CARTOONING

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COLLECTIVE
OWNERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

ABORTION

Prior to its legalization in 1973, abortion was the women's movement's broadest and clearest issue. One reason for this was that the demand for abortion was closely linked to more general demands by women for control over their own bodies. Feminist health activists saw no separation between the issues of access to abortion and control over how it was administered.

"Jane," an underground women's liberation abortion clinic, was formed in Chicago in 1969. The women at "Jane" created a clinic without the usual hierarchy, asserting that paraprofessionals could qualify to do the operation. Tasks were rotated and decisions made by the staff. Nationally, by 1970 women activists had generated referrals and counseling services. Women defined those services in light of insights from the '60s regarding quality care and sharing information about their bodies. A practice was developing which anticipated the kind of society we want to live in.

After the 1973 Supreme Court decision, in fact, profit-making clinics had to sell themselves by assimilating some feminist practices and principles. In Boston, which has a history of a strong women's movement, once abortion was legalized there quickly arose a number of abortion facilities. Their staffs were, for the most part, conscious feminists; and a women's liberation perspective therefore provided a social context within which patients and workers could overcome barriers and identify with each other, sharing common perspectives about abortion.
Very soon, however, the incompatibility between profit-making and feminist concerns for quality health care became clear. Within a year clinic management cut back their health care services, and cut counseling to a minimum. The overriding priority was to maximize the number of abortions performed. The revolt of workers against this policy led, in the winter of 1976-77, to a strike at Preterm, an abortion clinic in Boston. This strike is the subject of the article, “We Walk the Line.” The article discusses in detail the course of the strike, the strategies of the strikers and the management, and the broad support that the strikers received that ultimately made their strike successful.

The article discusses the strike at Preterm primarily within a trade union context. Because we were able to observe the strike at close hand, we have formed our own interpretation of the context for the strike and the reasons for the victory of the strikers. In contrast to the article, we see the victory at Preterm as a women's struggle, one that was ultimately successful not because of union strategy but because the issues involved — women's rights, abortion rights, and workers' control — activated radical networks from the women's movement, community organizations, and other parts of the left. By February, 1977, the strikers mobilized a support demonstration that was over a thousand strong. And this support sustained the strikers.

A discussion of the conflicting interpretations of the Preterm strike — a trade union struggle or a women's struggle — is important because it raises in embryonic form one of the major issues confronting the pro-abortion movement today, the question of alliances. During the strike itself, the clinic attempted to present itself as a defender of feminism because it was providing abortions. But at that time there was in fact no real conflict between access to abortions and community/worker control over how the procedure was done. The attack on abortion by the New Right was still a cloud on the horizon, and strikers could refer women who wanted abortions to other clinics in the Boston area.

Today the massive attack on the right to abortions has radically changed the relative importance of access and control issues. Within the women's health movement, for example, alternative clinics are beginning to suggest the possibility of community/worker-controlled health care. But on a mass scale a political movement cannot effectively mobilize people for control when all women do not even have access to abortion. In 44 states the accessibility of abortion is in jeopardy. Clinic management, workers, and patients are thus thrown into an alliance against the "Right to Life" movement. As a result, the well-financed Planned Parenthood and clinic management can claim to speak for women, while patients' and workers' rights are diminished. Community and worker control, which are necessary for quality care, have become secondary issues because the right to abortion itself is at stake. At the same time, poor abortion conditions — the phenomenon of the abortion mill — become fuel for "Right to Life" anti-abortion arguments, as happened during a recent expose by reporters investigating Chicago clinics. Their self-righteous claim to protect life becomes more palatable in the face of medical profiteering. We think that one lesson of this is that control issues, which were the impulse for the Preterm strike, should not be lost in the fight to defend the right to abortion.

Because of the massive attack on abortion rights, defending access to abortion for all women requires a powerful and well-organized movement. Yet because of the broad differences within the pro-abortion movement — as illustrated by the issues of worker and community control discussed above — the problem
of *alliances* has become a crucial one. While we do not feel in a position to provide "correct" answers at this time, we would raise two more examples of the problem.

The first concerns the long-standing tensions between the women's liberation movement and black and left-wing organizations. Originating in the late '60s and early '70s, these tensions in part emerge from the alliance of forces which led to the legalization of abortion in 1973. Two distinct groupings influenced this decision. Population control organizations like Zero Population Growth provided a power base that made important contributions to legalizing abortion, while the women's movement transformed the popular consciousness of many women by advocating a woman's right to control her own body. By 1970 the Black movement generally dismissed the distinctions between the two groups, accusing both of genocide and racism. Black organizations and the male-dominated left were quick to expose US population control policies, arguing rightly that the government's intention was not to eliminate poverty as a social condition, but to eliminate it as a social force. But these same organizations were equally eager to ignore the sexual politics of the issues, rejecting reproductive freedom for women as a framework for discussing the needs of Black and working-class communities. While many black men didn't hesitate to advocate compulsory pregnancy for black women, white women were quicker to criticize black men than to develop a thorough critique of population control policy.

More recently, as Black women became an independent voice for themselves, the situation has changed significantly. No longer can feminism simply be dismissed by arguing that the feminist movement is dominated by women who are white and middle class. As a broader group of women articulate their experiences, we become clearer as to how male control, its structure and dynamics, differs for each race and class of women. Nevertheless, some leftists insist on talking uncritically about "people's" rights to decide when, if, and how to have children. While men and women's interests may overlap, they are not identical. Without sexual politics, "people" almost always means "men."

A second issue which has raised problems of alliances is sterilization abuse, an issue closely tied to abortion and women's rights. The issue of sterilization abuse has been a focus for many Hispanic and Black women and men, rightly criticizing the blatant racism behind this abuse. Yet sterilization abuses are also attacked by the right. For example, five women recently brought suit against their employer, American Cyanamid, because women workers at the plant were being exposed to excessive levels of lead, potentially a cause of genetic defects in a fetus. To protect themselves from such suits, American Cyanamid made the women's jobs contingent upon them being sterilized. When their union, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, backed the women workers in their protest, they invited not only sterilization abuse and pro-choice organizations to join in, but "Right to Life" organizations as well. While such an alliance is a little unusual, it can be seen as a possible testing ground for the future. While the Left has clearly understood the racist dimensions of sterilization abuse, many on the left have been reluctant to embrace the sexual politics behind the issue as well.

The Preterm strike occurred and was won because all women had access to abortion and because Boston had an adequate number of other facilities which patients could use. With the recent shift in political realities, the workers have lost the leverage from which they could, and did, raise worker and patient rights in their conflict with management. Yet these very concerns are pivotal to securing a woman's right to
abortion and to securing health care that is responsive to women’s needs. Leftists and feminists must work together in a grassroots approach to regaining these rights and winning control.

POLITICAL CARTOONS
How can you do a caricature of a non-white person or a woman without aiding and abetting cultural oppression? How can you do a caricature of an arbitrary despot without increasing a sense of powerlessness? How can you use invective without undermining people’s ability to make a systematic analysis? How can you use humor without implying that you’re not serious?

The answer is that it’s hard. A cartoon can be extremely helpful for left propaganda and left media, but you cannot guarantee that it will produce any specific response. On the other hand, with a well-written article you can assume that the reader will not misunderstand your point, or take it in a direction that it wasn’t meant to lead. What a cartoon gets us, in return for risking an unexpected response, is the reader’s creative participation in the process of making a point.

A cartoon generally puts two or more things together as a way of commenting on one of them or on the relationship between them: but the reader formulates the comment in the process of looking at the different elements and synthesizing them. This is all the more effective if the synthesis produces a laugh. The “Career Opportunities” cartoon, for example, invites the reader to fill in the gap between the title and a picture of a woman with a mop and pail. This is a stronger statement than the sentence, “Women don’t get to do meaningful work” precisely because it is more open-ended.

Nick Thorkelson’s article in this issue uses examples from the history of cartooning to argue that cartooning is most effective and useful to
the Left when the Left respects the open-ended nature of cartooning, and does not force a cartoon to do the work of an illustration or an article. A good cartoon is more open-ended than an article because it makes its point by telling a story, and because it deals primarily with feelings rather than facts and ideas. By telling a story the cartoon can be true to the cartoonist's and reader's shared experience; by investing ideas with feeling the cartoon can be true to the cartoonist's and reader's shared sense of irony, rage, enthusiasm, bitterness or whatever.

Misunderstanding these qualities of effective cartooning leads not only to ineffective cartoons, but to a frequent distrust of cartooning by people on the left. The suspicion that cartooning tends by its nature to be shallow and reactionary leads many radicals, particularly radicals doing mass work, to believe that we should either not use cartoons or else (more typically) that we should exert specific control over their style and content.

The conclusion that cartoons are stylistically shallow is based on a misunderstanding of their story-telling function. It is true that cartoons use predetermined conventions to represent things; that most cartoonists have only one way of drawing a human hand and can only depict four or five human emotions; that to a cartoonist an arm is two lines, not flesh and blood. But a cartoonist draws a hand or an arm or an emotion in order to tell a story, not to demonstrate that she or he knows how to depict a hand, arm or emotion skilfully.

By paying less attention to details the cartoonist can give more narrative information. Future generations will learn more about what happened to American bohemia in the '60s from Robert Crumb's stories than from the paintings of that scene. The stories cartoonists tell must be real to their audience. Cartoonists serve political ends badly when they are not permitted to reflect experience. A left media has more to gain from cartoons that verify and clarify its readers working knowledge of the world than from cartoons that give a pre-digested view of things.

YOUTH CULTURE AND THE LEFT

The New Left, especially in its earlier phases, focused on youth as an oppressed group, and in the absence of an adult left in the US there was greater space for the development of cultural politics that would likely have been squashed by traditional socialist organizations. Given the political quiescence of the working class in the late '50s and early '60s, many in the New Left developed theories about youth that were not critical enough. This emphasis did allow for insights into patterns of authority in families and schools, passive absorption of mass culture, and the pervasiveness of acquisitive individualism. It also led to an exciting emphasis upon spontaneous activity and open forms of organization.

Yet youthful anti-authoritarianism is problematic when viewed from the left. Because all young people suffer from certain common oppressions does not mean that all forms of anti-authoritarianism ought to be supported. Responses to parental or other institutional forms of authority are by no means all progressive: extreme individualism, gratuitous violence, scapegoating other groups, deformed expressions of sexuality — all have been part of collective youth behavior.

Some of the problems with an uncritical assimilation of youth culture within the New Left were revealed by the emergence of the women's liberation movement. Primarily feminists-to-be were reacting to the male dominance more starkly revealed in a movement ideologically committed to equality and non-authoritarian practices. But there were also aspects of the New Left taken from youth
culture that were specifically targets of the women’s liberation movement. For example, the advocacy of greater sexual permissiveness was rightly criticized by many women as a cover for sexual exploitation of women.

Youth culture was also criticized by those who identified with Marxism-Leninism, whose numbers grew rapidly in the late ’60s and early ’70s. As the anti-imperialist movement grew, orthodox Marxists dismissed the energy and imaginative insights of the youth rebellion because they were part of the phenomenon which could not be easily digested by a “class analysis.” Yet as Paul Thompson argues in “Youth Culture and Youth Politics in Britain,” class and youth are categories not necessarily at odds with each other. In fact, they are both needed for an adequate analysis of the social, cultural, personal and political conditions of modern capitalist societies. At the same time, Thompson’s article warns against romanticizing youth cultures, and argues against seeing them as a substitute for more conscious political activity. The point is not to moralize, lecture and exhort young people, but to understand the conditions under which young people are more or less likely to be politicized.

Youth culture in Britain has been a very different phenomenon than in the U.S., largely because British people, young and old, are so much more class conscious than Americans. In the US it is possible to speak of a youth culture, but in Britain there are only various youth sub-cultures with strong class and regional characteristics. Furthermore, there has often been hostility between these sub-cultures, particularly racial hostilities. In response to some racist remarks by some punk singers, for example, other punk groups and their adherents joined with leftists in a variety of anti-racist activities. It was not greater will and organizing alone, but a critical appreciation of the possibilities within punk culture that brought forth the ties.

One of the problems with Thompson’s piece is that he does not adequately deal with the question of women within youth culture. Just as racism has deformed and split adherents of youth cultures, so sexism has had a deforming effect on a potentially constructive rebellion. Consider, for example, the celebration of violence and violent sexuality so often part of groups in which male friendships form the core of the group. Thompson’s article largely neglects the experience of young women within the overwhelmingly male-dominated sub-cultures and communities which he discusses.

THE TEAMSTERS

We are glad to print another article by our Associate Editor Staughton Lynd. Using the occasion of the upcoming round of contract negotiations by the Teamsters, and the recent publication of two books about their union, he has written both about the Teamsters Union and about the politics of rank and file organizing within large, bureaucratized unions. Drawing on the experience of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), he argues for the creation of parallel central labor unions, or the development of ties among left-led union locals on a regional basis, rather than attempting to install a new, progressive union leadership at the top. We hope that his observations and proposals will spark discussion and responses from our readers.
WE have
The Right!
Abortion On
Demand!

Photo by Ellen Shub.
In November 1976, forty-four women health care workers, members of District 1199, went on strike against Preterm, the biggest abortion clinic in Boston. The union members who struck included counselors, aides, receptionists, and medical records clerks. (No medical staff belonged to the union.) The workers felt frustrated by the clinic’s refusal to negotiate a union contract, and angered by the working conditions which hurt patient services.

During the months-long strike, the simple contract issues that had immediately triggered the action dropped into the background as we began to realize the larger significance of our actions. In a largely Catholic city we openly declared war on the health system’s right to profiteer at the expense of women needing safe, humane abortions. We fought off the guilt which service workers are made to feel when we stop providing our service; guilt women workers experience very intensely. We challenged the whole notion of a job hierarchy in health care. Throughout the strike these issues kept the strikers committed and brought us the support of hundreds of other people interested in our analysis and moved by our collective energy.

Preterm Brookline (part of Boston) opened in 1972 to provide a range of gynecological care. The “Preterm Model” of health care relies heavily on the counselor, whose task it is to educate the patient, provide emotional support, and guide her through whatever medical procedure she elects. Within six months of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, Preterm Brookline added an abortion clinic and moved from a five-room medical suite to two floors of a new medical building.
Since the successful openings of the Washington and Brookline Preterms, clinics have been established in Cleveland, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Sydney, Australia. The Preterm Institute has produced a set of twelve manuals detailing the operation of an abortion clinic, six video tapes for training abortion counselors, and various technical improvements for the abortion procedure itself. The Institute has also advised the governments of Jamaica and Iran on integrating sterilization and abortion into their family planning programs and is now considering requests from countries in Africa and Asia to provide similar assistance. Within the context of an extensive and prestigious organization the disillusionment of the workers becomes understandable. The strike brought into focus for us both the contradiction between providing good health care and running a profitable business, and the links between our work as health workers and the women we served.

**HISTORY OF THE STRUGGLE**

During Preterm Brookline’s first year, working conditions were acceptable. Both management and employees wanted the legalization of abortion and so people attempted to smooth over disagreements as we worked toward the shared goal. Preterm began performing abortions in the summer of 1973. Shortly after that the administration became noticeably less interested in employee satisfaction. Workers felt a diminishing influence over clinic policy and in September 1973, we presented a list of demands to Jane Levin, the administrator. We asked for additional hiring of minorities and increased input into decisions that affected staff policies and patient care. We were ignored. From then on, Preterm gave their own business concerns top priority, cutting back on services and speeding up employees.

In the spring of 1974 the staff began talking about a union. Preterm countered this rebellion in three ways. First, they tried to eliminate communication between workers in the various departments by ending inter-departmental rotation. Second, they tried to hire women who would not question Preterm’s right to operate the clinic dictatorially. In November 1974, they laid off half the gynecology counselors without regard to seniority and speeded up the rest. Third, the gynecology clinic was cut back. Preterm explained the gynecology cutback in financial terms. Management said that this clinic did not bring in enough business to support itself. Although the abortion clinic more than supported itself, Preterm refused to devote abortion profits to maintaining comprehensive gynecological services. Coincidentally, several of the counselors who were laid off had been actively pro-union.

While Preterm couldn’t have minded getting rid of troublemakers, that concern takes a back seat to strict business sense. Gynecology is less profitable than abortion. Abortion patients pay $150 per procedure; gynecology patients pay $30 at most. Gynecology, which teaches women how to avoid unwanted pregnancies, has the effect of undercutting the abortion market. Expecting Preterm to champion gynecology is rather like expecting General Motors to encourage mass transit.

*Free counseling made good public relations  
But the people in those jobs got no respect  
They felt they were betrayed  
Overworked and underpaid  
So 1199 they did elect.*

—The Green Rolling Bills of Preterm Clinic

Shocked and frightened by the changing nature of the clinic, 70% of the employees joined District 1199 in November of 1974, about one month after the layoffs. After the membership cards were signed, 1199 contacted the National Labor Relations Board to set up an election. On the eve of the scheduled elec-
tion, in February 1975, Preterm balked.

Between February and May 1975, when the election finally took place, management bombarded employees with anti-union literature. Arguments like "unions take away employees' freedom" and "male-dominated labor organizations have no place in a woman-run clinic" had no effect on the workers. Of the fifty people voting, only three voted against 1199.

The election was followed by months of painstaking discussion about the contract proposals the union would offer. No one had previous experience in writing or negotiating a contract and the clinic's extensive hours made meetings difficult to arrange. Along with the usual clauses in union contracts, the women at Preterm demanded a ceiling on the number of patients any one counselor would see in a day and a promise that volunteers would not replace members of the bargaining unit.

When negotiations began in December 1975, the union representatives (two 1199 staff members and thirteen Preterm employees) met with Preterm administrators Jane Levin and Diane Richards and their lawyer, Leon Kowal. Within the first few meetings Kowal made management's position clear: they would fight tooth and nail against every request the union made. He staunchly resisted such "extreme demands" as the right of 1199 to post notices in an employee lounge. On International Women's Day, March 1976, a member of the negotiating committee read a statement to the management committee, asking Kowal to refrain from call-
ing members of the 1199 team "girls." The use of the word "girl" symbolized for us Preterm's lack of respect for the workers and the union. This formalized a request that had been made many times during previous sessions. He exploded, "If you don't want to be called a girl, don't act like one."

Later that day, the president of New England 1199 spoke to a clinic administrator about Kowal, attempting to smooth things over. This gave Preterm an excuse to file charges against 1199 with the NLRB. Even though Preterm lost the case, they used the pending charges to avoid negotiating for three months.

After four sessions in June, Kowal walked out of negotiations again. That night, employees leafleted Jane Levin's neighborhood. The next day Preterm received the union's thirty-day strike notice. (Under NLRB regulations, health care workers must notify both the employer and the Board of their intent to strike forty days prior to any actual work stoppage. The forty days is broken down into a thirty-day period followed at any time after the thirty days expires by a ten-day notice.)

In the following months employees started to alert the community about Preterm's anti-union tactics. Realizing the worker's commitment to reaching a contract, Preterm agreed to involve the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in negotiations, something the union had first requested in March. The first session with mediation took place in August 1976. In retrospect it seems like this was only a further stalling tactic: the clinic knew it needed time to gear up for a strike. However, at the time it seemed like a victory.

Meanwhile, working conditions at the clinic continued to deteriorate. Like all health care facilities, Preterm wanted to get the most work out of the fewest workers. Understaffing forced us to work at top speed. Management understood our sympathy for the patients well enough to know that we would drop from exhaustion before forcing the patients to suffer.

The practice of understaffing assumed even greater importance during the summer of 1976. In May, abortion counselors had begged for more staff, unsuccessfully. By summer the situation was critical. Preterm continued to schedule sixty patients daily although the entire staff couldn't help each person adequately. Abortion counselors were made to feel intense guilt for calling in sick. On one Saturday, five patients had to be turned away after eight hours of waiting.

In the gynecology clinic counselors were pressed to give up the practice of accompanying patients through the physical exam. We refused. So we found ourselves trying to cope with as many as three patients simultaneously: racing from examining room to examining room to spend the essential minutes at the patient's side. Phone counselors were responsible for two or three phone lines at any given time, forcing them to interrupt even the most troubled patient to answer another line. Through the summer of 1976 Preterm attempted to squeeze the staff sufficiently so that the troublemakers would leave. They failed.

At the end of August a new coordinator was hired for the abortion clinic. Deborah Fein- bloom brought many reforms to the clinic in her first weeks: a permanent work schedule, paid meetings, extra pay for extra work, and paid job training. She scheduled enough counselors so that absences did not throw the clinic into chaos. After the treatment we had been subjected to for the preceding two years, Fein- bloom's reforms made us very suspicious. She instituted many improvements that we had already proposed for the union contract. She tried to convince the staff that our grievances were the result of poor supervision. We realized that without a union to guarantee the reforms, management could take away the improve-
ments as easily as they had given them.

Feinbloom succeeded in convincing many of the newly hired counselors that the union was unnecessary. She provided Preterm with a core of scabs that allowed the clinic to continue functioning during the strike. In that success, she was Preterm’s most efficient union-busting tool.

Five negotiating sessions with the mediators led to few agreements and many angry outbursts from Kowal. There was one small victory. Embarrassed by public exposure on the issue, management agreed to a maternity leave clause. While it was pleasing to have won this clause, Preterm’s long opposition highlighted the fact that Preterm never intended to sign a contract.

Workers began agitating for a strike. Members of the negotiating committee divided the telephone numbers of other union members and each committee member took responsibility for contacting four or five workers. After one contact, the phone numbers were shuffled and redistributed. This way each union member got the chance to discuss the issues individually with several people. At the end of September one union member wrote a detailed history of the union at Preterm and a copy was mailed to every other member. At union meetings held on October 5 we voted to strike on Tuesday, October 19 at 6:00 a.m.

On October 15, the Friday before the strike, 1199 offered to submit all outstanding issues to a mutually agreeable third party whose decision would be binding on both sides. This would have averted the strike. Preterm, however, had no intention of averting the strike. The previous week they had placed a classified ad in the Boston Globe for every union job category. On Monday, the day before the strike, two employees who were planning to scab conducted tours of the clinic for other prospective strikebreakers, while union members sat in the offices of the Federal Mediation Service.

Not surprisingly, Preterm rejected 1199’s offer of binding arbitration. Kowal gave two reasons. First, he claimed, Preterm’s relatively small size and its nonprofit status meant that it would have difficulty meeting the union’s demands. The union representative replied that the settlement would of course not exceed Preterm’s ability to pay increased benefits. Kowal ignored this. Second, he said, Preterm is operated by people who have devoted their lives to it and they will not give up their control to some outside party. Kowal did offer four meaningless contract proposals at that time. One clause had already been agreed to, another was already policy at Preterm, and two cut back on current policy. The union team felt betrayed. We had made every effort to avoid a strike and had received a slap in the face in response.

At 6:00 a.m. on October 19, pickets began to arrive. Preterm was ready. Approximately twenty private-duty Brookline police, two photographers hired by the clinic, and a police videotaping team were on hand. At 7:30 the strikebreakers, mainly those who had been hired in September, drove up in a school bus. The police formed a line from the bus to the building’s entrance by linking arms. The picketers shouted at the scabs to go home, angrily demanding to know who the scabs thought they were helping by crossing the picket line. Some scabs were crying and all of them looked frightened, but they entered the building anyway.

During the first two months of the strike picketers succeeded in cutting Preterm’s business down to about one-half of its pre-strike level. (Business later rose to about 90% of its pre-strike level.) Community support gave the forty-four strikers the strength to keep up a picket line six days a week, ten hours daily. Perhaps the most moving act of solidarity came
Preterm Support Demonstration, February 5, 1977, Brookline, Massachusetts, Photo by Ellen Shub.
ABORTION: CRISIS COUNSELING

Preterm's goal on any given eight-hour day is to perform 60-70 abortions using a maximum of five doctors per shift. As a result, efficient use of space becomes the highest priority. When the patients fail to move along the assembly line in the prescribed way, the entire clinic malfunctions. Given the diversity among patients the chance of such a "malfuction" is great. Management's desire to create a financially profitable "clinic flow" simultaneously hurts workers, who are forced to work faster all the time, and the patients, who get less and less of the staff's time.

Preterm's patients range in age from 13 to 45, although most are under 25. By and large they come from the Boston area. However, some travel from other parts of New England and even Canada. They come alone, with husbands, boyfriends, parents, children, or women friends. The most common escorts are friends, husbands, or lovers. About 50% of the patients identify themselves as Catholic. Most are single but many others are married with children, divorced, or widowed. They work at various jobs, from clerical and factory work to managerial positions. The largest number of patients are high school and college students. Secretaries and technical workers follow closely in number. Most women pay the full $150 before the abortion. Maybe one fourth to one third, however, pay through Medicaid or arrange some form of deferred payment.

Preterm's abortion clinic operates in such a way that patients could find it difficult to interrupt the "clinic flow" long enough to really analyze their intended decision. The assembly line begins at the receptionist's desk where the $150 changes hands. Leaving behind any family and friends she may have brought with her the patient proceeds to a waiting room filled with women she has never met. She fills out her medical history, gives a urine sample, speaks briefly with the nurse who draws her blood and who may do an internal exam to determine the stage of pregnancy. The patient then returns to the reception area, where she sits until a counselor is free. After waiting for up to three hours she is "picked up" by a counselor. The counselor, within minutes of meeting the patient, launches into an explanation of abortion and its potential complications "after finding out how many details the patient wants to hear," pauses briefly for questions, and then goes on to her birth control rap. Even good counselors find themselves repeating the same words to each patient as the descriptions become more and more routine.

By limiting the counseling time, Preterm glosses over the complexity of the abortion issue. Forty-five minutes is considered average for the counseling session. That leaves little time for the patient to speak since the counselor's transmission of information necessarily takes at least half an hour. All of our patients have been subjected to our society's expectations of women and have assimilated in some fashion the prejudice that motherhood is a woman's highest calling. A casual acceptance of a woman's right to abort without an understanding of the significance our society has placed on that decision or of the private moral issues involved, can be very destructive to the women involved in choosing between abortion and full-term pregnancy. Yet as late as February 1977, Jane Levin told a radio interviewer that they were concerned they might be "over-counseling" their patients. We can only guess at her picture of adequate counseling. It is clear that if counselors attempted to be thorough in their conversations with patients they would take far longer than the prescribed hour. And time is of the essence in the Preterm model.

If a patient chooses to take more time to consider her decision she can leave. Until May 1977, such women got all their money back. At
on the first Saturday of the strike. Half the nursing staff refused to cross the picket line. Without the protection of union membership, they chose between their jobs and sympathy for the women they had worked with so closely inside the clinic. They were all fired for this act of solidarity.

Early in the strike Preterm began the process of getting an injunction against the picket line. In the beginning of January 1977, that request was denied, but only because 1199 promised not to do any of the things management alleged were done in the past. To protect ourselves we became very cautious. The scabs gained confidence from our new behavior. Consequently crossing the picket line became more comfortable.

At the beginning of the strike, 1199 filed charges against Preterm with the NLRB. Although our effectiveness on the picket line had decreased, we felt confident we would win in the courts. In January, we gritted our teeth and set our sights on a demonstration scheduled for February 5 and on the NLRB trial which was to begin on February 14.

We wanted to keep our struggle in the news, knowing that by February the press would have stopped covering us. We wanted to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the Supreme Court legalization of abortion, connecting our struggle for good working conditions with the right of all women to safe, humane abortions.

The demonstration was planned and publicized almost entirely by people in the Boston area who supported the strike. When February 5 rolled around we were well into one of the worst winters in recent history. By 11:00 that morning snow was falling, two strikers were in jail, and we were all terribly nervous that no one would come to the demonstration. We left the picket line for the assembly point at 12:30. Little by little the playground began to fill with people. By the time we reached Preterm one thousand people were chanting and singing, yelling up at the scabs who lined the windows, "How do you get good health care when the workers are out on strike?" The demands of the demonstration were: 1) a decent union contract and 2) a return to comprehensive gynecological health care at Preterm. Knowing that so many people supported us, we were able to continue picketing through the rest of the winter.

During the NLRB trial, hoping to push for a settlement, the strikers offered to return to work unconditionally. We knew that should we ever win our NLRB case Preterm would owe us pay from the date we offered to return to work. Management never responded to our offer.

In the last days of the trial the strikers began to realize that we could not hope to beat Preterm through the NLRB. We were also aware that Preterm's business was beginning to increase, despite daily picketing. Our energy, which had seemed without limits until then, began to leave us. After many meetings and countless hours of discussion, we decided to end the picket line, ending six and a half months of striking.

During the strike we found ourselves questioning attitudes and practices we had accepted when working in the clinic. Walking the picket line gave us many long hours to discuss the effect clinic policy had on us and our patients. We realized that abortion is more than the simple medical procedure Preterm wished us to believe, that it has a deep emotional impact on a woman's life. We analyzed our relationship with 1199. We agonized over issues of internal democracy. We picked apart Preterm's mask of crusading feminism. We dreamed of the workplace we'd like to see, where distinctions based on rank were unacceptable. The following, then, is a brief summing up of our many discussions.
that time Preterm introduced a $25 counseling fee which the woman forfeits. Counselors always found it difficult to help patients reconsider their decision once they've mustered the courage to walk through Preterm's doors, but the $25 fee will make it well nigh impossible. Preterm has now provided an economic incentive for ambivalent women to go ahead with a poorly considered choice.

THE WORKERS AND THE UNION

The women who worked at Preterm before the strike came from varying backgrounds. Some supported whole families on their salaries ($110-$165 a week); others had outside incomes (usually child support or husbands) and worked part-time to supplement their incomes. Telephone counselors, aides, and clerical workers made less money than abortion and gynecology counselors. They tended to come from working-class backgrounds. Abortion and gynecology counselors were selected according to a strongly middle-class Preterm "model" which emphasized the ability to verbalize, to act assured, and to smooth over feelings. Built into these criteria for the ideal counselor was an exclusion of most working-class, Third World, and older women. The counseling staff did not reflect its patient population, and Preterm management was unwilling to change its hiring policies. Secondarily, Preterm looked for workers who were committed to women and to humanizing health care service. Although counselors made only slightly higher salaries than their co-workers, they were encouraged to think of themselves as professionals.

When Preterm first opened, women were hired who had experience in the women's health or abortion rights movements. Harry Levin saw this as a way to gain respectability in the women's community. Indeed, in its first years, Preterm was well-known and popular in Boston's growing women's movement. An emphasis on counseling and support, coupled with informality and a demystification of health care services made Preterm seem a progressive alternative to private gynecological care. Word passed around quickly and Preterm's reputation was established. But the very women Preterm had used to attract its clientele became the backbone of dissent. A few weeks after the strike began, Jane Levin said, "We need to look hard at our mode of interviewing prospective staff."

Management failed to understand its role in developing the union's popularity. Time and again administrators replied to workers' grievances by stating that "everyone connected with Preterm was part of a great crusading family." This attitude on management's part allowed them to label workers' grievances as attempts to undermine women's very right to abortion and decent health care. In 1974, gynecology counselors protested the speedup in the gynecology clinic. Management responded that the future of the clinic was at stake and paraded out dozens of near-disastrous economic statistics. To protest further would have been tantamount to treason. However, when the clinic simultaneously expanded its abortion and sterilization services, and bought costly art work for the waiting rooms, workers saw through the clinic's alleged poverty.

We had varying political points of view before unionizing, from conservative to radical. Administration often erred by considering the "union problem" a plot of outsiders — ex-campus radicals or malcontents who wanted to destroy the clinic. They never noted the objective conditions of radical workers. However, an obvious requisite for the job was a belief in a woman's right to abortion, and this meant that the staff was more progressive on women's issues than the average work force. Some were feminists who had come out of the women's movement. A few were socialists. No one had
ever joined a union before.

In criticizing and evaluating how we worked with and viewed 1199, it is obvious that there were two different sources of problems. First, the limitations of any trade union. In health care, as in other large industries, some basic issues are often not challenged through unions. In our case we fought very hard to maintain a certain standard of health care.

The second source of problems developed specifically from 1199. District 1199-Mass. is part of a national hospital and health care workers union based in New York City. Its major growth occurred in the 1960s when sizeable numbers of non-professional and mostly Third World workers were organized. 1199’s militance and strength won enormous victories for these workers in terms of economic benefits and self-respect on the job. Following these initial achievements a group of hospital workers in Boston, the Hospital Workers and Patients Betterment Association, affiliated with the New York District.

Unfortunately, organizing efforts have been less successful in Boston. In part, this reflects a national trend of setbacks for unions, caused by economic conditions. In addition, organizing drives are being met by well-financed management opposition supervised by sophisticated anti-union consulting firms.

Health care workers in Boston are just beginning the monumental task of unionizing. Both 1199-Mass. and Boston’s other hospital worker’s union, SEIU, Local 880, have had little success in organizing drives. 1199 has only unionized one major hospital. Workers at Massachusetts Rehabilitation Hospital lost a very bitter strike in 1971 which hurt 1199 badly.

At Preterm, we were never sure how much the union backed us. Communication was poor, and Preterm workers were often mystified at 1199’s absence from the picket line and lack of financial support. When we requested a voice at an Executive Board meeting to address the problem, we were put off. It became clear that we were being shielded from considerable internal dissension. Throughout the strike we never fully understood what the dissension was about, or how much we were a part of it. Some of us received strong support from individual members and shop stewards who expressed bewilderment at the union’s inaction. Significantly, our organizer worked tirelessly in our behalf. Even when the union laid her off, and even through her pregnancy and child’s birth, she was available to us at all times. She patiently took the flak that occurred between the workers and the union. Our debt to her is enormous.

A union struggle is a huge expenditure of time, money, and effort. Workers need organizations with the skills and resources necessary to fight highly organized and well-funded managements. In that 1199 helped us to act decisively in our own interests, it furthered our struggle. With decisions about tactics, the union’s experience was often important.

But there is a clear limit to what unions can achieve. At Preterm, many workers were concerned about our lack of control over decisions that affected us. Union contracts never change the management. We were informed early on by the union that no contract could give us control over staffing problems or decisions affecting patient care.

We who worked actively to unionize at times went too far in posing the union as the solution to our problems. We tended to defend 1199 against attacks even when the criticisms were justified. We felt that the most important thing was to stay united behind the union. We saw the union’s shortcomings, but thought attacking it meant attacking our goals of fair working conditions and a union contract. Many workers were cynical about 1199. They criticized the union for inefficiency, sexism, and an inability to respond to our particular situation.
While we still see the importance of strong support for the union, we have learned that it is important not to suppress disagreements with the union. This allows management to exploit the union’s weaknesses. Noting tensions between Eliot Small, president of 1199-Mass., and workers, Preterm management often tried to show that Small had lied, misinformed, or misled us. At times this was successful. Preterm was able to show us ways that the union let us down. Management also told outright lies about the union. For example, they alleged that 1199 was anti-abortion. In fact, 1199 had been one of the first unions to allow coverage on their insurance plan for abortion, and included in that coverage the fare to states where it was legal.

Because the workers’ bitterness about the union had the danger of turning into apathy, the negotiating committee had to tread a fine line between criticism and loyalty. Loyalty was necessary to win the short-range goal of a union contract. But criticism also was important. In practice, it was difficult to balance these conflicting needs. In July 1976, the union gave Preterm a thirty-day strike notice without first consulting anyone in the bargaining unit. Workers were furious. But at a meeting two days later, anger gave way to planning strategy. We had learned a lesson; if the bargaining unit did not act decisively, the union would act for it. We decided to make the most of the strike notice, recognizing that it was a correct step. We planned to show Preterm that we supported the notice: attendance at negotiations jumped, and informational picketing began. Internally, the unit became stronger. We demanded and won greater participation in union decisions.

While it was true that the union could not win for us the sort of control that workers need to have over their working conditions, some of our best internal struggles took place over ideas about what those good working conditions could be. At one point in developing contract proposals, the idea of an equal wage for all was put forward. This meant that gynecology and abortion counselors would have to lower their sights in order to equalize with underpaid aides and telephone workers. The idea stirred much controversy and strong opinions came out in the discussion. While opinion was still divided, the union vetoed the proposal, and it was dropped.

A shortcoming experienced by the rank and file, particularly women, is not trusting one’s own experience and judgment. When we differed with 1199 about a tactic or about the timing of a move, we often gave in to the union because “they must know better.” We actually were in a much better position to understand Preterm and what Preterm would do next. The union didn’t listen to us in these situations and they often acted according to formulas originally tested in large urban hospitals. The fact that Preterm held out month after month, in face of enormous disruption and financial difficulty, was not surprising to many of us. The union, however, was completely unprepared for the severity of the struggle, and the long-term drain on their resources. Strikers were left to do all the fundraising and find support for the picket line elsewhere.

Building support in the left community was an important two-way process. On the one hand, it brought us much needed help, on the picket lines, through benefits, and in planning the February 5 demonstration. On the other hand, equally important, it exposed strikers to wider politics and to notions of solidarity, and it lessened our dependence on 1199. Gay support for the strike appalled the union leadership. But in fact gay men and women walked the picket line when members of the union by and large did not. This was not the only example. Throughout the strike, many men turned out to support what was often seen as
just a women’s struggle. The feminist women’s community actively participated: the Women’s Community Health Center collective saw patients referred from the picket line, and the Cambridge Women’s Center held a dance on International Women’s Day to benefit the strike. We were in constant touch with 1199 members from Charles Circle Clinic, who staffed the support committees, worked on the demonstration, and walked the picket line. Strikers from Cambion (an electronics company) and the Protestant Guild for the Blind joined the picket line. A sizeable contingent from the University of Massachusetts at Boston contributed time and energy to picketing and planning benefits. Hospital organizing committees held seminars on the strike, and strikers were invited to speak on the strike in local classrooms, NOW meetings and radio shows. All this support emphasized the need we had to connect seemingly different struggles. Support of the strike became a concrete step others could take in this direction.

All the above issues were raised against the union’s advice. It was mainly after the strike began that workers took more and more initiative in decision-making. It was a shortcoming on the part of the strikers that this came partly as a result of being ignored by the union. Initiative in decision-making should have been stressed from the beginning.

*Preterm women, getting very strong now
Preterm women, stronger every day
Preterm women, building up our power
And we’re serving notice that we’re here to stay.*

— *Jane and Harry*

Those who came to picket regularly with the strikers often sensed an enormous energy and spirit that persisted even in the sub-freezing temperatures of 1977’s winter. Police, Brookline residents, and passersby became infected with the spirit of the strike, cheering us on when it rained, asking us how things were going. Building that spirit was our greatest strength.

In large measure, we surprised ourselves with our strength. One striker said on the second day of the strike that she would be unable to last beyond the first week, yet she lasted until the end. We continually replenished each other, made adjustments, and learned skills that were necessary.

The spirit that carried the strikers through six months of a bitterly cold winter had been built before the strike began. When management was unresponsive to complaints, workers turned to each other for support. Throughout the clinic, staff responded to the intense pressure with a humor and sisterhood that we needed to survive. When someone was tied up extra long, others covered for her. A worker worrying about a sick child, or going through a divorce, could expect no support from her bosses, so other workers would fill in for her. The coun-
sellers’ lounge became a place where supervisors were unwelcome, where “in” jokes about clinic management abounded.

The working conditions themselves were responsible for much of the strength in the union. There was a feeling of being under siege. When workers met adversity by pulling together, we recognized that we bore the burden of the clinic’s so-called crusading spirit.

From the first union meetings in 1974, all meetings were open to anyone in the bargaining unit. They were run democratically, and workers decided on a meeting-by-meeting basis whether to invite representatives from 1199. Meetings were held only at times when all could come. Active members divided up all the phone numbers and called everyone when there was a meeting or decision to consider. Because it was difficult to bring out people for meetings in what little time they had, union meetings soon wore down to a core group of ten to fifteen. These women were always known and accessible to others. They formed the informal negotiating committee. A newsletter appeared sporadically, written by whoever had the time. While interest in the union rose and fell, the embattled spirit remained.

The summer before the strike, committees were formed. These were: fundraising, media, internal communication, leafletting, and community support. Seeing the possibility of a strike, it became clear that many women might hesitate for financial reasons. So two benefits were held which immediately raised $400. These benefits showed us that outside interest and support existed.

October 19, 1976 was both beginning and end. It was an end to the months of anger and frustration with Preterm and an end to working under intolerable pressure. But the spirit of beginning was more obvious. We took the initiative and walked out. Soft-spoken women who had never seen a picket line before learned how to be assertive, how to make tactical decisions, and not to be afraid to raise their voices. We had been yelled at, intimidated and talked down to for years. With the strike, we brought back upon Preterm the full measure of their treatment of us. That was an energizing force in itself: the opportunity to openly and honestly oppose Preterm as an institution, and health care for profit as a system.

While we struck, we continued the sort of support we had given each other before. No birthday was forgotten. We made allowances for illness; we gave each other vacations and holidays. Some women had a particular talent that was employed to its utmost: an artist designed all the picket line placards and the benefit posters; one striker crocheted hats for all the others. Talents were shared and expanded. The striker with media experience persuaded several others to do radio shows and TV and newspaper interviews so that they too now have those skills. We all learned to speak publicly and hustle contributions.

Benefits were an important source of energy. They gave us a chance to socialize with our supporters — to plan and think about the implications of the strike for women and health care. Music itself was a medium for the strike. Strikers and their children composed over twenty songs and these helped pass the hours on the picket line.

The picket line seemed endless. Because patients had to be dissuaded from entering the clinic, it was necessary to picket in force, six days a week, twelve hours a day. We set up schedules that covered all times. It was the main activity we shared. It was cold, tiring, and discouraging. Every time a patient turned away from Preterm in support of the strike, we were rewarded. The hysteria of the management and scabs in response to us entertained and strengthened us.

Our conviction that we were right gave us
Front door of Preterm with reflection of striking picketers. Photo by Ellen Shub.

strength. No one expected that we could last as long as we did, least of all us. We learned that it was the struggle and the solidarity itself that kept us going.

STRUCK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Preterm’s initial success was based on the success of the broader women’s movement. Clinic administrators recognized that aping the feminist movement was the key to a popular and profitable business. Indeed, during the strike management insisted that they, and not the strikers, were the true feminists. We were accused of playing into the hands of the anti-abortionists and of thwarting women’s very right to choose. In fact, there never would have been a strike had there not been other abortion clinics in the city. The presence of a strong women’s movement in Boston meant that there would be an adequate number of abortion facilities during the time we were on strike for quality care at Preterm.

Because we never lost sight of the fact that our patients could easily be us we grew to share a broader understanding of the feminist aspects of our strike. Our demands for quality health care derived, in large part, from our identification with our patients. We realized how important it was for each of us to understand and control our own health (mental and physical), and how we too would want a slow, sensitive process which would give us the greatest comfort and the clearest choices.

By contrast, many service workers in bureaucratic institutions (schools, welfare agencies, hospitals) begin to objectify their clients. The working conditions themselves force social workers to objectify their clients as a way to stay sane. Preterm workers avoided this pitfall because the women’s movement had shown us the vital importance of abortion in women’s lives. As a result, we never fell into the all-too-common trap of blaming our patients for needing help. In spite of management’s opposition and the union’s lack of concern, we kept up our demands for quality care because of these understandings.

Our comprehension grew about the ways in which sterilization and drug experimentation against Third World women were related to the decline in care at Preterm. We researched Preterm’s non-profit status and explored the profit-making aspects of American health care more generally. Our relationship with the left helped us to see how the health care system puts profits before equal access to good quality care. Such insights allowed the strikers to put our
struggle in a bigger context and gave us the energy to continue.

The pretensions of bourgeois feminism by the owners of Preterm pushed the strikers toward socialist-feminism. We were forced to develop a more class conscious criticism of Preterm in order to point out the weaknesses of their feminism (although some of us already shared this view).

We shared the critique of feminist columnist Karen Lindsey.

'It is ironic and sad that an abortion clinic, ostensibly representing respect for the rights and dignity of women, should prove so indifferent to the rights of the women who work for it. Diane Richards, Preterm's director, has been quoted, in a piously feminist statement as saying "as a woman it is personally disappointing to me to contemplate the idea that labor unions, which for the most part are male-dominated organizations, are going to force us to admit we can't work out our problems together." It doesn't seem to "personally disappoint" her that female management is unwilling to provide basic job rights for its sister employees. Nor has her aversion to "male-dominated" organization prevented her twice from calling police to arrest strikers."

Sometimes we overemphasized our class alliances. Thus we occasionally defended the union against correct criticism from other feminist employees. Because the claim to feminism by our employers made it critical that we strongly identify with the union we had to learn to avoid excessive reliance on or opposition to the union. It was hard for us to recognize that our union did not comprehend the feminist aspects of our strike. Now we realize that in dealing with unions, women need to be prepared to fight for feminist concerns in a very organized fashion. There are powerful connections between women's struggles and workers' struggles which, if merged, make union struggles stronger, not weaker. Finally, even the union had to agree that support from the broader women's community and our identification with our patients often kept the strike alive.

BACK ON THE JOB

Today the effects of the strike on Preterm are mixed, but all show the impact of our analysis as well as our actions. New hiring has reflected a retreat from the management's pseudo-feminism of the early days. Preterm is now looking for "professionals" who will distance themselves from their clients and non-professional co-workers. The natural feminist empathy which motivated early counselors and other clinic workers is being replaced by professional detachment and expertise. The rigid hierarchy which characterizes all health institutions is even further entrenched by the hiring of "appropriate" new staff. Strikers back on the
job are isolated, although patient evaluations consistently show that strikers deliver the best-received services. Temporary management reforms reflect some of our concerns but we don't expect the changes to mean much, as the professional ethic, stressing the separation of staff and patients, increasingly dominates relationships.

Preterm can no longer parade as a feminist institution. At the very least the strike exposed its corporate, anti-feminist essence — committed to profit-making at the expense of its women patients and women workers. Management learned that it was too costly to allow women workers to identify and be involved with clients in exchange for lower wages. Now they are busily creating the anti-personal, anti-feminist, anti-labor institution which we have come to expect from the health care industry.

This article is adapted from a pamphlet, "Getting Stronger: Women Workers Organize the Abortion Clinics," which was planned and written in a group which met and worked for a year. The writing group consisted of two abortion workers who were active in the Charles Circle organizing drive, two Preterm strikers, a representative of the Boston Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, and the Red Sun Press Collective. Although everyone contributed suggestions and criticisms, the Charles Circle article was written by the Charles Circle union members and the Preterm article by the Preterm workers. These four writers have all been fired from their jobs at least once for union activity. To maximize their chances for employment in the future, they remain anonymous. The pamphlet can be ordered from Red Sun Press, 33 Richdale Ave., Cambridge, Mass., 02140 at $3.00 ea., prepaid. There is a 40% discount for orders of 5 or more.

NOTES

1. The Preterm Institute was founded in New York in 1970 to "study the problem presented by the increasing population of the world and the relation of abortion to that population growth." Preterm Foundation, Certificate of Corporation.

2. One of the last letters circulated by Preterm before the election foretold the subsequent course of contract negotiations: "Questions: Will the law compel the clinic to reach an agreement with the Union? Answer: Absolutely not! The Clinic does not have to agree to a single thing the union proposes as long as we bargain in good faith... We do not have to sign any contract which we do not believe to be in the Clinic's best interest." ("A Memorandum." May 5, 1975, p. 2.)

3. In the course of the strike thirty separate arrests took place. The charges were trespass, malicious destruction of property, disorderly person, assault and battery on a police officer, and failure to disperse. There were no convictions.

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"Don't Meddle With The Press." 1834 lithograph by Honore Daumier.
CARTOONING

Nick Thorkelson

INTRODUCTION

How has the movement's use of cartooning changed since the explosion in graphics associated with the anti-war movement and the "underground press"? My feeling is that it has broadened but not deepened. There is more demand for cartoons, and more chance of any particular piece's being seen by a non-elite audience, but there is less interest in originality and depth of feeling. This lack of interest is indicated in choice of imagery by a kind of mechanical correct-lineism, and in style by a tendency to tail after the standards of the blandest mainstream cartoons. The net result is that our cartoons do not succeed as well as they could in making people see, or think.

Part of the problem is a misunderstanding of what a cartoon does. A cartoon rests on an emotionally charged description of the world as it is, for example:

Modern life is terrible.
Power derives from the people.
The enemy is fat, parasitical, cruel, heartless, and unnecessary.
People don't have to live like this.
Things are seldom what they seem.
The world is changing.
We're all in this together.

These are descriptions that can be treated as revelations in a cartoon. A cartoon based on them can have the power of revelation in its impact.
A description is different from a prescription. “Black and white workers should unite” or “Women should take their lives into their own hands” are concepts that can be illustrated but they are not “cartoonogenic”. Of course, cartoonists have the responsibility to apply their own idiosyncratic imaginations and perceptions to the nuts and bolts of the articles they’re illustrating or the campaigns they’re supporting. The problem is that a lot of organizers, editors, and cartoonists try to make a cartoon do things that it can’t do as well as a slogan or an article can. By doing this they resist, on supposedly political grounds, the real power of cartooning to open people’s eyes.

All of the above rests on some assumptions about the “nature” of cartooning. These assumptions are based primarily on my own predilections as a cartoonist, but I think they are supported by the history of cartooning as well. The following history of cartooning, particularly American political cartooning, was originally presented as a slide show; I’m putting it into written form in order to back up my opinions about the movement’s use of cartoons today. It isn’t meant to be comprehensive, and I apologize to any reader whose favorites may have been left out.

* The slide show was designed to provoke discussion of imagery in community-oriented media at the Community Papers Conference, sponsored by CPF (Community Press Features, formerly CPS) in Boston in 1972 and every year or so since then. Thanks to all the participants in these workshops whose pointed questions forced me to sharpen my pencil, and to two fine books: Art & Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator by Richard Fitzgerald, which taught me almost everything I know about that subject; and The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons by Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, which is the only political cartooning history I’ve seen that treats cartooning as a job people do rather than a gift from heaven.

THE ORIGIN OF CARTOONS

The word “cartoon” was first applied to caricatures — drawings that “make fun” — in an 1843 drawing in Punch entitled “Cartoon No. 1: The Poor Beg for Bread and the Philanthropy of the State Accords an Exhibition.” “Cartoon” up till then meant a preliminary sketch for an oil painting, and the drawing in Punch was a criticism of the use of government funds for a high-brow exhibition of “cartoons” at a time of acute distress. The modern use of the word, then, is bound up in its birth with an attitude of skepticism toward High Art — skepticism from an underdog perspective. A cartoon by its nature says, I don’t care how sensitive or beautiful you think I am, all I want is for you to get the story straight and do something about it. A cartoon opposes illusions and shows reality. A cartoon would rather be shocking than comforting.*

To avoid a possible misconception right away: I don’t think cartooning is better than “Art”, or that making non-political art is a waste of time. Art and cartooning are two different things. Art reflects and excites a sensuous experience; while a cartoon can do this, it isn’t necessary for it to do so.

The forerunners of modern cartooning are of two main types: some attack a particular enemy; some expose society.

Cartoons that attack a particular enemy are propaganda in the narrow sense. Woodcuts circulated during the Reformation showing Martin Luther or the Pope consorting with

* The word “cartoon” is now applied to just about any drawing with a narrative function, while a caricature is seen as being more pointed — expressing criticism or ridicule of its subject. Up until this century, however, all cartoons had a point, an attitude of contentiousness or dissatisfaction, and this is the sense in which I want to use the word. I also mean by cartoon a mass-produced item, aimed at a wider audience than an art work.
devils were designed to rev up the troops. The message of this type of cartoon is, “Stop this monster now, or all is lost.” A good deal of paranoia and potential despair is implicit in this approach.

Cartoons that expose society are usually meant to encourage some sort of personal virtue rather than to incite a revolt. There have been a lot more and better cartoons criticizing personal corruption, vanity, and presumptuousness than cartoons empathizing with society’s uncorrupted victims. This approach is consistent with the teachings of the medieval church, which tolerated the publication of “dance of death” woodcuts. The best known of these were the series designed by Hans Holbein in 1538. These memento mori showed grinning Death giving the clergy, the nobility, the money-lenders and so on their comeuppance for being concerned with money, power, sex, or any other human gratification, at the expense of spirituality. While the ideology of these woodcuts was repressive, their popularity suggests that they were perceived somewhat differently from their intention, as cartoons that fantasize about a change — in this case, the death of the powers that be.

Peter Brueghel (c. 1525-1569), who designed engravings of peasants at work and play for popular consumption before he made his mark as a painter, represented the same admonishing spirit as Holbein, but his content subverted the misanthropic form. These peasants, with their faces dominated by their bodies and their bodies dominated by grandiose and changeable nature, were probably meant to have an elitist effect. The pictures illustrate and verify cosmopolitan assumptions about the stupidity of peasant life as a way of warning city folk of mankind’s insignificance in relation to God’s world. Hidden in this message, though, is the understanding that it is those who toil who have the most in common with nature, and that this relationship with nature is a source of strength. Whether any particular reader gets an elitist or democratic message from Brueghel’s prints is beside the point. The sharpness of the prints in either case was a result of Brueghel’s lack of sentimental preconceptions. For a cartoon to be effective it needs to be honest, by any means necessary.
Italian paintings. He satirized this taste in prints like "The Bathos, or, Manner of Sinking in Sublime Paintings," in which he rendered the cliches of allegorical art in his characteristically homely, matter-of-fact style.

Hogarth's attitude toward classes and class divisions is indicated in "The Laughing Audience" (1733). The low-ranking pit audience laughs uproariously at the play, while the gentry in the box seats completely ignore the show and flirt with the "orange girls" instead. (Sex in Hogarth always seems to boil down to a meeting of male lust and female greed.) The impression conveyed of a social class, by style as well as content, is that of a flat, homogeneous mass. There is no air between the laughing faces, and little difference in their expressions.

**CARTOONING IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION**

A hundred years later, the French artist Honore Daumier did a group satire of a social class called the "Legislative Belly" (1834) in which the style is the reverse of Hogarth's. In order to portray the atomized, individualistic bourgeois ruling class which had arrived on the scene, a totally different style was needed. The faces are now functional parts of the human physique, which is drawn with a strong consciousness of its three-dimensional nature, both
in relation to itself and in the different figures’ relation to each other.

The use of techniques developed by Italian painters to portray real space and weight, which the dilettantes of Hogarth’s day had embraced in their hedonism and which Hogarth rejected in his moralism, became an appropriate tool of cartoonists in the age of revolution. This is because the partial success of a social revolution allowed people to imagine that the evils of this world might be conquered by the physical force of a class in revolt rather than the moral force of individual vigilance. For the first time, the “materialism” we saw in Brueghel’s work could be a self-consciously progressive way of looking at things.

This is particularly clear in Daumier’s portrayal of working people. “Don’t Meddle With the Press” was a warning to the bourgeois king, Louis-Philippe, not to provoke a revolution like the one which brought down his predecessor, Charles X. The focus of the drawing is on the printer himself, portrayed simultaneously as a member of the class whose willingness to revolt is proven, and as the craftsman upon whose strength and skill the press depends. This figure foreshadows the noble worker of so many atrocious modern left-wing posters and cartoons — the type whose nobility is indicated by the body of a weightlifter, a chin that juts out of the neck, muscular wrists, and a furious demeanor. Daumier’s figure has the versatile strength of a working man, a normal chin, muscular arms and an expression of determination.

Empathy was another feature of Italian painting that Daumier could adapt to cartooning for the first time. Daumier draws his pressman with the same affection and confidence that Titian and Caravaggio showered on their gods and goddesses and biblical figures. In revolutionary times the line between cartooning and art breaks down.

Unfortunately, Louis-Philippe and the plutocrats had their way. Daumier spent some time in jail, and his later drawings lack the optimism and penetration of his youthful work. In Daumier’s satire on speculation, “Macaire Selling Phony Securities,” the entrepreneur hoodwinks a homogeneously passive crowd, whose faces are sketched rather carelessly. A fluid materialism is hard to maintain in the face of disappointed expectations.

America experienced its own Age of Revolution in the radicalism of the Civil War and Reconstruction years. This period produced the first really original American cartoonists (both foreign-born, by the way), Dr. Volck for the Confederates and Thomas Nast for the Republicans.

Adalbert J. Volck’s 1861 etching, “Great American Tragidians, Comedians, and Clowns, and Rope Danzers in their Favorite Characters.”
Dr. Volck's caricatures of Lincoln revert to the outlook of the Reformation cartoons mentioned earlier — stop this devil or all is lost. In "Lincoln and His Generals," Lincoln even looks like a cross between the devil and "grinning death." (He also looks a lot more like the real Lincoln we see in photographs than the portrait on the penny does.) This cartoon reveals the compatibility of reaction with decadent despair, in that the slaveocracy, like any arbitrary power, supposed itself to be the last line of defense against a diabolical world.

Thomas Nast was a sentimentalist whose inflated allegories for _Harper's Weekly_ on behalf of the Union cause were extremely popular and influential during the war, but who was forced by the fluidity of the Reconstruction years and the betrayal of their promise to adopt a more hard-edge, down-to-earth style.

Lincoln called Nast "our best recruiting sergeant," and his wartime cartoons certainly had the unreal flavor of a recruiting sergeant's spiel. What was real about them was Nast's own bitter way of looking at things — the most powerful of them shows an enthroned skeleton as a comment on the death of Lincoln — but they all have an unreal and impenetrable quality which reflects the spirit of self-denial, the motivation by ideals rather than experience, which is demanded of the home-front population during a war. After the war, Nast's work became brighter, clearer, and more concrete, even in its treatment of distant events like the rise of the KKK. At the same time his work lost none of its bite.

The most powerful (and famous) of his later drawings was called "Group of Vultures Waiting For the Storm to 'Blow Over'/ 'Let Us Prey.'" In it, William Tweed and the other Democratic Party bosses of New York City are depicted as vultures, cowering before a storm in a bleak mountain setting. While the world is shown to be as hard and dangerous as it was in the death of Lincoln cartoon, the implications are different. Change is now welcomed, not feared — which is not surprising since the storm represents the public furor over Tweed's crimes that was inspired by Nast in the first place. This furor led to the jailing of Tweed in 1876. What does this one instance of cartoons overthrowing a government (albeit a small one) tell us? The power of destructive criticism!

Nast was at his best when he drew the corporeal and changeable nature of the world. Like Daumier, he found it difficult to maintain this sense of flux in the face of disappointment. "The Senatorial Round House" was his flaccid attack on the domination of the federal government by railroad companies, in other words the emerging rule of monopoly capitalism. This was one government he could not overthrow.

**THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN CARTOONING**

The growing political power of the "trusts" was to be the major theme of the next generation of American cartoonists, the greatest of whom were Joseph Keppler and Homer Davenport. Keppler was the editor and proprietor of _Puck_, a lithographed weekly humor magazine based on European models. _Puck_ and its imitators featured huge, elaborate, full-color political cartoons, inside and out, which were very popular items during the late '70s and early '80s. Davenport was an equally popular cartoonist in a newspaper — the medium that
Joseph Keppler’s comment on the scandal surrounding James A. Garfield’s illegitimate child.

came to succeed the magazines as the most influential forum for cartoonists. Keppler and his imitators, like Nast, portrayed the trusts as awkward, foolish-looking giants, increasingly dominating the parties and the government. It was still okay in those days to call monopoly government into question, as a way for magazines to attract readers and for politicians to attract voters. Consequently these cartoons are not fatalistic, and yet their tone is not very urgent either. They express an odd mixture of grandstanding and flipness that reflects the seductive features of the emerging empire. (Of course they whipped up as much war fever and plucky expansionism as you could ask for when the occasion arose — it was during this period that Uncle Sam achieved his most cheerful and winning appearance.) The “painterly” feeling, which Daumier had used to establish lithography as a passionate medium for political cartoons, was turned by the weekly magazine cartoonists into an expression of rowdy high spirits without much conviction.

Davenport, working in pen and ink like Nast, maintained Nast’s tone of urgency in the period when Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst vied for the attention of New York’s working class readers. His figure for “The Trust” (based on an Italian statue of Samson) is a coldblooded warrior. While the attitude may be fatalistic, it is certainly not flippant. The figure standing with Mr. Trust in “The New Anthem at Philadelphia” (1900) is Mark Hanna, a wealthy industrialist who was McKinley’s campaign manager and Davenport’s favorite target.

Davenport was the last political cartoonist in the American mass media to work on a huge scale, both physically — Pulitzer would squeeze copy into the corners of a Davenport cartoon in order to run it all over the front page of his paper, the World — and emotionally. The wave of the future was Frederick Burr Opper, Davenport’s weaker contemporary, but more of a survivor. Oppé’s smallish newspaper cartoons poked fun at the trusts, reducing them to the unmenacing stature of merry, sadistic buffoons. Opper also invented, as a foil for the

trusts, the most pitiful sap in the history of the human imagination, John Q. Public, or The Common People, as he was originally called.

John Q.'s function was to make it clear that, no matter how unmenacing, the trusts were here to stay, since there was certainly no force capable of opposing them. When you identify with John Q. you feel resentful, but weak. You "paid too much for what you got." Eugene Debs had a lot to say about "the public" being a bogus concept designed to convince the middle class that the working class was not a part of the American people, and John Q. certainly bears this out. He has all the imaginable anxiety of the slightly propertied salary earner whose only work contacts are his superiors, his competitors and his subordinates. He has none of the realism or self-confidence that people can get from working in a group. (He also has what cartoonists then considered an Irish face, although you rarely see an Irish face like it in the real world. He was probably drawn this way to imply that he was a social climber.)

Having invented this satire on the "middle class" more or less as a way of denying the possibility of popular participation in American politics, Oppen deserted the increasingly boring editorial page and took his business elsewhere, to the comics page. There he was joined by most of America's best cartoonists of the twentieth century.

LEFT CARTOONISTS

After the coming of the comics, mainstream American political cartooning was dominated by the outlook of John Q. Public until the Vietnamese war. Mr. Public got his biggest workout during the New Deal, when he was constantly pitted against reckless deficit spending and creeping socialism. The diminutiveness of these cartoons reflects not only their conservative message but also their isolation from a caring audience. During the depression the political cartoon mostly represented a vanity on the part of the typically right-wing newspaper publisher, hoping to put his views over on an audience that was clearly not listening.
The de-politicization of mass media cartoons coincided with the rise of socialism as a force in American political and cultural life. Socialism in its turn provided an alternative medium for all the natural heirs of Nast and Davenport who were frustrated by the increasing constraints of the big newspapers and magazines.

The left press didn’t use John Q. Public as an object of identification for its readers. The IWW organ, *Industrial Worker*, featured “Mr. Block” (1900), a satire on working class backwardness by a working class artist, the likes of which no middle class radical publication then or now could afford to do. John Sloan drew “Summer Night” while he was working for the *Masses*, the main middle class radical publication before World War I. While the people who saw Sloan’s work were not usually poor, they could nevertheless identify with poor and working people as Sloan drew them.

There is a controversy about this. John Sloan supposedly argued a lot with the other, more politically oriented *Masses* cartoonists, and subsequently gave up on print media and socialist politics to devote himself to painting and

printmaking. Like most *Masses* cartoonists he came to that magazine from a successful career in the bourgeois media; unlike the other main *Masses* cartoonists, he had been an illustrator rather than a cartoonist in his earlier work, and was more inclined to draw pretty women than political themes. For these reasons and others his work in the *Masses* has often been perceived by art critics and left critics alike as not really socialist.

Does a drawing like “Sleeping On the Roof”, by not showing misery and struggle, miss the point and mislead the reader? It helps to look at the context. There were plenty of drawings exposing slum conditions printed in the bourgeois media in those days and for many years before, going back at least to the *Harper’s Weekly* illustration of 1879, “Before Daybreak”. John Sloan transformed this muckraking cliche by making the slum dwellers the subjects rather than the objects of his art. In “Before Daybreak” the reader is invited to identify with the standing stranger, who pities the condition of the helpless poor and longs for their disappearance. Slum clearance is the obvious answer to his problem. In “Sleeping On The Roof” the poor have minds and wills and problems of their own.

Magazine illustration is another context that illuminates Sloan’s *Masses* work. The trend in magazine illustration then, as now, was to present the public with idealized images of itself, having a naturalistic gloss. (Nowadays these images are legitimized by photography.) These images have the effect of making people ashamed of, and increasingly blind to, their actual surroundings and what they see of themselves and their lives every day (which includes idiosyncracies of the human physique). Sloan was more attuned to the beauty of working women than fashion models, and by choosing to draw the former he was making a statement which the bourgeois magazines were not interested in publishing.

Whether Sloan’s slice-of-life drawings would make any particular reader confident in the people or patronizingly fond of them or just plain sleepy cannot be assumed or predicted, but drawings like Sloan’s certainly serve a function. They remind a middle class radical audience that the working class has a life of its own, and does not exist simply to struggle. They also have the potential of allowing poor and working people to take their own lives seriously. Their revolutionism lies in their consciousness of the people’s talent for post-revolutionary life.

John Sloan was an empathetic realist in the fragile tradition of Daumier. When there was a working class revolt to draw, like the Colorado miners’ resistance to the Ludlow massacre, he drew it with all the force and passion and conviction which the occasion called for. He was equally direct and hard in his
“The Extreme Left: ‘Why don’t those strikers DO something—Let a few of them get shot and it’ll look as if they meant business.’” Cartoon by John Sloan, Masses, Sept. 1913.

You In Church”, racism is depicted as an innate hillbilly deformity. This Northern Liberalism (now we’d have to say Suburban Liberalism) is more snobbish than anti-racist. It doesn’t give readers any reason to deal with their own racism.

The appeal that socialist media had for the natural heirs of Nast and Davenport is most apparent in the career of Masses cartoonist Art Young. Before the Masses came along, Young was a successful magazine cartoonist, particularly in Life. (The original Life was a late entry into the humor weekly field, but unlike Puck and Judge it was printed by letterpress and featured black and white line drawings.) Before Life he was a successful newspaper cartoonist on papers in Chicago and Denver, for which he devised conventional attacks on derision of the dilettante leftism that he saw all around him in New York’s bohemian circles, as in the cutting and still relevant cartoon, “The Extreme Left.”

Attacking false consciousness has always been a tricky business for left artists. Reginald Marsh, who, like Sloan, made his mark as a painter but did cartoons and illustrations too, treated racism in his 1934 New Yorker cartoon, “This is her first lynching.” The strength and seriousness of the drawing is in the face of the girl, which has not yet been brutalized and, unlike the grownups’, reflects the horror of the scene. The tension is between brutality and people’s capacity to change. In a more typical treatment, Bill Mauldin’s 1962 cartoon, “See Reginald Marsh, “This is her first lynching.” The New Yorker, Sept. 8, 1934.
feminism, anarchism, labor organization, etc. He moved from newspapers to magazines to satisfy his penchant for more general commentary as well as slighter, more anecdotal cartoons. In his forties, living in New York, he began to wonder why the better part of his energy was still being consumed in the promotion and sale of his work, and this led him to try to comprehend more clearly the misery and insecurity around him.

He was first exposed to socialism as a systematic viewpoint in a debating class at Cooper Union, which he had joined to help him argue with magazine editors about the increasingly radical content of his cartoons. Socialism put him into a state of righteous indignation and he went to work producing the dark, passionate allegories of the twilight of capitalism reproduced here — at the same time immersing himself in Socialist Party politics and helping to manage the Masses. These drawings were contributed gratis to the Masses and other socialist periodicals.

One interesting thing about Art Young’s conversion is that he wasn’t expelled from the capitalist media on account of it. He suffered a major financial setback when the left-leaning Metropolitan magazine dropped a regular feature by him because of his opposition to American participation in World War I; but the editors of Life, Collier’s and the Hearst chain liked his style, probably didn’t mind his politics, and were determined to publish him as long as he could be restrained from alienating the customers. A Hearst editor supposedly told him to call one of his figures “greed” rather than “capitalism”, saying, “That means the same thing and it won’t get us into trouble.” Young didn’t nurture and supply the socialist media in order to have some influence — he would have had some anyway — but in order to speak his mind, to have influence as a socialist. This decision speaks to those of us who think we can be socialists without ever mentioning it in public.

Art Young hailed from Monroe, Wisconsin, and was steeped in that Calvinist republicanism which inspired Nast in his prime. His great pleasure as an illustrator was to draw heaven and hell — he did two versions of Hell Up To Date — and, like the first protestant cartoonists, he used these projects as a way of getting literary revenge on hated political figures, like Teddy Roosevelt and Billy Sunday. But his cosmic imagination never had a subject that was equal to it until he learned to see capitalism as a system that sucked the creativity and conscience and autonomy out of people. He drew this vision in cartoons like “Time to Butcher” (see cover) and “A Compulsory Religion.”

Again, people ask, is this socialist? Isn’t it merely demoralizing to draw the capitalist hell
without making it weaker than the socialist heaven? But Young was not pulled to socialism by the promise of a better world. He was pushed to socialism by the frustration and deadening of human creativity that he saw under capitalism, and this was the contradiction that he knew how to draw. It is also the contradiction that has turned a good many other would-be individualists into dedicated socialists over the years. In any case, his drawings do not make capitalism indestructible—the golden calf and a fat hog are hardly symbols of longevity.

The portrayal of power and collective struggle were the weak elements in Sloan’s and Young’s work, but there were other cartoonists trying to deal with these themes. Boardman Robinson was a class-conscious cartoonist of the time who felt constrained by the pen and ink
Robert Minor, though a socialist from the age of 23, had a fabulously successful career as a cartoonist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and later the *New York Evening World*. Taking a year off to study art in Paris he was simultaneously inspired by the work of Daumier and Goya and converted from socialism to anarchosyndicalism. As with Young, his opposition to the war forced him to choose principle over security and strengthened his devotion to left media and left politics.

An admirer of Boardman Robinson, Minor sharpened and simplified Robinson’s crayon and pebbleboard technique as he turned his attention from capitalist contradictions to class struggle. “That’s all any real picture is about,” he later wrote in an appreciation of Robinson, “the fight of forces. That is the only theme an artist ever knew.” The fight of forces in his *Masses* cartoons was more apt to be between imperialism and his own rage than between medium that photoengraving demanded. He saw in Daumier’s lithographs the sweep and conviction he was after, and invented the subterfuge of drawing with a crayon on heavily pebbled paper to achieve the appearance of lithography in a “camera-ready” form. This technique was quickly taken up by editorial page cartoonists all over the political map, including warmongers trying to instill a sense of mission in workers and soldiers. In sharp contrast to Daumier’s pressman is the muscle-bound, pin-headed worker of “We Can, We Must and We Will.” The logical extension of this sort of manipulative glorification is shown in a *Masses* cartoon by Robert Minor, “At Last A Perfect Soldier!”
classes, and yet the drawings generate plenty of heat. If he wasn’t able to apply Daumier’s empathy to the situation around him he was certainly a master of Daumier’s vitriol.

A 1918 trip to revolutionary Russia only reinforced Minor’s anarcho-syndicalist convictions, but on a subsequent speaking tour of the U.S. he was struck by the positive feelings that the bolsheviks had inspired among socialists. He quickly realized that the question people were asking was not “How revolutionary are they, really?” but “What does a revolution look like?” By 1920 he was a communist and a leading contributor to the Liberator, the communist successor to the Masses after the Masses was suppressed during the war.

Minor’s conceptions in the Liberator were sometimes not much better than the patronizing pro-war cartoons he had parodied. In his 1923 cartoon, “For God’s Sake, Sam, Can’t You Hold Him?” Minor depicts the AFL as a stallion beyond the control of its driver, Sam Gompers, and for all the astonishing power of the drawing it is only the power of wishful thinking. The AFL rank and file may have been restive in 1923 but the organization as a whole was hardly rushing headlong toward a labor party. To claim such an easy and imminent victory was to invite derision from readers who knew better or (worse) false confidence from readers who didn’t.

By 1926 Minor was so wrapped up in political work that he decided to give up cartooning. He remained a leader of his party, specializing in “Negro affairs,” until his death in 1952. Devotees of political cartooning have expressed much chagrin over Minor’s desertion of the true cause, but the weakness of his post-1920 cartoons leads me to believe that his artistic activity died a natural death. The strength of his Masses cartoons was related to the sincerity of his revolutionism, which in its turn required him to view all of his activity as a means to an end. He couldn’t function effectively as an artist while a weak and isolated movement was urging him to show a revolution that wasn’t there, so he gave up art in favor of activity which he believed would bring the revolution about.

COMICS AND COMIX

As a forum for passionate political cartoonists, the Masses and Liberator performed the function of Harper’s Weekly, Puck, Judge, and Life, but compared to them the socialist magazines’ circulation and influence were small. The tradition of cartooning as a circulation builder for the leading media was carried on in this century of mass literacy by the comics. An amazing number of books about American cartooning create the impression either that nothing good happened after 1900 (if the focus is on political cartoons) or that nothing at all happened before 1900 (if the focus is on the comics). In fact, “cartooning” was a constant throughout.

The obvious and most significant difference between political cartoons and comic strips is
one of focus — public life vs. private life. This exclusivity of subject matter has been foreign to first-rate cartoonists from Daumier to Al Capp, Walt Kelly, and Jules Feiffer, but all the pressure from newspapers has been for cartoonists to choose between life and politics. Partly this reflects some assumptions on the part of a 20th century newspaper editor: that the working class audience has no serious stake in politics, which is true in terms of the standard newspaper definition of politics; and that a little escapism is appropriate in the context of a heavy diet of bad news, which requires the assumption that a comic strip about the terrors of family life is escapist. The lack of politics in the funnies also represents a fear by publishers that any serious political statement is going to offend somebody, thereby limiting circulation.

On another level, reserving separate pages for life and politics is an expression of the ideological function of newspapers, which is to promote consumerism. The separation of life and politics supports consumerism because it implies that people are condemned to lives of pointless and endless work in order to support their families’ natural tendency to consume, rather than as a response to such political/economic factors as credit and inflation. Consumerism is thus identified with human nature.

Aside from contextual pressures, however, the comic strip form itself implies cynicism and privatism, in that the repetition of oppressive idiosyncracies is the basis of the humor. As in sitcoms, the daily or weekly presentation of a group of characters going through their routines necessarily implies that people don’t change, fools never learn, married people will put up with anything, etc.

“Andy Capp”, the most popular British strip in the U.S., is a prime example of this. Cartoonist Reg Smythe uses his strip to ridicule landlords, welfare state bureaucrats, parsons and the like on behalf of the working class, and he has conscientiously increased the power and stature of Andy’s wife, Flo, over the years; but Andy’s infidelity, tyranny, and exploitation go on and on nevertheless. The more powerful Flo becomes, in fact, the more her basic subservience is made to appear acceptable, since she’s clearly not bringing Andy his beer out of any personal weakness or innocence. Willy Murphy’s parody, “Blimey Broomstead”, points up the implied complicity between Andy and the reader that is the only unrealistic part of the strip, but even without his asides to the

* Newspaper cartooning is an example of the bait and switch selling tactic: many people turn to the comics first when they buy a paper, only to find them printed so small that the fine lines have been dropped out. Across from the comics, however, the reader is likely to find an advertising cartoon printed as hugely and handsomely as Homer Davenport’s cartoons ever were.
reader Andy would tend to win the reader over by virtue of his familiarity. Because of this, the bald realism of the strip, though liberating at first, backfires eventually.

On the other hand the comic strip form can be liberating, since the use of sequential drawings allows the artist to show change, including change in point of view as well as change in time. Showing change in point of view affirms the existence of points of view, which is important if you’re trying to deflate a conventional wisdom.

The “Chumley Parsnips” cartoon from a Philadelphia community paper of the early seventies shows a good political use of this liberating time sense in a comic strip — oppression, false consciousness, and resistance can all be shown in their sequence. The strip demonstrates the difficulty of depicting a multi-racial industrial work force from the vantage point of one race — the implication that black workers are so hip they don’t need overtime pay seems fanciful if not patronizing. It’s certainly better to try, however, than to fall back on the standard equation of working class with white men, or the wishful elimination of any differences between black and white workers. “Chumley” also has trouble offering a concrete picture of resistance in the small space available, but this is not always the point of a piece of propaganda.

The liberating quality of comics is also apparent in that least political of strips, George Herriman’s “Krazy Kat” (1910-1944), where the landscape changes so frantically from panel to panel that the rigidity of the characters is made ludicrous. Modern cartoonists Russell Myers (“Broom Hilda”) and Bobby London (“Dirty Duck” in the National Lampoon) have tried to imitate this benign tone but without Herriman’s feeling for space and weight and texture which makes the Krazy Kat drawings so much like real dreams.

The privatism of comic strips has not been a constant. Comic strip artists who are so inclined have been able to make points by situating politics in everyday life. “The Yellow Kid” by R.F. Outcault, commonly considered to be the world’s first comic, was even about a multi-racial poor and working-class crowd engaged in struggle, except that it was a crowd of kids and the enemy was usually a rival gang or the dogcatcher. Early comic strips like F. Opper’s “Happy Hooligan” and Outcault’s “Buster Brown” frequently referred to class struggle, if only in the form of the quarrels between middle class people and their servants and tradesmen. One highly class-conscious strip when it started in 1930 was “Blondie”, which dramatized the engagement of millionaire’s son Dagwood Bumstead to the low-class flapper, Blondie. Dagwood married Blondie, was disowned by
his family, repaired to the suburbs, and learned to live with the petty tyrannies of his wife and boss. This move heralded a narrowing of scope throughout the comics, with more and more emphasis put on the struggle between the sexes, increasingly portrayed in the context of a class-free world.

Blondie’s imitators in the fifties and sixties (“Hi and Lois”, “The Family Circus”, etc.) narrowed the scope to nearly nothing by taking the struggle out of marriage, ignoring the workplace, and painting the middle class family as a bedrock of decent values in spite of its petty irritations. As Mort Walker explained it, “‘Hi and Lois’ is about our family... with the pain left out. We decided early in the game to avoid the cliches of theickering parents and mean little kids. That has been done to a fare-thee-well-well-well-well.” Liberal as well as conservative readers are apt to see this glossing over of conflict as a move toward wholesomeness, but it doesn’t make for very funny gags.

Retreat from humor was not the overall trend in the ’50s comic strips, which was hardly a fallow period in cartooning. The family funnies are important, though, because they contributed to an atrophying of the capacity for realism in cartooning style, which I want to talk about later.

Mad, which first appeared in comic book form in the early fifties, expressed a cartoonists’ revolt against the cleaned-up, unfunny suburban comic art that had become the fashion in those years. The original premise of Mad was to match first class horror comicbook artists (namely Will Elder, Wallace Wood and Jack Davis) with the blandest characters from the straight comics — Archie, the Lone Ranger, Mickey Mouse, etc. The stories, by editor Harvey Kurtzman, forced these characters to go through the standard horror comic scenario of pride, corruption, and retribution. The retribution was usually in the form of betrayal by a trusted ally, as in the take-off on “Archie” in which juvenile delinquent Starchie Standrews gets sent to the penitentiary by his equally crooked pal Bottleneck. Mad sailed along until it ran out of subjects for its parodies. Kurtzman and his publisher, William Gaines, then tried to transform the comic into a satirical magazine, which allowed Wood and Davis to do some graphically stunning work but prevented any of the crew from exploring the theme they knew best, the lies of pop culture. Gradually the magazine was taken over by hacks.

The ideas in Mad got taken a step further by the “underground comix” cartoonists of the sixties, some of whom were first published by Kurtzman in the “public gallery” column of his magazine, Help. Robert Crumb, the best known of the comix artists, took the Mad formula and turned it around: while his style is usually whimsical and rubberv and cute, his characters are the real neurotics and charlatans and rustics of this world. While Crumb claims to be a crusty reactionary who longs for the sober, craftsmenlike forties, his drawings of today’s overdeveloped urban landscape are not so repellent. They imply, as Daumier’s and Herriman’s drawings did, a changeable world where anything is possible.

The let-it-all-hang-out spirit of cartoonists like Crumb and Kurtzman leads them to display a good amount of gratuitous racism and sexism.
ON THE AIR....

YEAH, I THINK THESE KIDS HAVE SOME POINTS WORTH CONSIDERING ABOUT OUR SOCIETY, JOHNNY. SOME OF THEIR GRIEVES ARE LEGITIMATE...

TRUE, TRUE...

OF COURSE, A LOT OF WHAT IS CALLED THE "COUNTER-CULTURE" IS JUST IMMATURE SOPHOMORIC NONSENSE, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR THE NEW LIFE-STYLES THAT ARE EMERGING NOWADAYS...

SPEAKING OF WHICH, YOU WANNA TAKE A LOOK AT A CLIP FROM MY LATEST MOVIE? I THINK YOU'LL APPRECIATE THE RELEVANCE OF THIS SCENE TO JUST WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT....

OKAY...LET'S ROLL IT!!

R. Crumb's "Fritz the Cat. Superstar."

OF COURSE, YOUR WORK IS GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME. JUST GIVE IT TWO OR THREE MORE YEARS AND YOU'LL BE READY FOR "YOUNG SMUT."


in their work. The racism in Kurtzman is the standard racism of the popular art of his generation: only white people are shown. Crumb goes much further, doing violent caricatures like Angelfood McSpade in order, he ways, to deal with his neurotic fantasy life by showing it to the world. But cartoons have a life of their own once they’re published, and Crumb’s race drawings have done a lot to legitimize racism for the hip audience. I believe, though, that Crumb’s sex comics have done a lot more than the family funnies to promote honest, loving sexual relationships. The difference is presumably because Crumb knows more about sex than he knows about black people. When he applies his enthusiastic realism to sex instead of bragging about his problems, he puts sex right in the middle of life, along with work and conversation, and makes it less of a fetish for people.

As remarkable as Crumb and the other early undergrounders may have been in their sexual frankness, they were still, like the vast majority of mass media cartoonists, men. This disproportion, as Sharon Rudahl’s autobiographical comic strip shows, has a lot to do with the overwhelmingly male bias of the humor
industry, making it difficult for any woman inclined to do cartoons to break into print.

An encouraging development in underground comix in the seventies, then, has been the proliferation of comix drawn by women. Along with Sharon Rudahl, such artists as Diane Noomin, Lee Marrs and Aline Kominsky have used the comic book's capacity for detachment to produce stories that undermine sexual fantasy as ruthlessly as the male comix do, but with more psychologically realistic results. The best women's comix, like good novels, recreate the dense, open-ended world we live in, promoting an attitude of acceptance in the reader. I don't mean acceptance of the world's faults in a spirit of resignation and privatism, but acceptance of the real world as suitable material for transformation, as the proper object of our attention and creativity.

The underground comix had to work outside the mass media in order to keep alive the admonishing, uncompromisingly realistic outlook that is the basis for cartooning. (Crumb once referred to himself as "the last of the medieval thinkers"). The last mass media cartoonist to display the Hogarthian spirit was the young Al Capp, despite his later career as a reactionary grouch. As a young revolutionary grouch he gave us the story of the schmoo, a soft, duckpin-shaped creature out of nowhere, whose willingness to provide humankind with all the means of survival at no cost was so infuriating to the food and toothpick manufacturers (the "trusts", more or less) that they hired mobsters to slaughter the loveable little creatures en masse. It's been pointed out to me that the schmoo was not socialism. True enough — the schmoo was free while socialism requires struggle and sacrifice. The schmoo story said that even if a humane, non-competitive society were easy to achieve, capitalism as a system would not permit it.
THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL CARTOONING

Meanwhile, back at the editorial page, cartoons right up to the mid sixties continued to simulate lithography by the use of soft crayons on pebbled illustration boards as a way of pleading their seriousness. Robert Minor’s strongest successor in this technique was the liberal cartoonist Daniel R. Fitzpatrick, who used it, as it was intended, to treat serious themes like unemployment and Nazi aggression without sentimentality.

More often the crayon survived as a mere convention. Herblock used it (still uses it), even though his roly-poly figures would probably be bouncier without it. Herblock’s energetic but undifferentiated characters served as perfect representations of the aggressively bland public figures of the U.S. in the fifties, and as striking contrasts to his bewhiskered major targets, Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, and the atomic bomb. Herblock’s talent proved to be unsuited to the more complex issues of the sixties, however.

Bill Mauldin, whose civil rights cartoon was discussed earlier, was, after Herblock, the best known political cartoonist of the fifties. This tells you something about the fifties, since few of his drawings had any more sense of reality to them than “See You In Church.” Their abstractness was all the more remarkable because Mauldin had already established himself as the most down-to-earth cartoonist to come along in years, through his World War II cartoons about the infantrymen, Willie and Joe.

Willie and Joe were based on soldiers that Mauldin got to know during the invasion of Sicily. Their grubby, dangerous lives and their distaste for officers were chronicled in weekly brush and ink cartoons that were published first in the 45th Division News and then in Stars & Stripes, and eventually syndicated in the U.S.

Mauldin was literally called on the carpet for these cartoons by General Patton, who gave him a lecture on the need for discipline in wartime. Patton was particularly upset by an uncaptioned drawing of enlisted men waiting to see a USO show — “Girls, Girls, Girls, Fresh From The States” — while back at the stage door some officers are waiting to take the performers out after the show is over. “You think the soldiers ought to get laid instead of the officers, don’t you?” Patton said. When Mauldin offered his standard defense — that the real Willies and Joes needed some confirmation of their existence to keep from building up resentments about it — Patton accused the real Willies and Joes of breach of discipline for having resentments. For some reason, Mauldin and his enlightened editors were allowed to continue the series. Whether or not Mauldin believed his cartoons were good for the war

"I can’t get no lower, Willie. Me buttons is in the way."

Cartoon by Bill Mauldin in Stars & Stripes.
effort, he knew they were good for the soldiers, and it was to them that he felt responsible.

Most of the real Willies and Joes, the infantrymen who invaded Italy, eventually died there, and Mauldin wanted to have the cartoon Willie and Joe get killed on the last day of the European war, too. But on this point the enlightened editors restrained him. The public would never have stood for it. Instead Mauldin drew the “Back Home” series, in which he tried to imagine how the traumatized, sanitized U.S.A. of the early Cold War would have looked to his characters, which was really impossible for him to do since he wasn’t living with them any more. Eventually he dropped the series and did political cartoons instead.

Ted Richards made a cartoon record of the Vietnamese War with the underground comix series, “Dopin’ Dan”, that resembles Mauldin’s World War II — except that Richards drew his comic from memory after he was out of the service, and it was not the kind of material that any army, no matter how enlightened, would publish. Richards, unlike Mauldin, has continued to do cartoons from his own experience, particularly the “Forty Year Old Hippy” series for the Rip Off Press Syndicate.

The problems of Bill Mauldin’s career reflect a general trend toward stylistic carelessness in newspaper and magazine cartooning that took place in the fifties. It was not a trend toward simplicity — the Willie and Joe cartoons were simple, especially the treatment of faces — but a use of simplicity to evade content. The most popular cartoons of the period, those in the New Yorker, usually depended on captions for their humor, while the characters were so undifferentiated that one cartoonist’s stout, middle-class couple looked pretty much like another’s.

Jules Feiffer once said that the Vietnamese War revived the art of caricature in this country because it gave cartoonists a public figure — Johnson — whom they could really hate. Without taking away from the brilliance of cartoonists like Feiffer, David Levine, and Pat Oliphant, I think it’s important to recognize that they aren’t any better than their social context and outlook allow them to be. These cartoonists, as much as Mauldin, are isolated from a community crossing class lines in which their politics could resonate, and consequently their cartoons are more cutting than involving.

The underground press of the 1960s was significantly different from papers like the New York Review of Books and the Village Voice for which Feiffer and Levine worked. The “underground” drew contributors and readers alike from a closely knit, self-conscious community which had self-determination as its stated goal, namely the “counterculture,” and cartoons like Ron Cobb’s in the L.A. Free Press reflect the strength of that context.

Like the best work of Art Young’s, Cobb’s drawings show a convincingly menacing twilight, although it is the twilight of industrial civilization rather than capitalism. Like The
Masses, the L.A. Free Press was aimed at like-minded people, which allowed Cobb to pull out the stops, and say what he meant. The result, as with Young, is a series of cartoons that reverberate far beyond the immediately intended audience.

The weakness of a community based on de-classing is that the survival of the community is based on social tolerance. That includes tolerance by bikers as well as tolerance by neighbors and authorities. A type of pacifism was the ideological expression of the hippies’ vulnerability, and that pacifism undermines Cobb’s drawings.

Pacifism makes hostility a primary consideration and the reasons for hostility secondary. It has a material vision of the problem but an ideal vision of the solution. Accordingly, Cobb’s drawings, like many of the underground comix, give a convincing picture of the waste and cruelty of American society but don’t offer convincing objects of identification for the reader. Cobb can do a perfectly empathetic portrait of the dolphins inheriting the earth, but his human protagonists lack weight and speci-
The original point of the community press was to reach and move people who didn’t identify themselves as radicals, but a lot of community newspaper graphics seem designed to offer aid and comfort to the committed, instead. Papers pay plenty of attention to the danger of offending potential recruits, but this is not the same thing as reaching out.

Along with dogmatism, there is a tendency in the community press to encourage cartoonists to hedge their politics. Since the community press is (perhaps necessarily) more militant than socialist, the cartoonist is put in the difficult position of trying to show contradictions and be positive and uplifting and non-defeatist about them without actually showing how they might be resolved. This results in the left cartoon cliche of the crowd of working class people grimacing and growling and clenching their fists while they watch the evil world go by — revolutionary isometrics. The way out of this dilemma is not to do what Robert Minor did — draw a revolt that isn’t happening — but to draw the world as we see it, which is what cartoonists do best anyway.

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The past couple of years has seen a large transformation of youth culture, music, and politics in Britain. The main element in this has been the emergence of an authentically new and important youth culture among sections of working and lower-middle class youth — punk. "Rock Against Racism," and the "Anti-Nazi League" have been the Left's biggest success for many years. They have contributed to what the Left likes to call a period of "youth radicalization." Moribund youth organizations of Left parties have been resuscitated, numerous papers started, still bearing the imprint of the 1968 generation of revolutionaries. Only the most sectarian and purist groups fail to enthuse about the new, if slightly uneasy marriage of music and politics.

But it took a lot of agonizing to reach this point. The British Left has never been noted for its ability to deal effectively with the needs and situation of youth. The period in fact started badly with one of the oddest events of the past year; when the Young Socialists passed a motion at its annual conference condemning punk rock as a capitalist conspiracy, diverting youth from its true revolutionary path (and leadership). This was a relatively extreme example. But you need only scan the pages of the left and music press to have seen earnest debates about whether punk is socialist/rebellious/progressive or capitalist/decadent/regressive. This, however, is a completely wrong problematic for looking at the nature of punk or any other youth culture. Not just because punk has internal divisions, but because it treats the phenomenon through ideological spectacles that do not and
cannot fit. In the absence of a mass socialist movement, with its own strong cultural influence, no youth culture, punk or otherwise, is going to be "socialist." No amount of deep interpretation of punk lyrics or style can make it that, despite valiant attempts — including depicting the bondage-style clothing used by some punks as symbolic of the restrictions of capitalism!

This is not the first time the Left has agonized over the nature of youth cultures and it indicates a series of political problems. There is no visible, large socialist youth movement in Britain. No independent organization and movement that defines socialism through its own eyes, instead of through the eyes of the parent organizations they are usually appendages of. Party domination is only one aspect of the problem. What also matters is the perception of youth that many on the Left tend to have, inside and outside of organizations. I was sitting as a delegate of my union in the local Trades Council recently, when a check was handed over to a young building worker as part of a housing campaign. Clearly overawed, he mumbled his speech of thanks. He was then asked to leave the hallowed chamber. A delegate asked could he stay and observe. A Chairman said in a very serious way that the rules didn't allow it, but he was sure that we would be seeing him back in a few years time as a proper delegate. The problem with much of the Left is that they see youth only as future workers, trade unionists or party members. I say "only," because of course, they will be these things in the future and there is nothing wrong with that. But we also have to recognize the specific oppression and position of youth; materially, culturally and politically.

This cannot be done while the junior versions of Left organizations act as safe conveyorbelts, offering partial alternatives which manage to avoid many sensitive areas uppermost in the minds of youth, notably sexuality and the family. The traditional organizations like the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS), Young Socialists (WRP), and Young Communist League (YCL), which work among youth for recruitment purposes are particularly guilty of this. They recruit a lot of dedicated young people, thirsting for action and knowledge of socialism as an alternative world-view. They also provide social activities and cultural events. On neither level are the things they do adequate. The "education" mirrors school-type parrot learning, producing youthful hacks, molded in the party line and seldom able to communicate with other young people. Culture is often used in an underhand way: discos followed by a dollop of Trotsky. But more seriously, the culture is usually not an alternative to existing capitalist forms. Young Socialist events have included beauty contests and baby competitions. The general competitiveness and sexism of existing culture is seldom challenged. The limits to the politics and culture of these organizations guarantees a high turnover and frustration. A young girl in the LPYS told me recently that she "wished they were more extreme." At her previous meeting the topic for discussion, led by an older member, had been "How to Buy a Car."

YOUTH CULTURES:
ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

Some are already accusing the Left of opportunism in jumping on the youth bandwagon. But this misses the point. It is necessary for socialists to use the opportunity of youth radicalization to develop its political potential and links to the labor and autonomous movements. The question is how? With few exceptions the Left has never treated youth seriously as an independent category for analysis and practice. Instead it has been seen as a "temporary" phase of high rebelliousness which can
thankfully infuse socialist politics with energy and commitment.

But unless the Left does start to understand youth culture, no viable independent socialist youth movement can be created. Historical analysis shows that youth cultures have tended to mediate or substitute for more political consciousness and activity. The form and content of those youth cultures are posed in a very specific way in Britain. While youth cultures have existed in many other countries they do not appear to have played as significant a role. The sole exception is the USA. An article in Radical America in 1970 stated that "no issue has generated more controversy than the political implications of youth culture." Some American writers argued that youth culture was the link between the movement and the working class. Others even that youth was in objective terms a "nascent class." While both proved to be inaccurate, they reflected the fact that youth culture was a cross-class phenomenon. Flowing from the partial disintegration of American social institutions, middle-class kids had sparked off what appeared to be a "generational revolt." The counter-culture it created did on occasions reach down to working class kids at street level. But the uniqueness of American youth culture appears to me to have been a specific product of its own class structure—a structure overlaid by complex ethnic divisions, with a higher degree of mobility than most capitalist countries, resulting in a very large proportion of youth getting some kind of higher education.

The objective basis for a singular youth culture posing its own alternative forms simply never existed in Britain. Aside from a few emergent hippie capitalists and stoned utopians in the late sixties era of OZ, International Times and so on the notion of youth culture as a singular group/class was absent. Counter-cultural youth movements of the American type have been a tiny minority in Britain; the descendants of beatniks and hippies are barely in evidence today. Class not generation has been the focal point of cultural form and content.

The contrast of Britain with other European countries is just as sharp. Certainly in countries like Italy and France the political consciousness of youth is higher. Cultural and political questions have often been fused, not just in the famous examples of France '68 and Italy '69, but, for instance, in the mass campaigns of youth in Italy for free rock congresses which involved pitched battles with the police outside the stadiums. Today in Italy the Proletarian Youth and Metropolitan Indians are descendants, if extreme variants, of these traditions. The contradictions of class and capitalism in these countries explode directly in the behavior styles and consciousness of youth. Pupil and school movements have been extremely strong, drawing on long traditions of political consciousness and concern for the total society that characterize working-class politics. The fact that these traditions are dominated by the Communist Parties is not the point. It is still a political culture, with which youth interacts.

BRITAIN

In Britain there is an absence of socialist and Marxist political culture. While we are a society with rigid class divisions and strong class consciousness, it is primarily corporate. That is, the working class demarcates itself from other classes without posing alternatives at a society-wide level. This inevitably reacts on youth cultures, which remain sealed within those limits. It helps to explain, for instance, the lack of any ongoing and widespread pupils and school movement. While the hostility to schooling, boiling up now and again into specific actions, is undoubtedly present, there has seldom been any transference to an organized, general, and conscious form. This is partly due
to the relationship of the working class and its institutions to education. Unlike other countries, the British working class movement, because of its corporativeness, has seldom questioned education's nature and functioning. At least since the last war, its demands have been for "more," within the social-democratic and individualistic framework of "equality of opportunity." Within this context, indirect resistance and apathetic rejection have functioned as working class pupils' response. What went on outside school, including youth cultures, was simply more important.

So the class contradictions that have expressed themselves through and in youth cultures have been only indirectly political. But they are enough to dispel the potent myth of the "generation gap." There may be differences in attitudes on questions of sex, morality, and music between parents and their children: the solutions that young people adopt in different youth culture groups show the links to their parent's social positions in terms of class, race, sex, and region. Far from operating in a generational void, youth cultures are trying to work out at their own age level and in their own way (through forms of style and symbolism related to clothes, dancing, fighting, etc.) the problems that affect their whole class or group. Or as others have put it more theoretically: while they share the same basic problematic of their whole social class to capitalist society, working class youth cultures express themselves through specific sub-cultural forms.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH YOUTH CULTURES

By looking at the experience of youth cultures in Britain, the above argument can be applied more specifically. The immediate post-war restructuring of family and community life, combined with a measure of economic independence, laid some of the material basis for the emergence of youth cultures. The first overt expression in the working class were Teddy Boys. Adapting an Edwardian style fashionable among well-dressed upper-class youth (suits with wide-shoulders and narrow trousers, pointed-"winklepicker" shoes, bootlaces, etc.) they emerged in the late fifties era of the Tory slogan, "You've never had it so good." The Teds were a critical exploration of the "affluent" culture of the time. The limits and suspicions were reflected by their backward projection into the Edwardian era and influenced by the fact that most were semi- or unskilled workers. In particular the Teds represented a critique of the cultural limits of consumerism and the deadness of mainstream culture. What shocked many people was precisely the indirect challenge to the ideology of practice of consumerism. They got mass publicity and even generated debates in the House of Commons about bringing in the army, because of their favorite practice of smashing up cinemas. The Carl Perkin's song best sums it up:

"Well you can burn my house, steal my car, Drink my cider from my old fruit jar, Do anything that you want to do, But honey lay off my shoes, Don't you, step on my blue suede shoes."

Teds chose to invest meaning in their own commodities, creating their own style, a pattern repeated right through to punk. They did not last all that long and oddly enough it was partially connected to the music. Teds latched onto American rock n' roll. The British pop business simply did not generate any authentic home-grown equivalent to Presley, Berry, Gene Vincent and the like. Cliff Richard, Tommy Steele, and Adam Faith just didn't fit the bill and all became "family" entertainers in a very short time. The Beatles and Merseybeat were Britain’s delayed rock n' roll explosion. But
this curiously had little effect on the important youth cultures that followed in the early sixties.

MODS AND ROCKERS

The most significant exploration of the limits of the affluent society was that of the Mods. They were the first truly mass working class youth culture, although they included a lower middle-class component often based on the Art Schools. As the name suggests they had a much more direct and living relationship with post-war capitalism. The stylish clothes and types of behavior involved an attempt to realize the myth of social mobility, the idea that the working class was becoming middle class and could “make it” if they worked hard enough or were “intelligent.” The motor scooter was the key consumer symbol. As someone once pointed out, the aim was not to get from point A to point B, but to look good on the way.

These processes were made all the more clear by the sharp contrast to the group they are rightly coupled with — the Rockers. These two groups battled it out in English seaside resorts for a number of years. Although the confrontations were largely ritualistic they were enough to set off hysteria among the press and forces of “law and order.” The real confrontation was one of social style and location. Rockers, a less charismatic variation on the American “Hell’s Angels,” were a static and backward social group. Their primitive rejection of consumerism partially reflected their social base. This was primarily among small-town, rural, and unskilled sectors, compared to the Mods urban, semi-skilled, and routine white-collar base. Unmarketable in capitalist terms, often drawn on by reactionary organizations to implement “security,” or “order,” not least at rock concerts on both sides of the Atlantic, Rockers have remained unsurprisingly similar to the present day.

The decline of the mods in the middle-late 1960’s reflected precisely the deterioration of the imaginary social mobility. Living in perpetual hope that next weekend would be better, their unchanging material situation eventually sunk all the myths. All this was sensitively, if retrospectively charted by the WHO in *Quadrophenia* — the WHO along with the SMALL FACES being the main Mod groups. The LP starts with lyrics like this:

“Every year is the same,
And I feel it again,
I’m a loser, no chance to win,
But I’m the one,
You’ll all see, I’m the one.
[From “I’m the One”]

“I’m getting put down,
I’m getting pushed around,
I’m getting beaten every day,
My life’s fading,
But things are changing,
I’m not going to sit and weep again.”
[From “The Dirty Jobs”]
It ends with the realization that:

"You were under the impression, that: that when you were walking forwards, You’d end up further onwards, But things ain’t that simple."

[From "I’ve Had Enough"]

SKINHEADS AND HIPPIES

It was inevitable that something like Skinheads would be the reaction; the name being taken from their cropped haircuts. From exploring social mobility images, there was a return toward the safer, even caricatured stereotypes of the working class. In marked contrast to the Mods, they were dressed as if they had come straight from manual work — heavy boots, baggy trousers or jeans with turn-ups, braces, and shirts with no collars. The music was also more uniform and regimented: reggae (well before international acceptance via Marley, etc.) and very basic English rock bands like Slade. They had none of the sophistication in dance styles of Mods. As one of the Slade said, their music was to "stomp" to rather than dance. So the "alien" elements in dress and music were gradually eliminated. Mobility was no longer a theme. In fact the emphasis was on home territory. The most common graffiti became things like "Liverpool Boot Boys Rule" or usually some smaller geographical variation, right down to particular streets.10

Skins also tried to eliminate other so-called "alien" presences: most notably in attacks on immigrants and homosexuals. This was known as "queer" and "paki-bashing." Serious racism became an important part of youth culture for the first time. Skinheads provided the emergent fascist organizations like the National Front with some of their street shocktroops. The abuse and actions were directed mainly at Asians, whom they considered weaker. West Indians were still "niggers" but partly respected for their toughness and common music taste. Underlying this was the reality that despite racism, West Indians were not all that culturally different. Asians were, and became a more obvious target.

Again the contrast was provided by the far more middle-class hippies. As previous models, they had a more consciously critical relationship with bourgeois culture. Rather than explore the images of what they hadn’t got, as in working class youth cultures, they rejected much of the basis of consumer society. Their cultures have been more passive and reflective, concerned with finding alternative "inner spaces" to the poverty of bourgeois life. They were despised by the Skins because of their looseness, diversity, and hedonism. Skins were re-asserting the puritanism and chauvinism that are features of working class culture. This movement in youth culture parallels the decline of affluent images in the working class as a whole. The mid-sixties saw a massive growth of unofficial strikes and other forms of working class resistance in industry and community as the economic crisis began to bite.

It was noticeable, though, that not allMods drifted towards being Skins. The older, better-off and longer-educated often became what was known as "Smoothies" or even more working class versions of hippies.11 Class showed itself to be the most important source of variation in youth cultures: the Skins’ social location being primarily in the poorer sections of the working class. The ending of the previous polarized patterns was merely the beginning of a longer period (from very early to mid 1970’s) of diversity and fragmentation, where mass youth culture groups declined. This fragmentation was influenced by two long-term trends. First, people between 15 and 24 increased by 24% between 1951-69. There are now 8 million, with one million in further and higher education. With such growth there is bound to be diver-
gence, with more regional variations and stratification by age. Capitalism was discovering that there was not just a youth market, but mini-markets within it: hence teenyboppers, weeny-boppers, and the like. Second, the increased overlap of youth cultures is partially related to the changing class structure, the most important being the growth of lower-level technical and white collar labor, largely filled by the sons and daughters of manual workers. The resultant mix with lower-middle class and other elements has encouraged social exchanges of taste and style. The products included less sharply defined differences in musical tastes and clothes: particularly the fact that many working class youth are now into heavier rock, longer hair, and soft drugs, without the attendant hippie or counter-culture ideology.

Of course, the decline of mass youth cultures reflects also the inevitable blockages and circularity built into the process. If youth cultures exist as an expression of wider class contradictions, their very isolation guarantees they cannot solve them. The extremes of images — affluence and ultra-proletarian — had been explored and there was bound to be an impasse. The social contradiction at the heart of youth culture is still present in a different form in the movement that has broken that impasse — Punk.

PUNK

Punk has never been a mass youth culture comparable to Mods or Skins. But it has touched tens of thousands of kids and has had tremendous social and political effects. Therefore it is worth taking seriously. Its origins are rooted in class and culture. At the level of musical, cultural influences the ground was laid by a combination of American garage bands and British "pub-rock" emphasizing back-to-basics and live performances, with the addition of the effects of the very different New York punk scene. This was concretized in the person of Malcolm Mc'Claren, first manager of the New York Dolls and later the Sex Pistols. The first entrepreneur of Punk, Mc'Claren was influential in developing the decadent and nihilistic end of the punk spectrum.

But to deal with the immediate influences is in many ways to miss the point. The links to American punk are in many ways tenuous, nor are the Sex Pistols necessarily representative of the most important strands of British punk.

"British new wave music comes from underprivilege and class discrimination — its lyrics are bitter and optimistic. But America is too far gone, and its bands have retreated into selfish fantasies of individual reality." (Parsons/Burchill)\(^{13}\)

We have to take account of the declining material conditions of youth in the past years. Although this is manifested most clearly by the record levels of youth unemployment, it also interacts with the increased drabness of many jobs, living conditions, and cultural options. A lot of the lyrics of punk songs have taken up these themes of drabness and "no future." A number of bands and their most devoted followers have arisen from the big housing estates in the major cities. The need for white working class youth to fight back has been a central theme, notably in the Clash's "White Riot":

"Black men have got a lot of problems, But they don't mind throwing a brick, But white men have got too much school where they teach you to be thick. White riot, I wanna riot, White Riot, I wanna riot of me own.... Are you taking orders or are you taking over."
This may explain the indirect impetus, but it does not explain the cultural form. This has to be partially related to past youth cultures. The past few years have become more and more blurred. Music in particular has become more studio-based, emphasizing technical excellence rather than live performance and guts. Moreover it revolves round a star system where the lifestyle of the performer is obscenely separate from the fans. Rock had become well removed from rebelliousness.

This helps to explain the rawness and deliberate lack of sophistication of the music and of the dancing style of up-and-down pogoing. The movement started from an anti-star position expressed in the Punk slogan: ‘No Beatles, No Dylan, No Stones in 1977.’ Most of the initial publicity and links were made in home-produced fanzines, run often by working class kids. ‘Gobbing’ (spitting) at performers and each other, plus other forms of stylized violence should also be situated within this context.

The dress and other behavior patterns pushed a path between the previous styles of Mods and Skins. But while punk is not anti-style, as Skins were, it is not the affluent upward-looking one of the Mods. It is instead an eclectic parody of consumer culture, with odd bits and pieces (safety-pins, zips and buckles, bin liners, ripped clothes, fetishistic sexual outfits, etc.) combining with the more usual narrow trousers, baggy shirts, and spiky or cropped hair dyed in all colors of the rainbow. This inverted consumerism expresses a critical relationship with existing culture, not merely an exploratory one like Mods or Teds. It is best expressed in the lyrics of Poly Styrene and X-Ray Spex:

“You're just another figure for the sales machine.”

“I know I'm artificial, but don't put the blame on me,
I was reared with appliances in a consumer society,
In a consumer society,
When I put on my make-up, my pretty little mask is not me,
It's just the way a girl should be in a consumer society.”

In punk it is nowhere clearer that ideas are the style, they're worn. But unfortunately the anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, and anti-racist is not the only strand. Most of the punk bands have taken a stand against racism and against the National Front. Many have appeared in Rock Against Racism concerts (Elvis Costello, The Clash, Tom Robinson Band, The Buzzcocks, etc.) But alongside this there is a strand obsessed with authoritarian and decadent images, including militaristic and Nazi regalia. Bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees (“Too Many Jews for my Liking” from “Love in a Void”), Adam and the Ants, and to a lesser extent the Sex Pistols (“Belson was a Gas” was part of their later stage act), represented this aspect. Essentially, any youth culture which is an expression of a system in decline will tend to combine individualistic, nihilistic (masquerading as anarchism), and decadent strands with the kind of collectively political and critical music of people like the Clash and Poly-Styrene.

Of course, in many ways the lyrics of Punk defy conventional textual analysis. The chaotic jumble of images and continual high-speed musical forms upturns existing cultural forms in a subversive way. It is not a question of how progressive or socialist the lyrics are, but of simply recognizing their subversive effect. This is manifested strongly in the denial of the usual
love themes. But here again it carries contradictory elements, notably a violently sexist aspect. A number of punk songs carried sadistic and anti-women overtones: Blondie’s “Rip Her to Shreds,” and a number of Strangler’s songs, including:

“Someday I’m gonna smack your face, Somebody’s gonna treat you rough, You’re way past your station, Beat you honey, till you drop.”

And once again the Sex Pistols with the anti-abortion song “Bodies.” Despite the a-sexual clothes and images in punk and the greater active participation by women, the machismo chauvinism of male culture was usually reproduced. There have been a number of violent clashes at Rock Against Racism gigs when women have objected to sexist songs by groups who wouldn’t dream of being racist. This has sometimes not been challenged by the organizers of the Anti-Nazi League and RAR, anxious to keep their large following of young working class lads. A parallel and often worse problem has been anti-gay attitudes. Tom Robinson has had thousands singing along to “Glad To Be Gay,” at ANL concerts. But it hasn’t stopped physical attacks on gay contingents at ANL marches and general abuse, or appalling articles like:

“Face to face, they’re fat, fortyish, wizened Nazi wankers having flaccid fantasies of butch, blond Bavarian boys resplendent in leather hot-pants . . . In rock as in real life fascism is the last refuge of bitter old tarts.” (Parsons/Burchill in Socialist Worker 29th April 1978)

THE DECLINE OF PUNK
Punk is in decline and fast fragmenting. From within punk there have been the inevitable complaints from fans that its leaders have “sold out.” But while the inevitable process of incorporation into business cycles and ethics has gone on, it is the cultural and political contradictions mentioned above that are at the root of the decline. To break with the convergence and stagnation of existing youth cultures, punk needed to combine elements present in previous youth cultures (style, aggression, critique of consumerism, etc.) into a total critique that made punk important politically and culturally. But not only was this very combination inherently unstable, its very extremism, for instance its asexuality, could never engage and hold on to the mass of working class kids. It could never become mass, and always co-existed not only with large numbers of kids still into heavy rock or soul, but also minority rivals of Teds and Skins. Punks had fought Teds in London right through last summer, while Skins followed punk-skinhead bands like SHAM ’69. Both groupings in London were strongly racist and supported fascist organizations, particularly in their East End strongholds. Often these kids were, as one writer put it — “Young, ungifted and white” and usually unskilled inner-city dwellers. The main social base of punk has tended to be among skilled young workers and the lower-middle class. Certainly the many thousands who went on ANL marches often fell into this category. Punk is retaining a certain proportion of them, but other kids partially attracted have fallen away. Punk fashions and elements of style have influenced both disco and heavy rock scenes, but not the more important ideological elements. More importantly, we are seeing an emergent revival of Skins, particularly in the big cities. The poorer working class kids feel safer with the proletarian images of Skins: the maleness, the toughness, and so on. Fortunately, however, it is not a simple rerun of the past. While the football ground is still the physical location of the skinhead culture, the
political and social attitudes are at least partially different. Many are ex-Punks. They retain an identification with punk music and tinges of its political radicalism and anti-establishment attitudes. There is a "Skins Against the Nazis" movement. Only time will tell its long term social and political character.

In conclusion, what can we say about punk? Despite its decline it has been the most important British youth culture. Not only for the reasons outlined through the article, but because it was non-exclusive and open. Punks were prepared to unite with and learn to like the music of black youth, soul, and other forms. "It's our music," was the theme of RAR. Its gigs often combined punk, reggae, rock, soul etc. A favorite chant of Schoolkids Against the Nazis" was "Punks, Teds, Natty Dreads — Smash the Front and Join the Reds." While the left has sometimes been uncritical of punk, it has opened up space for the development of a socialist youth movement. This is not to say
that such a movement should be based on Punk. This would be narrow and self-defeating. But the Left should use the momentum created to build on punk, with the aim of creating a socialist culture among sections of youth that transcends the divisions and has a distinctiveness of its own.

PROSPECTS FOR A SOCIALIST YOUTH MOVEMENT

Unfortunately, the chances of such a movement’s developing are limited. The participation of youth in the ANL, RAR, and SKAN have encouraged some of the major (and some minor) Left groups to launch youth organizations or newspapers without a significantly improved understanding of the theoretical and practical problems of youth culture and organizing. While this may recruit to socialist politics a proportion of newly radicalized youth, it will not create an independent socialist youth movement. Instead it will create a series of fragmented organizations attached to Left groups, which will eventually decline as the wave of radicalization starts to come to a halt.

The Left must develop an analysis of the specific basis of youth oppression. Its non-analysis has provoked some comrades to look for theoretical alternatives. One solution borrowed partially from American sources is the concept of “ageism.” This seeks to put youth oppression alongside sexism and racism. But this will lead to more problems than effective solutions. Youth does have particular oppression as youth in some respects. There are stereotyped assumptions (“You’re just a kid,” etc.), structural aspects like the exploitation of apprentices as cheap, disposable labor, and the continued restriction of legal rights. But it is the weakest structural basis for a specific oppression because of its temporary nature. Class, even if in mediated form, is more important in influencing the form and content of youth cultures.

The problem at the level of political organizing is that the use of “ageism” can lead to ultra-left excesses. It tends to pose conflicts exclusively on authority lines. In an undifferentiated way the enemy becomes the teacher or parent. While there are and will be conflicts between youth and these forces, not only does it ignore the long-term unity, but also short-term expressions of unity as well. For instance, pupils, teachers, and parents have fought common battles against cuts in educational expenditures. It also tends to overestimate the oppressive features of the nuclear family and underestimate its dual character as a source of emotional and practical support for young people. The ultimate in absurdity was reached by the Italian “Metropolitan Indians” and “Proletarian Youth” in this respect with their demands for: “The abolition of the age of majority so that all children who want to leave home are free to do so, even if they can only crawl,” and “Anti-family militias to free young people from patriarchal tyranny.”

Ageism not only underestimates class, but also sexual and racial divisions. Girls have tended to be subordinated in youth cultures. Styles and images behavior have often been molded in the male image, although the impact of the women’s movement is slowly changing this. Given these factors, a lot of the articulation of demands tends to be male-oriented. For instance, the demand for places where young people can go and make love plus general demands for more sexual freedom are double-edged. Girls are often sexually exploited in these situations and want the space to define their own sexuality. This includes the right to say no — even to “liberated” lads.

Black youth also cannot necessarily be subsumed in “normal” youth demands. The exist-
ence of fairly exclusive black youth cultures is evidence of their independent needs. And the unity between all black people (for instance in the Black Students and Black Parents Movements) often appears to take precedence over age divisions, which are also undoubtedly present.

So while this article doesn’t offer any magic formulas for understanding youth oppression; we must be clear that any analysis and practice has to recognize the multi-faceted nature of that oppression. Which variable is dominant will depend on the specific context, whereas ageism tends to collapse all the aspects into one. The prospects for an independent socialist youth movement have advanced considerably in the past couple of years. But it is still primarily a task of building particular actions on questions of things like anti-facism/racism, anti-army recruitment, information provision on abortion and contraception, youth centers, building school organizations, and so on. Whether a more coordinated movement or genuine youth organization emerges remains to be seen. There are many things to be won and a long way to go.

NOTES

1. “Rock Against Racism” was started by left-wing musicians and activists in the cultural sphere in mid-1977 in response to Eric Clapton’s anti-immigrant and Bowie’s pro-fascist pronouncements. It really took off when the Anti-Nazi League was formed some months later. An initiative of the Socialist Workers Party, and left-wingers inside the Labour Party, it quickly involved many show-business personalities as well as the rest of the Left. RAR, although independent, became the cultural arm of the ANL. RAR involved some of the only people on the Left thinking about culture and politics, some aligned to the SWP.

2. The Young Socialists are the junior arm of the Workers Revolutionary Party: the most dogmatic and politically bankrupt fragment of Trotskyism in Britain. The WRP inherited the Young Socialists through an “entry tactic” in the early 1960’s.

3. Trades Councils are regional bodies which combine the unions of an area in delegate form.

4. Radical America, September-October, 1970 (and an issue the previous November) had a number of articles on the youth culture theme. The debate, despite weaknesses, was very stimulating, and certainly touched on areas the British Left had never considered seriously.

5. Described in a very perceptive way by Mark Naison in “Youth Culture in the Bronx” in the above issue of RA.

6. These magazines were examples of a number of magazines circulating in the late sixties attempting to combine counter-culture and politics.

7. This article mainly deals with working class youth cultures. The completely different problematic of middle class, Bohemian, youth cultures is probably more familiar to American readers. Some comparisons are made later in the article.

8. The relation between British capitalism and education is examined in detail in “The Crisis in Education,” a pamphlet published by Big Flame.

9. The best and only serious work done on youth cultures on the British Left is that done by the “Centre for Cultural Studies” in Birmingham University. This is collected together in an excellent book, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, Resistance Through Rituals, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976).

10. Football matches played a key role in Skinhead culture. This was the “cement” that bound together Skins rather than any musical commitment.

11. Smoothies was a term to describe male working-class youth more into the conventional cycle of going to clubs and meeting women. They kept up the affluent style of Mods. The working class hippies were often called “Trogs” — a caveman analogy relating to the long hair, etc.

12. Pub rock was a term used to describe bands who played live music on a basically London pub circuit, mostly of the rhythm and blues variety. A number of famous bands emerged from the scene, notably Graham Parker and the Rumour.

13. From The Boy Looked at Johnny, a recent book by the two leading new wave music critics. The book is arrogant and superficial, but contains an occasional sharp comment. It is issued by the left-wing publishers Pluto Press.

14. This has been sometimes reinforced by the sexism of Reggae bands, whose pseudo-Rastafarianism led one group (Black Slate) to state that they hated the National (pro) Abortion Campaign worse than the National Front.
15. The initials of SHAM '69 meant — Skinheads in Margate 1969. Punks who followed the group referred to themselves as the Sham Army. They were the focal point for a Skinhead revival and hard-core racism, condemned by the band itself.

16. David Robins, being interviewed in the excellent left-wing local paper in London: “Islington Gutter Press.” He’s also written a book called Knuckle Sandwich: Growing Up in a Working Class City, (Penguin). SKAN was one of the most successful sectoral offshoots of the ANL.

17. At the practical level there are great problems of repression and lacks of organizing skills/experience. We could do with a British equivalent of the American manual “Student and Youth Organizing,” (Youth Liberation USA); although British versions may be soon on the way.

18. Given the male domination of youth cultures we have to be careful about analyzing the position of women. Studies, including this one, tend to be done through male eyes and underestimate the importance of women. A counterweight is provided by “Girls and Sub-cultures,” by Angela Mc’Robbie and Jenny Garber, and “A Note on Marginality,” by Rachell Powell and John Clarke, both in Resistance Through Rituals.

20. The analysis of black youth cultures would need an article by itself. The past period has been notable for the spread of Rastafarianism in loose forms among West Indian youth as a means of defining cultural identity and the emergence of independent organization among Asian youth.

I am indebted to Mike Jones for stimulating discussion, advice, and criticism of this article.

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**APPENDIX: DIAGRAM OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH YOUTH CULTURE**

The diagram does not include all youth. Many have never differentiated themselves from mainstream culture. Black youth cultures are also not included, as they are not dealt with in the article.
WHERE IS THE TEAMSTER REBELLION GOING?

Staughton Lynd


Every occupation has its own ambience. We are familiar with the particular mystiques of farm workers, coal miners, secretaries. At this moment, perhaps no occupational group has more vividly impressed itself on the public mind than the truck driver, or, to use the archaic term which denominates the union, “teamster.”

These books by and large feed the romanticized notion of teamster exceptionalism. And in truth, the history of truck driving in this country since the 1930s leaves one gasping. Consider, for instance:

- The leading organizer of teamster industrial unionism in the 1930s was not Hoffa, but Farrell Dobbs, a member of the Socialist Workers Party. Dobbs preached the need for regional union organization and a national collective bargaining agreement. “I realized,” Hoffa later stated on television, “how right he was.” (Moldea, p. 28) Yet it was also Hoffa who, as a personal favor to Dan Tobin, then president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, took a hundred or so goons into Dobbs’ Minneapolis stronghold at the beginning of World War II, and, in Hoffa’s phrase, “had the war.” (Moldea, p. 32) As Dobbs points out, Hoffa was helped in winning it by the Minneapolis Police Department,
the courts, the mayor, the governor, state anti-labor legislation, and the government of the United States, which jailed Dobbs and seventeen others as the first victims of the Smith Act.

- Hoffa appears first to have been introduced to organized crime by his mistress, Sylvia Pagano. (Moldea, p. 25) Then, in 1941, when John L. Lewis’ brother Denny sought to organize Michigan teamsters for the CIO, a raid which the UAW declined to support, “Perrone, Angelo Meli, Frank Coppola, and other crime figures gave Hoffa the support he needed to drive the CIO raiders out of Detroit.” (Moldea, p. 37)

- Hoffa was sent to prison for jury tampering by the testimony of Edward Partin, who, it seems, was offended when Hoffa threatened in 1962 to assassinate Robert Kennedy. One of the many Teamster fellow travellers who pressured Partin to recant his testimony so that Hoffa might be released from prison was Audie Murphy, most decorated GI of World War II. (Moldea, p. 279)

- Harold Gibbons, socialist, boss of the St. Louis teamsters, womanizer, and eligible heir to Hoffa’s power, broke with Hoffa when, as both Moldea and Brill recount, Gibbons (then helping Hoffa to administer the national organization) ordered the flags at Teamster headquarters in Washington lowered to half-mast after John F. Kennedy’s assassination.

- The exhausted National Guardsmen who fired on students at Kent State University on May 4, 1970 had been transferred from policing a wildcat strike of teamsters. (Moldea, p. 265)

- The CIA, through, among others, its deputy director of plans Richard Bissell (a Yale man), and evidently with Hoffa’s help, offered the Mafia $1,000,000 to kill Castro. This was more than letting out a contract. Under Batista the American mob had substantial business investments in Cuban organized vice. Part of the deal between the CIA and the mob was that American gangsters use “their old contracts on the island to set up a small network of spies” so as “to pinpoint the roads that Castro might use to deploy troops and tanks in meeting the attacking forces.” (Moldea, p. 130, quoting Time magazine. See, in general, his Chapter 7, “Teaming Up Against Castro,” based in good part on the Church Committee investigation.)

- During the month prior to John F. Kennedy’s assassination, Jack Ruby talked on the phone with Irwin Weiner, chief Teamster bondsman (October 26); Barney Baker, a Teamster enforcer (November 7, 8, 11); Murray Willer, head of the Southern Conference of Teamsters (November 8). Ruby also called Nofío Pecora, a prominent member of the Marcello “family” (October 30), and Baker was in contact with David Yaras, a brutal man who had helped to organize Local 390 in Miami, and was a recognized go-between for Marcello and Santos Trafficante, with whom Ruby was jailed in Cuba in 1959. Government investigators allege that on November 21 Ruby was in the offices of oil millionaire H.L. Hunt at about the same time as Jim Braden, a criminal and Teamster aficionado who was also near and in the Texas School Book Depository the next day, November 22, when John F. Kennedy was killed. (Moldea, Chapter 8, “Coincidence or Conspiracy.”)

- During the early Teamster organizing, Dobbs, but not Hoffa, tried to improve the working conditions of owner-operators. When Hoffa was imprisoned in the 1960s his underworld supporters were bought off and thereby won over by Frank Fitzsimmons. Accordingly, Hoffa, when he was released from prison by Nixon, perforce turned to rebellious owner-operators and other dissidents in an effort to build a base for his return to Teamster office. Thus Hoffa supported the 1974 wildcat of the Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers against high gasoline prices.
Clearly incidents such as the above are the stuff of Teamster romance. They foster the image of macho, country-and-western truckdrivers, a little bit different from all others, "thinking and talking about their cowboylike pasts, presents, and futures." (Moldea, pp. 326-27)

II

However, truckdrivers are employees like other workers and face essentially the same problems. This is true even of owner-operators, whose essential contention in the work stoppage underway as this is being written is that they are not small business men, subject to the anti-trust laws, but employees protected by the National Labor Relations Act. Truckdrivers own their own tools (if owner-operators) or (even if company drivers) have more control over their conditions of work than the assemblyline worker. These circumstances contribute to the elan of teamster rebels, just as underground work, danger, and the cultural isolation of Appalachia no doubt have something to do with the remarkable spirit and solidarity of miners. Still it is a dangerous error, which offers no real help to the dogged men and women seeking to change the Teamsters union, to suppose that the problems faced by truckdrivers are fundamentally unlike the problems confronting miners, autoworkers, steelworkers, and the rest of us.

All major American unions remain in need of a thoroughgoing democratic revolution. Autoworkers cannot vote directly for their national union officers. Steelworkers cannot vote directly on the Basic Steel Contract. In these unions, filing a grievance is a good deal like dropping a stone into a very deep well. In none of these unions do members possess elementary rights of due process, such as the right to be present at proceedings where one's grievance (say, a grievance protesting a discharge) is discussed; the right to be represented by one's own attorney; the right to have a written record made of the proceeding; the right to continue on the job until finally shown to be "guilty"; and so on.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is simply a little more so. In Teamsters' organizing, the employer is often pressed to contribute for the right not to be unionized. Among teamsters, dissidents get their houses bombed (Tom Gwilt, William "Red" Anderson, Jim Leavitt) or, at least in New Jersey, get killed (Anthony Castellito). And as everyone knows, Teamster honchos invest their members' pension funds in casinos, phony real estate developments, the drug trade, etc., more brazenly than their counterparts elsewhere.

Hence the special pathos of rebellion among teamsters, as, in a similar although by no means identical context, among farm workers or Southern pulpwood workers. Evil is so dramatic. The simplest democratic decencies, such as the right to elect shop stewards, appear almost revolutionary. To listen even casually to the rhetoric of Teamster rebels is to appreciate how bourgeois democracy, and Christianity, have functioned historically as revolutionary credos. At the 1977 convention of Teamsters for a Democratic Union a keynote speaker invoked Magna Charta, Milton's "Areopagitica" (which he struggled to pronounce but understood perfectly), and the Bill of Rights. At the 1978 TDU convention Peter Camarata, the organization's candidate for Teamster president, described himself as a born-again Christian. There was nothing at all funny about either speech. These are the beliefs which enabled these courageous rank-and-file leaders to believe that they can, indeed, overcome some day.

Accordingly, Marxists who organize within the Teamsters union face a familiar dilemma. Only with their energetic aid, seemingly, can the bourgeois revolution in the union be
effected. Yet the fruits of successful democratic business unionism are all too evident. The mainline CIO unions — UAW, Steelworkers, and so on — offer one set of examples. Arnold Miller’s election to the presidency of the United Mine Workers and its sequel is another. One need go no further than the history of the Teamsters themselves to prove the point still again. The IBT Bad Guys — Hoffa, Fitzsimmons, Rolland McMaster, Dave Johnson — were one and all rank-and-file reformers in the 1930s. Dan Moldea, scathingly impatient with the so-called reformation of Hoffa’s last years, nonetheless affirms that in the 1930s Hoffa showed “unparalleled enthusiasm for... union democracy, rank-and-file control of officials and union policies.” (Moldea, p. 27) Moreover, “he was willing to make tremendous personal sacrifices...” (Moldea, p. 28) What happens to such individuals? Can it be prevented? Must union organization endlessly reproduce dull and corrupt bureaucracy as a result? Why should TDU, or PROD, or FASH, avoid the same fate, much less move on from union reform to socialist transformation?

Critical reading in this connection are Steven Brill’s painstaking and brilliant chapters on the typical Teamster member, Al Barkett (Brill, pp. 25 ff, Ch. VII), the typical honest local union officer, Ron Carey (Ch. V), and the atypical, tragic Harold Gibbons (Ch. X). Barkett, in the last analysis, supports the existing leadership because it has paid off materially for him. Carey, in the last analysis, opposes the existing leadership because it prevents him from advancing in the union without total sacrifice of principle. Gibbons, in the last analysis, compromised so long that when the time came to take his life in his hands and challenge Fitzsimmons for the Hoffa legacy, he was silent.

Brill and Moldea differ somewhat about the early Gibbons. Brill tells of his conversion to socialism at a University of Wisconsin summer school for workers in the Depression. Moldea, citing the McClellan Committee hearings, states that Gibbons “literally purchased” St. Louis Local 688. But I have no reason to doubt Brill’s account (pp. 356-57) of what Gibbons did with Local 688 in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the Cold War set in.

“Gibbons’ workers got free, unlimited hospitalization and medical care for themselves and their spouses and children — a benefit virtually unheard of in 1951. ‘Other workers, if they had any health protection at all,’ Gibbons explained, ‘had insurance. But that had limitations. If you had to have an appendectomy the insurance gave you $75. But the doctor charged you $150, so you were stuck. That was no good. Some of the guys I was organizing were making 35 cents an hour, and they couldn’t afford that. So we built our own Labor Health Institute with its own doctors [57 of them working part-time by 1951] that handled everything. It was the first prepaid health plan as far as I know, and the employers paid for all of it.’ Gibbons’ members also got free dental care (except for bridgetwork and dentures, which they got at cost.) They got free home nursing services, drugs and eyeglasses at cost, and free legal advice. By 1951 they also had pension benefits — at least four years earlier than other Teamsters locals won them.

When food prices rose rapidly that year, the union opened a non-profit grocery for its members. A few years later, Gibbons persuaded the employers to pay for a recreation center as part of the employee health program. Wholly financed by employers, it had become, by the early ’60s, an unparalleled complex that included an indoor swimming pool and gymnasium center for winter recreation and a 300-acre outdoor swimming, camping, tennis and golf-course complex in suburban St. Louis. In short, the workers had the same kind of country-club facilities that their bosses had. ‘Many of our
members were from the slums,' Gibbons said. 'I saw the health-and-recreation camp as the only way to get their kids some fresh air and a decent place to play in. It was the first time recreational facilities were ever defined as part of a legitimate union health plan that the employers could pay for. For the members and children who were black, it was the only decent place they could go, because everything was segregated in those days.'

Gibbons fought segregation in St. Louis. 'We used the union as a social force.' In January of 1952, two years before the Supreme Court's decision striking down school segregation, Gibbons published a union plan for the desegregation of St. Louis's public schools. At the time, public schools were required by the Missouri constitution to be divided by race. 'It was just plain common sense. But what a reaction the fuckin' thing got,' Gibbons recalled. One St. Louis resident called it 'a Russian booby trap,' in a letter to a local newspaper. When the civil-rights struggle in the South opened on other fronts in the middle '50s, Gibbons thrust 688 into the battle headlong: 'If you were black you couldn't get into a theater anywhere in the city of St. Louis except in the black community,' he recalled. 'And you couldn't find anywhere outside the black community for a black woman to eat or go to the john when she was shopping. Our Local 688 led that whole goddamn fight. We picketed the theaters. We broke 'em down. We went down and sat in restaurants while we were in drug stores. We raised hell. We busted the city wide open.'

Civil rights was not the only social and political front into which Gibbons threw his union's muscle. A system of 'community stewards' was established to put Teamsters power to work in the neighborhoods. In each ward with more than twenty-five Local 688 members, a community steward organized meetings where members expressed themselves about garbage collection, street lights and other local services, and pressured officials to take action. As Gibbons explained it, 'If, let's say, we needed a playground in that neighborhood, we'd have the steward get all our members in that neighborhood together and start raising hell. We'd call a meeting, and you know when you're talking about a playground it isn't just for Teamsters members. So our guys would get every goddamn neighbor to go to the meeting, too. In the 24th Ward, which was our best ward, we'd have 1,500 or 2,000 people, when the ward committee man might get 150 to his meetings. He'd die. And you know he'd listen to us.'

The union tackled citywide issues as aggressively as it did neighborhood service problems: 'The streetcar companies were raising their fares and cutting back on service. Well, we have an initiative deal in Missouri where you can get up petitions and put something on the ballot. I mobilized the membership to sign petitions, and we got enough to put it on the ballot. The result is we socialized the goddamn transit system.... We now have a bistate agency that runs all the busses.... When a private company fucked up the sewerage system in the county, we went out and got all the signatures necessary and got a metropolitan sewer district — established strictly on the basis of 688's activities....'

This picture of Local 688 in the early years of Gibbons' ascendancy provides a glimpse of what a union might be which insisted on facing community as well as workplace issues, which explicitly organized the class as opposed to this or that segment of workers, and which, in so doing, began to transcend the apparent limitations of unionism and to function as a political party.

Something like this is envisioned by the Marxist organizers within the Teamsters who
speak of returning the union to class struggle militancy. The objective tendency relied on to bring that change about is “the employers’ offensive.” Now, it makes good sense to follow Marx in supposing that as industries (truck-driving included) become more capital-intensive, and as the world economy gradually tilts toward publicly-owned, centrally-planned economies, employers in the United States will demand more surplus value, more productivity. What is much less clear is that this tendency is likely to radicalize the union as an institution. Surely, we will increasingly see unions roused to battle to defend gains of the past which they had supposed secure. But this is militancy, not radicalism. To suppose that “the employers’ offensive” in itself will make unions something other than the cumbersome, parochial, bureaucratically controlled oligarchies they have obviously are, is like the vision that fascism would bring about socialism.

III

I should like to speak from my own experience about a somewhat different scenario whereby the struggle for democracy in unions might transform itself into a struggle for democracy in the society at large.

Whatever else it produces, the struggle for democracy, decency, elementary rights in unions is likely to yield:

1. a network of friends, persons who will respond more readily and effectively to the next crisis than if their common struggle within the union had not occurred;

2. local bases of power, such as control of a number of local unions, which tend to legitimize a next effort because erstwhile rank and file members now speak from the president’s chair and on official stationery.

Even these modest achievements may come at a great price. The more oppressive the union, the greater the temptation to forget that the employer is the main oppressor. American labor law offers the extraordinary worker far more tools and freedoms with which to combat his or her union, than to engage the company. Union politics can become a sandlot wherein workers vent frustrated energy against one another. Too, even local union office makes one part of the system. The reformer who becomes local union president is expected to deliver for the rank and file to a degree which the power of both the company and the international union over the local make impossible. These contradictions place strain on the very comradeship which it is the principal purpose of all this blood and tears to bring into being. Let two close friends in a rank-and-file movement decide by lot which of them will run for the local union presidency and which remain on the shop floor; they can count themselves lucky if a year hence the latter, whoever it turns out to be, is not denouncing the former as a sellout.

But suppose, nonetheless, that the principal product of the struggle within the union is a group, with some small victories to its credit, some local union offices to legitimate its existence, and the beginnings of a point of view. What next?

For what it is worth, in my own experience the only objective situations in which I have seen working class Americans naturally and organically begin to consider essentially socialist ideas is when an industry decides to leave town. No doubt it is a localized version of the Depression of the 1930s. The authority to rule of local businessmen and politicians comes into question. Questions are asked: Who gave the X company the right, suddenly and unilaterally, to decide to leave? Why don’t we buy the damn place? Slogans emerge (I am quoting the signs at the picket line December 29 against closing the Brier Hill mill in Youngstown): “People not profit.” “Save Our Valley.”

The existing union structures cannot handle a crisis of this kind. Bargaining about investment decisions is beyond their experience, and seems
faintly un-American. For the big international union even the loss of 5,000 members is a relatively minor setback, readily made up by recruiting another 5,000 elsewhere. The official union, in a situation of this kind, attends to orderly funeral arrangements: who will get what kinds of benefits when.

Therefore "the group," ensconced in the local union offices which it took over in its union reform phase, begins to function as the actual union leadership of the area. The benefit approach is rejected. "First we try to save our jobs. Then, if we fail, it'll be time to talk about benefits." Community activists recognize in this newfound rank-and-file muscle the only practical hope of getting the corporation to change its mind. Thus the union reformers assume de facto direction of a broader coalition including church groups, some of the political leadership, and other local unions and local rank-and-file groups. Meantime internal union politics loses some of its glamor, for the question is whether there will be any union at all next year. And the most pragmatic member will be found agitating, not for a change in the department's incentive pay rate, but to "Keep Our Mill Open."

I am suggesting that rank-and-file rebellion moves on to radicalism when, by one route or another, it comes up against the control of investment decisions. Every industry presents this issue in some form. Thus truckdriving, phenomenologically so different from making steel, has its own version of investment decisions. Weak companies force drivers to stay on the road longer, drive faster, and if they fail, are merged by means opaque to the ordinary employee. Indeed, the perspective of "the employers' offensive" has in mind just such practices as seeking ever greater productivity.

There is thus no deep divide between the perspective of the Marxists working within the Teamsters, and the outlook I have been trying to suggest. Yet there is a difference. I believe groups like Miners For Democracy or Teamsters for a Democratic Union drift into an expectation that their ultimate objective is to take over and clean up the international union. I believe this perspective to be in error. For this great expectation, union reformers are repaid in broken hopes and inactive co-workers. It would be better, I incline to think, to project much more modest goals. Yes, there can be a "combined development" whereby the impetus of bourgeois revolution carries over into further struggle, but this comes, perhaps, more by the creation of networks of trust and local bases than by illusory takeovers of national institutions. Yes, union struggle can produce its centers of "dual power," but likely these will be local.

The organizing model I am proposing to Teamster rebels and others is a middle way between the labor strategy of the Old Left and the labor strategy of the New. The Old Left sought to take leadership in national unions. To Old Leftists, like those in District 31 of the Steelworkers union, once you take power in a local the next thing to think about is how to do the same thing in the region, and no sooner is regional office won than the national campaign begins. The New Left, on the other hand, has often disdained even the office of steward, let alone a position on the local union executive board. In a nutshell, I suggest that it is right to run for the offices of steward and local union president, despite the very real compromises involved, and wrong to seek higher position or to control the union on a broader scale. Radicals in local office, according to the view urged here, should think horizontally: they should reach out to their counterparts in other locals of the same international union, and other locals and rank-and-file groups in different unions in the community. Their aspiration, in substance, should be a "parallel central labor union", or,
in rare situations, control of the official central labor body to which all unions in a locality send delegates. Such institutions should be seen as places where rebels in various work settings can meet one another, and educate each other into a consciousness which, because sensitive to the circumstances of all involved, is performe a class consciousness. Local labor parties or some functional equivalent would be a natural next step.

The foregoing perspective appears to be workable. Since it is not superhumanly demanding in

the manner of national campaigns, it permits participants to remain human beings and therefore, to stay involved. I should think any one could make real progress in this direction in any community over a period of, say, five years. Perhaps this middle way offers an opportunity, as the song suggests, to take it easy but take it.

Staughton Lynd works in Youngstown and is attorney for the local chapter of Teamsters for a Democratic Union and for the Ecumenical Coalition of the Mahoning Valley.
TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Kate Ellis

Heaven is in your heart
my mother used to say
but my heart caught a chill
when the price of oil went up
and the heat shut off
before I’d done the dinner dishes.
After a while I stopped complaining
bought a real wool sweater
wore it all the time. “Keep you
much warmer,” the salesgirl said.
“Them orlon ones don’t do a thing.”
Last summer moths had a real good meal.
I say you’ve got no dignity
if you can’t keep warm.

Back in school they spoke
of holding fast your self respect
but it won’t bring back
the one present from my mother
that I liked: the brooch dad bought
for her when Mike was born. Sharp
I remember those three gold leaves
with pearls around the edges.
Maybe they’d have stayed at home
the ones that battered down
my door if they had something
they loved like I loved that pin.
When I put it on I was
someone with a past.

“My dad said heaven is loving
your neighbours like yourself
but you can’t love people
who live downstairs
when they haven’t even said hello
since the old pipes rusted
and water ruined their new couch.
Did they have to believe
the landlord when he told them it
was all my fault, I never used
a bathmat or a shower curtain?
Now he says the boiler’s broken.
Old buildings don’t make money.
Old women neither.

“Heaven,” says the man who runs
the grocery store downstairs
“is what the saints and martyrs have.
No one can take it from you.”
Once a month a check in the mail.
A bicentennial cup. A photograph
of my brothers and me in sailor suits.
That’s all the treasure I’ve laid up.
But I haven’t been myself
since I got that new police lock.
I dread going outside, even in daylight
dream of a horse I rode as a girl.
I ride bareback. He rears.
I do not fall off.

These two books are about youth cultures in England; they are good sources for those interested in pursuing themes raised by Paul Thompson’s article in this issue. Aside from the fact that they are intrinsically interesting, youth sub-cultures are worth studying because they form the daily cultural context through which their members’ political as well as personal consciousness is formed. Through participation in sub-cultures people also form attitudes and practices they carry with them in their adult lives.

But why, if socialists are concerned with large-scale social change and with the historical crises within which such change is possible, is such an emphasis upon the personal, daily lives of people important? It is important because democratic change, change that people make for themselves, must include personal transfor-

mation. As Paul Willis writes in the introduction to *Profane Culture*, “Big change is no change unless it changes the small: our common sense beings, commonplace habits, and accepted use of everyday objects.”

The study of youth culture is itself of fairly recent origin. As Graham Murdock and Robin McCron write in their contribution to *Resistance Through Rituals*, “Our modern images of youth and adolescence were essentially the creations of the Victorian middle class.” Fearful of socialism, some middle-class reformers focused on the particular problems of young people that made them susceptible to socialist agitation or other forms of non-conforming behavior. With the extension of education and a growing hiatus between childhood and employment, adolescence became important. The social construction of adolescence has been a recurring focus of social science. Yet because Marxists have focused on class as the chief analytic category, many implications of extended youth have eluded them. Wilhelm Reich’s attempts at organizing German youth around sexual liberation in the inter-war years was an important exception, stopped by the Communists before the Nazis had the chance.

These books are both products of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, which is an institute for graduate study and research founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964 and now directed by Stuart Hall. Both books combine the political concerns of socialists with an understanding of the age as well as class determinants of youth culture. *Resistance Through Rituals* first appeared as a double issue of *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, the journal of the Centre, and it is just that — a set of individually and collectively written working papers on the problem of youth culture. *Profane Culture* was originally a thesis done at the Centre and is the more finished and engaging of the two. Both
are influenced by New Left interest in culture as well as the rich tradition of English Marxist historiography. The contributors to these volumes study the activities of sub-culture participants, but, in the words of Stuart Hall, they are aware of the "difference between history from the bottom and history of the whole." Those recent historians who have written history from the bottom up have emphasized the active role of subordinated groups in making history. But they often did not adequately explain the constraints on people's activity and consciousness, their limitations and failures, as a "history of the whole" must do. These studies seek to encompass the power of mass culture and the transmission of parental values, and the activity of people in the sub-cultures as they transform those influences.

The first essay in *Resistance Through Rituals* is a collectively authored theoretical piece that informs much of the more empirically focused work in the rest of the volume. Paul Thompson took his perspective from this piece, which emphasizes that sub-cultures are formed by young people as they adapt, for their own ends, aspects of the cultural forms they have inherited from their parents and mass media and the commodity market. Because of fewer long-term familiar responsibilities, more time to hang out, young people have — more than children or adults — the capacity to choose from different cultural influences to create, not merely receive, their own distinct cultures. Out of this process cultures, or "maps of meanings," are created. The variety of "maps" produced by young people in England is shown in discussions elsewhere in the book of Mods, Skinheads, Rastas, and those living in communes. One essay, "A Strategy for Living: Black Music and White Subcultures" is about the U.S. as well as Britain. An essay on "Girls and Subcultures" begins to set out some of the issues for young women in sub-cultures overwhelmingly male in content. It is to be hoped that at some point the cultural forms which both affect and are created by women will inform more Marxist studies on culture and will not have to be separately included in anthologies as a corrective.

*Profane Culture* is a study of bikers and hippies in the late 1960s. It offers a sense of the active relationship that the young men in these two very different groups had with the mass cultural forms that surround them. The content of their interactions with the mass culture was structured by their forms of socializing as well as by their ideologies and practices toward the rest of the world, such as work, race, sex, parental values. So, accepting their subordinate position in the general social hierarchy, the bikers had in their own culture a posture of "...manliness, toughness, and directness of interpersonal contact..." through which they sought control and identity. Through their interest in their bikes they expressed an attitude of "assertion which stressed the importance of control." The hippies, in contrast, were more thoroughly critical of society, but were also more passive, more resigned and their "critique remained silent, and finally, tragically unorganized."

Willis argues that the musical choices of bikers and hippies express and constitute their different modes of opposition to the dominant culture. Neither listened to the current hits played on the pop radio. Each selected those elements of rock music that most suited their particular sub-cultures. "There... seemed to be a direct connection between rock music and fast bike-riding." The rock the bikers chose was the early rock and roll of the mid-fifties, a music that emphasized rhythm they could dance to. They chose 45s. Willis argues that just as they wanted control and mastery over their bikes, so they wanted to be able to control the sequence of records and did not want to have
the order imposed by the sequencing on an LP. Hippies also chose their musical environment, but they were into “concept albums” where each track is meaningfully related to those that precede and succeed it, as first exemplified in 1967 with the Beatle’s Sergeant Pepper. For them, “a single was too short. It was riveted to a limited feeling. It was unable to contain the sweep of real experience…” Living through drugs rather than bikes, they were less active in their relationship to music and sought meaning in the lyrics more than rhythm, by contrast with the bikers.

In both cases, then, Willis argues, “oppressed or excluded social groups can creatively select, develop and transform aspects of their environment to make their own distinctive cultures.” Yet their “maps of meaning” differed from one another, and while Willis does not develop it, the class basis of these sub-cultures explains much about the differences. Clearly the bikers were more working class and the hippies more from middle class jobs and background, with more formal education. The bikers were less critical of the organization of work, or racism, or masculine aggression than were the hippies. Although they “customized” their bikes — that is, they refused to accept the commodities as offered to them — they “made no attempts to apply these insights to their working situations — or even see any connections between technology in their leisure and the more massive application of technology: machinery in work.” Willis writes this as though we ought to be surprised; yet it is precisely one of the elements of alienated labor that competencies are narrowly circumscribed. The hippies, on the other hand, did criticize technological and bureaucratic aspects of the society, trying to live outside the constraints of the Protestant Ethic. But male hippies also supported male supremacy with ideological appeals to the “organic” and “natural order.”

They did not develop any viable alternative images of society, and their implicit criticisms of technology and science were wedded to irrationality and a passive ad hoc kind of community. They had no common projects of creativity or active resistance.

Willis’ description of the cultures that bikers and hippies created, and their active relationship to the commodity culture, is an important corrective to the top-down analyses of mass culture which picture people as receptacles into which the most profitable mix of commodities is poured at regular intervals. His appreciation of the inner coherence and attractive qualities of the very different sub-cultures does not blind him to their inherent weaknesses. His analysis of the structural similarities between the forms of social interaction in the groups and the inner structures of the music the groups choose is an important insight into features of groups that condition their cultural choices. Yet, in the end, Willis overstates his case. The capitalist culture industry itself can and does provide a range of choice — such as the variety of music available on AM and FM radio stations — without threatening, even enhancing, both profit and social stability. The point is not that the theoretical perspectives of the lead essay in Resistance Through Rituals is wrong, but rather that Willis goes too far in overemphasizing the creativity of the sub-cultures.

The political import of these books remains unclear, but the undogmatic move toward comprehension of people’s lived experience is surely preferable to knee-jerk judgmental assertions. The very title Resistance Through Rituals suggests the limitations of sub-cultural resistance to capitalist domination. Ritualistic resistance does not challenge the fundamental structures of the society or connect them with the daily oppression that sub-cultures seek to, but cannot, redress. Willis’ concluding chapter approaches this political dilemma. He argues that
aspects of each sub-culture are implicit critiques of the dominant culture and also of the political left with its blindness to the importance of cultural concerns. Yet, and here Willis adopts a tragic view, each of the sub-cultures is of a piece; it would be impossible to keep the positive aspects and shed the negative. "Every limit we mark is riveted to a peculiar strength. We cannot hail the one and condemn the other without recognizing their specific, particular, concrete forms of combination. Nor should we think that any particular category... can be... easily rectified while keeping unchanged other things which are valued."

While this is true, Willis seems to reify the culture itself, for the tragedy is only in relation to the "culture," not necessarily in relation to the people whose activities constitute the culture. In social and cultural changes, valuable heritages are no doubt lost; yet if these changes are consonant with a development of people's confidence in their capacity to remake the world, then such losses, real as they might be, are surely sustainable. The tragedy is not that the good and the bad are bound together, but that it is so very difficult to consciously and collectively transform the combinations and their constituent elements into socially coherent cultures free of domination. Since even self-conscious left organizations are so seldom able to create non-oppressive relationships and cultures, the left ought to be more charitable towards non-political cultures for not purging themselves of deleterious or socially reprehensible qualities. But modesty and charity towards rebellious cultures need not mean that the left cannot criticize, or assist people to restructure their cultures, or help people oppressed by particular cultures to escape. Just what that role is varies: the recent socialist-punk collaboration in the Rock Against Racism events in Britain is a current example. In the U.S. there were moments of convergence between hippies and political New Leftists; neither remained quite the same and parts of both were thereby enriched. In each of these cases, the leftists involved — whatever they have to offer — will be more successful to the degree that they can learn from as well as teach the people they are reaching out to. The kinds of studies in these books help to argue that point.

Allen Hunter
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Allen Hunter
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