RADICAL AMERICA
Vol. 12, No. 5

THE BLACK SOUTH IN THE 'SEVENTIES

ERA DEMO
ROCK VS. RACISM
WOMEN, FAMILIES & UNIONS
ITALY'S COMMUNIST PARTY
Cover: Picking beans in Greensboro, Alabama. Photo by Lucia Droby.


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RADICAL AMERICA: Published bi-monthly by the Alternative Education Project, Inc. at 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143 (MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box B, N. Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140). Copyright © 1978 by Radical America. Subscription rates: $10 per year, $18 for two years, $7 per year for the unemployed. Add $2.00 per year to all prices for foreign subscriptions. Double rates for institutions. Free to prisoners. Bulk rates: 40 per cent reduction from cover price for five or more copies. Bookstores may order from Carrier Pigeon, 88 Fisher Ave., Boston, Mass. 02120. Typesetting by Sasha Graphics.

Second class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts.
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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the meteoric rise of Jimmy Carter to the presidency, the myth of a born-again "New South," in which racism has been virtually swept away, has taken hold in the media. In this issue we are printing Manning Marable's "Reaction: Thoughts on the Political Economy of the New South Since the Civil Rights Movement," which effectively refutes this image. Without taking away from the very real accomplishments of the black struggle in the South, it is important to reject the illusion that white supremacy is somehow no longer a pervasive feature of the region's (as of the nation's) social fabric.

Marable is sharply critical of black politicians such as Andrew Young and Barbara Jordan who have won considerable white acceptance as part of a process of moderating the militant thrust of the 1960s black movement. At the same time, he discusses the historical failure of interracial working-class cooperation in the South, and this failure is crucial. So long as the mass of proletarianized blacks are blocked off from being part of class-wide struggles, the only black leadership that can emerge is that of black politicians on the left edge of the Democratic party's mainstream. As for white working-class people in the South, so long as the traditions of white supremacy remain strong, they will keep both their relative advantages vis a vis their black counterparts and their severe disadvantage (vis a vis the rest of the country) of low wages, rampant exploitataton, and disorganization. The working class black and white is ill served by white supremacy. Nowhere is this fact more starkly clear than in the South.
The picture that Marable’s article leaves us with is bleak, but by no means empty of hope. The changing economy of the South, at the same time that it has undermined the old civil rights movement, is shaking up the region in a way that opens up new possibilities. The long-delayed entry of blacks into the textile industry is helping to bring a sustained challenge to that cornerstone of the region’s anti-unionism. The very fact that race-baiting is no longer a profitable tactic for conservative white politicians, at least on statewide levels, signifies the extent to which there is more breathing space for interracial movements. For leftists interested in helping to build a strong working class movement that will confront white supremacy and its false privileges directly, the situation is one of opportunity rather than despair.

Joanna Bornat’s article, “Home and Work,” is one whose implications are much broader than the particular scope of the study. From her interviews with people who worked in their youth in textile factories in the British industrial midlands, the author suggests new ways of looking at the modern industrial workforce. Leftists have too often seen “the workers” as stereotyped abstract figures whose identity comes from their wage-labor employment in a capitalist workplace. “The working class,” by extension, is seen as the sum of these one-dimensional workers. But as Joanna Bornat says, the relation of workers to their employment is often shaped in large part by their home and family life. In the case of the women textile workers that Bornat writes about, almost every aspect of their employment was strongly affected by their family ties and by their subordination within the family. In particular, the wage, rather than being simply a relationship between boss and wage-earner, was part of a complicated system of relationships within the family as well as between the family and the employer.

More generally, a study like this one helps to drive home the point that it is home and work together that shape working-class life — that the texture of that life is far richer than it often seems in left-wing writings. Class consciousness, rather than being a natural by-product of alienated wage labor, is also shaped in large part by family and neighborhood relationships. This should be obvious, perhaps, from strike situations, since historically the strongest strikes have been those which have involved whole families and working-class communities on the side of the strikers.

The textile union which many of Bornat’s interviewees belonged to (often because their fathers told them to join) appeared to them as an alien institution with little relevance to their own lives. In James Russell’s short article on a
significant recent local-union election in San Francisco, he describes an effort by a rank and file caucus to transform their union into a workers’ instrument. The very fact that the caucus (with considerable participation by independent leftists) was able to unseat the incumbent president is noteworthy. He is the president of the city’s Central Labor Council and has had enough of a progressive posture to win Communist Party support in his bid for reelection against the insurgents. But there are tendencies in any trade-union situation for victorious insurgents to settle into the leadership patterns of the officials they have displaced. This may well be happening in the culinary workers local which Russell is writing about. Still unresolved is the question of whether this sort of electoral campaign in a union can be shaped in such a way that the campaign itself will help to counteract this tendency.

The Italian Communist Party is the strongest Communist party in the West. Administering cities and provinces, controlling a powerful trade union federation and an elaborate bureaucracy, the Party has now been incorporated into the governing majority of the nation. Moreover, the Party maintains an elaborate network of cooperatives and cultural organizations, factory and neighborhood cells, and organizations for women and youth, through which it leaves its imprint on almost all areas of Italian life. To American socialists, a party of such strength claiming the parentage of Marx and Lenin seems beyond our wildest hopes.

Since 1973 the Italian Communist Party has been the leading party of a new trend within the Communist World, “Eurocommunism.” Insisting on the right and duty of Western parties to independence from the Soviet Union, the Italian party has tried to chart a new path to state power. Claiming that the lessons of the Chilean experience dictate that no party can hope to maintain power while alienating substantial portions of the middle classes, the bourgeoisie, and the military, the Italian party has proposed instead a “historic compromise” — a governing alliance with their main political antagonists, the Christian Democrats. Hoping to avoid an isolation of the Left, the Communist Party has nevertheless found itself in the nearly untenable position of attempting to administer an economy in decline, while having
little real power except for their ability to curb the demands of labor.

Since the emergence of "Eurocommunism" five years ago, the wisdom of the Italian course, and more specifically its applicability to other countries, has been widely debated. The other major parties of Europe — those of France and Spain — have entered into fraternal discussions with the Italian party. In the United States, the impact of the Italian departure has been to give hope to those forces which advocate an orientation of the left towards those sections of the Democratic Party which are not hopelessly corrupt. Opponents of this course have claimed that the Italian gains are illusory, and that "Eurocommunism" amounts to a betrayal of the working class analogous to those Social Democrats in the pre-World War I period whose "model" socialist parties eventually supported the imperialist war of 1914.

Discussion on both sides, however, has been hampered by a lack of information on the nature and working of Italian communism. As such, it has been essentially a moral debate, arguing in relatively abstract terms about what a communist party should do. We believe that Joanne Barkan's article, "The Italian Communists: Anatomy of a Party," will recast this debate in a new light. Drawing on Italian sources and first-hand experience, she examines the extent to which "Eurocommunism," at least in the land of its birth, is not simply the result of new policy initiatives, but is rooted in the history and structural conditions of the Party itself.
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REACTION

Thoughts on the Political Economy of the New South Since the Civil Rights Movement

Manning Marable

A conservative political and cultural reaction has occurred since 1968. Despite the rhetorical triumphs of Black Power, the influx of Blacks into economic and political positions of privilege and the establishment of Black Studies curricula in Southern schools, a retreat from the political logic of the sixties developed. Both before and after Martin’s assassination, key members of S.C.L.C. and the N.A.A.C.P. who had worked closely with Martin for almost a decade privately refused to come to terms with his new political position. Many continued to praise the King legacy publicly but as in the case of some of Malcolm’s former followers, they privately denounced the international perspective and the anti-imperialist analysis implicit within Martin’s final speeches. The material realities of America had forced Martin to abandon his older reformist ideas for a higher form of social and ethical criticism; this was something which other leading integrationists could not or would not do.

A host of S.N.C.C. activists retreated under the cover of the “Black Power” slogan into local and state electoral politics, to build a political foundation. Black entrepreneurs like James Farmer and Floyd McKissick forged a Booker T. Washington-type alliance with the Nixon administration to establish Black petty bourgeois power.

Despite the successful voter education and registration drives of S.N.C.C. a decade ago and despite the successful organization of independent Black political parties in Alabama and Mississippi, representative democracy between the races is actually at a standstill. Four million Black Southerners are registered compared with about two million Blacks in 1964,
but the Civil Rights Movement fell far short of achieving equal political power for Blacks. Black elected officials number 1,847 in the South, but that amounts to only 2.3 percent of the total number of elected officials in the region. Blacks constitute 20.5 percent of the South’s total population and make up popular majorities in over 100 counties, yet only ten counties are effectively controlled by Blacks. Only two Black Congressmen are from the South, and these persons represent the region’s major metropolitan areas. This small, elected Black elite represents, with few exceptions, the interests of the Black petty bourgeoisie and maturing corporate interests within the New South. It tends to represent political philosophies to the right of their Northern counterparts; e.g., Barbara Jordan’s staunch and sincere defense of the character of John Conally at his milk fund trial; Andrew Young’s solitary Black vote endorsing the 1973 appointment of Gerald Ford to the Vice Presidency.

Carter’s ultimate victory — and the Southern Blacks’ central role within that campaign — also constituted a reemergence of another “New South” onto the center stage of that tired drama which is American politics. There have been several New Souths at different stages of the nation’s history — the New South of Atlanta Henry Grady and the Redeemer Democrats during the 1880s; the New South of the “Atlanta Spirit” and the neoprogressives of the twenties; the “moderate segregationist” South of the T.V.A. — Maury Maverick — Claude Pepper mode. In each instance the Black petty bourgeoisie played no major role of importance in determining the function of the state, the nature of “white democracy.” C. Vann Woodward has observed correctly that segregation was the basic political reform of the Progressive South. The rapid rise of Barbara Jordan, Andrew Young, Ben Brown and other Southern Black moderates signifies a basic change from this tradition of whites-only politics: the Southern white ruling class has decided that it can accommodate certain representatives of the Afro-American community. Jordan’s speech at the 1976 Democratic National Convention and Young’s central importance to Carter’s candidacy represented the Black petty bourgeoisie’s endorsement of the New South Creed. Their successes represent a compromise of the real class interests of Black people with the American political economy of exploitation.

Like a number of Black Republican politicians during the 1880s many Black Southern Democrats have renounced the political liberal-left within the national Democratic Party and have cemented an alliance with new representatives of the South’s upper class, despite their rhetoric to the contrary. During the 1880s several important Black Republicans, most prominently Mississippi Senator Blanche Bruce, retained political prestige through an association with the Bourbon Democratic aristocracy, the economic conservatives and aspiring capitalists in the first New South. Bruce, a plantation owner and well-to-do entrepreneur in his own right, often had more in common with Mississippi Senator Lamar and Wade Hampton than with his own Black sharecropping constituents. Despite their roots in the Desegregation struggle, Andrew Young and other less prominent Black Southern politicians have made similar compromises with white power.

The fundamental reason for these political developments is economic. Since the late 1960s, conservative economists and corporate leaders alike have commented upon the “booster” character of the South’s modern economy. During the economic recessions of the Nixon-Ford administrations Southern business was the leader in stock market revival through their high profit margins, automobile sales and purchases of equities. Conservative capitalist economist Elliot Janeway notes that “stock broker-
age firms with national networks of branch offices report that the retail stampede to buy stocks began in the South. Its impact on Wall Street was to spread the word overnight: "When in New York, do as the Southerners do." Consumer confidence in the South immediately after the recession remained at 70 percent, the highest level in the country. Large numbers of foreign industries have relocated in the South in recent years to take advantage of low corporate tax levels: Volvo recently opened an assembly line in Chesapeake, Virginia; Michelin of France has already invested 300 million dollars in three South Carolina factories. Since 1960, gross per capita income in the South has risen from 133.6 billion dollars to 263.9 billion. Personal per capita income has increased from $1,707 to $5,198, while the industrial output of Southern factories has leaped from 25.8 billion to 54.0 billion dollars. The New South of the 1970s, like the original New South of the 1880s, depends upon the finance capital and rapid commercial expansion of heavy industry. During the post-Reconstruction era the capital influx into the South came from New England and the Mid-Atlantic states; today this capital comes from the North, the West Coast, and all parts of the world. In the 1880s, new cities like Birmingham, Winston-Salem and Atlanta were being created by commerce and industry; today the newer giants are the cities of Houston, Miami, Tampa Bay and Dallas-Fort Worth, and the suburban metropolitan areas of older towns such as Atlanta.

Coinciding with the rapid expansion of commerce and industry into the New South has occurred the process of proletarianization — a decline in agriculture employment, the destruction of a vital petty bourgeois agrarian class, the loss of Black land tenure and a significant increase in non-farm employment. From 1964 to 1974 twenty-nine percent of all Southern farms ceased operations, a total of 454,000 fewer farms. The general economic tendency since 1960 has been the increased isolation of the Southern agrarian petty bourgeois class in favor of agribusiness corporations. Without exception, in every region of the south the family farmer is being replaced by impersonal, profit-oriented bourgeoisie. In Florida, Tropicana, Coca-Cola and twelve other agribusinesses account for sixty percent of all citrus products grown in the state and employ a vast majority of farm laborers. Holly Farms, Inc., of North Carolina, has in less than a single decade absorbed the market of the majority of the nation's independent poultry farmers. The federal government's farm policies under Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford encouraged the destruction of the independent middle class farmer's market in the South, resulting in a real decline in agricultural output in the region, from 8.3 billion dollars worth in 1960 to only 7.4 billion dollars last year. Profits for Southern agribusiness remained high even during the recession years — for example, in 1973 Holly Farms netted 11.5 million dollars before taxes.

The South's political economy has become top heavy — corrupted at the top with the importation of heavy industry involving cheap labor, the political and cultural hegemony of a predominantly white bourgeoisie and managerial elite, the destruction of the Black and poor white agricultural classes and the expansion of an impoverished urban proletariat devoid of a cultural sense of collectivity and lacking a militant labor union consciousness. The rapid expansion of textile mills into the South's piedmont sections during the past four decades illustrates the workings of the Southern political economy. By the 1970s the South employed almost seventy-five percent of all textile workers in the nation, although less than ten percent of the 589,000 workers are presently members of unions. Textile workers in the South are also ranked at the bottom of all
industrial workers nation-wide, earning an average of $3.46 per hour compared to $6.43 per hour in the automobile industry.

The Southern police act, and even perceive themselves to be, an arm of coercion of the new bourgeoisie, escorting scabs through picket lines. The relative backwardness of Southern Black labor provides the Carter-Black elite strata with another beachhead of political support, an economic basis for reactionary politics. Yet Southern labor’s relative backwardness also indicates a real potential for radical change, given an activist leadership. The labor situation provides real parallels with the condition of national labor during the early 1930s, on the eve of radical labor militancy — if, again, the laborers themselves are raised to a sufficient level of education and working class consciousness.

This aggressive process of mature, capitalist economic development bears with it a complementary tendency toward agrarian underdevelopment. The small towns and villages of the picturesque, rural South lose their former share of the economic market to the massive metropolitan powers of Atlanta, Memphis, Birmingham, Charlotte and Nashville. The rural petty bourgeoisie become increasingly dependent upon the economic, political and cultural initiatives of the metropolis bourgeoisie. This dependency creates a lumpendevelopment of the former sharecropper and rural working class, forging a stratum of permanently unemployable men and women with scant formal
and technological education. This lumpen economic pattern of quasi-neo-colonialism is characterized by the influx of outside capital into the countryside and the concentration of the best lands and other resources, such as credit, labor and capital in the hands of the few. The lumpen development of the Black South isolates Black religious and ethical figures and other traditional leaders from their communities, creating Black bourgeois "leaders" with little popular following. In any agrarian society rapidly transformed into a capitalistic society, the entire civil structure of the culture of the oppressed becomes contradictory and irrational, filled with the tensions and philosophies from the old ways of life and the brutal material realities of the new individualistic age. From the tensions and economic contradictions springs, ultimately, a period of revolt.

Black elected officials have largely ignored the processes of proletarianization and lumpen-proletarianization which are occuring within the South's new political economy. The attention placed upon the narrow political struggle for integration and equal opportunity to participate within the bourgeois state has obscured the more fundamental social problem for Blacks — the destruction of the independent Black farming class throughout the region. In 1950 there were 560,000 farms under Black management in the South; by 1971 there were only 98,000 farms, and since the recession there appears to have been a severe drop in the latter figure. Black farmers have virtually disappeared: in 1950 there were 3,158,000 Black farmers, but two decades later only 938,000 remained. Federal government and private foundation support for Black farmers has been at best insufficient. Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers have experienced a violent economic purge during the same period, and high market prices between 1964 and 1969 pushed many thousands of Black tenant farmers off their lands. In 1969 there were eighty percent fewer Black tenants than there had been only five years before. Many of these farmers and their families were pressed into the new factories and industries arriving in the South.

The high rate of industrialization and the underdeveloped consciousness of labor in the South directly contributed to the conservative character of Southern Black politicians. Working class activism throughout the South is thwarted by universal right-to-work laws which permit all workers to refuse to become union members. Only fourteen percent of all non-farm workers have joined unions, compared with over thirty percent of non-farm workers nationally. The void of widespread, militant labor union praxis and a culture of protest and the lack of a viable Black Left has its intellectual origins in the middle of the nineteenth century and within slavery's political economy. Impoverished whites and Blacks should have been logical allies economically, but the extreme racism of local whites has traditionally pushed poor whites into the political arms of reactionary conservatives like Lester Maddox of Georgia. Because white laborers foster a backward culture of racism, the white bourgeoisie finds it easier to pay all Southern workers significantly less than the amount which laborers receive nationally. During 1974 total employment fell 2.1 percent in the South compared with less than one percent for the entire nation. The superexploitation of Southern labor, the feeble condition of unions and the loss of Black properties has combined in the historical creation of a first and second generation Black proletariat whose political leaders within the electoral arena represent the cultural and social attitudes of their exploiters.

The South's recent story in economics has pressed both capitalist parties into creating viable Southern strategies. Nixon's "Sunbelt" strategies, combined with his firm grip upon the
white middle and upper-middle classes, provided him with an impressive margin over George McGovern in 1972. Likewise, Carter’s campaign has clearly identified new Southern moderates as being pivotal to his election chances—men like South Carolina’s John West, Arkansas’ Dale Bumpers and David Pryor, Mississippi’s William Waller and Louisiana’s Edwin Edwards. The Reagan candidacy for the Republican nomination was the recipient of much former segregationist sentiment, and without the California Governor’s impressive primary victory in North Carolina and his overwhelming support among Southern conservatives like Jesse Helms he could not have mounted a serious challenge to President Ford this spring. The South receives far more federal allocations from the government than the older industrial and agricultural regions of the North, which also accounts for the region’s political power. Comparing federal taxes paid in 1975 with federal outlays, for instance, the Southeast received 9.5 billions dollars more than it paid the government while the East lost 10 billion dollars and the Midwest lost 20 billion dollars.

Occurring with the entrance of Blacks into Southern politics and the emergence of the region’s national prestige has also been an expansion of state institutional forms. Southern governments during previous New South periods were seldom more than petty courthouse committees of Black Belt plantation owners and the lawyers of industry. The “Atlanta Spirit” of the twenties was characterized in politics by “Neowhigs” like Virginia’s Harry Flood Byrd and Arkansas Governor John E. Martineau, conservatives who reluctantly expanded state services on a pay-as-you-go basis, and then only along a whites-only policy. Contemporary politicians have reversed this dominant theme in Southern government by demanding staggering increases in the budgets of state and local government.

One unlikely advocate of big state government has been George Wallace, Governor of Alabama. During his administrations he supervised the construction of fourteen new junior colleges, fifteen trade schools and introduced the largest highway construction program in the state’s history. The state bureaucracy tripled in size under his administration; the proportion of Alabama residents employed in public welfare programs, about thirty-four percent is the second highest in the nation. Wallace and other vocal segregationists, like Louisiana’s Risley Triche and Georgia’s Herman Talmadge, have openly renounced their racist rhetoric and legislation of only ten years ago and now demand that their state governments keep up with the rising expectations of Black constituents. While participating with moderate white politicians like Carter, Bumpers and Pryor, the old-line racist politicians have aided the establishment of massive and poorly managed state bureaucratic structures.

The growth of state bureaucracies within the New South manifests key elements and contradictions within the region’s political economy. The rapid underdevelopment of the rural petty bourgeoisie required new state sponsored welfare agencies. The rapid industrialization of the urban centers and the influx of a new first-generation working class called for state government intervention similar to the New Deal programs of the thirties.

III

The history of the relationship between Black and white laborers in the South is at best, ambiguous. Since the late nineteenth century Blacks acquired the reputation as strikebreakers or scabs. The Negro laborer was viewed as a temporary source of cheap labor by white managers of capitalist enterprises, and as such, seemed to pose a continuous threat to the direct economic interests of the white working
class. There were numerous incidents, however, of Black-white cooperation within the struggles of organized labor. During the reorganization of the United Mine Workers during the early 1930s in Alabama, white coal miners worked with Black miners to establish a strong biracial base. In 1935 there were 23,000 UMW members in Alabama, 60 percent of whom were Black. With the emergence of segregation as the central political and cultural factor within Southern society, interracial cooperation in the workplace steadily declined.

In the post-World War II South, biracial working class coalitions became virtually non-existent. When the Chattanooga Central Labor Union passed a resolution supporting school desegregation in summer, 1955, nine individual locals issued counter-resolutions against their organization and in favor of white supremacy. Several locals left the union, declaring that the organization's resolution was "Communist-inspired." During the early 1960s Local 12 of the United Rubber Workers of America, at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company plant in Gadsden, Alabama, was the battleground for numerous Black-white labor struggles on the question of racial equality. The white-dominated local refused to process grievances of Black employees who protested against segregated dining facilities and Jim Crow restrictions throughout the plant. Black workers with many years of seniority were regularly laid off without pay while white employees with less seniority were allowed to work. Few Black Civil Rights workers in the South attempted to convert white trade unionists in the South to a favorable position on integration. It was usually the white petty bourgeoisie and especially the college-educated upper classes who seemed to welcome the reformist demands of the Movement. Support for George Wallace, Lester Maddox and other segregationist politicians usually came from the white working class.

Union halls throughout the South were often meeting places for the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizen's Councils. In a number of important union certificate elections conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, Blacks often voted against unions and provided the margin of defeat.

To some extent, the separation between Southern Black and white workers was manifested nationally by the strained relations between Civil Rights leaders and trade unions. Historian Philip Foner observed that "the courageous and militant Blacks faced intimidation and repression, and the movement... was in constant need of funds and moral support. But the AFL-CIO gave neither." Among the most influential proponents of the thesis of a Negro integrationist-white labor alliance was Martin Luther King, Jr. With the exception of A. Philip Randolph, Martin became the leading Civil Rights spokesman who worked closely with various unions and their leaders. Speaking before a convention of the United Packinghouse Workers Union in 1957, Martin insisted that "organized labor can be one of the most powerful instruments in putting an end to discrimination and segregation." Unfortunately the labor establishment refused to accept this vanguard role within the process of social transformation. Individual labor leaders like Walter Reuther gravitated toward the centrist-conservative factions within the Movement, lending their personal and limited organizational support to the politics of desegregation. The majority of union leaders still accepted the historical image of the Black laborer as innately inferior or as the perpetual scab; they used neither their personal nor institutional influence to support the goals of the Movement. "Most union leaders," Foner writes, "feared repercussions and avoided adopting a stand clearly in favor of egalitarian racial principles."

In the wake of the Movement, Black and
white worker relationship have remained relatively backward. The illusion of equal opportunity and the elevation of a limited number of Black professionals into the business bureaucracy continues to dominate Black and white working class consciousness. Even in the majority of the new Southern factories, Blacks continue to be hired as janitors or in unskilled or low paying positions. Donald F. Roy argued in “The Southern Labor Movement” that the racial divisions within the working class South “have a depressing effect on union organizing...” Certain “white jobs” have been historically “protected from the large Negro labor surplus by the color bar.” As a result many white laborers recognize implicitly that the super exploitation of Black labor power allows for seemingly artificially higher wages for White workers. “Not only have white workers and management found basis for consensus in their mutual rejection of the Negro,” he notes, but the “threat of possible job replacement” by Blacks forces the white worker increasingly to the political right. Race becomes a driving wedge that separates and alienates workers and forces whites into the awaiting arms of white management. “And by pre-empting low-status jobs,” Roy concludes, “the Negro has withdrawn from the white labor market the alternative jobs that might have provided employment insurance to those who would risk firing for union activity.”

The area of the South with the worst record of interracial labor cooperation in recent decades remains the Black Belt. Despite the general growth of industrial development throughout the South since 1960, industrial employment has declined steadily in the Black Belt. In Macon County, Alabama, for example, the total number of workers employed in industry in 1950 was 9,719. By 1960 the figure had dropped to 7,833 workers and by 1970 the figure was 7,213. In the most industrialized county of the Alabama Black Belt, Dallas County, total industrial employment dropped from 20,266 employees in 1950 to 18,776 employees in 1970. As Alabama industrial employment climbed from 1,040,126 in 1950 to 1,235,287 in 1970, Black Belt totals declined from 136,059 to 105,504 during these same years. In a climate of decreasing industrial jobs and overall rising unemployment, occurring within the social context of a Movement to halt de facto and de jure segregation in employment procedures, labor solidarity across the color lines dissolved. Black Belt white workers clung desperately to their jobs, swallowed their complaints about low wages and deplorable working conditions, and remained apathetic about unionization. White laborers viewed the move toward the desegregation of Southern society as being a real obstacle to their own individual and collective social and economic mobility.

The illusion of Black mobility within the framework of the Southern political economy is perpetuated within the cultural apparatus, the publishing industries and the media. Blacks are suddenly given an equal billing within current events on the front pages of major newspapers; Black newscasters and reporters have become a permanent fixture on the late afternoon and evening newscasts in even small Southern communities. But within the media itself, Black workers have yet to achieve any substantial gains in income during the seventies. Within the publishing industry in Alabama, almost seventy percent of all Blacks employed are found in service jobs, at the lowest paying levels. Roughly ten percent of all Black employees hold blue collar jobs; less than one percent are classified as “professionals.” In Louisiana, 90 percent of all Blacks employed within the publishing industry are classified as service or blue collar workers. The percentage of Black managers, executives or professionals is less than five percent of the total Black work force within
every Southern state. Black representation within the media industry is also far less than the percentage of Black people living in Southern states.

For all of these problems and contradictions, there are indications that the "times are a-changin'." The Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union is currently organizing the 450 industrial workers of the J.P. Stevens and Company plant in Montgomery, Alabama. Despite Stevens' promise that union organizers would not be harassed, pro-union employees were fired in 1976 and 1977. Other employees were harassed and coerced into resigning. Stevens employees in Montgomery have no health insurance or pension programs; no parking facilities; no lunchroom or medical facilities. Sixty percent of all workers are Black but there is not a single Black supervisor in the plant. These conditions in Montgomery are not unusual: they are typical of the conditions for Stevens employees in any of the 85 Stevens plants throughout the South. Despite these hardships, many workers have met in weekly meetings and are now on the verge of creating a viable local. White workers have begun to reevaluate their traditional fears and racist notions and have moved toward the ACTWU's biracial, militant posture. In doing so they have begun to challenge the essence of Southern history.

IV

A new generation of opportunistic Black politicians have been elevated to hegemonic political positions within the Black community, largely due to their clientage relationships with fundamental regional bourgeois interests. The Black petty bourgeoisie provided critical financial support to Black constitutional reformers — Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; James Farmer, Floyd Mc-

Kissick and many participants in C.O.R.E.; Jesse Jackson and John Lewis. But as the political struggle gained major successes at the expense of segregation, Black radicals like Malcolm X, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and theorists like James Boggs pointed the way toward social revolution — a frightening specter of permanent struggle and cultural transformation which neither the Black petty bourgeoisie nor the white capitalist economic and political establishment could accept. The popular, massive struggles in the streets died down gradually as the political system granted certain concessions to the Black petty bourgeoisie — and after many important Black radicals were imprisoned, bought out or assassinated.

The cultural, or superstructural, rationale for the state within Southern society is subtle. There exists the need within civil society to provide legitimacy for the new directions the Southern bourgeoisie have taken within the past decade — the acceptance of Civil Rights legislation, the integration of many public schools, the influx of heavy industry and the demise of agrarian political influence in state legislatures. The New South's creed is explained to the people through expanded educational institutions, through the promulgation of electronic media, cultural journals, new newspapers and the arts. The New South's aesthetics negate, or attempt to replace, the Afro-American cultural heritage and the weltanschauung of the new urban working class. Accomplished behind the rhetoric of reform the state expands its influence into every aspect of cultural life, solely to frustrate the protest impulse evident within many phases of Afro-American Southern culture.

This cultural impact within Black civil society has been equally reactionary. Despite the continued rhetorical use of the word 'Black' most Black social and intellectual leaders in the
South have quietly accommodated themselves to the new capitalist realities and "New South" political leadership. On college campuses, radical Black professors and administrators are being fired; Black studies programs are abandoned; fraternity and sorority life has replaced an interest in political discussions. Clothing styles, mannerisms of speech and habits changed overnight. Afro-hair styles and dashikis are being rapidly abandoned for bleached hair, surreal clothing and high heels. The blues and jazz, once an integral part of the political struggle of the sixties, is replaced by blatantly sexist disco. Numerous Black activist journals and community newspapers initiated in the sixties have been forced to close for economic reasons.

Perhaps the strongest single cultural change has occurred within the relations between men and women. The Civil Rights era in the South was a period of expanded sexual freedom. Women like Rosa Parks of Montgomery and Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi assumed leadership roles in desegregation struggles; Black women of all ages ran for office, organized voter registration campaigns, gave political speeches and raised funds for civil rights activities. During recent years, however, an overwhelmingly Black male caste seized the newly available state and county political offices. Southern Black males have downplayed legislatures. Black politicians have not campaigned for expanded state-supported abortion facilities — for example, only in 1976 did abortion clinics open in Alabama, West Virginia and Mississippi. According to a recent issue of *Family Planning Perspectives*, however, less than one sixth of all women needing abortions and birth control services in 1976 could obtain treatment in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas.

Traditional social conditions of Southern Black women since segregation have reverted to the pre-1960 conditions. Despite federal programs in health care, many Black Belt counties have infant mortality rates in excess of 50 per 1,000 births each year. Sixty-five percent or more Blacks in Black Belt regions live below the poverty level, in states where legislatures seldom provide funds for day care for working mothers and grant minimal aid to dependent children. No Deep South state legislature has ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, and the traditional chauvinism inherent in the Southern ethos finds new expressions within Black middle class-sponsored beauty pageants and debutante balls.

The expansion of the state and the pre-eminence of the bourgeoisie within Southern civil society have sparked a demise in the real cultural and intellectual creativity and status of the region. The South's aggressive economic structure, from slave labor to entrepreneurial capitalism, has contributed to what journalist W.J. Cash termed the "savage ideal." The culture of the white bourgeoisie, its love of material possessions, its lack of humanism and gross disrespect for life and ecology has encouraged widespread social violence and a backward intellectual climate. More people are murdered per thousand in Savannah and Montgomery per year, for example, than in New York or Watts. The incidence of rape increased over 41 percent in North Carolina between 1969 and 1973, and increased by significant amounts in almost every Southern state. The "mind" of the South increasingly represents the dregs of American academic and cultural achievement. In 1970 the South had only five percent of the nation's leading graduate schools, according to a national survey. In spite of Wallace's expansion of state-supported educational institutions, Alabama ranks at the very bottom of every national scale for education. The traditional Black Southern college, the backbone of Black education in the South, suffers from declining enrollments and severe financial diffi-
culties, largely because of the desegregation of the region’s major white state-supported institutions. Many white and Black radicals have fled to the North and the West Coast in search of better working conditions, a freer academic climate and higher salaries.

The possibilities for social change within the South’s political economy depend primarily upon the success of Black activists and intellectuals in reeducating the dispossessed, Black working people and the poor toward the political consciousness of struggle. Recently Ron Daniels and the National Black Political Assembly have moved toward creating a progressive “Southern strategy,” picking up where S.N.C.C. had left off ten years ago. Presently, however, Black politics in the South is still markedly to the right of national Black politics. The March, 1976, Cincinnati convention of the Assembly was notable for its absence of Southern Black delegates. Excepting Virginia and Louisiana, no more than one dozen Southern delegates out of almost one thousand attended the convention. There was little interest in the Black South for the third party liberal candidacy of former Minnesota Senator, Eugene McCarthy.

All historical analogies have at best, a limited value, since history in essence is constantly dialectical. Each successive human struggle is fought on a shifting material base, on a different cultural terrain, for different political ideals. Any comparative study of reaction and revolution can only assist us in unearthing the contours of our past, as well as in understanding the limitations and possibilities for the future.

The history of humanity is no tidy series of
predictable events, moving inextricably toward an inevitable social revolution or political upheaval. The Civil Rights Movement as a series of political confrontations between Black folk and an archaic social institution was predictable but not inevitable. The present period of reaction in the South, caused by many subjective and objective conditions, cannot be understood outside of the important positive achievements of Black people in previous decades. Jim Crow will never return as it once existed, nor will its crude indignities which crushed the humanity of its master class. In spite of contradictory leaders, compromising politicians and an affluent petty bourgeois strata, the Black majority will never retreat fundamentally from the very substantial gains achieved during the 1950s and 1960s. The old tradition of community organizing, picketing, boycotting and rallying still exists and many Blacks who were too young to participate actively in the Movement seem now to be interested in reestablishing its activist ethos, if not its original organizational forms.

The next Movement in the South must be grounded within Marxian theory if it hopes to successfully combat racism. Southern community organizers and Black political activists have begun to realize the profound, historic symbiotic relationship between capitalist economic development and white racism. A principled struggle against the residual structures of segregated society can become the basis for a deeper conflict against cultural underdevelopment and expanding economic exploitation. The future struggle against the causes of racism must be channelled through new, practical political institutions that owe their perspectives to a materialist analysis of Southern life and labor. It seems probable that this depressing and immensely contradictory period will produce the groundings for an even more successful democratic movement against economic inequality in the next decade.

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THOUGHTS ON THE ERA DEMONSTRATION

Sherry Weingart

July 9, 1978: not a day of rage, but one of pageantry. A hundred thousand women, men and children gathered in Washington, D.C. demanding an extension of the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Organized by the National Organization of Women (NOW), the march and rally represented the largest demonstration either wave of United States feminism has yet managed to produce. Choreographed and costumed by NOW to resemble the Suffragists' marches of earlier this century, the event was staged to coincide with the first anniversary of the death of Alice Paul, who first wrote and introduced the amendment in 1923. The vast majority of marchers wore white — white eyelet flounce and white painters pants, white frilly dresses and white funky t-shirts. Diversity was most apparent with respect to age and class; white skin also predominated.

What meaning does this grandest of all feminist spectacles hold for socialist-feminists and the Left in general? The march may well have contributed to its stated goal of urging Congress to grant an extension of the ratification deadline. However, even the progressive media has been slow to explore its full impact on the women's movement, and has failed to pose questions which assist us in a broad interpretation. Here I discuss the event in the light of tensions between socialist-feminists and the rest of the women's movement, touching on the limits of single-issue organization and on its meaning in a time of New Right ascendency.

Like many socialist-feminists, I do not see the ERA, in and of itself, as a particularly compelling feminist demand, its significance being greater if it loses than if it passes. This push for equal access to American inequity is, however, a necessary reform that becomes even more timely as the anti-feminist backlash of the New Right gains steam. Yet, as a women's health activist from Boston, I only attended the march because I learned of a national meeting of progressive pro-abortion/pro-choice forces to be held immediately after the demonstration. That I (and most feminists I work with) had not seriously considered participating in the march on its own merits is significant. It points to our personal and strategic distance from NOW-defined feminism and to our vastly differing perspectives and experiences in regard to single-issue and electoral politics.

The Socialist-feminist perspective — that the inter-relatedness of women's issues demands a comprehensive approach — is clearly opposed to the current inviolable gentlewomen's agreement among groups with a single legislative focus. For such groups a division of the feminist turf among polite, non-threatening women's groups is viewed as the only successful way to bring social change. For example, I asked a Boston representative of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) if that group had challenged the NOW dictum of forbidding display or acknowledgment of other feminist issues (i.e. abortion, child care, sterilization abuse). NARAL is the Washington-based, liberal, national pro-choice lobby group which also represents many population control interests and works on abortion rights as a single issue. The woman stated that neither she nor anyone from that organization was active in preparing the march, that she respected NOW's platform making the passage of the ERA top priority.
over "extraneous issues" and that she had no intention of attending the event.

For me, however, it was hardly "extraneous" to think that a march for women’s equal rights would consider what was most on my mind: that two days before the march Massachusetts had become the thirty-sixth state to effectively cut off Medicaid funds for abortions.

Both NOW’s preparation for the march and the manner in which the event itself was conducted underscored NOW’s perceived need for hegemony. NOW’s process of mobilization, excluding as it did Left feminists, did not simply reflect the common liberal feminist assumption that our networks and grapevines would automatically turn us out for any demonstration, because in their view we are only concerned with short term militance, not "long range" solutions and organizing. By seeing legislative, pressure group politics as the only "mature and realistic" approach to change, liberal feminists create a built-in rationale for ignoring socialist-feminism. Knowing, also, that socialist-feminists would press for a broad perspective and for the need to go beyond the ERA, NOW seemingly wanted to demonstrate "unity" over "divisiveness" by not making a special effort to reach us.

Thus hawkers for the Guardian and the Militant, as well as anti-nuke and abortion rights newsletters were shooed off the grass and reprimanded for disruption. I knew I had to be there once I saw I wasn’t entirely welcome.

Once there, however, I wanted, really wanted, to feel good about being witness to and participating in the demonstration. Upon viewing the thousands and thousands of earnest and jubilant white-clad marchers, I wanted to discard any exclusive notions of sisterhood and see beyond the apparent limitations of the action. I was interested in the words of one of the Washington, D.C. nurses on strike against the city’s principal public hospital. She, a Black woman of about forty years of age (the greatest concentration of Black people at the march was in the labor contingents), told me:

It’s real important we’re here. I’ve stood on plenty of lines — picket lines, unemployment lines and in demonstrations. Big and small they’re all important. I’m proud to be here.

For me the result of these confused responses was that I alternated between berating myself for cynicism and dismissing the event as lowest common denominator politics. One moment I would be aware that socialist-feminists have never mobilized such numbers with this (save racial) diversity. Yet in the next minute some new example of unnecessary control, of the unheeding denial of anything deeply feminist would renew my critical judgement and I would once again wonder about the lessons of the experience for other participants as well as for the women’s movement as a whole.

It is ironic and telling that mainstream feminist leadership should believe that its greatest strength lies in the suppression of many issues from which the second wave of feminism has
grown. Agitation around issues of sexuality, the family, health care and welfare rights, to name only a few, has informed the most pressing and worthy feminist activities since the late sixties. Moreover, insofar as we have analyzed and acted on these concerns while integrating them with an awareness of class, imperialism and racism we have developed more vitality, depth and strength than ever achieved by the Suffragists or many contemporary movements in the U.S. To deny the power of these associations and to insist, as NOW does, that women can only achieve the ERA by excluding even any mention of them is to ignore the history of the last fifteen years and to underestimate the depth of the feminist response which women have already made in this country. Furthermore, the existence of multi-issue progressive social movements actually enabled NOW to mobilize as many as it did.

I had a chance to explore some of these questions with Carolyn Miller of Columbia Missouri, who is organizing that city's first NOW chapter, the only feminist game in town. Commenting on NOW's state of emergency regarding the ERA, she stated:

You have to understand where the ERA stands in a place like mid-Missouri. We are trying very hard to keep the work we're doing completely separate from the abortion issue and the labor issue. St. Louis is very strongly Roman Catholic — there is a lot of pro-life [sic] activity, much anti-abortion sentiment. There is right now a petition going around to get a right-to-work measure, and although I may personally be for abortion and the right to use our bodies as we see fit, and I may personally be on the side of labor, we feel that the feminist movement must focus on one issue. I have a number of friends interested in the ERA but who feel differently about abortion and labor. In order to get the support we need right now this is the thrust we have to take, and the other issues will come as we can fit them in. In order to involve women not just of the upper-class, educated elite, we have to avoid red-flag issues which can drive women away.

But women in the health movement, for example, have found that we can raise a wider range of issues with women (e.g. abortion and child rearing, sterilization abuse and gynecological malpractice) if we are sensitive and intelligent in our arguments and do not expect every woman to agree with us. The theme of the ERA march was historical, but clearly represented a selective, expedient and inaccurate reading of history. The first wave of feminism died, and many current struggles flounder, because of a too narrow focus on one issue. Our movement has grown exactly because it has responded to a multitude of women's concerns, whether they live in Missouri or Massachusetts. The call for "unity" which ignores this history is a false unity indeed.

Similarly, the results of this "single-issue" ERA campaign will be dependent on the continuing effectiveness of a multi-issue movement. As Miller stated, the real-life effects of the passage of the ERA are not fully clear:

We do not know yet what it will do. This is something we must still research. Obviously, the ERA won't change the entire economic system, but it will right certain inequities, and enable attitudes to change over generations.

Many women then, take a leap of faith with respect to the amendment's ability to bring a measure of justice to their lives. Like any reform legislation, the meaning of the ERA will evolve and will directly reflect the social and political climate in which it is litigated. In
the absence of strong multi-issue feminist agitation and organizing, it will have little impact and the faith will be unwarranted.

The women's movement has long been concerned with the processes by which women are politicized and the effect of that politicization on many spheres of our lives. The mistaken liberal feminist urge to narrow our scope in response to the Right's accelerated efforts has undermined women's ability to deal with the full ramifications of anti-feminist backlash. This backlash has deep roots and is inevitable with either the passage or the defeat of the ERA. We do ourselves no favors, then, by thinking that we can hide behind the ERA and avoid the realistic threat of feminism to this society. Instead we should examine the profound reasons why so many women attended the march and consider the personal and political pressures which even mere attendance created for many women. There were, no doubt, many furrowed male brows at the prospect of their women (wives, co-workers, daughters, employees) bussing off for a day of protest. Those women returned home — they must be given more than a lovely purple and gold banner if they are to deal with the predictable dissonance. Again, Miller is suggestive in describing this, her first mass demonstration:

This was great fun, fantastic, not a lot of anger — a most happy occasion. With the banners saying "Three generations for the ERA", mothers who had sponsored daughters to go, all the diversity; we were saying, "We're here, We've paid our own way, nobody told us to come, and this is what we should have."

The impact it had on me, and the impact I think for a lot of women there, was the fact that so many came, on their own, because they simply wanted to come. That in itself was significant. You could not ignore it.

Agreed. We cannot ignore that thousands of women went on principle and to affirm, however politely, their collective power as women. That statement of principle was broader than liberal feminism would admit. It is condescending to assume that most women believe that the stuff of their lives is as shallow as the single-issue reduction makes it seem. In fact, socialist-feminists can argue that the ERA succeeded in spite of the approach taken by NOW, succeeded because so many women spontaneously recognized the broad importance of the ERA.

Part of the New Right's power is its ability to fearfully manipulate symbols, to appeal to anxieties about change by urging not only the reversal of significant social gains, but psychological, moral and political reification. Any weakening on the part of any segment of the Left in confronting these issues contributes to this by making certain subjects taboo. Socialist-feminists cannot afford to let the Right define the issues just because liberal feminists will not take them up or because they falsely take full credit for the presence of one hundred thousand women at the ERA march. Instead we must try to shake mainstream feminism out of its expedient timidity and push socialist-feminism forward by continuing to develop strategies and structures, theories and practice, which are fully reflective of all that has gone before.

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THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS
Anatomy of a Party

Joanne Barkan

"A party of struggle, a government party," became the Italian Communist Party’s primary slogan in 1976, just about the time when Eurocommunism began to generate a great deal of discussion in the United States and abroad. Since then, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) has attracted particular attention. A party that wins 12 million votes, counts some 1,800,000 members, and claims commitment to an independent, national road to socialism is certainly impressive.

But questions arise as to the exact nature of the Italian party. Is it a revolutionary party that has developed a new kind of strategy for the socialist transformation of Italian society? Or is the PCI disguising reformism — either traditional or new style — under a cloak of rhetoric? In order to answer these questions, this investigation of the PCI will explore the Party’s day-to-day mode of operations, its internal structure, and its relationship in practice to the working class, mass movements, and the state since the Second World War. The slow shift in the nature of the PCI from a class-oriented, mass party to a socially heterogeneous electoral force, the Party’s organizational decline through the 1960s, and its subsequent gain in strength, the traditionally weak links between the PCI and the most politically advanced and militant sectors of Italian society, all of these are consequences of the PCI’s gradualist strategy and reformist pre-suppositions. After more than thirty years as a legal political force, the Party faces a series of problems which its strategy seems unable to resolve. The PCI’s future as a party of struggle and as a government party has been thrown into question. To understand how this happened, we must go back to the immediate post-war period.

This article is included in a forthcoming anthology of original writing DEMOCRACY IN POWER: The Crisis of European Capitalism and the Rise of Eurocommunism, edited by Carl Boggs and David Plotke, to be published in December by South End Press, Boston.

Opposite: For the first time following Liberation, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution is celebrated in Rome, November 7, 1944.
THE POSTWAR PERIOD — THE MASS PARTY

At the close of the Second World War, the leadership of the PCI rejected the alternative of an insurrection to seize power. Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill had already divided up Europe, and Italy was assigned to the Western camp. The secretary of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, returned from the USSR in 1944 having accepted the decision that there was to be no revolution in Italy. In addition, objective conditions for a successful insurrection at the end of the war were not good, since the allied troops were occupying the country.

The leadership of the PCI committed itself to working with all the non-fascist political parties in order to rebuild parliamentary democracy in Italy. The Communists participated in the writing of the new constitution and were part of the national unity governments of the immediate post-war period. The proposed strategy of the PCI was to play a primary role in the consolidation of a progressive democratic state that would enact structural reforms and allow for the gradual and peaceful transformation of Italy into a socialist society. In practice, the overriding concern of the PCI during the entire post-war period was to avoid a confrontation with the ruling class. The leadership of the party argued that the position of the working class was not yet strong enough to impede or withstand a reaction. National unity rather than class struggle dominated the PCI’s rhetoric, and the protection of civil liberties became a principal objective. The party’s tactics were defensive in nature and left the political and economic initiative to the bourgeoisie.

After the long years of clandestine activity and exile under fascism, the PCI emerged from the war not as a small organization of professional cadre, but as a mass party of 1.7 million members which grew to 2.25 million by 1947. Togliatti, who led the party from 1926 until his death in 1964, established the model for the PCI’s post-war development. The party would not function simply as an electoral force, but would be deeply rooted in every community and workplace where it would establish contact with the millions of Italians who sought to change their situation. In theory, the PCI was to give these people’s aspirations the form of an organized movement and lead them in struggles for specific objectives. This model for the party of struggle occupied a central position in their strategic formulations.

In addition to the Party’s self-conception, it is useful to apply the sociological categories “mass party” and “catch-all” party in any analysis of the PCI. The political organization planned by the Communist leadership was to be a European-style mass party. Such a class-oriented party has an explicit and coherent ideology and some kind of global program for the transformation of society. It acts in the interests of specific groups, and gives priority to this rather than to winning as many votes as possible. Electoral activity is just one of the mass party’s functions, and often not even its primary function. The party constantly initiates non-electoral political activity and mobilizes its supporters in demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and so on. It also plays a role in the everyday life of the workplace and the community, becoming a major force in the cultural, moral and intellectual socialization of its base. Because of its ideological thrust and its development of strategic as well as tactical positions, the mass party attracts a relatively homogeneous membership in terms of class.

Unlike the mass party, a catch-all party does not have an organic program for transforming society. It limits itself to electoral activity and changes its program to meet the demands of the moment. The catch-all party does not penetrate into the daily life of the individual and can not mobilize its constituency for non-electoral pur-
poses. Such a party presents no long-term objectives or fundamental principles, and its electorate fluctuates. The goal of the catch-all party is to obtain the maximum number of votes, and so it directs its electoral campaigns to all social classes.

In order to create a mass party, the Communist leadership gave primary attention during the early years to building the PCI organizationally. The "territorial section," which draws members from a geographical area (for example, a neighborhood) became the basic political and organizational unit, and one slogan of those years was "a section for every belltower." The PCI placed great emphasis on recruitment, and party militants devoted much of their energy to membership drives and to building new sections around the country.

In terms of this goal, the PCI was quite successful. By 1954, it had penetrated even some of the smallest and most remote communities and counted 9,569 sections and 1,578 nuclei (sections of less than 20 members). Only 14.7 percent of the cities and towns in Italy were without a section or nucleus.

The PCI also met many of the other criteria of a mass party. Its ideological orientation and strategic goals were explicit (although it is true that the party never developed an organic program of specific short and intermediate term objectives and well-defined tactics to achieve these). The PCI attracted members who identified with its ideology and strategy, and therefore the social composition of the party was fairly homogeneous. In 1954, urban workers made up 48.6 percent of the membership base and farm workers 21.7 percent. Small farmers and sharecroppers accounted for 19.7 percent, artisans and merchants 6.4 percent, white collar workers, intellectuals, teachers, and professionals 3.3 percent, and students 0.3 percent. The voting base of the Party was more heterogeneous than the membership, but the Party's share of the votes increased only 4.32 percent from 1953 to 1968 (from 22.64 percent to 26.96 percent).

As for intervening in everyday life in the communities and playing a role in the intellectual and cultural socialization of its base, the PCI put out daily newspapers, weeklies, theoretical journals and ran its own publishing house. The party gained control over the cooperative movement, and carried on commercial activities, ran recreational and cultural centers, organized popular festivals, and held administrative posts in the local governments of certain cities, towns, and provinces.

Belonging to the PCI required no more than signing up and paying dues, and only a small proportion of the members were active in the Party. There were probably about 200,000 activists during the 1950s, but estimates are that this number dropped to 80,000 during the 1960s.

Thus the PCI succeeded in establishing and maintaining its identity as a mass party from the end of the war until the early 1970s. Yet in terms of being a party of struggle, the PCI failed early on.

STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL CHOICES

During the 1944-45 armed Resistance, many partisans and workers expected Togliatti to escalate the anti-fascist struggle into an insurrection to seize state power. When instead he announced the new gradualist strategy and plans to participate in a coalition government, many cadre at first believed it was a ruse to distract the ruling class and the Anglo-American forces. Over the next four or five years, it became clear to the militants not only that the PCI leadership had renounced armed revolutionary struggle for the foreseeable future, but more important, that the party was making tremendous concessions to the ruling class
which shifted the balance of power in favor of this class and the Christian Democratic Party.

Once the PCI had committed itself to carrying out the post-war reconstruction within the boundaries of the capitalist system, the principal focus of class struggle became establishing the criteria for conversion of the war-time economy. The question was how much control each class would have and how much each would pay in terms of its own economic interests. The working class has as its instruments of struggle the PCI and the union confederation controlled by the PCI (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro — CGIL). The main concern of the Communist leadership, however, was to avoid a clash with the bourgeoisie. This concern determined its essentially passive stance.

Thus although the workers controlled the important factories of the North (the major industrial zone) at the close of the war, the PCI did not use this to extract concessions. The first taxes established were direct deductions from workers’ salaries rather than taxes on profits from speculation and the war. In general, the PCI put a brake on the industrial working class movement while trying to win reforms for the rural petty bourgeoisie and working class (for example, land reform in the South). In September 1945, the CGIL agreed to mass layoffs in industry. By August 1946, northern workers were demonstrating against the policies of the Communist Minister of the Treasury Epicarmio Corbino.

The CGIL refused to lead strikes in factories that were operating, and the occupation of non-operating factories did not greatly affect the capitalists at that time. In 1950, the CGIL accepted an accord that gave management a free hand in individual layoffs. The ruling class used this measure effectively over the next decade to weed out militant workers and unionists and to keep the rest of the labor force orderly.

By 1950 the capitalist class had reestablished its control. Thus just five years after the liberation, the PCI could do no more than propagandistically denounce the bourgeoisie for pursuing a course that favored foreign capital to the detriment of the national economic base. With the restructuring of the economy firmly in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the remaining economic battle to be fought by the working class was over the distribution of wealth. Here, too, the PCI was unable to secure a victory. From 1950 to 1955, profits soared 86 percent, but real wages rose only 6 percent.

The PCI also suffered several significant defeats in the political arena. Christian Democratic Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi resigned in May 1947 and then formed the first post-war cabinet in Italy without the Communists or Socialists. The Christian Democrats won an absolute majority in the April 1948 elections, and from then until the early 1970s, the exercise of state power was no longer an issue in practice for the PCI.

By 1951, the consequence of the post-war strategic and tactical choices for the party itself were clear. The Communist leadership had assumed that, as a party of struggle, the PCI would forge and maintain a strong bond with the vanguard of the movement. This, however, presupposed that the party would move along with, and guide, the vanguard movements, as well as sustain its organizational presence in the factories. Instead, the PCI participated in the struggles of the early years as a force of moderation and ended up weakening its ties to the traditionally militant strata of the Italian working class.

A variety of data demonstrates this trend. The non-PCI dominated union confederations began to increase their strength at the expense of the CGIL as early as 1951 when they won 25
percent of the vote in some large factories. By 1953, they had made significant gains, and in 1955, the CGIL lost its majority at Fiat, the historic heart of the Italian workers’ movement.

The PCI also lost strength early on in the large cities of the Northwest where the organized industrial working class was concentrated. The party’s vote in Milan, for example, fell from 24.9 percent in 1946 to 20.5 percent in 1953. The number of factory cells fell from 11,495 to 3,013 between 1954 and 1967. The “rate of adhesion” to the party (the percentage of PCI members in the entire voting age population) in cities of more than 200,000 inhabitants dropped from 7.2 percent in 1949 to 6.8 percent in 1952 and then continued to decline to a low point of 2.6 percent in 1971.

**PARTY LIFE**

The Party’s internal organization and its mode of operation on a day-to-day basis remained the same from the early post-war period to the present. As mentioned earlier, the territorial section drawing members from a neighborhood or municipality was the fundamental organizational unit of the PCI. Most activists channeled their political work through these “street” sections rather than through cells or sections in workplaces. The sections occupied themselves primarily with the routine work of membership drives, fundraising, distribution of the newspaper, and so on. The routine work was interrupted periodically by electoral campaigns and by major national and international events. The latter often sparked political discussion at the base level of the party, but the leadership tended to dominate these discussions and to treat whatever had happened as a “current event”, separate from the experiences and activities of party members and therefore unconnected to the tactics and strategy of the party.

*On rather exceptional occasions, the sections organized a mass response to political issues. In 1952, for example, the PCI led a successful campaign against the Truffa Law (promoted by the Christian Democrats, this law would have given almost two-thirds of the seats in parliament to any party winning 50 percent plus one vote). Yet this kind of call to mass mobilization was directed at the entire population, to all Italian citizens. The sections were not able to build and direct a class movement that brought together the most militant and politicized groups in specific struggles of a class, rather than civic, nature.*
At the intermediate level of organization (the federations), the party once again devoted much of its time and energy to routine matters involving budgets, membership, publications, and electoral campaigns. This kind of activity related to the maintenance and self-perpetuation of the party as an institution. The stronger of the 100 or so federations also ran cooperatives and community and cultural centers. Those in the “red zones” (where the PCI was part of the local government) had administrative responsibilities in various agencies. Although these activities rooted the party solidly in the social fabric of a given area, they also created a situation in which the party became a progressive institution within the existing system, oriented toward equilibrating that system.

The tasks of the federations made the intermediate level of the party particularly prone toward bureaucratization as well as integration into the “establishment.” Many of the functionaries (full-time party employees) worked at this level and became professional city council persons, unionists, and cooperative directors who depended on the party for their salaries and hoped to preserve their jobs. As well as lacking the time for “creative” politics and for building class movements that challenged the existing order, many functionaries came to perceive this kind of activism as working against the party’s and their own interests.

The highest levels of party leadership (the central committee, politbureau, directorate, and secretariate) concerned themselves primarily with elaborating the political line, developing and announcing positions on specific issues, directing the PCI’s parliamentary activity, and overseeing the work of the lower levels of the party. From so great a distance, the leadership was incapable of forging and directing a class movement, and the organizational structures, methods of work, and cadre necessary to bridge the gap did not exist.

As might be expected, the PCI’s deficiencies as a party of struggle took their toll. The years from 1954 to 1968 were characterized by a steady organizational decline. Between 1954 and 1968, the PCI’s membership dropped by 650,000 or 30%, while the rate of adhesion to the party slipped from 7% to 4.2%, and the PCI’s youth organization, whose size has always been an indication of the party’s strength among young people, lost over 70 percent of its members.

The number of recruits taken in each year varied between 96,000 and 160,000, but the number of members not rejoining was even higher, fluctuating between 115,000 and 306,000. The period of time members remained in the party was often very short. These figures all indicate an instability in the party’s membership base.

Between 1956 and 1967, the number of sections and nuclei fell by 300, and the percentage of Italian municipalities without a section or nucleus increased from 16.9 to 22.1.

By the late 1950s, the organizational decline of the party was of great concern to the leadership, but in spite of all efforts to rebuild the membership base (including recruitment contests between federations), the decline continued.

It is important to note that although the PCI’s organizational strength diminished, the party maintained many of the characteristics of a mass party (explicit ideology, consistent strategic goals, socially homogeneous membership base, and stable electorate) through the late 1960s. After that time, there were some significant changes, but in order to understand how these changes came about, we must look at the party’s relationship to the two cycles of militant class struggles that took place in Italy in the 1960s.
THE PCI IN THE 1960s

The PCI had clearly grown out of touch with changes occurring in the structure of the Italian economy and in the nature of the industrial working class. The party was caught off-guard by the wave of extremely militant struggles that swept through the factories of the North from 1960 through 1962, marking what is called the reawakening of the Italian working class. Young workers and "immigrant" workers from the South had been pulled onto the assembly lines by the tens of thousands as the economy expanded. Unlike the previous generations of skilled workers, the new "mass" workers generally did not belong to a political party or union, but their common experiences in the factory generated a level of unity and militancy that had not been seen in Italy for many years.

The PCI, which did not initiate or lead the struggles of 1960-62, was forced to respond to the situation as it developed; it is not surprising that the PCI benefitted little in terms of organizational strength from the movement. The same kind of separation from the vanguards and their struggles characterized the initial relationship of the PCI to the students' and workers' movements that shook Italy in the late 1960s. From the occupation of Milan's Catholic University in October 1967 through the "hot autumn" of workers' struggles around contract negotiations in 1969, the PCI had to deal with autonomous movements that questioned all forms of authority, hierarchy, and representative democracy as well as capitalist relations of production. The movements, which had their center in the large cities of the Northwest (Milan, Turin, Genoa, etc.), generated a kind of cultural revolution in the entire society. The leaders of the PCI, who continued to identify with the concept of the party of struggle, had to establish and maintain a relationship with the movements. This was especially true since a part of both the leadership and base (perhaps 15-20 percent) saw the struggles as a positive sign that a new strategy for revolution was necessary and feasible. The PCI therefore kept an "open" attitude toward the struggles and went along with certain specific demands. At the same time, however, it tried to get control of the movement and slow it down. By late 1969, the party had succeeded to a great extent. To cite just one example, the factory assemblies and councils of workers' delegates which had grown up spontaneously during the movement were institutionalized and transformed to take over trade union functions. In the meantime, there was a shift in the power relations within the party hierarchy. By 1968, the left position in favor of a more militant and activist party line was defeated, and the "middle generation" led by Enrico Berlinguer had consolidated its hold on the PCI.

The years 1968-70 marked a watershed for the PCI in three significant ways. First, the long-term trend of organizational decline was reversed, and the subsequent growth of the party had a somewhat different character. Second, there was a shift in the party's tactics. Third, the PCI took on the role of a government party, and this, of necessity, affected its relationship with the other political forces in Italy and its own base.

Considering first the PCI's organizational strength, there is no doubt that the movements of the late 1960s were instrumental in reversing the downward trend. After 1968, the number of recruits to the party increased while the number of members not rejoining decreased. Altogether the membership list grew by 301,935, reaching nearly 1.8 million in 1976. But the PCI was far from achieving the number of members and rate of adhesion it had attained in the late 1940s. In addition, the percentage of Italian municipalities without a section continued to rise, indicating that the PCI was gaining
strength in areas where it already had an organizational presence.

Unlike what many observers have assumed, the movements of the late 1960s did not channel themselves into institutional forms and "flow into" the PCI once their momentum began to subside. The PCI made few and in some cases no gains in those geographical areas where the movements were the strongest or among those workers and young people who had been the protagonists of the struggles. Instead, the late 1960s altered and increased the general level of political consciousness in Italy and shifted whole sectors of the population somewhat to the left of where they had been. It was in the geographical periphery of the movement (the cities of the northeast, south, and central regions — except for the "red zones" — and the provincial towns of the North) that the PCI made its strongest gains.

Looking at just industrial workers, the same trend is clear. Between 1968 and 1974, the percentage of industrial workers in the PCI in the Northwest dropped from 51.91 to 49.9, whereas in the Central region, there was an increase from 37.16 percent to 39.1 percent, and in the South, from 32.56 percent to 35.1 percent.

As for young people, once again the PCI did not gain strength by drawing in large numbers of this vanguard group. In 1969, the high point of the movement, the youth organization (Fed- erazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana — FGCI) suffered a near collapse, losing almost half of its already small number (68,648 members in 1969, 125,438 in 1968, and 463,954 in 1951). The organization began to recover in 1971, but still had fewer members in 1976 than it had a decade earlier.

Another indication of the PCI's failure to incorporate the most militant and politicized groups is the consolidation and growth of political forces to the party's left after 1968. Before that time, the "left opposition" to the PCI had
been extremely fragmented and dispersed. Then three organizations were born out of the movements, and each of them maintained a base of thousands of activists. The new left, or revolutionary left as it is often called, attracted many of those who participated in the struggles of the late 1960s, especially young people from the student movement. Until 1977, this political area to the left of the PCI was generally considered the strongest and best organized new left of any advanced capitalist country.

Although the PCI did not win over the protagonists of the late 1960s, it did continue to make significant headway among various middle class groups. By 1974, the social composition of the party’s membership base was somewhat different from what it had been in the early post-war period. As the chart below demonstrates, the middle class strata (artisans, merchants, white collar employees, intellectuals, and students) which comprised only 9.5 percent of the base in 1950 accounted for more than 25 percent by 1974.

THE 1970s: A GOVERNMENT PARTY

The PCI made its greatest electoral gains during the 1970s. In the administrative (regional, provincial, and municipal) elections of 1972, the party polled a national average of 27.51 percent. In the 1975 administrative elections, the PCI took 32.4 percent. This increase of close to 7 percent was a tremendous victory in a country where a 2 percent shift in the vote is considered a major change. The Communists won 34.4 percent in the parliamentary elections of 1976.

There is no definitive information as to who the new PCI voters are. One hypothesis contends that they come mainly from the middle classes; another theory is that they are Catholic workers who shifted to the left after the movements of the late 1960s. Given the increased weight of the middle classes in the PCI’s membership, it seems likely that the party also attracted many new middle class voters and that the first hypothesis must to some extent hold true.

Since 1970, the PCI has grown faster electorally than it has grown organizationally. Considering the nature of both kinds of growth since 1945, it is clear that the party has developed steadily over the years to become a tremendous electoral force while struggling — and for a long period failing — to maintain its organizational strength. When these observations are added to the fact that the PCI gained most of its strength after 1970 among those social strata that were not at the center of the mass movements, it seems justified to conclude that the party has lost in some measure its identity as a mass party and has taken on some of the characteristics of a catch-all party. Yet it is not true that the PCI has become simply a catch-all party or that it no longer functions at all as a mass party.

The growth and transformations analyzed so far are closely related to the shift in the Com-

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munists' tactics and to the PCI's new role as a government party.

Although the new orientation may have been developing for several years, party secretary Berlinguer clearly articulated the shift in tactics after the September 1973 fascist coup in Chile. He proposed that the Communists assume direct responsibility for administering the Italian state by reentering the national government in the near future. This in itself was not a change; the definition of the PCI's "national role" after 1947 presupposed the party's eventual reentry into some kind of coalition government. The new elements in Berlinguer's proposal were the kind of coalition sought and the class alliances envisioned for Italy's future development.

It had been assumed up to then that the Communists would wait until the Christian Democratic Party (DC) was split or badly shaken before going into the government. In this way, the PCI could play a dominant role and build the "advanced democracy" that would allow for Italy's transformation into a socialist society. The country had theorized a grass-roots alliance of social forces (the "new historic bloc") including Communists, Socialists, and Catholics that would be the foundation for a new coalition government. After 1973, the PCI leadership argued for a coalition government with the DC as it existed. The Communists proposed this political arrangement for the near future although there was no alliance of social forces to serve as the foundation. The leadership spoke of a possible shift to the left of the entire Christian Democratic Party, but in practice the PCI pursued the coalition even though this shift never materialized.

As for class alliances, the PCI had previously called for the cooperation of all anti-monopoly forces, including small and medium-size entrepreneurs. In the mid 1970's, the party proposed an alliance of the working class and all progressive capitalists, including those of the monopolized sectors, to reorder the economy so that the needs of both classes could be met.

The PCI leadership was clearly shaken by events in Chile and concluded that the Popular Unity government there had moved too quickly, alienating the middle classes and provoking a reaction. In a speech shortly after the coup, Berlinguer announced the party's objective of a coalition government with the DC, calling it the "historic compromise." By governing with the Christian Democrats, the PCI could share in state power and at the same time avoid full responsibility for the awesome task of resolving Italy's economic and social problems. For the leadership, the historic compromise also provided a way of avoiding a break or confrontation with the capitalists and middle classes since the coalition government would represent their interests as well.

The context for the new tactics was the general shift to the left that had taken place after the late 1960s. The PCI found itself in a more hospitable climate, as was shown by the party's electoral successes. At the same time, the Christian Democrats were discredited by 25 years of inefficiency and corruption, and there was a growing and generalized demand for reform. During the early 1970s, the PCI was increasingly identified with progressive change, efficiency, and honesty. The Communists pointed to their showcase administration in Bologna, where they had been the major government party since the war, as a model of what could be done all over Italy.

In addition, the political and economic balance of power had shifted somewhat in favor of the working class after 1970. Beyond increases in wages and benefits, Italian workers had wrested unprecedented concessions from the ruling class. They had won control over the organization and pace of work in the factories,
over lay-off policies, and — on paper at least — over production choices and investment decisions. They also established more egalitarian salary policies and the right to study a certain number of hours on company time. In effect, the workers in Italy had thrown capitalist relations of production into question.

Given the working class’s new position of strength, the more favorable climate for the left in general, and the PCI’s electoral gains, the leaders of the party were to some extent obliged to move the PCI out of its immobile position. The direction they chose was determined by their overriding concern to avoid a confrontation with the bourgeoisie, a concern which had conditioned the leadership’s tactical choices since the war. By making the PCI a government party, the leadership could promise both reforms to the population in general and protection of working class interests. The party also hoped to keep the movements (workers, women, young people, the unemployed) from erupting out of control. Since the movements had already reached a level of militancy and anti-capitalist consciousness that threatened the existing system, the PCI leadership could not allow the struggles to escalate without risking the break with the ruling class which it feared. So from this point on, the party argued that the aspirations and needs of both its constituency and the most radical strata of the population could be met through the mediation of the PCI in the parliamentary arena.

As the leaders began to direct most of their efforts toward reentering the government and made most of their tactical choices in function of this objective, they tried to explain policies in terms of a double identity for the PCI: a party of struggle, a government party. Yet, the line pursued by the leadership threw the PCI’s identity as a party of struggle into question as never before.

**THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE**

Defined by PCI leaders as a long-term tactic, the historic compromise is fraught with contradictions. First, there is the relationship to the Christian Democratic Party. After the war, the DC built an intricate, nationwide system of patronage which reaches down into the smallest communities. Its power rests on this system and on its control of the various government ministries, departments, and agencies. Since the early 1960s, the DC has also become the political party of big capital as more and more industry (now about 50 percent) fell under state control. Since the PCI’s program for sharing state power involves streamlining the bureaucracy, eliminating corruption and parasitism, and rationalizing the administration of state industry, the entire power structure of the DC is under direct threat. In addition the Christian Democrats would have to hand over ministries and agencies to their Communist partners, thereby relinquishing their nearly unrestricted hold on the state. For these reasons, part of the DC has been adamantly opposed to the historic compromise since it was suggested. Acceptance of the pact has always presupposed the DC’s reaching a point where it was unable to govern without the Communists. It seems clear, however, that at the first opportunity the Christian Democrats would scuttle the partnership.

Second is the capitalist’s relationship to the historic compromise, which is similar to that of the DC. They would agree to Communist participation in the government only if they could no longer deal with the economic situation themselves and needed the PCI to keep the labor force in line. This is precisely the role they would expect the PCI to play.

Thus the historic compromise puts the Communists in a difficult — if not impossible — position. The PCI hopes to carry out a reform program in alliance with a party that has always opposed reform. (Beginning in 1964, the Italian
Socialist Party entered into a series of coalition governments with the same goal and failed abysmally.) Meanwhile the PCI’s electoral constituency would expect reforms, and the Communist’s working class base would expect to have its interests protected.

From the start, the membership base of the PCI was surprised and confused by the historic compromise. Beyond the evident contradictions, it was jolting to have the leadership propose an alliance with the political force that had been seen as the enemy for so long. The debate on the new line began almost immediately. The new left organizations either condemned the historic compromise as a tactic that would lead to the working class’s defeat or
hoped that the PCI would carry it out and then be justly discredited. As was always the case with a new or controversial policy, the PCI functionaries and leadership made efforts to explain the historic compromise to the base through roundtable discussions, speeches, and articles in the various publications. Since loyalty to the PCI and party discipline are strong, most members were willing to go along with the leadership, many taking a “wait-and-see” attitude.

During the period from 1974 through the elections of 1976, the PCI’s reputation in the country as a whole grew increasingly strong and expectations rose as to what the Communists could and would do once in the government. The left in general and the PCI in particular gained social acceptance. It was almost stylish to be on the left (one trivial but indicative example, Berlinguer’s picture began to appear on the cover of personality magazines). All this approval, however, was directed at the PCI in its capacity as a progressive-reformist political force, one that was honest and efficient unlike the Christian Democratic Party.

The PCI’s 1975 electoral victory (32.4 percent) surprised even optimistic Communists. The membership of the party was triumphant, but the attitude of the leadership was somewhat ambivalent. The historic compromise was materializing faster than had been anticipated. The party now had to assume responsibility for the local government in about half the regions, and many provinces and municipalities. At the same time, the economy was in a severe crisis. The leadership seemed worried about the party’s ability to handle the situation, and, as if to prepare its constituency, warned that changes could not be made quickly. Events, however, continued to accelerate. The government fell, and parliament was dissolved in spring 1976. When elections were held in June, the PCI polled 34.4 percent of the vote, and the DC 38.8 percent. For the first time since 1947, the Christian Democrats were unable to form a government unless the Communists abstained on the initial vote. This marked a turning point in the post-war history of the PCI.

After June 1976, the Communist Party began to play the role of a government party. Its policies since then demonstrate both the contradictions of the historic compromise and the inadequacies of the PCI’s overall strategy.

The Communists were in the unusual position of keeping the Christian Democratic government afloat, but at the same time they were not a formal part of the government’s parliamentary majority. The PCI’s constituency expected the party to use its leverage to push through reforms. Instead the leadership devoted all its efforts to working out a formal agreement with the DC and backed down on major issues in order to keep the negotiations going. During the year of the “government of the abstentions,” the DC was able to pass a series of measures that served its own interests: large sums were allocated to industry with no stipulations as to how the money would be spent (this was supposed to be an industrial conversion program); the government covered the deficits of state-owned conglomerates but refused to investigate the questionable practices of these industries; controlled prices for basic consumer goods, public transportation, and utilities were raised; and the cost-of-living escalator mechanism (scala mobile) which protects the organized working class was partially dismantled.

By February 1977, the so-called “marginalized” strata (students, other young people, women, the unemployed) were in revolt, frustrated by the lack of jobs and the refusal of the government to enact significant social and economic reforms. Their protests were often directed at the PCI. Small groups within the movement armed themselves, and demonstra-
tions inevitably ended in violence. The Communist leadership reacted to the situation by condemning the new movement as criminal and by taking a law-and-order stand that was often more rigid than that of the DC. The result was to divide the new movement from the organized working class movement. In June 1977, the situation was tense enough to force the Christian Democratic Party to sign a formal accord with five other parties including the PCI. The DC, however, managed to dictate the terms of the agreement. There was no economic reform program, but the parties affirmed their commitment to follow the guidelines set by the International Monetary Fund (lowering the cost of labor, austerity measures to reduce the level of inflation and the balance of payments deficit, cut-backs in public spending). The accord also stipulated that hiring in the public sector be frozen and that patients be charged for medication which previously had been free under the national health program. In addition, the parties agreed to a series of law-and-order measures for parliament to consider: Police would be allowed to hold suspects for 24 hours without making an arrest and question them without the presence of a lawyer; the police would also have wider powers to wiretap.

Once the formal agreement was signed, the Communists were one step closer to being in the government. Yet the DC continued to dominate the political situation. The base of the PCI was clearly dissatisfied, but most members were willing to accept the leadership's argument that the PCI had to be a part of the government coalition before it could take a stronger stand. By December, however, the most militant sector of the organized working class — the metalworkers — was disgruntled enough to organize a mass demonstration to protest the government's policies. This was also an indirect protest against the PCI. As in the past, the party leadership was well aware that it could not ignore a certain level of dissatisfaction without alienating its base. The day after the 200,000 metalworkers, women, and students marched in Rome, the PCI declared that the existing political arrangement was not adequate. So began the long negotiations for the Party's entry into the government.

The Carter administration in the U.S. made it clear that an Italian cabinet including PCI ministers was unacceptable. The Christian Democrats were equally hostile to this solution. The compromise alternative was for the Communists to enter the parliamentary majority but not the government (cabinet) per se. On March 16, just a few hours after Aldo Moro, one of the most prominent Christian Democratic leaders, was kidnapped by left-wing terrorists, parliament voted the PCI into the majority with practically no debate.

The Moro kidnapping dominated the political situation in Italy for two months, but at the same time the PCI's mode of operation as a government party became clear. The necessity of maintaining the precarious alliance with the DC conditioned the Communists' policies. A good illustration of this is the maneuvering around the controversial abortion law. The DC proposed changes to make the new legislation more restrictive; the PCI abstained, allowing the changes to go through; parliament then passed the modified and weakened measure with the Christian Democrats voting against it. While the deliberations were going on, thousands of women, including those belonging to the PCI-affiliated Unione Donne Italiane (Union of Italian Women), were demonstrating outside parliament.

Five days after Moro was kidnapped, the Christian Democratic cabinet imposed the law-and-order measures contained in the 1977 accord as temporary decrees. In May, the parliamentary majority voted them into law. Over the next few months, parliament also passed long-
delayed legislation on the health care system and on rent control in a form that favored the interests of the DC. The economic situation continued to deteriorate, but the majority parties took no steps toward developing a comprehensive reform program.

In those places where the PCI entered the local government in 1975, the performance of the party was equally disappointing. There are several reasons for this. First, there was a general policy not to push the DC too hard for fear of upsetting the political negotiations at the national level. As a result, the Christian Democrats continued to manipulate the local situations. Second, the national government in Italy controls almost all funding for the local governments, and the DC controls most of the banks. Thus the funds for reforms on the local level were often blocked. Third, the PCI found it did not have enough trained or experienced cadre to be administrators in health care, welfare, sanitation, housing, urban renewal, and so on. The party shifted many of its functionaries and activists into specialized administrative positions where they had to train themselves on the job. This left the sections and federations understaffed and overworked in terms of party duties. The PCI has been less able than ever to respond to local initiatives around specific issues.

Thus two years after stepping into the national arena as a government party, the PCI has not been able to effectively condition the political and economic situation in Italy. The PCI’s membership base is well aware of the contradictions and failures of the party’s line. The base is dissatisfied, and, as in the past, this has had an effect on the party’s organizational strength. After increasing for seven consecutive years, the membership in 1977 remained the same as it was in 1976. More important, the number of members not rejoining rose significantly, especially in the Northwest region. Between 1976 and the end of 1977, party membership actually dropped in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome, and Naples. The Communist youth organization lost 10.6 percent of its members. According to a DOXA poll (the Italian equivalent of Gallup) taken in September 1977, about one-third of the PCI’s membership base did not approve of the party’s policies in relation to the Christian Democratic government.

The Communists’ electorate has begun to show signs of disaffection as well. In May 1978, there were provincial and municipal elections that covered about 10% of the Italian electorate. Comparing the 1978 returns with those of the June 1976 parliamentary elections in the same localities, the PCI suffered its greatest setback since 1956. The Communists dropped
an average of 9.1% while the DC picked up 3.6%. The new left parties did relatively well in those localities where they ran candidates. They more than doubled their share of the votes, taking over 3 percent in 1978. After the elections, the PCI leadership admitted that it had lost votes in certain cities to the far left. Meanwhile, the Italian Socialist Party, which had been losing voters steadily as the PCI gained strength, reversed its electoral slide, winning an average of 13.3 percent of the 1978 vote as compared to 9.2 percent in 1976.

The signs of dissatisfaction with the PCI’s policies since 1976 are evident. Yet the party is locked into tactical choices that seem bound to spell its continued failure as a reformist government party as well as a party of struggle. One can explain the PCI’s dogged pursual of this course only in terms of the party’s operative theoretical assumptions (its assumptions in practice) and its consequent choice of class alliances and strategic perspective.

On various occasions over the last several years, the leadership has stated that there can be no socialist revolution in Italy in this historical period given the national and international balance of forces. The PCI operated on this same fundamental assumption during the 1950s and 1960s, but the position has become more explicit since the level of class struggle escalated (after 1968) and since the economic crisis intensified (after 1974). What the PCI leadership proposes as an alternative to revolution in this historical period is the strengthening of the position of the working class through economic, social, and institutional reforms. The long-term political mechanism for this is the historic compromise. The short-term goal is to pull Italy out of its severe economic crisis. Once the balance of power has shifted significantly in favor of the working class and once other strata of the population have swung over to the left, the socialist trans-

formation of Italian society will proceed. Presumably, a more favorable international context would exist.

Underlying both this strategy and the PCI’s current policies is the assumption that the bourgeoisie and the working class can work together to meet their separate needs. This is why the Communist leadership calls for an alliance of the working class and the progressive sectors of capital to relaunch the Italian economy. In theory, this alliance would make it possible both to guarantee increased worker productivity and high profits for the capitalists and to redirect production and revenues to meet social needs. In the early 1970s, the PCI emphasized the national role of the working class to maintain order in the factories and a high level of productivity. Then once the economy, which had been stagnating since 1963, went into a severe crisis, the party leadership insisted that the workers had a responsibility to make sacrifices in order to prevent a complete collapse. Just as the Communist leadership hopes to avoid a confrontation with the ruling class and a political reaction, it also hopes to avoid an economic breakdown. The only solution it envisions for this historical period is rebuilding capitalism. For this reason, the PCI’s general economic plan has been essentially the same as that of the bourgeoisie. It conforms to the usual two-phase schema: First create the conditions for a new cycle of investment (increased productivity, labor mobility, higher profits). Then the new investments will generate jobs, increased income, and the surplus necessary for reforms.

This plan contradicts the analysis of marxist economists who argue that relaunching capitalism in Italy will require the working class to give up a good part of what it has won in terms of control over the labor process and lay-off policy as well as better wages and benefits. Labor mobility (laying off workers in certain
factories with the promise of employing them elsewhere) would probably translate into long-term unemployment. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that new investments would generate many jobs since much of the capital would go toward increased automation. According to this perspective, the needs of the bourgeoisie and the working class are in conflict, and the economic conditions necessary to satisfy both classes do not exist in Italy. This argument takes into account an analysis of the international capitalist order and Italy’s place within this system. World capitalism is in a long-term structural crisis during which the strongest national economies will of necessity maintain their positions at the expense of the weaker countries like Italy. Since the Italian economy depends on exports in order to obtain raw materials, energy sources, and advanced technology, the prospects for sustained economic growth in Italy during a long-term downswing are very limited. Meeting the needs of both the working class and the bourgeoisie would require a period of strong economic expansion.

The PCI argues that as a government party it can condition investment choices to promote production for social needs and for the development of the South and agriculture. A period of austerity and sacrifices on the part of the working class will make possible a rationalization of the economy.

The PCI’s economic analysis has generated skepticism for years. After the 1976 elections, both the party’s constituency and its political opponents pressured the PCI to present a concrete economic program. The leadership published its Proposal for an intermediate term project (Proposta di progetto a medio termine) in July 1977. The 115-page text covers industrial and agricultural conversion, employment,
the role of private enterprise, the public sector, government financing, planning, labor policy, education, health, welfare, state reform, worker participation and control, local government, the credit system, state controlled industry, the European Economic Community, detente, and the new international economic order. The general reaction to the proposal was disappointment in its vagueness. The program does little other than outline Italy's economic and social ills and name generic solutions. There is no explanation of how to move from the status quo to an ideal system of industrial management, health care, or international relations. There is no connection between the goals of the program and the concrete political circumstances in which the PCI is operating. The program offers no timetable or well-defined stages of development, but it does state that the most serious aspects of the Italian crisis can be overcome within three to five years. The text makes it clear that private enterprise — including multinational corporations, if they act in Italy's interest — has an important role to play in the country's future development. The vision is of a rationally ordered system which provides for both human needs and profits, yet there are no indications — either from concrete experiences since 1976 or from a general economic and political analysis — that the PCI's reform program is workable.

PCI ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The national leadership of the PCI is worried about the recent organizational and electoral losses of the party. Since late 1976, the debate at several central committee meetings has been more conflictual than usual. Part of the national leadership is concerned that the party is losing touch with its base and is less combative than before. Recently there have been open discussions about political and organizational problems. The discussions focus on the PCI's dual identity as a party of struggle and a government party and the relationship between the party and the masses. The national leadership admits that the sections are less able to organize the base and link up with the day-by-day needs of people in the communities and workplaces. Since 1975, the functionaries and local leadership spend most of their time administering agencies and meeting with the other political parties. There is a strong trend toward bureaucratization among the younger cadre (under 40) who have made up a good part of the intermediate level leadership since the mid-1970s. They relate primarily to the higher levels of the party hierarchy and tend to be out of touch with what is going on in the local workplaces and the neighborhoods. The national leadership also admits that the PCI has not developed the capacity to deal with the multiplicity and differentiation of issues (the environment, urban renewal, the universities, and so on) which have grown up in the urban areas since 1970. There is also great concern about the diminishing weight of worker cadre in the party. Of the nearly 12,000 PCI sections in 1978, only 800 were in workplaces.

The top leadership discusses these problems frankly but lays the blame on the party's inadequate assimilation and implementation of the current line. One observation that recurs during evaluations is that the base and intermediate levels of leadership accept the party's line as an obligation and carry it out without much vigor or conviction. When this observation is added to the facts on the PCI's membership and electoral losses after 1976, two important questions emerge: First, if the base and part of the leadership are dissatisfied, why are they not able to modify or even radically change the party's line? Second, who exactly controls the formulation of the PCI's strategy? These questions can be answered with an analysis of the internal structure of the PCI and its level of internal democracy.
The national leadership of the PCI includes the secretariat (nine members),* the directorate (37 members), and the central committee (182 members). In 1975, the party abolished the politbureau in order to give more authority to the directorate. Below the central committee is the regional organization of the party. Each of the 20 regions has a secretariat, directorate, and regional committee. Next is the provincial level which includes about 200 federations (practically all of them correspond to a province), each having a secretariat, directorate, and federation committee. Below the federation level are party sections which cover either a particular geographical area (for example, a neighborhood) or a specific sector of the population (for example, a large workplace or university). Cells are generally smaller groupings that affiliate with a section.

The party operates according to the principles of democratic centralism which can be summarized as follows: Once an issue is decided, the minority accepts and carries out the decision of the majority; within the organizational pyramid, the higher bodies have authority over the lower ones; and no organized political tendencies or factions are permitted.

In theory (and by statute), the national congress held every three or four years, establishes the party’s line which the central committee then carries out. The central committee is supposed to be the primary group providing political leadership. An assembly of delegates elects the central committee. The central committee in turn choses the directorate, and the directorate then choses the secretariat.

In practice, the debate at the national congress is limited to documents which the top

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* This and the following two figures vary slightly from year to year. The numbers given are for 1978.
leaders agree upon ahead of time. They present the documents to the congressional delegates as the party line to be defended, and the congress inevitably approves what the leadership has decided. The top leadership (the directorate and secretariat) also ends up controlling who is nominated and elected to the central committee, the directorate, and the secretariat. In general, only 10 to 20 percent of the leadership is new after the assembly of delegates holds elections.

The central committee meets too infrequently (every three months) and is too large to play its assigned role as the party’s political leadership. So in effect formulation of the party’s line, decision-making, and political power remain in the hands of the directorate and secretariat. The important debates take place within the directorate which meets every week, but neither the topics discussed nor the content of the debate is made public. If open debate reaches the level of the central committee, as it has several times since 1976, it means that the directorate is divided.

Although there are greater possibilities for dissent and debate at the base level of the PCI (within the sections and cells), the local leadership tends to dominate discussions, and many members feel too inhibited to participate. Opposition to the party’s line can develop in one section, but most often it is isolated horizontally from other sections, and vertically it comes up against the bureaucracy of the party. Thus the base of the party plays no role in formulating strategy and has little chance of modifying the line. The top leadership unilaterally decides policy changes. Major shifts in the strategy take place only when there is a break of some sort within the power structure.

In this overview of party hierarchy and internal democracy, it is worth mentioning the differences in social composition between the leadership and the party base. Workers made up 59.9 percent of the PCI’s members in 1974 but only 26.2 percent of the federation committees (1975). Intellectuals, white collar employees, and students accounted for 12.9 percent of the membership in 1974, but they held 65 percent of the federation committee posts (1975). In 1976, only 8.7 percent of the PCI’s parliamentary deputies and only 5.2 percent of its senators came from the working class. In the 1978 directorate, there was no one of working class origin.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of the Second World War, the practice of the Italian Communist Party has demonstrated the inadequacies of its gradualist strategy. Although the leadership has never been a monolithic block, the operative theoretical assumptions of the PCI have consistently been those of a reformist party. The consequent tactical choices weakened the PCI’s ties to the most militant and politically advanced groups and partially undermined the party’s roots in the working class. The PCI’s mode of operation on a day to day basis has always been another constraint on the party’s ability to forge and lead a class movement.

Although all this has been true since the war, the 1970s tested the Communists’ strategy in a new way. As the decade began, the working class was in a strong position and had achieved a level of political consciousness, militancy, and organization that was unsurpassed in any capitalist country. Other groups, such as women, young people, and the unemployed, had been politicized and continued to struggle, as did the workers. The ruling class was temporarily on the defensive, and its own party was weakened and beset by internal divisions. Objectively these conditions provided the PCI with a historic opportunity to shift the balance of power further in favor of the working class and allied strata by unifying a large anti-capitalist movement around the most advanced economic, political, and social demands possible at
the time. The PCI rejected this course in all the ways and for all the reasons we have seen. What became more evident than ever during this period of historic opportunities was the fundamental separation between the stated goals of the party and its tactics, between its theoretical program and its practices.

Given the presuppositions of the PCI leadership, the party's internal structure, and its mode of operation, it is not at all clear at this point in time whether the PCI will be able to devise a new and more adequate strategy. To do so would involve a kind of cultural revolution within the party to alter radically the relationship of the leadership to the base and the relationship of the party to the working class, to mass movements, and to the state. The party would have to elaborate a critique of its own theoretical presuppositions and of reformism in general. Then, after a thorough analysis of the nature of Italian capitalism, the PCI would have to develop an organic program of not only specific short and intermediate term objectives but also concrete tactics to achieve them, a program of struggle relating to the immediate political situation.

Yet even this would not be enough. Both the elaboration and the implementation of an adequate program would require that the internal structure of the party and its day to day mode of operation change. Rather than being imposed from the top down, the tactics of the party must grow out of the political initiatives at every level of Italian society. In order for this to happen, the PCI would have to function democratically and establish mechanisms so that the base of the party played an active role in formulating the line and in choosing all levels of leadership. The implementation of an adequate strategy depends upon the mobilization of large numbers of people and their ideological preparation. For this, the PCI would have to organize an active presence as a revolutionary force in workplaces, communities, civil institutions, and the many branches of the state apparatus, including the armed forces. The PCI could not continue to spend most of its time and resources on routine party duties, administering local governments, and maneuvering with other parties in the same bureaucratized fashion.

All of this adds up to a fundamental change in the nature of the PCI, and where the impetus for that change would come from is not clear. Perhaps the extreme disaffection of the party's base or a new cycle of militant mass movements including the working class or a political reaction from the right could bring about a transformation. It seems obvious, however, that unless the PCI changes its strategy and mode of operation, the party will increasingly become a catch-all party, a more or less moderate electoral force which tries to respond to the vacillating
demands of a variety of interest groups. The class nature of the PCI will become ever more tenuous, and the weight of the working class will be felt less and less.

This process has already begun, and yet it is also true that no other political party has at this point won over a large part of the Italian working class. The PCI, relative to other parties, has more support from the working class, grudging and qualified as that support may be. There are several reasons for this. First, for older activists, there is a historical bond going back to the armed resistance in which the PCI played a leading role. Second, the tradition of party loyalty and discipline runs deep for certain cadre. Third, in spite of the many significant limits already discussed, the size and organizational presence of the party are still greater than those of any other left organization. Until recently at least, this gave the party a certain amount of prestige and inspired a certain amount of confidence. Fourth and perhaps most important, although many sectors of the working class and other groups have been far ahead of the PCI in terms of militancy and political consciousness, a sizeable part of the Italian working class has remained reformist precisely because there was no revolutionary force capable of the ideological work necessary to transform values and political thinking.

Yet in spite of the PCI's gradualist strategy and its policies since the war, the Italian working class achieved a relatively high degree of autonomy and a position of strength in society. It is hard to imagine that the most politically advanced sectors of Italian society would resign themselves to giving up what they have already won and to making additional sacrifices in order to rebuild capitalism and preserve the political and economic hegemony of the ruling class. If the PCI pursues its present course, the party will most likely divide its own base, creating a situation where parts of the working class and other groups resign themselves to defeat while others align themselves in opposition to the PCI. If this happens, the leadership role will eventually have to pass to a new political force (or forces) that must win the active support of the working class and allied groups over time and develop an adequate strategy for a transition to socialism in Italy.

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SOURCE MATERIAL


Franchi, Paolo, ed. “Il partito, oggi; il rapporto con le istituzioni e con le masse” in Rinascita, January 6, 1978.


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HOME AND WORK
A New Context for Trade Union History

Joanna Bornat

Trade union history often neglects women. It has neglected the role a trade union plays in transmitting and explaining prevailing attitudes and relationships between men and women in a particular historical context. The way people participate in trade union activity can be better understood if the meaning of wage earning is analyzed in social, sexual and economic terms. To do this, I have combined a feminist derived explanation of the family, a set of male-dominated economic and social relationships, with a Marxist conception of wage labor.

Traditionally, the interpretation of a trade union’s development is based on official, minute-book, conference-resolution resources. But this approach necessarily tends to reflect the ideas and positions of its male leaders. Oral history, on the other hand, is a useful method for interpreting a trade union’s history based on theoretical meaning and experience of trade union membership for those working and living in an industry. The wool textile manufacturing industry of West Yorkshire, at the turn of the century, provides an example of women’s employment on a large scale with only weak trade union development and enables the testing of the ideas described above.

The conventional approach to trade union history, and the stress placed on the physical separation of home and work, are part of a tradition which draws attention away from the interrelationships of the work situation and the domestic economy. An analysis which sees home simply in terms of reproduction, socialization, and consumption neglects the surviving yet changed economic relationships which family members must play within the
capitalist mode of production. To say that capitalism needs the family is not the simple story of the exploitation of its members. It is also the story of how those members learn to survive and support one another within the constraints of the wage labor-capital relationship.

I am arguing for an approach which seeks to understand men and women, their institutions, interactions and self-conceptions, in terms of their living and working relationships. The theoretical approach which seems most promising is that which attempts to articulate dimensions of class and dependency. By class I mean the relationships between wage labor and capital. By dependency I mean the unequal relationship between men and women maintained through social and economic means within the capitalist mode of production.

In order to obtain a more complete understanding of these issues within a particular context of employment, I have interviewed nineteen women and four men who entered the woollen manufacturing industry between the years of 1900 and 1916 in the Colne Valley of West Yorkshire. I chose the Colne Valley area partly because I had found the most complete union records for this area, and partly because of its attractiveness in Labor History terms. The constituency based in this valley returned Victor Grayson to Parliament in 1907. J.B. Grayson was arguably the first socialist ever elected to the House of Commons. It also represents a geographically compact area with the appearance of what sociologists describe as ‘community’ — a concept of dubious value in the treatment of wage labor-capital relationships.

First of all I want to discuss three main points where the close inter-relation of home and work are evident. These are, firstly, the transition from home to work, secondly, the destiny of the wage and thirdly, training in work: The final section of the paper will discuss trade union membership, how this was acquired, and how it operated.

ENTERING THE MILLS

In the transition from school to work, consideration of the home situation over-rode other factors. This was true for boys and girls in working class homes at this time. All left school at the earliest possible opportunity on attaining Standard VII, the top class, at their thirteenth birthday and most went straight to work at the mill:

“My idea was to get to be thirteen as quickly as I could so that I could get in the mill and earn some money.”
“You don’t think about it when you’re a child you see. You know you’ve to get up and you were just shoved into the mill. That’s all.”
“Oh they was waiting for you in them days. It wasn’t bad getting a job in them days, not when I started work.”

Some had left even earlier than thirteen to do half time at twelve years of age, though this was becoming a decreasing practice especially for girls by 1914. One girl described her mother failing to get a full time place for her older half-time brother:

“And she went for his full-time papers to see about his full time papers and they said, Oh well, they hadn’t come. She said, Well I’ll have another half-timer. So she put me down for half-timer.”

Those who delayed their entry into mill work were in no sense idle at home. There were younger children to be cared for, domestic work, and occasionally work in a family shop. For one girl the First World War came as something of an opportunity:
“And when I went weaving the first it was at when the First World War started. I wasn’t going to have to go weaving you see. [She was lame]. But I were glad when war started in me own mind and I knew I shouldn’t have to stop at home. I used to think, I’m a little slavey enough without that.”

For one girl staying at home was a short-lived experience however:

“... they was going to keep me at home with the business but I started sort of running about like they do when they’re young and me mother said she thought I wanted some proper work and, you know, proper master like...”

What alternatives were presented to these young workers? To what extent was there any element of choice at the point of job entry? Apart from service and occasional shopwork there were no other alternatives. Several men-
tioned possibilities which they had not been allowed or had not wanted to take up:

“The teachers wanted you to stay on? Yes, the headmaster wanted me to — know if I could go to grammar school. But I just felt as if I had to go to work. We all had in those days... I didn’t think I wanted to go. It wasn’t me parents that stopped me. Probably they’d have let me go if I’d — if I’d wanted you know. I suppose I should want to go working like me friends was. We all thought we had to go in the mill in those days you know.”

“And why did you not go into dressmaking? Well, for the simple reason that you had to pay to learn and you’d no wages. You’d no wages. If you learned your trade you’d no wages. [The schoolmaster] came to see me father and he wanted to compensate me father, moneywise, to let me go to a higher school and to train for a schoolmaster. And me father wouldn’t. Well I could have gone to dressmake — but

Schoolroom scene, 1907.
mother didn't seem to fancy us going then you see."

Dressmaking might be a possibility for the younger delicate girl in a large family but it was out of the question when the family needed the young worker's wage. Even the four shillings brought in by the young girl above was a vital contribution.

The influence of locality, the pull of the home and parents seem to have been irresistible in forming choice. Mill work was considered the only job:

"We never thought of anything else."

A local school register shows a narrow range of occupations available to school leavers between 1896 and 1917. More girls than boys had scholarships; but, more boys than girls went into skilled or clerical jobs. Although small holdings and tenanted farms were common in the upper reaches of the valley, full time farm work was an unlikely option with the availability of waged employment in the valley itself. Aspirations in any other direction seem to have been checked by parental refusal or the pull of work itself.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the Colne Valley village of Marsden had its own version of a school strike in January 1912. This took the form of a protest about the raising of the school leaving age by the West Riding County Council. The school log book for Marsden describes sixty "scholars", "playing truant" as a protest against the Bye laws "which came into force unexpectedly on the 1st inst. and provide that all children must attend school full time up to the age of 14 years unless between the ages of 12 and 14 they can pass Standard VII". The log book from the next school down the valley, at West Slaithwaite, talks of a "mob of Marsden scholars... led and incited by two or three mill boys" pelting the school with stones and calling the children to join them.

The desire to become a worker and thus a contributor to the family income was overwhelming. The first pay day could be a red-letter day:

"It was an exciting moment you know that, when you went home with your wages. I should be pleased I daresay, I was contributing."

Real pride and feelings of elevated status were involved; a wage earner was a worker and families needed workers.

The industry needed young workers. One Essex interviewee had a sharp appreciation of this:

"... When they were thirteen they were ready for work. And you suppose to pass labor exam weren't you. But I never knew of anybody fail it. Never knew anybody fail it."

Finding work was no problem. In some cases mills actively sought families, especially those with large numbers of girls:

"Why did you move to Slaithwaite? Well there was a man came from Slaithwaite to see, with there being such a lot of girls you know. They used to seek families up that had a lot of girls, to go and work in the mills... if they heard tell of anybody that had a family of girls they used to go and seek them up and get them to go work in the mill."

The preponderance of women in textiles can be seen in the range of parents' occupations. Most mothers who had worked were in textiles, though a few were in service. These latter would normally have come from outside the area, sometimes from as far away as Suffolk. Fathers' occupations showed a wider range,
including miners, horsemen, a glassblower, quarry workers, labourers, soldiers, road surveyor and shopkeepers. Quarrying and reservoir construction work provided an important and persisting source of employment for men, and this too could attract workers from far afield, from Bristol in one case. The children of these parents would witness and take part in discussions about work at home which derived from quite dissimilar work experiences.

In contemporary discussions of boy labor, there was concern about the problem of "blind alley" jobs in textiles. (It is interesting to note that this was never seen as a problem for girl entrants.) The increase in proportions of women and girl employees in the decades up to 1914 suggests that textile employment was offering fewer openings to boys. Certainly the job histories of the men interviewed have a restless quality — reflecting perhaps not only narrowing opportunities but also the low wages typical of wool textile production.

The industry certainly exerted a real pull; still, work, home and family remained closely linked. This is clearly seen in the actual finding of a job, the final stage in the transition from school to work. If the freedom conferred by wage labor status and the needs of industry were really paramount, then the influence of home would appear minimal. However, this was not the case.

"And how did you get your job?

Oh they was waiting for you. It wasn't bad getting a job in them days, not when I started work. You see me sister worked there for a start. When she started — she were first — me mother knew the foreman when she were going you see. So she went to
his house. And he told her to come morning after you see, and start. Well with her being there you see, she arranged for me to go."

Even those who went independently to seek work had experienced socialization into the customs and practices. Taking sisters, relatives or neighbors their dinners, or listening to conversations in houses close to mills where friends and relatives might gather to eat their food, could provide information and introductions to opportunities. In one case a girl had only to cross the street in which she lived to ask for a job. Most were helped across this first bridge by mothers, fathers, sisters and aunts:

"... I was ill away from school. And I went to me Auntie. They used to take dinners to the workers you see. And I went with me Auntie to take her son's dinner and she asked for me because it was coming time for me to start at bobbin winding."

The usual first job was bobbin winding, for girls, at a wage of five shillings a week. But relatives already in some skilled employment could secure entry to preferred jobs:

"My sister was what they call a mender. And of course it was supposed to be both a skilled job and a job they could earn middlin' a money. And not as dirty as some of the other jobs. So when I was going to the mill she asked if I could go and learn to mend straightaway..."

I went with me mother... me mother had always worked at —’s. And like she said, she wanted me under her eye you see. And I got with a young lady warping and there was two warpers that were needing — we were called clerks..."

WHO GETS THE WAGE?
The second point at which family and work can be seen to interact is the disposition of the wage. Historian Peter Stearns states bluntly: "In England [daughters] paid board and room to their parents; on the Continent they turned their wages over directly." This assumption seems to be based on the evidence from the Report published by the Board of Trade in 1911 of the Survey of Accounts of Expenditure of Wage Earning Women and Girls. However, even among the 30 case studies published by the Board of Trade there are six women who give their wages intact to their mothers. Other interviews present no constant pattern of paying board for this country. There are both regional and social differences. I want to argue that the difference between paying board and "tipping up" (turning over) a wage to the family, represented by the mother, was crucial in both the relationship of the wage earner to the family and the wider economic significance of the wage beyond the point of producton. Although economic independence may appear as a natural corollary of waged employment, the theoretical freedom of the wage earner was actually limited in a number of ways. The encroachments of capital have been documented. What interests me here are domestic relationships. The interdependency of wage earner and family was based upon issues of survival. Thus the family in capitalist society is not only a creation of economic relationships but also a response to these, a necessary adaptation and expression of the will to survive. Tipping up a wage to the family related directly to the needs of the family unit and its individual members. This means that gender, age, and economic circumstances all helped determine the incidence of tipping up.

Wages were usually tipped straightaway and intact to the mother. Only two mentioned giving their wages to anyone else. These were girls who for various reasons lived in their grandparent's home. Their grandmothers received the wage:
"... it was 12 and 6 pence. And I said to me mother, can I give it me granny? She said, yes, you can. And I gave my first week's wage to me granny, because she'd always been so good to me."

Local and general custom decreed that a "penny in the shilling" could be kept for pocket money:

"Mother got the wage and I got 5 pence."

As wages rose gradually from the normal starting point of 5 shillings for a girl, slightly more for a boy, to somewhere about the pound level before the First World War, more could be kept back for spending on amusements, entertainment, or for saving towards holidays or marriage. However, the family's needs still came first:

"... I went home and others were buying a cream slice with the twopenny of the wage. We'd so much and this bonus on because of the war. And we'd this out of the wage and I know I bought this cream slice. I didn't half get it for it." (TRANS: I really caught hell for buying it.)

The amount kept back is less significant than the actual tipping of the wage. What was left for spending or saving was determined not by the wage earner but by the parents and by the relationship of the individual earner to the parents plus family. This could affect girls more adversely than boys:

"Our — were married and there was only me and me brother next to me. And then he were paying board and I had to tip all me wages up. Why did he pay board while you tipped your wages up? Oh well, that's a question, isn't it?... I know me mother gave me some spends and I daren't spend it because I was frightened we might want a meal during the week. And I said, Well you'll have to give me mother more money. I says, can't see why you should be going out every night a week — and if me mother doesn't give me half a dollar — I can't go out. Put some more money in."

Accounts of tipping up are graphic and resentment was experienced repeatedly:

"And I said one Friday night, I were coming up to being married. It'd be about 12 month before I got married. And one Friday night — me mother used to sit there with her apron open and we used to tip all our wages into her apron, me father, me and me sister. And I said to me Father, I thought, Oh I'll try it on, and I just — and he's a big moustache, he'd a Jimmy Edward moustache had me father you know. And I says, Oh father, I'm thinking of starting paying board. You see I were earning about six or seven quid a week then, spinning, which was a good wage then. And I just looked at his moustache and I could read his moustache. When — it used to drop some way when he were disappointed or angry. And he looked straight back at me and the only words he said to me were, If you do, you'll be the first one that ever has done at this house. And I says, Right. And I tipped every penny up to me mother up to getting — before I was getting married."

The feeling that as the young worker grew older he or she might be the local exception to the tipping up custom was frequently expressed. This may have been due to the fact that the determinants of tipping up were specific to each family in the sense that each family differed as to parents' occupations, numbers of siblings, ratios between sexes and age of parents. In general, however, it seems that tipping
up continued until the son or daughter left to form their family or formed their own home in the parents’ home. Those who never left or who married later than most, in their thirties and forties, only stopped tipping up when their mothers died or became too infirm to manage household affairs:

“I gave me mother... my wages until I was well over 20. And she said, well, and she had got to that state that she couldn’t do either shopping or housekeeping or anything — and she said, — what’s the good of giving it me — it’s you that have it to see to.”

An alternative to tipping up could be provided by going into lodgings for a boy. Those who talk of paying board at an earlier stage than leaving the parental home were saving towards an announced marriage and might be fortunately placed in the family, for example, a younger sister to older brothers. Family composition could be crucial:

“We could have new clothes you see and me mother used to make all our dresses... when she’d got those workers we had — we could have the best of hats... the best of coats. I remember having two pairs of shoes at once. One was ordinary shoes... and then we had some rinking boots... And oh, we thought we were well off then. Well we were. But you see it did away with all — anything like that when the First World War started because we’d no workers. (Her five older brothers went as soldiers).”

Those who did pay board, and they seem to have been few, were those whose family circumstances were comfortably secure, whose fathers were shopkeepers, skilled textile craftsmen or foremen.

The question of the mother’s role as receiver
of this wage suggests the possibility of economic power for the woman, within the domestic situation. It also links the domestic economy with the cash nexus at the point of production. In law, the woman was dependent, politically she scarcely existed, yet she had the key role in maintaining and servicing the family members. Her banker's role was determined however by her husband's legal powers, his willingness to tip up his wages and the wages of the other dependents in the family.

JOB TRAINING
The third area of relations between work and family is that of training at work. Unlike cotton, and outside the craft and supervisory jobs which were almost exclusively male, there were no examples of controlling entry from the mill floor, nor was the system of sub-contracting as general. Before World War I, there was a convention that learners would pay their teachers, but there were ways of circumventing this.

First jobs for thirteen year olds entering the mill were usually winding for girls and reaching in for boys in weaving sheds, doffing for either sex in spinning. These jobs would be taught by fellow workers and would be learned within a day or two at the most. The more skilled jobs of warping, weaving, and mending required lengthier training, perhaps two weeks in the case of weaving and even longer in the case of warping and mending. There were many tasks to learn and the more complicated weaving machinery took some managing. The most usual way of by-passing the question of cash payment to a worker-teacher was of course to contain the function within the family or wider kin network. If there was no weaver, warper or mender in the immediate family then family friends could take on the job:

"I know they used to pay a pound a week to learn to weave. But it was a friend of me mothers that learned me and she wouldn't take anything."

The young worker's career through the mill was punctuated by frequent job changes, sometimes in pursuit of more wages, other time in search of experience. More congenial working conditions and the location of a skilled uncle or father who would teach a weaver might also influence mobility. The girl who stayed put was a rarity and few made only one move. Mills varied in size from perhaps only a score of looms to several hundreds. This meant that to get a loom a would-be weaver might have to leave her twisting place to find not only training but guarantee of a machine. Under such conditions of mobility and uncertainty family ties could be a positive advantage for quite a number of years.

Such ties could have their disadvantages too. Rules of precedence in the family would determine choice of action in times when work was short, as happened to one young woman:

"Now then, I was one of the last to finish really but I had an uncle that was a weaver up there as well and when it came to my turn I let him have it because he had a wife and child — we had the business going on so I let me uncle... have my place."

More immediately, of course, those working with relatives endured a closer supervision than other workers:

"Me dad worked there and he asked for me. He wanted me to get there... and it were a pity he ever did. Because you know if ever I did owt they always told me dad. He always knew. He used to say we were too long at toilets you know."
Another girl had her brother-in-law for her overloeker:

"I didn't like me brother-in-law... I think he made me work harder than anyone else. So they wouldn't think he was... giving me a favour."

She went to complain about something at the office:

"Well if there was anything we wanted altering — a few of us would go into the office and of course I was the one. And the man that owned he'd say, And you —, he'd say, — your brother-in-law. I'd say, well what difference does it make? I says, The wrong's there just whether —'s my overloeker or not. You know, I stuck up for myself."

Perhaps it was easier to be forward with a relative in a supervisory position, but presumably he would make sure that challenges to authority were made in a controllable way.

FAMILY AND UNION

The close link of home and work maintained through dependence on and exploitation of family ties provided the context for participation in trade unions. Viewing the process from this angle rather than from that of the union as simply an organization with members in particular work situations may help us to understand the situation of women in unions in the first twenty years of this century.

Even in those unions which gave most attention and access to women as participants, in particular certain cotton unions, the type of participation and the nature of their involvement was not usually the same as that of the man in the industry. Trade unions are a product of a capitalist society and therefore play a part in reflecting and reproducing the social and economic relationships which persist in the dominant institutions in that society. In so far as they seek only to control conditions at the point of production, and take no wider social or economic focus, they will necessarily take a narrow view of the function of the wage in capitalist society. Trade union historians, following this narrow focus derived from trade union documents, and from an acceptance of this narrow definition of the scope of trade unionism, provide us with explanations of women's membership which are inaccurate and insufficient. Women have been regarded both
by trade union officials and their historians as either a menace to be kept at bay or as allies with limited fighting potential.

An alternative approach is one which sees unions as men's institutions and women's involvement as determined and limited by a male domination. However, this on its own is not a sufficient explanation, either. We need to know about the conditions for both the emergence and the perpetuation of such dominance, and the ways in which trade union policies and structures reflected and expressed the relationships between men and women.

The key to an understanding of these relationships is the notion of dependency as I have already argued. Dependency in the work situation was maintained with the assumption that women's work is marginal. That is, marginal not only in terms of a woman's life as such, but marginal to the whole area of work as conceived in terms of men's labor and its rewards.

In real terms, marginality was confirmed in a number of inter-related ways. Women were excluded from skilled occupations, they were paid lower wages and they were confined to certain areas of employment, basically service, subsidiary and casual work. The day-to-day expression of these relationships was confirmed through the experience of education and through the words of theorists and commentators whose explanations and interpretations persistently depicted the dimensions of labor in male, celibate terms.

Particular features in the structure, organization and ideology of trade unions reinforced marginality. Of course, all major unions at the turn of the century were exclusively male in origin and the cotton unions, thought generally to have had an advanced policy with regards to women members, left much to be desired. Some unions charged a lower level of subscription and therefore paid less in benefits to women members. The custom of excluding low-scale contributors from office had only recently passed. The double work load of most working women is of course an enduring feature. The Webbs, in discussing organization amongst cotton weavers, refer to:

"the disadvantage of needing... a large staff of paid collectors to secure the regular payment of contributions from the girls and married women who are indisposed to bring their weekly pence to the public house in which the branch meeting is still frequently held."

The establishment of Socialist Clubs and Trade Union promises helped avoid dues collection in public houses in open situations. However, the predominantly male clientele of the Clubs, as reflected in the nightly attractions offered — beer and billiards — did not go very far in improving the situation as far as young working women were concerned.
Within the wide range of possible areas for investigations, I want to look at two which have some bearing, I would argue, on the interpretation of trade union membership. These are the role of men in persuading women members of their families to join unions, and the system of house-to-house collection of union dues. I want to look at these within the wider defining scope of dependency and the interconnected worlds of home and work.

In discussion, and without prompting, women tended to mention their father’s or uncle’s influence in the question of joining:

“When we went to — and — ’s, everybody had to be in. There were people in the union. . . . . my father learned me and as soon as ever I got onto a loom of my own, man went: What about that lass of yours being in the union?”

Her account is revealing because she shows the appeal being made over her head rather than directly to her. Another woman was recruited by her uncle and describes what happened in appropriate Yorkshire speech:

“I asked me uncle — if he’d learn me to weave at — ’s. And he said yes. So I went and he says, I’ll tell thee summat, he just talked like that. . . . he says, Tha’s to join union before tha starts. I says, How do you mean? He says, I’ll tell thee that’s to join union afore tha starts weyving.”

One girl who never joined explained why:

“Me father wasn’t a member of the union and so we weren’t encouraged to join a union.”

This is not to say that weavers taught by women friends or relatives did not also join the union when they got their looms; they did in those mills where unions were accepted. These were few, however, before the First War.

However, the role of male relatives in arranging union membership was significant. Young workers would be about 16 or 18 when they first acquired a loom, and union membership was seen as an accompaniment of increased age and skill. The exclusion of the young and less skilled, by neglect or design, was always to be a weakness in textile union activities.

The recruitment of women to the union was often posed in family, paternal terms. The unions’ press, the *Yorkshire Factory Times*, frequently appealed to male members to ensure that the women in their families become union members. In February 1915 the anonymous columnist “Sweeper-up” castigated Bradford’s men trade unionists:

“These 24,000 Trade unionists are in close relationship to 15,000 women textile workers, but very few of them help the women in Trade Union matters or with Trade Union advice, and I cannot withdraw my observations that many of them are half Trade Unionists and semi-blacklegs as a consequence.”

In the paper the following week Ben Turner was recorded as expressing the same opinions at an ILP meeting in Bradford. His New Year Resolutions for the union in 1916 included the vow that everyone in “his house should be a Trade Union member, especially the women”. In 1915, a joint conference of GUTW representatives and Bradford Trades Council Executive, held to consider the question of improved organization of Bradford Women, resolved amongst other things to send each male Trade Union member a circular suggesting he encourage the women members of his family to join the union.

Although accurate figures are hard to come by, it would appear that roughly half the union’s members were women. Despite these proportions participation by women in the
management and control of the union was minimal. The war brought some changes. In 1920, Keighly District, for example, had a woman secretary with a committee of eleven women and one man. Bradford had ten men and eight women on its District Committee. But at the highest level men still predominated; there were twenty-one men and only six women on the executive committee in 1920. For a short period during the war the union had a woman organizer and a Women’s Guild which had no power to do anything but deliberate and advise. Some women, particularly in the Bradford area, were active and vociferous members of the union. But the framework of union government and power was dominated by men, and the language of agitation and negotiation was for the main part couched in terms relevant to men workers. Nevertheless, young working women were expected to look to this institution for representation on wages and work matters.

The women interviewed in Colne Valley had few positive statements to make about trade union membership. None had ever considered approaching the union over a shopfloor matter such as bad work or unjust treatment from a superior. Their association with the union was largely indirect. For this group of workers, the weekly subscription was usually paid out at the doorstep by mothers and grandmothers from the family kitty on behalf of the young worker to a collector who worked on a house-to-house basis.

"And did you pay your subscription from your wage — or how was it paid? It was out of my wage yes. And you paid it yourself did you? No, they used to come to the house for the union. Would your mother give it them? Yes. Just used to come — no, they wouldn’t let them
collect it in the mill. They didn’t like the unions you see in the mill... None of them. They didn’t want you to be in a union. They could pay what they wanted if you wasn’t in the union. If you was in the union they didn’t like it.

So they came round the house for the money? Yes, yes, more or less. And would your mother give your money, or did you give the money? Oh well — it came out of the wage. Me dad made me be in... He was a strong union man.

How did you pay your dues to the union? Well there was a collector used to come for them... He used to come about once a month. And it wasn’t so much at that time. You used to have to pay him. And did you pay or did your father pay for you? Well I had — well it’d be paid with all the lot I expect. We were all in.’’

An analysis solely in terms of conflict at the point of production ignores the significance of that point to different members of a family at different points in that family’s life cycle. Production in the domestic sphere comes to be seen in close connection with production under capitalist relations, when we follow the course of the wage past the point of its initial handling at the work place. The early twentieth century family is thus not only a product of capitalist relations of production with its formally independent wage earners, its physical separation from the place of work, and the forced contribution of all its members to the wage earning process whether in paid work or not. It functioned also as a means of survival, a dual function which by binding its women members especially close, also provided the means to by-passing some of the purely competitive aspects of the labor market. Again, the pooling of the wage, in theory providing a form of security to individuals at the mercy of the system of production, has to be set against its effect on women and young persons whose lesser wages were confiscated according to the varying economic fortunes of the family unit. This is especially the case for women, since the assumed marginality of their paid work weakened their attachment and claim to the wage.

In this article I have tried to produce an alternative analysis of women and trade unions, one which avoids psychologistic explanations of women’s participation as being determined by apathy or disinclination for collective action.
Trade unions are seen as operating interactively in two ways. Traditionally, in terms of their origins and persistence, trade unions protect and defend workers against employer action. But unions also play a part in providing explanations for and perpetuating certain social and economic relations between members of the working class. The extent to which a particular union seeks to change or modify these relations at the place of work, within its own structure or in the wider society, will tend to determine the position and activity of its women members.

This paper was first given in a draft form at a Feminist History conference at Essex University in May 1976. It was then revised and published in Oral History, Vol. 5, No. 2, Autumn 1977. The present version is again slightly amended and revised.

A variety of source material was used in researching this area. Apart from generally available secondary sources covering women's employment, trade union history and industrial sociology, a number of different primary sources were used. Local and national newspapers from the 1900 to 1920 period were consulted, as were annual reports, local directories, government papers and other printed documents. Trade union correspondence, minute books and other related evidence was used extensively. In the case of the General Union of Textile Workers this is mainly to be found in theNUDBTW collection in the Local History archive of Kirklees Libraries and Museum Service, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Material from school log books and factory records from the Colne Valley area was also used. Some of this is deposited at Huddersfield Library, some at the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds and some is to be found in the schools and factories to which it belongs. The oral history data mainly comes from interviews carried out with retired textile workers during 1975 and 1976 in the Colne Valley of West Yorkshire. A structured interview schedule was compiled and questions asked relating to family history and composition, work experience, social life and trade union membership. Other oral data was made available from the interviews deposited at the University of Essex, carried out by Paul Thompson and Thea Vigne for their project, 'Family Life and Work Experience before 1918'.

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LETTER FROM SAN FRANCISCO

Rank-and-File Union Victory

An event which has received amazingly little coverage and less analysis in the Left press was the victory this spring of a rank and file insurgent caucus which swept out of office the entrenched corrupt local leadership of San Francisco’s largest union. Joe Belardi was defeated for reelection as president of Local 2 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders. Belardi is also president of the San Francisco Central Labor Council, and for years he has been one of the most powerful men in San Francisco labor. Though it is hard to draw hard-and-fast lessons from this experience, it may at least suggest some of the conditions under which an insurgent caucus can unseat an oligarchical union leadership and raise issues of union democracy.

Not only is Local 2 with its 17,500 members the largest in the city, it is also one of the most economically strategic. Tourism is big business here and Local 2’s waiters, waitresses, cooks, maids, bartenders, bellmen, dishwashers, and bus-persons work the motels and restaurants. A strike at the height of the convention season, for example, would cause the loss of millions of dollars and have a ripple effect far beyond the hotels and restaurants directly involved.

SAN FRANCISCO POLITICAL ECONOMY

Since World War II tourism and finances have displaced manufacturing and longshore work as the heart of San Francisco’s political economy. Business leaders promoted these changes in a number of ways including a master redevelopment plan.

The shifting nature of the workforce threatens the traditional union shop character of San Francisco. Matthew Josephson called San Francisco “the country’s strongest union shop town.” It was in San Francisco that Harry Bridges led the General Strike of 1934 and built the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen’s Union. The new concentration of banks and insurance companies has brought with it a growing number of nonunionized clerical workers. For example, the largest bank in the world, the Bank of America, is headquartered here and its workforce is totally nonunion. At the same time traditional types of unionized

Cartoon for A.R.F. leaflet by Bulbul.
work in manufacturing and on the docks are moving out of the city. Consequently the proportion of unionized workers has steadily declined.

The threat facing the unions is that San Francisco will become a nonunion town if they are unable to organize in the new sectors of work and if they cannot keep hold of those (such as hotels and restaurants) in which they are presently organized. It is in this context that we must interpret the background of Local 2’s election, that is, that there is a management offensive to break the unions.

BACKGROUND TO THE ELECTION

Up until three years ago the local culinary workers were split into several different craft locals for the bartenders, waitresses, waiters, maids, cooks, and so forth. In 1975 they merged into one industrial union, Local 2. The International appointed Joe Belardi, long-time head of the cooks union, president and he appointed the officers of the other crafts to lesser posts. (Belardi is also a vice president of the International.) The autocratic way in which the merger was handled and Belardi’s leadership style were the most important objective conditions which set the stage for the election upset.

Only a minority of the crafts held elections on whether to merge. Under the new by-laws which Belardi presented as a fait accompli to the membership, business agents who had been elected in the separate craft locals were now appointed. An elected shop steward system was essentially dismantled. Further, the election of officers was put off for three years. The later campaign to unseat Belardi was fought in many respects over the restoration of the lost democratic rights.

On many occasions Belardi explicitly stated that a union must be run by experienced professionals and not the workers. Increasingly he hired business agents out of hotel management rather than from the ranks. After his defeat he told The San Francisco Chronicle that the new president, David MacDonal, would be unable to lead the union because his only experience had been as a cook. Not only did Belardi create a structure where the piecarts had total power, but they also gave themselves fat salaries. (The 21 business agents developed such a vested interest in their salaries that before the election they petitioned for a National Labor Relations Board election; they wanted to affiliate as a separate local of business agents with the Teamsters as insurance against being fired if the Belardi regime lost!)

A persistent complaint was that union officers were lazy about or opposed to processing many work grievances. Furthermore the business agents, many of whom had never worked in a hotel or restaurant, tended to treat the workers arrogantly. Some in the hotels even boasted that they could get a free room from management any time they wanted. The percentage of hotel and restaurant work under union contract fell from 90 to under 50 percent, and union membership dropped from 25,000 to 17,500. And many places were under union contract in name only because Local 2 had a number of sweetheart contracts with smaller restaurants; typically the workers in those places did not even know that they were covered by a union contract. The employer would pay into the union’s pension and health fund each month. The workers did not pay union dues since they didn’t know they were members; hence they were ineligible to receive benefits.

Most members developed attitudes of distrust for the union, cynicism, or simply apathy. Many of those not covered by check-off stopped paying dues and drifted away. Morale and consequently the ability of the union to fight management was at an all-time low.
THE OPPOSITION

The main subjective conditions which led to Belardi’s undoing were years of work by different oppositional caucuses and a final barnstorming campaign.

Belardi had had tight control of the cooks union, but the move from a craft to an industrial structure brought many more workers under his presidency and significantly diluted his control. Over the years a number of different caucuses had formed to fight the Belardi machine. Union meetings were wild affairs. From the podium Belardi ran the meetings autocratically over the howls of protest of an assortment of discontented members, Maoists, and other Leftists.

About a year prior to the April election Belardi tried to push through a $2 a month dues increase. This proved to be the final straw for many previously passive members — especially after it was widely rumored that the lion’s share of the new revenue was earmarked for a special officers’ pension fund. At the end of one union meeting Belardi was chased down the street by a group of angry maids. The dues increase was soundly defeated. The defeat was the beginning of the end for Belardi. The momentum swung to the opposition for the first time. The victory gave encouragement and optimism that the Belardi machine was finally vulnerable.

The Alliance of the Rank and File (ARF), the group which finally beat the Belardi machine, organized in 1977 to contest the upcoming election. It was a group of independent leftists, rank and file workers, and veterans of previous opposition caucuses. The core of ARF was and continues to be about 12-15 people. Most, but not all, of the members are young. Slightly less than half are from minorities. None of the nationally organized Left formations are represented in it, though there are a number of people who have been active in local Left study groups.

ARF was tightly unified in the need to dump Belardi, but less unified in its future program for administering the union. Issues of how to implement democratic control, how fast to move, and how to deal with the vestiges of the Belardi machine divided caucus members. These divisions would later become a major problem.

ARF was able though to gather together a slate and general program. Their slogan, “Watch Dogs, Not Fat Cats”, introduced a program calling for restoring an elected shop steward system and election of business agents, decreasing officers’ salaries to no more than that of the highest paid worker represented, limiting officers to two three-year terms, ratifying all contracts by secret membership vote, distributing contracts in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Tagalog before the vote (close to half of the local are minorities), and rank and file negotiating teams. (All of ARF’s leaflets were translated into all four languages — a practice often neglected by the Belardi candidates.)

Preceding the election a benefit raised $2,000 and ethnically and sexually balanced teams visited many workplaces to talk and post literature. At the same time the paid business agents, on union time, actively campaigned for the administration slate. In many workplaces the ARF members, once discovered by management, were thrown out. Meanwhile management allowed the business agents to campaign unbothered. Clearly management did not view the election with disinterest — they favored the election of Belardi.

The Communist Party, in an action which proved after the fact to be a major embarrassment, endorsed Belardi. The CP’s People’s World ran a front page article which praised Belardi (who had recently brought a CP member into the union’s leadership group) for supporting progressive causes. It referred to Belardi as a “tough fighter” and dismissed
ARF as insignificant. A CP member who works in the news department of the local Pacifica radio station kept all coverage of ARF off the air. On election day CP cadre from other unions campaigned for Belardi.

Many volunteered to work on the ARF campaign only reluctantly because they thought it, like past efforts, would be an exercise in futility. However, after experiencing enthusiasm on the part of the workers for the campaign, they returned with optimism and enough morale to work hard.

In many workplaces management had intimidated most of the workers, but over the years often there was at least one who had fought back and commanded respect. For example, Consuelo Torres, one of the ARF candidates, was for eight years a maid at the Hilton before being fired for militant activity. When she campaigned at the Hilton she was greeted like a returned hero before the managers had her thrown out. ARF was able to enlist others like Torres who had the respect of their fellow workers.

For the election ARF concentrated on the hotels because that was the core of their support — especially among the maids. The maids, all women and minority, have the most difficult and lowest paid work of the crafts. They had suffered the speed-up of increased numbers of rooms to clean. Many were opposed to the original merger and saw their position slipping further under Belardi’s new business unionism. ARF provided a free jitney bus service to get them from the hotels to the polls, a tactic which proved to be extremely useful.

The final vote gave MacDonald 3096 and Belardi 2508. In all ARF won three of the four offices which they contested (they lost the fourth by only 16 votes) and six of the eleven executive board seats which they contested. The Belardi machine still however retains a significant though minority part of the leadership structure.

POST-ELECTION

As stated, ARF was more of an amalgam of anti-Belardi forces than a tightly unified political force. After the election, differences over how to administer the union emerged as significant contradictions. The contradictions revolve around three issues: continuation of the caucus, dismantling the Belardi machine, and the program for structural reform.

MacDonald and a few others with administration posts have left the caucus, arguing that its continuance constitutes divisiveness which weakens the union. Obviously they saw the caucus as a temporary electoral coalition for dumping Belardi. Other ARF members with administration posts including the vice president, Winston Ching, maintain that ARF’s battle to transform the union has entered the key stage and that a strong caucus is more important than ever. They meet and want to
expand membership. Not surprisingly a rift is now developing over tactics and program between ARF and its former members in the administration. It would be premature to call it a full-blown split, but ARF members complain that MacDonald chose to compromise with the Belardi machine when he had the chance to swiftly dismantle it and that he is now back-pedaling on structural reforms.

ARF has two general thrusts for transforming the union. First, they want to establish a functioning democratic shop steward system as the best antidote to a bureaucratic leadership. MacDonald agrees in principle but, according to ARF, is dragging his feet on the implementation. Second, ARF wants to pass a constitutional amendment to curb the almost dictatorial power which is now given to the president.

MacDonald is not seen by ARF as an enemy. He, however, has stated that he will fight for some of the ARF platform issues only if there is pressure from union members — he will not take leadership to initiate those changes. ARF has accepted the challenge, and its main strategy now is to mobilize rank and file pressure on MacDonald to implement the changes.

In addition to the struggle to reorganize the union internally is the continuing struggle with management. Many restaurants will undoubtedly attempt to initiate decertification elections to test the strength of the new leadership. Furthermore, in November Local 2 will begin contract negotiations with the Hotel Employers’ Association. The negotiations will last into 1979, and a major strike is likely.

CONCLUSIONS

The San Francisco Culinary Workers election has national significance for its lessons regarding union elections and programs for radical reform. On the first count what is to be learned is that we are in a period of rank and file militancy where the opportunities for left work are heightened. The culinary workers election upset should be seen in the same frame as the mineworkers militancy last spring. (The election campaign happened shortly after the nationally covered refusal of the miners to accept a weak contract.) The forecast for a serious economic downturn should add to the appeal of leftist arguments. A somewhat restricted lesson is that the merger of craft locals into industrial unions can enhance the possibilities for oppositional slates since the direct power of the oligarchic leadership is lessened.

On the second count — the question of programmatic change — the lessons point to a classic dilemma for leftists in electoral coalition work: the election of individuals does not guarantee the implementation of a program or that they will keep their ties with those who worked to get them elected. There is no easy solution to or formula for this problem inasmuch as election success does require a broad participation of people with differing interests, politics, experience and levels of commitment. But as a generalization it can be stated that the looser the political and organizational unity of a caucus, the less the likelihood that electoral success will lead to implementation of the program. ARF members now conclude that in their zeal to guard against left sectarianism which characterized previous caucus work, they went too far in the other direction. That is, their political unity and discipline was too loose, and in some cases they could have chosen candidates with more caution.

In sum though, whatever the outcome of the reform slate internal struggle, nationally the election is one more example which lends credence to the view that rank and file movements are posing an increasing threat to the old guard labor establishment. Locally it was the most significant event in years in San Francisco labor politics.

James Russell
LETTER FROM BRITAIN

Carnival Against the Nazis

The Left here is still basking in the reflected glory of the April 30th Carnival Against the Nazis which took 80,000 people to rock East London against racism in a march that was 3½ hours getting clear of Trafalgar Square and four miles in length. Though the carnival reflects patient political groundwork over some years, its scale inaugurates a new era in anti-racialism in Britain. And not before time, with all the Parliamentary parties moving briskly to the right on immigration, the Nazi National Front making rapid electoral gains and the next election likely to be an exercise in competitive black bashing and crocodile tears.

The sheer size of the march was the first surprise, especially in a country which has never experienced fascism first hand and whose anti-fascism is therefore bandaged up with national patriotism. But the carnival stood comparison with the high points of the nuclear disarmament and Vietnam movements and was certainly the biggest anti-fascist rally since the Thirties. In class terms it was a blast too. The white working class youth, the universally maligned and largely unemployed, the punks and soccer fans and skinheads and school kids, largely outside any political organization, had got there under their own steam. And the black youth, cagey at first, turned up too. My workingclassometer registered the march as markedly more proletarian than anything since the big Industrial Relations marches of the early Seventies and with the average age about
15 years younger. This is not to knock the British lower middle class's capacity for organised moral outrage, from the Turkish Atrocities through CND to My Lai, but to record that anti-racialism is no longer an optional foreign policy issue. Modern immigration is about imperialism coming home, race in the capitalist nations of old Europe is now a working class, street level matter, a critical element shaping modern class consciousness.

It was, into the bargain, a most exciting looking demonstration. Trafalgar Square, the site of so many grey occasions, was raked with colour. Yellow Anti-Nazi League (ANL) roundels, punk pink Rock Against Racism (RAR) stars, day glo flags oscillated in approval to the speeches. Giant masks of the Nazi leaders, streamers, Lone Ranger masks, steel bands and reggae and punk from flat bed trucks, and thousands upon thousands of plastic whistles formed slip streams of colour and sound. It was a carnival, a positive, joyous carnival against the No Fun, No Future philosophy of the NF. Behind various scenes a lot of counter-cultural know-how had come together again.

Working towards the Victoria Park stage from the perimeter, and passing the outskirts of older thermos flask and Sunday paper picnics with families watching fire eaters, clowns on stilts and mobile popular theatre through the middle ground of nodding, weaving and reminiscing lefties to the hard core of pogoers who had camped for days in mud and bottles and were periodically hauled over the stage barrier to a make-shift hospital even as scaffolders fought to strengthen it under the weight, one traversed three political generations. A strange meeting of Woodstock and Weimar, only in strictly UK idioms.

The politics of musicians performing free at the Victoria Park end were at least as interesting as those of the politicians on the plinth. As well as their highly political music, all had gone on public record in the weeks before the local elections against the NF and several had been down to picket NF national headquarters, despite the powerful lobbies of conservatism, cynicism and commercialism which saturate the music business. They spoke out not just as representatives of their rock and roll generation or in solidarity with fellow-musicians but to start repaying some of the dues any musician owes to the black roots. RAR started in a spontaneous protest against some off-the-cuff racialism from Clapton and Bowie. But it's grown into something much bigger, a rank and file rock and roll roots music movement against the NF, respectable racism and superstar cool. With help from the music press, goodwill from the bands, a natural empathy with the emerging UK reggae dimension and a record for putting on AI gigs, RAR provides some sort of a way for musicians of the new wave to keep in touch with their audiences and their ideals instead of spiralling off into superstar insanity. They really mean it maan, the music politics mix, so forced in the rock Sixties, now, in harder times, comes naturally.

Thus Poly Styrene, Brixton-born, Anglo-African, Shirley Bassey-meets Johnny Rotten-and-wins, punk chanteuse; "If you want to live your life in mindless bondage, join the NF. If not, don't bother." Patrick Fitzgerald, Irish-East End poet: "The black and white question is a cover story, concocted to hide the fact that working class people are still being screwed all over the place." The Clash, though atrocious poseurs (Jo Strummer modelled a Red Brigade tee shirt) are still brilliant and very radical musicians and the Tom Robinson Band, lead by a gay singer whose name should be obvious, capture perfectly in Tom's lyrics the camouflaged-crisis and polite-tension of late Seventies UK.

Best of all Steel Pulse, the first UK band to level with the JA sounds in music and politics
too. The Pulse's "Klu Klux Klan" is not only a masterpiece of electronic sound and multi-rhythm but a brilliantly wry and defiant lyric about the return of organised racism. The concert ended with a jam round a white reggae riff which had Mick Jones and Danny Kustow, the two best white guitarists of the new wave dropping power chords into a chant by Steel Pulse, 90 Degrees Inclusive, and Jim Pursey of Sham 69. It flowed because just as white and black UK kids in the Sixties related to the sounds of the black cities of North America to fashion their music from, they are now listening where the black struggle is fiercest and the music most intense, the Carribean and Africa.

If you North Americans still think punk is something to do with CBGBs and "Tom Verlaine" and that reggae is Jimmy Cliff, Rastaclitches and white pop with a fake reggae drop, you've got a lot of listening ahead. The punk-gay-reggae line up was amazing but is real because it expresses the common experience and defiance of inner city life; street heat, maximum unemployment, sexual ambiguities, fuck-all future, corrugated iron and the NF biding their time. We have integrated riots these days. So if you still want folk music, all you ra-a-dicals, try the Italian Communist Party who are busy re-running Woodstock. Sometimes it has seemed, in the political dog days of the last three years, that the Marxist Left divided between those disappearing headlong into Lacan and Althusser and those reading the stoned codes of Dillinger, Peter Tosh and The Clash. It was apparent on 30th April who had made the right connection. It even showed up on the electoral swingometer with the NF vote plummeting in the local elections after they had promised their followers a breakthrough at the polls.

After that euphoria there is need for some perspective which will be helped by the national conferences of the ANL and the local committees against racism and fascism which are linked around an excellent newspaper CARFF. Margaret Thatcher's statement about Britons being "Swamped by an alien culture" has marked a new level of official racism as has the Labour Left's involvement in a Parliamentary Commission, which has recommended what amounts to inter alia identity cards for blacks. Immediately following the NF poll defeat and under the political umbrella of Thatcher's respectability, there has been the most ghastly murder of an Asian tailor in East London, Altun Ali, which has jerked the Bangla Deshi community, especially its youth, into national action. In my opinion, the tactic of physical opposition to the fascists, most associated with the Socialist Workers Party and much tut-tutted in pacifist and feminist circles, has been invaluable. The policy of No Platform and They Shall Not Pass which culminated in Lewisham last summer were essential to block the NF attempts to use organised fear as a political force. So was the public identification of the NF's cadre as committed fascists. But racism in Britain is much more widespread than the present fascist base and represents a species of thwarted working class reformism. To tackle this physical blockade of the organised fascists is necessary but insufficient and can consume far too much of the revolutionary left's still small resources. The extent of support for ANL, RAR and the Carnival show that the tide can be turned and that there is more widespread disillusion with an ultra-right Tory Party and a conservative Labour Party than the electoral system has registered. We are, as Tariq Ali, one of the leaders of the Vietnam movement, predicted at the funeral of Altun Ali, in for some big political movements in Britain after a period of stagnation. After the Carnival we all feel more optimistic.

David Widgery
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