RADICAL AMERICA
VOL. 19, NO. 2-3 $3.50

STONEHILL COLLEGE LIBRARY
SEP 20 1985 RECEIVED

THE BRITISH MINERS' STRIKE OF 1984-85

ALSO:
STORIES OF THE IWW WORKING CLASS ACADEMICS
Editors: Margaret Cerullo, John Demeter, Marla Erlien, Phyllis Ewen, Elizabeth Francis, Ted German, Ann Holder, Joe Interrante, Donna Penn, Ken Schlosser, Deb Whippen, and Ann Withorn. Intern: Virginia Bullock.

Staff: John Demeter.


REMEMBERING FREDY PERLMAN
As we go to press, we are very sorry to report the death on July 26 of Fredy Perlman during corrective heart surgery. Aside from being a warm person and a profoundly original libertarian writer whose work has been important over the years for a number of Radical America editors, he was a skilled printer. He did the press work on Radical America from 1970 to 1975, as a participant in the Printing Co-op in Detroit. His patience and pride in his work established a standard that we have tried to emulate over the years. In a future issue, we hope to publish an appreciation of his evolving social thought by RA founding editor Paul Buhle. For now, we can only record his passing with much regret.

The Editors

Radical America welcomes unsolicited manuscripts, but can return them only if sufficient postage is included. Writers may also send abstracts or inquiries to Manuscript Coordinator, c/o Radical America.

RADICAL AMERICA (USPS 873-880) is published five times a year (bimonthly except for a single issue March through June) by the Alternative Education Project, Inc. at 38 Union Square, Somerville MA 02143; (617) 628-6585. Copyright ©1985 by Radical America. Unauthorized xeroxing or other republication without the express permission of the journal is prohibited. Subscription rates: $15 per year; $26 for two years; $10 per year for unemployed, retired, or fixed income. Free to prisoners. Add $3 per year to all prices for foreign subscriptions. Double rates for institutions and libraries. Bulk rates: 40% reduction from cover price for five or more copies. US distribution by Carrier Pigeon. Typesetting by Gay Community News. Typos and mistakes by Alfred E. Newman. ISSN 0033-7617.

Second class postage paid at Boston, Mass. and additional post offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to RADICAL AMERICA, 38 Union Square, #14, Somerville, MA 02143.

RADICAL AMERICA is available on microfilm from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and indexed in Alternative Press Center Index, P. O. Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218. It is also indexed in America: History and Life, Sociological Abstracts, and Women's Studies Abstracts.

RADICAL AMERICA is a member of the Alternative Press Syndicate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICE AND THIEVES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE British Miners' Strike of 1984-85</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Contrasts in the Miners' Strike</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Sutcliffe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE DANCED IN THE MINERS' HALL</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Interview with ‘Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners’</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry Goldsmith, Brian Flynn and Bob Sutcliffe</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘WE ALWAYS SANG THOSE WONDERFUL SONGS’</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie Cohen, Joe Murphy and the I.W.W.</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Georgakas, Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD READING</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA DOLCE VITAE</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Working Class in the Academy</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Hoffman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LETTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

War is usually presented as the best and quickest way for an advanced industrial economy to rescue itself from economic crisis. World War II, for example, certainly lifted the US out of the Depression, and indeed, established its world economic domination for two decades. But wars provide nations with an opportunity to campaign against domestic “enemies” as well. In the whipping up of nationalistic fervor, they enable a state’s leadership to enforce loyalty from sectors of society that normally perform accepted “oppositional roles.” In the US and Britain, wartime “necessities” have been evoked as justification for limiting the rights of political parties and groups, trade unions and the mass media. In fact, the assaults upon domestic “enemies” have themselves often taken on a militaristic coloring, so that the war effort and postwar campaigns against internal troublemakers have merged into one continued crusade against “anarchist traitors,” “communists within,” or “terrorist sympathizers”—pick your decade and diatribe.

In the US, the most prominent examples of war and postwar harassment are the suppression of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the World War I period and the persecution of Communists after World War II. But equally disheartening, and with as critical an effect, is the self censorship which oppositional groups may apply to themselves—either in self defense or as part of their actual support for a “popular” war. So, while decisions like the “no strike” pledge of American unions during WWII...
may be understandable in the context of the period, it cannot be separated from the continuum of repression and harassment that enforces discipline during popular military ventures and then undermines our ability to resist continued limitation of freedom during "domestic" wars.

In the midst of Britain’s current economic crisis, and with her popularity at an all-time low since assuming office in 1979, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher entered such a war—against Argentina in a dispute over the Falklands/Malvinas Islands, in 1982. The British government defeated Argentina, secured the islands for the English settlers, and in the process, boosted its public standing immensely. Given the depth of the fiscal crisis in that "Frostbelt" country, though, this war accomplished little in the way of economic salvation. On March 1, 1984, Thatcher entered into a second "military" adventure, one much more directed at establishing the groundwork for her Tory Party’s overhaul of the British economy. While she has claimed victory in that fight as well, the nature of the "enemy" and the locale of most of the battles, may have scarred, more than healed, her public standing, and only further enveloped the troubled national economy in deficit and expense.

The second war was waged in the coalfields of England, an army of police demonstrating a recently centralized military capacity against, in Thatcher’s words, "the enemy within"—the National Union of Mineworkers. The miners capitulated nearly one year after beginning their fight against the National Coal Board and the Thatcher government. Even beyond the dramatic recent drop in popularity polls for Thatcher and the Tories—placing them third, behind Labor and the (Social Democratic/Liberal) Alliance—the economic legacy of the strike is awesome. Latest estimates hover at around £6 billion for the total government cost in the battle against the miners, nearly three times the bill for the war against Argentina.

In this issue, we are publishing a special section on the miners’ strike of 1984–85; examining its history, the ramifications for British society, as well as reflections on its meaning for the Left. Beyond the obvious connection of the vicious union busting that lies at the cornerstone of both Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's programs for economic reconstruction, the story of the miners’ strike, we believe, provides some insight into questions equally critical for the American Left, as well as for our counterparts in Britain. As much as there are differences in the demographics of both countries, their economic capabilities, and the nature
of the “opposition” and the Left, the strains of commonality—particularly with regard to the changing role of the working class, the ability to forge new coalitions for radical social change, and the need for innovative and creative planning and tactics in such coalitions, ring clearly for Left and trade union activists in the US.

It is extremely clear, as both John Field and Bob Sutcliffe state in their articles, that Thatcher and the Conservatives planned and directed their attack on the miners for several years prior to provoking the strike in 1984. Choosing the miners, who have long stood as the archetypal proletarians in modern English history, was deliberate. Thatcher went to the heart, if not the body, of British Trade Unionism and of the Left’s “working class” base. While the miners had dramatically declined in numbers and clout over the last few decades, the message to the larger general unions, and the medium sized public service or white collar unions, was direct. The reestablishment of old concepts of discipline, enforced as much by the specter of unemployment as by the police, brought comparisons to wartime Britain. In fact, as Sutcliffe documents, such was the very language of the Prime Minister herself.

With the obvious parallels of NUM/PATCO and the Falklands/Grenada, the reactionary administrations of Britain and the US continue to demonstrate an ability to balance mediocre economic records with “successful” military adventures and construct a broad populist appeal in each country. Additionally, with both country’s “opposition” party reeling from landslide electoral defeats, and the Lefts in disarray on both sides of the Atlantic, prospects for the future can, euphemistically, be termed challenging. Since the electoral losses of the Labor and the Democrats demonstrated a defection of significant numbers of their traditional, working class, constituency, to the other side, both parties are reexamining their programs. Despite dramatic divergences in their ideologies and political roles, both parties seem to be moving in more conservative, rather than radical, directions. The Democrats’ obsequiousness to Reagan’s blatant militarism in recent weeks has mirrored a shift to the right on social issues as well. For Labor, the equivocation of its leadership during the miners’ strike, equally “condemning violence on both sides,” has cast sections of that party into open debate on the consequences of the strike.

As the three articles included here raise, the questions of the miners’ strike, beyond its significance for coal, reflect wider points about the centrality of organizing strictly in traditional industries, rather than developing a wider social and political base of support. Are there ways to forge coalitions, not only of vastly different work forces, but with community and issue-oriented organizations as well, that can work towards anticipating and more effectively opposing state attempts to destroy unions and communities as well? In this historical period, when cold war ideology saturates both domestic and international affairs, is there a way to break with and expose the imagery of war, and the identification of “enemies,” as we build wider support? Can the attempts to link labor issues across national boundaries, as in European support for the miners, and international labor support for Central American and South African trade unions, possibly break the economic and ideological consensus Reagan and Thatcher are attempting to enforce?

It would be a serious mistake for interpretations of the strike, additionally, to be located merely in the realm of labor-management or union-government questions. As one writer commented during the strike, “Not only is the current dispute the longest since the end of WWII, it is not even about pay or conditions. It is about jobs and communities, a way of life, and the future.” Nowhere is this clearer than in the role women played in the strike. While in previous
strikes, the media had managed to portray the women of the mining communities as strike breakers, urging their husbands to go back to work, no such distortion could be attempted this time. It was the women who developed the concept of support groups, becoming involved of their own choosing. Some reached a level of militancy that led them to avoid affiliation with NUM in fear of restricting their autonomy. Beyond making previously invisible work, visible, the women demonstrated that "natural" roles for women were actually learned. The level of self-organization and cooperation that the women spurred, furthermore, has brought not only shared discussions of "politics," but a broadening of the very meaning of politics to deal with the whole spectrum of issues affecting working class men and women.

As we mentioned previously, the Wobblies in the US were frequently cast as "domestic enemies" in the early part of this century. And while the two veterans whose interviews we carry in this issue quickly point out the limitations of some of their strategies and tactics, there are clear lessons of a history of refusing to submit to self censorship or accommodation, much like the British miners in their strike. The Wobblies argued the need to expand beyond simple syndicalism and were able to effect wide community support for many of their struggles with a vibrant counter-culture. Marked by a strident fight against intellectual elitism and the separation of mental and physical work, the Wobblies can offer sobering lessons to the subjects of the two books reviewed by Nancy Hoffman—working class students who have entered the field of higher education in this country.

As Hoffman comments, in discussing "Strangers in Paradise" and "Terminal Degrees," even unionization offers limited help to these teachers who find themselves locked in part time positions in colleges and universities glutted by the increasing professionalism of the labor force. Paralyzed by the conflicting tension of being "undervalued" in a very class-based meritocracy and viewing collective action as demeaning, many of these working class academics fall beyond the interests of faculty unions dominated by the interests of their full-time, and usually male, members. As Hoffman concludes with a call for progressives in the field to work towards strengthening models of collective responsibility and action, we cannot help but look closer at the examples of empowerment and mutuality that evolved from the experience of women, gays and lesbians, community groups and miners themselves during the British miners’ strike.

As much as most critiques of the strike concern themselves with questions of the "centrality" of class-based organizing, and older models of labor action, we see the need to reap some of the centrifugal offshoots of that struggle. Forging those links appears to offer deeper hopes of placing radical politics, not accommodating electoral maneuvering, on a truly oppositional agenda for labor and the left. In that way, perhaps, an unambiguous victory may be snatched out of the jaws of what Bob Sutcliffe terms, "an ambiguous defeat."

John Demeter
POLICE AND THIEVES
The British Miners’ Strike of 1984-85

JOHN FIELD

It is hard to explain the nonchalance with which the American press ignored the twelve months-long miners’ strike in Britain. To many in Europe — to socialists, certainly, but also to conservatives — the strike marked a turning point. It represented the largest outburst during the 1980s of the kind of mass rank and file militancy that characterized European industrial relations in the 1960s and 1970s, with the significant exception that this time the striking miners were notably uninterested in wage gains. It introduced the ‘Falklands Factor’ into British collective bargaining — displacing powerful tendencies towards corporatism, that had determined government strategy for three or four generations, with a determined drive to rid industry of the trade union ‘veto.’ And it was in Britain the largest single dispute, as in Europe more generally, which reflected the rise of what some economists call ‘the workless state’: that is, the deliberate encouragement of high levels of long term unemployment to enable employers to control the labor market.¹

The strike threw up a number of questions about the future of the labor movement in Europe. Some of the questions are specific to coal, an industry which has since about 1920 suffered in extreme form the penalties deriving from Britain’s early industrialization. In the late 1920s, the veteran socialist R.H. Tawney warned that the predicament of the decaying

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of many informal conversations with my colleague Jean McCrindle over the length of the strike. The author takes sole responsibility for the ideas stated here.

Confrontation with police, Miner’s Strike.
coal communities would become the "Irish Question" for his generation. Nationalization in 1947 was intended to remove the most important obstacles to a planned and humane coal industry — namely, the private owners who had failed to mechanize, had attacked wage rates to cut the high unit costs that derived from inefficiency and seam exhaustion, and had created high unemployment without offering alternatives to the workforce. But the industry has had its problems since nationalization — particularly from the late 1950s, when governments started to reduce progressively coal's contribution to Britain's energy requirements, and to allow wages to drift steadily downwards in an attempt to encourage younger workers to seek work elsewhere. Not until the great, and victorious, strikes of 1972 and 1974 did the miners find a full response; the Tories have cast a baleful eye ever since over the industry and its future.

More generally, coal has demonstrated a general truth about British society. Organized labor in Britain possesses considerable obstructive power; it is able to inhibit and set constraints upon the state and employers, especially at the point of production; but other than on wages, it has rarely moved forward to seize the initiative for itself. In Gramscian terms, the British working class, perhaps more than any other in Europe, has been able to place limits upon the bourgeoisie's maneuverability, without demonstrating either the capacity or the will to govern itself. The right to manage and to operate state-owned industries along strictly financial lines were both very much at issue for the government during the miners' strike of 1984-85 as a junior government minister reminded the annual conference of the British Association of Colliery Managers. Both remain very much at the heart of the government's overall strategy.

The third set of questions concerns the role of organized labor protest in a period of mass unemployment, especially when combined with aggressively anti-labor government policy. What forms of organization are appropriate when the withdrawal of labor is a relatively weak sanction? Even more crucially, what forms of organization and protest are appropriate for those, like the unemployed, who have no labor to withdraw in the first place? Large scale unemployment, in the long run, tends greatly to undermine labor solidarity and to withdraw resources for struggle from the unwaged; it greatly increases the scope for managerial erosion of previous trade union gains. While it is significant that the greatest struggle against worklessness in Europe was waged by those who had jobs — the British miners — it is equally significant that they did not win. They were by no means defeated; but they were unable to impose upon the state cut restraints upon the closure of 'uneconomic' coal mines.

**Origins of the strike**

The implacable opposition of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to the National Coal Board (NCB) and government was hardly surprising. What was unique was the duration and intensity of the dispute: each side played a high risk game, investing heavily in resources needed to sustain their respective strategies.

NUM adopted a clear policy on the issue of pit closures. It would accept closures only on geological, not economic grounds. Fossil fuel, as a non-renewable resource, could not be evaluated simply by market criteria; nor would the union accept an accounting that took no notice of social and cultural costs. Opposition to pit closures was a major part of Arthur Scargill's campaign in the union's 1981 presidential election — an election that he won with a convincing 70 percent majority.

"It's a fight for this union, a fight for our members, and a fight for our jobs," said Yorkshire Area president Jack Taylor shortly after the strike had started. While Taylor in particular went on through the strike to develop detailed arguments about the need to protect communities from the economic dereliction that has afflicted the cities, and about the values of caring for one another, NUM's case at the outset was a simple one. It regarded the NCB's non-negotiable proposal to close Corby in South Yorkshire and four other collieries as an unacceptable threat to its members' jobs, and as a direct challenge to the union's collective bargaining position.

---

*Many of the photographs illustrating these articles, identified by Miners' Strike, are taken from The Miners' Strike, 1984-85, In Pictures produced by the Workers' Revolutionary Party (England).*
NUM’s positions since nationalization had been a deeply contradictory one. On the one hand, it had entertained extremely high expectations of the nationalized industry, and had reorganized its own structure — creating the NUM from the old country and craft associations which had constituted the Mineworkers’ Federation of Great Britain — so as to accommodate the national framework of the publicly owned industry. In 1944, Will Lawther, MFGB President, expected nationalization would win the complete confidence of the miners and their families. Generations of suspicion and hatred would be wiped out, and an entirely new attitude developed towards the coal industry.4

The leadership of the newly-formed NUM constantly reminded its members how vital public ownership was to their interests, pointing out that strike action might jeopardize not only the future of a single pit but the principle of public ownership over the industry as a whole; particular grievances, according to the NUM, would have to await the return of a sympathetic Labor government. NUM appreciated the difference that state ownership made to its members, and was not about to rock the boat by encouraging industrial militancy.

Yet the industry retained its reputation as one of the most strike-prone in Britain. Many of the NCB’s senior personnel were taken direct from the old private companies, leading at local level to the suspicion that the old bosses were back under a new guise; the management structure of the NCB itself was bureaucratic in the extreme, a characteristic that was common to British nationalized industry between 1945 and 1979; from the 1950s, an intensive program of pit closures embittered the miners, particularly in the hard-hit peripheral coalfields of Durham, Scotland and South Wales. Finally, at the local level a complex and antiquated series of piecework payment systems ensured that wildcat disputes would remain a feature of the industry. Successive governments were unable to eradicate the strikes, even with the help of the national officials of the NUM.

Whatever NUM’s response to situations in the industry, it was structurally too weak to carry much authority. As Brian McCormick has noted, the reorganization of the MFGB into the NUM left intact the tendency for the union to remain a federation of trade unions, even a federation of pit villages, with an untidy organizational structure and overlapping and competing unions... Nationalization gave the NUM a monopoly position and (political) factionalism has been superimposed upon regionalism.1

At pit level, unofficial strike rates over local issues — including earnings under the piece work systems — were highest in Yorkshire, whose leadership tended to be politically conservative; it seems likely that this reflected a recognition by the rank and file that a “rag out” (wildcat) was more likely to produce results than an appeal to the union’s officials. Yorkshire, moreover, experienced little unemployment among mineworkers and along with Nottinghamshire its coal reserves had been earmarked by the NCB for long term exploitation.
The less secure areas — Durham, South Wales, Scotland and Kent — tend to be closer to the coast line; the exposed seams have been worked out generations ago, and the reserves tend to be deep, of uneven quality, and inaccessible. Three of the four areas have been under Communist leadership for years — in South Wales and Scotland’s case, since the 1920s at pit level and since the 1930s at area level; Durham, on the other hand, has an even longer tradition of political moderation. Politically, then, the union was fragmented; for historical and geological reasons, the impact of pit closures was extremely uneven; and the national union was lacking in authority. Add to this the powerful centrifugal tendencies produced by local differences in piecework systems — certainly differences between pits, sometimes between grades and faces in the same pit — and it is possible to see why the NUM, despite its members’ responsibility for uniquely high levels of wildcat striking, was rarely able to unite behind a single banner.

The extraordinary solidarity of 1972 and 1974 were, in fact, made possible only by the government’s insistence on bringing all miners under a unified, national day wage scheme. The National Powerloading Agreement ran between 1966 and 1979; it was intended to guarantee production levels and inhibit wages drift by removing the source of grievance, i.e. piecework. In practice, by setting all mineworkers on a common pay system, it created the preconditions for the unity of 1972 and 1974, and offered the left-wing militants in Yorkshire the chance to win leadership over the Area union.6
By 1974, a new mythology had entered the folk memory of British trade unionists: that the miners’ unity had brought about the downfall of a Tory government, and that mass picketing had the status of a divine instrument.

Three qualifications need to be made at once. First, the defeat of the Heath government in 1974 was largely a self-inflicted wound; indeed, the Tories actually won slightly more votes than Labor, but the quirks of the electoral system gave Labor just enough MPs to form a government. Second, and as crucially, the miners’ unity was very much contingent upon the daywage system; when it was replaced in 1979 by area-based productivity incentive schemes, the tenuous tendencies of the industry reasserted themselves once more. Last, mass picketing had been successful primarily because other workers had agreed to block coal movements; and while the tactic played a little part in 1974, its success in 1972 was in part due to Heath’s unwillingness to use troops to move coal stocks, in the absence of any other alternative. Neither in 1972 or 1974 was there any need to direct pickets against working miners (other than in the tiny shallow pits that remain in private hands); they were sent to docks, power stations and supply depots.7

But the mythology lost none of its force once the Tories were reelected in 1979. The Tories had themselves spent their opposition years planning in detail for the breaking of strikes in the public sector, and were faced within two years of assuming power with a rash of strikes in coal against pit closures and the election of Scargill — closely identified with the Yorkshire left and the flying pickets* of 1972 — as NUM president.8 While in 1981 the government was clearly not prepared for a national coal strike — and admitted it — by 1984 it had made detailed contingency preparations, and installed the American union-buster Ian MacGregor as chairman of the NCB. As a consequence of management’s new assertiveness and aggression at pit level, there was already a rash of local “rag outs” before the closure of Cortonwood was formally announced on March 1.

The week that followed demonstrated the strength of the rank and file organization in Yorkshire, rapidly joined by Scotland, Kent, South Wales and Durham. At every crucial stage, it was the rank and file activists who set the pace, rather than Scargill and the national leadership. The Yorkshire branches — especially the most militant, in the Doncaster area — pushed the Area Council into endorsing a strike that had already closed the entire coalfield, and decided to send pickets into neighboring areas to halt them as well. They were completely opposed to the idea of a ballot, on the grounds of natural justice (“No one has the right to ballot another man out of a job”). Scargill’s mistake, if there was a mistake, was not to call for flying pickets or a ballot; it was to follow the lead of the organized activists in Yorkshire and elsewhere, and to refuse to betray those rank and file militants who were actually leading the struggle. By the time the national executive met to grant its support to the area strikes, something like 80 percent of the NUM’s membership was out.

Against all the odds, the strike held solid. The majority of strikers held out for an extraordinary twelve months. They did so under enormous pressure from a hostile state and mass media, and lived through hardships that left massive indebtedness amongst the miners and record bankruptcy rates in and around the coalfields. It was a unique episode in British labor history. And, if it was by no means a victory, neither was it an unqualified defeat. Yet the costs have been high. A large part of the NUM’s membership worked, and wished to work, throughout; the Nottinghamshire area has formally severed its link with the national union and is likely to be joined by other areas that worked and by smaller numbers of individuals from the striking areas. Moreover, in depressing contrast to 1972 and 1974, solidarity was not forthcoming from other unions. The strikers were sustained largely from within their own communities, and predominantly by the unprecedented community-based campaigns — largely led by their wives — which raised funds and resources to feed and nurture the miners and their families. Much is significant about the great strike of 1984-85. But perhaps three areas stand out as of particular long term importance: the collapse of labor movement solidarity; the role of the women’s groups; and the part played by the state in undermining the dispute.

* Flying picket is the term for mobile squads of strikers and supporters who travel to other work sites for picket line reinforcement.
Miners Against the British State

1984, the newspapers solemnly informed the nation on January 1, was Orwell's year. Ironically, this was to be truer than most journalists — who know as much about George Orwell as I do about flying — could imagine. Not since the early popular and radical struggles of the first decades of the nineteenth century has the British state engaged in such a massive and brutal display of force as was used against the striking mineworkers.

Most visible, at every level, was the role of the police. In 1972, at the height of the strike, the Chief Constable of Birmingham had ordered his men to close the gates at Slatley coke depot — a symbolic turning point in the use of the picketing tactic. The government undertook an immediate review of policing, and further reviews were conducted after the inner-city rebellion by blacks in summer 1981. In particular, the police established a central National Reporting Center, to aid cooperation between different regional police forces; and riot-trained Police Support Units were established, each consisting of about 23 men, which could be switched from one part of the country to another at will. Both developments were part of a longer-term centralization of police power; and, coming as they did largely independently of any elected authority, they furthered the autonomy of the police from local police committees.

Few of the police tactics during the miners’ strike were themselves new; but the degree and scope of the powers assumed were entirely without precedent. Roadblocks were established along county borders, and pickets were stopped and turned back — affecting something like 17,000 pickets a week by July 1984. Large numbers of riot-trained police were dispatched to the coalfields — between 4,000 and 8,000 at any one time — giving the mining villages the appearance of occupied territory. Picket lines were extremely tightly controlled; a piece of advice contained in civil law guidelines, suggesting six as an appropriate number of picketing, was enforced as though it were a criminal law. Over 10,000 miners were arrested, frequently on catch-all charges such as “obstruction of the highway.” And, particular-ly in South Yorkshire, mounted police and occasionally unleashed dogs were used to disperse pickets, often with great violence.¹⁰

Much of this was new, indeed shocking, to the British public. One particular television image — of a police officer repeatedly batoning a helpless miner outside Orgreave coking plant — caused a brief but intense outcry (the police who investigate complaints against themselves in Britain, found they were unable to take any action against the officer concerned.) But by and large the police operation was accepted as necessary.

The media played a significant role in rendering police power acceptable. For example, one photograph later used on posters and leaflets supporting the NUM, showing a woman bystander (calling for an ambulance) about to be truncheoned by a mounted officer, appeared in Labour Weekly, and subsequently in other socialist papers; but neither the mainstream press nor the broadcasting media ever picked it up. More remarkably, a piece of television news

A woman from Sheffield Women Against Pit Closures is attacked by mounted police while calling for an ambulance for an injured miner. John Harris photo.
footage showing mounted police riding into a peaceful crowd of pickets, who then started to stone the police, was broadcast with a commentary stating that the stoning had come first. Systematically, press and broadcasting organizations (with a few exceptions among the regional press) treated the miners as the culprits, the police as puzzled neutrals.

There were major complaints from miners and their lawyers about the operation of the courts during the strike. One miner referred to his court appearance as 'supermarket justice': he was sent to Lincoln prison for breaching a bail order which prevented him from further picketing activities. Yet his original offense, of which he had yet to be found guilty, carried normally a penalty for non-miners of a £15 fine! Stringent bail conditions, backed up by the threat of imprisonment, effectively removed several thousand men from the picket lines. Fairly frequently, the police would offer to drop charges against arrested pickets, provided they would agree to be bound over to keep the peace; many agreed, rather than face charges in an unsympathetic court, and were thus effectively barred from further picketing. Magistrates were carefully selected so as to exclude any with possible trade union connections.

The weakness of police evidence against arrested pickets was graphically demonstrated in two recent jury trials in Sheffield. Both were mass trials, one of a group of miners charged with 'affray' after a picket on the NCB's Yorkshire headquarters, and the other of thirteen charged with riot at Orgreave coking plant. Cross-questioning of police and other prosecution witnesses demonstrated that officers had forged signatures on their statements; had written statements at the dictation of a South Yorkshire detective; had arrested men whom they had watched being beaten by other officers; were unable to positively identify men accused of stonethrowing; claimed that bricks had bounced high in the air, among many other exposures. Two police witnesses felt so ill when they arrived at the court that they were unfit to give evidence. The first group of men were found not guilty by the jury; in the second case, faced with a jury that openly laughed in court at much police evidence, the prosecution dropped all charges. This came as a considerable relief to other miners awaiting trial for similar serious offenses. But the police procedures and methods revealed during both trials led to furious calls from defense lawyers for a public inquiry and for criminal charges to be brought against the South Yorkshire constabulary.

It is a request the government is likely to ignore. The police operation, far from being an instant reaction to the picketing, was in fact carefully planned as part of the state's strategy for dealing with industrial disputes. The most probably outcome will be the further strengthening of police powers, and the further erosion of the right to a jury trial in more serious cases.

The state also interfered directly in other ways. The courts sequestered the assets of the South Wales Area and of the national union (leading to an entertaining struggle between the sequestrator and the overseas banks, where the NUM had deposited its holdings, for control of the union's assets). The Department of Health and Social Security denied benefit to many mining families and docked £16 weekly from the
benefit of others, on the grounds that they were receiving strike pay — which they were not. (This ruling was even applied to those, like women canteen workers, who were not themselves striking but had been laid off because of the strike, in an attempt to turn opinion against the strike.) And, when faced with the possibility of a national railway strike, the government instructed the British Rail Board to concede much of the workers’ claims despite earlier cash limits it had imposed on the railways. At every stage, the state’s power was used to place the mining communities under siege, stopping short only of the introduction of troops.

The miners’ victories of 1972 and 1974 were due, in large measure, to labor solidarity. In particular, dockers, railway workers, truck drivers and power station workers who refused to handle scab coal put the government in an exposed position, from which it could only retreat or bring in the armed forces (provoking inevitably a general strike). In 1984-85, it was the miners who were isolated and exposed.

This is not to say that the miners stood alone. They did not. But they enjoyed support rather than solidarity, and it took the form of food and cash rather than direct action. Much of this support came from unexpected sources: from white collar unions, from peace groups, from black organizations (especially after the battle at Orgreave), from gays and lesbians, and above all, from women. But the nature of the support was such as to sustain the miners’ own struggle rather than provide what was necessary to defeat the government and NCB.

Some trade unions were able effectively to block the movement of coal during the strike: particularly the rail unions (in Leicestershire and Notts), and the seafarers’ union. Occasionally, printworkers intervened to obstruct particularly vicious attacks on the NUM; the Sun local, for instance, refused to print a photograph purportedly showing Scargill giving a Nazi salute (in fact, a wave); while workers on other papers won the NUM the right to reply to particular attacks. But in general the unions were unable to deliver solid direct support, even after the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in September laid down the forms that support should take.

The traditional explanation for such failures is to blame union leaders for treachery. But this is to miss the seriousness of what took place during the miners’ strike. Ron Todd, general secretary-elect of the left-wing Transport and General Workers’ Union, warned a solidarity rally in February:

Don’t pretend that we have got an army out there straining at the leash — because we haven’t . . . . You can’t make a backbone out of a wishbone.”

The mood among rank and file trade unionists has changed greatly since the early 1970s: indeed, the shift to the right has been dramatic.

The Collapse of Solidarity

I’ll tell you one thing the miners’ strike did. It killed off the idea of solidarity. Dublin Trades Council worked as hard as anyone to support your people and stop them going under. But that strike killed solidarity stone dead. (Irish trades unionist, May 1985).

It is a fact that the NUM did not receive the level of support we needed and were entitled to expect from our colleagues in the wider Movements. (Arthur Scargill, July 1, 1985).
In the 1983 general election, some 32 percent of trade unionists are estimated to have voted Conservative, compared with 39 percent who voted Labor.\textsuperscript{12} The equation between labor movement membership and progressive political loyalties is probably at its lowest point in this century. And the dispute was widely seen, with some justice, as fundamentally political in nature: its very essence — no pit closures on economic grounds — challenged the heart of the government’s philosophy and program.

The unwillingness of ordinary trade unionists to risk their jobs for the miners was matched by divisions within the NUM itself. The strike’s great strongholds were not by any means the traditionally left-wing areas of the NUM: South Wales, Scotland and Kent were joined not only by the more recently left-led Yorkshire area, but also by the traditionally moderate Durham miners. But all the striking areas were united by their long traditions of political action, whether channeled through the Labor Party or Communist Party.

In Yorkshire and the peripheral coalfields, political action had always played a part in the union’s agenda. The first two working class MPs (Member of Parliament), both elected as Liberals in 1874, were miners — one from Durham, the other from Scotland. The MFGB enjoyed a lasting relationship with the Liberal Party before becoming one of the largest and most loyal constituents of the Labor Party. In the 1920s, South Wales and Scotland were among the few areas where the CP was able to build a substantial and highly influential base; they were joined by the newer Kent coalfield as victimized militants found work there between the wars. But in the midlands coalfields, and in north Nottinghamshire in particular, political traditions were late to emerge and remained fragile; tight control over the newer mining communities both by coal companies and large landowners delayed for two generations the transition to popular support for Labor, and established a tradition of paternalism. Employers were, moreover, eager to see a return on their relatively recent investment: even after 1920, new pits were opening in north Notts, exploiting the deep seams that run under the Dukeries, and offering the possibility of massive savings through mechanized coal pro-

Maggie Ellis photo.

duction and high productivity rather than through pressure upon wage levels.

The Nottinghamshire miners had a tradition for collaboration and moderation before 1926, when about one quarter of them joined a non-political company breakaway union. The breakaway survived until 1937, when it amalgamated with the Nottinghamshire Miners’ Association; the leader of the breakaway became, in 1944, first president of the Notts Area of the NUM. The Left was unable to break the Right’s grip on Notts until the 1970s; even then, the return to productivity payments weakened the Left’s position, leaving it exposed and isolated when the strike broke out in 1984. Lacking a tradition of political organization and campaigning in Notts, most miners regarded the strike as a ‘political’ one that had nothing to do with their union; moreover, as there had been no national ballot they rationalized it could not be constitutional. The national union’s response was to argue that men who had secure jobs had no right to vote other men out of work; that the union’s rules gave the national executive the right to sanction strikes by Areas without prior balloting; and,
that no miner should ever cross a picket line. Underlying the confrontation were conflicting conceptions of democracy: the electoral and the Jacobin. The problem was that whereas the Jacobin conception of government by popular action was acceptable to most miners in the striking areas, for historical reasons, it was almost entirely lacking in legitimacy in Notts.

The divisions within the NUM posed impossible difficulties for the rest of the labor movement. Even without the general downturn in working class struggle, and the decline in union membership in Britain, it would have been difficult to persuade other unions to risk their own organization for a divided NUM. In practical terms, the size of Nottinghamshire coalfield meant that sufficient coal was being produced to meet the needs of the midlands power stations and some other customers as well; high stockpiles together with a massive switch to road transport, and importation of coal from Poland and elsewhere, and an increase in oil and nuclear electricity production, made the outcome of the strike at best uncertain. In any event, winter passed without any major power cuts — a poignant contrast with the unlit nights and three-day week imposed by the Heath government in 1974. And in moral terms, the strike’s legitimacy among other workers was seriously weakened by the NUM’s failure to bring out its second largest constituent area.

More or less privately, many socialists harbored strong doubts about the NUM’s strategy of trying to picket the Notts miners out, in a dispute that they did not support and would not endorse. Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labor Party, compared Scargill in a well-publicized ‘private discussion’ to a World War I general ordering his troops over the top. Pete Carter, industrial organizer for the Communist Party, bitterly criticized Scargill in a pamphlet that the Party has not yet dared to publish. Even the veteran Communist militants of the South Wales area were, by the end of the dispute, threatening to make their misgivings public.

Undoubtedly, the strike exposed the weaknesses of Scargill’s fundamentally syndicalist strategy. He has argued since then that the NUM broadly got its strategy right; it was others who were to blame for the union’s failure to defeat the government:

Early morning picket, Lea Hall Pit, Staffordshire. John Harris photo.
There have been suggestions (. . . from critics, cynics, even some colleagues) that traditional, picket-line militancy is dead. Nothing could be further from the truth. . . . It was not a failure of mass picketing, but a failure to mass picket, that represented a weakness in many sections of our Union.14

Scargill regards talk of "defeat" or "setbacks" as no more than "an orgy of self-criticism":

We should stand confident and proud of what we have achieved, proclaiming the positive aspects of the dispute, and the most important victory of all — the struggle itself.13

Yet for all this, the strike has exposed the serious limitations to militant trade union syndicalism in the very different conditions of the 1980s. One of its costs has been the death of the picket line's authority among many workers: some truck drivers waved their union cards at picketing miners as they drove into working pits during the strike, a significant symptom of how much has changed from 1972 and 1974.

Other workers have certainly not been anxious to follow the NUM’s lead. Steelworkers at Sheffield's Tinsley Park mill, threatened with closure by the state-owned British Steel (where Ian MacGregor had worked previously), have been loath to strike and instead have followed a community-based campaign.

If the miners couldn’t win after a year, we’re not going to get anywhere by striking. We won’t get anything by standing outside the gates. (Steve Deakin, ASTMS representative, Tinsley Park multi union committee).

The miners' inability to wage a united struggle was itself symptomatic of changes in industrial solidarity within the NUM, marking something of a reversion to the traditionally fractious pressures of the industry. At the best of times, this would have made solidarity action by other workers difficult; even worse, the NUM leaders often behaved as though such solidarity should be expected as of right, rather than something which had to be earned. Barely a handful of NUM branches — all of which are affiliated to local Labor Parties — took any steps to press their case through Party branches and regional organizations, for example. But even a careful and detailed campaign to win support from rank and file workers in the energy and transport industries would have faced the mountainous task of convincing workers that traditional class loyalties overrode particular immediate sectional interests. The British working class has changed dramatically since 1945 — in occupational structure, in gender and ethnic composition, and in culture. At all levels, it faces a crisis: older ways of working class being, material and ideological, are in decline, helped on by a radical government deeply committed to the development of American styles of industrial relations. This poses problems that the miners never tackled, and could hardly have been expected to resolve.

New Forms of Solidarity

If the traditional labor movement proved unable to offer effective material support to the miners, sympathy and resources came from a number of new and unexpected sources. The part played by women in the strike was remarkable. Women's action groups sprang up early in the strike, initially in response to press reports that the men's wives wanted them back at work. They provided from the outset a focus for an extraordinary mixture of campaigning and caring, organizing both emergency feeding arrangements and mass rallies — such as the first national rally held in Barnsley with over 12,000 women. By the end of the strike, the women's groups were linked together in a national federation, were demanding associate membership status within the NUM, and had firmly established themselves as a distinctive voice within the coalfields and beyond.

At times, the NUM gave every sign of not knowing quite what to do with the women's groups. In the early stages, a cartoon was circulated showing a miner holding his baby under one arm and shopping under the other, saying "When this strike's over, I want my wife back — not the one I've got now, but the one I had before." Emergency feeding was one thing; but lobbies of parliament, regular evening meetings, and trips to Europe to raise funds were quite another. Yet by the end of the dispute the women had earned a degree of
genuine dialogue between the miners’ wives and those feminists who were working to support them — most significantly, Jean McCrindle, who had helped set up the first wives’ group, in Barnsley, and has worked with national Women Against Pit Closures since.

Many of the women were determined after the strike that their gains and achievements would not be lost. As one wrote during the dispute:

I have spoken to other women and it is obvious that we are all of the same mind. We know that the support groups which have been formed since the strike began must carry on after it is over, for the strength and solidarity which has emerged can be used to the benefit of others. The voices of the women of the mining communities must be raised in defense of people who face similar situations. Their power must be applied to bring about the changes which will benefit the working classes."

The establishment of Women Against Pit Closures as a national organization took place in the last weeks of the strike. It failed, by a narrow margin, to win associate member status of NUM at the July 1985 conference — in part because of the grumbling suspicion of the Yorkshire Area, which voted against associate member status, that “the women are trying to take over.”

Certainly the women’s groups have raised the
possibility of a working class feminism in Britain. As the Derbyshire wives' song has it, "Where women's liberation failed to move, this strike has mobilized." By orchestrating the power of women in the coalfields, and embracing normally "private" domestic labor (feeding, clothing, children's parties, Christmas celebrations, and entertainments), as part of the communities' strategy for self-defense during the strike, the women staked out a claim to a radically different conception of trade union action from that held by the men. Little wonder that many of the strikers sometimes doubted whether they approved! In only a handful of instances were women allowed onto the strike committees that — in traditional NUM style — were supposed to "run" the dispute; and these were in areas where strikers were very much in a minority and therefore lacked the traditional support sytems of the union. Other than at the level of rhetoric, the union rarely acknowledged the women's contribution. Gender conflict reemerged in new forms, given the almost complete breakdown during the dispute of firm lines of division between male waged labor and female domestic labor.

The development of a working class, feminist perspective seems to have been far from complete. Even when socialized, women's domestic functions continued to be relatively under-valued, their contributions diminished. Jean McCrindle believes that local women's groups that have survived the end of the strike tended to have developed other functions than purely domestic. Yet those groups that had organized feeding and other services had effectively supplanted the welfare state, as well as socializing many traditionally private forms of behavior — an achievement that many themselves were unaware of. And for many women, their participation in the groups was contingent upon their husband's role as striker; if he returned to work, the woman dropped out.

For most of the strike, we had 1,800 on strike out of 2,000. It was tremendous. The women ran this village for eight months. You can't believe the difference it made. Things started to change as soon as the men started going back to work, as soon as their husbands went back the women stopped coming, but the feeling of community for those eight months was like nothing you've ever seen before. We've got to hold on to that somehow. (Community worker, Shirebrook, February 1985).

Certainly, if nothing else, the experience of the wives' groups generated a new confidence among ordinary working class women in the coalfields, and has opened up the possibility of links with women active in the peace movement, Labor Party and trade unions.

The women's groups are the strongest example of the way that "New Left" political styles have started to influence the traditional labor movement. Generally, the styles of action were more important than the direct contribution that the New Left was able to make to the strike. The radicalized ex-students of the 1960s and 1970s are now influential in such white collar unions as the National Association of Local Government Officers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, both of which incurred the anger of their own membership by making donations to the NUM. NALGO's national executive survived a challenge to its support for the NUM only
because it required a 66 percent vote at conference to overturn existing policy. NATFHE was similarly embarrassed by its own members’ annoyance over a donation of £10,000 to the NUM. In every town in Britain, local Labor Party members were rattling collecting cans for the miners, to great effect. But all were aware that financial support was in itself grossly inadequate to the task. Wakefield miners’ support group, which cast a mug to raise funds for the NUM, even felt it necessary to print on the side, surrounding the Yorkshire Area’s emblem, the slogan “Solidarity not Charity.”

Yet the NUM had clearly learned something from the community and issue-based campaigning of the British Left since the late 1960s. If the NUM seemed to have not as clearly learned anything from the tactics of the peace movement, many of the women mentioned Greenham as one source of inspiration. The union also picked up something of the peace movement’s flair for publicity — if not its success in handling the media. Buttons and stickers were printed in massive numbers; one Yorkshire badge-maker alone produced over 100 designs for local NUM branches and women’s groups. The union sponsored a series of video tapes to present its case, made by sympathetic broadcasting workers. It co-published a volume of poetry by miners and their wives.’ What it did not do, however, was throw its members wholeheartedly into a series of locally-based campaigns to win over public support and help create the conditions that might have produced the solidarity actions the miners so desperately needed. Instead, it was naturally preoccupied

‘Let’s not make too much of our plight — we might get a visit from Bob Geldof’

Deep Digs! Cartoons of the Miner’s Strike, a benefit book for Women Against Pit Closures, Pluto Press.
with the question of getting the Notts men out.

Seam exhaustion, reorganization and high technology, together with the pit closure program of the present administration, mean that by the end of this decade, the British coal industry may employ as few as 80,000 people. In the abstract, this is no bad thing: deep mining is not an industry — sentiment apart — where jobs should be created for their own sake. British labor now has to move forward on the basis of the miners’ achievements: as well as considering how to protect and create employment, it must also bear in mind why.

The achievements of the mining communities, though, will bear a little restating. In the face of the economic crisis confronting British working people, the striking miners challenged the market economy so dear to the Conservatives, and raised the future of work to the top of the political agenda. In the face of the cultural crisis lived by working people, the coalfield communities displayed values of mutuality, public loyalties and communal self-care — values that should be at the heart of any socialist philosophy. The strike is over; the fight has just begun.

Significant though the women’s groups were, they shared both the strengths and weaknesses of community-based organizations. They mobilized latent energy and talent, and became the nucleus of an alternative welfare state. But that energy could only be sustained while the struggle was at its height; moreover, its achievements in the short term were necessarily limited to preventing the state from starving the men back, lacking any means of bringing pressure upon the state directly. Elsewhere the development of new forms of solidarity, drawing in new social groupings, was fragmentary and incomplete. The strike generated enormous enthusiasm and support among the British Left; but it was powerless to help it in the form that the miners most desperately required.

The Miners and the British Labor Movement

In 1926, the MFGB accounted for about one fifth of total Trades Union Congress (TUC) membership and as much as one quarter of all Labor Party affiliations. Today, the NUM represents a bare 2 percent of TUC membership — a graphic indicator of the decline in the
miners’ significance in both the economy and politics.

Yet the miners remain of enormous symbolic importance. The Durham miners’ annual gala — held in a coalfield where there are fewer than 20,000 miners — is still a significant ritual event, attended by the Labor Party leadership and by many thousands of other trade unionists. But it is ever more visibly something of a memorial service to a passing way of working class life.

For most of the last century, the miners have marched at the head of the British labor movement — in spirit, if not always in body. They have been its archetypal proletarians — an increasingly anachronistic role in a society where the typical worker now probably has a job in the service sector, may well be a woman, and could be a part-timer. The pace and degree of social change have been far greater than the labor movement’s capacity to respond; nor is there any evidence that any future economic recovery — should one occur — would ever reinstate manufacturing employment to the levels common in the 1960s and 1950s.

FOOTNOTES

(N.B. Where quotations are unattributed, they are taken from interviews by the author.)

4. Foreword to M. Heinemann, Britain’s Coal, London, 1944, p. 11.
15. Ibid.
17. M. Jones and W. Ross (eds.), Against All Odds, Sheffield, 1984.

John Field works in labor education and trade union studies in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. He was a founding member of Police Watch which monitored police activities during the miners’ strike.

* * * * INTERNATIONAL APPEAL * * * *

Over 700 miners were fired during the British Miners’ Strike of 1984-85 and have not been allowed to return to work. A fund has been set up to provide financial support. RADICAL AMERICA urges its readers to contribute. You can send donations to:

HARDSHIP FUND
C/O National Union of Mineworkers
St. James House, Vicar Lane
Sheffield 1 England

COMING SOON!

A BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED 1986 CALENDAR

• Featuring samples of the cover art and graphics that have graced the pages of RADICAL AMERICA since 1967*

(Full information will appear in our next issue/ subscribers will be notified by mail/ limited press run, so order early.)

1986:

20th Anniversary Year
IS THERE LIFE AFTER REAGAN?

A SPECIAL ISSUE EXPLORING COALITION POLITICS
AND THE BLACK ELECTORAL MOVEMENT . . .

SPECIAL SECTION on the Mel King Mayoral campaign in Boston
- Political changes in Boston, 1963-1983
- Views from within the Rainbow by representatives of Boston's
  feminist, black, gay and lesbian, Asian and Hispanic communities.
- Anti-racism as electoral strategy
- Neighborhood, constituency and the dilemmas of electoral organizin

PLUS

AMERICA'S NEW URBAN POLITICS:
Black electoralism, black activism and Black political protest

128 pp. Illustrated

$4.50 each

40% BULK DISCOUNT for 5 to 50 copies

for larger orders, call or write for details.

"...RAISES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE VIABILITY OF COALITION POLITICS...
AN ENGAGING AND PROVOCATIVE RECORD OF
THE CAMPAIGN."

MEL KING

BLACKS, GAYS, LESBIANS, LATINOS, ASIANS, WOMEN EXAMINE
THE MEL KING CAMPAIGN IN BOSTON — AND BEYOND . . .

The Rainbow Coalition was first used to describe the movement that formed around the mayoral candidacy of Mel King in the Boston elections of 1983. A black radical, Mel King astounded political analysts by winning the preliminary election — the first person of color to do so in a city that continues to exhibit some of America's worst racial strife. How did Mel King amass the largest vote total among white voters for a first-time black mayoral candidate in the U.S.? How did Boston's disparate communities participate in this effort? What were the problems and lessons of their electoral campaign and social movement? What was the role of the Left, women, gays and lesbians and Boston's communities of color? Was this simply a campaign of two forms of populism — one with a white, the other a black candidate? Can electoralism be directed in a democratic, decentralized campaign? All these questions and more are addressed in this special issue of RADICAL AMERICA. Plus, commentary and analysis on the national black electoral movement and the victory of Harold Washington in Chicago. The most extensive reporting of a community and electoral movement attempted in this country. Order today. See below for details.

For course, organization or study group use: order direct from Alternative Education Project, 38 Union Square, #14, Somerville, MA 02143 or call (617) 628-6585.

Bookstores: order additional copies from your local distributor — Carrier Pigeon, Ubiquity (Joseph Massey) in New York, Homing Pigeon in Texas and Southwest, Prairie News in Chicago.
THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN
Four Contrasts in The Miners’ Strike

BOB SUTCLIFFE

Much of the debate within the British Left about the Miners’ Strike of 1984-85 has turned around the question of whether it vindicated the continued centrality of traditional class politics or whether, by its failure, it demonstrated that such forms of struggle had been superceded. Contributions to this debate have mostly been attempts to use the miners’ strike to justify previously held positions. The more perceptive and creative analyses of the strike have pointed out how old methods of struggle became fused with new, and how old economic issues came to be linked with questions which the labor movement, in general, and the National Union of Mineworkers, in particular, had previously avoided.

In these respects, the miners’ strike produced such complex and rich experiences, varying of course from place to place, that it would be a monumental task to try to detail all of them. I would like to present an alternative interpretation of the strike and its aftermath, gleaned from a number of published post-strike analyses. Organizing the material into a study of contrasts, I believe it will provide a general understanding of the possible significance of the miners’ strike for modern British politics. Only “possible,” because it cannot be foreseen whether the seeds which germinated during the events of 1984-85 will grow and flourish or whether they will be stifled — either by the old established plants (or weeds) of the Left, or by the defoliants of the Right.
I  The Economics of the strike, and the economics of the Coal Board

It is clear that one reason the miners’ strike produced such a richness of forms of organization, participation, and issues lies in the strikers’ imperative need for material support. From the start the government set out to starve the miners back to work. During most of the postwar period the families of strikers in Britain have been entitled to receive state aid in the form of what are known as supplementary benefits. (Since 1980, however, single strikers — even in extreme hardship — have not been entitled to any benefits.) Some time before the strike, the government issued an edict that supplementary benefit entitlement would be reduced by £15, later £16, a week; this was the amount that the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was officially deemed to be paying in strike pay. In fact, NUM paid no strike pay. To have done so would have bankrupted the union in a matter of days. In any case, later in the strike it had its funds sequestered by the state. How it could then be deemed by the same state to be paying out £16 in strike pay was one of the many glaring inconsistencies of the government’s position which (mainly due to the collaboration of the media) it was never forced to explain.

All this meant that the miners’ communities would literally have starved unless they could organize a regular supply of food, money and other necessities. Their own resources were not sufficient and help from outside was imperative. The need, remarkably, produced a nationwide support movement totally unprecedented in British labor history. Union branches, local Labor Parties, local labor and political coalitions, women’s groups, lesbian and gay groups, black groups, other political organizations of many kinds all set up support groups to collect money and other supplies. The total number of such groups ran into the thousands. They became collectively an alternative economic system which linked the miners’ communities with supporters throughout the country. To describe this alternative economy which grew up during the strike would be as difficult as to describe a national economy. Money was collected and distributed at many different levels and in many different ways. At one extreme Paul Getty, Jr. sent a large much-publicized check to a national appeal; but hundreds of thousands of people put out a pound or a few pence in the bucket of a street collector; or placed a tin of food in one of the collecting boxes which were placed outside some supermarkets. It has been estimated that the total amount collected by the support groups was £60 million, though it seems likely that this is an underestimate.

This contribution was more than twice as important as Supplementary Benefit. Official figures show that almost 48,000 families received supplementary benefit during the strike and the total sum paid out was just over £26 million. Families ran down what savings they had and were sometimes helped by the provision of credit by local shopkeepers. Some managed to borrow from banks and to agree delays in loan and mortgage payments. And utility bills often went unpaid either because local managements were less than assiduous in collecting overdue payments or often because communities organized militant resistance to anyone sent to cut off electricity, telephones, or gas supplies.

The contribution of the supporters’ collections and Supplementary Benefit averages out very roughly at £20 a week per striking miner. Such a pittance might have to suffice for a family of five. The fact that in these conditions the strike lasted so long can be taken as a measure of the miners’ commitment. The nature of the alternative strike economy was non-capitalist, participatory and decentralized. In the mining communities, committees, almost invariably dominated by women, organized local collective, planned-economies in a way which has never happened before in Britain, at least not since the previous long miners’ strike of 1926. The general strike itself never produced such local planned economies since it lasted only for nine days. From all reports the mining communities in 1984-85 bore more resemblance to some of the anarchist areas in Spain during the Civil War of 1936-38 than to anything in British labor history.

There could hardly be a greater difference between the alternative economy of the strike and the economies which led to the dispute. The
alternative economy was devoted entirely to meeting the needs of a community in a fair, democratic, and decentralized manner. The National Coal Board, under Thatcher's personal appointee, Ian MacGregor, was on the other hand pursuing profitability. MacGregor is devoted not to making workers fulfilled, nor communities content nor people warm nor even simply making coal; MacGregor is there to make money. His brief is to make the Coal Board profitable in the shortest possible time.

As was pointed out by Andrew Glyn in many articles and an extremely useful pamphlet, the Coal Board has a very special way of accounting. It includes as part of its costs of production sums which have nothing at all to do with the present cost of mining coal (interest payments on past borrowings, costs of environmental making good, pensions, and so on); and it omits from the costs of closing mines the costs to the state in unemployment pay for the laid off workers. If calculations took account of these factors there were few, if any, uneconomic pits.

If a much longer-run perspective is taken into account, the NCB’s calculus was even more absurd. This is because pit closures in most cases prevent the reserves of coal which they contain from ever being used in the future. Fritz Schumacher, once a leading Coal Board economist and later much more famous for his advocacy of intermediate technology in Small is Beautiful, drew attention to this many years ago:

“We must recognize that the concepts of ‘economic’ and ‘uneconomic’ cannot be applied to the extraction of non-renewable resources without very great caution. . . . To eliminate the losing factory means the elimination of waste. But to close the losing colliery means merely to change the time sequence in which finite resources are being used. . . . It is a policy of doubtful wisdom and questionable morality for this generation to take all the best resources and leave for its children only the worst. But it is surely a criminal policy if, in addition, we willfully sterilize, abandon, and thereby ruin such inferior resources as we ourselves have opened up but do not care to utilize. This is like the spiteful burglar who does not merely pinch the valuables but in addition destroys everything he cannot take.”

Preparation for pickets in Wales, Miner’s Strike.

For this reason, a rigorous pit-closure policy could reduce the life expectancy of the reserves from 300 to 500 years. Hence the Coal Board’s profitability calculations, on which criteria it declares some pits uneconomic, were logical neither in terms of a capitalist nor of a social calculus. It follows from this that the government’s argument that a profitable unsubsidized NCB would help in the campaign to reduce public expenditure was therefore a lie; the government knew perfectly well that it would not.

In fact, the costs of the strike itself to government finances would take many years to compensate for even on the basis of its own calculus. The total cost to the government for the year of the strike has been estimated at slightly over £6 billion—or about £60,000 per striking miner. About a third of this was the extra costs of fuel paid by the electricity supply industry, another third was extra losses of the Coal Board, and
the rest included the Supplementary Benefit spending, the policing costs (currently estimated at around £400 million) and lost income tax. The total is about three times the cost of the war against Argentina.4

The Government’s economics then were in many senses insane in relation to their stated objectives. But their real objectives were different: to destroy the power of the NUM, to prepare for the privatization of the coal industry, and to enlarge the scope for nuclear power.

Commenting on the cost of the strike to the government, the Economics Correspondent of the Financial Times shrewdly observed: “... for the Government, the defeat of the miners’ union will have much deeper significance. It will be seen as a major step towards loosening the trade unions’ repressive grip on the workings of a free market economy. This is why Mr. Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor, suggested in the Commons before Christmas that winning the strike could be worth every penny it cost.”5

Politically, it is clear that they had planned for some years a major confrontation with the NUM, which since 1974 had been seen as the main obstacle to Tory plans for the labor movement. Preparations were made as for a war. On both sides the economic aspects of the strike assumed some of the form of a war economy. For the miners it was a question of surviving with no productive capacity, in the face of economic sanctions by the enemy, and also often in the face of outright acts of warfare by the police against the mining communities. The president of NUM, Arthur Scargill, described the struggle as like the European anti-fascist resistance in World War II.

Because to the Government this was a war, all expenditure was justified as it had been against Argentina. Thatcher constantly tried to draw parallels between the two situations. As with all wars, the government had to present its campaign against the miners as a just act sanctioned by some higher moral code. Here again the government’s economics became crucially important. The miners were denounced for attempting to violate the “natural law” of the market. The police became the enforcers of that law as much as the laws relating to picketing. These points have been brought out by Bob Fine and Robert Miller in a volume which they edited about the many issues raised by the exceptionally repressive policing of the strike:

“The law of the market, it seemed, demanded the closure of pits no less than the law of gravity demands its due of falling objects. . . . Behind the Tory slogan of the law of the market, we discovered a commitment to maximizing the rate of profit and minimizing the influence of workers and the public on how surplus is produced and distributed; a view encapsulated in the idea of ‘the right of management to manage.’ Behind the Tory version of the rule of law, we find an equally anti-democratic commitment to maximizing the power of the state at the expense of democratic forms of organization within and without the state and of the civil liberties of individual citizens.”6

Nonetheless, they also had more specific motives for a dispute which they consciously provoked and prepared for. Included in these was the preparation of the coal industry, or significant parts of it, for privatization (resale to the private sector). In the light of this plan the NCB’s accounting procedures are not so crazy. Of course, the inclusion of government expenditure is irrelevant if the aim is to create an enterprise profitable to a potential capitalist purchaser. Also, the inclusion in costs of items which are not related to coal production makes some sense. As a result of it the industry looks less profitable than it is. The appearance of low or negative profitability can be used as a justification for measures to cut wages and raise productivity. Then, no doubt, at a politic moment before privatization the burden of interest payments and other historic and “irrelevant” costs could suddenly be lifted to reveal a genuinely profitable and attractive bargain.

A further government motive was to benefit the influential corporations of the nuclear power industry which saw subsidies to coal as an obstacle to their own profitability. The head of the Central Electricity Generating Board is a devotee of nuclear reactors. Though there is an element of contradiction between the two aims of additional nuclear power and a private, profit-making coal industry, they are in principle reconcilable as long as the overall size of the coal mining industry is reduced. In a more than figurative sense, therefore, the government was
engaged in an attempt to "nuke" the trade union movement.

II 1972, 1974 and 1984-85: Ambiguous Victories, Ambiguous Defeat

Most people have regarded the strikes of 1972 and 1974 as signal victories of the NUM over the NCB while the 1984-85 strike was seen as an utter defeat. Such a judgment, if tempting, seems over-simplified. In 1972 and 1974 the miners gained relatively large pay increases which enabled them to make up some of the wage differential they had lost during the previous ten years. Yet those strikes did not take up issues other than wages, and, in particular, the issues which led to the 1984-85 strike. By this omission they prepared the way for a right-wing NUM leadership to make deals with the NCB which would reduce the union's numbers and undermine its strength. One of these was the acceptance of a regional pay bonus scheme which enabled miners in the more "profitable" and less threatened coalfields to get higher pay; this was the material basis for the failures of solidarity within the NUM during the 1984-85 strike. Another was a modernization and pit-closure program which by the early 1980s was resulting in 20,000 lost jobs a year, almost as many as are planned for the future.

If the 1974 strike was in retrospect not an untainted victory, the 1984-85 strike may turn out to be, at least for the socialist movement as a whole, not an unambiguous defeat. It has raised to public discussion a set of issues which are very far ranging and very threatening to the ruling class: the right to manage, the appropriateness of profit as opposed to community need as a basis for decisions, and the role of the police.

The way in which the miners fought was exemplary and inspiring. It would be hard for the bourgeoisie to level against the strikers of 1984-85 the usual charge of "greed": they did not strike for higher pay; they suffered a year's extreme hardship, and will go on suffering
more, in order to win their case; in a sense they fought ironically for social stability and continuity against a ruthless, destructive government.

For the supposed victors of the strike the triumph still seems somewhat phrygic. Since the end of the strike the popularity of the Tory government has sunk to depths not seen since before the war against Argentina. The rhetoric with which Margaret Thatcher fought the strike was very similar to her rhetoric against the Argentinians. It was the rhetoric of war. Scargill, in particular, was linked by Thatcher with “the nation’s enemies” and the miners in general were represented as “the enemy within”; as a result, the armed force of the state was unleashed quite mercilessly against them. The net effect was that the miners’ communities have been politicized in an extraordinary way: totally differently from the instinctive class Laborism of the years before the strike. Now they have seen the state in a different light and in large numbers they have joined the Labor Party — clearly with with a view to supporting Neil Kinnock, the present Labor leader. And outside the mining communities, if Thatcher’s rhetoric and actions were less provocative they seem to have failed to convince. The most often-quoted reason for her decline in popularity is said to be the widespread belief that she lacks humanity. Perhaps people are becoming weary of Thatcher’s “wars.”

Though the Coal Board is pushing ahead with its plans for pit closures and is clearly succeeding in many of them, there has been remarkably little passive acceptance of this by the miners and their families. There have been hundreds of further strikes (very little publicized) since the return to work in March. These have to do with closure plans, refusals to reinstate fired miners (though by mid July 1985 one third of the 900 fired miners had been reinstated) and problems of working with those who scabbed during the strike. The Coal Board still seems a long way from having reestablished its ability to manage. And there are signs that its right to do so will continue to be challenged in a militant fashion. Ironically the miners who went on strike to defend their jobs have found that life also exists outside the pit. They want their jobs but not at any cost.

III MacGregor and Scargill

The contrast between the alternative economy based on the supplying of people’s needs and the NCB and the government’s economy of greed and profit is pointed out by the nature of the Coal Board head, Ian MacGregor. Though once head of the US mining conglomerate AMAX, MacGregor is not really an industrial capitalist, let alone one who knows about producing coal. In fact, it would be purely coincidental if he had ever seen a lump of coal. He is a member of the new class of finance capitalists who in an economic sense are increasingly the managers of the world. Still listed with the New York investment bank Lazard Freres, MacGregor gained a reputation for financial acumen and ruthless union-breaking which attracted the attention, first, of former Labor Prime Minister James Callaghan, who made him Deputy Chairman of British Leyland and then, of Margaret Thatcher. She sent MacGregor into the British Steel Corporation to make gold, which to some extent, he did, with the aid of a trade union that collaborated with his plans to cut jobs. Then he found it was more difficult to turn coal into gold, particularly when faced with a non-cooperative union. He represents an extreme kind of capitalist — the embodiment of the pure moneymaker, totally mindless of human need. His style — grim, sarcastic, dour, and monosyllabic — reflects his content.

The contract of this capitalist Hector, with the labor Achilles, Scargill, was striking. Scargill is earnest, occasionally humorous, always single-minded, and never at a loss for words. For a year he dominated the media coverage of the strike. The press seized on and wilfully distorted every word that they could. Television was unable to do the same since he spoke his own words. Interviewed nearly every day during the year of the strike, he maintained an astounding courtesy in view of the scurrilous manner of questioning often adopted by the interviewers, and refused ever to be put off saying precisely what it was he wanted to say, often quite regardless of the question he was asked. It was a remarkable performance which gained and kept much public sympathy for the
Coal board dinner, March 5, 1984, the day before the Board announced the closure of 20 pits and the loss of 20,000 jobs. Miner's Strike.
miners, not through charm or sweet reason but through a completely single-minded and undeflectable defense of his members. He incited hatred and contempt in large measure from his enemies but never the kind of cynicism received and deserved by so many of his fellow union leaders. Scargill seemed not to lie, not to compromise and not to prevaricate. The strike was, therefore, one which had more real national leadership, as well as more rank and file initiative, than almost any in living memory.

Scargill is not a modest leader. He does not worry about the touch of blasphemy epitomized by songs in his praise set to well known hymn tunes, or the oft-repeated cry that ‘‘Arthur walks on water.’’ Yet despite his recent assumption of Presidency of the NUM, for life, he did not run the strike as an autocrat. He had to fight for, rather than impose, his positions and frequently he lost. He emerged more as an authentic servant of his members’ interests than as an arrogant potentate unto himself.

Surprisingly, on a number of occasions during the strike, Scargill admitted he had made errors, and showed an ability to learn publicly. He may not have undergone a full scale conversion to the struggle against women’s oppression, for example, but for a union leader well-known for backward positions on sexual politics, the small changes were noticeable. Now in the aftermath of the strike, attempts to enlarge the real role of women in the affairs of the NUM have been rebuffed by assignment to symbolic roles. So the changes in that arena for him, and the NUM as a whole, remain in a very early stage.

A more remarkable change occurred in his stand on Poland. Previously an avid supporter of Jaruzelski’s repression of Solidarnosc, Scargill changed his position during the strike when the Polish government, despite NUM appeals, continued to export strike-breaking supplies of coal to Britain (to get some of the foreign exchange they need to pay back loans to Ian MacGregor’s New York banking colleagues). After Solidarnosc had sent its own message of support to the NUM, Scargill offered Lech Walesa his public apology and in a letter to the Polish ambassador express his ‘‘absolute disgust’’ at the continued exports of Polish coal.

Within the labor movement, the Left, and in the NUM itself, Scargill is the subject of an increasing barrage of criticism for his running of the strike, his conduct within the union and his overall politics. Many of the criticisms are completely contradictory; but they might yet combine to make him a martyr to the strike’s failure. Nonetheless, during the strike Arthur Scargill provided the miners with a kind of leadership which was qualitatively distinct from what has come to be expected of the British trade union leaders. His performance gained him the often grudging admiration of many whose differences with him are very great.

IV Learning and Teaching the Lessons of The Strike

The London Gay Pride March in the Spring of 1985 was the largest the city had ever seen. Leading the march was the banner of a South Wales lodge of the NUM, borne high and surrounded by members of that mineworkers’ community who are not gay or lesbian. That scene — unimaginable a year ago — is symbolic of one of the many lessons that emerged from the Miners’ Strike of 1984-85, particularly

---

**NOTICE**

**IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO WORK ON SUNDAY MORNING FEB.16TH AS A FULL COAL SHIFT .. EVERY MAN IS EXPECTED TO WORK ON SUNDAY AND THROUGH THE WEEK TO HELP IN THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY. EVERY MAN IS EXPECTED TO PULL HIS WEIGHT**

*From The Home Front, War Years in Britain 1939-45.*
within the network of material support. It was inside this network that an important and original part of the politics of the strike developed. In the cities of Britain, the support movement mobilized a wider layer of activity than any other recent struggle. Many of the most active people were new to politics. In some ways it was possible to see a new generation of politically young people aroused after several years of dwindling activity. Links were made between the support groups and the miners’ communities in various ways. Miners and their families went to the cities to help with support work. They addressed meetings of union branches, or Labor Parties. In exchange many members of support groups went to visit the mining areas.

In this way miners’ communities met their supporters not just as unknown persons in solidarity with them but as individuals who were helping to maintain the material survival of their communities. It was this contact which opened up all kinds of political questions which in any other strike would have been buried as diversions.

The accounts which have been given of the visits of members of the London Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners group to Dulais in South Wales show that they were by no means typical of the contacts which developed; but like other such contacts they profoundly affected the social conceptions of both hosts and visitors.4

The extent of women’s participation in the strike has become legendary. Women in miners’ communities who have discussed their role in the strike have shown how both spontaneously because of the issues which arose in the conduct of the strike, and also as a result of their contact with feminist supporters outside, their consciousness of women’s oppression had radically changed.

In these and many other ways the strike demonstrated a potential for changes of social and political consciousness both among the mining families’ communities and among their supporters — changes which make political alliances of anti-capitalist forces seem much more attainable. The strike support movement was moreover one in which the sectarian wrangling which so weakens the British left became at least a little subdued. Sectarian advantage-seeking by left wing groups was not well-received in the movement.

As Ralph Samuel observed in one of a number of perceptive articles on the strike:

"The miners’ strike, almost in spite of itself, offered some of the elements of a new Labor politics, one which linked the protection of living conditions with the defense of local rights, the assertion of women’s power with the maintenance of family integrity, the preservation of jobs with the re-unification of work and home. . . .

Uniquely, it contrived to unite [Labor] Party opinion of all stripes, it enabled the extra-parliamentary left, the mainstay of the local support groups, to transcend their sectional interests in pursuit of a cause which, momentarily at least, could be recognized as larger and more dignified than their own. For a Party living on depleted moral capital, and an ever receding past, it offered also a living example of collectivity and mutual aid."
This of course has not stopped the left wing groups from conducting self-justifying post-mortems on the strike. One such example comes from the largest of the British extraparliamentary left groups, the Socialist Workers Party. In a very well-produced, and in some respects informative, book about the strike two members of the SWP provide an object lesson in what is wrong with the British left. Except for the specific facts of the strike, the book could have been written before it even began. It is formula politics; the political equivalent of painting by numbers. The strike was for the authors an unambiguous defeat. That is important because, if it was not a defeat, no one could be blamed for it. And who is to blame? The same people of course as for all other defeats — the Labor Party and trade union leadership. Some of their targets here are justified enough: the trade union leaders who failed to organize or sabotaged solidarity of other workers with the strike. And Labor Party leader Neil Kinnock, Member of Parliament for a mining constituency, who never appeared on a picket line until near the end and whose even-handed condemnation of violence by all sides in the dispute helped to reinforce the ideological campaign of the government and press against the strikers. But the pre-determined case is not complete unless it can blame the leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers themselves. It is hard to argue that Scargill, who throughout the strike conducted the most vigorous and uncompromising struggle that one could imagine from any trade union leader, and who resisted capitulation to the very end actually betrayed the strike. Hard, but these critics manage it.

Scargill, they admit, is "one of the most outstanding leaders the British working class has had." Yet he is blamed for not breaking publicly with area leaders in Yorkshire, South Wales, and Scotland; for believing in the relevance of change in the Labor Party for the future of socialism, for what remained "the attempt of an individual to substituted for the collective organization needed to win the strike." "Any strategy," the SWP experts conclude, "which rests on the determination and commit-
ment of individual leaders is bound to fail. In spite of his outstanding performance in the strike, Arthur Scargill cannot avoid his share of blame for the miners' defeat. 11

In a strike which the rank and file and their supporters ran more than any other major British strike in memory, the formula which simply blames the leaders for defeat fails to acknowledge the real material and political problems which such a strike would face even if the rank and file were in complete control.

When the strike began there were few people who would give it more than a few weeks of life expectancy. Its astonishing success was to have a developed support movement and a grass roots political coalition which kept it alive despite the sabotage of Kinnock and Co. That support movement grew and remained strong not only because it provided solidarity with the strike but also, if in some cases only embryonically, because it allowed the strikers' communities to see their own struggle for livelihood as related to other political questions.

There are forces on the left that do not want to acknowledge that because it will upset another part of the formula: "questions like women's oppression, sexual politics, disarmament, the anti-nuclear movement and so on are, though not unimportant, subsidiary to what has to remain the main struggle: the industrial struggle of the working class." An important lesson of the strike is surely that it started to break down the frequently asserted dichotomy between "class politics" and the "secondary" social issues. It showed that coalitions of even the most predictable kind can be viable. That is why the alliance of a South Wales mining community and a part of the lesbian and gay movement was and is, not typical of the strike, nor quantitatively a major element in it, but genuinely symbolic of its political reality and of what it might offer for future political alliances on the left.

In a creative analysis of the work of the support movement Doreen Massey and Hilary Wainwright conclude:

"In much of their work many support groups illustrate in practice the kind of movement we need to build in order to achieve socialism: a commitment to change through building up democratic power at the base, in the factories and in the communities; a breaking down of the inhibiting boundary between politics and trade unionism; a sense of local strength and identity which at the same time is not parochial; a commitment to a non-sectarian but principled form of unity, in which political tendencies are respected and work together; an emphasis on reaching out, a confidence that radical demands can be popular if they are argued for . . .

We are not claiming the world. But nonetheless something radically different has emerged out of a movement in support of what was seen as an 'old' struggle. Many thought this impossible. They have argued that the left must move with the times — that 'old-fashioned' class struggles are doomed to isolation, without resonance or relevance to present-day socialist policies. Behind this argument is an equation of class politics, on the one hand, and the existing institutions of the labor movement on the other. 12

To appreciate the importance of these aspects of the strike it is necessary to want to learn its lessons rather than to teach them.

Conclusion

The issues of the miners' dispute continue to reverberate throughout the British labor movement. Neil Kinnock breathed an audible sigh of relief when the strike was defeated since he wants to be dissociated from militant struggle. He still rails as strongly against Arthur Scargill and some of the leading political supporters of the miners as he does against the Tories. The miners therefore continue to provide the focus of opposition within the Labor Party to the opportunist leadership of Kinnock and Roy Hattersley (the Deputy Leader) who have become almost completely indistinguishable from the Liberals and Social Democrats. They are especially embarrassed by the ongoing campaign for an amnesty for the jailed and fired miners.

Within the miners' strike and its support movement there began to develop a new political alliance which combined previously organized sections of the Left, parts of the women's, lesbian and gay, black and anti-
nuclear movements, and many new people who had not previously been politically active. If this did not finish off the divisive sectarianism characteristic of the British Left at least it showed for a moment that there might be another way. Many of the miners’ support groups continue to exist and to organize the continuation of moral and material support for the miners’ communities. The very well-received woman speaker from Dulais who spoke at the Gay Pride March symbolized the potentiality which remains from that movement.

But despite these positive aspects of the Miners’ Strike, it would be absurd to deny the negative consequences of the return to work. The miners’ union may now be formally split, a breakaway union being formed in the relatively secure Nottinghamshire coalfield. In other areas, plans are afoot to destroy 100,000 jobs over the next four years. If this is successfully carried out, and the split in the union is not healed, then the NUM could be reduced to a mere 60,000 members.

But even if Thatcher and the NCB do their worst, something of this extraordinary strike will remain in the consciousness of millions of Britons, who were in some way touched by it. The political impact of these memories is hard to predict. Political memories can, of course, be clouded, obscured, and erased by the media, by political leaders, even by time. But they also remain, perhaps to be jogged and refreshed.
FOOTNOTES

1. Lesley Sutcliffe and Brian Hill, Let Them Eat Coal; the political use of Social Security during the miners’ strike, Canary Press, 1985.

Welsh miners’ banner leads London Gay Pride march. Mike Jackson photo.

Bob Sutcliffe is a visiting professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts. He is a member of the Labor Party and an active member of the lesbian and gay group of Teachers In Further and Higher Education.

ANTIPODE — Recent Issues

Volume 14, No. 3 Agriculture and Rural Change
Volume 15, No. 1 Radical Cultural Geography
Volume 15, No. 2 South Africa in the Global Division of Labor
Volume 15, No. 3 Geography in the McCarthy Period, Marian Regional Economics in Japan, Southern African Development, James O’Connor’s Fiscal Crisis after ten years
Volume 16, No. 1 Sociogenesis and Peace, Marx’s Method of Abstraction, Health Care in Mozambique
Volume 16, No. 2 The Fourth World: A Geography of Indigenous Struggles
Volume 16, No. 3 Women and Environment

Single issues: $4.00 (except 16.2 and 16.3, which are $5.00).
Subscription to Volume 16 (1984)—special introductory rate of $10.00.

Antipode, P.O. Box 339, West Side Station, Worcester, MA 01602, U.S.A.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

History Workshop Journal is planning an issue (Fall 1986) edited from the United States. The editors are eager for articles, reviews, reports, etc. of all lengths on areas of American history, written with the journal’s mainly British readership in mind. Areas we’re particularly interested in include: public history; current, local and oral history projects; city politics and political machines; women’s history; the Depression in the US (especially compared with Europe); origins of Reaganism; democratic traditions in American culture; black history; gay and lesbian history; the American musical heritage in relation to popular movements.

Articles are due by the end of 1985, and prospective contributors should contact the editors as soon as possible: Jane Caplan, Dept. of History, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr PA 19010/or Sean Wilentz, Dept. of History, Princeton University, Princeton NJ 08544.
WE DANCED IN THE MINERS’ HALL
An Interview with ‘Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners’

BRIAN FLYNN, LARRY GOLDSMITH AND BOB SUTCLIFFE

“‘The Bottoms’ succeeded to ‘Hell Row.’ Hell Row was a block of thatched, bulging cottages that stood by the brookside on Greenhill Lane. There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away. The brook ran under the alder-trees, scarcely soiled by these small mines, whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle around a gin. And all over the countryside were these same pits, some of which had been worked in the time of Charles II, the few colliers and the donkeys burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and the meadows. And the cottages of these coalminers, in blocks and pairs here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockingers, straying over the parish, formed the village of Pestwood.

‘Then, some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place. The gin-pits were elbowed aside by the large mines of the financiers. The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered. Carston, Waite and Co. appeared. Amid tremendous excitement, Lord Palmerston formally opened the company’s first mine at Spinney Park, on the edge of Sherwood Forest...’”

—D.H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, 1913.

“You have worn our badge, ‘Coal Not Dole,’ and you know what harassment means, as we do. Now we will pin your badge on us, we will support you. It won’t change overnight, but now 140,000 miners know that there are other causes and other problems. We know about blacks, and gays and nuclear disarmament. And we will never be the same.”

—British coal miner David Donovan, December 1984

Young picket in Cannock, Miner’s Strike
The history of the lesbian and gay liberation movement, has, relatively speaking, been the tale of an isolated struggle. The battles against sexism and for sexual liberation have often been dismissed by other movements for social change as decadent, or, at best, as secondary issues, properly subsumed under the agendas of more pressing struggles. The road to a more radical analysis of the politics of race and class has not in itself brought the Left to more enlightened views on the subjects of sex and sexuality.

But if the Left has not always reached out to ally itself with lesbians and gay men, neither have lesbian and gay political strategies been especially inclusive. In the conscious narrowing of political demands to "gay rights"—non-discrimination legislation based on the "right to privacy"—lesbians and gay men have sometimes lost sight of the other struggles to which their own is tied. In part, this narrowing of demands has been the familiar response of an oppressed group making significant gains in privilege and leverage within the political system. But even where radical lesbians and gay men have maintained their theoretical commitment to multi-issue politics, the real opportunities for alliance have been neither easily seen nor accomplished. There are obvious intuitive connections between lesbian and gay liberation and movements of resistance to militarism, racism and attacks on the working class, but these have not always been linked through activism.

Now more than a year ago, workers in Britain's coal mines went out on strike. The stranglehold of Thatcher's Conservative government on the miners, combined with the role the strike has taken on as the Last Showdown between Thatcher and the Left, has resulted in support from unexpected places. Although there are by law no female coal miners in Britain, women, both inside and outside of mining communities, have played a significant role in the strike, recalling the American automobile strikes of the 1930s. And there are currently eight lesbian and gay groups in Britain organized to support the miners.

We met with members of London's Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSMM) on January 4 in the cold cellar kitchen of an Islington flat. Mike Jackson, Mark Ashton, Rosie Leach, Brett Haran and Martin Goodsell were the LGSMM members present. Our discussion, reprinted here in edited form, was actually a joint interview for two publications: Gay Community News (GCN) and Il Manifesto, an Italian leftist daily. Asking questions were Rob Elliot and Carolina Peverati of Il Manifesto, and Bob Sutcliffe, Brian Flynn and Larry Goldsmith of GCN.

Mark Ashton: It started with a collection at last year's Gay Pride March. Mike and I arranged a few nights before to do a collection. We thought this would be a good way to get some money. There was no group in existence at that stage. So we went to the Gay Pride March with buckets and collected 180 quid. It bowled us over. Unbeknownst to us, the Labour Committee for Gay Rights had organized a meeting, a fringe meeting after the Gay Pride March, in Mallet Street, and they had a striking miner there, who was talking. And then, just that week, we thought, 'Let's get a group going.' The miner made a lot of links. He was thinking about things and talking about things that we'd never actually expected a miner to think or talk about, and actually gave a rude awakening to my attitudes towards them. Previously I had had this semi-antagonistic attitude towards the organized labor movement, trade unions, macho het bully boys, and it just opens your eyes to the attitudes that they had, and that the strike up to that stage had kindled in people. So that prompted us to start the group off, and we called a meeting and eleven people turned up. And that was it—we started collecting outside pubs and clubs, got some leaflets out, made a lot of banners at the media, hammered the media, planted letters and articles in as much left and gay and feminist and black press as we could, and it just snowballed from there.

The London group, which was the first group, and it's the biggest group, has a twinning arrangement with a whole mining community in South Wales [the town of Dulais]. So all the money, or a majority of the money we raise goes directly to this one mining community. We basically pay I think a quarter of their bills every week here, for food, paying off debts and stuff like that, whatever they use it for. So we've actually been able to make a much more
personal relationship. For political reasons, it was actually much more important to us to make those personal links with people, because those are things that will continue after the strike. We’ve taken miners to gay bars and we’ve gone down to Wales. Lesbians and gay men have danced in a miners’ welfare hall, which was outrageous. Together.

**Brian Flynn:** Did you say you’re one gay support group, that there are others through England?

**Mark:** Yes, we started off at Gay Pride Week, which was last year in June, and I think the first group outside was Glasgow, wasn’t it? And then Edinburgh, in Scotland. So there’s two there now, in Glasgow and Edinburgh, about two months later. And then there’s Brighton, Liverpool, Manchester, Bournemouth, Southampton, Leicester, Cardiff, Swansea. And there’s a women-only group that split off from Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners and formed Lesbians Against Pit Closures, so there’s a lesbian-only organization as well, which is autonomous.

**Mike Jackson:** I think people have been astonished really with the things that have happened in LGSM. The composition of the group is really mixed. You’ve got people who are in a variety of different political parties on the British Left, and you’ve also got people who are unaligned and have never been aligned to any political party, just ordinary, working-class people who have seen the tragedy of the pit closures program. So I think it’s been a long time, the first time really, that so many lesbians and gay men have come together for a single issue and worked together, prepared to allay any sort of sectarian political differences for the sake of a single-issue campaign. And it’s very exciting; it’s very encouraging.

**Mark:** Except it’s a double-issue campaign, because it’s a two-sided sword. The whole political idea, the fact that it is organized by lesbians and gay men who are taking gay liberation as one of the aims of the group, has been to take the ideas of gay liberation and lesbian liberation into the organized working-class, the labor movement.

**Rosie Leach:** Shall I tell about once? We put an advert in one of our papers, *Socialist Worker*, to see if there were any other lesbian and gay support groups around. And one of the letters we got back was from this gay bloke who was on strike. I think really he was asking for personal support, financially, and we went to see him just before Christmas, two of us went up there. And what we decided was, we’d send or give some money to the soup kitchen that is organized in the village where he lives, because then we’ve done it openly as lesbians and gays, and that means that the people in that village are going to realize that we do support what they’re doing, so they’re less likely to be hostile towards him as a gay person. And so we’re hoping as time goes on, that should actually improve the atmosphere for him to be open about his own sexuality.

**Larry Goldsmith:** What do you think it is about this specific issue that has brought people together?

**Mike:** It’s a very political event anywhere in Britain. It’s probably one of the most significant political struggles in decades.

**Rosie:** It’s the longest strike we’ve had, too.

**Mike:** So it’s not just that it’s rocking the lesbian and gay community; it’s rocking the whole British society, the economy and everything. And I think the miners’ strike will recoil through all sorts of institutions, including in that sense the institution of gay liberation.

**Mark:** It’s also the current climate in Britain. The miners’ strike is really like the cherry on
top of the trifle. For the last seven years, the situation in Britain has been getting hotter and hotter. After Thatcherism, there's the whole threat of nuclear war, there's the eradication of trade union rights, the attacks on the working-class, and they've been going on continuously. And the miners' strike just came at a time when everybody was really fucking angry, and this was a way of channeling all the anger as well. **Rosie**: I think a lot of people have been angry for a long time, without doing a right lot about it, you know. Everybody hates Thatcher, and this is actually becoming something for people who haven't got the confidence to take action themselves but have started off giving money every week, in various workplaces and just on the street. The atmosphere is being raised no end. Beforehand, you were always looking for opportunities to talk to people politically, and now you just can't keep up with all the conversations.

**Mike**: I think people were sort of beginning to think that Thatcher was unstoppable. The media coined this abbreviation, TINA, for an expression she kept using: There Is No Alternative. It's this idea that the economy is somehow superhuman, it's out of the control of the British people or whatever, because there is no alternative. And at last what is happening is that one group of society is saying there is an alternative, we are going to say no. And that is what the miners are doing.

**Rosie**: I think in some ways it's the press and the police that have made the link for a lot of gay people, because they see what happens to them all the time, getting hassled and getting called old names in the newspapers and all that. And I think that really is the link that people make, that police are hassling the miners and police are hassling the gays. The media says awful things about gays; the media says awful things about the miners.

**Mike**: The miners have actually said that themselves. We had a public meeting and one of the miners came up and said, at one time lesbians, gays and blacks were the outside groups, they were then the outlawed groups in our society. And now what the miners say is they're now the outlawed group, they're the ones who are—they've adopted this expression—'outcasts of the state.' And he said, 'So now we know that it's like to be an outcast of the state and we know how the state treats you, and how its lackey, the right-wing press in Britain, treats you, as lesbians and gays.'

**Rosie**: I think something like this strike is like a sort of glimpse sometimes of what society could be like, because you actually get the chance to talk to people you've never spoken to before or had any reason to, and then, with this strike coming, you're going to someone's house who you've never met and you get asked in and you're given a cup of tea and all . . . and it's just that people realize that you don't have to be hostile to one another all the time.

**Mike**: At the Bronski Beat benefit the other week, there was this lone Yorkshire miner standing there, and I got chatting to him, and he was just totally amazed by it all. He said something like—he was gazing around at everyone and just said, 'I had no idea you people'—now the guy wasn't using the words lesbian and gay, it was not part of his vocabulary, but I know what he meant by that expression 'you people'—'I had no idea you people supported us. I'd never even thought about you people.'

**Carolina Peverati**: Do you think the involvement of women in the strike all this time has been very important and positive in changing this kind of contact?

**Mike**: It is tremendous, the women we've met in Dulais have actually been able to achieve things for the strike where the men have failed. They've stopped the movements of steel, and

*Arthur Scargill welcomes marchers at Yorkshire gala, Miner’s Strike.*
they’ve actually had more effective picketing than the men have been able to achieve. They’re now actually leaving the men at home to get on with support groups in their communities, and getting the domestic work, whilst they go out around the country, go out to places like Bologna, in northern Italy, to speak.

**Mark:** It’s humanized people; it’s taken the dogma out of politics and humanized it a lot. The thing about the strike is that it’s involved a hell of a lot of people in struggle all at the same time, and it’s managed to create around itself, around the actual NUM, this whole sea of struggle. It’s involving millions of people, not just the people who are directly involved in the strike itself, or directly involved in supporting the strike, but also people who live with them, live next door to them, see the stickers and the badges, see it on the news and read it in the papers. It’s making people think about politics *per se.* What is life all about? How much choice do I have; what’s my relation to this person and that person? It’s done that rather than just hand out dogmatic lines, which is what the capitalist press are constantly trying to do, reduce it to dogma: here we have this Stalinist Scargill, the Red Fascist, leading his sheep over the edge of a cliff. Good fucking riddance to them; that’s their attitude.

**Brett Haran:** What we’re all aware of now is that the battle lines are being drawn for the future stage of play. We all know that if the miners lose, that’s a big tide of confidence that Thatcher’s going to be riding on for a long time to come, and that means bad news—the ramifications will just be so wide, it doesn’t even bear thinking about.

**Rob Elliot:** What about the strike overall? Have you got any opinions on the perspective of the strike?

**Mark:** This is where the fight starts. We used to have six- or eight-hour meetings, at the beginning. And seven hours of those eight-hour meetings were discussing the way forward. And there’s fifty people in the room, forty-nine different views, and a chairperson... . . . What we actually said when we started was that we would support the National Union of
Mineworkers, the elected leadership of the NUM itself; we would take guidelines from them, we wouldn't be in a position to speak or tell them what to do. They're leading the struggle and we're supporting them; we're not creating it. Hopefully, what will happen, and is happening, is that the struggles will start to link up.

**Rosie:** I think actually that situation has changed a bit, anyway, because of the fact that you can't send money now directly to the NUM, even if you wanted to. It's much more a kind of grass roots affair altogether, whatever your opinion about your trade union leadership. In a sense that argument is being by-passed, because of the way that the funds are being organized.

**Bob Sutcliffe:** Has there been any reaction to the group from the officials of the NUM, nationally, as opposed to the reactions from the miners individually and from the areas you've used as contacts?

**Mark:** At the Labour Party conference this year, the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights, there was a letter of support [from a miners' group] which said 'Support civil liberties in the struggles of lesbians and gay people. We welcome the links forged in South Wales and other areas. Our struggle is yours. Victory to the miners.' And that was a letter sent to LCGR for us. Which was quite a significant thing.

**Brian:** There's been no attempt to tell you people, 'You're right about these connections, but the important thing now is the miners' strike.'?  

**Mark:** No. I mean, we've had more hassle from the gay community than from anybody else.

**Bob:** Why don't you say a bit about the different reactions that there have been from throughout the gay community. What are the kinds of problems that you've had to fight against with the gay community and how did you tackle that?

**Rosie:** 'What have the miners ever done for us?'

**Mike:** The funniest thing that's happened is just before Christmas, LGSM's been going six months, and we've raised now over 11,000 pounds. Just before Christmas, the gay Conservative group decided to support the miners—the working miners. I don't think it's a coincidence that the gay Conservatives have managed to raise 25 pounds for the miners, for the working miners.

**Brett:** There's another side, which is why aren't we raising money for—

**Mark:** —for AIDS. The arguments we're saying are, look, the point is that the economy's being run down, the Health Service is being run down, the first thing they close are the VD clinics. It's happened before, when the Labour Party was running down the Health Service in the late 60s, the first thing that went were the VD clinics. It's a fact that they're going to go, already VD clinics are closed down, inside London, which is also cutting money, stealing money, from AIDS.

**Brett:** You've got a lot of gay people who have obviously got a sense of identity about being gay, but they don't make the connections, they don't really see what it means to be gay in the wider kind of society. They just go about the business of being gay in the evening, when they go out to the clubs, having a bock, having a dance. And they go home, they get up and they go to work. They don't really make the connections. Because if they did make the connections, then they would be bound to see that this government is kicking them in the teeth.

**Brian:** Is that response more typical among gay men than lesbians?

**Rosie:** I don't know; I don't think so really. There's a lot of lesbians who aren't political at all, who aren't feminists at all.

**Mike:** I've never actually counted, but I have this sneaky feeling that women and unemployed gays proportionately offer more support to the miners than men, the rich. For example, one pub that's been outstanding in the amount that it's given toward the miners is actually probably one of the pubs that has the most unemployed customers going to it. It's also a mixed gay pub; there are a lot of lesbians who go there.

Also, I've been quite surprised by the number of lesbians and gay men who have actually got fathers and grandfathers and family who are miners. Quite a lot have come up very quietly and put a pound or five in the bucket and said, 'My dad's a miner.' They won't say anything else; they just walk away, whilst we've actually been surrounded by a sea of abuse from other people, and those will pass and say that.

**Brett:** Also, there's the stink we've kicked up in
Capital Gay through the reports of our activities—we’ve had a flood of letters coming in saying, ‘Why is all this money being given to people who are macho and heterosexual and don’t support us anyway?’ So it’s created a political debate, if you like, whether they wanted it or not, in London’s only sort of surviving gay newspaper.

Mark: So in that respect we’ve gotten the political arguments across to at least ten percent of the population of London. That’s got a circulation of 50,000, and it’s handed around, passed around to other people. From all the stuff we’ve done in Capital Gay, we’ve managed to reach an enormously wide public.

Night picket, Rossington colliery near Doncaster. Howard Sooley photo.

Mike: It’s also interesting, we’re a London-based group, and yet actually there’s no mining community near London. The nearest one is 80 miles away, in Kent. But an awful lot of people in our support group are actually from outside London, originally. And, tell me if I’ve got this wrong, but, certainly myself, and I suspect an awful lot of the others, the reason we ended up in London was because life was easier to be gay in London than it was outside. I work on Gay Switchboard... Every single shift I get a phone call, I get one, I get five phone calls from a young person in Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Belfast, you name it, in a working-class community, and basically, are they fucking isolated. Eventually, they’ll probably end up just like we did, in London. I think that’s really sad, that we have to come and live in this little ghetto. And if there’s one thing I’d like to see this strike do, for example in Dulais, if nowhere else, is for young gay kids to be able to grow up there, and for their mothers and fathers to say, oh, alright, and for certain information to be around. Well, I now feel confident to say that in Dulais, there are hundreds and hundreds of parents now, thousands possibly in the valley around there, who do now know something about it. They’ve said, ‘If my kids grow up to be lesbian or gay, I shall know a lot more about it.’

I think on a personal note, something that is important is that a lot of people in the group have found an amazing new set of friends, of people to know, people who are worth knowing. We were talking about the word ‘comradeship,’ probably out of Edward Carpenter and Walt Whitman, who a century ago used to talk about comrades. Basically, it was a euphemism for homosexual lovers, and they tended to be working-class homosexual lovers. And it’s almost for me, it’s almost like that word has taken on its old significance again, because there are people who I’ve met in the support group whom I’m immensely proud of and really pleased that I’ve got to know, because they are socialists, because they do care, because they do think. It’s formed a new social focus for a lot of people, which I don’t think will disappear after the strike; it’s something there for life, probably. And then after that the links and the invitations we had from the miners and their families in various parts of the country have been very emphatic in saying, ‘We don’t want you to just visit us during the strike; we want to make ongoing links, cultural links, after the strike.’

At The Fallen Angel, a gay pub in London, there’s now a pendant presented to Lesbians and Gays from Nottinghamshire NUM, which is proudly displayed behind the bar, and there’s also a little piece of anthracite coal, which is a Welsh coal produced in the area we support—
the best coal in the world—and a miner’s lamp, which was also presented to us by the South Wales miners. Again, I think a year ago the idea that a gay pub in London would have this memorabilia from the miners would have been unbelievable.

Brian Flynn works with Gay Community News and is a former intern of Radical America. Larry Goldsmith is a former writer for GCN and is presently staffperson for the National Lawyers’ Guild in Boston. Bob Sutcliffe teaches economics and is a member of the Labor Party in England.

This interview first appeared in the March 16, 1985 issue of Gay Community News. The introduction is a revised version of the one appearing with the original interview.
"Latin American Perspectives has in its short lifetime acquired an eminent reputation among Latin Americanists both in the United States and in Latin America. It fills an intricate gap in our knowledge of this area which is not currently covered by other journals. I have long subscribed to this Journal and also urged my students to do so. I have also used several of the special issues in my classes."

Helen I. Safa, University of Florida
President, Latin American Studies Association

LATIN
AMERICAN
PERSPECTIVES
A Journal on Capitalism and Socialism

LAP is the leading progressive journal on Latin America, and publishes more work of Latin American scholars than any other North American journal.

LAP is not afraid to publish the controversial, the left of center, the revolutionary voices active in Latin American scholarship—voices that otherwise might not be heard. In Latin America itself, LAP is one of the most widely read journals to come out of the United States.

LAP provides a clear, multidimensional look at Latin America.

- economics—and the study of the moral, political, and social desirability of economic policies
- political science—and the patterns of social action that underlie the operation of nations, the struggle for power, the conduct and misconduct of governments
- international relations—particularly as they affect the nationalistic movements and internal problems of Latin American countries
- philosophy—theoretical, and applied to the hard realities of developing nations
- history—a critical view, with inside views of history in the making
- sociology, geography, anthropology, even literature . . . the personal, poetic comments of activists and revolutionary scholars

"As a journalist, I work to try to increase public awareness and understanding of Latin America. In this process, I rely on Latin American Perspectives . . . to stimulate my ideas and provide valuable information often unavailable elsewhere."


Frequency: Quarterly in February, May, August, and November

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>One Year</th>
<th>Two Years</th>
<th>Three Years</th>
<th>Single Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
<td>$36.00</td>
<td>$54.00</td>
<td>$6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>$46.00</td>
<td>$91.00</td>
<td>$136.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On subscriptions outside the U.S., please add $4 per year for foreign postage.

SAGE PUBLICATIONS
The Publishers of Professional Social Science
275 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90212
The "Blanket Stiff"

He built the ROAD—
With others of his CLASS, he built the road,
Now o'er it, many a weary mile, he packs his load,
Chasing a JOB, spurred on by HUNGERS good.
He walks and walks, and wonders why
In H---L, he built the road.

Industrial Worker, April 23, 1910.

The interviews with Joseph Murphy and Sophie Cohen are excerpted from Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW by Stewart Bird, Dan Georgakas, and Deborah Shaffer. Copies are available from Lake View Press, Box 578279, Chicago, IL 60657. (Paper: $9.95, Cloth: $25.)
"WE ALWAYS SANG THOSE WONDERFUL SONGS"
Sophie Cohen, Joe Murphy and the I.W.W.

STEWART BIRD, DAN GEORGAKAS AND DEBORAH SHAFFER

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and its political and cultural legacy, has all but been erased from popular consciousness. The fact that its most visible and active period peaked in the early part of this century, and the IWW encountered one of the most vicious and contracted examples of state repression in American history, have contributed to the near-invisibility of the legacy of the IWW. Though the organization continues today, it is a shadow of its former self. When the stories of the Wobblies are uncovered, as in the excellent 1979 documentary of the same name or the recent compilation of oral histories in "Solidarity Forever," we can find ourselves easily romanticizing them as "our last great revolutionaries." It was a brave, multifaceted organization, and the Wobs never shirked from confronting capitalism, its bosses, and its social conventions. Somehow the Joe Hills, Big Bill Haywoods, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's loom larger than life, like the characters in the famous drawings of Wobbly publications.

The interviews in "Solidarity Forever," from which we have excerpted, help to flush out the human stories behind romanticized images. They give us a picture of the ordinary lives and struggles of rank and file Wobblies: the people who went out on strike, who organized the unorganized in textile, rail, and lumber, often without recognition or, all too often, victories to sustain them. We have selected the two interviews printed here because they show, in the example of Sophie Cohen, the important work of women in what has often been characterized as a "brawny, male-identified" organization; and in the example of Joe Murphy, the role of prior family activism in encouraging people to join the "dreaded" IWW. We encourage our readers to examine the book for the other pictures it shows of the daily lives of the Wobblies. Taken together, these oral histories present a picture that seems more real, and perhaps ultimately, more encouraging — of the everyday people, with all their faults and foibles, who give life to social and political movements.
JOSEPH MURPHY

My father was one of the organizers of the American Railway Union. By the time I was born in San Francisco, he had been blacklisted all over the country. Eventually he ended up back in Springfield, Missouri, his home town, where he became a yardmaster, but when I was very young, he was blacklisted. In order for him to get from division to division of the railroad, he'd have to wait for a union conductor to come on duty. I have letters in my possession which indicate that the password was "Hot Springs." Well, there were six boys and six girls in the Murphy family that were traveling to "Hot Springs," Arkansas. The union conductors would move us from division to division, and sometimes they'd even take us home for a meal.

I first heard of the IWW through my brother Emmet. He ran away from home when he was a kid and joined the IWW. The Missouri papers of that time billed the IWW as a bunch of devils who were out to sabotage the world. The truth is that the IWW did practice sabotage to a certain extent.

I first joined the IWW in June of 1919. I had run away from home before to go to the strawberry harvest in Arkansas. This time, when I was fourteen, I joined the wheat harvest and encountered Wobblies who were attempting to hold out for fifty cents an hour and ten hours a day.

You have to remember the situation we were up against. In California, the ranchers and big business had put through a criminal syndicalism law that meant that membership in the IWW more or less made you an outlaw. One story we told was that after a fellow had taken out a card in California, he asked the organizer what his card entitled him to. The organizer said, "If they catch you with it, it entitled you to two to fourteen in San Quentin or Fulsom." The laws were enacted to keep us from organizing agricultural workers.

"Freight Train, Freight Train"

One of the big advantages of being in the IWW at that time was being able to ride the freight trains. Riding a freight car was miserable, but it was the only way a migratory worker could go from job to job or seek a job in the harvest. The Wobblies used physical force to unload riders who didn't have a red card. Then the railroaders got so they would unload riders who didn't have red cards too. A lot of men took out a card just to ride the trains. I think now that one of the mistakes we made was to spend too much time trying to organize the riffraff instead of the home guard, the guys who stayed in one place. We would have built a more substantial organization by concentrating on the homeguard instead of the ones that just took out a card to ride the freight trains. We made men out of many of them on skid row, but when you have proletarian riffraff — as Marxists called them, the lumpenproletariat — you got an awful low life form to organize.

I became a delegate in the harvest about September when they gave me what we call the rigging. We were fighting to keep our places on trains. In those days, there were petty racketeers who would come along the edge: the fireman, the engineer, two brakemen, and a conductor. They would have pick handles in their hands, and they would make everybody donate either a dollar or a pocket watch or a pocket knife. The Wobblies put a stop to that. We beat the hell out of a few dozen train crews. They got the message real quick that they weren't going to shake us down just to ride their trains.

There's nothing more discouraging than to ride a boxcar for eight to twelve hours between one division and another, hungry, cold, wet, lousy, and then look out across the country and see the light in a house with people gathered around a table. The only home you have is in the insides of a boxcar or maybe a gondola — a gondola is an open car that hauls sand and coal — and you're all wet and look at this beautiful light in the distance or even close by as you roll along or wait for another train to pass.

It was a dirty, miserable existence on the freight trains. You'd get lousy very easily in the empty boxcars from the paper when you'd lie down, because so many of the men were dirty and wouldn't boil up. Boiling up meant taking a five gallon can and filling it with water and putting in your clothes and building a good fire.
underneath it in order to keep clean. The Wobblies preached that cleanliness was next to godliness, in order to get members to stay clean.

Freight traveling was something you had to do, not something you wanted to do. Then for a time it got real dangerous, because hijacks tried to take over. It was 1922 and I was elected to the Flying Squad which was assigned to take care of the hijacks. The hijacks worked like this: Generally there were three or four of them, armed with .38s and .45s, but mostly .38s. They’d stick up a hundred harvest hands in a boxcar. They had a rope ladder that they came down over the top with, and if somebody got a little smart with them they’d give them a little push and the train would be going thirty or forty miles an hour and the guy would fall under the train and be ground to bits. This was known as greasing the rails, and was quite common.

There’s only one way to deal with that stuff. We took them hijacks, many of them; we took a razor, a Gem razor blade, and cut “IWW” on their face, “I” on the forehead and “W” on each cheek. Then we put permanganate potassium into it. That marked them up. We got a surprise out in Spokane, Washington. A group of hijacks had been sticking up apple workers. Two or three days after we got to them, an article came out in the Spokane paper that the IWW had marked up one of their cops. He was one of them hijacks.

We did away with some other types too. We did away with the gamblers, the tin-horn gamblers and the D-horns, the ones that peddled canned heat and cheap wine and beer. We said that the D-horn’s nose was deepest red, a parody on “The Red Flag” to educate members not to do any drinking. Personally, I’ve more than made up for it since.

Working conditions were very important to us. In 1924, we were building a dam and a tunnel for the city of Seattle to get water and power projects for the country. The guys who were working in the glory hole, the glory hole was where they were going to build the dam, were getting it bad. The builders were such a highball outfit that they insisted that every skiff be loaded over the top. The result was that stones kept falling off and hitting the workers in the glory hole. The tunnel work was just as bad. They would run the men in just after they’d shot dynamite, and the workers would catch gas. They would get terrific headaches from that.

Centralia: Violent Harvest

Sometimes it got violent. In 1919, it was Centralia. I had been in the harvest from Kansas to Canada and had come into Washington to pick apples. It was the night of November 11th in Seattle when the message came to the hall that the American Legion had raided our hall in Centralia. About a hundred of us took the big G, the Great Northern, to Centralia, where we were met by about a thousand Legionnaires and company gunmen. They had raided the hall that day. When they broke in, four Legionnaires had been killed, and they had captured about ten Wobblies and thrown them in the can. Supposedly, only one Wobbly was lynched that night, Wesley Everest, but three or four others were taken out and we never saw them again. A doctor told an Elks meeting one night that Wesley Everest had been castrated before he was lynched.

At the Centralia trial, eight Wobblies were found guilty. Members of the American Legion went into the courts and were paid $3 a day by the lumber barons to intimidate the jury. Any worker that showed up was either put out of town or given thirty days. I was given thirty
days because I had on a sack shirt and they found my rigging. The convicted Wobbly
were given twenty-five to forty-five years in Walla Walla Penitentiary. Later, the jury said
they were intimidated by the Legionnaires with their uniforms, and they all signed affidavits to
that effect throughout the years to get our guys released. There is a monument in Centralia to
the four Legionnaires that were killed. I'd donate money to see it blown off the map.

Centralia was a very emotional part of my
life. It made me hate the employing class more
than ever. The morning when Elmer Smith was
brought back to jail to gather his blankets up—
in those days you had to have blankets in jail
too — he turned to the eight of them that had
been found guilty and said, "Just remember,
fellas, I've got a few dollars and my brother's
got a few dollars, so as long as we have any
money, I'll continue to fight for you to get you
out." Which he did, until the day he died. We
were up in Yakima, Washington, myself and
another Wobbly, when the waitress, I don't
know why she picked me out, but she said,
"Did you know Elmer Smith died?" Well, we
beat our way to Centralia for the funeral. Out
of the clear sky there must have been five hun-
dred lumberjacks and construction workers and
Wobbles and friends of Wobbles. I guess that
was about 1928. There weren't many lawyers
like Elmer Smith. He fought so often he was
disbarred as an attorney in the state and could
only practice federal cases, but he gave decent
attorney's advice on compensation cases. Fin-
ding an attorney to defend workers was a hard
thing to do in those days.

The background to Centralia was our cam-
paign to organize the lumber camps. We were
carrying on a struggle to get the eight hour day.
We wanted to get beds and decent living condi-
tions. In the lumber camps, the beds were three
bunks high and there were no baths. Workers
were lousy and food was lousy. We ate pig
jowls, pig tails, and pig feet. We'd say, "Pass
the runing gears," or "Pass the gate feeder." Breakfas would be oatmeal and bread with the
worst coffee in the world. Everything was the
cheapest you could get. Each man carried a
couple of blankets in an empty sack to be used
as a mattress. He'd have to go to the corral
where the horses were kept and get straw to fill

it. It smelled bad, especially in the middle of the
tent, because most of them were tents, not real
bunkhouses. There would be all those wet
clothes, because nine months of the year
Washington is full of water, so workers had to
boil up and hang their clothes as close to the
stove as they possibly could to dry them out.
One way we harassed the company was to stop
working after eight hours, or work two ten
hour days and one four hour day and say that
equals three eight hour days, and we'd pull out.
We burned blankets whenever we could. Lots
of them wouldn't burn, so we threw gasoline on
them and set them on fire. It was a stinking
mess. Some of the men hated to see their
blankets burn because they needed them to
sleep in a boxcar, but some of them liked it a
lot. Whether you liked it or not, your blankets
were taken and thrown into the pile. It was the
best way to get some action. We got the blanket
reforms. We got spring beds, white sheets, two
or four to a room instead of forty. We even got
better food. We ran the belly robber, the cook,
out of camp unless we got decent food. After a
while we started to get pork chops and rib
steaks instead of joints, tails, livers, kidneys,
and hearts. A lot of these reforms didn’t come
until the early 1920s.

“We never let up”

We never let up on what we wanted. We
knew that until we got the economic power or
the physical power to take it away from the
employers, we could only get reforms. We used
to sing songs like the “Internationale” and
“The Red Flag.” We used poems, toasts,
leaflets, doggerel, speeches. I loved what
Eugene V. Debs would say. He wrote beautiful
pieces. He would talk about a world without
prostitution, a world where the worker receives
his full share, where the old people would
receive a decent pension, a world that was not
sped up, a world without wars, a world without
crime and diseases.

The IWW did a lot for the working class, but
we had weaknesses, too. One was that the IWW
wouldn’t sign an agreement with the employer,
so we couldn’t hold the conditions that we won.
Second, we made the initiation and the dues too
cheap. The IWW fell into the hands of the
migratory workers. They were less stable. The
big split happened in 1924. Many of us wanted
to see the two factions stay together, but it
didn’t work out.

Our success was being able to organize. The
biggest thing a union can do is organize. No
matter what the industry, a union can improve
hours, wages, conditions, health, welfare. To
get that, you have to have people walk
thousands and thousands of miles on the picket
lines. We did that. A lot of the benefits that ex-
ist came from our work. We helped the AFL,
the UMW, all of them. The CIO used a lot of
ex-Wobblies just like they used Communists to
get themselves organized. They used sabotage,
too. John L. Lewis’ brother was organizing the
building trades and would throw mustard seed
into a sand pile, and two weeks later out of the
wall would grow the finest crop of mustard you
ever saw and no one could remove it. They bor-
towed that method from the IWW. I once got a
watch from John L. Lewis for work I did.

I worked as a sailor on ships. I worked in
construction. I worked in the woods. I worked
in the harvest fields. I worked in restaurants.
After I left the IWW in 1932, I became an
organizer for other unions. I organized in San
Francisco. Cement plants, water works, park
employees, the Golden Gate workers — I
organized all of them. In the IWW I learned
that the working class and the employing class
have nothing in common. Between those two
classes, the struggle must go on until the work-
ing class organizes as a class and abolishes the
wage system. Wesley Everest was taken out and
castrated and hung up to a railroad bridge and
then they buried his body no one knows where.
Joe Hill was killed organizing against the Mor-
mon Church in Utah construction. Frank Little
was killed in Butte, Montana, for organizing
the Anaconda copper mines. Many other Wob-
blies were killed, but nobody knows their
names or who they were. They just waded in
and shot them and took them and hung them
and threw their bodies somewhere. If you
didn’t have any relatives or didn’t keep any ad-
dresses, no one knows. That was why I came to
believe in any kind of methods and means to
overthrow the capitalist system. What more can
you add?

From American Labor.
SOPHIE COHEN

Paterson had a prison-like feeling when you walked through the narrow streets where the mills were. They were red brick buildings with small, dirty windows set very high. The mills were next to the Passaic River. We lived about two blocks from the river, so when I had to bring lunch to my father, I had to go uphill. Whenever you walked from the center of town, you walked up.

My father collapsed at one of the mills when I was young, and he was told never to go back again. That was a terrible time for us. My mother had a child that died during birth and my little brother died from diptheria. Somehow, though, my mother and father got together with another family, and they managed to put a deposit on a farm outside of town. I remember the fields and how hard they worked, but they couldn’t keep up the payments. That’s when we came back to Paterson.

My father couldn’t go back to the mills, but he was able to set up a laundry. We’d get shirts and things from our family doctor and other people who were a bit wealthier and could afford to send lace curtains and things like that to a laundry. Childhood was not unhappy for us. For Christmas or Hanukkah, my father would take us to Broadway where there was an Italian fruit shop and he’d buy big California oranges. That was a big treat. There was one group that said it would give toys to all the children of the workers. I think it was the Salvation Army, but I’m not sure. My sister and I went. We stood in line and went into a house where they gave us a little package. They said not to open it until we got home. But we couldn’t wait. We opened it up and found a broken toy. That was the closest to toys we ever got. We used to play with mud pies. We dug holes and things like that. Sometimes, my father would take us to the woods. One thing that was very different from now is when we had a meeting, everyone went. Adults and children attended as long as they were part of the shop. We didn’t divide ourselves by age.

There were a lot of nationalities in Paterson. A lot of the textile workers were Italian, and there were Jewish people, Poles, and some Germans. When we went to a picnic or mass
meeting, we didn’t care if someone was a different nationality. The children played together and the people talked together, as well as they could. The children would be sent over to get beer for the adults. It made no difference whether you were Italian or Jewish or Polish. The barrels of beer were for everyone. There was a lot of singing too, at the picnics and at the meetings.

“Do you like the Boss?”

During the strike, Carlo Tresca was one of our leaders. You didn’t have to understand Italian to feel what he was saying. Everyone spoke with accents but that didn’t get in the way. There was a refrain everyone knew:

Do you like Mr. Boss? No, no, no!
Do you like Miss Flynn? Yes, yes, yes!
The IWW! Hurray! Hurray!

A lot of speakers would use that in their talks. They’d yell out, “Do you like Mr. Boss?” and people would laugh and shout back as loud as they could, “No, no, no!” Those were tremendous events for us when we were children.

We children didn’t have many entertainments. Only three stand out in my mind. One was the Italian organ grinder. He had a little monkey who tried to get money into his cup. There was little money, but after a lot of giggling, screaming, and singing, he would sometimes get a penny. The minute he would get a coin, the organ grinder would leave. That was all he was waiting for, but in the meantime, we had a lot of fun with him and his monkey. On Fridays a violinist came. He would play and tell the story of the fire that happened in the Triangle Shirt Waist Company in New York. He would try to get some pennies too, but he wanted to make us aware of political issues. The other thing we did was walk to the Passaic Falls. Other than that, there was school and the mills.

When I was graduating from the eighth grade, the principal came around to tell us that there was a new shirt company opening that was perfect for young people because it was not noisy and dirty like the textile mills. The factory was offering $5.00 a week, which seemed a tremendous amount then. I was only fourteen at the time, and girls my age were not allowed to come to work at the usual starting time of seven. We waited until eight and then stayed until five; on Saturdays, we worked until one. At the end of the week, we got either $3.75 or $3.95, because they had deducted the hour we didn’t come in. Our job was to box shirts. The conditions were dreadful. If you went to the bathroom more than twice a day and were more than a few minutes, you were reported to the office by the floorwalker.

Most of the girls were taught to weave by their parents. Since my father was not in the mills at that time, I went to an office where the bolts of cloth were shipped. In return for helping them, I was taught how to weave. They never paid me, and as soon as I thought I knew enough, I left. Soon afterwards, I went with one of the girls I had met at a Wobbly picnic to look for a job. I told them I was a weaver. It was all right for a while, then a filling got stuck. I didn’t know what to do. I got so frightened I never went back after lunch. I didn’t even go to ask for the money I had already earned.

I finally did learn to weave and got my first job as a weaver. One of the big issues for us was the loom system. They used to get people to work four and even six looms at a time. That’s the reason men brought their wives with them. It was too much for one person. If a thread broke or a piece fell down, the fine threads would be flawed. You couldn’t let this happen,
so you had to stop the loom to fix it. When you did that, you weren't making cloth. You had to keep going from the front. You had to inject the filling and then go around the back to see how the threads were there. To keep four or six looms going was just impossible. Even if you somehow managed, you still didn't earn enough for the fundamentals of living.

**Singing with the Loom**

I remember the clanging of those looms, the sound of steel against steel. You couldn't speak with one another unless you shouted. Many of the weavers brought a piece of wood to stand on to get relief from the cement floor. It didn't relieve anything for me. The first time I walked out of the mill, I couldn't hear normally and although I knew my feet were touching the ground, it felt strange. After a time, I got used to the noise. There seemed to be a certain rhythm to the loom. It encouraged me to sing. The only way I could endure that work was to sing along to the rhythm of the loom. Most of the discomfort could be forgotten that way. Maybe that's why we used to sing so many Wobbly songs.

About this time, the AFL tried to organize the school teachers. A number of the teachers were quite sympathetic. They felt sorry for young girls who could only go to the eighth grade and then were sent to the mills. They started to teach us in small groups on Sunday. We'd read Shakespeare and Dreiser, and they tried to help as much as they could. When the school system found out, the teachers were fired. There was never a union for them.

Everyone worked long days then. My mother would go to the farmers' market at four in the morning pushing a baby carriage. The farmers had come from the night before, and anything they didn't sell, they would let you have cheap or for nothing. Sometimes she'd get potatoes or big sacks of vegetables. The neighbors would come in and they'd divide up whatever they got. Before I started working in the mills, my mother used to send me up to the butcher to buy meat. If you bought meat, he'd always give you a lot of bones, and some days you would get liver. I would ask for liver "for my cat." Of course it wasn't for the cat. My mother always had a big pot of soup on the stove. People would often come to ask my father to help him find a job or discuss a problem. My mother always managed to have a bowl of soup to offer. It was always from the bones, but to get the bones and liver free, you had to buy some meat.

My parents could read, write, and speak German, Russian, and Hebrew. Our home became a nucleus for people who wanted to write home but were illiterate. They would come to our house to have my mother write their letters. But people from Warsaw and Lodz tended to be well-educated; and they were the ones who became leaders in our strike. People used to meet in our house to talk about conditions. You weren't allowed to belong to a union or organize one. If you were heard talking about that at work, you would be blacklisted immediately. Many of the Polish people worked in the dye factories. The smell was so bad that when we'd pass by, we had to hold our breath and run. Even from the outside, we could hardly breathe. They worked in water up to their knees. The clothes most of us wore were hand-
me-downs. People would crowd in about three rooms and then take a boader to make ends meet. You couldn't get credit from the butcher, but the grocer used to sell a few odd pieces of meat which helped. Many of the men couldn't take it. Instead of going home with their pay, many headed straight for the saloon. There was one on our corner, and I would see children running to find their fathers, or wives coming to see if they could rescue some money before the husbands drank it all. I couldn't blame the men that much. There was nothing to look forward to after pay day. They had to start the same thing all over again. Conditions became worse and worse until either you had to just stop living or become a rebel. That's when the IWW came in.

Everyone would go out to the IWW picnics and meetings. Haywood came to speak. Gurley Flynn came. There was Tresca, Scott Nearing, Norman Thomas, Roger Baldwin. I remember once I didn't want to go. I said, "Pop, all they do is talk." He said, "Listen." One time they refused to let the IWW meet in the Turn Hall. We had to walk all the way to Haledon, a small town outside Paterson where they had a socialist mayor who allowed us to have picnics in the woods and to hold meetings.

Gurley Flynn looked just like the pictures we see of her now. She was young, vibrant, enthusiastic. She wasn't a really good speaker, but she gave so much of herself in her talks. She would come at night to the soup kitchens. There were big caldrons of soup set up in a lot next to the church and she would get up on a platform. There were red flares around her, and she'd get them singing and then she'd talk with them. It was just the thing people needed to keep them together and give them courage.

Although my father was very sympathetic to the IWW, he couldn't be a member; he had a store. But he always went to the meetings and
picnics. When he spoke of Scott Nearing, he would lower his voice as if he was talking about a person so great he was almost holy. We liked Haywood, too. He seemed a tower of strength. He was a big fellow and had one eye closed. He didn’t wear a patch. The eye was just closed.

“This is America...”

It’s important to realize that we were very proud to be Americans. Even though we were radical, strikers always carried the flag. In those days, during the elections, newspapers would flash images on sheets attached to the sides of the buildings. Candidates would soap-box in front of them and sometimes they’d have arguments. My father always took me, and he would say, “This is America. They say whatever they want during the election; but afterwards, they shake hands. It isn’t like other countries where they shoot one another and kill one another. This is America.”

During the actual strike, most of the people were sent away to people in New York. They wore red sashes and were put into trucks, yelling and screaming like it was a lot of fun. They were in front of our laundry and I wanted to go too, but my father said, “Shhh, you have something to eat. They have nothing.” It wasn’t easy for the families to give up their children, but my father was right. There was no income and the strike fund was low. The grocery fed most of the workers on credit, and there were soup kitchens. The strike lasted until the summer, then groups began to fall away.

The police would be violent when there was picketing, but the Paterson workers were never violent. That was the last thing on our minds. We had no guns. I don’t believe anyone I knew could operate a gun. There was one Italian man shot on the picket line. There was a collection to raise money for his widow, who, I think opened an Italian grocery afterwards. The police also raided homes. There was a Wobbly who had important files in his room. One night after an IWW dance, someone suggested we go to New York. I had never been to New York, to Greenwich Village, and a whole group of us decided to do it. We went to Long John Silver’s the Pirate’s Den, where the waiters wore patches for atmosphere. We missed the last train home and didn’t get back until dawn on the milk run. There was someone waiting to tell us that the Wobbly’s room had been raided. I saw it. The room was a private house, but they had pulled open all the drawers and taken things away. The police weren’t gentle, and of course they arrested many people.

We had a big pageant for the strike. That was much more our way of doing things. John Reed was involved in that. It was to show exactly what had happened in Paterson. It showed how the looms had stopped, how a striker was shot, how the picket lines were. Although the pageant seemed to siphon off some of the energy we had, there really wasn’t much more that could have been done. The employers were stronger. The workers had nothing but their enthusiasm and courage.

I wasn’t an official organizer, but when I became a weaver, a girlfriend and I would take jobs in unorganized factories and try to organize them. We would refuse the four looms, saying it was too much for us. Because we were young girls, we were permitted to work only two. After a few weeks, we would hand out leaflets and call for an organizing meeting. We looked so innocent that the managers never thought we were capable of even believing in a union. In one place, they locked us out. They called the police and we had to get out pay at a little booth. When the police handed us the pay and our tools, I refused the tools because I considered the factory to be on strike. The cop got angry and said if I didn’t take them there, I could come for them at the station. Rather than be organized, that particular factory closed and left town to start again somewhere in Pennsylvania.

For a Song

The companies never stopped putting the pressure on. If you said you were an IWW, it was like saying you were a criminal. For years there were people who would not let you know they had been IWWs. They would deny it out of simple fear. If you were an IWW in Paterson, you were blacklisted. I got a lesson on how much they feared the IWW when I was just starting to work. I used to teach children on the block some IWW songs. I’d always come home
for lunch, and one day while I was eating, there was a bang on the door. My mother, who was very short, opened the door, and there was a gigantic policeman standing there. He said he wanted to see me. She led him to the table where I was eating. He looked down at me, and he must have realized how ridiculous the situation was. He had been sent to find a dangerous rebel, and there was a fifteen year old girl eating lunch. He left. But imagine! A little girl sang a song in school and the teacher reported it and the principal called the police and the police came to my door. For a song.

I guess I had no choice about becoming a rebel. The first dress I ever bought that was mine was after I had earned my first pay as a weaver. I wanted to go to a Wobbly dance, but I had to bring that money home, because we never had any extra spending money. On the way home, I saw a pretty dress. I opened my paycheck and took some money out and bought the dress. When I got home I told my mother someone saw me looking at the dress, bought it, and gave it to me. It was a ridiculous story. It was having to make excuses like that that kept you fighting.

The IWW left people with a taste for organization. Every time workers win a big strike, it helps straighten out their backs a little more and lifts their heads a bit higher. Even though the big strike was lost in Paterson, there was a feeling of togetherness among the workers. We had a medium of expression. From then on, there were a series of strikes and every shop had to be reorganized. Every shop refought the eight hour day all the way down the line — and the four loom system. We used to carry placards: “Eight hours work — eight hours pay — eight hours sleep.” Well, there was always some shop going on strike for one reason or another. The thing in 1913 that we really acted on and won was the two loom system.

I'm still with the IWW. The AFL-CIO was organized along the lines of a big corporation with the president receiving a fabulous amount and the workers just like commodities. The IWW was more than a union. It wanted to bring forth a new form of society. The IWW taught that the worker has nothing in common with the employer. The average worker still doesn't understand that. The eight hour day and pensions are taken for granted. They can't understand there was a time when the word vacation was foreign. The IWW tried to educate people to be more than horses, more than cogs in a wheel. The IWW never had high paid officials. How can a president who earns so much understand the plight of a working mother who has to deposit her child in a day care center and run off to her job still worrying about a fever the child might have? The president worries about the best college to send his kids to. They can't understand each other. There is a big division. The leaders have political jobs. They need the workers so they can exist, but they do not function in the interest of the worker, of the working class.

The IWW fought for new values, for a society where every person can be a full human being. We saw that men were bored from doing the same ritual work, day after day, week after week. Of course, they drank too much. We had a slogan: “You can't fight booze and the boss at the same time.” We were against drink and in favor of education. What the worker needs most is not more pennies per hour but education. We thought that when workers got to understand their situation, they could have a general strike and through the general work stoppage, workers would get their various goals.
If you are not a rebel, it is easy to be pessimistic. How can people live with themselves? I fought whenever I could. During the Sacco and Vanzetti struggle, I soapboxed on South Street. I told the audience that we should cut the powerlines so they couldn’t electrocute them. Another time, I was there and got swept into the safety of a restaurant when the police came through swinging clubs from their horses. When I moved to New York, it was different from Paterson. There were no mills. But I would work for and organize dances for the General Recruiting Union. I never charged any expenses. When my husband was working — he was a carpenter — I thought, how can you take money for doing things for the organization? We couldn’t. We struggled as best we could and we always sang those wonderful songs.

Dan Georgakas is an Associate Editor of Radical America, an editor of Cineaste, and author of “The Methusaleh Factors.” Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer are filmmakers. They produced “The Wobblies,” a documentary history of the IWW, in 1979.


Diana Johnstone has recently gotten herself into some hot water. As European correspondent for the socialist newsmagazine In These Times, she attended last summer the Perugia Peace Convention in Europe and wrote a critical article on it, “Is the European peace movement a dead END?” The article raised some serious questions about the European Nuclear Disarmament movement, and it raised some hackles across the Atlantic. E.P. Thompson himself took to the pages of In These Times to respond to Johnstone’s charges that END is attempting to “link” nuclear disarmament with human rights (à la the Commentary crowd) and that by a form of European chauvinism END is playing into the hands of those hoping that a nuclear-armed Western European Union might become the world’s third super-power. In her response to Thompson, Johnstone makes reference to “a book to appear shortly”; that book, The Politics of Euromissiles: Europe’s Role In America’s World is now out, and it will do nothing to calm the trans-Atlantic waters.

To begin with: it is a book about the European disarmament movement, but it mentions British peace campaigns (Thompson is British) scarcely at all. France (where Johnstone lives) gets a whole chapter, as does Italy and West Germany. Great Britain is consigned to a section of a chapter entitled “Fragmented Europe,” with Scandinavia, Portugal, Spain and the Benelux nations. This is surprising, considering that the European peace movements have derived much of their intellectual foundation and political inspiration from British activists, but
that is a side issue. Johnstone’s main point, although never clearly stated as such, is worth several intercontinental disputes on its own.

Essentially, Johnstone argues (quite correctly, in my opinion) that the introduction of Pershing II and cruise missiles into Europe is a major part of the US plan to cow the Soviets and make the Third World safe for American intervention. Euromissiles are, in Thompson’s phrase, “committing: strategically and also politically.” They are committing because they enable the United States to strike the Soviet Union from Europe, while leaving the American homeland out of it. They are committing because they demonstrate the American desire to outdo the Soviet Union in every important category of nuclear weaponry (in this case, land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles). In all, they are committing because they are another attempt to make the US nuclear threat capable of credibly backing up the use of American conventional force in the “grey areas” of the world — and this is a commitment that must be taken seriously indeed.

They are also committing because they illustrate that the United States is willing to endure profound opposition from its own allies in order to get them in. Although the Euromissiles were supposedly deployed at European “request” (this is a rationalization Johnstone is adept at pulling apart), in fact the European allies — facing serious domestic opposition to the missiles — hoped that the missiles could be negotiated away in Geneva and not deployed at all. That they were deployed is due to American insistence on this point; it is another example (yet another: Western European’s softening of support for the Sandinistas) of American dominance over its military alliances, and Western Europe as a whole.

By the end of the Euromissile crisis Europe had further cast its die with Washington. But Johnstone posits an alternative: that the European people, living, as she puts it in a chapter title, “Between North-South and East-West,” make a very different choice, not align themselves with superpower realpolitik but instead with its target, the Third World. Most important, this is the agenda she sets out for the European peace movement: to dispense with perfidious condemnations of superpower activities and misplaced European chauvinism, and develop “the capacity to advance alternative social models, technological development and North-South relations.” This, she states, is the true measure of European independence.

It might well be. After reading the book, one begins to sense that it is. But then why are we left with only that sentence to mull over? Why, after fully 54 pages on the history of the post-war French Left (sure to give anyone an almost fatal sense of in-

quietude) are we given only three lines on future proposals for the European peace movement, and only glib generalities (“the peace movement needs to be more than a single-issue movement”; “peace movements must face up to the complexities of these issues”) for we Americans? The peace movements of Europe and North America should indeed, as Johnstone suggests, begin to address complex issues and face up to issues of Third World relations. This process may well be beginning. But if it is to succeed, we are going to have to develop substantive, detailed proposals about political tactics and long-term goals, and how the two interact. That, however, will be left to future pens: it will not be found in this book.

Matthew Goodman
LA DOLCE VITAE
The Working Class in the Academy

NANCY HOFFMAN

Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class.

If books about higher education in general are notably dull, technocratic, and apolitical, those specifically about faculty are worse. Written for administrators who use terms like "human resource allocation," they focus on improving productivity from an institutional perspective.¹ By contrast, these two recent books, Terminal Degrees and Strangers in Paradise examine in depth the current issues and experience of faculty from their own perspective; indeed, the three authors are living through the situations they describe. Trained as an historian, Emily Abel has not had a tenure track job and is moving into the field of public health. Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey are both of white working-class backgrounds.

In the autobiographical essays and excerpts from extensive interviews, one hears the voices of disillusioned and alienated workers whose estrangement, a key word in both books, from each other and the workplace is all the more striking because most started out with such idealism. While this news is depressing, especially to leftists who have seen the university as an activist community capable of criticizing mainstream American culture and politics, these books do suggest what is the matter.

Terminal Degrees is an account of the personal consequences, psychological and economic, of the shrinking academic job market in the later 1960s and 1970s. In it we hear the
voices of 43 Ph.Ds or near-Ph.Ds who, despite their many achievements and hard work, were dismissed from their academic jobs because of negative tenure reviews or in the pre-tenure review process. We also hear the story of the so-called "gypsy scholars," those academics who survive at the margins of academia, earning a meagre living on "piece-work." Picking up courses here and there, they fill the gaps left by enrollment changes, illnesses, leaves, and by the increasingly common cost-saving policies of academic institutions.

Strangers in Paradise tells the opposite story. It is an account in large part of the consequences of the expansion of higher education during the fifties and sixties that enabled many ambitious working class people, mostly white, mostly male, not only to enter colleges and universities, but to become professors themselves. In a series of autobiographical essays, twenty-four currently employed white academics who define themselves as coming from working-class backgrounds, recount their feelings about their jobs, and the circumstances that permitted them to finish Ph.Ds.

Together the books provide a summary of the still puzzling story of the rapid expansion and unexpected contraction of higher education in the last three decades. For working class aspirants to higher education, the expansion began post-world war II with the GI bill, the baby boom, and the cold war. The GI bills of 1944, 1952, and 1966 had as their genesis the need to combat post-war unemployment, to reward and perhaps to pacify returning soldiers, and to respond to the need for more highly trained workers. The bills sent 20,000,000 men and a few women to college. By the late fifties in its rush to increase the number and quality of skilled workers, the federal government made such large infusions of dollars to higher education that talented students could attend college no matter what their class background.

The so-called Golden Age of Higher Education — the period from 1960 to 1970 — saw an expansion of the student body from 3.8 million to 9.2 million. Not only were costs low and access easy, but college campuses were the place to be in the 1960s. Motivated by the egalitarian spirit of campus social protest movements, and a job market which demanded increasingly technical and professional training available only in college, women, working class students, and members of minority groups, as Emily Abel puts it, "thronged to [higher education] institutions, lured by the belief that a college degree would enable them to cross the great divide separating manual from mental work." Along with more open admissions came a proportional expansion of the professoriate. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of faculty in four-year institutions expanded 138 percent. Many of the working class academics of Strangers in Paradise hit the job market just as the baby boomers’ college applications flooded through the mails. They were soon hired, and usually tenured. What they did not know, however, as they began to urge their students on to graduate school in the late 1960s was that no Golden Age lasts forever, and this is where Terminal Degrees begins.

For Radical America readers the story is probably all too familiar, yet the statistics, as Abel assembles them, still have the capacity to startle. The graduate student body more than tripled between 1960 and 1975, growing from 314,000 to 1,054,000. In 1970 alone, almost 30,000 Ph.D.s were awarded, and, by 1976, annual production had risen to 34,000. By contrast, fewer than 10,000 people received doctorates in 1960. Ph.Ds in the humanities have been among the hardest hit by the closing of the job market, and figure importantly in Abel’s sample. “Over 25 percent of all humanities doctorates ever awarded in the United States were conferred during the 1960s and over 44 percent during the following decade.” By 1972, undergraduate enrollment had peaked, yet the production of Ph.Ds continued to rise. In the early 70s rumors often swept through the job market, especially among humanists and social scientists: three jobs in modern European history this year, 800 new Ph.Ds. By the late 1970s the government began to treat higher education like other social services — as if it were a privilege not the right it had been in the flush days. The closely watched open admissions experiment at the City University of New York was declared a failure and closed down.* Although President Carter created the Department of Education in 1980, at the same time he

* [ED. NOTE] For a detailed discussion on the history of open admissions within the City University of New York, see “City College: Rise and Fall of the Free Academy” by Sherry Gorelick (RA Vol. 14, No. 5, Sept.-Oct. 1980).
pushed to reduce funds for everything from student grants to research funds to dollars for capital development. Today, intense competition for jobs, pressure to perform heroic feats as a teacher, researcher, and publishing scholar, caution in regard to political activism, low salaries and weak unions, as well as tensions about class size and productivity, are accepted as the status quo.

As one of the academics who managed to get in under the wire — I was hired at the University of California/Santa Barbara in 1969 — I clearly remember the heady decade between 1960 and 1970. As an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of California/Berkeley there seemed no more satisfying work than combining graduate study, and then teaching with organizing — for civil rights; against the Vietnam war; in women’s consciousness raising groups; in a union for graduate students; then in women’s studies. While teaching at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology in 1972, I realized that the growing quietude and careerism among colleagues and students (perhaps more apparent at MIT where there were very few women) would soon make this happy combination of teaching and political activism less possible. For most of the last twelve years I have taught at the College of Public and Community Service of U/Mass-Boston in a BA program for working adults, most of them women. Here, while there are typical institutional pressures, commitment to activism and to education as a vehicle of liberation has persisted, and so I have escaped some of the disillusionment. In contrast, a visiting friend from another university recently sat in at a meeting chaired by our academic dean. With tears in her eyes, she observed that she had never before heard a dean urge slower, more detailed work, more tutoring, more workshops. Like most academics, she was pushed constantly to hold bigger classes, to test more and tutor less.

The authors of Strangers in Paradise, like my friend, find themselves in conversations “about the mixed blessings of being half-committed to our work, half-resentful over the fact that our workplace in many ways was so disappointing.” They sum up their charges against the university in language familiar to many left academics: “The careerism and conformism of colleagues, perverted authority relationships within the academy, the failure of the university to serve sound and laudable academic or social values, location of the university in the class structure.” But unlike most, they hypothesize that their special dissatisfaction is due to “internalization of class conflict.” They imply that having overcome such tremendous obstacles to “arrive” in academia, they feel its contradictory clashing of meritocratic and egalitarian ideals more keenly than others. They feel divided against themselves.

To test their hypothesis, they sought essays from a network made up largely of social scientists of working class origin. Only two of the 24 are women, and none are people of color. Although the editors of Strangers in Paradise imply that being working class is the explanation of everything from personal unhappiness to political criticism of the university, I could identify but one clearly class-related theme. Only in descriptions of social life and leisure pursuits did these academics feel a direct class-based alienation. For example, one historian explains that he likes his colleagues, but “they’re not the people I want to be with otherwise.” He lives in a white working class neighborhood, yet when a neighbor claims his dog “would bite any nigger who comes into the yard,” this self-defined radical historian is troubled and guilty because he remains silent. Another dislikes academic elites who read James Joyce, study Noam Chomsky, and listen to Schoenberg. And although a third says she has never identified with the working class, she taunts her colleagues with a T-shirt that says “Fuck Art, Let’s Dance.”

Perhaps Ryan and Sackrey cannot identify a working class experience more consistently because academics of working class origin are now at least one quarter of all faculty, according to a 1977 study. (For this reason I was suspicious of the authors’ assertion that they could find only two women, and no people of color to contribute essays.) There are other feelings which the “strangers” share with most professionals who are not white and male — a fact the authors do not mention. The interviewees worry about their language, their style, their inability to drop names and make “con-
nections." Like many women and people of color, the boys' club makes them uneasy. Several mix contempt with admiration when they look from their run-of-the-mill institutions to private elite colleges with their well-groomed obedient students, decorous social activities, and light teaching loads.

Except for these distinctions, however, the best way to read Strangers is as a fairly representative portrait of a college teacher's work in mainstream academia, no matter what one's class background or, even, politics. Like so many academics they express confusion about the importance of publishing; a lack of interest in teaching; and a deep alienation from their colleagues.

Even after taking into account that it is easier to be sympathetic with the unemployed and under-employed than with unhappy job holders, Terminal Degrees is a better book than Strangers. It offers an analysis which is much truer to the voices of interviewees who appear in its pages; it distinguishes consistently and carefully between the experience of women, people of color, and white males; and the author is clear not only about her own politics but about strategies to change specific practices of unions and academic institutions. Terminal Degrees paints a portrait of the personal impact of unjust, discriminatory, or just plain painful institutional procedures on those who have not succeeded — procedures for which all of us in academia are at least partly responsible. Reading of failed tenure battles and sex discrimination suits, the inability or reluctance of unions to fight for part time faculty, the spoiled hopes of those on short term contracts, one comes to understand how the competitiveness and fierce individualism of academia wounds all. Those who fail to find permanent jobs — no matter how they may explain publicly that colleagues dislike their style, politics, color, or gender — indicate in innumerable ways that deep down they believe they were not as good as they should have been.

In her first chapter, "Out of Work," Abel chronicles the personal impact of unemployment from interviews with forty three displaced academics, and from the literature on the topic. Although she is careful to point out that her subjects enjoyed many advantages that mitigate the consequences of unemployment, she found the economic and emotional costs similar to those of other unemployed workers. Like other workers, unemployed academics felt robbed — in this case of a professional identity. One man said, he felt as if he had "been killed in a car accident and was just coming back as a ghost."10 "It means that no one in the country is considered better educated or smarter than I am..." said one unemployed historian.11 Yet the effect of unemployment was not to encourage these smart people to band together. Abel comments somewhat ruefully that Western society has been haunted by the specter of "an unemployed intelligentsia... becoming drawn into revolutionary activity," but the academics in her study exhibited "little potential for collective action."12 Abel attributes the estrangement of academics from each other to academic training where individual achievement is rewarded, narrow specialization encouraged, and competition for the attention and protection of mentors the status quo.

The underlying commonality in the topics that follow — the academic job search, the trauma of dismissal, part-time employment — is the fragmentation and isolation of academic work. In the beginning is the humiliation of the "slave auction," usually at the yearly convention of the professional association, where freshly minted Ph.D.s vie for interviews. Said one job seeker who had attended the same convention for five consecutive years, "There's a very predatory atmosphere. There's just incredible tension. Everybody's eyeing everyone else and checking out their credentials and asking, 'how many publications do you have?' "13 If one lands a job, then in four or six years, there can be the trauma of termination. Unlike factory lay-offs, which affect groups of workers, one is usually separated out for dismissal by one's peers. One's failures are common knowledge, every word and act of one's professional life has been under scrutiny. In the several months after dismissal, one must come to work everyday and be treated, as one woman said, "as if you're one of the living dead."14 The pain of Abel's interviewees was akin to bereavement for themselves, for lost connections, for identity.

The heart of Abel's book, however, and that
which assembles information I have seen nowhere else, concerns not fired academics, but that 41 percent of the academic workforce that is now part-time. In this group, the sense of isolation is also profound, and likely to remain so. But, because part-time faculty have such tenuous connections to institutions, and because they are often invisible, there are few statistics about them. The plight of these academics helps us to see into the heart of the academic enterprise, and unfortunately into the future.

Abel compares the situation of part-time academics to workers in the competitive sector — those who work in cleaners, restaurants, grocery stores, and the like. They receive no fringe benefits, have no job security, and little chance for advancement. In most institutions, hiring and firing procedures are haphazard, and they are the first victims of layoffs. In addition, Abel argues, they are proletarianized — stripped of the prequisites of professional status. Many have no office space, no secretarial help, no xeroxing privileges, no telephones. Furthermore, they are typically assigned the repetitive lower level courses, and often at the last minute, as if no preparation time were necessary. Other faculty and administrators tend to treat them as non-persons, seeking them out only when they cause “trouble” by failing to hand in grades or book orders on time. However astute, these observations are not surprising.

What is surprising and very complex for those who think of organizing part-time workers are the attitudes that Abel’s interviews elicited. For if the nature of the work is proletarianized, the workers are not. On the positive side, Abel’s interviews yielded a consistent and impressive pattern of commitment to teaching and students among part-timers. Some suggested that, undervalued by peers, their satisfaction came by throwing themselves into teaching; others thought this the only way to be rehired; still others simply conducted themselves “professionally” no matter how trying the circumstances. But the issue of unionization raises the old spectres. While most part-timers, especially those in social science and humanities, thought collective bargaining
would improve their lot, they were not likely to become activists. One interviewee states flatly: "There are ten people for every job. You want to break a union, just have these conditions. . . ."

Abel's final chapter, "Fighting Back," should be required reading for anyone interested in the struggles of part-time faculty either to unionize separately or to gain power within full-time faculty unions. Like women grievants in sex discrimination suits (with whom Abel compares them), part-timers seem paralyzed by the tension between believing that the university is a meritocracy from which they have justly been excluded and thinking of themselves as an elite for whom collective action would be demeaning. These attitudes are reinforced by the unions themselves. As Abel points out, even when unions defend part-timers or women grievants, the process forces one to focus on the merits and achievements of individuals rather than on systemic patterns of injustice.

Both books should lead us to consider seriously the political and ethical ramifications of fortifying an educational system that fosters individualism, competitiveness, and exclusion, and that wounds in a variety of ways those who are supposedly most successful. Progressives within higher education must assume responsibility for conducting our own teaching and re-search in such a way as to strengthen models of collective responsibility and action for colleagues, students, and yes, even administrators.

Where, one might well ask, are the organizers, the collaborators and community builders in academia today? I would look among the women and people of color who join together in women's and black studies programs, in research institutes, in curriculum development projects, in national campaigns to support those contesting termination, and even in committees to help prepare colleagues for tenure review. Indeed, one of the few notes of optimism in Strangers comes from a young woman folklorist who says rather gently, "my sense of community comes from both inside and outside the academy. Recently I have found a number of people my age who now have Ph.D.s and are functioning inside universities. . . . I have come to realize that many folklorists come from working class backgrounds. . . . Academia is like an eccentric member of my family whose company I enjoy. . . . what I value and begin to find, even in the academy, is cooperation, a sense of community, concern for the disenfranchised, and attempt to lead a balanced life."
LETTERS

(EDITORS’ NOTE: The following letter is being circulated among Boston-area activists in the movement to oppose US intervention in Central America. As it expands on information in an article on Boston's Asian community in our special issue on the Mel King campaign and coalition politics (Vol. 17, No. 6-18, No. 1), we felt it was important to share with our readers.)

To the editor:

We urge all anti-intervention activists to express their outrage at the recent brutal beating of Long Guang Huang, a Chinese immigrant worker. Mr. Huang was physically assaulted by a Boston plain clothes police officer in broad daylight on the streets of Chinatown. Activists in the struggle for peace, justice and self-determination in Central America should be among the foremost supporters of the oppressed nationality communities’ demands for equality and empowerment here in Boston.

We urge the city government to meet the just demands of the Chinese community. In particular, we demand that the charges against Mr. Huang be dropped and Officer Francis Kelly, Jr. be prosecuted for the beating.

One of the major obstacles of even greater U.S. intervention in Central America has been the so-called “Vietnam Syndrome”: public opposition to U.S. military and intelligence operations in other countries and questioning the legitimacy and morality of U.S. domination of other countries. The recent wave of anti-Asian violence, of which the Huang case is a particularly flagrant example, is directly related to efforts by the government, the media and other opinion-makers to overcome this “Vietnam Syndrome” by inciting a chauvinist and racist climate, especially targeting Asians. Racism and attacks on people of color here in the U.S. directly contribute to the political climate needed to support U.S. intervention and domination of countries of the Third World.

We recognize our moral and political responsibility to oppose U.S. intervention in Central America and to do all we can to support the nations and peoples of Central America in their struggle for peace, justice and self-determination. In that same spirit, we call for justice for Long Guang Huang and say no to police violence and yes to community empowerment here in Boston. We cannot remain silent for silence is acceptance of injustice.

Letters to Mayor Flynn and Police Commissioner Roache are one way to show your support for Mr. Huang. Anti-intervention and solidarity organizations and individual activists are encouraged to add their names to the growing list of Mr. Huang’s supporters. For further information about Mr. Huang’s case, contact the Committee to Support Long Guang Huang at (617) 426-5313.

Footnotes

1. Ryan and Sackrey, p. 25.
3. Abel, p. 3
7. Ryan and Sackrey, p. 312.
10. Abel, p. 33.
11. Abel, p. 43.
13. Abel, p. 66.
15. This, however, we do know from several surveys and from a study Abel did of the California State University System: nearly half earn the majority of their income in part-time teaching; as second class workers, they tend to be tracked into the schools with the lowest budgets, and the largest working class and minority populations - community colleges. Thirty percent teach on a part-time basis at more than one institution. In the CSUC system which is the model for the three tiered systems favored nationally, women represent 20% of tenure track professors and 38% of the part-time teachers. Ethnic minorities are 12% of tenure track faculty and 18% of part-timers. 25% of CSUC part-timers hold the Ph.D., and 73% had at least 3 years teaching experience. Women rely on part-time work for a higher proportion of their personal income than do men.” Abel, pp. 80-102.
17. Ryan and Sackrey, p. 117.

Nancy Hoffman teaches women's studies to adults at the College of Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts/Boston. She writes about women, education, and social change.
Dear Editors:

Having just finished working on a block association project painting over graffiti-smearred walls, I thought it was a good time to write this letter which has been on my mind for several days. I was distressed to read Reebee Garofalo’s article in the Nov.-Dec. 1984 issue of RA, because if the Left has to glorify or romanticize graffiti vandalism to find a constituency, it is in an even worse state than I realized.

As a resident of a mixed middle and working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, I share with my neighbors a passionate hatred of graffiti as a form of urban blight which only increases the ugliness and demoralization all too common in our cities. Garofalo’s article, and even more the photographs, attempt to depict graffiti as a form of art with some type of political message. Graffiti, and the blaster radios which smash music into our ears, do have a message: “fuck you, my name and my noise are all I’ve got, and you can’t do anything about it!”

Graffiti is the poor kid’s version of Reaganite selflessness: arrogant, hostile and anti-community. As for art, even the “full car murals,” some of which I admit are impressive, have been desecrated by hundreds of scrawled signatures. I have lived in the city long enough to remember the first, and for a while only, subway car signature, “Taki.” New Yorkers have had to live with graffiti for about 17 years and it has hardly evolved into an art form despite the Whitney biennial. Graffiti is everywhere, smearing its hostility on every surface with its message of destructive anger and selfishness, which is hardly radical just because it has been expressed by proletarian teenagers, white as well as black and Hispanic.

Graffiti and box radios are the latest form of warfare for control of public space which goes back at least to the early nineteenth century if not before. At that time the bourgeoisie took the offensive with new police forces and laws designed to control and confine disorderly proletarian behavior. The agents of order invaded working class neighborhoods to close down saloons and force men and women to “move on” if they congregated in the streets. The urban parks of the middle nineteenth century, created ostensibly for all the people, were carefully policed: signs really said “keep off the grass” and there were men to enforce the rule. Within the last twenty years, however, relaxing standards of conduct and greater tolerance of cultural diversity eased those regulations. The change was a breath of fresh air, a liberation from the feeling that a moral big brother was watching you. However, the angry egotistical teenager has shattered that liberation, seizing public spaces for him or herself alone to the exclusion of other people’s enjoyment. The official agents of order have withdrawn, leaving public places the private, personal space of angry and destructive youths. The Left has always sought openness instead of restriction in public places where diversity can be expressed and celebrated. Openness and diversity do not mean the tyranny of the meanest kids in the park or on the block; that sort of power is for the Right.

Bill Miller
Brooklyn, NY

Author’s Response:

I must admit that my initial reaction to Bill Miller was to think of the punk phrase, “old and in the way.” But I’m probably as old as Miller and I don’t have the same reaction to graffiti or to rap music. Upon more sober reflection, it strikes me that Miller’s position points to competing conceptions of the city, of the production and consumption of urban culture, and of the proper posture of the Left in all of that. Miller seems to celebrate the failure of “early nineteenth century new police forces and laws designed to control and confine disorderly proletarian behavior,” but refuses to apply that same sentiment to the current situation.

That graffiti is an act of defiance is without doubt. That some of it is vicious and as ugly as Miller contends may be the case. It is also the case, however, that graffiti at its best—eg., the work of artists such as Phase 2, Futura 2000, or Lee Quinones, whose “full car murals” even Miller finds impressive—is genuine people’s art which should be en-
couraged by the Left. But more importantly, I would ask Miller how he thinks urban youth of color—among whom unemployment has risen as high as 80 percent in certain areas—should relate to a community where walls scrubbed clean resonate nicely with antiseptic glass and steel towers. These stand as monuments to an urban environment which systematically excludes these young people from its official cultural life; denying them any future in their respective communities. The hip hop subculture offers something of a temporary solution, however magical, to a situation otherwise dominated by despair. What can Miller offer which is better?

As to the "blaster radios which smash music into our ears," I would point out that in the 1950s when Rock 'n' Roll burst onto the American scene, car radios were blaring the music publicly in much the same way. Rock 'n' Roll youth were celebrating the sounds of the city, discovering their sexuality, exploring cultures other than their own. In short, they were engaging their natural environment in reaction to the numbing dullness, moralistic hypocrisy, and political conservatism of an era typified by images like the Eisenhower presidency, McCarthy witchhunts, suburbia, and fallout shelters. All of which was given ample cultural expression in the tin-pan alley pop of the day. Rock 'n' Roll was considered the antithesis of good taste in its day and it was denounced in much the same terms applied by Miller to graffiti and rap music. But Rock 'n' Roll stands, in my estimation, as a victory, albeit not an unequivocal one.

The cultural forms of hip hop represent, I think, a similar engagement on the part of the current generation of young people, in response to conditions which, for them, are far more alienating than were the 1950s for its youth. As embodied in the work of reigning hip hop guru Afrika Bambaataa, this movement can hardly be characterized, to use Miller's words, as "the poor kids' version of Reaganite selfishness, arrogant, hostile, anti-community." In the first place, middle class kids write graffiti and play plenty of loud music, and if anything conjures up the image of "Reaganite selfishness," for me it's the disengagement of individuals with "walkpersons" plugged into their heads, saying, in effect: "Fuck you. I'm affluent enough to insulate myself from your poverty and despair and I can go it alone." That sort of aloofness is for the right.

Rebee Garofalo
SUBSCRIBE NOW TO

RADICAL AMERICA

RADICAL AMERICA is an independent socialist-feminist journal that has published continuously since 1967. Articles feature the history and current developments in the working class, the role of women and Third World people, with reports on shop floor and community organizing, the history and politics of radicalism and feminism, and commentary and analysis of current socialist theory, popular culture, and social movements.

Name ___________________________ Cut out this box and mail to: Radical America
Address ___________________________ 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville, MA 02143
City ___________________________ State ________ Zip ________

☐ $100.00 Supporting subscriber
☐ $50.00 Sustaining subscriber
☐ $15.00 One year sub (Six issues)
☐ $10.00 One year sub (Unemployed, retired rate)
☐ $26.00 Two year sub
☐ Add $3.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions
PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER
Make all checks payable to Radical America

************** SPECIAL OFFER **************

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE ANY TWO OF RADICAL AMERICA'S RECENT SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUES FREE! ($8.00 value with a new one or two year subscription; issues detailed in ad in this issue.) Use this tear sheet.

Yes, send me ☐ “Facing Reaction”
☐ “Dreams of Freedom”
☐ “15th Anniversary Retrospective”
or ☐ Coalition Politics in the 80s

*Checks for $50.00 or more are tax deductible and should be made payable to Capp St. Foundation and sent to Radical America at the above address.
"RADICAL AMERICA: A 15 YEAR ANTHOLOGY" - Special retrospective with selection of articles that have appeared in RA since 1967: Black Liberation, Work-place Struggles, Feminism, Community Activism, American Left, Culture and Art.


"FACING REACTION" - Special double issue on the New Right and America in the 80s...Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 1981)...160 pages, illustrated.


"DREAMS OF FREEDOM" - Special double issue featuring "Having a Good Time: The American Family Goes Camping"...Vol. 16, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 1982)...180 pages.

Featuring: Interview with Carlos Fuentes; SPECIAL SECTION: Reviews of recent Radical History on women, blacks, rural populists, auto workers and responses to industrialization; POSTAL WORKERS AND SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT by Peter Rachleff; PEACE AT ANY PRICE?: FEMINISM, ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND THE DISARMA-MENT MOVEMENT by the editors; SOLIDARITY, COLD WAR AND THE LEFT by Frank Brodhead; R.I.P.-BUT HOW HARD SHOULD WE CRY AT THE FUNERAL? by Anita Diamant; and, poetry, movie satires and more.

SPECIAL BULK RATE AVAILABLE:
$4.00 (plus 50¢ postage) 40% Discount for 5 or more copies
BACK ISSUES OF RADICAL AMERICA

VOL. 18, NO. 6
SPECIAL ISSUE ON CULTURE AND YOUTH with articles on "Women in Pop Music"; Punk and Hip Hop Subcultures; Rock Against Sexism; "Zoot Suits and Style Warfare."

VOL. 18, NO. 5
SPECIAL ISSUE ON WOMEN AND LABOR ACTIVISM with articles on Comparable Worth; the Yale University Strike; Trade Unionism and Feminism in Italy, Canada, and Britain.

Since 1967, the journal of American dissidents

VOL. 18, NO. 2-3
"Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism"; Children and Language; Socialist and Utopian Women in the 19th Century; Labor Control in Japan; and debates on Anti-Semitism and Abortion.

Individual back issues are $3.50 each. Inquire for bulk rates for five or more copies.

Radical America (USPS 873-880)
38 Union Square No. 14
Somerville, MA 02143
ISSN 0033-7617

Second Class Postage
Paid at Boston, MA
and additional Post Offices