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DREAMS OF FREEDOM

The American Family Goes Camping

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Interns: Susan Mitchell and Antonio Sousa.

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Q. WHAT’S 15 YEARS OLD AND PACKED WITH HISTORY, POETRY, REVIEWS, ART, HUMOR, ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY?

A. RADICAL AMERICA’S SPECIAL 15th ANNIVERSARY RETROSPECTIVE!

Coming this May, a 120 page special-format retrospective that will feature excerpts from much of the important writing and art that has appeared in RA since 1967. Each major section — RADICALISM RE-EXAMINED, FEMINISM, BLACK LIBERATION, LABOR, CULTURE, the MOVEMENT, AND PRE-REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLES — will not only present the RA perspective but also a wisdom evolved from the struggles we have all experienced. Our own editorial comments will be minimal. The pages largely speak for themselves. And, we think, speak eloquently.

INTRODUCTION

All of the reviews in our continuing section on recent radical history (both last issue and this one) are concerned, to varying degrees, with the problem of culture and politics. As we noted in the introduction to our last issue (15:6, November–December 1981), radical historians' treatment of this problem has changed: whereas culture once referred to a way of seeing the omnipresence of capitalism, today culture has become a label for the study of that which lies "outside" the workplace and political institutions. Paradoxically, as interest in forms of "cultural resistance" has grown, discussion of the question of political consciousness — sometimes misrepresented and dismissed as a question of political "correctness" — has disappeared. Or it has been raised within the categories of bourgeois historiography which the earlier view of culture sought to challenge explicitly. For us, this change poses important questions about how recent radical history, as a perception of and reckoning with the past, contributes to our conceptions of reality and to our ability to imagine and create a different future. While the introduction to our last issue described this change in general terms, here we would like to examine some of the specific questions raised by the work reviewed in both the last and present issues.

As Jim Green notes in his review of working-class history, radical historians have been conspicuously silent, or unspecific, about the contemporary implications of their work. Their revision of the older view of workers as the passive victims of industrialization has tended to emphasize the "heroic" aspects of worker resistance to capitalist discipline, especially through their defense of preindustrial traditions based on and within ethnic, religious, and family ties. This emphasis raises questions about the political implications of
defending such conservative traditions intact, which these works usually downplay or ignore.

Those implications are actually an explicit point of controversy in the works of nineteenth-century Populism reviewed in this issue by Billy Pope. As Pope notes, the focus of so much radical work on factory struggles has helped to encourage a view of rural resistance as intrinsically “backward looking”, a view which the new works reviewed by him challenge and revise. At the same time, these works raise new questions about the possibilities and limitations of organizing opposition to corporate monopoly without challenging the premises of private ownership or the structure of political participation which were basic assumptions in Populist thought. In particular, the debate between Lawrence Goodwyn and James Green concerns the ability of “radical democratic” movements to coexist within capitalism without losing their radical potential or the interest and support of many members.

An important question for us concerns the way both socialist and populist history do not, in general, incorporate feminist perspectives into their analysis. Working-class historians’ treatment of culture as an outside resource, for example, assumes the separation between “work” and “family” — a breadwinner perspective — rather than seeing it as part of the problem to be examined. It is also true that women are virtually absent from most of these studies, except when they entered the factory or became involved in community struggles related to workplace issues. Similarly, the problems posed for Populist organizing, as it moved from revivalist summer encampments of rural families and kin networks, to economic cooperatives among (male) farm owners, to electoral politics, are never confronted in terms of Populism’s patriarchal configurations. At most, male dominance is acknowledged, but the possibility that this may have something to do with the weaknesses and ultimate failures of labor or agrarian struggles is rarely suggested.

In abandoning or failing to incorporate feminism, this new radical history actually stands in a less critical position to the history packaged by mass culture and promulgated by the New Right. Traditional social history’s nostalgia for the tenacious survival instinct of the patriarchal family, the media’s promotion of an expurgated rootsmania, and the New Right’s invocation of the petit-bourgeois nuclear family, together represent a response to, and attack upon, the kind of historical memory encouraged by feminism and radical history during the last decade. In the face of this counterattack, many liberals and some leftists have urged a return to “pro-family” politics. Whether intentional or inadvertent, the uncritical embracing of culture “as it is” offers no alternative to this selective amnesia, and no challenge to this defensive political strategy.

Betty Friedan’s call for a “second-stage” return to profamily politics, is the context in which Marla Erlien examines the feminist theory of Zillah Eisenstein’s The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism. She reminds us quite clearly of the dangers involved in ignoring the more volatile issues of feminist politics, especially the issue of sexuality. This point is also raised in Rosalind Petchesky’s review of Linda Gordon’s Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right. Ellen DuBois examines some of the important feminist work on women’s sexuality in the nineteenth century. This work, like the work in primarily gay male history reviewed by Joseph Interrante (in 15:6), emphasizes the historical and political nature of sexual experience and identity, in a way which challenges directly our consciousness of what sexual liberation means.

It may be the relative newness of sexuality as
a topic that has allowed this kind of radical history to remain more flexible in the questions asked about cultural experience, about what makes or might make a community, and about how cultural experience can develop into political consciousness. In lesbian history, for example, the idea of nineteenth-century women’s “homo-sociality,” described by DuBois, has led to discussion about the implications of such relationships for the development of a lesbian sexual identity and lesbian politics. (Some of these issues were discussed by B. Ruby Rich in her article on Maedchen en Uniform in 15:6). Similarly, Linda Gordon, in her review of Ellen DuBois’ Feminism and Suffrage (15:6) urges historians of nineteenth-century women’s culture to examine more carefully the contradictory relationship between that culture and the development of woman’s rights feminism. Interestingly enough, this problem is analogous to the issue of culture and politics in working-class history, and the debate between socialists and democratic populists over the legacies of Populism.

In the face of New Right reaction, and the equivocation of some parts of the left in their responses to it, radical historians need to return explicitly to this problem of culture and politics. But we need to do this, as Jim Green notes, in a way which looks critically at both the older traditions and new solidarities of capitalist relationships. As David Gerber points out in his review of Eugene Genovese’s From Rebellion to Revolution (15:6) we need to avoid overly restrictive concepts of politics which downplay the importance of culture as the emotional and conceptual framework within which political consciousness develops. We especially need to challenge the idea that culture and politics represent separate categories of thought and action — a separation which, Frank Brodhead pointed out in his review of work on “social control” (15:6) is part of capitalist and patriarchal discourse.

As Brodhead noted, it is difficult to do this because these categories permeate every aspect of modern life, and are inscribed into the very cornerstones of education, science, and mass culture. Nonetheless, we need to question, as Linda Gordon suggested in her review of Dolores Hayden’s A Grand Domestic Revolution (15:6), the modern solutions of rational calculation efficiency, and economies of scale: not only, as she said, because they tend to smother the values of human caring and autonomy — clearly some of the values which have been condensed into “the family” by the New Right — but also, as Jim O’Brien suggested in his review of Native American history (15:6), because these solutions do not address the ecological consequences of capitalism’s destructive relation to the environment. As the Mexican novelist and activist Carlos Fuentes says in the interview printed in this issue, the West’s linear sense of history is nothing more than a “trap of modernity.”

*       *       *

An article on family camping in the middle of the winter? No, Radical America has not received any gifts of money, watches, or even real estate from the Florida Tourist board. (At least, none that we can remember.) Nor is our presentation of this article an attempt to stick our heads in the tropic sands of some sunny yesterday while the political climate in this country grows colder by the hour. Believe it or not, Phyllis Ewen’s and Margaret Cerullo’s examination of family camping addresses an important debate within the Left at this time.

The recent interest of some parts of the Left in citizen-action groups as a potential base for movement building has led to debate over the extent of democratic participation in these
Ewen's and Cerullo's study of family camping suggests that the populist assumptions about working-class experience may be as distanced from what actually goes on in everyday life as the populists allege radicals to be. As they argue, family camping embodies a critique of daily life which is expressed in and through leisure. It is a form of recreation which, in a number of paradoxical ways described in the article, deliberately breaks with the segmented forms of day-to-day life which are built into the urban environment. These breaks not only constitute one of the principal attractions of camping for the families who take part in it, they also enabled the authors to participate in, observe and comment upon working-class experience in an immediate way not usually possible in urban neighborhoods.

One of the exciting qualities of this article is the way the authors actually listen to what the members of the Worcester Family Camping Association have to say about camping, without dismissing it as escapist nostalgia or eulogizing it into an embryonic movement. As Ewen and Cerullo suggest, the attractions of family camping embody a self-conscious critique of work, domesticity and daily life that relies upon the products of consumerism and is realized within the boundaries of leisure time. Central to this critique are campers' experiences of and ideas about family life, which are condensed into an ideal of family "togetherness." Yet togetherness means different things to husbands and wives who enjoy in camping what they sense is missing from their lives outside the campground. (In fact, camping may not even be an "ideal" way of spending time for their teenage children, who not coincidentally are absent from the family campfire or barbecue most of the time.) Togetherness also means different things to retired couples, young couples, and single parents. And it is these dif-
ferent meanings of family togetherness which give rise within the WFCA to a conflict, described by the authors, over the right of two women and their children to share a campsite as one “family.”

We want to draw attention to the way in which the organizational structure of the Camping Association, the social arrangement of campground space, and the sexual division of camp work and play shape the conflict among campers over this issue. As Ewen and Cerullo note, the divisions of authority and privilege within the WFCA are manifested in the allocation of campsites: from the families of WFCA officials camping near the headquarters located in the big tent, down to the single-parent families camping along the “back street” of the camping village. While the divisions between public and private space are blurred in family camping, and constitute one of its main attractions for campers (especially for women), recreational vehicles and tents preserve a more private territory which particularizes each family within the more open, shared space of the campground. It is striking, therefore, that the issue of lesbianism raised by the demands of two women to be recognized as a family is discussed only within that more private space — which is where these people confront issues of sexuality in the world outside the campground, through the presence of gay relatives, for example, and the changes in relations between husbands and wives created by women’s involvement in the paid workforce and represented in abortion.

In contrast to these discussions, the issue debated in the public meetings of the WFCA is democracy: specifically, the unfairness of bending WFCA rules for the two women, versus the unfairness of Association leaders’ authoritative behavior. The issues of lesbianism and women’s independence, which women sense lie at the heart of the conflict, remain privatized behind the walls of tents and trailers. Their husbands’ view that lesbianism shouldn’t be an issue serves to render it invisible during the public meetings of a Camping Association membership organized through male heads of families. Hence the paradox that a vote which in effect redefines “family” away from this male-headed, heterosexual model, never quite challenges the organizational or spatial structures of the association which are based upon it. In this respect, the issue of democracy actually confines other issues of sexual politics which, from the beginning of the conflict, were an integral part of it.

Ewen and Cerullo raise important questions about what is or can be confronted within the terms which emerge from the culture of family camping as it exists. The important point here is that the issues of sexual politics are already present in the lives and consciousness of family campers. The authenticity of this account suggests then, that organizing strategies which ignore those issues may not only rest upon a somewhat patronizing view of working-class consciousness, and may not only fail to address some of the most immediate concerns which working people have, they may also end up supporting an undemocratic structure of association which excludes certain issues, especially women’s issues, from public consideration. In short, the “second stage” of feminist and radical politics may actually require that we move, not back to the individual campsite, but into the public arena of the big tent.

*   *   *

One of the reasons to suspect “modern” solutions to capitalist crises is their assumed technological determinism. Peter Rachleff’s analysis of recent and projected changes in the
US Postal Service questions whether management's introduction of new technology is either inevitable or progressive in its impact. Their article also offers a striking, and in some senses frightening, glimpse of what may be in store under the Reagan administration's program for capitalist renewal.

Although these changes began in 1970, the parallels between them and current strategies for reindustrialization are worth noting. After a nationwide strike by postal workers in 1970, broken in part by the use of federal troops, the Post Office Department was made a semidependent corporation modeled after private industry. This move toward "less government involvement" provided the opportunity and justification for postal management to apply science and technology in order, as Rachleff documents, to speed up, routinize, and regulate work and to reduce the skills and discretion of postal workers. These changes were often accompanied by, and accomplished through, the arbitrary closing of plants and their relocation elsewhere — a relocation which also greatly reduced the number of black workers. Yet these "solutions" failed to solve the postal service management's "problems" of inefficiency and insolvency. Management's response? More technology, this time electronic message systems.

Rachleff challenges capitalist notions of technological determinism by detailing the choices made by postal service management to use technology in order to gain complete control of production. At the same time, his analysis urges us not to romanticize the pre-1970 postal workers' skills or working conditions, nor to reembrace the alternative of government ownership. As a federal agency, the Post Office Department was a dinosaur, already the scene of deteriorating and degrading work conditions. The demands for worker management made by some local postal unions reject the dichotomy of public versus private corporate ownership which characterizes capitalist thinking among businessmen and politicians.

At the same time, reading this article highlights for us the ways in which our responses to struggles in the workplace can remain bound by the categories of capitalist experience — in this case, categories of workplace versus community, and of workers versus consumers. The demand for worker management raises numerous questions about the possibilities for worker and community control present in such struggles — political questions about the meaning of community involvement, the sexual bias of traditional definitions of skill, and the racism and sexism permeating traditional forms of craft consciousness. These are questions which we have discussed in past issues. Here we would point out another aspect which is dramatized by the postal service.

As a consumer service industry, especially one providing a "necessity" like mail delivery, the changes and struggles in the postal workplace affect us all in a direct and immediate way that does not happen in an industry like steel. Spiraling postal rates, standardization of letter and package size, lost mail, destroyed packages, long lines at post offices, and proliferating red tape — all of these, as Rachleff implies, directly related to management's attacks upon postal workers. They are also, in a sense, work which management-introduced technology has passed on to the consumers of mail service. Yet consumers usually do not break through the experienced inconveniences and disruptions in the service to make these connections. Indeed, if we vent our frustrations at all, we do so usually to the workers staffing post office counters, who are seen as the representatives of the postal service industry. The point here is not to romanticize postal worker
behavior. Rather, it is to suggest that this consumer-worker relation has elements of antagonism as well as potential solidarity. It is important then, for postal workers to also overcome the adversarial qualities of the service relationship by also realizing these connections. However, as the PATCO strike suggests, this is not an easy task; indeed, the PATCO experience suggests that a strictly consumerist argument (air safety) may lose sight of, or be pulled away from, the central issue, the quality and control of the workplace (controllers' work schedules and right to unionize).

DON'T BE SURPRISED

With great patience, Radical America has awaited the trickle-down benefits promised us and all Americans by President Bonzo. Our patience (and meager coffers) are now wearing thin — particularly with an onslaught of continuing postal rate increases and higher printing costs. Reluctantly, we’re going to have to raise our subscription rates and the price of single issues. Beginning with Vol. 16, No. 3 (May-June 1982), the following rates will go into effect:

- Single issues — $3.50
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Subs to prisoners will remain free.
Current subscribers wishing to extend their subscriptions at the old rates may do so until May 1, 1982. Just send us your address label. (Applies to individual subscribers only.)
"HAVING A GOOD TIME"

The American Family Goes Camping

Margaret Cerullo and Phyllis Ewen

Family camping is a pervasive and popular form of recreation in the United States. From May to October, American families on the move flow from cities, suburbs, and small towns for weekends and sometimes longer vacations. Equipped with tents or trailers and the paraphernalia of daily life, they seek out a dense and varied network of national and state parks and private campgrounds, some buried off in the woods and others at the edge of major highways. An arena in which mass culture and popular culture intersect, camping cuts across class lines. The wish to escape the realities of industrial culture and live out a fantasy of a different life is shared by families of the upper middle class as well as the working class; for working-class families camping is often the only affordable way to do this. For most of these campers, camping is squeezed into weekends or at most a week’s vacation, at sites that are seldom located more than an hour from home.

Our interest in family camping grew from our view of leisure as a site in which fantasy is enacted and fed, and from our interest in the power of mass culture to fuel and shape the dreams that emerge in leisure time and space. Our focus on working-class family camping developed only gradually. We became particularly interested in camping that involved large groups of people who camp together, often in “caravans” of recreational vehicles on bald open lots re-creating the jumble and density of a crowded city. At first this mode of camping startled us. It was wholly foreign and distant from our own images, shaped by backpacking and cross-country trips, of camping as an experience of natural simplicity or a cheap way to
travel. Both of us, however, found continuities between our own needs and dreams and those of the people we met camping. Yet many things separated us as well. Language, taste and style, in a number of ways, loomed as barriers between us, only to dissolve suddenly and re-emerge unexpectedly. Reminders of difference, unpassable gulf of experience, moments of startling connection, and glimpses of sameness — these threads that complicate the tale of class in contemporary America run through the story we will tell.

Observing the care and imagination with which people arranged their campsites, we guessed that a fantasy about family was at the center of the family camping experience. Indeed, we became increasingly convinced that family camping had little to do with camping as we spontaneously understood it, but had very much to do with families — as people worried about them and attempted to construct them in their free time and space.

While we began interested in the meaning of leisure in working-class life, we discovered as much about the meaning of family. Our ability to use family camping as a lens to focus this issue was enhanced by the extraordinary fact that during the time we spent with them, the members of the Worcester Family Camping Association intensely and urgently debated the question “What is a family?” in their official meetings and in trailers late into the night. The story of how that came to pass is central to what we will discuss.

Since camping takes place outside, it offers campers unusual occasion to eavesdrop on each other’s family life. It restores visibility and creates a public space for the intimate interactions that within our culture are normally hidden behind walls. The public nature of camping ensured that we were not the only investigators on the campsite. Our neighbors regularly observed and commented on our doings with the same interest we showed in theirs and they showed in each other’s.

During the summers of 1978 and 1979, we camped alongside family groups in some of the state and national parks and private campgrounds of New England.* As two women in a small canvas tent with minimal camping gear, we identified ourselves honestly as working on an article and photo essay about camping. As such we were accepted without much question into “family campgrounds.”** In some places we attracted a great deal of attention and interest; in others we were seen as just another camping unit. Everywhere we were treated with friendliness and openness. People fed us, covered our gear when it rained, and talked around campfires about all aspects of their lives.

Certain themes were expressed so invariably by the people we met as to constitute an ideology. Experiences that ran counter to the ideology were not integrated. Beliefs about a classless society, freedom, and family dominant in American mythology and consciousness are not easily challenged by lived experience. This article, is, therefore, about the mystification and denial of experience as well as about the critique of daily life that camping poses. In the first section we will explore the myth of equality that shapes the experience and the actual social organization of camping. The second section

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*We expect that our observations could be generalized to the rest of the country, but they may reflect the particularities of this landscape, social structure and culture.

**The experiences of our friends, other women camping together, suggest that our identification of ourselves as “working” rather than playing or living together was not irrelevant to the general acceptance and treatment we received at family campgrounds. We were regarded — rather paternalistically — as “girls” and, as such, only temporarily outside of families, able to be taken in by other families, and not disturbing to the familial social order.
moves to an examination of the experience of camping as fantasy of freedom and a critique of everyday life. The third section focuses on the centrality of ideas and experiences of "family" in this critique.

**BONDS AND BOUNDARIES: THE FAMILY IN A "COMMUNITY OF EQUALS"**

When you pull up next to someone, you don't know whether he's a doctor or a sanitation worker.

A critique of the city and a return to the simpler life was until the 1920s or 1930s a privilege of the upper-middle classes. The postwar mass market further democratized the critique and the fantasy. A short escape from the city is within reach for many. An important ingredient of the fantasy underlying the family camping experience is that in this simpler life, under the stars, all have become equal. While one can spend quite a lot outfitting the family for camping, the enormous differences in wealth and and the display of consumption that characterize American society are absent. It feels as if there is a more equal distribution of the goods.

It also appears to matter less what someone does in "real life" because the skills needed when camping are as available to sanitation workers as to doctors. They don't require an expensive education, but are learned living day to day. The work of camping is more or less the same whether one is camping in an Airstream (the Cadillac of trailers) or a small canvas umbrella tent.

The family campers we met actively seek out a leisure activity in which they feel a part of a larger community of "equals." The camping unit is the nuclear family and it is between families that the notion of equality is idealized. As we shall see, within the family the power relations remain by and large the same, although there are subtle ways that, while camping, they are changed and equalized. In any case, camping reinforces a vision of America in which differences in wealth are minimalized and in which, "no matter who you are, you are treated the same."

In fact, one would be unlikely to find a doctor and a sanitation worker on neighboring sites — unless, perhaps, the doctor were black and the sanitation worker white. Within a particular campground, with few exceptions, one tends to find people of similar class backgrounds. Indeed, for campers, this hidden reality underlies the feeling of being among equals. There is a definite hierarchy among campgrounds which reflects the structure of the world beyond the campsite. At the top are the national parks which have the most undisturbed scenic beauty, the greatest distance between campsites, and a camping population decidedly upper-middle class. These campers are typically on long car-vacations — often
cross-country trips — seeking out the vanishing pockets of natural beauty preserved in national parks. In the middle of camping's social spectrum are the more elaborate (and expensive) private campgrounds — like family summer camps — which have minimum stays of a week or two. Below these are state parks and, at the bottom end of the social hierarchy, most of the private grounds. The distance travelled by campers to get to the campground shrinks as you go down the hierarchy, as does the distance between sites (and in most cases the beauty of the spot).

For middle-class families, wilderness camping, usually at national parks, is a stripping away of the paraphernalia of middle-class life. Outfitting a family of four for comfortable, if not luxurious, camping can easily be done for about $500.

It is working-class families (or retired people for whom the trailer is home) who, if they can afford it, will invest in trailers or campers that can cost up to $25,000. The amount spent on a trailer that hitches to a car or a pop-up tent-trailer varies enormously (in part due to an active second-hand market), so that families of very different means can afford a "recreational vehicle" of some sort. "RV's" dominate the family camping scene.

A complex interrelationship between affordability, aesthetics, and lifestyle determines the choice of campground and equipment and the style of camping that a family chooses. An outsider can see evidence of "taste" and, through this, the expression of class. It is the subtle recognition of like tastes and styles that assures campers that they are among like-minded people.

Campers emphasized again and again that camping among like-minded people was central
to their enjoyment. They expressed both distrust and fear of groups different from themselves. While camping, they felt their belongings and way of life to be more secure.

Although the dominant "ethnic" group camping in New England is French-Canadian, the French identification is submerged. The overwhelming impression is of assimilation, of the triumph of American values and the American mobile nuclear family.

Inner-city blacks, Jews, Italians, Eastern Europeans, and Hispanics barely exist in the camping world. At a state park in Maine we met a working-class black couple escaping the woman's children for a short weekend. They came on a motorcycle and put up a small tent that fit over the back wheel and then anchored to the ground. Thoroughly citified, they were at a loss as to how to relate to the camping experience. They sat around reading and rereading the New York Times and worrying about the children. Some black families, assimilated into the dominant culture, share the camping ideology. At a smaller private campground in Massachusetts, amid white working-class families, we met a single middle-class black family of four. The parents were the only college-educated adults in the campground, and the only adults reading books on their vacation. Like the white families to each side of them, they talked about equality and community. They felt emphatically part of the camping scene. Yet, this was, in part, illusory. Others at the same camp ground complained of the "new element" appearing at the campsites and of the (black) teenagers causing trouble. And at least one camper talked about being "Jewed" by local farmers at an outdoor market. There was
an assumption everyone had the same relationship to family, religion, and foreignness, that one could tell Jewish jokes or Polish jokes without offending anyone present.

While a commitment to equality might seem to underlie the ideology of family camping, seeking out “a larger community of equals” and a “belief in equity” should not be confused. The family campers we met want to be with people who have similar longings and a capacity to act on those longings through family camping. Homogeneity, the sense of “being with one’s own,” is central to their experience of equality. A populist morality, with its attendant dangers, lurks beneath the campers’ fantasy. They have defined themselves and their desired way of life — partially realized in family camping — as what people do/should want. They presume to speak for lots of people, yet their imagery of the people is restricted. They distrust not only elites but also “the new elements.” The egalitarian impulse, extended only to “people like us” in fact projects moral criteria for “equal treatment.”

Lay of The Land

The camp site provides the physical basis for the sense of equality shared by family campers. For a fee ranging from $1.50 to $12.00 a night, each camping unit is given a standard “plot”: a cleared area big enough for a tent or trailer, room for a car, a picnic table and stone fireplace, access to running water, and in some campgrounds electricity. To these sites, families bring their personal belongings and expectations. In addition to natural boundaries (trees, bushes, small hills, or weed patches), clotheslines, curtains of towels or sleeping bags, tent ropes, carefully placed folding chairs, a cooler or picnic table, the rear of a trailer — all help to define the family turf.

At the same time that social distinctions are minimized within the campground, contrasts among the several types of campgrounds we visited suggested that the experience of camping remains confined within socially distinct “neighborhoods.”

At the state park at Sebago Lake in southern Maine, for example, the sites are located next to each other along dirt roads set out in an informal rectangular grid — the layout of a miniature landscaped housing development. The front door of each site faces onto the single-lane road, while the “back yard” abuts on the back of another site. Camping there in mid-June, we easily met our neighbors over the low bushes which separated our sites. These boundaries give the feeling of separateness while allowing a good view into the neighboring site, confirming to each camping group that the people next door are similar, doing similar things, and experiencing the outdoors and the camping rituals in similar ways. It is at once a feeling of being protected in one’s own home and yet accessible to the rest of the camping community. The borrowing and sharing which weaken the boundaries of households and are so much a part of the folklore of camping were evident — and yet here and later we learned not to intrude on people’s lawns without asking or being invited. But if boundaries are respected and crossed only with permission, they are not barriers to neighborliness. As two women camping alone, we were assumed to need care and attention. We were overheard having trouble with our stove one evening and within minutes help came in the form of our next-door neighbor.

Our immediate neighbors all lived near each other. The campsite became home for the weekend and life went on as usual. Paul, a Maine state trooper, and Carla, his wife, had guests on Sunday, friends who drove in from town to
have a cookout at the campsite. They, like our other neighbors, had simple camping equipment. Newly married, they were beginning to put down money on things that would give shape to their lives. Carla wanted her driveway at home blacktopped before starting a family. The weekend we met them they were in a tent; a week later they put a down payment on a pop-up tent-trailer,* the next step up in comfort, expense, and separation from the outdoors.

During the weekend, most of the adults we met relaxed on their own site throughout the day or occasionally visited neighbors. Wandering children forced some to the lakefront. The outdoors was met quietly sitting on a folding chair in a small clearing surrounded by some trees, clotheslines and other family campers. This and the preparation of meals occupied most of the time.

At the more middle-class Acadia National Park in Maine the distance between sites favors privacy and solitude (for communing with nature). There is less socializing between campsites in these parks, as families hike, climb, swim, fish, bird-watch, and explore in nuclear units. At a campground like Acadia we were reminded of wealthy suburbs where one can see the lights within a nearby house but not overhear conversations. After visiting Sebago Lake and some of the private campgrounds which are even denser, more sociable, we felt isolated and lonely at Acadia — eager to return to a friendlier neighborhood.

At Sleepy Hollow, a private campground in central Massachusetts, we tented on a small field. Most campgrounds in the Northeast have two kinds of terrain for camping: wooded areas where one can have the illusion of relative privacy and of being “in nature,” and open fields with campsites located around the periphery. Here at Sleepy Hollow the center of the field — a common area — was treated like a street and was used for driving to and from the site and for more public socializing: walking dogs, playing games, repairing vehicles, or hanging out with other campers. The family campers had positioned their tents or trailers with the doors facing outward toward the center of the field. Once again ropes, tables, coolers, cars, and garbage pails separated each small “house-and-plot” from the next. But here one is openly facing outward toward the other sites, observing and commenting on the goings-on. Only during meals or around the evening campfire does the family physically turn inward, showing backs to the field. The open field offers an opportunity for unabashed sociability and this is clearly the reason these campers are here. For some, being outdoors is part of the experience, but it is a comfortable and familiar “outdoors,” one that makes it easier to care for children (who are in sight) and to spend relaxed time with other people. To an outsider it resembles a parking lot, but to those who stay there it becomes a protected dead-end street, or perhaps a housing complex built around a common courtyard. The campsite counters the isolation in which most of the people we met live year-round.

As at Sebago Lake, residents of our field were weekend campers; the men work during the week throughout the summer. Many normal weekends are spent moonlighting or doing chores at home; these camping weekends renew energy, give family members time to be together, and offer a brief experience of living in a “neighborhood.” People return time and again to the same campgrounds, where they know the lay of the land and have made contact with other regular campers.

A number of sites in this private campground, however, are reserved for seasonal campers. At a summer rate, families leave a

*In 1978, these cost from $2,000 to $3,000 new.
trailer, a screened-in dining tent, and other equipment for two months and come and go as their lives permit. These people often take part in maintaining the campgrounds and in organizing games at the tiny swimming pool or social events — cards, a children's square dance, Bingo — at the lodge. A seasonal site has even more of the trappings of home as a parked trailer serves as an inexpensive summer cottage. A screened-in porch is often fixed to the trailer and potted plants or window boxes abound. Some have statues — like the fountains and swans found on front lawns in all kinds of suburbs. Or the site might be demarcated by rows of lights in the shape of owls or ice-cream cones. A name plate identifying family and home town is common. But there is no reference to a specific family's status. Decoration is neutral. There are no religious icons and no decorations associated with an ethnic group. People display their attitudes to life with aphorisms or cute names for their trailer-houses. The personalization of the site is to communicate uniqueness, but also sameness. It says to other campers, "We are the Joneses, your next door neighbors, a family very much like yours."

Near Sturbridge Village is another large private campground which surrounds an artificial lake. Around the lake, the sites are nestled close to each other among trees and these plus the hilly lay of the land create a feeling of near-privacy. The choice sites are lakefront and are reserved well in advance, but all sites have a "view." The other half of the campground is an immense open field which when empty is punctuated by picnic tables and electrical hook-ups on metal posts suggestive of a drive-in movie. When full, it becomes a camping city. It was here that we met the Worcester chapter of the North American Family Camping Association out on its June safari. The intricate social organization of family camping into a network of local and regional associations which hold regular summer-weekend "safaris," as well as camp shows and social meetings throughout the year, was one of our earliest discoveries.

We found a cross between America past and present: a small town re-created in this open field, yet with the destiny of a claustrophobic urban neighborhood. Two rows of recreation vehicles — there are no tenters in this group — lined a Main Street, kept wide enough for traffic on foot and wheels. People sat in small groups in front of the trailers talking, drinking, and watching the goings-on around them.

Men tended fires grilling hot dogs, hamburgers, and barbecued chicken while women kept one eye out for their children as they conversed. Children rode their bikes up and down the "street," played frisbee and baseball. Some adults strolled up and down, stopping to chat, to taste a new sauce for chicken, or to share a beer. Radios blared throughout the campsites, competing with the campers.
The Social Order of The Camping Village

Wandering through the maze of people and activity of the camping village, we discovered that the “neighborhood” had a social structure. People at the social center of the association had sites in the center of Main Street or at its edge where they were able to watch all comings and goings. Another row of smaller trailers and pop-up tents parallel to the main drag gave this camping city a secondary side street. Here, some of the late-comers or people on the margins of the association’s social networks camped in quieter surroundings. We also discovered a back street, three camp sites separated off from the rest of the families, arranged as a terrace. Three women, all friends from Parents Without Partners, lived on the back street. Here things felt different — quieter, less chaotic, and poorer.

These forty-odd families, with trailers packed as close as tenements, were escaping the city together, as they do once a month from May to October. We met them in June and later accompanied them as invited guests on their September safari in north-central Connecticut. Safaries are all planned within an hour’s drive. Although the group is loosely connected to the national organization of family campers and abides by its rules, the members’ fierce loyalty and energies go to their own chapter.

Membership in the chapter is a family membership. Dues are the same for a family of eight or a family of two. A nuclear family group is expected to occupy a single site on a safari and any visiting adult or child — even a relative outside the immediate family — is considered a paying guest. Any deviation from this can make other members of the association feel that the offending people are “sponging” off the group or trying to get away with something. The chapter is, after all, fair. People, wherever they come from, whoever they are, are treated the same — and expected to act the same.

The association cannot prohibit anyone from joining, yet the rules and expectations encourage people who are comfortable with each other to join and participate. Several members told us that it was in the chapter that they met their friends, people like themselves. This seemed to mean: people in nuclear families with no obvious ethnic or religious identification (although most were of French-Canadian background and Christian), with the men holding traditional working-class jobs (a small minority owned their own small businesses) and the women playing more or less traditional roles within the family (although some worked part-time outside the homes).

The lack of any strong identification with an ethnic community, church, or extended family seemed to be a motivation for joining the chapter in the first place. These are people without
any well-integrated social place. Their lives are characterized by job instability, geographic mobility, divorce and remarriage, and distance from relatives. They are isolated as nuclear families in small industrial cities. We were told by men that their workplace was too fraught with competition and distrust to be a source of social contacts and by women that they spent most of their daytime hours apart from other adults. An older woman, when her children had left home and moved away, had gone into a severe depression and had a "breakdown." She was saved by a sensitive family doctor, her husband's retirement, and membership in the camping association.

There is tension within the chapter between the belief that everyone is treated equally and the reality that some people have more power within the chapter than others. A small clique is reelected each year as officers, and although there are attempts by outsiders to gain seats they don't succeed. Though many resent the ingroup, the members feel safe with it. The tension is acted out in many ways. It can be seen physically in terms of space allotment. Supposedly, whoever arrives first — late Friday afternoon — is given first choice of sites and then slowly by Friday evening the camping city fills up. In fact, the people who assign sites save the best ones for the people with the most clout in the chapter. In June, as we wandered through the camping city, it became clear that the central people were centrally located.

Then in September we witnessed a struggle over site assignment. A member of the in-group and a democrat on the fringes, each with responsibility for the safari, vied for the right to assign sites. As trailers approached the field, the democrat signed them in and directed them to a site. Meanwhile the officer-in-charge, positioned at the other end of the field, intercepted and redirected. One was operating on a "first come, first served" basis and the other was saving spaces for his friends. The outcome was that the location of the trailers reflected the chapter's social structure almost as clearly as it had in June. This time the officers and their families made a horseshoe of trailers around the chapter tent located at one end of the main street. Here would take place the campfires into the night, the clambake, the more public socializing, and the officers' board meeting.

Power between men and women is unequal. Over half the members in the chapter are women, yet it is the men who run it. It is a "family" association with all the positions of leadership held by men, although officers are officially elected with their wives. In only one officer-couple is the woman the more active and she is, predictably enough, the chapter secretary.

The inequalities manifest through personalities and control within the chapter in some sense mirror the differences between members in the outside world. Although the officer-in-charge did try to make sure that his group controlled the central space on the safari, this group might have gotten what it wanted even on a first-come, first-served basis. They are people with somewhat more control over their daily lives than the rest of the members. They either own their own businesses or have working-hours that permit leaving the city mid-afternoon on a Friday, whereas others work late shifts or longer days and cannot get to the safari until after sunset. The men who run the chapter are more skilled at organization, public speaking, and argument, having had experience as small businessmen or in some cases as union officials. The president of another local chapter, a factory worker whom we met at the winter camp show, had taken public-speaking courses through the Family Camping Association after his election. Sometimes the exercise
of power in a camping organization is an alternative to mobility blocked at work; sometimes, it serves as practice for mobility still dreamed of.

Within the chapter, then, there are conflicts about equal treatment and disagreement about what is fair; yet the members continue to believe the ideal and argue their differences in terms of it. In spite of the tensions, the chapter is felt to be a place where they have a chance to be considered the equal of their neighbors. This belief in the camping community of equals, though more formally structured within the Worcester Chapter, is shared by the families camping in smaller groups on the other side of the campground.

Daily life evokes in the people we met an intense desire to "be equal" — i.e., not subordinate and not made to feel inadequate. Their rebellion against unequal treatment coexists uneasily with a profound internalization of the meanings of equality and inequality in American society. The resulting ambiguities and contradictions in consciousness are not silenced when they project an alternative. The space of equality, created so insistently against the force of the culture of everyday life, betrays its precarious insecurity. The identification of equality with a secure sense of place, and the fears of displacement which underlie it, constrict the ideal. "Equality" becomes sameness; the community of equals is homogeneous and tightly bounded against threats perceived to be coming from the "outside." Later in the next section, we look at some of these threats. But first we investigate the critical perceptions campers articulate of the daily life from which camping offers an escape.

At home in a public auto camp near Yellowstone Park, 1923. (Library of Congress)
GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL:
DREAMS OF FREEDOM

Today's man [sic] whether or not he writes his critique, spontaneously carries out in his own way, the critique of his daily life. And this critique of daily life is itself an integral part of daily life, realized in and through leisure. — Henri Lefebvre, forward to *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne* (2nd edition, 1958)

We met Charlie Corvalho on a hot Saturday afternoon in the center of the Worcester Chapter's crowded camping city. Charlie was large and loud, friendly and funny, and immediately engaging. That day he was wearing a bright yellow t-shirt with "Born Bad" emblazoned in silver and black on its front. Standing in the middle of Main Street carrying his ever-present beer and plateful of food, with kids tugging at him, in the center of constant noise, sociability, and used car deals, he was one of the first people to tell us that "the great thing about camping is that you really get away from everything."

If we had at first wondered what this crowded scene had to do with camping, even more puzzling was what it had to do with "getting away from everything." To the urban visitor, the trappings of life at the campsite seem to replicate some of the most obvious features of life at home: density, noise, lack of privacy, shoddy commodities, and food additives. Yet to campers it represents an escape from that life, and in many ways a critique of it. Discovering both what people want to get away from in their "free time" and what visions come to them as they imagine and create a different and freer existence became a central focus for us. We asked Charlie what he meant. "What do I get away from?" "The clock, mainly — and the telephone. I leave it all behind when I come here." For Charlie camping was an escape from his workday life. We once asked him whether the people in the family camping association were his friends, more, say than people he worked with (as a "comptroller" in a wholesale food business and part owner of a used car dealership): "Oh yeah. I have much more in common with them. We’ve done a lot together. I don’t have as much in common with the guys I work with. Just work."

The themes Charlie articulated — camping as an escape from work, from the clock, from the anxious demands of daily life, were almost universal. Hardly a person we talked to failed to mention getting away from the clock; for the working-class families we met, a day at the campsite is purposefully left unstructured — a chance simply to relax. "When we're camping we have no routine. We eat when we want." And many spoke of "really being able to relax — there’s nothing to do here." This perception was puzzling. It’s true that the pace of camping life was slow. And many people, particularly women, simply planted themselves down for the weekend, hardly moving from their sites. The family campers we spent most time with didn't fill their leisure with the projects characteristic of the more middle-class camp sites we visited — nature walks, bird watching, and such. Even swimming, when available, for the most part interested the kids rather than their parents. Nor did very many people explore either their natural surroundings or the towns adjacent to the campsite. In the one case that provided an exception to this pattern, it was the husband who went off exploring, sometimes with the kids, while his wife stayed behind, planted — unmoved and unmoving — close to home. At the same time, however, people were occupied constantly with all the tasks that encompass a family's weekend life. Thus the perception of "doing nothing" was ambiguous, and unfolding its meanings can be illuminating.
Many of the people we met camping, men and women, housewives and those with outside jobs, explained that they were unable to relax at home. "Working around the house," "working for yourself" on weekends, that postwar suburban dream of compensation for confinement during the workaday week, has become hollow for men like Charlie. The routinization and anxiety of the workweek, the feeling of being harnessed to the clock, are not so easily left behind on the weekend. "Free time" so sharply marked off from "work time" absorbs too much of its character, is unable to slacken its rhythms or discard its anxieties. Family campers aspired to another vision: not simply a release from work or the tasks of daily life but a reprieve from the rigid divisions of work and life, work time and family time, that encircle people's daily existence with an ironic same-ness. They sought and created a momentary experience of a way of life, an art of living, that defied those divisions.*

Camping involves (for both men and women) a lot of work: preparing and packing ahead of time, then a weekend full of entertaining, cooking, cleaning up, and taking care of the kids — without the comfort and conveniences of home. But the campsite is a timeless place in which, while working, people yet relaxed. Still, the social definition of work persists and campers describe themselves as doing nothing, echoing perhaps the perception of housewives who, after long days of housework, when asked "What did you do today, dear?" answer: "Nothing."

*Television, in our culture, is perhaps the most common timekeeper. It is a talking, moving clock which defines and keeps track of the rhythms of a housewife's day or a family's evening. It is striking that we never saw a TV set on a campsite or in a trailer.
Down Among The Women

For many of the men, getting away from work, its impersonality and disconnection from "life," was an obvious appeal of a weekend camping vacation. We assumed that for women, though, camping would only repeat and expand their daily routines as housewives. Yet women are among the staunchest supporters of this kind of vacation, and we wondered how they felt about it.

On the back street of the Worcester camping village where the "irregular" families live, we spent an afternoon with Pat Conway and Nancy Ware, who camped as a family with Pat’s teenage children, and Teresa Browne, camping with a man she had met through Parents Without Partners. Each of the women had a pop-up camper, the kind of tent that stretches above an apartment kitchen and extends to provide cramped sleeping space on either side. Pat and Nancy had bought their campers from two previous "parents without partners" who had moved into the main line of campers, more comfortable and elegant, when they married each other. The three women were working lazily together the day we met them, preparing vegetables on a table set up between their campers. Pat McCarthy’s two teenagers appeared and disappeared from time to time. They all loved camping, the women told us, in a now-familiar refrain, because it was a way to get away from everything. To these women, "getting away from everything" seemed to mean most importantly getting away from housework. Like many other women we spoke to, they talked of their houses as an enormous and endless burden. "When you’re sitting in your backyard," Teresa Browne said, "you think of a hundred things you have to do — dusting, cleaning . . . . Here there’s no cleaning. Who cares?" But getting away from housework didn’t mean simply a quantitative change, a matter of fewer tasks. More important for most of the women we talked to was the fact that camping transforms the social experience of housework. It is more public and visible and, frequently, is shared, Jean Bouchard offers a good example.

When we first met her, Jean Gallaso Bouchard was struggling to keep the barbecued chicken going while angling for a look at the pinup magazine her husband, Bob, his friend Wayne, and the kids were circulating, or rather each was snatching away from the others and running through the crowded campsite to savor a private peek. Finally she tore it from Bob, gave it to her son, and told him to take "Tish" away and give them a few minutes of peace so they could talk to us. "Tish," she explained conspiratorially, "is the overendowed woman in the magazine. All the guys here are big boob men."

The Bouchards were raucous and expansive, dark and ethnically distinct in a way most of the other campers were not, and always extremely thoughtful. They had just begun to manage a small apartment complex together. Although this job was demanding, exhausting, thankless, and insecure, Jean said that she preferred working together with Bob at home to his last job where a distant commute added to the time he was away. When we asked her why she liked camping, especially since it didn’t seem like much of a vacation for her, she made the same connection: Bob looked after the kids, helped cook, and was nearby.

Our initial skepticism about whether women experienced camping as a vacation from their routine as housewives was clarified by women like Jean Bouchard, Teresa Browne, and the innumerable others who echoed their experience. Husbands did more "housework" while camping than they typically did at home,
women reported consistently. Usually that meant looking after the children more and cooking, but in a way that both departed from and reinforced the division of labor within these families. Men tended to do the festive, visible, outdoor cooking at the barbecue (evocative, we sometimes felt, of the return from the hunt); while women continued to do all the routine work that turned barbecued meat into a family meal. Since most of the cooking was in fact done outdoors this redivision of tasks did provide real relief for the women. Once the planning and packing was done at home, women could relax more during the actual preparation of meals, their previous hidden “housework” now appreciated more than usual, as husbands helped to unfold the meals they had prepared. But more important than the actual division and number of tasks seemed to be the context in which they were performed. It was the rhythms of daily life, and the isolation and invisibility of housework, that women sought a vacation from. The sociability of the campsite and its relaxed schedules and standards seemed to ease the burden of the housewife’s chores for women like Jean Bouchard and Teresa Browne. Their enthusiasm for family camping had in it a distant image of family — one in which men and women and children performed the tasks that had to be done as they came up, in sight or within the experience of the others, a kind of family in which work and men had not yet departed from women and the home."

In a major way, what women like Jean were "getting away from" was the loneliness so many women experience in nuclear families. Tales of loneliness and isolation punctuated the stories of many of the women we talked to. Rhea Allard, a sixty-year-old grandmother, provides a particularly vivid example. Rhea grew up in a huge mill family of ten children that had migrated from French Canada to Fall River, Massachusetts. "Oh, everybody worked in the mills. My father, his sisters, my sisters and brothers. I remember when my sister was old enough to go to work. We finally graduated from salt and baking soda to toothpaste and pink soap in a tin. My husband went to work when he was fourteen. His father had a mill job for him as soon as he was old enough to sneak him in. He was only making twenty-five dollars a week as a weaver then in 1935, with five kids. With my husband working, they took home fifty-two dollars between the two of them. I only wish my husband had the opportunity to develop his talent. We’ve had a lot of fun in our marriage, especially the later years. For eighteen years, he worked nights. It was kind of lonesome when I was young." "Did you want a big family?" "No. We couldn’t afford it. My kids came four years apart. I didn’t measure. It just came: four, four, four. That was the most pleasant time of my life. I was lonesome so far from my parents. If it wasn’t for my kids I woulda gone bananas." Rhea also worked in the mills for sixteen months, "doing the combing," until her first child was born. "I was stunted going to work." "Were you glad to leave?" "No. I missed the company of the girls. You’re lonesome when you come home to have a baby. My sister came to help take care of my babies. I was so lonesome."

The desire to escape loneliness was echoed in the experience of other elderly people, men as well as women. They, too, found themselves isolated by the processes that streamlined living units, pared families down, left them "stripped for action" — for the constant mobility in

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*It is perhaps this integration that explains why the Bouchards regarded their kids' interest in pornography so benignly here. We wondered whether in the fragmentation of ordinary family life it might not have represented a threatening move away from the family.*
search of jobs that we encountered so often among the people we spoke to.

Ellis and Mary Robbins, for example, are a retired couple in their mid-sixties who used to manage a motel in Maine. They camp in a small trailer, cozy and comfortable, with two rooms (separated by a kitchen and bath) ingeniously designed with furniture that converts from tables to eat or play cards on by day to a double bed and extra bunks at night. Theirs is the RV that young couples with small pop-up tent campers, two kids, and only bunk beds dream of. Vases of artificial flower, knickknacks on the window sills, and a painted plaque out front that announces "This Rig is for the Birds" indicate that the Robbins' made their trailer their weekend home.

"We're a family," Ellis Robbins told us when we said that we were doing a study of family camping, indicating with a sweep the surrounding campers, "a camping family." Eight smaller families, all with their own vehicles, he explained, camp together regularly all summer, going off by themselves on weekends when the camping association hasn't scheduled sarafis. This sprawling "camping family" includes three generations: the Robbins' and Hazel and Herb Wilmott (another older couple they have known for years through the same church where Ellis and Mary met), the Robbins' daughter, her husband (Charlie Corvalho) and their small children, as well as friends and some relatives within the daughter's generation. The space their camping family filled for the Wilmotts was one emptied as their own children married and moved away. Hazel especially talked of being "terribly depressed" when her children left. Her description of married life — with almost constant moving and changing jobs — suggested the central place her children occupied in her life, and the isolation their leaving home threatened.

The Robbins' and the Wilmotts and their friends recreated an extended family in their free time, away from the isolation that spaced the weekends they were together. For many young couples we met, however, camping provided the opposite experience. Living in duplexes or more crowded quarters with the parents of either husband or wife, for them camping meant getting away from the extended family. It was a time for husband and wife to be alone without the watchful and intrusive presence of parents, always nearby, always lurking, often disapproving.

A Sense of Place

Images of confinement — to work, to home, to family, to routine — and of isolation ran through these discussions. Others focused on camping as a release from confinement in space, a move toward the outdoors, away from a spatial routinization which campers readily associated with the city. Ed and Betty Carver, a couple in their fifties, repeated the description of camping as "getting away from it all."

Ed Carver is a galvanized pipe welder. Betty worked full-time at the Humpty Dumpty Potato Chip factory in Portland, Maine, for twenty-four years, but recently took a part-time job till two in the afternoon so that she could watch her granddaughter after school while her daughter was working. They began camping regularly at Sebago Lake State Park only last summer after they took a trip to the Smokeys with friends. For the Carvers, camping meant getting away from the city, a weekend vacation which they described as a relief from being hemmed in, "packed in all week like a cord of wood." Sebago Lake State Park, with its campsites more widely spaced than the ones drawn up by family camping associations on open fields in public campgrounds, did provide
spatially a less urban experience. But people in the densely populated camping towns also described their experience of camping as a release from city life, obviously attaching different meanings to the city. The question of what campers associated with "the city" became a tangled and interesting one. Many people were preoccupied with a fear that their things would be stolen, a fear often spoken in contrast to a time "when nobody used to worry about money." The threat at the campgrounds was from a "new breed of people" sometimes characterized as "vacationers" to set them apart from regular "campers." This recurrent wariness puzzled us, as people who expressed it were seldom able to report that anything had been stolen from them or their friends while camping, nor did we hear of any thefts during any of our camping trips. People sometimes acknowledged that they were generalizing from other experiences of "the way things are now" and "how much life has changed." But even when we asked about experiences at home, the campers we met had almost no tales to tell of being robbed or mugged.

Camping as an escape from the city was less successful than the flight from the clock and other routines; city fears, it seemed, were harder to leave behind. The fears that people brought to the campsite were vague and menacing, but vividly associated with "outsiders" and often explicitly with the city. They re-emerged transposed into an obsession with stealing and "vacationers." They began to cast their shadow on the meaning of a vision of "getting away from it all" that persistently invoked an earlier and simpler time.

For the family campers we met, "getting away from it all" meant getting away from the contained rhythms and space of industrial life. It meant getting away from the isolation of women in houses that had become prisons of housework and consumption. For some, it was getting away from the confinement of being in extended families. And it was getting away from the new breed of people who lurked in the city.

If "getting away from it all" represented an escape, it was an imperfect one. Family campers searched out a new frontier each weekend, at the same time within and against the civilization they sought to leave behind. If it was an industrial nightmare they sought to escape, it was the products of industrial civilization that offered themselves to aid and abet their escape. If it was an escape from work and the clock they envisioned, they found the very meaning and experience of leisure defined and circumscribed by the images and rhythms and moral valuations of work. If they sought to leave civilization behind, they brought with them to the "wilderness" their fears of change, of outsiders, of disorder — new terrors apparently fostered by the very social order that seemed to
shield them from a fear of nature, fear of want. They gave collective expression to a need for security, for a sense of place, a need to which moralism and the establishment of various kinds of order have traditionally responded.

Family campers collectively established a boundary across which they took themselves each weekend, often in caravans of recreational vehicles, a boundary against the industrial culture that circumscribed their daily lives. They created a community of relaxation and sociability and safety, a community of self-reliant, like-minded families. But the community that emerged was in part a defensive community, tightly bounded against outsiders. A struggle over how that boundary should be drawn will engage us in the next section. For now, we are left with the paradox of a critique of daily life in contemporary America, a resistance to its terms, a revolt, however, deeply tangled in the web of the culture it defies.

KEEPING THE FAMILY TOGETHER

The power of families lurks somewhere in most of our lives. Even when they’re no longer central to our daily activities, the families we grew up in linger in our dreams and imaginations, our worries and our guilt. And they form a tangled line to the families we are struggling to create or avoid or transform, to define ourselves within or against. While we have learned to think about the family as a political institution, about its structure and functions for capitalism and patriarchy, its meaning in people’s lives and imaginations has been more elusive.

Our starting point here is the view that images of family compress enormous social tension as well as individual dreams and fears. In part it is images of family, often different from anybody’s experience of real families, that people are attacking or defending or surrendering with difficulty in the important social movements we confront — from feminism to the New Right. This section begins to probe the multiple, ambiguous, and contradictory meanings that family encompasses for the group of working-class people we met camping.

Some of the most perceptive observers of contemporary leisure (like Henri LeFebvre, whom we quoted at the beginning of the previous section) have tied it to a need for a dramatic and definitive break from daily routine — not only from work and its compulsions, as we discussed previously, but also from family life. The people we met, however, structured their leisure around a polar-opposite need: the need for a break from lives that kept them away from their families, that separated family members in time and space. The people we talked to often wanted to “get away” not from but to their families.

The kinds of daily pressures that create difficulty in finding time to be together as a family are suggested by the following glimpses we caught of people’s lives from the campsites. We met Carla and Paul Laurence camping on the one weekend in six that Paul has off from his job as a Maine state trooper. They were our neighbors at Sebago Lake State Park whom we mentioned in the first section. An affectionate and appealing young couple, they counted on their hard work and careful planning to ensure their mobility at least a rung up from the large French Canadian northern Maine mill families they both had grown up in. Their vision of mobility included the assumption of “companionate marriage,” and they shared housework as well as friends and an interest in tennis and movies. Carla was a medical secretary who worked a steady nine-to-five job; but the highway patrol took Paul off not only on weekends but several nights a week as well. “How do you ever see each other?” we asked them. Paul laughed. “This way.”
Vern and Ellie Dihlman, a couple in their mid-thirties whom we met at Sleepy Hollow, camp regularly around central Massachusetts with their oldest friends, Peggy and Chet Walker. The two families are linked by a tie between the men, who have been friends since high school. In fact, Vern and Ellie’s marriage was practically arranged by Chet who designed as a plan to overcome their shyness that they should meet first over a CB radio. After ten years the match appears successful, but they find it almost impossible to see each other, let alone sleep together, since they work nonoverlapping split shifts.

Other families echoed the experience and the problems of the Laurencnes and the Dihlmans. Chet and Peggy Walker also described camping as stealing away from home to be together away from the telephone that often calls Chet back to work on the weekends. For the Walkers, this involves a delicate balancing act; neither of them is willing to jeopardize Chet’s new mechanic’s job, which rescued him from the truck driving that used to take him away from home for weeks at a time. Brad Richmond, another trucker, also used to work away a lot on a regular run from Portland, Maine, to Boston. Now that he has his own rigging business, he doesn’t have to. He and his wife, Beverly, talked vehemently about how much they hated it the other way. They got into camping, they explained, when they went off one weekend with their kids at the invitation of friends, “We got to spend time together. And we realized we never do. We’re too busy.”

A consistent theme emerged from these conversations. The separation of work and home, and the increasing demands of family survival, have wrought havoc in family life. Many people turned to camping in response to wanting some time to “be together” and to “be a family.”

The problems and pressures on families are visibly and urgently on people's minds. “My family was never close,” Bob Bouchard explained, “Now I bring them all together, three times a year, from both sides, and we camp. We all eat together. We eat the whole time.” Jean Bouchard looked thoughtful for a minute and then was even more explicit: “Camping is a way to keep the family together.” This was a perception volunteered again and again, particularly by women. “This is the only time to really be a family. At home everybody’s off in their own direction.”

What was striking was the extent to which, for most people we met, “being together” as a family didn’t seem to imply or require being alone. Carla and Paul’s need to be together alone lasted half the weekend; friends from the city with their children spent all day Sunday with them — and the two of us who had already been added to their party. Vern and Ellie and Peggy and Chet actively created an extended family on their weekends away. If anything, it seemed that the family ideal of “being together” required other people. The nuclear group was too small to obtain the needs for connection and socializing that people sought from families.

The threats to family cohesion that campers most readily identified converged on the demands of family survival — jobs that took men away, split shifts, and the incredible busyness of life at home. The role of sex in couples’ desires to be away and together interested us, but proved elusive. Among all the campers we met only Peggy and Chet Walker talked regularly and openly — in fact incessantly — about sex. For them, camping meant getting away to an undisturbed — lusty and relaxed — sex life. Their sleeping arrangements on the campsite provided one tent for the kids, keeping the second for the adults — which they
shared with the Dihlmans. This pattern of separate tents for kids and adults occurred frequently when an “extended family” camped together. In trailers, the adults’ bedroom was separated from the children’s sleeping space by the common living space of the trailer and by a door for even more privacy.

While in part camping offered a practical escape snatched away from the demands of jobs that pursued people home and structured family life, it also contained a symbolic meaning: it suggested another time, another way of life, another kind of family. “Real families” as they lived in people’s imaginations, and particularly as women envisioned them, were families in which men and their work stayed closer to home. Communities of women to counter isolation of housewives were absent from the lives of many of the women we met. The geographical mobility that separated them from mothers, sisters, and friends, and the constant moves that seemed characteristic of their lives, had taken a toll.

Women looked inward toward the family for social connection, and in the absence of husbands, many held on to their children. But this was a tenuous hold; the centrifugal tendencies tearing families apart could not be escaped by a weekend flight to a campsite, and people, particularly those with teenagers, knew it.

“Camping with the family,” passing weekends away from friends and actively at home, held limited appeal for teenagers. The effort to hold them through the “teen club” established by the family camping association was feeble, attracting mainly the children of the association’s officers who were either forced into it or genuinely enjoyed replicating the adult structure of boards of directors, officers, and constant meetings. Sometimes kids came grudgingly but pleased enough to be with the children of their parents’ friends or bringing along their own. Dressed-up and made-up the entire time for Saturday night in town, they would spend the weekend in or close to the car, listening to music, sneaking time to make out when the adults were preoccupied.

If camping failed to keep the children from “going off in their own direction,” other new threats to family cohesion were also reflected on the campsite. In many of these camping families, women whose kids were finally in school (and some whose weren’t) were taking jobs outside the home; others were returning to school to become practical nurses, secretaries, or beauticians. And men, it appeared, had begun to worry about their wives straying too far from the hearth.

The afternoon we encountered them, Brad and Beverly Richmond and Brad’s cousin Jack Meade and his wife Barbara were carrying on about “Germans.” “You’re just an old German,” Jack said to Brad, as Brad complained about shucking corn for dinner. “You’re a German yourself,” Barbara chimed in. “They’re all Germans,” added Beverly. We wondered what was going on. “I’m a German,” Brad announced to us, puffing up to his full two hundred pounds: “Germans believe in the rule of the man, the law of the husband.” These cousins provided an extreme version of a pattern we were to observe often. Men actually did help their wives with housework on the campsite, but they often accompanied their crossing of role division with ritual assertions of male authority. To many of these families, women’s and men’s roles were in a state of transition and confusion. Beverly Richmond was one of the many women planning to return to school for a retraining program. The traditional family that camping re-created (at least temporarily and at least in appearance) provided a kind of reassurance that men (and sometimes women) seemed in need of. If house-
work regained visibility on the campsite, the tasks of planning and gathering the stuff of family meals clearly belonged to the women. The inside/outside distinction operated with the force of a sacred, if unconscious, taboo. Men participated in all varieties of outside activity, from cooking to organizing sports equipment, but never crossed the threshold that marked the inside of the trailer as women’s domain.

Family camping continually evoked a past that was rapidly slipping away. This perception of another time was reinforced as we watched families setting up their campsites in a ritual reminiscent of homesteading: husbands cleared away leaves to make an elaborate site for a home, and set up the tent, while wives prepared the cooking which the men would often share later. Family campers established a traditional family identity with a visible correlate — a little plot of ground. As discrete units, these families formed a respectable community, whose internal lines of authority were clear and firm and whose control over recruitment left disturbing influences behind in the city. Or so it appeared.

In fact, the families we met camping encompassed a broad spectrum of arrangements for practical and emotional survival and support, a kaleidoscopic picture of the ways Americans currently live. An ideal of an intact, nuclear family of “one mother, one father, and their unmarried children living at home,” was present as the norm in the regulations of the family camping association. However, the core of nuclear families we encountered was surrounded on the campgrounds by parents without partners, young couples like Paul and Carla not ready to have kids, retired couples whose children were grown and gone, intergenerational families like the one structured by the Robbins’ and the Pendle-

tons, single and divorced people camping alone or in pairs, and back-street families like the one Pat McCarthy and Nancy Ware created. Even more disturbing to the traditional family image many campers sought to re-create, divorce and homosexuality were part of the family and neighborhood experience of many people we talked to. They emerged with surprising frequency as topics of conversation and reflection on the campsite. People whose struggle was to keep the family together lived with newly visible social and sexual realities which challenged the security of the traditional family and the grip of the family ideal. Our outsider and temporary status in people’s lives perhaps made us useful sounding boards for people who were trying to sort out the meanings of the changes for their own lives. Chet Walker sat down one afternoon, stretched back for a long talk, and opened with a discussion of his discovery that his brother-in-law was gay. “First I was furious, barred him from my house, and thought he was a ‘sucker.’ Then I had to think about it and realize that he brought out all my own fears and inhibitions. I had to accept him and see that I was the sucker.” Abortion was another troubling issue that people were interested to talk about. Paul Laurence, the Maine state trooper raised in a strict French-Canadian Catholic family, brought it up out of the blue. “I don’t believe in abortion. It goes against the morality I was taught. But, I can’t help thinking ‘I’m a man, and I don’t have the right to keep a woman from making that decision. It’s her body.’”

This kind of thoughtful and reflective self-examination, as well as reactions more akin to Chet’s first angry refusal of his brother-in-law, took over everyone’s conversations the weekend the Worcester Family Camping Association confronted the threat of lesbianism and the problem of what a family is.
The September safari of the Worcester Family Camping Association is the culminating event of the summer camping season. A lobster dinner on Saturday night (for those who can afford the extra five dollars a person) concludes the vacation period of relaxed weekends, more time with the family, and freewheeling sociability. It is a bittersweet time of reminiscing about the summer that is slipping away and reluctantly looking forward to the long winter. As special guests of the association in September 1978, we participated fully in the safari weekend. Our old friends the Bouchards, "wagonmasters" in charge of coordinating the weekend and more harassed than usual, met us on arrival and assigned us to our site. Friday, the power struggle over site assignment we described in the first section emerged. As the other "wagons" struggled in, and eventually found their way to a site, we greeted friends lazily, all of us tired from the week and from preparing for the weekend. It was an early night, with a quick meal and quick to bed.

On Saturday morning the campground thinned out when the members went on a hayride and most of the rest played softball at the invitation of a blaring loudspeaker, "Good Morning Campers and Softball Fans. A Game is Being Organized on the Main Field. All Ages, All Sexes." We attended the business meeting of the board of directors, so we could "see how we operate here". (People were always extremely generous in inviting us along to "typical activities" that we might want to write about or photograph. So we attended many a "typical card game" or "typical social activity" and ate a lot of "typical food," which we much preferred to a "typical board of directors meeting." ) The reports of the various subcommittees (the scholarship fund, the teenage club, the camp show) and information about getting more NAFCA (North American Family Camping Association) patches and jewelry proceeded routinely and quickly. We were most interested in the undercurrent of griping from the women near us (members elected to the board automatically bring their spouses along) as their husbands volunteered for more responsibilities ("He's the director and I get all the work"). We were also struck by how closely the financial records were kept and monitored ("We need better reports to know exactly how much it costs us to put on a ham and bean supper" and debate about whether the treasurer should be reimbursed for toll calls made in the line of business). This reminded us of the appeals of family camping mentioned by many of these families ("Where else can you take a family of four on a vacation or a weekend and have a total cost less than fifteen dollars?").

As the meeting seemed to be winding to a humdrum close, the president, an overbearing and unpleasant man ("His heart's as big as his body," we were told before we first encountered his full three-hundred-pound bulk) introduced an item of new business. "Two families came to this weekend in one trailer and paid as one family, as a way to save money. They were trying to hide in the woodwork. I think we have to abide by the rules. Unless anybody thinks we did wrong in objecting." Barbara Boucher, a gritty woman, on the board in her own right, intervened. "But it's a single woman. Probably she felt: why should she as one person pay thirteen dollars and others with four or seven pay the same." The president would have none of this: "They joined FAMILY camping. They should have joined a singles club." Barbara was intimidated, though nods of support came from Sally Warren sitting next to me. After more loud explanations from the president, she beat a retreat: "OK, you're right: If everyone could pay a different rate, there'd be mass
confusion.” The item was tabled and the meeting proceeded to a hasty close. Rather dumb-founded by this unexpected and still confusing passage of events, we strolled off with Sally, who quite upset, explained what had happened.

Pat Conway and Nancy Ware, departing from their usual custom, had come this weekend in one trailer and occupied one campsite as a family. The president and some of his cronies had demanded a guest fee from Nancy on arrival, defining her not as a member of Pat’s family but as a guest trying to “hide in the woodwork.” When the Bouchards and Sally’s husband, Dick, officially in charge of the safari weekend, learned about this they were upset and troubled, sensing both high-handedness and discrimination. But neither couple felt able on their own to challenge the president’s actions. By the evening after the board of directors meeting, however, the campsite was buzzing. As word of the controversy spread, everyone tried to sort out their reactions to the president’s treatment of Pat and Nancy.

At the end of the field dominated by the officers, their families, and their friends, the sentiment was against Pat and Nancy, and the more public snubbing of the women took place under and surrounding the big tent. On down the line, feelings ran more toward the two women and their right to camp with the group. Support grew around individual family fires and around the kitchen tables inside trailers. During the weekend, the incipient support for the women was still found behind these closed doors; the public space, controlled by one group within the chapter, rang with condemnation.

On the surface, the issue was one of fairness. Pat and Nancy were two families, it was argued, camping on one site. They were trying to get more than others, to be treated specially. The community of equals, precarious at best, was threatened by this transgression.

At first, support for the women centered on the crassness and cruelty of the confrontation with them and on the fact that the president had bypassed those officially in charge of the weekend in taking his action. Thus, what was “fair” and “equal” treatment was debated. But Jean Bouchard finally clarified what else was at stake. “They think they’re gay. That’s why they treated them that way.” “That doesn’t matter,” Bob argued. “It’s none of anybody’s business.” “But that’s what they think,” Jean insisted, “and that’s why there’s so much trouble. They don’t want them in the organization.”

The Bouchards were discouraged and troubled. The Family Camping Association was an important social context for them, and their dream of being accepted into its mainstream social circle was beginning to collapse. “It’s not right,” Jean said. “I don’t want you to think I’m a woman’s libber. I don’t agree with lesbianism for myself. But a lot of people are gay now. It’s not right to exclude them or to treat them badly.”

We spent most of our time the rest of the weekend back down among the women. Pat and Nancy, Joan Davis, an old friend of theirs from Parents Without Partners, and Sally Warren gathered Saturday night in Joan’s camper. The conversation late into the night was reminiscent of an early consciousness-raising group. We all talked about our lives, our histories, our dreams and disappointments. We talked about relationships with men and women friends, about our work, and about how men treated women at work and in families and in the society at large. Identifying us as feminists because we were single women and on our own, they plied us with questions about how we arranged our lives and how our friends
did, whether there was room for both work and intimacy and whether we found it from men as well as women. We talked about sex and abortion, and children, about deciding to have them and deciding not to. They wanted to know everything about feminism and women's groups, and about the new possibilities they represented for women. They were interested in discussing the option of not getting married and not having children, choices which had never presented themselves in their lives. The issue of lesbianism, however, was never brought up.

Throughout the evening Dick Warren or Paul Davis would appear at the door of the camper and then nervously retreat as they realized we were deep in conversation. It was almost as though the inside of the camper, always women's space, had been reclaimed, invested with new meaning. Paul Davis was clearly troubled by the turn of events. A gentle and sensitive man, he wanted to belong and be accepted by the family camping group. He already took an enormous amount of razzing from the other men about the dilapidated truck he used for pulling his trailer — an apparent displacement of other anxieties he evoked in them. His sympathy and understanding of fairness and decency were clearly with Pat and Nancy, but like the Bouchards he realized that his principles might finally secure the wedge between him and the mainstream of the association. It was as if this community, so tenuously held together, was beginning to break apart along all the fault lines usually latent within it.

Sunday was an uneasy day and many families decided to leave early. We agreed to keep in touch with our new women friends, and we learned from them a few weeks later that the October meeting of the association would be devoted to the question "What is a family?" with the immediate purpose of settling the issue of Pat and Nancy's treatment. For reasons we could never fully understand, these women deeply wanted to belong to the chapter and be accepted, although they did not fit the norm and remained socially marginal within the organization. They had decided to fight the organization's rules which excluded them from its definition of "families," newly confident of themselves and of support from others in the association, at least from their "women's group." The October meeting was held at the Grafton House, a restaurant and bar near Worcester. The meeting was packed and an incredible tension hung in the air. Nancy and Pat's supporters were there in force: Joan Davis and Paul, her husband, Sally and Dick Warren, the Bouchards, Teresa Browne, and Barbara and Jim Boucher. The rest of the members were a mystery.

Pat chain-smoked, more nervous than usual, and Nancy looked over the speech they had written for her to deliver. She first raised the question of the treatment she and Pat had received from people with whom they'd associated over an enjoyable and friendly two-year period, people they felt owed them respect and decency, and from whom they demanded an apology. She then moved on to the central issues. The officers of the association who had "given them a hard time in September" based their action on a refusal to consider Pat and Nancy's campsite living arrangement a family. Nancy, drawing confidence from her "understanding that quite a few people in the chapter are in sympathy with us," contested this view. To the association's definition of a "family" as a mother, father, and their unmarried children, she opposed a view of a family as a group of people who shared the tasks and troubles of daily life. She charged that in September she and Pat had been discriminated against as single parents and demanded a refund of the
extra fee. "We have camped together many times, in fact with the chapter many times, the four of us in one site." She concluded "We're a family. We camp together." And Pat added: "There's nothing wrong with us but we go together." They insisted that their view of fairness be submitted to the entire membership for a vote. The atmosphere remained incredibly tense and troubled when she finished. The president blustered defences and explanations, becoming louder and more domineering as they became more incredible. "I'm not agreeing or disagreeing with you. I just want to explain that the problem in September came up because of the rules of the state of Connecticut. Every adult had to be registered in case of an emergency. If the state police came in and looked for someone, then we'd be in violation of the state laws. These are little things, but things we had to consider when we decided what rule applied to the two young ladies." A vote was taken. Pat and Nancy prevailed overwhelmingly.

There was a complicated sense of elation in the social time that followed the meeting. Nancy and Pat were triumphant, and their close supporters shared their pleasure and almost disbelief at their new-found strength and power. Everyone had a sense that something important had happened. But the exact significance of the events remained uncertain. Some members of the association, like Bob Bouchard, cast their opposition in terms of the leadership "needing to learn not to push people around." Others, like Jean and the women's group, had different perceptions of what was at stake. They sensed that fear and anger about lesbianism underlay the debate. And they had begun to perceive that the leadership's defense of the traditional family against people 'trying to hide in the woodwork' was in part a defense against independent women. But the issue of the fear of lesbianism was never raised in public debate, except in a most oblique manner by Pat ("There's nothing wrong with us").

The officers had discovered a limit to the arbitrary power they were accustomed to wielding within the association. Subordinated and powerless in most of the rest of their lives, they had created an internal hierarchy through which, beneath the official picture of an association of equals, they exercised a petty tyranny. We had heard complaints about the leadership before the September events, but they had never generated a real challenge to its legitimacy. In their treatment of Pat and Nancy, the leadership confronted an important test of the limits of their power, and failed. They provoked an opposition which began to question the assumption, implicit in the family ideal that all still shared, about where men and women could find intimacy, support, and caring in their lives. Their opponents reached toward a vision which extended the substance of their family ideal beyond any traditional family form. In a moment of crisis they redefined the boundary of their community in a way that left the relationships within it profoundly challenged.

CONCLUSION

Family camping embodies many anticapitalist yearnings and a dream of a different life. Preindustrial visions and populist fantasies live in people's imagination and shape the dream: of a life that is whole, an unchanging community close to the natural world in which work is related to survival and families are held together by shared work and physical proximity. It is a dream in which there are no great inequalities and in which the market does not determine human relationships. Yet paradoxically, these preindustrial fantasies tie people more tightly into the market. Mass production and mass
marketing have made family camping possible for working-class people. Families go further into debt in order to make the investment in camping equipment. The experience of nature is mediated by commodities. And at the upper end of the spectrum, brand names carry status. Groups more exclusive than the North American Family Camping Association are sponsored by the corporations that market the luxury RV's: Holiday Rambler Clubs and Air Stream Conventions.

The dream is filled with contradictory images and mixed metaphors taken from mass culture which represent the past, the exotic, the basic. Images of work juxtapose hunting and gathering with corporate hierarchy. Homesteading exists side by side with fraternal organizations. Wagonmasters and boards of directors compete for time on a monthly safari. A large, shiny RV, christened "Ramblin Rib," is plugged into an electrical outlet on a bounded field. The nomadic community communicates on CB radios. This nostalgic vision has no history; it is a mass cultural creation which blurs critical understanding.

Family is the glue that holds the fantasy together. For the campers we spent time with, it is a central defining idiom. In the absence of other experiences or ideas that might create and extend bonds, the family is left as a powerful ideal. Men and women play house in a miniature world and see themselves mirrored in their neighbor's games. In this play space, where people feel more real than they feel (or want to
feel) in everyday life, the collective play-acting reinforces the belief that the nuclear family unit is strong and secure. But, as we have indicated, the nuclear family is inadequate to contain and express people's needs for intimacy, connection, and sociability; it can survive as an ideal only when embedded in a larger community. The nostalgic camping community provides a context for living out the ideal; in it, the ideas that motivate family campers begin to feel like reality.

The family image which campers idealize embodies an implicit critique of family life. But the critique is a limited one. It is not the inequality between men and women in the family that is considered the problem, but the quality of family life as it is distorted by the demands of capitalist economy, the separation of work and home, the rigidity and demands of inflexible time schedules. Equality in the campground is between families, not within them (nor is it readily extended to people outside the family). As such, it is patriarchal, defining equality as between (white) men, not between people as such. Questions of gender and sexuality are only privately — and then hesitantly — raised.

We are left with questions about how we can address some of the longings underlying the family camping experience. That the Left too often reduces working-class aspirations to tangible economic gains is obvious and our investigation here confirms our belief that the needs of the spirit are as propelling as those of the belly. Mass culture offers many irresistible fantasies that channel and cut off a potentially powerful critique of what is and that set the terms for acting on it. We are convinced that it is to the level of fantasies and hopes that we must speak if we are to offer any viable alternatives to capitalism.

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MARGARET CERULLO, an editor of Radical America, teaches at Hampshire College.

PHYLLIS EWEN is an artist and photographer. She is an editor of Radical America.
WE ARE NOT AMERICA'S GUINEA PIGS

Who were those masked men? RDF troops in Egypt get ready for sand—or trouble
PEACE AT ANY PRICE?

Feminism, Anti-Imperialism and the Disarmament Movement

An effort is underway to build a huge mobilization at the United Nations’ Second Special Session on Disarmament (SSD-II) in New York on June 12th. Political division exists as to the meaning of this demonstration. For some, it is the opening mass act of a new broad-based peace movement. This perspective, carried by activists from the feminist, anti-draft, anti-intervention, lesbian and gay liberation, and anti-nuclear power movements, has met with resistance from the current leadership of the disarmament movement and the SSD-II campaign. The counter-image sees mobilization around a single event to exert influence through the United Nations to secure an arms reduction treaty between the US and the USSR. Within this perspective, broader political discussion and debate are seen as distracting from the main focus of getting people onto buses to New York. Activists who raise issues that connect nuclear arms buildup to questions of US foreign and domestic policy, let alone to questions about the power relationships of daily life which support those policies, are perceived as divisive. There is a concerted effort to project an image of a “respectable” movement which will draw in professionals and through their authority “ordinary people.” Thus, along with scientists and doctors, the Catholic hierarchy is a favorite target of appeal.

The two documents we are printing here represent interventions by activists whose participation in the movements of the last 15 years challenge the politics of this model of mobilization. The first document raises questions about the politics of a focus on the single issue of nuclear disarmament to the exclusion of US military intervention, an issue which is exploding within the peace movement, not to mention the nation as a whole. The second document, a speech given at the opening event of the Boston mobilization around the
SSD-II, recalls the feminist critique of the anti-war movement of the 1960s. It resulted from a struggle that emerged when the organizers of the kick-off events in Boston propelled into leadership a disarmament activist implicated in a sexual harassment case which has deeply divided the local political communities.

Women initially interested in working in the campaign perceived this situation as a symbolic statement that their concerns were trivial within the disarmament movement. Fearing that the sexual politics of the 1960s was reemerging in the present peace movement, women challenged the terms of the campaign. Continuing and extending these debates is crucial if we are committed to building a peace movement that can change the priorities of US society.

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Anti-Interventionism and Anti-Militarism

The organizers of the demonstrations scheduled next June to coincide with the UN Special Session on Disarmament recently made an important decision. Faced with proposals to include issues of US intervention prominently in the demonstrations, the organizers voted these proposals down. The focus of the demonstrations will continue to be on the danger of the nuclear arms race and the enormous drain on human resources it causes.

While these are obviously important — life and death — issues, the decision raises some important questions. First, can the issues really be separated? What is the linkage in the real world between nuclear war and conventional war, whether intervention into Third World conflicts or a "conventional" war between nuclear powers? And second, does this emphasis on nuclear weapons alone really help build, and not divide, the peace movement? For it is argued that a focus on nuclear weapons is not only appropriate because of their danger, but that including other issues such as US intervention would be divisive within the consensus that is emerging about the threat of nuclear war. And hanging over this discussion is the dramatic growth of the peace movement in Europe, where a single focus — no nuclear weapons, East or West — has organized massive demonstrations against war. Wouldn't a similar focus create a mass movement here as well?

In the first place, this is not Europe, and it makes no sense whatsoever to derive the goals of the US peace movement from the experience of the peace movement in Britain or the Netherlands. We live in the heartland of not only the nuclear weapons power, but the imperial gendarme as well. It is our nation that has inflicted so much suffering on countries of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and now Central America, and we have a moral obligation to do what we can to stop it. It is all very well to be mobilized for peace when our cities are threatened with destruction, and ourselves and our friends threatened with instant or lingering death. But death and destruction are no less real when they are inflicted by our armies or those of our surrogates on the populations of the Third World, even if no nuclear warheads are involved. The point is that this demonstration is occurring in the US, organized by the US peace movement, and it is irrational bordering on racist to limit our disarmament demands to those weapons that threaten the white populations of the world, while leaving unchallenged those used daily to kill darker skinned peoples.

Secondly, what is divisive and what is unifying about different demands for disarmament? The peace movement needs to think this through quickly, for the rapid growth of our ranks is electrifying. Each week finds a new "professionals for social responsibility"
organization springing up. We are daily made aware of new people, new sectors of people who have never been touched by the peace movement and are now terrified about the dangers of nuclear war. Yet we would be blind not to see that this popular movement for peace is growing across a wide spectrum, and is not confined simply to the issues of nuclear weapons. We can see that the fear of widespread popular opposition is suppressing the Reagan Administration's natural inclinations in Central America, and that the periodic sputterings of the anti-draft movement have served notice on the Administration that this issue is trouble, and one better postponed until after the 1982 elections. Yet it seems likely that Haig and Co. will find itself with little choice but to rush more US aid to prop up the military regime in El Salvador this spring. And the Administration has no choice but to proceed with the prosecution (now scheduled to begin in March) of those young men who failed or refused to register for the draft. Both Administration moves can be expected to tap the latent energies of strong movements for peace, which have proven their vigor in the past with quick, dramatic outpourings of opposition to the government. Wouldn't the Special Session demonstration organizers be wise to anticipate such a mobilization this spring and reach out to include its energies in the campaign against nuclear weapons? Can this be done
while rejecting the proposal to include the issue of intervention in a disarmament focus, or when the issue of the draft is scarcely mentioned?

What about the real world connection between nuclear weapons and conventional warfare? Particularly at a time when the peace movement is growing so quickly, experienced leaders have an obligation to educate new recruits to our ranks, and fill them in on our best efforts to get at the root causes of the arms race. This is particularly important in the linkage between conventional and nuclear war, because a substantial sector of “informed opinion” now says that we need to bolster our conventional forces in Europe in order not to be so dependent on nuclear weapons. If we are serious about lessening the possibility that nuclear weapons be used, goes this argument, we would bring back the draft, step up our chemical warfare capabilities, and build a lot of tanks.

We know that this connection between conventional and nuclear warfare is at least a half truth, and that the most likely scenario for nuclear war is one which emerges from a conventional clash in Central Europe. But the best guessing is that such a clash would itself grow out of a US-Soviet clash in the Third World; and what information is available shows that many of the occasions when the US contemplated using nuclear weapons in the past grew out of real or alleged superpower conflict in the Third World.

The connection between nuclear and conventional warfare also works the other way. The drive by the US to regain clear nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union is primarily intended to give the US a free hand in the Third World, particularly in areas close to the Soviet Union such as the Persian Gulf. Only if the level of US military superiority is clear at each possible stage of escalation, reasons the Pentagon, will the Soviet Union refrain from challenging a US intervention that uses conventional forces. This was the pattern set in Korea and Vietnam, but one which has been challenged by the “essential equivalency” in nuclear arms that the Soviets achieved in the 1970s. Nuclear superiority is the umbrella under which the US will police or expand its sphere of influence, using the Rapid Deployment Force. This was the clear message of the Carter Doctrine, which threatened to use nuclear weapons if the Soviets challenged the US in the Persian Gulf.

If this outline is accepted then it is vital that the struggle for peace not be divided into “ban the bomb” and anti-interventionist forces. These struggles are linked not just in our minds, but in the minds of the Pentagon as well. The organizers of the demonstrations around the US Special Session on Disarmament are playing a divisive role in the peace movement by separating these issues. They are linked whether we like it or not, and the job of organizers is to educate people about reality. If it is too late to persuade the organizers in New York to emphasize the dangers of conventional warfare, US intervention or the draft in relationship to nuclear war, we should try to take up these issues at the local level, and make the US Special Session on Disarmament an occasion to work for a genuine, secure peace.

Frank Brodhead
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FRANK BRODHEAD is on the staff of Resist and an editor of Radical America.

***
Introduction

Building coalitions means working with people who are different from one another. We learn in that process, hopefully, what we share, what we have in common even though before that work we never knew each other. At the same time we often learn the ways that we are different especially here in this multi-layered and very complex society. Sometimes in that process of learning how to work together those differences emerge in such a way that we find ourselves in struggle with one another. And I think often that's a frightening prospect. We want so desperately and we need so much to work together to confront issues like the threat of nuclear war and the disregard of human needs in our society. So it becomes frightening to think about struggling with people who we want to be allies with. But I personally find that that is an important and exciting and positive ingredient in the process of building a movement that is strong enough to change this country's priorities. We can't be afraid or run away from that struggle; we have to engage in it openly and as honestly as we can. If we go into that struggle with positive and open feelings, I believe it can be an energizing force for our work, not a demoralizing force. I actually hope that the process of struggle and through that the process of learning and growth is something that continues and grows in our movement, that it is not something we wipe out or say we'll deal with later, but that it becomes part of the very political process that we are engaged in. In that context, or with that as a backdrop, I should say that during the last week as people were getting ready for tonight's event and tomorrow's organizing conference there has been a dialogue, a discussion, with people in the feminist movement and the women's community, also with other activists in the peace and anti-draft and disarmament community in this city, discussion between those folks and the organizers of this event. And through this discussion it became clear that it would be a positive addition to the program tonight and hopefully a positive addition to the work that we're all going to do when we leave here tonight to add a speaker who would specifically address the history and the reality of what it has meant for women to work in the disarmament movement and what it means to bring a feminist perspective and a feminist commitment to the work we are all doing. And it is out of that discussion that it was decided to have an addition to the program, somebody who will briefly address those points. Again, I should say that while that decision came out of struggle I think it has to be understood as part of finding ways to work together to build the most unity that we can possibly build for these events in June, to help us all find the werewithal to organize our communities to get to New York on June 12. With that as background, I'd like to introduce Margaret Cerullo.

Leslie Cagan

Feminism and Anti-Militarism

I'd like to begin by evoking the context that brought us here tonight and open the issues of the relationship between feminism and anti-militarism. The most recent context in which we operate is one in which there is re-institution registration for the draft, increased prospect of US military intervention in Central America, El Salvador most visibly, and of course the increased prospect of the use of nuclear weapons. These developments both signalled an accelerated militarization of American society and provoked an opposition to it. These events combined to trigger for many of us memories of the last major massive upsurge of opposition to American militarism, the anti-war movement
of the 1960s. As it triggers those memories it strengthens our determination to carry forward to this surge of political activity the lessons that we learned the last time around. The response of the anti-militarist movement has been various in terms of how friendly it has been to feminism and to some of the other politics that emerged out of the 1960s, particularly around race. Because Carter included women in the initial proposals for draft registration, the anti-draft movement has had to grapple with the relationship between women and war and the resulting anti-draft politics. But a broad based anti-militarist movement which incorporates feminism has yet to emerge. It is our intention to bring forward what it means to carry feminist insights into this work.

The lessons that we learned as women in the anti-war movement operate on two levels. The first level is the one that Leslie Cagan referred to in her introduction. We succeeded in many things in the 1960s. We built a movement that contributed to ending the war in Vietnam. We did not build a movement that was successful in reversing the priorities of American society — so that ten years later we’re faced again with building an anti-war movement. This time around, as part of mobilizing for the SSD-II, and as part of trying to build the largest demonstration that we can on June the 12th, we’re also committed to building a mass, grass-roots movement that exposes the connections between the different kinds of power that operate in this society. The women’s liberation slogan “The Personal Is Political” was an attempt to underline the relationship between the power which produced the war along with the other policies we opposed and the power arrangements in our daily lives — the normal arrangements under which we lived. Again, today, we must attack not only the arms build up; we must also challenge all the props that support militarism as the characteristic American solution to problems in this society and in the world. So that’s our first lesson and that’s our first commitment.

The specific feminist challenge builds on the lessons we learned, the inspiration and the language we borrowed, from the Black Power and civil rights movements. And the crucial lesson that the black movement and the feminist movement brought forward as a critique of the anti-war movement in the 1960s was a recognition that power in this society is so deep that it operates and invades and sometimes is reproduced in movements which attempt to oppose that power. So what we want to do as feminists is to unearth that power between men and women wherever it exists — in our movements as well as in society at large. It has been helpful to us in formulating some of these ideas to look back at a pamphlet that was written by Marge Piercy in 1969, “The Grand Coolie Damn”* which I recommend to everyone. That pamphlet was written at the moment of the first feminist recognition of how our participation in the anti-war movement reproduced the roles that women assumed in society. Marge Piercy identifies the two characteristic ways in which women participated in the movements of the 1960s: as wives of anti-war activists, subervient housewives supporting the activities of our husbands, on the one hand, and as so-called “liberated women,” sex objects, on the other hand. And she described quite graphically what that second option was like. She described “fucking a staff into existence [as] only the extreme form of what passes for common practice in many places in the movement. A man can bring a woman into an organization by sleeping with her and remove her by ceasing to do so.”

*reprinted in Robin Morgan, ed., Sisterhood Is Powerful.
It is important to recall how our political movements reproduced the characteristic roles that women had in American society. These roles were simply the latest incarnations of those that women have had in Western society: Virgin Mother, or sexual object/whore. It is important to us to remember this history, to recall the critique that was developed at that time as we attempt now to articulate women's relationship to anti-militarist politics. An example of one of the ways this relationship is articulated, which is pre-feminist, is that increasingly women's opposition to militarism is argued, legitimated, in terms of our roles as mothers. That is, by embracing our traditional roles in this society. We are thought to participate in anti-militarist politics because, as mothers, we have concern for the future of our children, which is, needless to say, cut short by the prospect of nuclear war, arms build-up and so forth. This way of formulating the issues returns us to the 1966 slogan “Another Mother For Peace”, which by 1968 became the object of feminist criticism. The problem with this perspective is that, on the one hand, it lets men off the hook. For, if it is only as mothers that we can oppose these developments, what's the source of male opposition? On the other hand, it restricts us as women by reproducing and reinforcing the traditional definitions of who women are. We bring our roles in the family into the movement. Now the further problem here is that all the existing terms of motherhood are also carried forward into the movement. Mothers in this society, as we know, are self-denying, peacekeepers, and nurturers — characteristics which block women from recognizing what our legitimate needs are as women then come to define the terms of our political participation. To assert our needs and interests as women, as opposed to as mothers, can become as difficult in the movement as it is in the society at large.

To give an example of how this works, consider the issue of abortion and how that has come up in the context of the peace movement. Feminists are accused of divisiveness when we raise this issue. If we articulate, justify, legitimate our presence in the movement as mothers, we no longer have terms in which to challenge the accusation that we’re being selfish. We're up against the cultural definition of who
women are — we’re the ones who sacrifice our needs for the greater good, and therefore women’s issues, women’s deep concerns as women, are marginalized within our movement.

In order to see how the issue of abortion helped to define different options for women in this society, we have only to recall Marge Piercy and what our starting point was. Abortion is critical to our attempt as feminists to break those two roles that were offered to us: wife/mother or whore. For abortion is essential to redefining the terms of both motherhood and female sexuality.

The quote from Marge Piercy about women’s traditional forms of access to politics, about how staffs were “fucked into existence,” indicates why abortion on its own is not sufficient to challenge the terms of male power. The issue of sexual harassment has been named and carried forward into the seventies as an issue which extends that feminist critique and understands the ways in which male power over women is reinforced. Sexual harassment, naming that issue, was absolutely critical to breaking through the confining options Marge Piercy described because sexual harassment is one of those issues which wasn’t recognized, wasn’t experienced as such not only by men but also by women. So, naming what we took as normal to be an issue, to be a political issue, naming that harassment, broke some of the
hold that the traditional options had not only on men but also on women. It becomes absolutely crucial to break into the traditional terms of women's existence.

If sexual harassment was one of the ways in which women were blocked from access to equal participation in politics, Marge Piercy identified some of the more subtle structures of power which also functioned to reinforce women's secondary status in politics and in the movement. At the height of the anti-war movement, she articulated a critique of the structure that had emerged which marginalized women's political skills. Women had developed political skills throughout the sixties as participants in the civil rights movement and in community organizing projects. There's a very different kind of political skill that you develop in local grass-roots organizing efforts than the kinds of skills that are required to do the national mobilizations and mass demonstrations that characterized the anti-war movement. The anti-war movement, Marge Piercy reminds us, propelled a model of leadership which she described this way: "The typical movement institution consists of one or more men who act as charismatic spokesmen, who speak in the name of the institution and negotiate and represent that body to other bodies inside and outside the movement. And who manipulate the relationships inside to maintain their positions," — a model of leadership which marginalized women. What was the other side of those movement institutions which carried such a model of leadership? The other half of those institutions was the people who did the actual work. And, of course, those were, more often than not, women. So it was that kind of movement institution, that kind of leadership and that kind of woman power at its base that reproduced male power and became the source and subject of our challenge. Once these power structures began to be seen, the experiences women had had within them were understood as political rather than personal failures. As we build an anti-war movement ten years later, we don't want to recreate the structures which undermine the intelligence and capacities of the people within it.

Piercy went on to articulate a whole model of organization which made women's access more difficult — a model which has yet to be transcended within our movements. First, she identified control over the media and the publications — those formal movement channels which people look to for information and analysis. In 1969, she criticized New Left Notes, the Guardian, Liberation News Service. Today, we might point to the Nation, New Left Review, Working Papers and Mother Jones. Recognizing the kind of power that consists in control over the sources of information means challenging control over the content of these publications.

But, power is also built through control over informal channels of communication. "A person may come to usurp the prestige of an organization simply by being the speaker on all public occasions or by representing that group to other movement groups." Piercy points out how those informal channels were often based on male bonding — entrenched networks of friendship to which women didn't have access. "It is possible to build up power simply through insisting or arranging that all contact occur through you. The important thing is to keep all transfer of information routed through you... In-groups are created of people who respect and trust only each other."

The feminist challenge then became a challenge to all of these — more obvious and more hidden — forms of power. We understood that if we were to participate as equals in politics we'd have to crack and expose these entrenched
structures and show how they operated. We had to democratize access and challenge the terms of leadership and in order to do that we had to break the monopoly on information, on communication, and on skills. And so these are all parts of the feminist perspective that we want to bring forward into this work so that this time around we build a movement that exposes all the kinds of power and challenges them.

Margaret Cerullo and Marla Erlien

Epilogue

Although this speech indicted the politics and organization of the local campaign, it was enthusiastically received by the leadership. Then, the following events ensued. At the organizers conference the next day, the religious task force proposed a resolution that no one publicly representing an anti-abortion position should be on the SSD-II platform, while at the same time everyone was encouraged to participate in the campaign. The enthusiasm for the speech waned in the face of a resolution that took up its content. Fear of alienating conservative Catholic bishops became a primary concern in this and other debates about the politics of the campaign. A willingness to sacrifice Catholic women, who polls indicate are (privately) in favor of abortion or at least choice, to the authority of the Catholic bishops, sharpens the questions of alliances. These debates have illuminated that the cutting edge for many of us in the movements we are building is that the politics we project include a critique of the New Right.

Leslie Cagan works for the Boston office of Mobilization for Survival.

Margaret Cerullo, an editor of Radical America, teaches at Hampshire College.

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*This speech was a collective effort, which resulted from a discussion among Denise Wells, Margaret Lazarus, Hope Abramson, Susan Bisaillon, Marla Erlien, Margaret Cerullo, Robin Greeley, Lena Sorensen, Cynthia Enloe, and Jessica Shubow. It was written by Marla Erlien and Margaret Cerullo. Our thanks to Alice Friedman who remembered Marge Piercy.
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SOLIDARITY, COLD WAR, AND THE LEFT

How to Respond to Poland

Frank Brodhead

The military coup in Poland and the suppression of the Polish labor movement have aroused widespread opposition around the world. Little of this opposition has focused on the specific character and demands of Solidarity however. In consequence protests against the coup have had a largely nationalist character and have not distanced themselves from the cold war rhetoric of the Reagan Administration. Indeed, we now have the irony of the most antilabor administration in history leading the defense of one of the most radical labor movements of our time.

How radical a movement is it? The Polish movement is clearly both nationalist and Catholic. It is also “anti-communist” or at least anti- the kind of ideology and society that passes for “Communism” in the official press of both East and West. For these reasons, Solidarity has gained at least the verbal support of conservative Western governments and leaders; and for these reasons as well, sections of the Western Left denounce Solidarity as misguided at best, and at worst as the spearhead of a US-backed plot to reestablish capitalism in Eastern Europe. It is important that we characterize Solidarity correctly, for it is daily becoming more apparent that the East-West conflict will continue to be exacerbated by the situation in Poland, with potentially disastrous consequences. A good understanding of Solidarity is important particularly for Americans, and if the Soviet Union becomes more
overtly involved in the suppression of Polish labor, the Reagan Administration will seize the opportunity to divert attention from the failure of its own economic program, rally the country around a nationalist military buildup, and greatly increase the dangers of war.

A second reason to focus on Solidarity is that in organization and program it embodies a radical critique of the US labor movement. Here sit-in strikes are illegal, a tactic outlawed after they brought the CIO into being. Sympathetic and general strikes are rare, and illegal under most union contracts. In Poland, where all the actions of the original strike committees that formed Solidarity were also illegal, the workers showed that united, mass action can prevail over the power of the state. Regional labor organization in the US is at best a confederation of all unions, not a representative body drawn from all the region’s workplaces, as in Poland.

The Gdansk workers were also state employees and were as vulnerable as PATCO to isolation and repression. Indeed, both the Polish regime and the Soviet Union later justified the attempts to bring Poland’s workforce under control by referring to Reagan’s actions in the PATCO strike. While the proportion of state employees is smaller in the US than in Poland, neither they nor the thousands of workers covered by “no strike” contracts are given the same rights that the Polish workers fought for.

There is a third reason to attempt to understand Solidarity better. I believe that it has some lessons to teach the West, particularly the Western labor movements, because Poland indeed represents the more universal crisis of modern societies. This crisis is worldwide, rippling out of its twin centers — the US and the USSR — and eddying into the backwaters of the spheres of influence of both powers. This is a crisis of economies built on the “extermination industry,” as E. P. Thompson has called it, economies which now collectively channel half a trillion dollars a year into military, waste production. With both economies evolving new governing bureaucracies based on military production — the so-called “Iron Triangle in the US, its counterpart in the USSR — the tenure of the managers of the “extermination industry” appears increasingly secure against appeals to consider the “general interests” of society.

How can we challenge these twin bureaucracies? How can we stop this madness? Clearly we are up against forces so powerful (and so heavily armed!) that only a massive, popular revolutionary movement will have a chance. The decisive battles will be fought by an urban working class in the metropolis, not by peasant armies in the countryside. It is to movements like Solidarity that we must look for lessons on the way forward. Today the collapse occurs in Poland, and the Polish workers build Solidarity. Tomorrow we can expect the workers of Britain, Brazil, or Hungary to find themselves with no choice but to take matters into their own hands. We need to consciously begin to build the political and intellectual infrastructure that will help prepare Americans to create a “Solidarity” movement of our own.

SOLIDARITY TRANSFORMED

The history of Solidarity is that of an organization transformed from one maintaining that it was only a trade union, and had no “political” interests, to one which began to assume responsibility for the whole society. By the summer of 1981, Solidarity became an alternative government, lacking only the tolerance of its neighbors for it to simply announce
that the old regime was abolished and a new one had taken its place.

How was this transformation accomplished? In many respects it was latent in Solidarity's origins. First there was the question of democracy. Emerging from a general strike in August 1980, Solidarity developed a style of work in which negotiations were broadcast to the entire workforce, and in which decisions were preceded by lengthy discussion in search of a consensus. No more "leaders of the people" to give orders. As a consequence accurate information became a common objective of the workers' movement, and in the months ahead workers would fight for the end of censorship, and a vigorous press would launch 600 different Solidarity publications alone.

Secondly, there were the demands themselves. In August 1980 the shipyard workers in Gdansk forced the government to agree to their now-famous twenty-one point program. Heading the list were the demands for independent trade unions and the right to strike. On the basis of these two demands, reasoned the workers, all else could be accomplished. Yet their remaining demands clearly indicated that though theirs was in form a trade-union struggle, in essence it recognized that in a modern, state-dominated economy and society there is little real distinction between "political" and "economic" demands. The Polish workers, for example, demanded a reduction of privileges for police and Party officials, pay raises that would narrow the wages gap within the working class itself, and improvements in daycare, maternity leaves, and housing. They demanded not only that strike leaders be let out of prison, but that intellectuals and others who were jailed because they aided the workers' struggles be released as well. They demanded that honest information about their struggle be broadcast to the entire nation, and that corrupt officials be replaced.

Finally, the form of self-organization of the strikers foretold what was to come. Led by the shipyard workers, the workers in the Gdansk area formed a strike committee representing all the plants, all the workers in the region. This form was copied by workers in other regions of Poland, and at the end of the strike the regional strike committees formed a loose national structure, Solidarity. Thus at the outset Solidarity was prepared to represent all the population, not just workers in particular crafts, plants, or industries. Its structure mirrored that of the Party and the government itself.

The potential latent in the August struggle was soon realized. While the Western press gave prominence to the role of religion and the Church, and to the personality of Walesa, workers concerned themselves with questions of production and workers' rights. Would the Gdansk Agreement be implemented at the local level? What about wage increases? Would the police beating of union activists go unpunished? What about a five-day workweek? Would Solidarity be allowed to determine its own organizational structure and constitutional form? In each of these cases and others, Polish workers were forced to use or threaten to use the strike weapon to settle their grievances. They had no other weapons at hand: elections, parliamentary lobbying, compulsory arbitration and grievance procedures — the staples of the Western labor movement, which encourage conservatism and class collaboration, were closed to them. Direct action, not representative action in a Congress or behind the scenes, was forced on the workers if they were to pursue their struggle at all. And thanks to Solidarity's regional structure, each successive struggle became a massive teach-in, a program of public education showing how struggles were connected, and that victory depended on labor solidar-
ity. An injury to one was everybody’s business.

By the summer of 1981 it had become increasingly clear that the economy was headed for disaster. No more credits could be obtained from abroad, and Western banks had pulled a billion dollars in deposits out of Polish banks. No more food or raw materials or spare parts or replacement machinery could be imported. Production bottlenecks became more acute, as essential components or raw materials could not be found to finish a product, in turn depriving some other production process of a necessary step. Everything that could be exported was, in order to earn precious hard currency to repay Poland’s debts, resulting in tremendous shortages. Demonstrations and then riots against the shortages began to break out. Solidarity, indeed all of Poland, began to realize that if the economic crisis were not resolved, their society might disintegrate.

But how was this to be done? Only a massive mobilization of effort could reverse the nation’s economic decline. Who could have any faith however, in those who had already mismanaged their local factory or the entire nation’s economy? At the local level, Solidarity activists pushed for the right to select their own managers, and achieved a number of important successes. At the national level, however, Solidarity was less successful in forcing the government to share with it decision-making power over the nation’s economy. Instead the government wanted Solidarity to share the responsibility for a regime of austerity. “They want us to pull our load, like workhorses,” said the workers. “But we want to hold the reins as well, so that they won’t take any more wrong turns.”

In attempting to solve this impasse, Solidarity hit upon an ingenious plan, but a revolutionary one in the eyes of the government. In the summer and fall of 1981 they worked out a plan to directly administer a portion of the society’s production and distribution. They would do this by working on the “free Saturdays” that their earlier struggles had achieved. But they would do so only under rule of the workers themselves. “We are not donating these Saturdays to the authorities,” they said, “but to ourselves. Insofar as we do so we are here and now inaugurating the principles of self-management.” They proposed that on Saturdays each factory would be administered by its factory commission or committee for self-management. The additional production thus achieved would also be administered by the workers themselves. “If Polish society responds to our appeal,” concluded their resolution, “then Solidarity must do everything to keep all extra production under constant scrutiny in order that the increased efforts of working people not be wasted. This will constitute the first great
test of the constructive power of employees’ self-management.”

If this plan had been implemented it would have given Solidarity control over the allocation of a sizeable fraction of the nation’s output of basic goods, and thus a foothold toward the union’s goal of “socializing” the planning process. But of course it was not to be. Confronted with the choice of either sharing power or crushing Solidarity, the regime chose the course of repression. The deployment of small squads of soldiers to the countryside, the arrest and harassment of union militants, the deliberate aggravation of the food crisis, and other moves by the regime we can now see were preparatory steps to the military coup.

JUNTA SOCIALISM

The military coup of mid-December is not the end of the struggle of the Polish people, but the beginning of a new chapter in that struggle. Many things are now lost: the renewal of civic life and voluntary organizations, a flourishing press and the transformation of universities into centers of intellectual inquiry. Also gone is any lingering trust in the authorities and confidence in the military, trusts which always struck Western observers as overly credulous, but ones which were affirmed again and again by Polish citizens. The most important loss, of course, is the beachhead of legal space achieved by Solidarity’s nonnegotiable demands in August 1980: free and independent trade unions, and the right to strike.

The centrality of workplace organization for Solidarity can be seen in the initial response to the military coup. While Western reporters strained from the confines of their hotel windows to see large, open-air demonstrations in the streets of Warsaw — and failing to see them reported little resistance to the coup — the Polish people chose to organize their self-defense around the workplaces where Solidarity was born and where it retained its organizational focus. A report from the Polish Workers’ Task Force in late December, for example, said that 200 plants were occupied throughout Poland, and that at 700 plants workers were not let in to work. In many cases there were reports of family and community supporters massing outside the plants or mines to block the police attack. Though workers also attempted to defend Solidarity headquarters and to organize street demonstrations in some areas, the most significant form of resistance was factory occupation. The Church was a place of refuge, but not a center for self-defense.

This should not be surprising. Factory occupations are a uniquely twentieth-century form of working class self-defense, representing the endurance of syndicalist tendencies in the modern labor movement. That the Polish workers chose to adopt it helps us to see the link between their struggle and the great strikes in northern Italy in 1920, the auto-industry sit-in strikes in the U.S. in 1936-37, the factory occupations in France in 1968 or the cordones in Chile in 1972-73. In each case workers built a community of struggle and self-governance within and around the great concentrations of capital and industry. So much the center of daily life in “normal” times, the factory became a fortress where the most expensive machinery in the nation was held hostage, insurance against the potential violence of the state. Each of these occupations, as well as those in Poland, of course had different outcomes; and it is perhaps significant that the only clear success occurred in Detroit, where the goals of the struggle were modest — union recognition — and not sufficiently threatening to the state power to justify the use of overwhelming armed
force.

What makes Poland’s future so grim is that the authorities seem to have chosen with uncanny skill a method for regaining control of society which is guaranteed to exacerbate the Polish crisis. Given a decade of economic mismanagement and investment policies which in retrospect are seen as insane, and given the international economic straitjacket in which Poland now finds itself, any hope for recovery must rest on mobilizing the enthusiasm and productive initiative of vast numbers of people. Only a program which clearly shares austerity on an equitable basis, and which offers hope for the future, can enlist the creative capacities of people to the extent necessary for national recovery. Instead, the authorities have chosen to destroy the networks and fabric of informal relationships around which productive work is really carried out. By destroying Solidarity the authorities have rejected any accommodation with the accumulated experience that such networks have achieved over the past quarter century, of which Solidarity was the expression and the outcome.

What alternative to workers’ control do the Polish authorities present as a means to reorganize the labor force and raise the level of production? A week after the military coup there was a meeting between representatives of the government and the top managers of the thirty largest factories in Poland to address this question. According to a memo prepared by a government representative and published in Solidarity’s underground Information Bulletin, the meeting concluded that “It is absolutely necessary to institute reform, immediately. We cannot allow the creation of a vacuum in the wake of the... suppression of trade unions. In the factories in the future, trade unions and workers self-government should be created. In the majority of factories, however, the compo-
sition of these self-governing boards will have to be changed. A condition of winning the trust of the workforce is: the improvement of the quality of propaganda, and conducting a dialogue with the workers.” Yet how can this be done, now that Polish workers understand what real self-governance is, and now that they have experienced the junta’s chosen method of “dialogue?”

Some indication of the government’s strategy appeared in early February. According to US newspaper reports, the Polish authorities were considering reorganizing trade unions along industrial and professional lines, rather than the regional federations organized by Solidarity. The government’s goal will be to encourage a new trade-union structure that isolates workers from each other, rather than allowing the workplaces to serve as foci of class-wide regional organizations as before. In a statement that would warm Lane Kirkland’s heart, government spokesman Jerzy Urban asked, “What interests, for instance, do a shoemaker and a pilot have in common? Sharing a territory doesn’t mean they have common interests.”

The Polish workers have a different viewpoint. They are well aware that for the immediate future their cooperation and even enthusiasm at the workplace is necessary to end Poland’s economic crisis. And, as before, they will decline to participate on the basis of the terms offered them by the authorities. A clear indication of this can be seen in a document called “Basic Principles of Resistance,” printed in Solidarity’s Information Bulletin No. 8 (December 28, 1981). The document outlines a plan of guerilla warfare that combines the slowdown and work-to-rule tactics known to trade unionists throughout the world with injunctions to maintain the levels of comradeship and mutual aid necessary to survive the repression.

“Eagerly carry out even the most idiotic orders,” urges the document. “Do not solve problems on your own. Throw that task onto the shoulders of commissars and informers. Sooner or later the commissar will want to be left in peace. THIS WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF DICTATORSHIP.”

This is the formula for a protracted struggle between the Polish people and their state, centered around a desperate attempt by the authorities to extract a greater level of production and efficiency from a workforce which has made it a matter of class and national pride not to cooperate. The suffering and rebellion that will surely follow can only lead to a police state, and to continued danger and instability in Central Europe. Both the peace movement and the Left in the US will be faced with extremely strong pressures to treat Poland as strictly a Cold War issue, and will find many within our own ranks who will portray the Polish workers as simply the victims of either Western bankers or of Soviet aggression. There will be little space given us to present the Polish people as the subjects of history as well as the objects of fate, as seekers after a path of radical change and self-governance that continues and helps expand the tradition of libertarian workers movements in this century. Yet we must seize this space and enlarge it, for it allows us to argue that the Polish workers movement has much to teach us in the West, and that learned properly its lessons will help us to find a genuine path through the crisis of our time.

FRANK BRODHEAD is on the staff of Resist and an editor of Radical America.
HISTORY AND MYTH, REAL AND SURREAL

An Interview with Carlos Fuentes

Carlos Fuentes writes novels. He also speaks out on political questions, especially those involving his native Mexico. His fiction puts him squarely among the postwar Latin American writers, like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, who compress myth and history, traditional Latin culture and stinging social criticism. Fuentes and his contemporaries, who are creating a bold, vibrant imprint on world literature, are leading the charge against the cultural domination of the industrialized West. Through such notable works as The Death of Artemio Cruz, A Change of Skin, and Terra Nostra, Carlos Fuentes has challenged the conventions, both literary and political, that the West has tried to bequeath to Latin America.

Fuentes grew up in Washington, DC during the 1930s, the son of a diplomat. Though he identified with the ideals and heroes of the New Deal, it was during his years in Chile amid the politicized atmosphere of the Popular Front years that he began to reclaim his Spanish heritage. Soon after, he moved to Mexico, where the tension between his love for his heritage and his harsh critique of authoritarian politics and dependent economics in Latin America has continued to pull at him.

Participating in leftist coalitions in Mexico and elsewhere, Fuentes has often spoken out on the dilapidated economic and political conditions in Latin America and the Third World, against governments dedicated to protecting “the private rights of the patrimonial clan,” and especially against the “technological executioners like Argentina’s Videla and Chile’s Pinochet.”
In 1977, Fuentes resigned from his post as Mexican ambassador to France. This political break with the Mexican government was in protest to the appointment to a diplomatic position of an ex-president whom Fuentes holds directly responsible for killing student demonstrators in the 1960s.

This interview was set up and conducted by Stephen Kinzer, Central American correspondent for the Boston Globe, and Billy Pope of Radical America.

Q: Would you talk a little about your dual role as novelist and political activist?
A: We do a lot of things in Latin America — jugglers. Sometimes my American writer friends say that journalists should do their job and politicians do their job and writers do their job, all in completely separate spheres, separate worlds. I don’t criticize this. The United States has a strong and highly diversified civil society; so does western Europe. But there are nations that have very weak civil societies. It is a privilege to have education, to be educated in good universities. To have been born into families that have means gives an added responsibility to address certain questions and problems, to speak out and do many things that would otherwise be left undone.

Q: Do you view literature as a political tool?
A: Why transform literature into a vehicle for polemics and politics? You can do that in the press, in speeches, and in many other ways. But inevitably, everything that you write has a political content, whether you wish it or not. It is reflecting a political reality or creating a political reality.

The writer speaks for many things which otherwise would not be said. But my fervent hope is that one day, throughout Latin America we have what Gramsci called organic civil societies, with sufficient development so I can stay home and write novels all day long, which is what I really enjoy doing.

It is very easy to be a spokesman and write badly. We have been doing that for years. Instead, we writers in Latin America today are trying to give expression to the deeper reality of our continent, the deeper identity. We are all baroque writers in Latin America, writers of the counter-conquest. We are trying to lift the weight of the Spanish conquest from our shoulders. We have turned our backs on what was once thought of as a heritage of conquest and failure.
Q: In your writings you experiment with the use of time. You once said that the West has imposed a linear sense of time on the world. What did you mean by that?

A: At least since the Renaissance and certainly since the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment, the West has relied upon a linear conception of history and of time. It is a way of denying the existence of other civilizations and of other cultures.

Time is always present, events are not over just because they are no longer happening. In Latin America, we feel the presence of the past. We don’t want to murder any of that past in the name of linear time.

Everybody, of course, is caught in the trap of modernity. Probably our greatest historical problems are problems of modernization: What does it mean, how does it effect us, what do we do with modernization, how far does it go? How do we reconcile being modern with ethical and cultural realities which are at the root of our existence? To reconcile these things, we come to a sense of time which is ours.

The theories of the West, both capitalism and Marxism, share an extraordinary faith in the future. There’s extraordinary faith in progress and the perfectibility of man. This attitude loses the tragic dimension older cultures have, because they know we can fail. We’re not predestined to be successful. When a country like the United States fails, it doesn’t know what to do with itself.

We know that the essence of humanity is to know that you can fail and to know that you can still go on. If you are surprised by failure, then you respond with crime. And our century has been the century not of tragedy, but of crimes. Auschwitz, Guernica, Gulag, My Lai, and all the horrors we have seen in this century are not tragedies: they are crimes. They are crimes in a way derived from the absence of what Unamuno called “the tragic sense of life.” A sense of tragedy has always existed at the root of civilized freedom.

Q: In Terra Nostra you collapse and confuse centuries of time, blending history and myth, the real and the surreal, around an idea that people create their own history and tradition. At the same time, you seem to force the reader to come along with you and participate in the process of creating history too.

A: Yes, that’s correct.

Q: Magic realism seems to be a way of writing particular to Latin American writers. Does this come from any special problems that confront writers of Latin America?

A: In the first place, there is the problem of language as we perceive it in Latin America. The English language has this great continuity of expression; from Defoe to the present day there is hardly a hiatus in writing fiction in English. In Spanish you have to think, after Don Quixote, what? You have to make a great, great jump to the nineteenth century. Our problem is trying to fill in the great gaps that were left because of many factors, predominately because of the political and religious and social factor of what Spain was — the bastion of the Counter-Reformation. We have to struggle mightily with the language and fill in the voids of the language which are also the voids of history. By giving a shape to the language, you are trying to give a shape to a history that was unwritten, especially in the colonies. There was a gigantic silence hanging over the colony of Mexico for three hundred years. So there is a demand inherent in our language and our imagination to fill in the voids of history, to say in novels what history has not said, or what was silenced by history, and to take in a vast historical time and space.
Q: Your novel The Death of Artemio Cruz is a classic study of the development of the authoritarian personality. In the years since you wrote that book, has anything changed? Can you add something to this personality type?
A: I can add a funny anecdote. I was preparing an interview on television with Bill Moyers. He was asking me about Artemio Cruz and saying: “You are optimistic about the future of revolutions, yet you prove that revolutions fail through this character, Artemio Cruz. You’re a sort of nationalistic Mexican, yet you prove again through Artemio Cruz the degrees of corruption and authoritarianism that you can have in Mexico. Isn’t there a contradiction here?” I didn’t think there was a contradiction at first, of course, because Artemio is a character. He is a character who represents a dimension of, but does not exhaust, reality. But as to the uniqueness of the character, I told him: “Mr. Moyers, you think Artemio Cruz is unique to Mexico? You have worked for the American Artemio Cruz, Lyndon Johnson.” So it’s different degrees, but you get Artemio Cruzes wherever you have a process of capitalist expansion. Artemio Cruz is in the novels of Balzac, he is in the novels of Dickens. You will find him in many places. But for me it was unusual to find him suddenly at the center of Mexico in the years following the revolution.

Q: Mexico will soon have a new leader, Miguel de la Madrid. Can you tell us anything about him and the challenges he will face?
A: I know him quite well. First, he’s a young man. I’m very sad that for the first time in my life the president of Mexico is going to be younger than me. It fills me with strange feelings of doom for myself.

He is a very well prepared man. He’s a lawyer, a man of equilibrium, an evenhanded man. He is very conscious of some of the principal problems we are facing right now. In his recent speeches, he has been stressing the regional imbalance in Mexico and the need to proceed toward a much greater sense of equilibrium in the regional structure. He doesn’t talk about class conflict, but in a way he is talking about problems of class when he is talking about these problems of tremendous inequality, injustice, and imbalance that exist in Mexico. I am hopeful that certain things will happen.

He has to apply himself to important internal problems that have to do with this imbalance of regions. For example, it has now been perfectly pinpointed that 80 percent of the undocumented workers that come from Mexico to this country come from seven of the thirty Mexican states. When you are receiving $18 billion a year from oil revenues, you really can make a thrust for development in these seven states and give opportunities for jobs and for growth that will diminish the exodus to the United States. That is something that can be done in the plan of regional equilibrium that de la Madrid conceives.

There is the great problem of agriculture in Mexico. In 1964, Mexico changed its traditional emphasis on subsistence agriculture to a policy favoring the production of cash crops for export. Now with the oil boom, Mexico has found itself importing food to feed itself and paying with oil revenues for this food. There has been a rather successful attempt by the Lopez Portillo government to shift back to subsistence farming, to the production of food for the people. As a result, this year for the first time in our recent history we are not importing a single grain from the US.

The foreign policy will support political and diplomatic solutions in the immediate areas of our concerns, which is the Caribbean and Central America. It will be a policy of cooperation with the nations of the area, especially with the
nations that have begun processes of transformation of the old colonial structures. It will be a policy of trying to further the disintegration of the bipolar structure of the world, replacing it with a multi-polar world containing several centers of power, which is what is in our interest and in the interest of the future of Latin America.

There is the problem of the distribution of wealth through fiscal reforms, which has been constantly postponed by successive Mexican governments. And there is the population explosion, there is the rapid growth of cities — it is a country that has gigantic problems. But let me add, they are problems born from development, not from stagnation. They are problems of quick development.

Q: How strong is the Right in Mexico, particularly the industrialists in Monterrey? And how is the Left responding?
A: The Right is very, very strong not only in Monterrey, but in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Chihuahua, everywhere you want to look. They staged a coup d'état in 1976 against President Echeverria and practically got away with it. The Echeverria government was assailed by a combined action of the industrial groups that
provoked a devaluation of the peso. This was done through exportation of capital (to the degree that $400 million left the country over a single weekend), through decisions not to invest, and through massive layoffs of workers that provoked the devaluation of the peso. This constituted a sort of warning to the successor, Lopez Portillo. It was conceived in those terms.

The Right is extremely strong, but next to them you have the structure of the [ruling] Institutional Revolutionary Party [PRI], with its different wings and trends and factions, its left and its right and its center. Then you have a new thing in Mexican politics which is a growing Left, with growing power, with growing capacity for organization, but with great problems of bickering and self-destruction and debating how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. But I wouldn't be surprised if the [presidential] candidate of the coalition of the Left, who is the secretary-general of the Communist Party of Mexico, might reach a very healthy 15 to 20 percent of the vote in the coming election. The Communist Party itself now has about ten deputies. They have not been manipulated, they have stopped many presidential initiatives. At least many of the laws have been thoroughly discussed, as they were not in the past.

This is an important development in the history of the country because until now, the great claim to legitimacy of the PRI and the government has always been: “We are the Left, we are the revolution. There is nothing to the left of the PRI. We are the heirs to Pancho Villa, Zapata, and all the rest.” Now suddenly there is a Left to the left of the PRI.

There is an extremely high level of critical conscience in Mexico, and it is growing every day in a country which is more and more diversified, economically, socially, and culturally. So eventually I think that all these factors will meet and there will be a much greater political diversity in Mexico. I’m not saying tomorrow, but in the coming decade.

**Q:** At any given moment, there are about six million Mexicans working in this country. When they return to Mexico, do they compose any sort of political force there? Do they bring any influence from the US, or is it simply an economic movement of people going back and forth across the border?

**A:** It is not only an economic movement, it is cultural because the undocumented workers bring back to Mexico many, many forms of life and ideas from the US. But at the same time, they bring to the United States a lot of cultural forms which are injected into American life in a way which makes many Americans uneasy. Here is the first time that the melting pot faces the problem of immigrants that do not come from over the ocean and leave their language and their customs on the other side. No, they bring these things with them and then they insist that their children be taught Spanish in school so they will catch up with the American students. This creates many cultural problems, not the cultural problems created by Italian or Russian or Swedish immigration to the US.

**Q:** Lately, we’ve seen a real escalation in rhetoric from Washington about the situation in Central America. Within Central America itself there is continuing turmoil. How do you analyze what the Reagan Administration is trying to do and the possibility that their current policies can succeed?

**A:** There are two ways of looking at it. One is to consider the recent statements as bragadocio, simply bluff and bluster. This obviously is an administration that came in trying to prove that the United States was no longer a soft country. There had been a big charge of
weakness following the events in Vietnam and Iran. The new administration wants to show that it is macho again. It chose a place where it seemed easy to prove machismo, which is El Salvador. I once compared it to slapping a nine-year-old around to show you’re extremely brave. So one way of looking at it is that they are proving their machismo.

But of course by proving their machismo, they created a situation of East-West confrontation in Central America, which has preoccupied many countries in the region, notably my own country, Mexico. We immediately began arguing with the Americans that this was basically a situation born from local realities, from circumstances that had to do with the history of El Salvador, with the culture, with the politics, with the economics, with the society of El Salvador. We argued that only the Salvadorans could solve these problems, that they were not going to be solved by a fictitious appeal to East-West confrontation. Countering this East-West view of the conflict are several factors, notably the Franco-Mexican declaration last August, which stated that the forces in conflict and especially the opposition forces should be considered as politically representative forces so that a negotiated solution, a political solution could be found in El Salvador.

How are you going to have free elections in El Salvador while the army is running amok? How are you going to ask the civilian opposition to reappear on the political scene in El Salvador in order to get assassinated? The question is not whether they are going to be killed, but who is going to kill them. How can you have this faith in elections when the army is running around killing thousands of people? There are even some people who say that in El Salvador you can’t talk about the fourteen families any more, because they have been displaced. It is the army which now represents both the politi-
cal and economic power. How are they going to give this up? The only way the military has traditionally given up power in Latin America is through armed revolution. That is the way it happened in Cuba, Nicaragua, and in Mexico.

Mexico as a nation feels that, by its policies in the Central American region, more than anything it is defending itself. What we’re most worried about is that the military presence of the United States in the region might eventually overflow into a basic strategic situation, which is of course Mexican oil. Who can say what will happen to the Middle East in the future, in the months and the years to come? Mexico is always the reserve, and it’s not days away, it is only hours away from the United States. So what we are extremely afraid of is pretexts for a military presence by the United States, an increased military presence, an exacerbation of tensions. The damage done to basic principles of self-determination and nonintervention in the region might ultimately affect the integrity of our own territory or of our own resources. We’re very wary of this because we’ve had an experience, a very old experience, and there is a national consensus on this matter, apart from political differences within Mexico itself.

Q: How important is the new relationship between Mexico and France?
A: For us it has created a new situation and it is that we have an ally in western Europe. We have a very close relationship with the Mitterand government. We are acting together with them in many, many spheres — political, economic, cultural, social. So it is a great event to have a government with which you can work so closely in Europe itself. This breaks immediately the geographical fatality — that you deal with Americans only — which weighs too heavily on Latin America. With Mitterand, and also increasingly with the Germans and perhaps with the English also, there is a new possibility of breaking barriers that existed in the past.

Q: How do you explain the fact that so many different governments that ordinarily would line up with Mexico and France were whipped into line by the United States to oppose publicly the Franco-Mexican declaration on El Salvador?
A: There were many factors there. I think one factor was an internal factor in Venezuela. It’s an electoral factor. President Herrera Campins, who has very close relationships with Napoleon Duarte and with the junta in El Salvador, who has in effect been giving money for arms to the junta in El Salvador, is facing an election next year. So in a way Herrera Campins was precipitating the electoral campaign and saying, here I have an issue on which I can whip up some sort of national unity consensus behind me in the election to come.

But the lineup you were talking about is a lineup that will not last long. The government of Peru is very preoccupied with what is happening. The Brazilian government is more preoccupied than we think at what is happening. There are going to be changes of government. The situation is not eternal; the Franco-Mexican declaration will win support in the future. Of course, the United States brings great pressure to bear on the continent. Sometimes it lines people up, but for how long? That is another matter.

It is absurd to say Mexico and France are intervening in El Salvador when they are actually asking everybody not to intervene. If anybody is intervening in El Salvador, the only proof I have is of United States intervention. I know of no proof of any other intervention. Let everybody step aside and let the Salvadorans solve their own conflicts.

Now there has been the new escalation around Nicaragua and Cuba. Again I wonder. I really don’t know what the purpose is. I do not
see the United States, except through an act of stupidity, wandering into a military venture in Cuba or Nicaragua. It would set the region afire, I would think.

Q: Would you offer some general comments about the situation in Nicaragua?
A: Recently I was reading Winston Churchill responding to Averill Harriman when Harriman criticized the British parliamentary system during his term as ambassador in Britain during the war. Churchill said to him, "It is difficult enough for one man to understand the politics of his own nation well, let alone to understand the politics of another nation." Politics are very concrete, local affairs. Always when I speak of El Salvador or Nicaragua, I feel presumptuous. I don't know all the facts, I have to admit it. If I arrive at an understanding of my own country, I am satisfied. And I don't even have that, because it is a very mystifying situation — at times you have to decipher hieroglyphics to understand what goes on in Mexico.

I must speak as a Mexican constantly, and I think of what was happening in Mexico when our revolution was two years old. We were about to enter an era of unparalleled chaos in Mexican history from which the revolution was ultimately going to find its legal and institutional basis. Because we tried to apply the precepts of our 1917 constitution, we experienced a protracted period of aggression from the United States, of tensions with the United States, of being unable to apply many of the revolutionary reforms because of American opposition. The whole first thirty years of the Mexican revolution was so damned complicated. So many things happened. It was difficult to reach a point of equilibrium after so many sacrifices.

Now you ask me to judge a revolution which has just started, which for only two years has faced the challenge of changing a situation that has existed for nearly five centuries. It is difficult for me to judge what is going on or to demand of that political revolutionary situation more than I would have demanded of the revolutionary situation in my own country sixty years ago.

Ideally, wouldn't we very much desire that a revolution would promptly bring into effect a democratic system? Indeed we would. I think personally that this would be the very best response to the United States that could be given, if it were possible. It would be a way of taking arguments away from the Americans. Unfortunately, it cannot be this way because we arise from a history of colonialism, of subjugation, of patrimonialism, where we have to wipe away many ghosts and many structures from the past.

Sometimes disagreeable things, undesirable things happen and one asks why the new revolutions do not learn from the mistakes of the old ones. I know that Fidel Castro has been telling the Nicaraguans: Don't repeat my mistakes, don't do away with the private sector, don't do away with the opposition press, do not link yourself excessively to the Soviet Union, all these things. But Nicaragua faces an omnipotent imperial power, an extremely strong nation, that makes things very difficult for them. This creates elements, I admit it, of paranoia, of fear. This is a small country that feels assailed, a country where the revolutionary leadership is very young, very inexperienced.

Sometimes I notice the facility with which we in Latin America can pass from a belief in the conservative hierarchies and dogmas of the Catholic Church to equivalents on the left that are also dogmatic and hierarchical. We run the risk of losing the revolution in the name of the defense of the revolution. But it is so difficult to judge. There is, however, one paramount fact
— the presence of the United States as a superpower in the region.

Mexico and Latin America will not tolerate an aggression against any country in the region. We cannot accept this sort of thing any more. Certainly an invasion of Cuba is doomed to absolute failure. The Pentagon cannot be thinking seriously about this or they have gone mad. They would be entering a losing war. I don’t think the United States can stand losing a war any more.

Q: What means would the Latin American countries have to force the United States to adopt another course more to their liking?
A: It suffices that they let the lid off the bubbling cauldron that is Latin America. This can easily be done by many governments. Off goes the lid and take the streets, here we go. Rampage if necessary. Go at it. I think we would see something that’s never been seen before.

Q: The American Embassy?
A: Many, many things.

Q: Does that include Mexico?
A: Oh yes, certainly.

Q: Would there be any armed reaction if the United States were to intervene, for instance, in El Salvador?
A: There would be a rush of volunteers that would form brigades in Mexico and Columbia, in Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, many, many countries. Because this intervention would really go to the heart of Latin America. The world of 1981 is not the world of 1901, when Teddy Roosevelt was in the saddle. It is not the world of 1954, when Eisenhower was in the saddle and certain things could be done. They cannot be done any more. We can now appeal to many things in the world, mobilize many things in the world.

Q: I’d like you to read Reagan’s mind a little bit more...
A: I cannot read a void.

Q: I wonder if you could try to read his political and personal impulses a little more. What do you think he really wants for the hemisphere?
A: I think that basically what he wants for the hemisphere is what he considers to be the good of the United States, which is: quiet, no movement, no change, good opportunities for American private investment, a tranquil lagoon. Now of course, this doesn’t happen. Things are changing, the lagoon is choppy, even stormy. How do you cope with all these things? I’m afraid that the present administration really doesn’t have serious political responses or diplomatic responses to the problem of change in Latin America.

Q: You attended the recent North-South conference at Cancun. Can you provide us with some insights as to what kind of a dialogue the developing countries are seeking and what the response has been from the United States and other industrialized nations?
A: First of all, the participating leaders bent over backwards so as not to make Reagan feel uncomfortable, so as not to give him reason to believe he was going into a hostile environment. The attitude was: “If this guy is going to feel isolated, let him isolate himself. We’re going to be extremely open. We will tell Mr. Reagan that we are not the Indians shooting arrows at his covered wagons. We are inside the covered wagons ourselves, and the arrows are being shot at all of us because of the international economic crisis.”

This is basically the message everybody tried to get through, what Mitterand called the
problem of codevelopment: that the industrialized North is not coming out of its economic doldrums without the South. The industrialized North will not be able to reindustrialize, it will not be able to export unless there is a developing economy in the South. Who is going to buy the capital goods, the technology of the North? Even in the case of aid, the US immensely helps its employment problems, its corporate problems, its problems of exports through the assistance it gives.

American business has become an acute problem. The southern countries — let us call them the South for convenience sake — are incapable of stabilizing their economies when, as the foreign minister of the Ivory Coast said, the prices of what is sold are not decided by the market but by a small group of buyers. Economic planning becomes impossible.

The industrialized countries also have dwindling economies, high unemployment, isolation, stagnation, which in a great measure is derived from the fact that the economies of the South are stagnated and are not progressing. So there is here a problem not of massive transfers from the North to the South or of opening up wallets and giving money to the South, but of understanding the problem in its dimension of co-
development. We have to do certain things together in the spheres of energy, trade, financing, and food production or it will be curtains for everyone.

There was a very clear perception at Cancun of the connection between the problem of development and the problem of security, which I think sometimes the American delegation was not very acutely conscious of. Mitterand’s argument is that by creating actual, concrete, real conditions for development in the developing world, you are avoiding the intrusion of the Soviet Union in that economic and political space.

It was interesting that not only the leaders of the developing countries, but Mitterand, the Germans and the Japanese, and even Mrs. Thatcher were able to understand something that the American delegation did not want to or could not understand. It is the following, as one of the leaders from an African nation put it: “I am not against private enterprise. I am not against private investment in my country. I have a socialist economy, I nationalize, but nevertheless private capitalists come to my country. But they would not have come, they would not have been interested unless first I had created an infrastructure, unless first public capital, the public sector, created the conditions for private enterprise to come. If the public sector does not create schools and roads and power lines and communications, not a single cent from private enterprise will come.”

This is something that seems to be extremely difficult for the Reagan Administration to understand, in spite of the economic truth contained in it. This was repeated over and over again. I don’t know if Mr. Reagan and his delegation were educated at all in this very basic matter because he still insists that private enterprise do the job from scratch, which is not possible. When Reagan said that the problems of agriculture and food production could be solved only by private enterprise, [Tanzanian Prime Minister] Nyerere immediately shot back and said: “But Mr. President, you have the most heavily subsidized agriculture in the world. Without your subsidies and your farm supports, you would not have the agriculture you have. It is an agriculture propped up by state interventionism, so what are you talking about? How do you expect Tanzania or Mexico or India to go about it without a basic infrastructure, without the initial intervention of the public sector?”

Lopez Portillo turned around Reagan’s favorite metaphor of the fish and the fisherman. You remember Reagan says that if you give a man a fish, he will eat it, but if you teach him how to fish, he will never be hungry again. Lopez Portillo countered with: “We have to consider two situations. It is best to teach the man to fish, but there are situations in which

Phyllis Ewen
you have to give him the fish or he will not be there the next day, he will be dead.”

Another thing I found very interesting at Cancun was the cultural diversity represented there. Here was this country, the United States, that has this tremendous tendency — especially personified by the Reagan people — of believing its solutions are the best solutions for the world. “Our example is the shining example, everybody descends from John Calvin and Benjamin Franklin.” Well, here you had many voices from many cultures. There were China and India, there was Latin America, there was Western Europe, there was black Africa, there was Islam represented. You immediately had the sense that not only were many cultures represented, but many economic solutions were represented, economic solutions that have not had a chance, economic solutions derived from the cultural, historical, political experience of all these nations in the world. Why do we have to be tied with two models only? There should be a plurality of models derived from a plurality of experiences. We have no economic imagination. We haven’t started to think, started to imagine what can be done if we really take a close look at the solutions that might be there.

Q: Did something concrete other than dialogue emerge out of that conference? Do you have hopes that some serious changes will come from this process?
A: Many countries are rethinking their relationship to the United States. There is a big shift among the Europeans. The French, the Germans, and even the English — because of pressure from the Commonwealth nations — have acquired a conscience that was not there ten years ago. They are looking for solutions together with the Third World nations, even if they have to go about this process without the US. Mitterand was very emphatic that global negotiations will start next year in the United Nations, implying that this will happen whether the US participates or not.

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• WORKING THE FAST LANE

Jobs, Technology and Scientific Management in the US Postal Service

Peter Rachleff

Scientific management and machine technology have gone hand in hand down the years causing a progressive dehumanization of work, disruptions in the work process, alienation of workers, and, frequently, unemployment. As one author noted years ago, "unlike generals, who win their wars by recruiting armies, captains of industry win their wars by discharging armies." The pattern of mechanization and reorganization found in private industry since the turn of the century has repeated itself in the handling of the nation's mails in the short span of only one decade. The impact on jobs and working conditions has been no less severe. Understanding what has happened would seem a logical first step for postal workers — and the public — in trying to protect jobs and job rights and to maintain the integrity of an essential public service.

THE POSTAL SERVICE BECOMES A BUSINESS

For nearly two hundred years the US Post Office Department had functioned as a federal

This article is based on a series of lectures in July 1980 to a group of postal clerks attending an educational program in Morgantown, West Virginia. Keith Dix, Betty Justice, and Paul Becker of the Work Environment Project were very helpful in the process of getting the material ready for publication. A much longer version is now available in pamphlet form from the Work Environment Project, Rt. 10, Box 30, Morgantown, WV 26505; single copies are $3.50, postpaid, five or more copies, $3.00 each, postpaid.
agency and as such had been largely immune from the pressures for higher profits and capital accumulation facing business enterprises. The delivery of the nation's mail relied almost exclusively on manual labor, with management in the hands of political appointees. Congress determined policies governing the Post Office Department, established appropriations for running it, and evaluated its performance. In July 1971, with the passage of the Postal Service Reorganization Act, all of this changed. Once seemingly immune to goals of business and distant from the havoc created by new technology, in the decade of the 1970s the postal service now moved into the economic mainstream.

As the volume of all mail more than doubled between 1940 and 1970, and first-class mail tripled in volume, the postal service compensated by adding to its workforce, becoming the second largest employer in the entire country. Postal facilities became increasingly crowded, with both mail and workers, and the quality both of service and of working conditions went steadily downhill. In 1969 a postal-union official told a House of Representatives committee:

The average mail handler working in one of these poorly lit, dirty, cluttered, depressing and inefficient operations, usually bears the brunt of the Post Office's backwardness. He finds himself lugging around an 85 to 100 pound sack that could be transported far more efficiently and easily by machines operated by mail handlers. Many of our major post offices are so inadequate for today's needs that mail handlers and other postal employees are literally falling all over one another trying to get their job done.

In 1970, this deterioration of the postal service came to a head for both management and workers. Drawing strength and confidence from the movement of public-employee unionism in the 1960s, rank-and-file postal workers, from mail handlers to letter carriers, defied their national union leaders and launched a nationwide wildcat strike. For one week, the nation's mail was disrupted as postal workers held firm and, in some cities, threatened to expand their strike to other dissatisfied public employees. Administrators, meanwhile, had become convinced — some before, some during the strike — that full-scale "reorganization," wedded to massive capital improvements, mechanization, and "modernization," was the solution to their problems.

Postal workers were united in their quest for significant wage increases. At the time, their average annual income fell well below the Department of Labor's minimum standards for a family of four. There were even stories of full-time workers receiving public assistance. Postal workers had no intention of going back to work, whatever their union leaders told them, until they got their due. It did not take long for management to make conciliatory noises, as even Wall Street tottered on the brink of shutdown. President Nixon told the public that postal workers had been underpaid for the past twenty-three years. Within the halls of Congress, rumors of substantial wage increases were leaked out. Even then, even after all this talk, it took the deployment of 25,000 federal troops into the New York City postal facilities — the very center of the strike — to finally push postal workers back to the job.

Postal management, for its part, was thinking beyond the immediate termination of the strike to full-scale reorganization. An elaborate plan took shape, whose implementation would change the postal service from top to bottom. Part of this plan was, first, the convincing of union officials that their members' demands for decent wages and working conditions could only be met through reorganization and mechanization, and then, secondly, to use the union
leaders to convince their members of the same. Over the 1970s, the first would prove easier to accomplish than the second.

In 1971, a new, semi-independent United States Postal Service was born, with a new, "nonpolitical" management structure and new, corporate goals. The new USPS was given "broad borrowing authority," the right to float bonds to finance capital improvements. "Efficiency," cost cutting, attrition, mechanization, productivity, and "self-sufficiency" became the watchwords of the new management. Here, then, was the ultimate answer to the threat which had been posed in the 1970 national wildcat.

One of the first steps taken by USPS was to seek binding collective bargaining agreements with a limited number of nationwide trade unions, along industrial rather than craft lines. With rapid job transformation and work reorganization in the offfing, postal management knew that an industrial-union structure would prove more amenable to the job loss and transfers that would result. The agreements also specifically denied postal workers the right to strike. A highly formalized grievance procedure with arbitration as the final step was negotiated for solving questions that arose under the contracts. Each agreement contained a "management rights" clause patterned after those in private industry. It read, in part:

C. To maintain the efficiency of the operations entrusted to it;
D. To determine the methods, means, and personnel by which such operations are to be conducted.

In short, the USPS was given a free hand to "reorganize" postal work as it saw fit.

Mechanization was seen as the way to reduce the total labor costs of the USPS, which management feared would outstrip its ability to pay — especially in light of the wage concessions that had been necessary to end the 1970 wildcat. Many hoped that mechanization would eventually bring immunity to the disruption of strikes. Frederick R. Kappel, then chair of the USPS Board of Governors, was asked by a congressional committee in early 1973:

Q: What would we do if we had an occurrence of the strike of a couple of years ago? Do we have any machinery now that would work any better than we had before? Mr. Kappel responded:

A: No, we do not. I do not know what you could do about it. I think we have some mechanization, but it only feeds into a place where there isn’t any, and I think we are still in a very serious condition should a strike occur.

Overall, mechanization was seen as the ultimate strategy for making the new Postal Service economically self-sufficient.

Of course, the introduction of expensive machines could only be economically justified where there was an adequate, and regular, volume of machine-processable mail. Zip codes, originally intended primarily for use by large-volume mailers, were now promoted for adoption by all users of the postal service. Postal management also began a long — and ongoing — campaign for relative uniformity in envelope and postcard dimensions. But, most importantly, their strategy centered on accumulating large volumes of mail at a limited
number of locations, volumes large enough to justify the capital investment in new, costly machines. Peter Dorsey, then the regional postmaster for New York and later the USPS’s primary strategist in its mechanization campaign, told a congressional committee in 1973: “I suppose the ideal thing would be to have a long conglomeration of equipment hooked up sequentially where you could dump raw mail in one end and have it come out sorted to the carrier at the other end.”

The early 1970s saw the piecemeal introduction of such notions, with chaotic and catastrophic results. New machines were installed in antiquated and overcrowded postal facilities in major cities. Moe Biller, then president of the New York Metro local postal workers union, told a congressional committee in 1973:

The mechanization program, which runs into billions, will yet prove the biggest bust of all. You can't quarrel with the idea of mechanization in 1973, just as we’re all for motherhood and against sin. Let’s look at the New York experience in this regard. The introduction of letter-sorting machines into the general post office, a building built in 1910. That is a crying shame. The noise is unbearable. The machines are not cleaned enough; frequently there are paper lice.... The workers on these machines have mostly nightwork and most of them work weekends even though, initially, management advertised these jobs as mostly weekends off. Management’s comment? The people must be where the mail is.
At the same time, during the early seventies, the new postal management also adopted the strategy of reducing total labor costs through attrition, actively encouraging early retirement and even imposing a hiring freeze in 1972. They sought quick results, and they got them: 55,000 postal employees opted for early retirement. In New York for example, total postal personnel fell by 13 percent between 1970 and 1973. Needless to say, such across-the-board reductions failed to mesh with the mechanization program and created even more chaos in the postal service. Letter carriers certainly didn’t have their loads lightened. With their ranks reduced, they found their routes lengthened, their traditional work patterns disrupted by such directives as crossing lawns rather than walking on sidewalks, and their actual work observed by timekeepers and monitored by devices in their vehicles. Local union officials across the country reported an increase in heart attacks among letter carriers. Inside postal facilities, the reduced work forces were called upon to put in long overtime hours, actually increasing labor costs of many facilities. New York regional postmaster Peter Dorsey admitted to Congress in 1973: “We may have gone too far, we were hell bent on saving money as opposed to service.” James H. Rademacher, then president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, summed it all up in his testimony before the same committee:

We can state without fear of contradiction by the general public that the level of mail service is at the worst stage in history and the quality of the nation’s mail service is the poorest it has ever been.

Indeed, no one contradicted him.

By 1973, the business-oriented management of the new USPS had introduced new machines in existing postal facilities with high mail volumes and had reduced their total workforce through an attrition campaign. All observers, inside and outside the postal service, were agreed: the immediate results had been disastrous. The USPS was no closer to “self-sufficiency” than it had been in 1970 at its establishment. The quality of mail service had become a national scandal. And working conditions inside postal facilities had deteriorated even further. Despite the no-strike clause in the contract, management feared another major disruption of the nation’s mails upon the contract’s expiration in 1973. Apparently, the business-oriented management’s new strategies had backfired all around.

In this context, postal management moved to drastically reorganize the postal system, seeking to create large accumulations of mail in specific locations. A single, centralized facility would process all the originating mail for a given geographical region. And the entire range of new mail-handling and processing machines would be installed in these new buildings, constructed according to new, “modular” specifications. Similar plans were laid for the construction of twenty-one new bulk-mail facilities, which would transform the handling of parcels and other non-first-class items. Peter Dorsey, now promoted to senior assistant postmaster general for operations despite his problem in New York, reported in 1974:

Inside a Bulk Mail Center or Auxiliary Service Facility we will replace today’s manual single sorting operations with high-speed machine processing designed to maintain a continuous flow of mail through the facility. Our aim is to reverse the present 80% manual, 20% mechanical ratio in processing bulk mail.

Put very simply, the basic idea behind the national Bulk Mail Service is to centralize mail processing so that it is more efficient to utilize mechanization.
Thus relocation and mechanization became inseparable strategies as postal management moved to put the service on a more businesslike basis. Without relocation to concentrate the mails, mechanization would not be profitable — and without mechanization, relocation would make no sense at all.

Having reorganized the work place and the whole mail-handling system, management established standards for the output expected from each type of job within the post office. It also prescribed the most "efficient" methods for performing individual tasks. Now it resorts to discipline or discharge for those who fail to meet the standards or refuse to follow established methods.

In the short span of one decade the US Post Office Department, a federal agency which provided an essential service, was reorganized, and in the process of that reorganization it acquired new goals.

THE POSTAL SERVICE MOVES TO THE SUBURBS

It was part of postal management's overall strategy to locate many of the new facilities for accumulating mail outside of central cities. Publicly, postal officials offered a range of weak excuses for this major decision. Traffic was too congested in central cities, they argued, and it would slow the transportation of mail to and from the new facilities. But it turned out that many of the new locations were on major commuter arteries, and no less prone to traffic tie-up than urban streets. Land was too expensive in the cities, they also argued. But then they went out and paid exorbitant sums for suburban acreage. Of course, under the new United States Postal Service structure, they did not really have to convince anyone of the justice of their argument. What was behind their strategic relocation of major postal facilities?

The center of the 1970 wildcat had been in the major postal facilities in large cities. In Detroit, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York, some 50 to 75 percent of the workers — and strikers — had been black. Moving to the suburbs was designed to alter the composition of the workforces at the major postal facilities. Forest Park, Illinois, for example, was selected as the site for a new facility to replace the major Chicago center. In the old post office, a majority of the employees were black. In Forest Park, a lengthy commute from South Chicago, there were no black families — not one. It was unlikely that many black postal workers would make the transfer. Similar concerns were voiced in city after city.

The suburban location of the new facilities would alter the composition of the workforce in other ways as well. Many workers would choose not to transfer, either seeking jobs elsewhere in the postal system or retiring altogether. Administrators would thus have considerable latitude in hiring new workers or reassigning veteran workers, and, with their strengthened hand, could shape the workforce more in accordance with their own preference and needs. An added weapon, of course, was that workers transferring in had to be able to master the operation of new machinery. The location of new facilities at some distance from the currently operating centers therefore gave management a tremendous opportunity to reorganize the workforces inside the centers of the postal system.

But the implications of this relocation extended even further, for it simultaneously undermined two major sources of postal workers' strength. With the reorganization of work and the workforce which accompanied relocation, informal work groups which had developed over many years were suddenly torn apart. Men and women who had come to trust
and understand each other would never work together again. Moving to a new facility was an individual decision, and many chose not to go. Even accepting reassignment offered little promise of keeping work groups together, for the new machines in the new facilities demanded a reorganization of the work itself. Management in the new, mechanized facilities could thus operate, at least initially, with little concern for the workplace powers developed by experienced work groups.

The impact of relocation was even more wide-ranging. Traditionally, the bars, taverns, and restaurants surrounding a large workplace have served as centers of socializing and discussion by the workers employed there. These establishments, and the neighborhood within which they are located, have been a critical element to whatever strengths their patrons and residents exercised at work. The old, central-city postal facilities were situated within such a framework, one which helped consolidate and extend the postal workers’ immediate work-group relationships. But the new facilities were constructed “in the middle of nowhere,” surrounded by miles of concrete in every direction.

The new postal facilities were not located in the heart of any neighborhoods, surrounded by various social institutions. Nor have such institutions developed. Most postal workers live too far from the new facilities to be willing to add to their time away from home by hanging around after work. The prospect of an hour’s drive in heavy traffic is enough to sour any man or woman on relaxed socializing.

One postal worker gave the following account of a postal relocation in Pennsylvania:

On July 28, 1979, a new General Mail Facility (GMF) was opened in Lancaster, Pa. The new facility was designed to further consolidate the handling of dispatch mail within a three county area. It also serves the purpose of breaking community ties around the former facility and changing the relationship between employees.

Before occupation of the GMF facility, mail was collected from the county offices and processed for dispatch in each of the three counties within the Sectional Center. When the GMF became operational, all the collected mail from the three counties — including local mail — began being trucked to Lancaster for processing and dispatch. This means that mail going to a post office five miles down the road may be trucked forty miles to Lancaster and forty miles back to the destination. The reason given for consolidation was to improve efficiency through increased use of mechanization in Lancaster.

The GMF is on the outskirts of town. While the facility is only 2.5 miles from the old building, the setting is totally different. The old building is three blocks from the center of Lancaster. A convenience store and sandwich shops are literally across the street or around the corner. Banks and stores in the downtown area can be walked to during lunch break or after work. Numerous bars and taverns are within walking distance.

In contrast, the GMF is surrounded by acres of grass and farmland. There is no store or sandwich shop within walking distance. Employees are thus subtly encouraged to stay in the building. Except for the administrative offices, there are no windows in the building. The building consists of a one story, 156,000 square foot concrete slab. The warehouse atmosphere is cold and sterile.

Postal management officials have designed these bleak facilities in such a way as to maximize their control over workers. The results are strikingly similar to a prison yard. (Postal workers noted that even the newly remodeled facilities in central cities look very much like fortresses and prisons.)
On the basis of efficiency and financial return on the dollars invested, however, the relocation strategy did not make a particularly good showing. The bulk mail centers soon became the subject of much public criticism. In February 1979 the nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson sent one of his staff into a bulk mail center as a postal employee and then published the following impressions, under the headline "BULK MAIL CENTER: AUTOMATED NIGHTMARE."

The bulk mail center is a machine-powered world modeled after Charlie Chaplin's movie, "Modern Times." Automated carts filled with mail run along trolley tracks, heedless of parcels that fall off and people who get in the way. Overhead trays carry mail through the building, tipping their contents into chutes on command from the control room.

Operators in the control room can tell how the mail is moving by watching the flow on video screens. Unfortunately the screens don't show the plight of a worker frantically trying to load a truck as fast as the conveyor belt spews the mail out. It also doesn't show the assemblyline workers who can't keep pace with the relentless machines and can't shut off or slow down the conveyor belt. The parcels often spill off the belt onto the floor, where they may remain for days.

Employees at the Washington center have their own wry slogan: "You mail 'em, we mail 'em." It's not the humans who are doing the mauling, though; it's the machines. Like the sack shake-out rig that empties parcels — including those marked "Fragile — Glass" — from mail sacks and lets them fall four feet onto a belt.

Packages that get jammed in the automatic conveyors are ripped apart. Attempts are made to patch them up, but the many Humpty Dumpties irrepairs end up in a parcel graveyard — a room designated "loose in the mail" and off-limits to all but a few employees. Our reporter got inside for a look around, and found thousands of items from books to homemade Christmas presents. There were so many books that they had been arranged by topic on metal shelves....

The billion-dollar bulk mail system was supposed to save the Postal Service $300 million a year. Recent estimates have now reduced the potential savings to $40 million — a return of 4 percent on the money invested.

Nor is there any evidence that the bulk mail system saves time. A package en route from El Paso to Midland, Tex., for example, is sent 1,483 miles out of the way to be processed by a bulk mail center.

WHEN MACHINES REPLACE PEOPLE

Traditionally, mail had been sorted manually by experienced clerks, working in "teams" around a shared table. Each person had to memorize complex sorting "schemes," and all were able to maintain virtually 100-percent accuracy. A great deal of pride and experience went into learning "schemes," and tight-knit informal work groups developed within the post office. All this was wiped out by the introduction of letter-sorting machines (LSM's).

Now clerks sit before keyboards and screens. Letters — already faced, cancelled, and placed in position — appear on the screen at the rate of one per second. Reading the zip code, the clerk then types the appropriate code on the keyboard. Each clerk sits, fixed before the automatically placed screen, in a separate cubbyhole. Communication with workmates is virtually impossible. The LSM's are very noisy — so noisy that many operators contend they exceed OSHA noise levels. At any rate, the level of noise presents a major obstacle to normal conversation. But that doesn't concern postal management, since normal conversation among LSM operators is prohibited in most facilities.

The new LSM's rely on electronic memory banks, which allow operators to sort mail into an immediate 277 separations, far superior to the 77 which had been standard under the
manual-sort system. The new machines reduce the number of sorts necessary overall, and, intermeshed with the accumulation of mail volumes in a limited number of locations, their use made possible a significant reduction in the sorting workforce employed in mail processing. The LSM alone, according to postal management, was at least 57 percent more productive than the manual sorting system.

Nowhere in management’s productivity claims did it count the human toll. Here is the description offered by one worker, Jack Katzmir:

Although I am no longer an LSM Operator, I spent the better (or worse) part of 6 years as a “Trained Monkey” so most of my comments will deal with problems in and around the LSM. I started in the Postal Service in 1973, being hired under the LSM Training Program, whereby I had to qualify on the LSM or lose my job. I did qualify, and worked on the LSM for about 6 years, in which time I went physically and emotionally downhill.

Prior to working on the LSM, I had never needed glasses, but finally got my first pair in 1976 — and should have had them before that. Anyone can look down a row of people sitting on the LSM and see how few don’t have glasses — the few that don’t being relatively new to the LSM, it being only a matter of time until they need their first pair.

I haven’t had my ears professionally tested to determine what degree of hearing loss I have actually suffered, but there has been a definite hearing loss — not only have I noticed it myself, but those close to me pointed it out repeatedly.

The main physical problem I experienced, and one of the major factors in my decision to bid off the LSM was my hands. My hands cramped up constantly and gave me an arthritic like pain the entire time I coded. I got to the point where I coded with only one finger on each hand, as this helped to ease the pain compared to coding normally with all my fingers. I went to our medical unit, but neither the nurse nor the doctor were any help in determining what was causing the problem or what to do to alleviate the problem...
The letter-sorting machine was not introduced alone. Rather it was interfaced with a host of other innovations, which brought mail processing close to a continuous flow operation. Mechanical cullers, face-cancellers, and edgers fed mail into the LSM’s. Operators processed letters at the rate of one every second, and trays were automatically swept, the letters bagged for transportation to their post office of destination. The labor needed for first-class mail handling dropped sharply.

Postal management was — and still is — very interested in yet another innovation which could be interfaced with the LSM, further boosting productivity and displacing labor. This technological wonder — the optical character reader, or OCR — has long held a particular fascination for postal management. Jim P. Lee, the San Francisco sectional center manager, pulled no punches when he told a congressional committee in 1973:

The only piece of machinery that we have no problem with is the OCR. But as long as you put a human being at one of those LSM’s, we do have a problem because it is getting this human being adjusted to the machinery.

While there are technical problems to be overcome before the OCR can be introduced on a system-wide basis, when it does come the OCR will eliminate the LSM operator’s job.

This, then, is the modern facility where most first-class mail is processed. Clearly, it has cost postal workers a great deal. Interestingly, it has not seemed to solve the USPS’s problems. More mail than ever is sent through private carriers. Overnight delivery remains a pipe dream for most first-class mail. Postal rates have continued to climb, while the goal of “self-sufficiency” remains as elusive as ever. Missent mail floats throughout the system. But there is no denying that this reorganization has strengthened postal management’s hand vis-a-vis its employees. In this sense, and in no other, the reorganization of first-class mail processing can be termed a “success.”

The second main area of postal reorganization and mechanization has been bulk mail. Changes in this area have proven even more disastrous for postal workers.

In the early 1970s, the new management of the USPS earmarked more than $1 billion for the construction of a complete, integrated, mechanized bulk mail system. Twenty-one BMC’s and eleven auxiliary Service Facilities were to be constructed by the mid-1970s. Here, as with the relocation of major postal facilities, management’s public justification was questionable. The stated goal was to win back the parcel-post business which had been lost to UPS and other private carriers. However, a study commissioned by the Postal Service itself in 1973 had concluded that, even if it worked perfectly, the new bulk-mail system, with its complicated rerouting of packages over thousands of miles between facilities, would never be competitive with UPS within a 600-mile range of delivery — precisely the area in which UPS has captured the largest share of USPS business. Even before the new bulk-mail system became operational, then, it was clear to postal management that it could not magically recapture the lost business.

But this did not deter postal management. The new system — with its centralized control, relocation of centers to suburban areas, recomposition of the workforce, and reorganization of work — remained attractive to them. Despite a series of construction delays and equipment failure, the new system was put into operation in the later 1970s. George R. Cavell, the first program director of the Bulk Mail Processing Department, explained to Congress what was supposed to happen in each facility:
The equipment in question consists of high-speed sorting machines into which parcels are introduced from a series of automatic induction units. When the machinery is running, unsorted parcels are brought on conveyors to employees who, by operating simple keyboards, feed the zip code of each package into a computer. Once a package has been through this key code operation, it is automatically transferred to one of a number of shallow trays mounted on chair-driven carriages. These trays move by at a rate of 160 per minute, and, following an oval path, carry the packages past a series of slides each of which leads to a different collection point. The computer "remembers" which individual collection point each package is destined for, and as the tray comes up to the particular slide into which its package should be deposited, the computer activates a tripping device that tilts the tray and lets the parcels slide out.

It sounds pretty smooth. But in 1976, Representative Charles Wilson opened his subcommittee's hearings on the Bulk Mail System by calling it, "a dream gone sour, or, more appropriately, a management blunder of the first magnitude, which will cost the American public millions of dollars."

Witnesses told Wilson's subcommittee of packages caught between conveyor rollers, parcels being run over by containers, small parcels being damaged in induction unit slides by heavier parcels, and packages being smashed upon dropping from sack shake-out machines. William Anderson, Deputy Director of the General Government Division of the GAO, which had just released its study of the bulk mail system, testified:

We believe much of the damage is caused by the equipment in the centers. Unlike the other problems the Postal Service may have, the personnel have very little to do with this one. It's just a case of the machinery.

Missent and misdirected parcels remained a much larger percentage of total volume than was expected as well. Instead of the targeted maximum of 5 percent, for example, the Washington, D.C., regional facility was rarely below 10 percent in 1975 and 1976, and occasionally above 20 percent.

The BMC's were also quite unsafe. Accident rates were high from the day the centers opened, and they have remained high to the present day. In 1978, for example, USPS figures ranged between twelve and fourteen injuries per million work hours, triple the nationwide average. The brand new buildings with brand new machinery were proving as unsafe as the old, antiquated facilities which were being closed. GAO investigator William Anderson testified in 1976:

The walkways are really tough to stick to and then these towveyors are moving downward. There are a lot of instances, and I know we had to dodge them all over the place walking through the plant here. The work floor is just so crowded, and these things are coming sporadically and if you don't keep your — if you're not intent all the time on trying to spot a coming towveyor, I can understand how people can be getting hurt.
It is unfortunate indeed that frequently the public placed the responsibility for postal services inefficiencies on the postal employees rather than on poor management and ineffective machinery. Employees who have traditionally prided themselves on both speed and accuracy in handling the nation’s mails have thereby been hit hard from both sides. The new technology has eliminated jobs and degraded those that remain. And when the new technology fails, the workers get blamed.

Summoning up the USPS’s success in making the mails more efficient, one union leader made the following critique in 1976:

What has $3 billion in plant and mechanization accomplished? The Bulk Mail System cost $1 billion and high speed letter sorting machines, and other mechanization cost nearly $2 billion. Let’s look at the Postal Service when it was labor intensive. During that time, missent, misdirected and damaged mail amounted historically to about \( \frac{1}{2} \) of 1% of the volume during the decade proceeding the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. Today the Bulk Mail System damage rate is 1% and the missent is approximately 5%. This error rate is machine error, not human error. In the letter sorting machine operation the error rate (machine) is 4% . . . .

Who now thinks of “self-sufficiency” as a feasible goal for the USPS? Postal rates increase, subsidies increase, and postal service remains a public laughing stock. It is now important to ask ourselves why have these been the results of the new strategies of postal management.

One is tempted to answer the question glibly by dismissing the USPS’s condition as merely another typical example of government bureaucracy in action. To be sure, instances of mismanagement, ignorance, stupidity, and perfidy can be cited ad infinitum. But, was there not a method to this madness? Are there not some long-run advantages to management which will outweigh the costs and confusion which we have noted? It seems so.

The one critical, shared feature of the measures taken by the new business-oriented management was that they all attacked postal workers’ sources of power. Not only was the workforce reduced and the postal unions tightly restricted, but the attack also targeted the informal work groups, the neighborhoods around the postal facilities, and the once-crucial importance of the workers’ skill and knowledge to the daily operations of the postal service. Work was simplified, mechanized, routinized, and subjected to the automatic pace of machines and the centralized control of management. Parking lots look like prison yards, surrounded by high gates. Management’s concern with gaining control dictated the strategies which have resulted in the continuing deterioration of the quality of postal service, but these same strategies now place management in the driver’s seat for determining, without challenge or interruption, the future of the postal service.

**IN GENERATIONS TO COME**

Mechanized mail processing grew from 25 percent of total volume in 1971 to 70 percent in 1979, while the workforce fell through attrition, by 80–90,000. One-time American Postal Workers Union official David Johnson estimated that 250,000 to 300,000 postal workers will be eligible to retire between now and 1985, reflecting the big postwar expansion of postal employment. How many will remain, and what they will do, will largely depend on postal management’s implementation of two major technological innovations. How postal workers and their union cope with these impending innovations will determine the future of their jobs and the future of the postal service.
In retrospect, it certainly seems that postal management blundered into, and through, its reorganization, construction, and mechanization programs of the 1970s. Historically, management’s quest for the “rationalization” of production has always generated chaos for its employees, whatever the industry, whatever management’s expertise. However, this sort of problem certainly seemed profound in the Postal Service in the 1970s, and the resulting levels of workplace chaos and disorganization were extreme.

On the other hand, had postal management really “had its act together,” so to speak, in its reorganization and mechanization programs, the consequences for postal workers might well have been all the more extreme. Tens of thousands of postal workers might have found themselves out of work altogether, at a time of ever-tightening labor markets. Maybe we should be thankful that postal management was so inexperienced and so inept. Had they not been, the present situation might be even worse than it is.

However, there is little solace in such observations, for contemporary postal management is moving towards the implementation of electronic message systems with little of its previous uncertainty and confusion. They have hired experts from NASA and contracted for the services of the nation’s most advanced computer and electronic firms. After a decade of stumbling, postal management now knows precisely what it is doing in the area of electronic message systems, and they have carefully worked out plans that would eliminate most postal workers’ jobs in the next twenty years.

It is important to take a close look at the two major technological innovations that postal workers can expect to face in the 1980s: (1) widespread use of advanced optical character readers (OCR’s) with both “read” and “code” capacities, interfaced with a battery of multiposition letter-sorting machines, and (2) a full-fledged electronic message system (EMS), which would do away with most mail handling and processing as we know it. If postal workers are to cope with these innovations, it will be necessary to understand them.

Neither of these technological innovations is genuinely new, in the strict sense. Postal management has expressed an interest in their development since the mid-1960s. But only in the last few years has postal management committed itself to developing and using these new technologies. Now, after the spending of millions of dollars on research and pilot projects, full system-wide implementation is around the corner.

In 1977, Roger K. Salaman of the US Department of Commerce told a congressional committee that some 60 percent of the Postal Service’s first-class mail consisted of financial transactions which could be completed through the new, privately operated system of “electronic funds transfers.” He predicted conservatively that, within the next decade, up to 40 percent of first-class mail might disappear. Congressman Hanley responded to Salaman’s testimony: “Because of the development of this technology of electronic transfer of funds, I think it is fair to say that we kiss [this mail] right off, say good-bye to [it].”
But other witnesses argued against such a fatalistic concession. They suggested that the USPS develop its own electronic message system with all deliberate speed. Not to do so, warned Dr. Rader of the National Research Council, would mean: "mounting costs, decreasing volumes, and continually rising deficits, a 'no-win' situation leading inevitably to a deterioration of services and a growing dependency on subsidies." In short, then, one of the reasons for management's current interest in computer and electronic innovations is that reorganization and mechanization in the 1970s failed to ensure the continued adequacy of mail volume necessary to justify the mechanization itself.

At the same time, the new centralized control that management gained in the 1970s now gives it much more of a free hand in its latest plans for the introduction of new technology. Postal management now believes it can introduce new technologies, bringing a massive loss of jobs, with little collective opposition from their workforce.

Most postal workers are familiar with optical character readers. They are computer-controlled machines that scan addresses and then route the envelopes to the proper bins of the LSM's with which they are interfaced. Linked to the introduction of nine-digit zip codes, OCR's will sort much of the nation's mail automatically. Prototypes have been developed which are reportedly capable of sorting upwards of 80,000 pieces of mail in an hour. The introduction of OCR's will, quite simply, replace all LSM operators, who read addresses visually and then key-in codes. In short, the very occupation will disappear.

The development of the OCR has been plagued with problems, mostly stemming from the machine's inability to "read" all mail. The inability, or unwillingness, of people to address their letters uniformly has created the greatest problems. However, between 70 and 80 percent of first-class mail volume is generated by businesses, who have already shown a willingness to dovetail their mailing operations with the technological requirements of postal machinery. They are already addressing their envelopes in such a way as to make them "machine-readable."

To date, where OCR's have been introduced, they have been directly interfaced with standard LSM's. In short, they simply replace the LSM operators. A greater challenge lies in the interfacing of OCR's with electronic message equipment, such as facsimile transmission. This is the wave of the future.

Postal management has divided its research into electronic message systems into three stages — the so-called Generation I, Generation II, and Generation III. Let's look at them in turn.

Generation I substitutes electronic transmission of information for a portion of the mail stream. Functionally, this is similar to the World War II "V-mail" service, in which a letter was photographed and reduced to microfilm which was transported to an overseas location for reproduction. Today's technology enables letters or messages to be converted to electronic signals for transmission and reversion to hard copy.

In Generation II, information enters the mail stream at a postal installation close to the recipient. Prior to the production of a hard copy at this postal installation, the information exists in electronic form, possibly with a concurrent hard copy for local record purposes. All transmission and sorting is electronic. An example of Generation II is Mailgram, developed jointly by Western Union and the USPS. Mailgrams may originate at a terminal (Telex, TRW, or InfoCom), at a computer (direct or via a West-
ern Union office), by a toll telephone call, by acoustically coupled terminals (facsimile, wordprocessor, or teletypewriter), or across-the-counter at a public telegraph office. Once entered into the system, the information is switched and transmitted electronically to a post office near the addressee, and a hard copy is produced. The hard copy is put into an envelope by USPS personnel and dropped into the conventional mail stream for delivery.

The conceptual model of Generation II suggests telecommunication services similar to Mailgram, with electronic inputs entered directly at a postal installation near the originator. It is estimated that 80 percent of all letter mail originated by government and 40 percent originated by business would yield to input in electronic form. As Generation II service grew, addressees would receive an increasing proportion of their mail in the form of messages that have been transmitted electronically and converted to hard copy for delivery.

Looking beyond this, it will become feasible to replace physical delivery with electronic delivery for each individual recipient, depending upon the specific circumstances. Two main elements are required for Generation III to operate widely: The engineering problems here are immense, but USPS management thinks they can be overcome. As early as 1977 William J. Miller, the director of advanced mail systems development, testified before Congress:

Q: How soon do you foresee the opportunity of having what some refer to as “the black box” in the home, an inexpensive means by which every individual household could receive its message?
A: Miller said: 1990

To be sure, much controversy has followed these plans. Private firms have challenged the USPS’s expansion into this area, especially its quest for a legally-sanctioned monopoly. The FCC and Congress, traditionally responsive to business demands, have failed to grant the USPS the free hand it has sought. Other critics have expressed concerns about the potential violation of privacy such systems could occasion. In Generations I and II, what will happen to the originating copies of letters? Will they be returned to the sender? destroyed? or stored? Who might gain access to them? Our knowledge of the traditional cooperation between USPS management and the FBI and other agents of domestic surveillance gives us little confidence in glib assertions that electronic mail poses no threat to individual privacy. Similarly, though, our knowledge of the government’s growing disregard for individual civil liberties is hardly reassuring. Unless there is a strong outpouring of public sentiment on this issue, the USPS and the government will do as they see fit.

Given what we know about the available technology there is no denying that the future is exceedingly grim for postal workers. Postmaster General Bolger told a congressional subcommittee in 1978 that the adoption of electronic message systems would displace three-fourths of the processing workforce, even without eliminating the uses of “hard copy” at both ends of the operation. Can we comfortably agree with the GAO’s William Anderson’s contention that: “Anything that will make the Postal Service less labor intensive has to be to the Nation’s good”?
LAST THOUGHTS

The introduction of new technology involves more than a simple quest for improved productivity, or the general "march of progress." The development and introduction of new technologies is governed by social decisions. Those in power have always sought out and promoted precisely those technological innovations which will increase their control over other human beings, be it the consumers of energy or the workers in their plants.

In the workplace, the availability, development, and introduction of new technologies has consistently provided management with a powerful weapon to disrupt workplace organization, reorganize production, routinize work, and increase control over the employees. It was the growing demands and militancy of postal workers in the late 1960s, reflected in their national wildcat in 1970, that pushed postal management in the direction of wholesale reorganization. The replacement of human labor by machines and scientific management of the workplace became the order of the day. But this was not all that happened. The new technologies which were introduced broke up work groups and the social networks of support, regimented the work of all postal employees, and centralized management's immediate control within each facility. This strategy, we have seen, was disastrous for both postal workers and postal patrons. The quality of the nation's mail service plummeted. But these technologies had served their purpose for management, for they significantly shifted the balance of power in their direction.

Interestingly, two figures in the rank-and-file militancy of the early 1970s, then presidents of New York City locals of the APWU and the National Association of Letter Carriers, now head their respective unions. Together, they negotiated a post-deadline contract with postal management this past summer. Most impressive was the size of the money package in the contract (at a time of "takeback" bargaining) and the maintenance of the cost-of-living escalator, which Postmaster General Bolger had publicly targeted for extinction. Amidst preparations by both local management and rank-and-file groups for a wildcat strike upon the expiration of the old contract, the new agreement caught everyone by surprise.

Both Moe Biller and Vinnie Sombrotto appear tamed in their new roles. Neither opposes technological change in the post office. Despite their "militant" pasts, they, too, have been part of the consensus that has seen technological development as the answer to the postal service's woes. Perhaps their faith was rewarded by the 1981 settlement, which surely strengthened their hand within their union. Postal management obviously preferred to strengthen the influence of these "responsible" leaders by letting them deliver the goods (in terms of money, anyway) to their members, rather than face more than 600,000 angry workers, outside of their union leaders' control. Postal workers themselves had shown a willingness to exchange wage increases for technological development, even in the tumultuous early seventies. And, in 1978, they had agreed to a two-tier system within their union, with life-long security promised to those hired before 1978, but six years of continuous service required of those hired afterwards in order to be covered (not unlike the now notorious "A" and "B" systems of unionized, longshoreworkers).

While there were some postal workers who remained dissatisfied with the contract, they had little hope of galvanizing other union members into a wildcat walkout. Barely a month later, while many postal workers were still
pondering how to cast their ballots, President Reagan sent them, and all other unionized workers, a strong message, when he fired the striking air traffic controllers. The new administration chose an inexperienced, small, isolated union, with supposedly well-paid members, to make its point — that public-sector workers could now expect to be punished for striking in the face of no-strike laws, oaths, and clauses.

All this, especially in the shadow of the destruction of Solidarity by the Polish military and Communist Party, underlines the hollow nature of state ownership as a working-class goal. There has to be much more. What this could mean in an agency like the postal service is suggested in an editorial appearing in the newsletter of the Prince Georges County, Maryland, local of the APWU. Written by Union Dispatch editor Danny Betman, it says in part:

My very modest proposal is really very simple. Get rid of the current make-up of the Postal Service, the PMG, the Board of Governors, the whole mess. In its place, turn over the operation and running of the Postal Service to the only people who know how to run it correctly — the people who do the work day in and day out. This could be done by working through the Union structure. Let the Congress stake us to just three years Postal Subsidy to cover the period of reorganization, and we would be breaking even at the end of those 3 years. How would we organize it differently in order to do this? Easy!

The problem with the PO isn’t the hopeless situation of trying to provide a cheap, efficient service to the people and it is not with the workers themselves. The real problem is with top management who sit down in L’Enfant Plaza in air conditioned and carpeted offices and play around with computers, adding machines, pushing a lot of paper and juggling a lot of figures. The problem is that they don’t know the first thing of what it is like on the workroom floor, of what it is like actually trying to move the mail. The average worker on the floor knows more about his/her job than any so-called “expert” and there is nothing that cannot be learned by the workers about the rest of the operations.

We would run the PO democratically. The first step would be the elimination of all craft distinctions, and the equalization of salaries for all Postal workers. All supervisory and managerial positions would be filled by democratic vote, all would be subject to recall, and would receive salaries no higher than the rest of the workers. This would insure that only people with an interest in the welfare of the service and of all would want these positions.

Any grievance concerning working conditions, safety, etc. would be heard by a committee of elected co-workers who would solve these problems. All rules and regulations concerning work, salary, etc. would be decided democratically. The workers would elect representatives to make policy for the running of the business. The postal service would remain as the property of the people of the US, run and operated by the workers as a non-profit service to the public.

The problem with the PO is not the workers. The problem is the system under which the PO is run. Even the politicians who are hell-bent upon destroying the Postal Service say this. Their solution is give it away to business and the public and workers be damned. We see the same problem but offer a different solution, one that can provide a cheap, reliable service to the public and safeguard our welfare, our safety and our livelihood. So, Mr. PMG, give away the postal service, not to those who only want to use it for their own profit, but to those who are the only ones capable enough and caring enough to do the job.
NOTES

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PETER RACHEFF teaches at community colleges and works in labor education in western Massachusetts.

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Boston College

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One more cup of coffee
and I will be ready to leave.
I no longer listen to your words,
but second guess the weather report. My
eyes slow to share yours for a distant
instant and move on to assess the sky.

I hesitate, debate stepping inside you:
Time only to gather up my reluctant
ambiguities and depart (Work Waits).
The day ahead demands a vigilant
agile caution (a focus I can only find
by folding inward. The price of
survival paid with increasing sorrow).

Tonight, after a period of decompression
in the shower, my heart (I hope)
will open again. In the damp bedroom,
beneath a bare lightbulb, flowered
bedsheet softens mattress on the
bent brown floor. You bounce bouquets
about the house with a dusty
Hong Kong harmonica. We fall, swallowing
the wet fragrance of crushed flowers
and release a swarm of sighs.

In the dark, I will dilligently
search my soul for calluses.
Tomorrow: We gamble again.

Gene Dennis
Nightshift No. 2

In the middle of some warm and favorite dream
he arrives
tense and resentful
making me, somehow, responsible
for the job the crazy hours
the cold walk home
rearranges blankets
wrenches pillows
throws himself to an uneasy sleep
while I huddle guiltily
on the cold edge of morning
until the baby wakes.

Daily, the house is a battle ground
and I, the buffer zone
between doorbell telephone
my son’s joy
the hostile stranger
in the bedroom.

All day long I hear him
tossing and swearing
At dinner, he presides in silence
anger palpable behind his eyes.

The baby whines plays with his food
I hurry to remove him
and hear above the sound of his bath
the inevitable drone of the T.V.

And though I know in my head
it’s the company’s fault

I am busy plotting
the best way to pick a fight.

---

Overtime No. 3

After about a week
of steady overtime when
I’ve had it with trying
to keep the kids quiet and
watching supper shrivel
on the stove and being
afraid to tell him about
the dent in the front fender
Just about the time I figure
the overtime will barely cover
a divorce

It’s payday

He comes in more quietly than usual
I make coffee and we talk
for a while
then just before he goes to bed
he hands me the cheque
as if it had my name on it too

Bronwen Wallace
CULTURE, POLITICS AND WORKERS' RESPONSE TO INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE US

Jim Green

In recent years radical historians have taken a new and exciting look at how industrialization took place in the US and how workers responded to wrenching changes in their lives. Moving beyond the traditional confines of labor history, these historians have occupied the larger terrain of social and cultural history. Using modern Marxist and feminist methods, they have challenged many of the old assumptions about how the transition to industrial capital occurred and how working people experienced that change.

The local studies of industrialization by Thomas Dublin, Paul Faler, Alan Dawley, and Bruce Laurie, though limited to white workers in the Northeast, provide us with a new understanding of the transition to industrial capitalism. They also develop a convincing class analysis that goes beyond economic determinism to include a strong cultural dimension. And by uncovering a variety of resistance movements — economic, political, and cultural — they affirm working people's ability to make their own history within prescribed circumstances. This Marxist view of economic and social development seriously challenges the assumptions of modernization theory which has become very attractive to liberal historians of the industrial revolution. According to this theory: "Industrialization begins with a short and turbulent period of uprooting; but, with time, resistance succumbs to the processes of acculturation and the result is something approaching harmony and stasis." So, as one critic writes: "The grandchild of the premodern peasant laborer adjusts to the time clock and the incentive wage; the primitive rebel is succeeded by the leader of a wage conscious trade
union." The historical studies reviewed here provide little support for this ideological view of industrial progress.

To a considerable degree, these writers of local histories of industrialization have been influenced by two older writers whose own work has continued to generate insights in the past decade. Herbert Gutman and David Montgomery both came out of Communist Party backgrounds and both worked in factories for a number of years in the post-World War II period. But they both came to find traditional Marxist views of American working-class history to be too simple, too narrowly concerned with the actions of labor-union leaders. Gutman's influential collection of essays, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (Knopf, 1976), outlines a striking new way of understanding the transition to capitalism as a series of violent confrontations in which each generation of new workers challenged the industrialists' demands not only through unions but through the use of cultural resources like "pre-industrial" rituals, crowd protests, and collective celebrations. David Montgomery's early work also explores the importance of popular cultural and political traditions for the "pre-industrial working classes" in the 19th century. His recent essays, collected under the title *Workers' Control in America* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), move beyond the early period of industrialization to explore control struggles in the twentieth-century workplace. These essays penetrate beneath the rhetoric of labor leaders, industrialists, and various experts and reveal the thoughts and actions of rank-and-file workers on the shop floor.

Three other historians use some of the same social and cultural insights while focusing primarily on intellectual history. Daniel Rodger's well-written study of the work ethic explains how workers resisted capitalist labor discipline but also conceded something to the work ethic by asserting the dignity of work. Eric Foner's study of Tom Paine and his artisan followers in Philadelphia combines social and intellectual history as it probes the strengths and weaknesses of Painite republicanism which had a strong influence on labor politics in the early 19th century. Nancy Cott's thoughtful study of what women wrote about their own "sphere" of life and work in the 1780-1835 period challenges the adequacy of previous Marxist class analysis for understanding social history. It also raises fascinating questions about the relationship of women's culture to feminist politics — questions that can be readily applied to the connection between workers' culture, notably its "pre-industrial" form, and radical politics.

British social historians, notably E.P. Thompson, have been enormously influential in the development of a new approach to industrialization and workers' history in the US. Thompson of course stimulated a remarkable reorientation in social history with his powerful and evocative book *The Making of the English Working Class*. He defended the early "catastrophic" view of the industrial revolution against economic historians who argued that the masses of people benefitted through a higher standard of living. But he did not depict English workers as helpless victims of the capitalist juggernaut. Far from it. The degradation and exploitation described by Engels in the *Condition of the Working Class in England* and by Marx in *Capital* have their central place in Thompson's work, but strong emphasis is also given to the popular cultural traditions which sustained opposition and helped create a form of class consciousness.

Thompson's Marxist methodology has been of special importance to left historians in this
country. Class is presented as a “historical phenomenon” that happens in human relationships rather than as a static category. Class experiences are largely determined by the “productive relations” into which people are born or enter involuntarily. And “class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms, embodied in traditions, systems, ideas and institutional forms.” It would be hard to overestimate the influence of these ideas in recent social and labor history. Indeed, all of the historians reviewed here acknowledge their debt to Thompson in one way or another.

THE POLITICAL STAKES

The questions raised by Thompson and by the American historians discussed here are not simply a matter of antiquarian interest. Certain populist intellectuals have articulated the political lessons they think the new social history offers to present-day activists. In his recent book on “the new citizen movement,” The Backyard Revolution, Harry Boyte argues that Thompson, Gutman, and a new generation of social historians have discredited “the left wing view of social movement” as, among other things, “inattentive to the complexity of tradition” and unaware that “actual movements inevitably draw on rich buried cultural themes from the past that coexist with repressive ones.” “Left-wing theory and politics,” he argues, “cuts people off from their past, their folkways, and their group identities [and] results in social policy abstracted from concrete reality.”

The populist interpretation of the new social history is set against “left theory” in which
radical movements appear through a "radical rupture with the past." This paradigm, if we can call it that, surely derived from the emphasis Marx and Engels originally placed on the "dead weight" of the feudal past. However, their view was more complex than the populist critics suggest. In the *Communist Manifesto* the "bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has... pitilessly torn asunder the motley ties that bound man to his 'natural superior'"; hence the progressive nature of a radical rupture with the past. But Marx and Engels also realized that working-class opposition to the wages system relied upon memories of what they called "feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." Lenin later adopted a unilinear historical view based on Western models of progress through large-scale industry and technology. The populists strike telling blows in their attacks on this worldview. The present-day Left, in fact, draws far too little on the more romantic version of 19th century Marxism which allowed William Morris to hold up folk memories of the past to maintain a vision of socialism in which old "rituals of mutuality" became the basis of a new society. As Thompson says in his new thoughts on Morris, the Left's abandonment of romanticism and utopianism robbed its critique of moral force and made its vision less humane.

But before we reject Marxism as a method for understanding radical and revolutionary movements, we should examine the alternative that is implied by the populist interpretation of the new social history. After all, it gives us little understanding of what role organizers or outside agitators play in social movements, and more importantly, how radical new ideas influence those movements. This interpretation clearly supports a view of left politics which is, according to historian Lawrence Goodwyn, "based on one specific theoretical premise: our maxims of democratic procedure must be grounded upon the acceptance of human consciousness where it is..." The stakes in this debate are high. If the populists are right, then Marxism, the New Left, and feminist movements have all been wrong in attacking traditional culture and trying to create new, liberated cultural forms through politics.

The political interpretation of the new social history is important. What are these historians telling us about how people encountered industrialization and how they responded politically? Thompson, Gutman, Montgomery, and the younger social historians whom they have influenced do not make a simple link between protest movements and a "radical rupture with the past." But they do assume a kind of dialectical relationship between old traditions and new productive relations, between folk wisdom and radical new ideas, and between ritual protest and modern political activity.

In contrast to this dialectical approach, populists tend to be too impressed with the strength of tradition, the relative autonomy of subcultures, and the immutability of established social structures. Their paradigm seems to be based on the notion that protest movements emerge — often rather spontaneously — from activities taking place within various "free spaces" like the Baptist church, the women's club, or the ethnic society. They brand as elitist other forms of political activity led by radicals with nontraditional views, because these subversives challenge folk wisdom and custom. There is a troubling resemblance here to the views of conservative historians who criticize "feminism in the name of the common woman" and socialism in the name of "John Q. Worker." This interpretation also ignores the ways in which traditional understandings of social structure and political
power limit the radical potential of social movements.10

If the new social history is to help the Left in its contest with the New Right over cultural and social issues, we need a dialectical understanding of how traditional and modern ideas and tactics have been synthesized. The left social historians reviewed here give us a lot to work with. They let us see the cultural side of the industrial revolution and the ways in which working people held up the past as a way of criticizing the present. They do show how "rich, buried cultural themes" fed radical movements, but they are equally aware of how "repressive" themes restricted those movements. They also understand how the "sharp jostle of experience" — to use E.P. Thompson's phrase — gave subversive meaning to certain traditional ideas and opened the way for liberating new ideas that helped transform people's understanding of their collective experience.

CLASS ANALYSIS AND THE CULTURAL SIDE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Traditional labor history can be divided into two schools if one looks at the extreme ends of the continuum. For many years the progressive labor economist John R. Commons and his students at the University of Wisconsin dominated the field with impressive scholarly studies emphasizing the emergence of job-conscious business unions as the inevitable product of an expanding market in which workers organized to protect their wages and skills from competitors as well as employers. The Marxist historians who were the Commons school's most persistent critics (though they got little hearing in academic circles) wrote with the viewpoint that there had been class struggle on a grand scale which needed only to be documented. Both schools of thought limited their work largely to trade-union and political history and shared a basic economistic orientation. Neither the liberals nor the Marxists wrote about the social and cultural history of the industrial revolution. Indeed, they tended to ignore the origins of industrial capitalism and workers' ritual response to factory discipline and the division of labor.

Herbert Gutman challenged both of the old schools in a series of essays on local strikes in the late nineteenth century. He effectively demonstrated the importance of local support from newspaper editors, grocers, law officers, and other middle-class elements left out of previous accounts. The extent of public support in these strikes clearly indicated that workers could mobilize enough political and social power to check employers in crucial struggles. Industrialists found that local communities often viewed "the factory and its disciplines" as alien. The factory owner "met with unexpected opposition from nonindustrial property owners" and "learned that the middle and professional classes did not automatically accept his leadership and idolize his achievements," Gutman writes in Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America. "Moreover, the new working class, not entirely detached from the larger community, had significant ties to that community which strengthened its power at critical moments." In sum, the class struggle included all elements in a community.

Herbert Gutman established the cultural dimension of workers' response to the factory and presented a class analysis that extend beyond the "narrow economic analysis" of the old schools. Gutman's work paralleled Thompson's though it was less explicitly concerned with the formation of class consciousness.

Both historians depart from the economistic definition of class as a static category. For Gutman, class experiences and feelings happen
when first-generation workers confronted exploitative conditions and "used" their "pre-industrial culture" to resist alien demands imposed by corporations. Like Thompson, he shows how culture exerted an influence on class formation and, implicitly at least, on class consciousness. At the same time Gutman's work challenges the pluralist assumptions of many social historians who see working-class life largely as a series of discrete ethnic experiences; it indicates how the common experiences of working-class people gave new meanings to national identities in the US.

Herbert Gutman's influence is clearly evident in the local studies of industrialization by Thomas Dublin, Paul Faler, Bruce Laurie and Alan Dawley. Their monographs help us understand better than ever the class nature of the transition to industrial capitalism. Building on the earlier work of progressive historians like Caroline and Norman Ware, Constance McLaughlin Green and Edith Abbott, these socialist historians depict the human tragedy of the industrial revolution." But like Gutman and Thompson they view workers not as helpless, uprooted victims of economic forces, but
as active, articulate participants in a historical drama in which they played leading roles. These historians document the flexibility and tenacity of family and kinship ties in the face of exploitation and degradation, though they are less inclined than mainstream social historians to romanticize the "survival of the family" or to minimize the human costs extracted in the process of adaptation. Finally, these left social historians follow Gutman and Thompson in emphasizing the important role of past practices, rituals, and cultural values in the formation of class and class consciousness. But they would also agree with Thompson's comment: "I hope that nothing I have written...has given rise to the notion that I suppose the formation of class is independent of objective determinations, that class can be defined simply as a cultural formation, etc." Rather the historians reviewed here show the interplay of material changes, cultural formations, class experiences, and politics.

Paul Faler's evocative study of the Lynn shoemakers, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (State University of New York Press, 1981) offers a sensitive portrait of hearty, self-reliant artisans who are certainly not degraded victims. This is not a catastrophic view of helpless masses toiling pathetically in giant factories. Indeed, Faler shows that industrial capitalism arrived in Lynn during the decades after the Revolutionary War, long before the shoe factory appeared. Sounding like Gutman, he explains how difficult it was for the early capitalists to have their way in Lynn. There is a wistful tendency in Faler's book which perhaps exaggerates the journeymen's power as a counterpoint to the alienation of unskilled working people who later toiled in factories. But the cordwainers of Lynn did not long escape the effects of industrial capitalism by remaining in their cozy "ten-footer" workshops. Faler impressively describes the social and cultural impact of the initial division of labor created by a new class of merchant capitalists. The division of labor broadened into a wider division of classes that affected nearly every social and cultural institution in Lynn, from the Methodist chapel to the grammar schools and the town cemetery. No one has offered a better description than Faler of the cultural dimensions of class conflict created by industrialization.

Paul Faler's moving descriptions of the mechanics and their community contain the kind of insights that can come from empathy. But Faler writes of manufacturers as well as mechanics, and this gives his class analysis a kind of dialectical balance missing from most labor history. His discussion of how capitalists and their allies attempted to create a new "industrial morality" is absolutely critical to our understanding of the early industrial revolution. Moral police were injected into many areas of life: educational reform to separate boys and girls while inculcating "habits of application, respect to superiors, and obedience to law"; a new poor law, "inculcating a profound dread of poverty and a compulsive drive to do all humanly possibly to avoid poverty"; and temperance reform, "to wean the mind from those scenes of festivity and amusement which at the present day are all too prevalent among us." Doctors, for example, agreed not to prescribe spirits for medicinal purposes and even "decided not to attend to any family whose head was a drunkard." Faler, like Gutman, reveals the important place social drinking assumed in preindustrial popular culture and how much this "libertine" way of life conflicted with the demands of capitalist industry. As a result the industrial revolution generated not only a conflict over wages and
hours fought in the forms of strikes, boycotts and mass protests, but also a kind of class war fought on cultural terrain.

In *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Harvard University Press, 1976) Alan Dawley provides the best local study we have of the entire nineteenth-century industrialization process. Dawley builds upon Faler’s work but is somewhat less concerned with the social and cultural effects of the process. He devotes more attention to economic and technological change and to politics. *Class and Community* establishes the validity of a Marxian interpretation of the industrial revolution by refuting the famous theory of industrial relations articulated by John R. Commons in his 1907 essay on American shoemakers. Based on the assumption of a fluid marketplace in which ownership gave no decisive advantage to capital, the theory “relegated Marxian categories of surplus value and the mode of production to the status of secondary factors, not causes,” Dawley explains. For Commons the causes lay in competition from other, less skilled workers. The historical development of the shoe industry did not support Commons’s theory, according to Dawley, who explains that the Knights and Daughters of St. Crispin did not organize primarily against the “menace” of “green hands” but rather against employers’ power to determine wages, hours, and conditions solely on the basis of their ownership rights. Indeed, contrary to Commons, both Faler and Dawley show that many workers “saw no vital role for the capitalist in the productive process” and proposed producers’ cooperatives as an alternative.

Both of these historians write eloquently and convincingly about the origins and development of capitalist industry, first in the “domestic” and then in the factory stage. Perhaps they could have offered a more dialectical view of how the manufacturers’ attempts at social control related to the workers’ struggle for control.13 But we can hardly ask for more accurate or moving descriptions of what industrialization meant to working people themselves.

Lynn was an unusual city in the nineteenth century, a one-industry town with a large community of skilled workers who shared similar cultural values, religious beliefs (Methodist), and political traditions. Its history is perhaps more susceptible to class analysis than larger multi-ethnic, economically diverse cities. Bruce Laurie’s outstanding *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Temple University Press, 1980) attempts to analyze the effects of industrialization in this more confusing context. Like Dawley he challenges the Commons approach arguing that class conflicts erupted between masters and journeymen long before national markets developed. Laurie carefully describes the diversity of work settings in Philadelphia without losing sight of larger class differences — and without ignoring the communities in which workers resided. Laurie argues that “culture and consciousness are made and remade by the interplay of living and working conditions and what individuals bring to communities and workshops from prior experiences.” This dialectical approach allows him to account for the violent religious, racial, and ethnic conflicts of the nineteenth century, while also explaining how solidarity could cut across ethnic lines when need arose to strike collectively.

Divisiveness among working-class Philadelphians did not result entirely from immigration, according to Laurie. Ethnic groups themselves were divided by craft and political identification. Nationalistic divisions did not seem very important until the 1840s with the massive influx of Irish and the emergence of a nativist
movement. "Deteriorating working conditions or the arbitrary exercise of employer authority sometimes dissolved cultural animosities and encouraged unity between rival groups," Laurie writes. For example, Catholic traditionalists and revivalist millhands "buried their differences" and joined with radicals in the ten-hour movement of 1848-49. Thus "cultural fragmentation itself had less to do with immigration than with the uneven development of capitalism and the prior experiences of the work force." Worker deference cannot be explained by intergroup rivalry, Laurie argues; it is better understood as the result of working people's "conceptions of class and attitudes toward work." For instance, revivalist workers refrained from confrontations with their employers "not because of their suspicion of those who did not because of the respect for individualism and reverence for employers and entrepreneurs emitted by evangelical Protestantism." These workers "blamed themselves for their travail."

In sum, Bruce Laurie's sophisticated analysis includes a detailed understanding of cultural influences and how they were transformed by material conditions and class experiences. If Gutman first "posed questions about the role of culture in class formation" and about the "role of class experience in the formation of ethnic cultures," then Laurie supplies some of the best answers we have in his study of working-class Philadelphia.

The books by Faler, Dawley, and Laurie do not adequately integrate women into their class analyses of industrialization. In Woman at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860 (Columbia University Press, 1979) Thomas Dublin describes the initial period of adjustment by Yankee farm women to the factory system as one in which the "mill girls" main-

ained their cultural identity and dignity through a kind of "sorority" that developed in the mills and boarding houses. These new social bonds supported the first "turn outs" in the 1830s and the ten-hour-day movement in the 1840s.

Dublin does more than other left historians to show how factory work differed from home work and gave women a sense of independence and solidarity they lacked on the family farm. Unlike some labor historians Dublin does not ignore the role of Yankee women in the farm family or the role of Irish women in the immigrant family. Drawing on the work of other women's historians, he argues that the increasing division between wage and home work led to a "devaluation of women's work and a new emphasis on women's non-economic activities."

Nancy Cott makes much more of this growing division between the man's world of paid labor and the woman's sphere of domestic activity. Although she concentrates largely on middle class women, her book The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (Yale University Press, 1977), has a lot to say about labor history. Cott applies the insights of Thompson and Gutman to help explain why women resisted the demands of industrial discipline. Indeed, she adds insights of her own, arguing that with the coming of the industrial revolution, "Habits such as the alternation between intense work and leisure, and the use of social occasions for work or work for social occasions (such as quilting bees), persisted in women's lives." Female mill operatives and others who worked outside the household also resisted industrial discipline and rarely stayed in factories for a long time.

"The canon of domesticity," Cott says, "embodied a protest against the advance of exploitation and pecuniary values." But this
canon “did not directly challenge the modern organization of work and the pursuit of wealth.” In fact, Cott argues:

The values of domesticity undercut opposition to exploitative pecuniary standards in the work world, by upholding a “separate sphere” of comfort and compensation, instilling a morality that would encourage self-control, and fostering the ideal that preservation of home and family sentiment was an ultimate goal.

The argument here seems quite similar to the classic Marxist notion of the family’s role in separating life from work. This kind of analysis is surprisingly lacking in more consistently Marxist social histories, even those emphasizing the cultural dimension of industrialization. If the “cult of domesticity” also existed in working-class life, it may be related to other aspects of social control embedded in “industrial morality.”

By giving all women the same natural vocation, the canon of domesticity classed them all together. This definition has a dual function in the national culture. Understanding the rupture
between home and the world in terms of gender did more than effect a reconciliation to the changing organization of work. The demarcation of women’s sphere from men’s provided a secure, primary social classification for a population who refused to admit ascribed statuses. (emphasis added)

In short, in “the attempt to raise a democratic culture” sex not class became the basis of an “acceptable kind of social distinction.”

One weakness of Cott’s book is that her focus on “middle-class” women prevents her from considering the ways in which women’s entry into industry allowed them to challenge the canons of domesticity based partly on a class understanding of their position. Dublin’s work, and to a lesser extent Dawley’s, shows how proletarian women developed new solidarities which allowed them to challenge the “cult of domesticity.” Dublin agrees that the female labor reformers of Lowell shared the language and sensitivity of female moral reformers and that this suggests the existence of a “distinctly female culture” which united women reformers in this period. But he also shows that “The textile mills played a crucial role in inducing women to question the basic tenets of the cult of true womanhood because they permitted women to support themselves outside the family setting.” If Cott tends to ignore the ways in which class divided women, she nonetheless provides useful insights into the ways in which sex roles separated people of all classes, insights largely absent from left labor history.

By the nature of their locale — all in the Northeast, all but one in New England — these books are implicitly limited to the effects of early industrialization on whites. No parallel studies have appeared about the transition from farm to “factory, mine, and mill” in the late-nineteenth-century South. We do know — from the old classic studies like Liston Pope’s Mill-hands and Preachers and C. Vann Woodward’s Origins of the New South that the experience was brutal and wrenching for the poor whites in manufacturing and blacks in the extractive industries. This much and more is documented in the fine oral history, labor journalism, and historical narrative produced by the journal Southern Exposure since 1973. A new collection entitled Working Lives (Pantheon, 1980) edited by Marc S. Miller, presents the best of this work. In his introduction to Working Lives, Herbert Gutman observes:

There are powerful class structures in the South today that are seemingly resilient and inaccessible to popular pressure. But by examining how several generations of Southern workers have confronted their oppression, Working Lives demonstrates that the transformation of working-class cultures into oppositional social and political movements has been a constant theme of Southern history. That fact sustains an egalitarian and democratic vision for the South.

The Southern people who experienced such a brutal confrontation with industrialization also created some of the most combative protest movements in US history despite the obstacles created by racism. Still, there are difficult tasks for historians, including the challenge of explaining just how working-class subcultures were transformed into “oppositional social and political movements.” Some studies of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party attempt to do this for rural radicalism, but the task remains to be done for the Southern labor movements.¹⁴

A final point that may be made about the new left-wing studies of industrialization is that they tend to ignore the disastrous environmental effects of industrialization. We learn little about the poisoning effects of industry, little of the “dark, Satanic mill” — the “symbol of social energies which were destroy-
ing the very ‘course of Nature,’” as Thompson writes. Still, the accomplishments of the left social historians are impressive. They strike a good balance between the forces of capitalism and popular resistance; the human beings who appear in these books are not overwhelmed by economic development.

PRE-INDUSTRIAL CULTURE AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

Unlike many social historians, those reviewed here take a strong interest in political history and suggest some interesting relationships between popular cultural traditions and workers’ politics. We have seen that populist intellectuals interpret Thompson, Gutman, and other left historians to argue that cultural resistance and popular tradition are the primary bases of radical politics — that class consciousness and revolutionary ideas are mere abstractions that have little to do with the “concrete reality” of people’s lives. I think this interpretation misrepresents left social historians by emphasizing the cultural side of their work and ignoring their emphasis on politics.

For example, Nancy Cott and Ellen DuBois are listed among a “new generation of social historians” who find that feminist consciousness “grew directly out of traditional structures and ideologies that women reshaped for radical purposes.” But their work is also concerned with how feminists actively reformulated the past’s meaning through political intervention (at Seneca Falls for example) and also how old structures and traditions could indeed limit feminist consciousness and the development of the women’s movement. Ellen DuBois applauds the discovery of “women’s culture” as a “way to see women creating themselves and not just being created,” but she goes on to say that the emphasis in social history has been placed on “resistance” rather than liberation. “Women’s culture itself did not constitute an open and radical break with the dominant sexual ideology any more than slave culture openly challenged slavery,” she remarks. In fact, her current work on Elizabeth Cady Stanton suggests that “women’s rights feminism grew out of a critique . . . of women’s culture.”

The questions DuBois raises about women’s culture are certainly applicable to workers’ history. “At what point,” she asks, “can we say that feminism surfaced out of women’s culture? How was feminism in conflict with, as well as a development of, women’s culture? What was the impact of feminism, and particularly the emergence of women’s politics, on the course of women’s culture?” To these queries I would add the following questions about the social history of workers: What aspects of workers’ “preindustrial” culture helped them resist capitalist demands and what aspect encouraged them to comply with those demands? What aspects fit easily with a consciousness of class and which ones helped to make for communal identity across class lines? And were the same aspects of cultural tradition that contributed to resistance the ones that could be the bases of new revolutionary ideas that transcended the limits of traditional thought?

Some of these questions are addressed by Nancy Cott in The Bonds of Womanhood when she describes how religion was “feminized” in the 19th century, with maternal reform associations emerging as a result. These voluntary associations could either “encourage women’s independence and self-definition within a supportive community, or . . . accommodate them to a limited clerically defined role.” Unlike some social historians who assume that women’s clubs or benevolent associations were direct predecessors of the
women’s rights movements," Cott explains that “Evangelical activity fostered women’s emergence as social actors whose roles were based on female responsibilities rather than on human rights.” Women’s religious associations could not be classified as either proto-feminist or crypto-conservative, but Cott argues that they did create a kind of group consciousness within women’s sphere. This consciousness was egalitarian rather than hierarchical (although the participants were entirely middle-class) and “could develop into a political consciousness” (emphasis added).

Thomas Dublin’s *Women at Work* is more helpful in explaining just how group consciousness was used to create political consciousness. He shows how a sense of sisterhood fostered in the spinning rooms and boarding houses of Lowell provided the social basis for the ten-hour movement and the Female Reform Association which displayed worker and feminist consciousness. Dublin describes first-generation workers whose protest is based upon “familiar cultural traditions and yet moved beyond the culture in which they were raised.” Solidarity did not readily emerge from the individualistic, patriarchal culture in which the Yankee “mill girls” were raised. But through a “system of job training, the textile corporations unwittingly contributed to the development of solidarity among female operatives” for whom “work proved to be a social and not simply an individual experience.” Solidarity on the job carried over into other spheres, according to Dublin. Most of the women Nancy Cott studied did not “move on from evangelical societies to advocate equal education, equal pay and political rights for women,” but many of the participants in the ten-hour struggle in Lowell did move in this direction. Their remarkable petition campaign to Massachusetts state legislators proved frustrating but it radicalized many women who came into direct conflict with the state. “From opposition to the corporate paternalism of the mill agents and legislators, it was only one step to questioning accepted standards of women’s conduct and the limits of women’s spheres.” These ideas did not spring directly from the areas of autonomy allowed to women in traditional culture; they grew within the new sphere women created for themselves in an industrial setting where collective working and living conditions made new kinds of solidarity and political activism possible.
Part of the problem with the populist interpretation of social history is that it does not recognize the way a historian like Dublin can skillfully use Marxist methods without necessarily conforming to a crude paradigm in which industrialization creates uprootedness, exploitation, and alienation which then leads to class consciousness if revolutionaries intervene. The populists know that oppositional movements drew upon "rich buried cultural themes from the past" but by carrying that insight too far they often ignore the role of changed production relations, state repression and outside political intervention. They tend to disregard the ways in which traditional understandings and values limit a movement's radical potential.

The one left social historian whose work comes closest to fitting the populists' mold is Herbert Gutman. His essay on "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America," does create problems by overemphasizing "pre-industrial" culture as a basis for oppositional politics. Gutman's dichotomy of "pre-industrial vs. industrial" is convenient, writes David Montgomery in a friendly criticism, but it "both obscures the historical development of capitalist work discipline before the rise of the mechanized factory... and tempts the reader to assume that, when the process of industrialization had run its course and everyone 'adapted' to the new ways, class conflict would end." From this dichotomy it is possible "to infer that, given sufficient historical and psychological time and the cessation of immigration, workers resigned themselves to 'the imperatives of industrial life.'" Of course Gutman would not make these inferences, but liberals would and so might populists who oppose class-conscious organizing and believe that the modern factory has, in Christopher Lasch's words, been the "graveyard" of working-class revolution.

In fact, the role of traditional culture in resistance movements is more problematic than Gutman suggests. As one critic notes, "some first-generation industrial workers labored considerably harder than the norm." Refractory habits were not necessarily based on pre-industrial rituals or artisan customs, as the resistance of the Lowell "mill girls" indicates. The most intractable New England textile workers were not the Irish of Lowell, the French-Canadians of Manchester, or the Italians of Lawrence, but rather the British spinners of Fall River, second-generation workers whose "factory-nurtured disorderly habits make it clear that industrial experience did not invariably result in acquiescence to the ideals of the new economic order." 21

And as Montgomery maintains, "we misunderstand labor's activists if we conceive of them simply as tradition bound." Militants like Richard Davis, a black UMW militant who is the subject of a fine essay by Gutman, played a self-conscious role in creating a "new working class culture, which was different from both traditional and bourgeois world views, though elements of both were evident in it." Various activists from the Lowell female reformers to the Debsian Socialists drew upon traditional cultural themes, including evangelical Protestantism and radical republicanism. Preindustrial cultural values often failed, however, to produce effective ideas and strategies for gaining working-class political power. If anything the traditions of preindustrial protest led to "flashes of independent political anger" rather than to sustained efforts at effective movement building. 22

Faler, Dawley, and Laurie also share Montgomery's more critical view of the role of traditional culture in the development of political consciousness. Their books carefully describe the differing effects of culture on artisan
politics. In a jointly written article, Faler and Dawley classify Lynn’s workers into three groups, based on their cultural response to the industrial revolution: the “traditionalists,” whose resistance to the employers’ values and commands was tinged with nativism and racism rather than radicalism; the “loyalists,” who adopted their employers’ religious and political values along with their work ethic; and “the rebels,” who shared some of the manufacturers’ values such as sobriety, self-discipline, and a respect for learning and turned them against the employers. 

Examining the tortured political history of a much more cosmopolitan city, Bruce Laurie saw a similar but more complex typology. In Philadelphia the “revivalists,” or “militia of Christ,” were partisans of the new industrial morality, much like the Lynn loyalists. The “traditionalists” — or “boys of pleasure” — used their “autonomous” cultural space to resist work, engage in endless drinking bouts, and run with fire companies or gangs which turned on black and Catholic communities. Lastly the “radicals,” or “Tom Paine’s progeny,” were rationalists, deists, and Universalists, all self-educated, self-disciplined artisans who, according to Laurie, had the largest following of the three groups in Philadelphia before the disastrous 1837 depression. Their hero was Tom Paine, whose relationship to the Philadelphia artisans is impressively described in Eric Foner’s Tom Paine and Revolutionary America (Oxford University Press, 1976). And like Paine, these radicals “defended the necessity of a radical break with tradition,” which seemed to be based far more on superstition and deference than on freedom and resistance.

The radicals organized the most remarkable working-class movement in early American history, the Philadelphia General Trades Union. Using the legacy of republicanism as a “legitimizing notion of right,” they gave a secular tradition a radical interpretation by extending the rights of man from the town meeting to the workplace. Unlike the “boys of pleasure,” whose activity was rooted in traditional forms, the radicals tried to create new institutions like the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge that would provide new cultural spaces for the use of leisure time. Rather than following ethnic or religious lines, these new institutions encouraged the development of class consciousness. However, the General Trades Union did not survive the 1837 depression, and afterwards the rationalist radicals lost control over the labor movement to a new group, the radical revivalists. These new radicals objected both to the traditional values of unskilled Catholic and Protestant workers who rioted against each other and to the universalistic rationalism of the old radicals.

The radical revivalists employed the classic labor theory of value and embraced the precepts of evangelical Protestantism, which — as both Gutman and Laurie realize — contained moral values antithetical to those of capitalism. As Gutman notes in his important essay “Protestantism and the American Labor Movement”,

Preindustrial Christian perfectionism offered Gilded Age labor reformers absolute values in a time of rapid social change and allowed the labor reformer or radical to identify with “timeless truths” that legitimized his attack on the absolute of Gilded Age social thought — the determinism of Spencerian dogma, the sanctity of property rights and freedom of contract and the rigidity of political laissez faire.

In some cases radicals like Gene Debs could transform revivalist enthusiasm into a “religion of common brotherhood.” But revivalism
could also be intolerant of Catholic and Jewish workers’ values. Clearly, the old rationalistic radicalism was more conducive to ideas about universal equality. Laurie and Gutman say little about the regressive effects of radical revivalism, although Faler sees Methodist revivalism in Lynn largely as part of the middle-class movement toward industrial morality.

All of the authors reviewed take a critical view of the two key elements of artisan politics, the labor theory of value and republicanism, both based on “preindustrial” ideas and both intimately related to the mechanics’ cultural values. The labor theory of value helped unite all producers and provided the basis for a radical critique of monopoly capitalism. It
helped create the foundation for an alternative cooperative philosophy much as it did for 19th-century farmers. However, this theory could also be used to exclude certain workers who did not seem to be honest producers. For example, the radical revivalists in Philadelphia “defamed the Irish,” according to Laurie, “not only because of their national origin and thirst for liquor,” but also because they supposedly “refrained from productive labor.” And of course women who worked at home could be labeled as unproductive and thereby excluded from the labor movement — a problem Marxism inherited from producerism. Artisan politics emerged from an “independent culture” developed within the relative autonomy of handicraft production. But that culture was also affected by the class position of the independent producer and therefore limited radicalism in decisive ways. As Faler observes of the Lynn cordwainers, “the acceptance of existing property rights was the limit beyond which the ideological upholders of the labor theory of value did not go.”

The artisans’ use of republicanism was also rooted in a Lockean and Jeffersonian respect for private property. Tom Paine’s amazingly influential pamphlet Common Sense — a textbook in how to make radical arguments in plain English — called for “a radical break with the English past, an erasure of historical continuity, the construction of government from first principles,” says Eric Foner. There were no appeals to “rich, buried cultural trends” in Common Sense, because to Paine, as to Marx and Engels, feudal tradition represented a dead weight.

We certainly know from The Making of the English Working Class, as well as the writing of Faler and Laurie, that Tom Paine’s ideas took root in the artisan culture. The point here is that certain kinds of traditional culture produced “Tom Paine’s progeny” and another kind produced “the boys of pleasure.” The existence of free space, though it may have been “opaque” to ruling-class agencies, did not necessarily create oppositional culture that could be transformed into radical politics. That transformation depended on the development of radical ideas and the activities of intellectuals, mainly worker-intellectuals who could enter into a “dialectic with the people” by blending new ideas with traditional language.

Paineite republicanism provided artisan radicals with a broadly popular legacy of democracy which could be applied in a non-revolutionary situation. “Unlike the native-born American workingmen of the post-Civil War period who used the Scriptures to comprehend what was happening to them, the Lynn shoemakers used the secular tradition of the Revolution,” writes Faler.

They compared their oppressors to George III and themselves to the patriots of 1776. At many points they recognized a close analogy between the arbitrary oppressive tyranny of the king and the arrogant exploitation of their employers, between the heroic dedication and sacrifices of their forebears and their own emerging resistance to a monied aristocracy.

The “equal rights tradition,” then, “provided a rich stock of metaphor, language, and parallel experiences that all Americans reared in the folklore of the Revolution could easily use and understand. Here was a viable political tradition which would be used to appeal for workers’ rights and to condemn the undemocratic, aristocratic actions of the capitalists who also clothed themselves in the rhetoric of republicanism.

At least two problems resulted from this dependence on the republican “equal rights” tradition. First, women and blacks were not necessarily included and Indians definitely were
not. Recent historians have found that artisans were surprisingly active in the abolitionist politics of cities like Utica, Cincinnati, and New York. 23 But Laurie maintains that the radical Philadelphia artisans did "not regard women as equals" and did not endorse "the rights of Blacks, either as workers or as citizens." The Lynn artisans opposed abolitionism; Faler is not wholly convincing when he argues that they did so because its leaders were wealthy Quaker manufacturers who refused to admit a parallel between chattel slavery and wage slavery. Dawley also comments on the exclusion of women in his discussion of the great 1860 shoe-workers' strike in which female binders played a critical role. He then makes the understatement that "The Equal Rights tradition countenanced a limited version of feminism."

Second, Paineite republicanism closely complemented the labor theory of value and led away from a proletarian class analysis. Tom Paine's artisan followers opposed any "agrarian" or "levelling" ideas that involved the redistribution of property because they were usually small proprietors themselves. As Eric Foner points out in Tom Paine, the republicans attributed social ills "primarily to defects in the political system, and electoral reform was viewed as the 'groundwork' of all necessary social change." 24 Alan Dawley contends in Class and Community that the Lynn artisans who became shoe-factory workers believed they had a "vested interest in the existing political system." While European workers tended to view the state as "an instrument of their oppression, controlled by hostile social and economic interests, against which it was necessary to organize separate class parties; American workers tended to cling to the illusion of an ameliorative popular sovereignty." 25 Dawley goes too far in saying "the ballot box was the coffin of class consciousness," but he does show that the legacy of republicanism was "so optimistic about the potential for reform, so sure of the basic goodness of the political system, so pleased with success," that its proponents were unable to "look beyond history at the polls toward programs that would infringe upon the rights of property and effectively redistribute wealth to bring about the equality it so passionately desired." Historians should examine the way old cultural themes and political traditions have been revitalized and radicalized, but they should also explain, as Dawley does, how the "past wears thin" and how movements need new ideas. Furthermore, they should be aware that broad popular traditions like republicanism have often been more easily adopted to ruling-class purposes. By the time of the Civil War the Republican Party with its capitalist notions of free labor had won the loyalty of Protestant workers in Lowell and other northern cities. 26 Tom Paine's legacy did not help to counter this capitalist version of republicanism. In sum, social history without critical intellectual and political history will tell us little about how insurgent movements grow or fail to grow.

One example of an intellectual history which raises crucial questions for social and political historians of the labor movement is Daniel T. Rodgers's beautifully written book The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920 (University of Chicago Press, 1978). The author knows that many workers refused to "break with accustomed mores" when faced with industrial discipline. In fact, he presents a fine analysis of the American workers' most common "act of rebellion" -- quitting. But many peasant immigrants were not primitive rebels. Some were greenhorns who "brought with them not only ambition but some measure of faith in toil itself." Not all peasant cultural values conflicted with the work ethic. And even
the seasoned veterans of industry who led the labor movement embraced a version of the work ethic when they affirmed the “dignity of labor.” Socialists like Eugene Debs rhetorically praised “workers and producers” as the “creators of society” and feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman demanded paid work for women to increase the dignity of toil. “This fervent praise of work meshed awkwardly at times in the socialist rhetoric with equally fervent praise of leisure,” Rodgers remarks. William D. Haywood of the IWW was more skeptical than Debs and other labor leaders about the politics of glorifying craft traditions and dignifying labor in capitalist society. “One of the worst features about members of the working class is that they do not think themselves happy unless they are hard at work,” wrote the Wobbly leader. They had got themselves into the rut of work and did not know when “to give up a bad habit.” Haywood’s contempt for the self-proclaimed dignity of skilled craftsmen and his praise for play and being “on the bum” conflicted with working-class cultural traditions; but as Rodgers suggests, those powerful traditions have limited radical consciousness in important ways.

Rodgers agrees with the new social historians and their populist interpreters that “protest movements are not successfully made on the theme of exploitation alone” — a lesson some leftists still need to learn. “Thus even those profoundly alienated from their work rallied to leaders who knew the rhetoric of pride, who defended the wage earner as the ‘bone and sinew’ of the nation... and insisted that work itself was noble and honorable.” Even for those who “chafed” at the capitalist labor process, “the appeal to the moral centrality of work was too useful to resist.” An appeal to
powerful traditions is perhaps central to successful protest politics, but such an appeal can have unforeseen consequences. Pitched in the abstract, this moralistic praise of work "turned necessity into pride and servitude into honor; it offered a lever upon the moral sentiments of those whose power mattered." But as Rodgers sagely observes, "in the process, a work-immersed culture exacted its due from its largest body of rebels." Those fighting in working-class communities for welfare rights will doubtless understand this point about the way in which deeply rooted traditions with oppositional value also carry conservative meanings. Rodgers has clearly begun the task so often ignored by social historians of studying rich cultural themes to see how they are useful to social movements and how these same themes can be repressive.

**A DIALECTICAL APPROACH**

Feminist and socialist historians need a dialectical approach to the relationship between culture and politics. And Marxism has much to offer to this approach as we have seen in the work of the left social historians reviewed here.

George Rude, the accomplished historian of European social movements, provides the most advanced Marxist paradigm in *Ideology and Popular Protest* (Pantheon, 1980). In an essay on "Ideology and Class Consciousness," he criticizes the formulations of Lenin and Lukacs because they are premised on the polarization of society into two classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with no account of the historic role of other classes. They also posit the existence of only two ideologies, ruling class and "true" working-class (i.e., socialist). We are left with no way of understanding the popular ideologies of other classes, artisans and peasants, or how "false" consciousness becomes class consciousness, except through the crisis of capitalism and the intervention of the "elect."

Rude is far more taken with Gramsci's approach because "he is concerned with growth and development, as shown in his notion of the gradual building of a counter-ideology to destroy the ruling class's hegemony and in his recognition of surviving 'traditional' classes...."

In discussing the culture and politics of popular protest, Rude usefully distinguishes between "inherent" and "derived" ideologies; the first is a traditional form of thought "based on direct experience, oral tradition and folk memory and not learned by listening to sermons or speeches or reading books," while the second is "the stock of ideas and beliefs that are 'derived' or borrowed from others." Throughout history, derived ideas like republicanism or the labor theory of value became inherent as the context changed, but this only happened where the ground had already been well prepared (as it was in Haiti for instance, where Touissant incorporated the ideas of the French Revolution into a culturally based slave revolt). In fact, derived ideas are often a "more sophisticated distillation of popular experience and people's 'inherent' beliefs." There is then a "constant interaction" or dialectical relation between the two. "Marx himself, possibly the greatest purveyor of 'derived' ideas in history, wrote in the *Manifesto* that 'they (the Communists) merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle... from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.'" In this sense Marxism is not the application of abstract theories to human history — as the populists would argue — but rather a way of thinking derived from working-class struggle and from the "common sense of the working class."

But Rude does not dismiss the importance of capitalist crisis and the role of the revolutionary
intellectual so dominant in the thought of Lenin and Lukacs. An inherent popular ideology must provide the basis for opposition to ruling-class hegemony. Derived ideas must then be grafted onto oppositional forms of culture in order to create movements which under the right circumstances — a crisis of the old order, a war, a depression — are capable of making radical social change. Whether a movement took on a "militant or revolutionary form depended less," says Rude, on "the 'inherent' beliefs from which they started than on the nature of the 'derived' beliefs compounded by the circumstances then prevailing."

Not surprisingly this new paradigm is most clearly reflected in E.P. Thompson's recent historical work. He explains how a plebian culture in 18th century England, "the self-activating culture of the people derived from their own experiences and resources" countered the gentry's hegemony in many respects. This culture, Thompson argues, "constitutes an ever-present threat to official descriptions of reality; given the sharp jostle of experience, the intrusion of 'seditious' propagandists, the Church-and-King crowd can become Jacobin and Luddite, the loyal Tsarist navy can become an insurrectionary Bolshevik fleet." For the most part left social historians in the US have not approached the sophisticated dialectical understanding of popular movements suggested by Rude and Thompson. But David Montgomery's work comes closest.

Montgomery's first book, Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans (Knopf, 1967) showed the importance of inherent beliefs such as the dignity of labor and republicanism; it also described the role of "seditious" propaganda introduced by working-class intellectuals like Ira Steward, father of the eight-hour movement, and William Sylvis, the peerless union organizer of the 1860s who advocated producers' cooperatives and a workers' party. And in particular, it revealed how the "sharp jostle of experience" could profoundly affect the fate of a radical movement based on traditional values and revolutionary new ideas. Beliefs in the harmonious nature of society which labor reformers shared with Republicans shattered after the war, "labor spokesmen" insisted that propertyless wage earners were denied real participation in the Republic and a real share of the equal-rights tradition.29

David Montgomery's attention has shifted more toward social history in recent years, but like Thompson he maintains an intense interest in political questions and in the historical role played by state power. Along with his understanding of skilled labor (as an ex-machinist) and his Marxist analysis of the labor process, David Montgomery brings to bear a wide knowledge of ethnic and social history and a very sophisticated analysis of working-class politics. As a result he can provide a dialectical approach to the way radical movements emerge that is lacking in most social history.

The essay in Workers' Control in America about immigrant laborers' response to Taylorism illustrates the dialectical approach Montgomery takes to explaining the relationship between preindustrial customs and industrial practices. When confronted with scientific management, first-generation workers reacted by drawing upon traditional peasant customs and rituals, as Gutman demonstrates, but they also adopted new forms of opposition learned from experienced craftsmen. This analysis undercuts modernization theory by establishing the permanency of the struggle for control, a struggle that continued after the first generation experienced the initial "shock" of industrial work and even after the last generation of craftsmen lost their jobs to new machines and machine tenders. Unlike Gutman, Montgomery
is not concerned mainly with the conflict of industrial and "preindustrial ways" but instead "with the patterns of behavior which took shape in the second and third generations of industrial experience, largely among workers whose world had been fashioned from their youngest days by smoky mills, congested streets, recreation as a weekend affair and toil at the times and the pace dictated by the clock." Against modernization theorists, Montgomery maintains that workers who emerged from such settings displayed "neither the docile obedience of automatons, nor the individualism of the 'upwardly mobile,' but rather a form of control which became increasingly collective, deliberate and aggressive, until American employers launched a partially successful counterattack under the banners of scientific management and the open shop drive." Contrary to some critics of modernism, like Christopher Lasch, Montgomery does not conclude that working-class radicalism drew on "earlier traditions" more than it did on frequently led by skilled workers, did not find the modern factory a "burial ground." Montgomery's work suggests that "rich, buried cultural themes from the past" will not necessarily address the concrete realities of the workplace that make people angry and rebellious to begin with.30

Workers' Control in America moves confidently from the shop-floor struggles over technology, scientific management, and work rules to the arena of politics. An important essay on the "Machinists, the Civic Federation and the Socialist Party" sharply delineates the turn-of-the-century class struggle and casts doubt on the notion that corporate liberals coopted the labor movements with promises of reform. The decisive role of the state in modern class struggle is also emphasized in powerful analyses of the 1909-22 period and the New Deal era. Montgomery is the only historian reviewed here who directly evaluates the working-class socialist movement. His essay on the machinists is filled with shrewd observations about the Socialist Party's strengths and weaknesses in industrial towns and labor unions. He explains that the Socialist Party's inability to develop a strategy against scientific management and to lead shop-floor control struggles created disaffection among the ranks in left-led unions and even to an alliance of Catholic conservatives and syndicalist rebels who opposed the policies of Socialist leaders in the Machinists union during the 1910s. He makes an even more pointed criticism of the IWW, which failed to grow not just because of repression but because of its "contempt" for skilled workers and their control struggles. There are some problems with the broad way Montgomery defines these struggles and the emphasis he places on scientific management, but he has corrected for an obvious bias against skilled workers in left labor history.31
There are two rather different ways in which Montgomery’s book can be criticized as workerist or economistic. The first criticism results from his inability to incorporate the kind of cultural and social analysis done so effectively by nineteenth-century historians like Dublin, Faler, and Laurie. Workplace and community are not linked closely enough.12

There are, however, glimpses of this kind of analysis in Workers Control. For example, his analysis of the Socialist Party goes beyond the shop floor. In a brilliant sketch of three Midwestern industrial cities where the socialists gained great support, Montgomery shows how the Party’s attempts to create kindergartens aroused opposition from the Catholic Church and created an important community control struggle, along social and cultural lines. This leads to the important observation that the Catholic clergy effectively defended the “patriarchal family” and male individuality against the invasion of the “servile state.” This kind of cultural exploration would have added an important dimension to the exciting essay on “Workers’ Control and Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century.” This is a discussion of shop-floor culture as it developed among skilled craftsmen who created strong traditions and practices of mutual support. These in turn became the basis of the crucial sympathy strikes that helped rebuild the house of labor around the turn of the century. Montgomery knows, of course, that the craftsman who was a collectivist and a loyalist among his peers could also exploit the unskilled worker through the subcontracting system. Now that the old image of the selfish labor aristocrat has been put to rest, we need a fuller discussion of the craftsman’s complicated and at times contradictory “ethical code.” For instance, this code may have demanded a “manly” posture toward the boss, but, as Daniel Rodgers suggests, militant assertion of labor’s dignity may have immersed craftsmen in a work-obsessed culture that “exacted its due” even from the “rebels.” Montgomery admits that this is a complicated matter when he remarks that the “ethos of manliness” connoted “dignity, respectability, defiant egalitarianism and patriarchal male supremacy” (emphasis added). He does not explore this last connotation further, but he should: as Nancy Cott argues, the separation of the man’s world from women’s sphere may have had vast consequences for the development of class consciousness.

There is a second, less convincing, way in which Montgomery’s history has been faulted.
for workerism or economism. And that is the
Leninist critique of a "workerist illusion" in
which job-control struggles appear as "intrin-
sically revolutionary" and craft traditions are
romanticized "at the expense of political con-
sciousness." This attack erroneously portrays
Montgomery as a pure-and-simple syndicalist
and ignores the dialectical approach to eco-
nomics and politics that characterizes *Workers’
Control in America.*

Like many of the left historians who have
written for *Radical America,* Montgomery
emphasizes the importance of shop-floor strug-
gles and outlaw strikes — as distinct from offi-
cial union activities — and explains how they
heighten solidarity and class consciousness.
This approach can exhibit various "workerist
illusions" if it assumes that militancy equals
radicalism, if it fails to address the wider poli-
tical implications of "control strikes", if it
ignores the dynamics of how resistance is actu-
ally organized, and if it does not explain that
some purely defensive struggles tend to height-
ен exclusionary consciousness of skill, race,
gender, or nationality. Montgomery’s work avoids these pitfalls and suggests how socialist historians can write about workplace struggles without falling into workerism.

David Montgomery not only transcends workerism; he joins Edward Thompson in rejecting the Leninist illusion of “substitutionism” based on the theory that the “party, sect, or theorist” discloses “class consciousness, not as it is, but as it ought to be.” Both historians share the view that class consciousness emerges through the handling of class experiences in cultural terms and that such consciousness is therefore “embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms.” While Thompson, Gutman, and their followers treat the early industrial revolution and therefore stress the ways in which consciousness of class was shaped by popular traditions and preindustrial cultural values, Montgomery stakes out the more confusing and frightening terrain of modern industrial production, and finds the embodiment of class consciousness in shopfloor traditions and practices. Montgomery’s rejection of Leninist theory does not take him as far as Jeremy Brecher in Strike!, which contends that left organizations “had little significant role in instigating mass struggles” and often served to inhibit worker militancy. Montgomery, reflecting no doubt on his own experience as a Communist organizer, believes that “working-class activists and their ideas” made a difference in many struggles; they “provided a framework through which millions gained better understanding of the meaning of mass struggle (whoever ‘instigated’ them).”

It is this dialectical sense of how class experiences relate to political consciousness that makes David Montgomery’s historical work so suggestive. His paradigm assumes an important role for activists, revolutionaries, and “subversive propagandists,” but it does not assume that “socialist consciousness must be brought to workers from without their ranks.” Instead, he asserts in a passage that might have been included in the preface to Workers’ Control in America:

Socialism grows from the work and living patterns of working people. Its tap root is the mutuality spurred by their daily struggle for control of the circumstances of their lives. But that mutuality is manifested in values, loyalties, and thoughts, as well as in actions, and it can triumph only by becoming increasingly self-conscious and articulate. The struggle for workers’ control advances only as it moves from the spontaneous to the deliberate, as workers consciously and jointly decide what they want and how they want to get it. 

This paradigm is clearly a different one from the crude Leninist theory populist critics find it
so convenient to attack. It is however a model still under construction, as Montgomery would readily admit. He has shown how socialism and other forms of working-class opposition do grow from workplace experiences; but the "living patterns of working people" that lead to mutualism and, under certain circumstances, to socialism and other forms of radicalism have not been as fully explored in the twentieth century. And as we have seen, that exploration in the nineteenth century has been misguided by social historians who rely too much on the magic of cultural transmission without understanding changes in the social relations of production and the effect of political interventions. The relationship of work-centered class experiences to community, family, and popular culture generally remains to be examined more critically in the work of 19th and 20th century historians. By increasing our understanding of this relationship, radical social historians can help greatly to advance our model of how working people rise above the circumstances of social history to build insurgent movements and make their own history.

6. Ibid., 53-55.
7. This dialectical approach is drawn directly from the new Marxist cultural analysis of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, who have rejected the old determinist relationship between material base and cultural superstructure. In doing so they have disclosed "the possibility of a materialist analysis of consciousness as well as the reverse, a moral and aesthetic evaluation of material life." This "interactionist" understanding of the relationship between social being and social consequences provides the basis for what might be called a New Left paradigm for explaining popular resistance and political radicalism. See Alan Dawley, "E.P. Thompson and the Peculiarities of the Americans," Radical History Review, 19 (Winter 1977-78), 33-60 and Michael Merril, "Raymond Williams and the Theory of English Marxism," ibid., 9-33. This approach has been erroneously characterized as "culturalist" by more orthodox Marxist theorists. For the criticism and Thompson's response, see comments by Stuart Hall, Richard Johnson, and Thompson in Raphael Samuel, ed., People's History and Socialist Theory (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 375-408.
8. For descriptions of the populist paradigm with the emphasis on "free spaces," see Boyte, "Populism and the Left," pp. 55-59 and Lawrence Goodwyn, "The Cooperative Commonwealth and Other Abstractions," Marxist Perspectives, no. 10 (Summer 1980), 6-32. For a criticism of the populist approach to understanding radical movements, see James Green, "Populism, Socialism and the Promise of Democracy," Radical History Review, 24 (Fall 1980), 7-41.
10. For example, Boyte cites Eric Hobsbawm and other Marxist historians for their emphasis on the importance of traditional religion in social movements. Boyte, "Populism
and the Left," p. 58. But he does not explain that Hobbsbawm is acutely aware of the political limits imposed on movements by traditional ideas, so much so that he calls certain kinds of peasant movements "pre-political." E. J. Hobbsbawm, Primitive Rebels, (1959; New York: Norton, 1965).


17. Ibid., p. 29.


22. Montgomery, "Gutman’s Nineteenth Century America," p. 427. What is lacking in the populist interpretation of nineteenth-century social history is an appreciation for the industrial traditions created by workers in their jobs and communities. Two studies of protest politics among Irish immigrants illustrate the importance of these specifically industrial traditions and show, contrary to Oscar Handlin’s thesis in The Uprooted (New York: Grosset, 1963), that migration and adaptation did not invariably lead to conservatism. Irish immigrants not only drew upon "pre-industrial" religious and ethnic traditions, as Gutman shows, but also created industrial traditions of their own. See Daniel J. Walkowitz, Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855–84, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978, and Eric Foner, "Class, Ethnicity and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish-America," in Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), which explains how "collective organization and class consciousness nourished the phenomenal growth of the Land League" among industrial workers.


24. The phrases in quotes are from Thompson’s Making of the English Working Class. The "culturalist" interpretation of Thompson’s book, whether it comes from Althusserian critics or populist admirers, dwells upon the cultural definition of class consciousness but ignores the immense weight assigned to state repression in "the making of the English working class." In addition the emphasis on popular tradition as a seedbed of radicalism fails to notice the importance Thompson gives to new ideas introduced by subversive propagandists like Paine, Spence, and Owen. [See Philip S. Foner, "A Voice for Black Equality: The Boston Daily Evening Voice, 1864–1867," Science & Society, 38 (Summer 1974), 304–25].


32. A recent book that does try to connect workplace and community is John T. Cumber, Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1920, Greenwood, 1979. Cumber compares Lynn and Fall River, Massachusetts, and finds important relationships between common ethnic-community ties and workplace experiences during the nineteenth century that created militant working-class traditions in both cities. His analysis falters, as social history often does, when the study moves into the twentieth century and the separation of work and community appeared to be more extreme. For an elaboration of this point see the review by Susan Porter Benson, "Class Consciousness and Solidarity," Reviews in American History, June 1980, pp. 251-57.
37. Montgomery and Thompson contribute to this new paradigm having emerged from Communist Party backgrounds. Their approach is strikingly similar in many respects to the non-Leninist Marxism of C.L.R. James, whose politics developed partly in a Trotskyist context. James criticized Leninists for not recognizing the signs of what Engels called "the invading socialist society." He insisted on a dialectical approach to history and argued that socialist intellectuals and parties had to derive their ideology and strategy from the "forms of life, of action, of consciousness, of human relations" which the proletariat develops by "the very circumstances of its existence." C.L.R. James, Grace Lee, and Pierre Chalieu, Facing Reality (1958; Detroit: Bewick Editions). p. 60. See also James, Dialectics, Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1980.

JIM GREEN teaches labor history at the University of Massachusetts — Boston and is an editor of Radical America.

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ANOTHER TIME: ANOTHER PLACE

Blacks, Radicals and Rank and File Militancy in Auto in the 30s & 40s

Nelson Lichtenstein

If the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Day demonstration proves to have lasting consequences, the legitimization of a left-wing current in the mainstream labor movement may prove the most significant. Just as John L. Lewis called upon his former socialist opponents to help build the CIO in mid-1930s, so too have conservative unionists like Lane Kirkland, recognizing that their unions are in big trouble, opened the door to a working relationship with those who are self-consciously radical about their politics. The historic collapse of labor-liberalism, as both social force and political program, has forced even the most stolid of unionists to rethink their approach. For the AFL-CIO actually to call a mass demonstration symbolized part of this shift; the politically non-exclusionary character of the march represented another break with the postwar tradition.

If the time is approaching when left-wing militants may again help significantly to rebuild the labor movement, what lessons can they learn from another era of radical influence and insurgency? In the 1930s and 1940s the automobile industry was the central arena of struggle for the American working class, and the three books under review here give us a good view

of that struggle. They highlight the efforts of Communists, Trotskyists, and black union militants to organize the United Auto Workers, defend its tradition of shop-floor democracy, and make concrete its rhetoric of racial equality. Each work has a very distinctive political viewpoint, but what makes all three books important to us is their shared focus on that stratum of secondary leaders and cadre whose activities actually defined politics among the auto workers.

Roger Keeran’s solidly researched *Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* shows that the very formation of a strong and permanent industrial union in the industry depended upon activists whose own ideology far transcended the union movement itself. In absorbing detail, he shows how Communists in the auto industry provided the unbroken link between the revolutionary dual unionism of the early 1930s, the American Federation of Labor federal locals of the mid-decade, and many of the strongest UAW locals thereafter. In the 1930s about 600 to 1,100 Communists were “concentrated” or “colonized” in the largest auto plants. Organized into shop fractions, they helped lay the groundwork for mass unionization and, when opportunity struck (first at Briggs, then at Cleveland and Flint, and later at River Rouge), they emerged as key leaders in many locals. Keeran’s detailed account of the communist experience in the UAW provides a powerful refutation to the historical polemics of the (first) Cold War that questioned the “legitimacy” of the UAW Communists. Not stealth, but hard work, careful organization and, when appropriate, daring and militant leadership moved Communists into the union’s leading circles.

The Communists had built a genuine base in the UAW. But the question that remains is: What did they do with it and why did it collapse so easily in the decade after 1937? In their years of greatest influence the Communists pursued a Popular Front strategy that called for the maintenance of a “left-center bloc” within the UAW and the CIO. On day-to-day-issues (but not, significantly, on the question of defense of the USSR) the Communists made themselves indistinguishable, at least in a public sense, from the general run of New Dealers. In 1938–39, and again following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the UAW Communists dismantled their shop fractions, cheered on the Roosevelt cult, and defended an increasingly stolid national CIO apparatus. Keeran argues that they had no real choice. To have fought for a program more critical and independent of the New Deal would have merely “isolated themselves and provoked a split in the union.” It is a theme that emerges time and again in the latter half of his book.

Contemporary union radicals often face a similar dilemma in their relationship to progressive union leaders and liberal politicians. Michael Harrington, the most prominent proponent of a new, social-democratic popular front, argues that a socialist break with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party would condemn radicals to sectarian isolation. Thus the fate of the UAW Communists becomes instructive. In the years of their greatest influence thousands of workers looked to the party for leadership, but the consistent support Communists gave to the Addes-Frankensteen “center” in the union generated few dividends. Instead, it helped demobilize much of their constituency, without retarding the bureaucratic drift of the union. As Al Richmond wrote several years later, the Popular Front had become “all alliance and no struggle.”

Actually Keeran is somewhat critical of what he considers the party’s excessive social patriot-
ism in World War II. In keeping with the post-war Communist critique of its wartime activities under the leadership of Earl Browder, Keenan believes the Party failed to take advantage of the favorable conditions that existed in this era, while its “rigid and overly enthusiastic pursuit of the CIO’s war policy” seriously eroded Communist support among many rank and file. But Keenan argues that the decline of Communist strength in the UAW came primarily from their inability to resist the anticom- munist onslaught of the early Cold War years.

In a blistering final chapter, “Reuther and Reaction,” Keenan indicted the new UAW president for touching off the liberal anti-Commu- nist purge that swept the major unions in the early Cold War years.

There’s a good deal of evidence, however, as even Keenan admits, that Reuther’s success in the UAW derived as much from his accomodation to a rising tide of shop-floor militancy as from his vocal anti-Communism. Despite the “unconditional no-strike pledge” offered by the UAW in the war (and supported most fervently by the Communists), far more auto workers went on strike in 1944 than even in 1937. These wildcats radically challenged the emerging industrial relations system and the wartime ideology of class unity.

Martin Glaberman took part in these wildcat strikes and in the simultaneous effort by some non-Communist UAW radicals, many of them Trotskyists, to rescind the no-strike pledge in their unions. In Wartime Strikes, he draws upon this personal experience, as well as additional documentary research, to offer a historical assessment of the strikes’ larger meaning. Under conditions of wartime capitalism, Glaber-
man argues, the UAW leadership became a de facto part of the state bureaucracy. Wildcat strikes represented a giant leap forward in working-class consciousness. The most advanced workers were not the most “political,” or the most union-conscious, but those who struck. A UAW referendum in 1944–45 upheld the no-strike pledge rather decisively, but Glaberman says the vote’s real significance lay first in mass abstentions — only about a third of eligible workers voted — and second in the remarkable fact that even while the voting took place the number of workers engaged in wildcat strikes reached an all-time high. “To many thousands of auto workers who wildcatted…[the referendum] did not matter because to most workers the union structure (like the institutional structures of society generally) is an alien reality.” Glaberman asserts that those workers who were relatively new to the factories, such as women and southern migrants, were least likely to accept “the discipline of factory work and the discipline of the union.”

But this just does not describe social reality. The center of auto-worker militancy during the war came not in new factories like Willow Run or the other aircraft plants recently built in Texas and Southern California, but at Dodge Main, Briggs, and other Detroit-area shops, where union traditions had their deepest roots. Here a dense shop-steward system, a history of local activism, and a radical political milieu gave organizational and social coherence to the inchoate rebelliousness of workers old and new. These conditions held, even in those factories where Communist supporters of the no-strike pledge held office.

Throughout his book Glaberman leaves the impression that wildcat strikes were a spontaneous upsurge from a leaderless, unorganized rank and file. Undoubtedly, some strikes of this sort occurred, but for the most part even the numerous departmental “quickie” stoppages took place under the informal leadership of union-conscious militants. As Glaberman himself records, many of the largest and most polit-
Detroit and the Rise of the UAW, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick describe a massive transformation in the allegiance of black auto workers. As late as 1940 most were at best indifferent to the UAW, while the key institutions of their community, including the churches, the NAACP, and the Urban League, were staunchly promanagement. Black attitudes derived largely from the historic racism of the AFL unions of the city, as well as from the paternalistic policies of the Ford Motor Company. In Depression-era America, the boast “I work at Fords” still won respect among the families and friends of the ten thousand blacks who held even foundry and janitorial jobs at the giant Rouge complex.

To crack Ford’s intransigent resistance, UAW leaders recognized the need for an ideology of interracial solidarity, less as a matter of abstract justice than because it was the minimum required to win black workers to UAW ranks. The Ford strike of April 1941 proved the turning point. Although most black workers at the Rouge still resisted outright identification with the UAW, some advanced elements of the NAACP in the city had by this point begun to align themselves with the union. They did this initially out of fear of a full-scale race riot should the black community seem to scab on the strike, but they soon came to realize as well that the UAW could ultimately be a more powerful vehicle for racial advancement than paternalistic employers like Henry Ford.

In this transformation, the Detroit NAACP and the organized black workers in the UAW became increasingly militant. By 1943 the local NAACP had more than quadrupled its membership to upwards of twenty thousand to become the largest branch in the nation. Meier and Rudwick give no social portrait of these new recruits, but many of them certainly seem to have come from the newly unionized black
working class. River Rouge militants like Shelton Tappes, Horace Sheffield, and Otis Eaton emerged within both the NAACP and the UAW as a dynamic new black leadership. In the effort to unionize black auto workers and fight job discrimination, a cadre arose which effectively linked the traditionally middle-class ideology of the civil rights organizations with the shop-floor militancy engendered by the UAW. Black politicization ran deep: although Meier and Rudwick unfairly discount the influence of the Communists, many working-class blacks joined that organization, if only for a few months or a year. Keeran reports that by 1944 about a third of all new recruits in Michigan were black.

Meier and Rudwick write about wildcat strikes too, but their focus is on Detroit’s relatively few but explosive “hate strikes,” stoppages that erupted in protest at the integration of previously all-white departments. They were often led by local union leaders, and sometimes by the same individuals who helped organize wildcat strikes on more “traditional” issues. Meier and Rudwick give no estimate of the number of such strikes, but my own guess is about a hundred or so, peaking in 1942–43. By way of comparison, wildcat strikes over production standards and shop discipline numbered well into the thousands. The hate-strike phenomenon reached a climax in June 1943, when two blacks had been promoted to a grinding machine department and 25,000 Packard workers walked off the job for a week. Two weeks later came the long-expected Detroit race riot, which left factories calm only because most blacks stayed home in fear while the more racist whites were roaming the streets.

Meier and Rudwick argue that white workers were so racist that UAW officials like President R. J. Thomas could support shop-floor integration only with the greatest caution and finesse. And Local union officials who tried to end hate strikes could have been swept aside in a wave of racist antiunionism. What Thomas and other top UAW leaders did was to ask the federal government to take decisive, even punitive action — which the UAW could then vigorously support in the name of a patriotic war effort. Thus, during the Packard strike, Thomas secretly flew to Washington, where he persuaded War Labor Board officials to order the strikers back to work and pleaded with the War Department to seize the plant. This tactic, write Meier and Rudwick, enabled the UAW leaders to advance a racially enlightened industrial policy against the resistance of their rank
and file, while it solidified a twenty-year alliance between the union, the NAACP, and the liberal community.

Meier and Rudwick applaud this kind of cooperation between government and union, because from the perspective of their book, white working-class racism is an undifferentiated fact of life which liberal elites must manipulate, evade, or suppress in the interests of an enlightened national interest. Throughout their work the consciousness of the white working class remains an unexamined given, a social "problem" quite unrelated to the larger context of factory life. (Wartime Communists turned the issue on its head, but were equally one-dimensional. In the aftermath of the hate strikes and the Detroit riot, the Party absolved the white working class of complicity by blaming those production-stopping disturbances on the work of the KKK, the Black Legion, or mysterious "Hitler agents").

But working-class consciousness is a changing and complex phenomenon. In the 1930s the UAW's ability to forge a strong union consciousness among industrial workers went a long way toward reducing the traditional ethnic cleavages among auto workers, and as Meier and Rudwick's own account of the great Ford strike shows, union militancy could at least partially dissolve racial antagonisms as well. In wartime, racial tensions surged to the fore, not only because of the new assertiveness of black workers and the influx of southern whites, but because this social recomposition of the auto workforce was accompanied by a managerial offensive which the union itself did little to resist. As factory managers threatened to take back the gains won in the late 1930s, many white workers feared that these same managers would use the influx of blacks, women, and youth to erode work standards and dilute job security. The abdication of both the official UAW leadership and the Communist cadre from the shop-floor struggle meant that the militancy which did erupt would lack the unifying dynamic of the prewar struggles, and that racial and sexual patterns of tension and discrimination would flourish anew in the postwar years.

None of these books offers a magic formula for rebuilding a radical cadre in American factories; at best they provide some insight into the circumstances that first engendered and then eroded militant shop-floor leadership. Certainly, the economic chaos that has engulfed the auto industry in the early 1980s has vastly complicated the task of the Left. Wage cuts, layoffs, and speedup simultaneously anger and demoralize, while the import problem has engendered a new wave of racially tinged chauvinism. Nevertheless, it is just possible that this crisis has set the stage for the reemergence of a politicized strata of union activists. As in the early 1930s, many auto workers recognize that the old order has failed in some profound sense. The capitulation of national UAW leaders and the virtual destruction of industry-wide collective bargaining has weakened the authority of the union bureaucracy. All this opens the door to the sort of decentralized struggle which forged the union half a century ago and in which the influence of union radicals can again be felt.

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN teaches working class history at American University in Washington, D.C.
DOWN ON THE FARM:

The Agrarian Revolt in American History

Billy Pope

The colonization of America was based first and foremost on land — acquiring it, working it, and living off its wealth. The land bonded the European colonizers together as they sought through force and fraud to displace its original occupiers, the Indians. Even as soil-depleting agricultural practices and rural overpopulation contributed to the growth of a new nineteenth-century urban proletariat, the primary basis of wealth was still the land. And it was the desire to own land, to work for yourself, to build an autonomous life through your own sweat that was the substance of the American dream.

Mainstream US historians have traditionally pulled out all stops to romanticize the great wagon train west and the heroic yeoman settler. In their view, small landowners were a principal bulwark of the American economic and political system, characterized by plurality and consensus.

Actually, it was only the large landowners who were able to make their influence count, in alliance with merchants, bankers, and industrialists. Small farmers, especially those in the southern and western periphery, were excluded from power. And it was in the rural recesses of the American countryside that resistance to US industrial and finance capitalism took its most serious form: the agrarian revolts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is here that several radical historians have directed their attention. Lawrence Goodwyn examines the organization and culture of the rural resistance in *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford University Press, 1978). Bruce Palmer writes about what the Populists thought about the world around them in *‘Man Over*
Money” (University of North Carolina Press, 1980). In Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943 (LSU Press, 1978), James Green examines the rise and fall of the Socialists in the Southwest (mainly Texas and Oklahoma), a region originally politicized by the Populists. And Robert Rosenbaum, in his Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest: “The Sacred Right of Self-Preservation” (University of Texas Press, 1981), explores the agrarian resistance of mexicanos to Anglo-American land grabs and encroachments in Texas, New Mexico, and California from 1848 to 1916. But before we delve into these new works, let’s place them in context by quickly reviewing previous historical studies of this period.

Older accounts of agrarian radicalism in the Progressive tradition emphasize the conflict waged by struggling farmers of the West and South against Wall Street — a sectional as well as a class struggle. Populism fits into a certain interpretation of people’s history that begins with Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard and was later extended by John Hicks and C. Vann Woodward, who emphasized country versus city, West and South versus East, producers versus plutocrats, the people versus the interests. Woodward, in his magnificent biography of Georgia’s Populist leader Tom Watson, took up the more difficult issues of race and class within the People’s Party. He did so in a context of tragedy and irony.

Woodward handles these issues brilliantly — better than more overtly Marxist historians. The Goodwyn, Palmer, and Green books all flow directly out of Woodward’s work on agrarian radicalism, but they place different emphases on the place of race, class, and culture.

Goodwyn, who writes firmly in the Woodward tradition, emphasizes sectionalism, culture, and the importance of third-party radicalism. Like Woodward, Goodwyn rescues an authentic Populist radicalism distinct from Democratic Party reformism. Indeed, Goodwyn denies that the Populists were simply capitalist reformers.

Goodwyn writes about “the flowering of the largest democratic mass movement in American history,” which is “necessarily a book about democracy itself.” He describes vividly how a group of central Texas farmers met in 1877 to form a cooperative farm organization that soon blossomed into the National Farmers Alliance. The Alliance fought tight money and gouging merchants by such means as forming their own trade stores, by encouraging barter among members, and eventually trying to build their own factories to produce needed goods.

From this modest beginning, an insurgent movement burgeoned that soon claimed over 40,000 sub-alliances. It constituted a culture of resistance that challenged the growing centralization of land, the power of the railroads to fix rates, and the expanding monopolization of industry. It also spawned a political party, the People’s Party, that elected numerous officeholders on platforms denouncing both Democrats and Republicans as tools of the capitalists.

Goodwyn tells an exciting story of ordinary people, people who had once thought there was no way out of their desperate plight, who then began to realize their combined strength, their growing self-respect as they fought against powers that once seemed omnipotent. A dream of autonomy, economic freedom, and genuine democracy seemed realizable.

Goodwyn develops a structure of how mass democratic movements need to form, recruit, grow, and prepare for attack. He goes beyond the irony of Woodward’s history and seeks lessons for modern radicalism. Though this intense concern with the dynamics of insur-
gency sometimes gives Goodwyn’s work an ahistorical quality (as his Populists speak across generations directly to our own political dilemmas), it also leads him to very important political questions about how movements are built. At times the force of “movement culture” or of certain ideas seems to rather implausibly overcome barriers of class and race, but in the end Goodwyn tells us far more about how the nation’s largest radical movement was actually built than does any previous historian.

At the same time, there are several shortcomings in Goodwyn’s analysis. He blurs the class distinctions between large landowners, small farmers, tenant farmers, and agricultural workers. His rejection of socialist criticisms of agrarianism leads him to dismiss the accomplishments of the Debsian Socialists who came later and tried to avoid the Populists’ mistake of lumping all rural residents into one category with one common interest. Goodwyn, therefore, has to explain the demise of the Populist movement in terms of liberal politicians (the “shadow movement”), who gained control of the People’s Party; he does not fully explore the internal contradictions of the movement. In
addition, though Goodwyn does show how the Populist movement was organized around family and kin, he doesn't take it a step further to discuss the questions of sex; the Populists did support women's suffrage, but this late-nineteenth-century movement has little to teach us today about challenging traditional male-female roles or about overcoming male domination in the movement itself.

On the other hand, Goodwyn does point out how the farmers even with their critique of bankers and monopolists, were still tied to the dominant southern culture which was built around the massive trauma suffered during and after the Civil War. As a result, Populists would recruit black sharecroppers but were unable to go beyond the economics of the moment to question their own implicit ties to white supremacy.

In short, the Populists created a reform movement that focused on their truly stifling economic conditions but failed to fully recognize the social, cultural, and racial barriers to a democratic society. As such, in 1896 the People's Party, led by its "shadow movement" politicians, abandoned its insurgency and fused with the Democrats in William Jennings Bryan's crusade for free silver.

In "Man Over Money," Bruce Palmer examines, not so much the historical activities of the Populists, as the ideas they generated and the way they thought of themselves. Looking at their speeches, newspapers, and platforms, Palmer shows the fear small farmers and tenants felt about the way that industrialization was consolidating power in the hands of the wealthy businessmen whom they saw as enemies. The Populists were not revolutionaries, but they did demand a radical distribution of wealth. And in its Omaha platform of 1892, the People's Party called for government ownership of railroads, telephone, and telegraph, and a government-supported credit plan to replace the private banking system. In short, "the Populists mounted in the 1890s the last major mainstream political attack on capitalism and its business culture in America."

Palmer examines several areas of Populist thinking. I found his discussions of religion and the reformers' economic and political dilemma to be particularly enlightening. As Palmer says, "the Southern Populists took a received tradition and did the best they could with it." In this sense, they did not fight against the evangelical Protestant heritage, but used its language, morality, and methods of recruitment to expose and combat the dangers of monopolies. Southern Populists developed their ideas of radicalism from the Bible more often than from Marx. But as useful as the merging of religious culture and political reform often was, it also underscores the limits of Populism and the ultimate ease with which this moment of insurgency could be fused back into the dominant culture.

Though sympathetic to Populism, Palmer seems to enjoy exposing the many dilemmas this reform movement faced. He examines the contradictions: the belief in the absolute primacy of private property versus the demand for more government intervention and public ownership; the desire to share in the material benefits thought to derive from industrialization versus the clinging to rural values and to the Jeffersonian ideal of a democratic society; and the desire to "retain a competitive, private profit- and property-oriented market economy" versus the goal of a just, non-hierarchical, and democratic America.

With the fusion in 1896 of the People's Party into the Democratic fold (back into the "party of the fathers" in the white South), Populism as an organized movement began to dissolve. But though the organization fell apart, the
conditions, people, and vision continued. It is here that James Green’s *Grass-Roots Socialism* takes up the story.

In the early 20th century, industrialization and those who controlled it were demanding more tribute from the countryside and old democratic ideals were being assaulted by a new vision based on corporate hierarchy. These were the same years that gave birth to the Socialist Party. The Socialists developed a democratic land program that was attractive to small farmers, agricultural workers, and especially tenants. It was based on eliminating absentee landlords and land speculators: land was for those who worked it. The vision, then, was of a society without tenants or sharecroppers — no more slavery through debt. The state would coordinate the storage and marketing of crops and provide credit for operating the farm. At first the Socialists, at the insistence of the party’s urban contingents, had also demanded land collectivization; it took several years of struggle for this politically naive demand, which strikes fear in the heart of agrarian people, to be dropped from the platform. The major problem, however, was not so much the refinement of its program as it was how to recruit around it, how to get in touch with large numbers of people. What they needed was a core of veteran agrarian organizers who both understood the program and how to organize in the countryside. Enter the old Populists, especially the radicals of Texas and Oklahoma.

Green recovers the history of the Socialist organizers in the Southwest, and, if for no other reason, this book is important for the wealth of information it provides. But Green goes on: he argues that this socialist movement in the Southwest, though developing from seeds laid down by the Populists, was different in its class makeup and consciousness. More and more small landowners were becoming tenants, and their expectations of moving up the agricultural ladder were consequently being bashed. At the same time, industrial unionism was expanding throughout the region. Examples were the militant United Mine Workers in eastern Oklahoma, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (who organized across racial lines in the east-Texas forests), and later the Industrial Workers of the World. They reflected a strong class identity that, when united with the stirrings of the large numbers of tenants, changed both the nature and the direction of the agrarian revolt in the Southwest.

As Green moves through the colorful history of the Socialist organizers, he pulls out many stories that give a feel for this period of rapid transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one. Riots, uprisings, blacklists, protective associations, night riders — all were part of the economic warfare that extended through the First World War and ended with bloody repression.

Bruce Palmer and Jim Green, who come from the Woodward tradition, emphasize the importance of Populism as the most important mass expression of American radicalism and underscore the validity of the Populists’ critique of finance capitalism. But Palmer and Green do apply a Marxist critique to Populism which reveals a number of its shortcomings. Both suggested the Debsian Socialists had a more viable critique and program. Unlike Woodward and Goodwyn, they do not see the agrarian Populist approach, which was primarily based on restoring the independence of small property owners, as an effective strategy in the monopoly-capitalist period. Whereas Goodwyn argues forcefully that the Populists’ rural radicalism was fully adequate and indeed represented an inspiring example of how to fulfill the promise of democracy, Palmer and Green are more
critical of the ideological character and political direction of resistance movements.

What is new in the work of Goodwyn, Palmer, and Green? In one sense, they simply document the richness of an early radical tradition that rejected consensus politics, and so they continue a New Left tradition begun by earlier historians like Jesse Lemisch, Staughton Lynd, and Norman Pollack. Goodwyn is superb in laying out how radicals actually mobilized poor people. And Palmer and Green take the political ideas stemming from the period another step: they delve into how the problems of race and class limited the potential of agrarian radicalism, and how the radical critiques of the Populists and Socialists compared to social reality under monopoly capitalism.

What Palmer and Green contribute is a new way to look at radical movements that avoids
the pitfalls of earlier Marxist history. Without taking a condescending view of the Populists that reduces them to the status of petit-bourgeois reformers, Palmer and Green examine the strengths and limits of agrarian reform. Like other New Left social historians, they insist on a serious accounting for the most significant forms of popular resistance to capitalism, and they attempt to learn from rival forms of opposition to dominant capitalist values.

But the history of resistance in the Southwest is not complete if limited to the stories of the Anglo-American Populists and Socialists. Though largely ignored by historians, both progressive and mainstream 19th century mexicano resistance is certainly an important chapter in the history of agrarian radicalism, and it also reveals the roots of the americano-mexicano conflict that continues today.

The Aztlan school, which includes the works of Juan Gomez-Quinones and Aztlan (the journal of the Chicano Studies Center at UCLA), is an excellent example of the recent retrieval of Chicano history.2 Like earlier accounts of the Mexican revolution (e.g., John Womack's Zapata), they explore the extraordinary depth of mexicano resistance on this side of the border to European and US business domination, and they often show how much this resistance was rooted in peasant cultural traditions, a point Marxist historians have often underestimated.

In Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest, Robert Rosenbaum has extended and enlarged the history both of Chicano resistance and agrarian radicalism. He writes of the conflict between americano and mexicano “as a struggle between peoples from a complex world who imposed their forms, for their benefit, upon a more traditional society.” In many ways the history of the relations between these peoples is a history of the confrontations between cultures — language, religion, race. But the issue that provoked violent resistance was the land, and the legal contortions that surround it.

Rosenbaum points out that mexicanos viewed the land as a given, not a commodity. From this grew conflicts over common land, land grants, and enclosures through fencing. At stake was mexicano autonomy. And during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, resistance to Anglo encroachment sprang up from Texas to California.

Mexicano resistance took on many of the same issues as Populist and Socialist resistance, including demands for fair treatment of wage labor, a more equal distribution of wealth, curbs on banks and monopolies, and a land
policy that would preserve the autonomy of the farmer. They also used many of the same techniques: night riders and social bandits (with widespread community support) directly challenged Anglo land settlements, and at the same time there was organizing in the political arena.

In 1890, Mexicanos in New Mexico formed El Partido del Pueblo Unido, which did quite well for a couple of years. But though this Spanish-speaking people’s party made common cause with the Populists on general issues of wealth, land, racial harmony, and the worker, the two people’s parties could not overcome the cultural differences, racial antagonisms, and realities of power. “They fought on the same side, but always as distinct armies.”

Mexicano resistance had at its core the restoration of the traditional use of the common land. Thus, the mexicano struggle was framed around the preservation of tradition, a tradition encrusted with oligarchy in politics, hierarchy in religion, and patriarchy in the family.

In addition, mexicano unity rarely extended beyond the immediate locality. The mexicano worldview, therefore, was more constricted than the broad social vision of the Populists and Socialists. In short, mexicano resistance was more a holding action than an attempt to create a new, more democratic society.

Another critical problem affecting the unity and success of an organized mexicano rebellion was its blurring of class divisions. Dependent as it was on a strong ethnic identity, the movement had little concern for the blending of los ricos with los pobres, though they had different interests. The uncritical mingling of classes subsequently undermined the movement; for example, los pobres were never able to establish economic institutions, as the Populists sometimes did with their cooperatives, that were independent of los ricos. And los ricos ultimately had interests that made them more amenable to accommodation with the Anglos.

The major problem with Rosenbaum’s study
is one of omission. He focuses so sharply on filling in the historical blanks of *mexicano* resistance in the US that the connections between these rebellions and rural resistance elsewhere in the southwestern US or in Mexico gets displaced. Even if there was little organic connection between the Anglo and the *mexicano* revolts, the revolutionary turmoil that was spreading throughout Mexico must surely have provided some inspiration, if not direct substance, to the *mexicanos* in the US. Rosenbaum alludes to these connections, but he is stuck too fast to his particular narrative to give a real sense of the whole regional picture.³

However, what Rosenbaum does accomplish is quite solid. He thoroughly establishes that "the fact that *mexicanos* in California, Texas, and New Mexico resisted violently demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the Anglo regime and their active commitment to doing something about it." He also establishes that the local isolation of the varied *mexicano* revolts coupled with a traditional worldview and the incompatibility of their internal class makeup limited the impact of their resistance.

Taken together, these four books highlight the power of resistance to capitalist expansion mobilized by rural people between 1870 and 1920 — a phenomenon often ignored by earlier left historians who looked only to the proletariat or to urban socialists for leadership in a period when the countryside was far more rebellious than the city. These books clearly show that the resistance to capitalism mobilized in the South and Southwest was not marginal and deserves careful attention from radical historians and activists who wish to understand the dynamics of insurgency past and present.

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**Footnotes**

1. For those interested in raging debates, see *Marxist Perspectives*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1980) for Larry Goodwyn's blast at Jim Green; and *Radical History Review*, no. 24 (Fall 1980) for Green's response.
2. See Juan Gomez-Quinones's *Sembradores: Ricardo Flores Magon y el Partido Liberal Mexicano* and his *On Culture*, both monographs published by the Chicano Studies Center at UCLA. For more information about *Aztlan*, write them at the Chicano Studies Center, UCLA, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90024.
3. To be fair, the connections between Anglo and *mexicano* resistance and the importance of the Mexican Revolution are almost nonexistent in the Goodwyn, Palmer, and Green books. Green, especially, should have dealt with whether, or to what extent, the Mexican Revolution affected the Socialist organizers in the countryside of the Southwest.

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**PRISONER PROJECT NEEDS HELP**

The Prisoner Education Project is a special program of Beacon College, an accredited liberal arts college. The purpose of the P.E.P. is to work with prisoners who otherwise would not have access to quality education, particularly in often-controversial areas of social sciences. Since its inception, over fifty prisoners have been enrolled, and we are now expanding. The bulk of the studying is done by independent study and correspondence with volunteer instructors. But we badly need donations for books and supplies. Please send a tax-deductible donation to Beacon College/Prisoner Education, 2706 Ontario Rd. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. For more information about the Project, write Prisoner Education Project, Box 204, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.
BEYOND THE VICTORIAN SYNDROME

Feminist Interpretations of the History of Sexuality

Ellen DuBois

Until recently, the dominant view of the history of sexuality was a simple and optimistic one. Historians described (or assumed) a movement from sexual “repression,” which peaked in the Victorian period, toward relative liberation. They charged Victorian society with doing violence to the human personality by thwarting natural sexual expression, and praised modern sexuality for progressively throwing off artificial restrictions, becoming more and more natural and healthy. This interpretation assumed the existence of a “natural” human sexuality, which society could either try to control or (wisely) leave alone. It also rested on a contrast between Victorian sexuality and our own, in which we moderns were clearly the winners.

The main impetus for revising this interpretation came from the modern feminist and gay liberationist movements, which raised serious questions about just how “liberated” contemporary sexuality really is, and insisted that any attempt to trace its history must consider homosexuality as well as heterosexuality, women as well as men. The result has been much new research and the beginning of a new synthesis which is both more complicated and more comprehensive than the old one.

The most prominent revisionist historian of sexuality is the French philosopher Michel Foucault. In The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1978), Foucault criticizes the “repression hypothesis” for its simplistic reading of the past and its naive assessment of the present. He outlines a radically different and more complicated sexual history in which, for
example, the Victorian era was marked by a rapid multiplication of sexual “dialogues” and sexual practices. In this framework, “natural” sexuality fades into the dim mists of the past — if indeed it can be said ever to have existed.

Foucault puts such emphasis on the way that larger social forces construct sexuality, and his writing is so abstract, that he rarely descends to the level where the distinction between men and women becomes relevant. But feminist historians of sexuality have come up with an interpretation that shares many of his criticisms of the traditional “repression” model. Indeed, the work of feminist historians may well have influenced Foucault’s efforts more than he recognizes. Like him, feminist historians reject the stereotype of the nineteenth century as an “age of repression,” which is both condescending to the people of the past and a misrepresentation of present-day realities. They go beyond Foucault, however, to say that most generalizations about the history of sexuality, even his, are based only on male experience. Women’s historians always face the problem of history written as if the world were populated only by men, but when the subject is sexuality, this dilemma becomes especially acute. In all societies to date, human sexuality has existed within a system of gender differentiation and the subordination of women to men. Our own language suggests the complex interaction between gender and sexuality by giving us only one word — sex — to talk about both. In the work of nonfeminist historians, if women appear at all, they do so as the objects of male desire, never the subjects of their own. Only feminist historians of the subject regularly take care to study the history of women’s sexuality, and to investigate systematically the relationship between gender and sexuality.

In this essay, I will examine three of the earliest and most important contributions of feminists to the revisionist history of sexuality: Nancy Cott’s “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1835” (Signs, vol. 4, 1978); Linda Gordon’s Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America especially Part Two (Grossman, 1976); and Carroll Smith Rosenberg’s “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” (Signs, vol. 1, 1975). What unites these three pieces is their common conviction that the history of women’s sexuality is not characterized by a simple movement from repression to liberation. Accordingly, they all insist that nineteenth-century sexuality is the place to start in revising the history of sexuality. All three concentrate on sexual ideology and consciousness, rather than on behavior, which they presume is shaped by systems of sexual meaning. Taken together, they provide a unified account of Victorian sexuality which is congruent with what we know of women’s experiences, and with which we can begin to reexamine the emergence — and nature — of modern sexuality.

Nancy Cott’s “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1835” considers the Victorian notion that women lacked sexual passion. She correctly identifies this idea as central to the nineteenth century’s reputation as the age of sexual repression. Nineteenth-century sexual ideology generally took for granted the existence of male lust; it merely suggested that men harmed society by indulging themselves, and that female passionlessness was a better model for civilized morality. Cott has left to the others the question of the degree to which women’s sexual behavior actually conformed to this ideology. Her concern is with women’s ideas, and her hypothesis is that women themselves embraced the
women’s sexual nature was considered primary and their social autonomy was slight,” Cott explains.

Cott then traces the early-nineteenth-century switch in the ideology of womanhood from excessively sexual and amoral to excessively moral and asexual. Women found that the new ideology of passionlessness could be made to serve them in many ways: it replaced a despised definition of womanhood with an esteemed one; it allowed women a respected role in social life; it linked women together in their common distaste for (male) sexuality; and, last but not least, it gave women the right to reject unwanted sexual intercourse. Cott recognizes the probable costs: “The tacit condition for the elevation of [women’s moral reputation] was the suppression of female sexuality.” But inasmuch as the feminist criterion for freedom, sexual or otherwise, begins with the ability of women to act and to act independently, Cott’s position is that women gained more than they lost by embracing the ideology of their own passionlessness.

A similar perspective, and many of the same themes, are developed in Linda Gordon’s *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right*. While Cott’s focus is on the ideological dimensions of the history of sexuality, Gordon’s is on the political. To find the driving force in sexual history she looks at conflicts between classes and genders over the right to control and define sexuality, and political movements like feminism and sex radicalism. Her specific concern is to understand why the birth-control movement failed to give women either reproductive or sexual freedom, and much of her book deals with the twentieth-century history of that movement. She starts, however, where Cott leaves off, with the efforts of nineteenth-century women to reinterpret their society’s sexual-belief system in their own best interests.
Given her political focus, she concentrates on the women who were self-conscious and organized about such change, namely feminists. She is particularly successful in reconstructing the feminist position in a society where sex was experienced differently than in our own, where the necessity of restraining and reducing sexual drives was widely conceded, by men and women alike, radicals and conservatives alike.

Victorian feminists held ideas which to us seem contradictory. They believed in the right of women to control their own reproduction, but rejected the use of contraceptive devices as "immoral." Their solution, widely advocated as "voluntary motherhood," was long periods of abstinence from sexual intercourse, as determined by the woman. Their frequent prudery, Gordon defines as "women's attempts to defend their interests in familial fidelity" against male sexual privileges. Yet despite this, and despite their belief that women universally desire motherhood, nineteenth-century feminists also began to reassert the existence and integrity of female sexuality. Even the conservative Elizabeth Blackwell believed that it was a "radical physiological error" that "men are much more powerfully swayed by this instinct of sex, than are women."

On the surface, Gordon's argument seems to contradict Cott's hypothesis that nineteenth-century women embraced the doctrine of their own passionlessness. Much of the apparent contradiction disappears when we realize that Cott is concentrating on the early nineteenth-century and middle-class women in general, while Gordon's subject is feminists, several generations later. Moreover, both militant passionlessness and the reassertion of female sexuality were part of nineteenth-century feminists' attack on the sexual double standard. Usually feminists extended the doctrine of passionlessness to men, and insisted that they be held to the same high standards of chastity expected of women. Occasionally they asserted that women had the same capacity for sexual pleasure as men. Both were necessary elements in the difficult political project of shaping a sexual system able to accommodate freedom for women as well as for men.

Carroll Smith Rosenberg's contribution to the feminist history of Victorian sexuality rests on her recognition that any sexual economy structures relationships among women as well as between men and women. In her article "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America," she rejects the "post-Freudian cultural perspective" on women's intimacies with each other, because its focus is individual not social, and seeks primarily to separate the abnormal from the normal, the sexual from the platonic. This, she argues, distorts the experiences of
nineteenth-century women, who did not make such distinctions in the loves they developed for each other. Their intimacies with other women were emotionally intense — often more so than their marriages — and physically demonstrative, although Smith Rosenberg will not distinguish between genital and nongenital physicality. "An intriguing and almost alien form of human relationships," she observes, "they flourished in a different social structure amidst different sexual norms." To keep from reading the present back into the past, Smith Rosenberg rejects the term "homosexual" for this form of female intimacy and coins her own word: "homosocial." The concept of "homosociality" has since gained wide usage among feminists and historians of sexuality in general.

Above all, love between women in the nineteenth century was common and accepted, not monitored and surrounded by taboos in anticipation of its becoming sexual; thus, the nineteenth-century "female world of love and ritual" compares favorably with the low level of intimacy permitted between women today. Like Gordon’s interpretation of the Victorian principles of sexual abstinence, Smith Rosenberg’s work on the character of female intimacy establishes the integrity of the Victorian sexual economy and identifies the elements which distinguish it from our own. It also suggests, in Smith Rosenberg’s words, that “the supposedly repressive and destructive Victorian sexual ethos may have been more flexible and responsive...than that of the mid twentieth century.”

Along with certain conclusions in Gordon’s work, Smith Rosenberg’s findings suggest that the "liberation" of female sexuality in the twentieth century is an extremely limited phenomenon, confined entirely to relations between men and women, and largely to intercourse and to marriage. These are suggestions which future work on this subject will undoubt-
"WOMAN'S BODY, WOMAN'S RIGHT" AND THE CURRENT REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Rosalind Petchesky

*Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, by Linda Gordon, was written in a buoyant climate, when feminism in the US appeared strong and reproductive rights relatively secure. Our optimism has waned, but I believe the importance of Gordon’s book, not only as women’s history but as feminist theory, has not. If anything, the understandings it contains about the politics of reproductive freedom provide guideposts to help us steer through this difficult period.

*Technology and politics*. Gordon takes as her starting point a rigorous denial of technological and biological determinism. Surveying the ancient and varied history of conscious birth-control and abortion practices, through many means and in nearly all cultures, she argues that not a lack of technology, but its suppression, caused “the imprisonment of women within their biological functions.” Reproductive freedom is thus mainly a political and social, not technological, problem. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where much of *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right* is set, the early birth-control movements arose as organized resistance to the way that doctors, the church, and the state were wresting control over abortion, birth, and birth control from midwives and popular healers. Indeed, this is where Gordon’s analysis of the nineteenth-century birth control movement starts: with a look at the criminalization of long-standing, and increasinlgy common, popular

practices.

The concept of a dialectic between popular activity, its repression, and organized resistance has been applied by Marxist historians and theorists to class struggle and the sphere of production; but never has it been used so frequently to clarify the politics of reproduction.

This dialectical view has obvious implications for today's struggle over reproductive freedom. If birth control, abortion, and sterilization are a political terrain and not a technique, then it is their social context and not merely their availability that will determine their potential for enhancing or restricting women's freedom. Cutting off women's legal access to abortion won't stop women from getting abortions, at whatever risk, but neither will maintaining legality assure that abortion is either available to all women who need it or "freely" chosen. As Gordon makes clear, like any other technology, abortion and birth control are no more than "tools," whose potential for liberation or repression depends on who is controlling their use, under what conditions, and for what ends. The opposition of some religious-pacifist groups to abortion on the ground that it is a "technological fix" for social problems mindlessly ignores this fact. But even reproductive-rights activists sometimes ignore the fact that surgical sterilization among women — including those who are poor, Puerto Rican, Native American, or black — may be a means consciously chosen by them to better their lives; its coercive potential is not inherent in the technique but related to the social and political context in which choices are made.

The Commonalities of Gender. At the heart of Gordon's theory of birth control politics is the assumption that they are bound up with gender divisions and male supremacy. On the broadest level, this means that the sorts of birth control that are available and the ways they are controlled will vary depending on the political, economic, and social position of women in a given society; that birth control is itself a reflection more than a cause of women's situation in other domains; that in periods of the most intense subordination of women [for example, the "race suicide" craze that accompanied the pre-World War I antifeminist backlash] birth control will be most severely repressed. Women as a group have a specific relationship to fertility and birth control issues that is different from that of men:

The desire for and the problems in securing abortion and contraception made up a shared female experience. . . . the desire for spaced motherhood and smaller families existed in every class, and . . . was so passionate that women would take severe risks to win a little space and control in their lives. The individual theory and practice of birth control stems from a biological female condition that is more basic even than class.

While the close connection between fertility rates, fertility control, and the position of women may seem too obvious to mention, most demographers today ignore it. In academic literature about fertility and family planning, the assumption is that "couples" or "families" are homogenous units that make "cost-benefit" calculations about childbearing and child-spacing based on their (shared) economic situation. (This model is surprisingly adopted by some Marxist demographers, who recognize class and cultural differences in "family strategies" about fertility but not gender divisions within the family.) The historical reality that "motherhood" signifies a totally different relationship to pregnancy and to children than "fatherhood," that the desire to control pregnancy is a "shared female experience" that cuts across class, is absent from this literature. Unfortunately, it is also absent from the awareness of some groups on the Left, who continue
to think that abortion and birth control are "middle-class" issues while, for the working class, "family" issues only involve jobs and the size of paychecks. But insofar as Gordon's perspective of commonality speaks of a collective need of women, it is also entirely different from the liberal feminist view of abortion and birth control as 'individual rights' which middle-class women may feel confident a "free market" will guarantee (to them, individually). The rhetoric of "pro-choice" is inadequate, not only because it lacks drama (compared to "pro-life"), but more importantly because it fails to evoke the sense of collective need and struggle that Gordon's book so eloquently conveys.

*The Specificity of Class.* If birth control and abortion are a "shared female experience," they nonetheless differ, in the conditions that surround them and the specific needs they address, for women of different classes. Gordon's awareness of the class divisions among women is constantly in balance with her insistence of their common lot. Nowhere is this clearer than in her discussion of the class differences in access to effective birth-control and to abortion. While emphasizing the strong desire of working-class and poor women in the 1920s and 1930s for effective birth control, Gordon explains their lower rate of "success" in using birth control, compared to middle-class women, in terms of the material and social conditions that structured their daily lives. In particular, those conditions involved the increasing reliance on doctors for birth-control advice and instruction and, simultaneously, the division of American medical care along class lines. The "professionalization" and medicalization of birth-control services meant that private physicians who catered to a middle-class female clientele, would exercise the power to exclude lower-class women from safe abortion and birth control. Middle-class women had more hygienic homes with running water, more cooperative husbands, fewer religious and moral scruples, and less need for children as a form of social security; but more than anything, they also had "better instruction and medical advice in the first place."
Still, the relation between access to abortion and birth control and sexual self-determination is a preliminary one at best. Abortion and birth control are necessary but far from sufficient conditions for satisfying, unpressed, and “equal” sexual relations (whatever those might be). Reproductive freedom is about the capacity of women to determine whether and when they will take on the culturally defined conditions of *motherhood* — even when those conditions, and sex itself, remain limiting and oppressive for women. Gordon reminds us that birth control and abortion, like other “liberties” (e.g., freedom from censorship), are but minimal requirements or enabling conditions for genuine liberation in all domains of sexual and social life. In order for them to be more than “class privileges” or to seem more essential to the majority of women than just another “commodity,” they must be sought within a much larger movement to change the basic structures of class privilege and male supremacy.

*Birth Control and Radical Movements.* Finally, the lesson of *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right* has to do with political organization and political commitment. The depoliticization and deradicalization of birth control earlier in this century is a story of the failure of birth-control radicalism, feminism, sexual liberation, and socialism to come together in a single united movement. Gordon attributes this failure during the pre–World War I period in part to the deliberate “silence” of the American Left on the subject of birth control. Socialists such as Kate Richards O’Hare and the male-dominated organs of the Socialist Party accepted a traditional view of woman’s place in the family and the primacy of her childbearing function. On the other hand, the major feminist organizations likewise shied away from an active commitment to birth control. This reticence, Gordon suggests, grew out of not only feminists’ acceptance of “race suicide” and “maternal instinct” dogma but still more — at least for the older generation of suffragists and feminists — their fears of the sex radicalism and “promiscuity” they associated with birth-control politics. Thus feminist conservatism and socialist antifeminism, along with the decline of radical movements for other reasons, combined to effectively cut off the birth-control movement from links with broader socialist and feminist organizations.

Today, reproductive-rights groups are again in danger of being disconnected from both feminist and socialist organizational frameworks, for similar reasons and with similarly dire consequences. Many existing publications and groups on the Left, intimidated by a chilly political climate, have either kept silent or equivocated on the question of abortion rights and “right-to-life” ideology. At the same time, NOW at the national level, the largest feminist organization in the country, continues to give reproductive rights and sexual freedom a lower priority than the ERA and “economic equal-
ity” (as though these were separable); while Betty Friedan, always on the right wing of feminism, publicly proclaims her opposition to abortion and homosexuality and her devotion to “the family.”

In a period when radical movements of all kinds are on the defensive, we tend to forget that our movements themselves and the ideas they generate grow out of real social conditions and needs. Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right is a powerful document of the organic relationship between political consciousness and organization and the needs and motives that arise out of daily life. The birth-control movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries articulated a need that women felt at every level of society. Similarly today, the rise in abortion, enlarged social spaces for teenage and homosexual/lesbian sex, and women’s quest for personhood outside marriage and childrearing reflect social needs and practices that cannot be eliminated by fiat, though they may be driven “underground.” Even the attack on legal abortion has recently been splintered against the weight of this social reality. The task facing feminists in this period is how to sharpen (not narrow) our ideology and broaden our political organization so that social need becomes mobilized in collective consciousness and action.

Today the class division in reproductive health care is sharper than ever: even at the height of legal, Medicaid-funded abortion in the mid-1970s, physicians in some states were still refusing to provide abortions for low-income women, and most states and counties had no public or nonprofit abortion or “family planning” facilities at all. Since the Hyde Amendment, of course, poor women are having to beg, scrape, and borrow to pay for their abortions, or are carrying their unwanted pregnancies to term. The risk of being sterilized without informed consent is still one that falls mainly on poor and minority women. And careful instruction and encouragement in the use of the safest birth-control methods — especially the diaphragm and jelly — is still a privilege reserved for middle-class women over twenty. Activists in reproductive-rights politics are well aware of these discrepancies, but we are very far from building a movement which encompasses all the groups of women affected by them.

The Contradictions of Consciousness. The kinds of movements that have developed historically around birth-control issues, and the forms of consciousness they represent, reflect these class differences. Gordon divides her study into three distinct stages, with each stage corresponding to a different sort of birth-control movement growing out of different class interests and values. Only in the pre-World War I period was the birth-control movement truly a popular movement, representing the aspirations of masses of immigrant and working-class women. The story of how that movement became depoliticized and co-opted into a medically and managerially oriented “family planning” establishment is a fascinating and scrupulously researched, if depressing, part of Gordon’s book. Gordon’s revision of conventional notions about Victorian “prudery” through a feminist analysis of nineteenth-century “voluntary motherhood,” as a kind of rational defense against sexual and reproductive oppression, is probably the most original contribution of her book. The core of the “voluntary motherhood” concept was the essentially radical view that women alone, because they experience pregnancies, have the right to decide whether and when they will bear a child — a view which, Gordon argues, was shared by all feminists of the time.

While recognizing the resistance aspects of this ideology, Gordon at the same time stresses
its accommodationist aspects. In particular, the feminist demand for “voluntary motherhood” rested on the dominant “cult of motherhood” as “an exalted, sacred profession” which was “exclusively woman’s responsibility.” In this respect, it represented a kind of “false consciousness...that ignored or denied the privileges men received from women’s exclusive responsibility for parenthood”.

The dialectic of resistance and accommodation characterizes radical and feminist consciousness about birth control and reproduction in different historical periods. In the present context — when birth-control language, values, and practices have for nearly fifty years been monopolized by medical and family-planning professionals, whose monopoly is now being challenged by religious and moralistic archconservatives — feminist consciousness about birth control and abortion is inevitably complex. For example, our resistance to both the medicalization and the “moralization” of birth control and abortion tends to overlook that “the general health context” of women is critical to the providing of really decent, safe birth control and abortion. That is, birth control and abortion are not merely personal “privacy rights” but are social needs, requiring a genuinely public, socialized health-care system.

*Birth Control and Sexual Freedom.* A particularly confused dimension of current feminist
consciousness has to do with the connection between reproductive freedom and sexual liberation. For the feminist advocates of "voluntary motherhood," the "right to control one's body" meant the right to refuse sex as well as to refuse pregnancy; but sexual satisfaction and self-expression were hardly the issue. And probably for most women throughout history, the conscious desire to be free from unwanted pregnancy has had more to do with personal health and well being, and the demands and risks of pregnancy and child care, than it has directly with the quest for sexual pleasure. Gordon's critique of the sex radicals of the 1920s helps us to see the contradictions embedded in an overly simplistic linking of birth control and abortion to sexual liberation. Relief from the fear of pregnancy would not by itself result in fulfilling or nonexploitative sex, in a society structured on women's economic and social subordination.

In the 1940s, "sex without fear" and "marital fulfillment," through sex therapy and counseling, would become the province of a newly respectable family-planning profession. But the sex-and-birth control professionals carefully restricted their attack on "sexual dysfunction" and "unwanted pregnancy" to the traditional framework of marriage, motherhood, and "family stability," removed from questions of gender relations or women's power in the society at large. Gordon's excellent history of the sex-and-birth control profession (especially Planned Parenthood) reveals how mistaken is the notion that either "reproductive freedom" or "sexual freedom" (in the sense of liberation) can be separated from the totality of women's condition.

Today both right-wing sexual politics and the development of feminist thinking about sexuality make these connections seem more complicated. Steps by the Moral Majority and the Reagan administration not only to outlaw abortion but to curtail teenagers' access to birth control and sex education, and to harrass Planned Parenthood clinics, reveal the grim truth in Ellen Willis's old statement that "the nitty-gritty issue in the abortion debate is not life but sex." Moreover, this repression is a reaction to something positive — not a "sexual revolution," as feminists have long known, but a clear determination of feminists and women generally to lead their own sexual lives outside the bonds of marital, heterosexual, or parental constraints. Since Gordon wrote her book, feminists have begun to explore the variety of "sexualities" and the terrain of erotic desire that exists in a different dimension from either economic or gender oppression.

ROSAIND PETCHESKY teaches at Barnard College in New York and is active in anti-sterilization work.

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A FUTURE FOR LIBERAL FEMINISM?

Marla Erlien

Zillah Eisenstein’s book *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* enters the political scene at a difficult moment. Liberal feminism is in disarray. The deadline for the ERA edges closer, people are being rattled by the Right’s campaign against abortion and homosexuality. Within this state of emergency, Betty Friedan argues for a “new stage” of the women’s movement.¹ The former priorities of our sexual politics, like homosexual rights and abortion, according to Friedan, were distorted. This “made it easy for the so-called Moral Majority to lump the ERA with homosexual rights into one explosive package of licentious, family-threatening sex.” Friedan argues for a politic that does not threaten women “who still look to the family for their very identity, not only among the dwindling numbers who are still full-time housewives, but also among women who do not get as much sense of worth or security from their jobs as they get — or wish they’d get — from being someone’s wife or mother.” Sexuality, for Friedan, is so laden with emotions and repressions that it can be used to divert people from real issues like economics into presumably false issues like sexual orientation, thereby unleashing sexual hysteria. “Surely,” she says, “it is politically unwise to seem to threaten that area of inviolate sexual privacy now.” So throw out slogans like “free abortion on demand” — it’s tainted with sexual permissiveness and rudely affronts conservative morality by “implying a certain lack of reverence for life.” In order to advance women’s rights (synonymous with economic interests), we need to invoke our right to privacy.
Friedan is significant because she represents a cultural politics which now dominates the response to the current economic crisis and the rightward political drift. Two developments fuel the reformation of such a politic. The context is one in which spontaneous political activity from the left is blocked; as activists are forced to become the source of the movement, politics becomes subsumed by questions of strategy. Winning or defending reforms is pitted against projecting competing values, images, and visions for life. Secondly, people's lives have become enmeshed in the conventions of capitalist society; thus, our perceptions are narrowed — "personal life" concerns become marginalized as do the lives of those who raise these questions, e.g. lesbians and gay men. The liberal tendencies within even the gay liberation movement emerge as the only gay politic. Reforms via judicial and legislative action are advocated while challenges to the norms get reduced to a hope for coexistence. This redefinition of what is "political" happens either without a conscious reevaluation of the impulses which propelled us into the social movements of the last twenty years or by a dismissal of the New Left and its inheritors — the feminist and gay movements — based on their narrow class or race composition.

Zillah Eisenstein's book, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, enters this arena with the hope of breaking the hold liberal politics has over women's consciousness by revealing the radical core of liberal feminism. The title itself bespeaks an optimism that liberal feminism can project a future in which relations between the sexes will be radically transformed. Eisenstein helps us to put Friedan in historical perspective — exposing the contradictions of her thinking as rooted in the tension between liberalism and feminism — the sacrificing of feminism to liberal thought. Eisenstein hopes she can make liberal feminists conscious of their assumptions and more committed to the need for theory.

Eisenstein uses liberal in its specific historical sense of the autonomy of the individual — that is, of white men. This bias reflects the patriarchal roots of liberalism and exposes its ideological character — defining relations among individuals as the core of civil society only masks the power relations that shape individual lives. Eisenstein surveys the development of liberal individualist theory and how feminism since Wollstonecraft adopted and yet contradicted its premises. She points out the way in which feminist theorists have located women as part of a "sexual class" — members of a social group who recognize that they have been defined solely by biology. And this biology has a political dimension in that the differentiation of men from women makes us unequal. The inequality is then institutionalized, reproduced through the separation of home from paid work, personal from political, and private from public. Sexual class is not some fixed entity. Eisenstein draws on E.P. Thompson's definition of class to show its historically changing character, stating "the contours of sexual class become defined through the fight against oppression."

While liberal feminism carries the contradiction between individualism and sex class in theory, Eisenstein points out that its strategies have involved a recognition of the former more than the latter. She does help us recognize the way feminism can become trapped by the either/or ideology of American society — male/female, public/private, home/work. She continues by articulating the role of the state in mystifying the connections between the domains. Her hope is that in the struggle to secure reforms from the state, such as childcare, battered women's shelters, protection against sexual harassment, etc., women will realize the
state’s role in maintaining the patriarchal structures of our lives.

The struggle for abortion rights provides a clear example of the dynamics of reform that Eisenstein lays out. While the 1973 Supreme Court decision seemed to be a victory for feminists, in fact the abortion law was based on a right to privacy rather than women’s right to self-determination and reproductive freedom. The right to freedom from state interference (privacy) was then extended to deny medicaid funding for abortions — illuminating how the liberal state maintains the separation between public and private and mystifies its role in controlling women’s reproductive lives. In this way Eisenstein reframes recent Marxist attempts at reconceptualizing the state by exposing the state’s patriarchal role in maintaining “the public and private domains of sexual hierarchy between men and women.” On this score, she is a helpful departure.

Her overall attempt to intervene in the larger crisis of the women’s movement reveals a method not far enough removed from orthodox Marxist interpretations. Within the terms of radical politics Eisenstein sets out, regarding abortion we find a stagist notion of political change. Political consciousness grows in
distinct stages — from the mere demand for abortion rights to a perception of the change in material conditions necessary for their full realization. The radical extension of abortion, for Eisenstein, consists in exposing the gap between the promise of abortion rights and the material realities — of poverty interlaced with class and race — which in fact deny them to all women. A radical abortion demand in her view would include access to abortion for all women, socialized health care, and a living wage. Strategically, Eisenstein proposes that left feminists ally with liberal feminists — on their terms — supporting e.g., “pro-choice,” since this position is seen as a step away from a radical critique of itself. Her challenge to Friedan would be to expose the limits of an individualist view which doesn’t recognize sex class, and can therefore speak only in the name of some (white, middle-class) women and not all women. While this critique is crucial, there are deeper contradictions in liberal feminism embodied in Friedan’s stated concerns which Eisenstein does not address.

The very formulation of “choice” is a false one. The availability of abortion does more than simply add one more option — it changes the meaning of all the choices. A radical politics around abortion must recognize that the fight for abortion is a struggle to redefine the terms of motherhood and female sexuality. It is these implications that the New Right understands. To abandon the cultural terrain, as Eisenstein does, robs us of our ability to articulate new values and a change in our way of life — the promise which propelled the feminist movement to struggle for abortion. The continuity between Eisenstein and Friedan is that both defend abortion without carrying the challenge to the values that once defined feminism.

Economic crisis coupled with political reaction pushes survival issues to the center of politics. The impulses which propelled women in the late sixties into a women’s liberation movement — impulses toward autonomy, toward the promise of a different life, a redefinition of need and satisfaction — are lost. We transcend the first stage of the women’s movement by burying it; no longer is women’s alienation from prescribed roles and identities a legitimate political issue. The psychic hold of the normal arrangements — around family, money, time, sexuality, parenting — reasserts itself. As a result, even within the Left a pro-family politics emerges. The feminist critique of the family is forgotten once its “survival value” is discovered. The appeal then is to existing authority, not so much the obvious authority of the state, government, and business, but the authority of culture and tradition. Today, the power of culture and tradition haunts even that which was its most striking critic: feminism.

In another example, Eisenstein does not go beyond comprehending the failure of feminism to articulate a politics that embraces sexual desire. Eisenstein’s optimism for the radical future of liberal feminism flows from how she identifies the sources of revolt. On one hand, she argues that the contradiction between the promise of equality and the experience of inequality will awaken women to their real status in society. Sara Evans, in her book Personal Politics, begins with such a notion and proceeds to unravel its falsity. It was not the tension between the rhetoric of equality within the civil rights movement and women’s recognition of their unequal status that allowed women to speak of their own liberation. Rather Evans emphasized that women within the civil rights movement and community organizing projects were in situations that pushed them to break with traditional definitions of womanhood, to develop strengths and power that led them into a cultural revolt. It was from these experiences that we understood our alienation from
woman's place, and the need for a women's liberation movement.

Eisenstein identifies a second source of revolt in those whose lives embody the "structural contradiction" between the organization of private and public life. Here she is more concerned with a correct accounting of the objective social and economic structures than with rethinking the crises of subjectivity, our difficulty in being actors. The failure of people to mobilize around abortion remains unexplained. Her method for developing strategy avoids analysis of the ways the actors have been blocked and remains committed to true perceptions of "objective reality." She sees strategy flowing rationally from awareness of points of contradiction. For example, because "working mothers" experience the strain of the existing organization of home and work, they can realize the need to transform the relationship between the two spheres, not simply to gain equality within the existing structures. Thus feminists should concentrate their efforts on mobilizing this sector.

Here she reveals her attachment to habits of thinking embedded within orthodox Marxism. For Eisenstein, theory designates how people should act. For those who depart from orthodoxy, the question is rather to explain how people do act. Neither the failure to revolt nor the sources of revolt has been so literal or logically predictable. No one expected the youth rebellions of the sixties, France '68, the women's movement, or gay movements, or that the Catholic Church in Poland would provide a space from which assertions of democracy would flow. And such rebellions redefine our perceptions of social relations, redefine what we want, demand new explanations of the human condition, and expose unexpected sources of political revolt.

What all this points to is the distance between liberalism and a radical critique. There is no logic that connects the two. The radical break comes with the challenge to values and social norms. Once the question is raised of what life is about, the break with liberalism is over the issue of goals. Eisenstein's neglect of a cultural dimension obscures this difference. Once the language of "choice" is accepted as a substitute for proabortion, the issues of morality, sexuality, etc. are already silenced. If we are to seriously respond to the New Right's capture of personal life politics from feminism, we must recognize the voids within feminism — there are crises in morality, sexuality, heterosexuality. They need exploration and confrontation. Only recently (in Heresies: Sex Issue) has this gone public. By sidestepping these arenas, Eisenstein participates in the larger crisis and does not pose a perspective that confronts the homophobic and antisex conservatism of today's defensive politics.

MARLA ERLIEN, is an editor of Radical America, and works with Women Opposed to Registration and the Draft (WORD).
ERA
RIP

But how hard should we cry at the funeral?

Anita Diamant

Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
— the proposed 27th Amendment

It stinks: with three states needed to ratify and the June 30 deadline looming ever closer, the Equal Rights Amendment looks doomed. Even though polls have consistently shown that Americans support the ERA by a two-to-one majority. Even though 16 states — including Mormon Utah — have passed constitutional equal-rights provisions. Even though pro-ERA groups have spent millions of dollars and countless hours on national and state campaigns to get those 24 words added to the US Constitution.

It stinks, but there it is. What the ERA’s defeat will actually mean, however, is unclear. Phyllis Schafly et al. will congratulate themselves about having saved the American family. Ms. magazine has already assigned a story about the kinds of sophisticated and expensive strategies mustered by the Right against the ERA in various states. The media in general will, no doubt, treat it as a grave crisis for the American women’s movement because, for the last five years, many ERA supporters have been running around and getting quoted on how the amendment is “both the symbol and the substance of the women’s movement.”

Well, political rhetoric is notorious for overstatement, but though the battle won’t be over until July 1 (and political miracles do happen), that well-intentioned but facile phrase has
already begun to haunt the future.

If the ERA were truly symbol and substance (it sounds positively religious, doesn’t it?) of the women’s movement, if it represented a distillation of the challenge to sex roles, sexism, and sexuality that’s been voiced over the past decade, then the failure of the amendment would signal the death of feminism. But it’s not so. You simply cannot equate the ERA with a continuing cultural revolution that daily redefines the way women and men think about themselves and their responsibilities to one another.

But if July 1 is, finally, the ERA’s burial day, the headlines will banner a death knell for feminism, the columnists will gloat or moan (as is their wont) and . . . what? Husbands who have been sharing the housework for the last seven years will not suddenly hang up their dish towels and tell the little women to take care of business in the kitchen. Organizations like 9to5 will not close up shop, and neither will the Association of Latin American Women, nor the Rhode Island Feminist Theatre. The psychologists who have developed, published, and taught new theories about women’s personalities will not revert to the penis-envy paradigm of female inadequacy. Women will not disappear from the driver’s seats of buses or from jogging paths or TV anchor posts. If shelters for battered women close their doors, it will be the fault of Proposition 2½ and/or Reagan’s military spending spree — not because the ERA died.

Which is not to say that the defeat of the ERA won’t hurt. Substantively, states with equal-rights provisions have shown progress in a range of legal and legislative areas. The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund has assembled an impressive packet of information showing how state ERAs help set precedents that benefit women in a variety of ways.

Still, even if the national ERA were to be passed, in the context of a Reagan administration it could provide little guarantee of progressive policies or an improved legal or legislative outlook. One might expect that, with the ERA, there would be far-reaching changes in the Social Security System regarding compensation for homemakers. Of course, those changes wouldn’t mean a thing now that the Social Security System is being gutted. And if you had to measure the benefits that the Massachusetts ERA has brought us against the contributions made by the handful of committed feminist legislators on Beacon Hill, I doubt that the ERA would come out on top. In other words, a national ERA could not, in itself, create a context for reform.

The loss of the ERA fight will do serious symbolic damage to the idea of the women’s movement as a mainstream political force. The ERA is the most visible and widely acceptable single issue identified with feminism. It’s so vague and bland, the support it has thereby attracted is so diverse, that political meaning is ambiguous, to say the least. Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and Socialists have hopped on the ERA bandwagon. There are a good number of anti-abortion activists on board as well as virtually all prochoicers. There are business leaders and college students, lawyers and maids.

The failure of the ERA will be taken to mean that the women’s movement has not yet achieved political clout — that it cannot deliver the least divisive item on its own agenda, that it is small-time, penny-ante and not to be taken seriously at times when the big boys are dividing the spoils.

The questions “Why did the ERA die?” and “How did you screw up so badly?” are currently being tossed in feminists’ faces — whether or not said feminists happen to be ERA activists.
Underlying these classic blame-the-victim queries is the still un tarnished assumption that the deck wasn’t stacked, that we live in a land of opportunity and open access, where justice will win out.

ERA supporters had more to do than win over the apathetic masses, which were, arguably, much ignored by an elite reformist movement. They had to fight the well-funded, well-organized, and much-underestimated ERA opposition. That opposition is formidable; white, conservative, rich, well-connected, powerful, fearful of change — in other words, the people for whom Reagan’s tax package is such a bonanza. That the ERA issue has stayed alive as long as it has is testimony to the tenacity of the amendment’s advocates and to its popular and common-sense appeal. And besides, in this, the land of lobbyists and political payoffs, since when does right make might?

Confronted with the loud “Why?” left in the wake of the ERA debacle, many liberal feminists are looking more conservative, back-pedaling furiously on issues they were never too fond of in the first place: abortion and what is called, at arm’s length, “gay rights.” Their lament goes, “If only the women’s movement had stuck to business — the ERA — we’d be planning our victory parties today.”

The fuzzy thinking that gave us that unfortunate “symbol and substance” slogan comes of a bad historical memory. The second wave of American feminism did not begin as an ERA caucus. It grew from consciousness-raising groups held in kitchens and living rooms. And the first item on the agendas there was far more likely to be birth control or orgasm than constitutional guarantees of equality.

The ERA did not precede tougher issues like abortion and sexuality — it followed them. But because it was simpler and less threatening, because it could so easily be fit into the rules of the game as it is played, ERA was adopted as the cause celebre of the mainstream women’s movement; NOW, the National Women’s Political Caucus, women’s professional associations, and the like. And since these were the groups that sought and got press coverage, the women’s movement and feminism came to be
identified with ERA and not necessarily with issues like abortion or violence against women, universally available day care, the feminization of America's underclass, the challenge of love between equals, the vindication of housework as an economic necessity. These and a hundred other feminist concerns were relegated, in popular discourse, to back burners, while the business of the women's movement narrowed to the real-politics of getting the 27th Amendment ratified.

Sadly, the ERA mobilization has tended to shrivel the public notion of what the women's movement is all about. It has shrunk a mind-expanding theory called feminism into one convenient, bite-sized morsel. And the ERA's defeat is, in effect, another announcement that a cultural revolution cannot be neatly and peacefully legislated. The amendment's opponents deserve credit for having taken so seriously the challenges and changes that are implied even in the apparently harmless bill.

In reality, the death of the ERA is a legislative and judicial (because the judiciary probably would have the most to do with its implementation) setback. But because of the primacy given the ERA by the largest and most visible of women's groups, and by attendant media attention to it, the setback threatens to have some serious psychological consequences.

Perhaps it will vindicate the sexism of some, but the impact on those who have fought for so long will vary. Some will, no doubt, be terribly discouraged and withdraw from all forms of activism. Others will plunge into electoral and party politics, having been well trained by their years with the ERA campaign.

The feminist movement of the late 19th and 20th centuries culminated in 1920, when women finally won the right to vote. The suffrage battle absorbed the time and energy of American feminists almost to the exclusion of every-
thing else — even certain scruples. (During World War I, some of the National Women's Suffrage Association's leaders withdrew from women's peace organizations and toned down rhetoric about the pacifism of their sex in exchange for political favors that were eventually repaid with the endorsement of the 19th Amendment.) The movement became so narrow that after the vote was won, it seemed pointless to continue. To continue doing what? There was no compelling answer to that question in 1920, and the women's movement went to sleep for 50 years.

I doubt that a victory for the ERA in June would result in a similar collapse of feminist activity. But its defeat may well mean that those whose entire feminist analysis and commitment was summed up on their ERA buttons will have to rethink their polite distance from the messier issues that inevitably attach themselves to any struggle for women's self-determination. Women's rights cannot be divorced from issues of reproduction and sexual freedom. They come with the territory. The Right knows this, and it's time for mainstream feminists to recognize it as well.

Today, the women's movement is so diversified, so rich in ideals, publications, institutions, associations, and activities that have nothing to do with the ERA, that the end of one battle on this one front — either in victory or in defeat — will not mean the end of the whole campaign. In fact, this war metaphor, which works so very well in reference to the ERA, breaks down in discussing the broader project of which the ERA is only a small part. The whole project is the redefinition of "equality" in ways that the ERA has never dreamt of.

Anita Diamant is a staff writer and columnist for the Boston Phoenix. This article is reprinted from the Boston Phoenix of March 2, 1982.
time warp 47 (job market)

two black men on Washington Street
both young both scruffy though
one wears a leather vest (& no shirt).

walking uptown, a middle-aged (30)
white man in a business suit, hurrying.

"What time is it" a black man asks.
"Ten after" the suit answers, irritated.

"Ten after what"
"Ten after twelve" suit walks by fast.

Ron Schreiber
**Good Reading**


This is a good book to have back in print. Not only a stirring account of Seattle’s 1919 General Strike, it is one of the richest autobiographical tales an American labor radical has set down. Like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn’s *Rebel Girl*, like Bill Haywood’s *Book, Revolution in Seattle* has the smell and feel of real events, real personalities.

O’Connor is some personality himself, and although he interjects his own life only modestly and for the most part indirectly, the character shines through. He worked at the office of the *Seattle Union Record*, organ of the Central Labor Council which directed the historic strike; he had already passed close by the Socialist Labor Party, and became an independent radical sympathetic to the Wobbles. Strictly a junior partner in the events, he has a great sense for the regional quality of the Northwest coastal movement, the mixture of ethnic and political types which made that moment of American labor history unique. Later on he drifted eastward, served for decades in the Left’s own wire service, the Federated Press, helped the steelworkers organize in Pittsburgh via the local ACLU (some of this is recorded in *Radical America*'s upcoming anniversary issue), and wrote several of the great muckraking anticapitalist classics like *Mellon’s Millions*. In short he trained himself as labor comrade, investigative journalist extraordinaire. *Revolution in Seattle* is the result but also in a certain way the tale of the grizzled, ironic veteran going back to pick up the pieces, and reconstruct the most vivid events of his youth.

*Revolution in Seattle* carries the story from the first utopian colonies in Washington with their combination of free land, nudism, and Debsian Socialist ideals, through the formation of political and labor movements, into the stirring events of the late 1910s. Along the way we find “Red” and “Yellow” Socialists, Wobblies, wage-conscious labor activists, and most interestingly, a powerful anticonscription movement. The antiwar character of the entire Washington radical bloc drew steady repression but also prepared the Left to intervene in the most decisive labor battles. Anarchism, pacifism, cultural radicalism all played a part as well in refusing the European Socialist orthodoxy which prescribed labor cooperation with the war. Thus when we find Seattle workers ready to throw over patriotic guff, more than iron determination and good politics can be credited. Unionists knew that nothing less than a general strike could break the assault on the practical gains they had made. But they had also been influenced by the wry humor of the radical journalists, the vivid utopian sense that the new society of individual self-expression might already exist within the shell of the old order.

We could draw lessons from the bitter repression that swept over Seattle after the strike, or from the ideological fallout that pulverized the remaining Left, but *Revolution* has a far greater significance today. We must bring into any movement our whole selves, deliver as much as we can of the maximum message. Anything less is a cheat and a fraud to those whom, we expect, will join us in freedom’s cause.

*Paul Buhle*
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APOCALYPSE NOW

(Vietnam, 1978, 180 min., black and white)
Billed as the real story behind US involvement in Vietnam, this film was three years in the making, and has just been released in this country. It’s history set to music with a dazzling set of song and dance as we follow the plight of a USO tour group that is captured and held hostage by the NLF in 1972. After the only Third World entertainer, Harry Belafonte, is released, we watch an amazing spectacle as the rest of the tour (including Bob Hope, Ronald Reagan, John Wayne and Charlton Heston) attempts to imitate Belafonte’s calypso song and style in hopes of also being released. They only succeed in lengthening their captivity. “Lays bare the cultural imperialism of US entertainment,” Gus Hall, Daily Worker. “God, they’re awful,” Arthur Bell, Village Voice.

REEDS

(US — USSR, 1982, 426 min., color)

MY DINNER WITH MARCEL

(US, 1981, 109 min., color, subtitles)
Described as a cerebral tour-de-force by Director Louis Grandmal, this witty and engaging film follows two typical men as they sit down and attempt to communicate over dinner in a restaurant in which neither can read the menu. Newscaster Ted Koppel (ABC Nightline) and mime Marcel Marceau gesture and grimace for an hour and a half until an alert waiter mistakenly applies the Heimlich hold and breaks Koppel’s neck. Script by Ted Koppel, and Andre Gregory. “It made me think,” Weinstein, IN THESE TIMES. “Best dinner movie of the year,” Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel, Sneak Previews.
KRAMER VS. U.S.

(U.S., 1982, 96 min., color)

Not just another "sensitive male" movie of the after-effects of women's lib, this heartbreaking sequel to Kramer vs. Kramer follows a single-father as he attempts to cope with the America of Reaganomics and service cut-backs. Laid off by his advertising firm when the company moves to the Sunbelt, Kramer goes on welfare, applies for foodstamps and enrolls his son in a day care center only to have himself placed on workfare, his stamps cut and his son's day care center shut down. He sues the US for breach of promise, alleging he was duped by the Old Federalism and media images of masculinity. Losing the suit, he is plunged into despair. The film comes to a dramatic finale when he shoots Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor as she reads the Court's refusal to grant his appeal. Dustin Hoffman, Donald Sutherland and Mary Tyler Moore as Justice O'Connor. "I loved it," Steinem, MS. "The performances will elicit sighs," Haskell, Mademoiselle.

REBEL WITHOUT A SQUAD

(Libya — Cuba, 1981, 123 min., color)

The penultimate statement of 80s alienation and ennui, Henry Winkler's performance as Jay Dee, the moody, acerbic, and amusing contra-hero of Rebel will no doubt remind viewers of James Dean and a much slimmer Marlon Brando. An independent American leftist, Jay has shunned joining innumerable groups and parties — even the Guardian Angels — until he meets the mysterious Carlos, an international terrorist. He falls in love with the terrorist after a chance meeting in a Boston moviehouse only to be arrested by the FBI the next day and charged with being a Libyan Hit Squadder. Facing a life sentence, Dee flees the country aboard an ill-fated DC 10 that crashes in the North Atlantic. Henry Winkler, Franco Nero as Carlos, Bruce Dern, Marthe Keller and James Cagnery as J. Edgar Hoover. "A politico-socio-sexual blockbuster," Kleinhans, Jumpcut. "Go see it," Demeter, Radical America. 'It poses the right questions," Judis, IN THESE TIMES.

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Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, Rob Ruck

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