffected by the trade-union-government politics. Nor has the

mobilization in the factories been brought to a complete halt. Recent months have witnessed a revival of the struggle in an increasing number of factories. A motion to support the struggle of the self-reduction of electricity bills was approved at a special meeting of 1,000 workers' delegates in Milan recently, indicating the degree of resistance the unions may still encounter among workers. In part this new upsurge stems from the workers' reaction to the new electricity rates, which became effective in January. The new rates are based on a graduated system, depending on the level of consumption of each household. In effect, for a typical working-class family, the new rates mean an increase of 33%.

Many feel this increase is certainly worth the struggle; particularly the millions of housewives for whom a forced reduction in the consumption of electricity means more work, with housework normally done with electrical appliances, now being done by hand.

If the present policy of Italian capital is to reduce levels of consumption in order to patch up the current economic crisis, it has become clear to what extent the burden of this political operation falls on the shoulders of housewives. It makes it possible to squeeze from them a huge new amount of unpaid labor without serious inflationary consequences.

The present Italian crisis has shown with unusual sharpness the importance of the home as a unit of production, and housewives as protagonists of the struggle against capitalist planning in this sphere.

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