Bananas, Bases, & Patriarchy

Feminist Questions about the Militarization of Central America
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INTRODUCTION

During the past year a combative and energetic opposition to U.S. policy in Central America has become more visible in this country. Actions in communities and campuses have emphasized diverse approaches to political education and mobilization. Most of the efforts have been specifically located around the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, against U.S. support for the contra terrorists in Nicaragua, and in other specific campaigns. While there has been creativity in these anti-interventionist efforts, there seems to be little interest among today’s activists in rethinking the theory of imperialism itself. Unlike the anti-Vietnam war movement which took on a decidedly anti-imperialist focus in its latter stages, current efforts remain anti-interventionist in character. While attempts to incorporate such analyses as the conventional-nuclear war “deadly connections” scenario or a “North-South” (vs. simply East-West) perspective that considers the Third World in Cold War realpolitik are gaining some currency, most work is directed against specific policies rather than world systems.

It was not long ago that debates emerging from the Left over the “lessons” of Vietnam complicated people’s notions of the nature and direction of imperialism. Some retreated from the abstractness of the debates, others from sectarianism, still others from a naive perception that they had seen in the case of Vietnam a “simple” case of errant policy. Does the strength of current anti-intervention work
rest in part on its capacity to tolerate, rather than engage, theoretical gaps and impasses in order to get on with the work at hand? In the vastly different terrain of the 1980s, that may be the case. But if our notions of why and how imperialism exploits people and nations are stale, we may not recognize new ways to expose and combat it. We may also inhibit a broader comprehension of resistance in the Third World and possibilities for connection. One example of that came from our observation that while many feminists were playing a growing role in the current mobilizations against U.S. policy in South Africa and Central America, it was not clear that feminism has informed analyses of how U.S. power operates.

In Cynthia Enloe's article in this issue, she considers how to extend her feminist analysis of militarization to imperialism itself. She argues that even radical theorists of imperialism present a conceptual framework that is gender-blind. By not recognizing patriarchy and gender politics, standard critiques have no compelling reason for differentiating how women, in contrast to men, are affected by imperialism. While women become invisible, men get viewed as the central players in a cast that runs the gamut from multinational executives, policy makers and U.S. military recruits, to landlords, juntas and revolutionary fighters.

In contrast, Enloe suggests two ways that feminists can engage and take on prevailing views of imperialism. The first is simply to gather all we have learned both about how imperialism invades, and is resisted, and then to ask—in the economic, cultural, political, and military dimension: "Where are the women?" and "What are women doing?" Using U.S. domination of Central America and the Caribbean as a test case, Enloe demonstrates how gender-specific material can surface. How do women respond to the economic dislocations and "opportunities" caused by multi-nationals? How are women negotiating the increased absence of men? Enloe asserts that if women's experience is seen and valued, our understanding of imperialism and our capacity to combat it will be significantly enhanced.

Secondly, Enloe recommends a radical break with the basic assumptions of current anti-imperialist analysis, where fundamental feminist questions are never fully explored. Instead, Enloe asks what we learn when we introduce patriarchy as a primary element in international aggression. What if we see rape and violent intimidation as neither an excess nor a meta-phor but rather a basic aim of imperialist control? What if perpetuating male privilege is seen as a strategic question, not a periodic tactic, of contemporary imperialism?

Enloe's article is a beginning—it is suggestive and provocative. As we discussed this article, it became clearer to us how complex and contradictory are the ways in which imperialism affects the men and women in target countries. While right wing apologists amazingly argue the improved lot of women in these countries, certain left theories that equate the level of oppression with the degree of resistance can be as problematic. It is possible for a conclusion to be drawn, for example, from Enloe's discussion of the various social dislocations of women under imperialism, that such disruptions can only strengthen women's resistance. That is not clear. As we remind ourselves, even in applying newer feminist and cultural perceptions of the world to older theories, we must reflect on the Western lens we all share. In all, Enloe's article is an important contribution to a growing—and more inclusive—understanding of the effects of development and imperialism. We can also hope that such new ways of looking at the world can provide more energy and growth, and prod us to more effective action.

In the pre-World War I American South, black and white timber workers fought their own battle against the entrenched economic, legal, and political tentacles of capitalism. In their account of the fight of the radical Brotherhood of Timber Workers (B.T.W.) against the southern lumber trust, Jeff Ferrell and Kevin Ryan document an important, if short-lived, chapter in U.S. labor history. The story of the efforts of the B.T.W. brings to mind the similarly tenacious battles of the Civil Rights Movement half a century later and suggests lessons for us in a time when conservative forces increasingly use "legal" means to suppress labor militance.

In an adventure story worthy of a movie script, an interracial group of B.T.W. labor militants, male and female, used secrecy, sabotage, and an inclusive network of community support, to fight the overwhelming efforts of Southern lumbermen to break them. While the virulent anti-unionism that typified the South of that period has continued into the modern era, it is the cross-racial and cross-gender involvement that provides such a striking legacy. That legacy of the B.T.W. would be revived during the 1930s and again during the 1960s as new labor militants would try to break the barriers that divide and defeat South-
ern workers. As for the lumber industry, it was not until 1982, when Mississippi woodcutters finally achieved legislative recognition that the efforts among lumber workers were to reach some success.

In the U.S. of the 1980s that may be small consolation, as a seemingly less violent but more insidious legal and media campaign against unions, as “special interests,” is in high gear. The recognition by the Southern timberworkers over 70 years ago that extraordinary means must be used to fight “legal” harassment is vital. In order to consider equivalent tactics today, however, we need to know more than Ferrell and Ryan’s account tells us. What happens to democracy in a union riddled by spies? How do open, wide-ranging political discussions about union strategy occur in a climate of constant legal, political and economic harassment? And how do the delicate social relations necessary to nurture interracial and cross-gender trust take place in a context of intimidation and attack from outside?

Chris Tilly and Marie Kennedy offer another historical look at an important contemporary question for social movements—what are the possibilities and problems of coalition building between feminists and socialists? The last twenty years of feminism, for instance, has witnessed struggles between the New Left and women’s liberation, and among different strains of feminism over the intersection of class and gender issues. Historically, various liberation and “rights” movements have sought to unite and join forces but have found themselves parting company more often than not around exactly such questions. Many of the tragedies of social movements have arisen from what Tilly and Kennedy see as the failure to “find more ground for common work” among differing movements.

Here the example is socialists and feminists in Germany, France, and England at the turn of the century. At that time socialism, although ideologically responsive to feminist demands, repeatedly failed to integrate feminism into the daily concerns of a revolutionary movement: feminism was always secondary to class. Bourgeois feminism, on the other hand, consistently failed to consider class differences among women, and therefore was far from attractive to its working class sisters. For socialist-feminists the conflict was a real one, only partially resolved by working in “autonomous” women’s groups parallel to or within the feminist movement.

Tilly and Kennedy locate their discussion historically as well as geographically, pointing to the political traditions specific to each nation under question in order to assess how that particular tradition shaped the relative success of coalition building in each case. As products of today’s socialist feminist movement which has struggled often with these questions, we welcome this article as part of a growing body of literature which helps us to understand the sources for the divisions that continue to plague us.

**ERRATUM**

In our special issue on “Questions for the Peace Movement” (RA Vol. 19, No. 1), there was a typographical error in the article by Dan Smith, “After Cruise: The View from Europe,” which we wish to correct. On p. 332, second column, line 5, the sentence should read, “I am aware that a fourth issue could be added — ‘Us and the Third World’ and a fifth — Us and eastern Europe.’ ” The italicized section was inadvertently omitted during editing.

The Editors
"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.

Featuring: IN THE WINGS: NEW RIGHT ORGANIZING AND IDEOLOGY by Allen Hunter; THE CONTINUING BURDEN OF RACE: a review by Manning Marable; ABORTION: WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? by Ellen Willis; THE LONG STRUGGLE FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS by Linda Gordon; THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS: FEMINIST AND ANTIFEMINIST by Barbara Ehrenreich; RETREAT FROM THE SOCIAL WAGE: HUMAN SERVICES IN THE 80s by Ann Wthorn; also THE NEW TERRAIN OF AMERICAN POLITICS by Jim O'Brien; ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CONSERVATIVE POLICIES by Jim Campen; DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM AND SEXUAL POLITICS by the editors of Gay Left; and Noam Chomsky and Michael Klare on COLD WAR II and US INTERVENTIONISM IN THE THIRD WORLD. Plus, BILLBOARDS OF THE FUTURE!

"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.

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BANANAS, BASES, AND PATRIARCHY

Some Feminist Questions About the Militarization of Central America

CYNTHIA ENLOE

When you finish writing a book or an essay there is always this curious mix of elation and uneasiness—elation from feeling that you’ve managed to come full circle in your thinking, but uneasiness that you’ve left important puzzles more glaringly unresolved than ever. For my part, since completing Does Khaki Become You?*, an exploration of how and why militaries depend on and attempt to control women, I’ve had a sense that it may be more than just military operations that are gendered; it may be the whole network of power and dependency we call “the international political economy” that is gendered as well.

By the time I had finished doing the research for Khaki, I was aware that not just Cold War cosmologies but also presumptions about sexuality—women’s and men’s—shaped global military basing formulas. I also had been struck time and again by how militaries had depended on the sexual division of labor to launch, and to end, their wars. But after the final pageproofs went off to the publisher, I remained uneasy with an unexamined presumption, that the subjugation of women, for the privilege of men, was not as much a part of the workings of the World Bank as of the militaries that I’d been investigating. I realized that for too long now, explaining the patterns of global power and profit has been dominated by male historians and social theorists who have considered gender irrelevant.


Photo: Susan Meiselas, from “NICARAGUA,” 1981.
The well-known commentators that occupy the stage of almost any critical discussion of imperialism or interventionism apparently believe that there is almost nothing to be gained by looking at women's lives. Emmanuel Wallerstein, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Perry Anderson, Noam Chomsky—some of these men are from the first world, others from the third. Together, they have helped fashion the intellectual tools many of us use to explain how EXXON, NATO, the IMF, and Hollywood have come to distort relations between the world's rich and poor. But they have developed this critical worldview without much consciousness about gender. They almost never ask whether it matters that the Third World's investment-attracting "cheap labor" is made cheap by being feminized. They scarcely ever wonder whether the IMF's standard package of austerity measures, imposed on Third World governments, changes the relations between women and men in those countries. They also seem to believe that the expansion of Third World militaries due to foreign arms sales and the influx of military aid do not depend at all on changing notions of what constitutes "masculine" behavior in those countries or in the donor country. When reading these commentators, we are almost never prompted to try to figure out what the connections might be between international debt, foreign investment, and militarism on the one hand, and rape, prostitution, housework, and wife battering on the other hand. The message one comes away with is that the former are inherently "serious" and "political," whereas the latter are "trivial" and "private."

When we root our political organizing in analyses which disregard gender, feminism can quickly get shrunk to a shadow of its formerly vibrant self. If questions about where women are, or whether ideologies of masculinity and femininity shape power, lose their political relevance, then feminist politics can be limited to challenging sexism inside our own political organizations or creating women's solidarity projects that are only marginally related to the mainstream of an anti-intervention movement.

Surely everything we have revealed in the last twenty years of the women's movement suggests that we should be very wary of any theory that presumes the economic and emotional relations between women and men are outside the pale of serious politics. The practical result of this wariness has been that many of us are dissatisfied today when the male activists of any political movement leave it to the women to take up "women's issues," as if they were peripheral to the movement's central thesis. It seems to me, that what would be helpful in moving beyond those unexamined presumptions about the peripheral role of gender, at least in the anti-intervention movement, is posing some questions about women's lives. Perhaps by asking where women are and what they are doing we can start to imagine what a distinctly feminist analysis of international politics would look like.

**Where Are the Women?**

It seems like such a simple question, why is it so rarely asked? What in fact would we see if we looked at women's lives in Central America and the Caribbean, for example?

One possibility is that we would understand how the policies of the American government and its local allies intensify the hardships of women's lives. If we take women's lives seriously, we cannot assume that local or international politics affect women and men in identical ways. For example, some of the issues named and contested by feminism become visible as integral parts of U.S. intervention policy. The denigration of women intensifies with the U.S. militarization of Central America. There is increased rape and battering. The male role as protector and sexual exploiter is affirmed and extended; prostitution is a mainstay of preserving military organization. More difficult, but equally important, we need to understand the full costs of Nicaraguan militarization to the future of the revolution. While U.S. policy has forced such a mobilization, the way in which the Nicaraguan government views its defense and appeals to its people to join the effort may deepen the power of men over women, as well as endangering democratic goals.

There is also a second possibility. If we keep asking "Where are the women?" we may find that we will have to modify our understanding of the requirements for U.S. policies to succeed.
in the Third World. In other words, it might be that women's lives are worth considering not only for the sake of detailing the impact of militarism and imperialism, but also for the sake of clarifying their basic underpinnings: how U.S. power locks into existing power relations within the countries it seeks to control.

This, in turn, has an impact on how we would rethink our organizing strategy around Central America. For instance, what sorts of campaigns would we launch if we discovered that American corporate executives weighed their overseas investments, not just in terms of profits, but in terms of gender relations; or if we knew that U.S.-Honduran joint military maneuvers depended as much on shared notions of masculinity as they did on shared state paranoia? At this stage we don’t have a fully articulated feminist theory to explain how imperialism and militarism have structured our relations with Central America and the Caribbean. But we do have the makings of such a theory. We do know enough about how power operates inside societies to urge that men-as-men and women-as-women be made visible in any investigation of how power operates between societies.

Colonialism and the Reproduction of Gender

Sugar. Coffee. Cotton. Limes. Cocoa. Bauxite. Rice. Bananas. These are the raw products for which the countries of Central America and the Caribbean are famous. Each has its own peculiar politics. Each has its own history. Most have been nurtured not just by the region's warm climate and rich soil, but by foreign capital and hierarchies of class and skin color. When militaries have been sent into these countries it has usually been to protect those hierarchies and the rewards they have garnered from their control of sugar, coffee, bananas and other products for export.

In the last decades other, less traditional industries have been added: tourism, cattle, garment-making, electronics assembly, oil refining and, most recently, office work.

Both the more traditional and the recently introduced products have been enmeshed in global power struggles from the outset. The colonizing governments (Spain, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, France) and the internationally competitive companies (Gulf and Western, Tate and Lisle, Bookers, United

Fruit, Alcan, Kaiser, Del Monte and Dole) have waxed and waned in their fortunes, have bargained and fought each other, and have withdrawn from some places in order to intervene in others. But remaining constant has been the extreme vulnerability of the local peoples to decisions made outside their own societies.

Most historical accounts we have of these decisions and how Caribbean and Central American people have tried to cope with, or at times resist, these decisions are written as though no one ever had gender on their mind. But is this true? For instance, did British and Spanish colonizers never consider whether female Africans made less valuable slave laborers than male Africans? New work being done in this country by black women historians suggests that it is misleading to imagine that sexist strategies didn't shape the ways in which racism was developed to rationalize and organize slave labor. They suggest that these early uses of sexist strategies have had lasting effects, helping to sustain patriarchal notions within the black communities, notions which present obstacles to effective political action even a century or more after slavery's abolition.

What then of the present day politics of Jamaica, Trinidad, Dominica, Guyana? Until shown otherwise, it seems unwise to theorize about post slavery "plantation societies" of the Caribbean as if women and men experienced slavery in identical ways or as if the politics of post slavery communities were free of the legacies of the colonists' patriarchal strategizing.

Essentially we would be asking how divisions of labor have been constructed, divisions that have made the cultivation of sugar and bananas, for instance, profitable enough that they reaped profits for the overseas companies and their local allies. Furthermore, questions about how racist bases of such profitable divisions are dependent on sexism aren't relevant solely to those countries in the region with histories of slavery. In Central American societies, where colonists' use of African slaves was less prevalent, racism nonetheless was wielded in order to create domestic stratifications of color that served to coopt the Hispanicized and exploit the Indian. Were the formulation and, even more interesting for us today, the persistence of these divisions of Central American labor accomplished without any dependence on sexism?

We have heard a lot about the potency of machismo ideology, about how women in the insurgent movements of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua have had to struggle against the presumption of male privilege inside their own organizations, but we rarely ask how machismo has supported the racist stratifications on which most of the coffee, sugar and banana companies depend for their own operations. We often proceed as if ideologies of male dominance have their place in Central American history, ideologies of Indian inferiority in turn have their place, and never the twain shall meet. Moreover, in most of our political organizing it is the latter that gets treated with more seriousness, as if Hispanicization and its complementary exploitation of Indians is what "really" explains how profits are squeezed out of sugar cane, banana trees or coffee beans. Machismo's role in the process is hardly considered, or, if it is, it is not discussed in ways that could tell us how sexual divisions of labor have been used to support racial and class divisions of labor.

Brazil. Photo: Maria Thereza Alves, reprinted from IKON.
Bananas and Patriarchy

Take the banana. The banana's history is embedded in the history of European colonial expansion and, later, North American neo-colonial control. It is also integrally tied to the ways that women's relations to men have been shaped by local governments and foreign companies, bolstered from time to time by U.S. military intervention. So the banana perhaps is a good place to start in our fashioning of a feminist analysis of American militarization of the region.

The banana is not native to Central America. Its original home was Southeast Asia. By the 1400s the banana had spread westward to become a basic food on the Guinean coast of Africa. When Spanish slavers began raiding the coast and shipping captured Africans to the West Indies and South America, they shipped bananas as well. The banana, then, entered this hemisphere as the slavers' choice of a cheap and popular African staple to feed enslaved women and men. The yellow bananas familiar to North American consumers were not developed as a distinct variety until the 19th century. They were first served at the homes of wealthy Bostonians in 1875. United Fruit's corporate empire, which over the next century came to behave like a surrogate state in much of Central America, grew out of the American popularization of this humble globe-trotting fruit. That marketing success wove an invisible but crucial political link of interdependence between the women of North America and the women of Central America.

In the 1950s United Fruit took the lead in launching a brand name for its own bananas—"Chiquita." Standard Fruit, its chief competitor, followed quickly on its heels with its own brand name—"Cabana." Thus began a marketing way to win the allegiance of the American and European housewife and her local grocer. The goal remains today, to persuade predominantly female consumers that bananas from one company are of higher quality, and possess longer shelf life and greater overall reliability.
The conventional way of thinking about how and why it’s “banana republics” that American officials want to preserve—by force, if necessary—in Central America is one that focuses on class alliances made by United Fruit and Del Monte executives with local political and economic elites on the one hand, and with Washington policy makers on the other. They all have a common stake in keeping banana workers’ wages low and their political consciousness undeveloped. But who are these workers? Pictures that I have seen of Honduran banana worker union members always appear full of men. Do only men work on the major banana plantations, or is it only the male workers who are employed in the banana industry in ways that allow for unionization? Where are the women? One reality is that women do work that makes bananas profitable for this triple alliance of elites, but the work they do (weeding) is so marginalized that they develop a different sort of political consciousness and are excluded from the unions by their fathers and brothers who imagine their conflicts with management more “political”, more “serious.” Another reality is that women do not do any waged work on the plantations of United Fruit or Del Monte, that they are at home doing unpaid subsistence farming, child care and cooking. Feminists in scores of industrialized and Third World countries have revealed how even mining and agricultural operations that recruit only male workers still depend on women’s work. For without women being relegated to doing the hard but unpaid work of subsistence farming and household maintenance the companies would not be able to pay their male workers such low wages. The unpaid work that women do—and the patriarchal assumptions on which that work depends—allows for the survival and reproduction of those paid workers.

Given these realities, the “banana republics” that U.S. militarization is intended to sustain are patriarchal in at least two ways. First, the colonially seeded culture of *machismo* serves to legitimize local class and racial stratifications in ways that make the subjugation of all women perpetuate the inequalities among the country’s men. Second, the gender, class, and ethnic strategies of labor and profit that foreign companies use serve to perpetuate low wages and attenuate union organizing. If we thought these propositions were worth investigating, we would also find how they operate together so as to sustain the kind of internationally dependent, militarized society we have come to call a “banana republic.”

The economies of Central America and the Caribbean have been undergoing important changes during the 1970s and 80s. Most of those changes have been initiated by foreign
corporations and governments in order to rese-
cure their hold on the region. In part because of
the growing militarization and its resultant
social unrest and in part out of their own in-
house global strategies, some of the largest
banana companies are threatening to cut back
their Central American operations. Both Hon-
donias and Nicaragua have been told that coun-
tries such as Ecuador and the Philippines now
look greener for banana operations. The cor-
porate decisions have been reported in terms of
their effects on unemployment in already
fragile Central American economies. Scarcely
anything has been said about what it has meant
for relations between women and men.

If we knew that women and men in Nicara-
gua and Honduras had identical roles in the in-
ternational banana industry, then it would be
superfluous to ask those questions. But we
know this is not the case. Women and men have
been affected by these recent corporate deci-
sions in very different ways. For instance, Hon-
donian peasant women reportedly are trying to
develop cash generating projects such as the
making of straw hats and the processing of
cashew nuts. This is a political development, a
step women are taking to reduce their earlier
dependence on exploitative middlemen, coy-
otes, and to gain some social autonomy as
women. But the pressure to start these new
cooperative projects is also coming from the
gendered ripple effects of the banana com-
panies’ cutbacks. For the unemployed banana
workers are overwhelmingly the men in these
women’s families. Women as mothers and
wives are joining women’s straw hat and
cashew nut cooperatives at least in part to off-
set the decline in household income. But what
are the long range implications of male banana
workers’ unemployment and women’s cash-
producing projects? Will the political pro-
imence of the Honduran banana workers’
union fade? Will Honduran women demand a
larger say in leftist political organizations? It is
not unreasonable to predict that whatever
change or resistance to change does occur will
get played out not in the plaza but in thousands
of peasant homes.

ite. Rice. Bananas. Each deserves consideration
on its own in order to spell out how they are
woven together into an imperialist web over the
last three hundred years. And if we look at how
sexual divisions of labor have been created as
the pillars of these industries we should not ex-
pect to find precisely the same patterns.

Women in the region have been making their
own critiques to address the presumptions of
gender’s political irrelevance or women’s unin-
volvement. For instance, the Jamaican populist
women’s theater collective, Sistren, has created
a play about women sugar workers. They are
reminding Jamaican poor women (and us, as
well) that though Jamaican post-independence
politics has been dominated by men in part
because it was men who led and filled the ranks
of the pre-independence militant sugar workers
unions, the sugar industry was not an all-male
affair. Women too worked to make profits for
the giant British company. Yet they and their
labor have been made politically invisible in
ways that continue to obstruct Jamaican
women’s entry into the nation’s political life.

Similarly, before the U.S. military invasion,
Grenadian women were organizing to make

Young Mother, Ecuador 1975. Photo: Dan Weak.
Reprinted from Radical History Review.
their work in the cocoa industry (a principle export sector) more visible. Grenadian women in the revolutionary movement began to insist that the men take their work seriously. Beyond that, they began developing government policies which would dismantle the sexual divisions of labor on which the island’s cocoa business has relied. These important sexual politics were cut short by the landing of the U.S. Marines. It is likely that the post-invasion Grenadian society is being “developed” on an even more stark sexual division of labor by the expansion of the tourist industry and by the (not terribly successful) attempts by Washington officials to “secure” Grenada by inviting American light industries to establish cost-cutting assembly plants there. Both tourism and light assembly are notoriously feminized industries. The chief political difference between them and the cocoa industry is that women’s cheap labor contribution is a lot harder to make invisible in the former.

A Nation of Chambermaids

As landlessness increases in Central America, women and men may be making quite different choices about how to survive. There is no reason to believe a priori that landlessness is any less gendered than plantation labor. One indication that this is happening is the rising numbers of women migrating from the countryside to the towns to seek jobs as low paid seamstresses and, if they are less lucky, domestic workers. According to one estimate, 64 per cent of all women working for wages in Guatemala City today are employed as domestic workers. Many of these women are Indian women working for Latino families. Many of these women are the sole caretakers of children.

The fact that more Latin American women work in domestic servant jobs than in any other type of waged employment is an important clue to what kind of class transformations are occurring in the 1980s as a consequence of changes in the international economy. Having household servants is one of the most visible signs of having joined the middle class. The push of more and more peasant women out of the countryside, where they no longer can support themselves and their children, and into the towns, where they must accept low paid jobs with minimal workers’ rights, allows more and more Central Americans with relatively secure incomes to imagine that they have arrived in the middle or even upper middle class. For many a man of this class it is an arrival that is accompanied by peculiarly masculine privileges, sexual access to a young rural woman under his own roof who has only minimal resources with which to resist his demands. For the woman of this growing middle class the role of employer —of another woman—may serve to reconfirm her sense of upward mobility and blunt her sense of shared destiny with other, poorer women in her own country.

Simultaneously, prostitution is being integrated into this gendered and globalized political economy. A woman working as a domestic servant may be fired by her employers if she becomes pregnant—by the man of the house who wants to cover up his own actions, or by the woman of the house who prefers to deal with her husband’s “indiscretions” by turning her anger on the victim. Those women, as well as women from the countryside who never were lucky enough to find jobs (or who found jobs in a factory assembling bras or transistor radios only to be laid off soon afterwards), still have children or parents to support. Thus they often turn to the last resort, prostitution.

Our understanding of what changes are occurring in Central America needs to go beyond simply talk of “landless peasants” or “peasant mobilization.” What kind of politics does a woman learn from being the sole caretaker of someone else’s child? What are the understandings about power that come from working as an Indian maid in a Latino home? At what point does sexual harassment by the father or son of that household begin to inspire resistance — resistance supported by whom?

In the Caribbean as well, the resort to domestic work has been a growing trend among poor women. Some of those women have sought domestic servant jobs in their own countries. Thousands of women have migrated to Canada, the U.S. and Europe in search of income with which to support themselves and their children. Some of them have started to
overcome the isolating effects of such work to speak out and to politically organize. In the United States one such organization includes both Caribbean and Central American women, as well as U.S.-born Latina and black women. What would our political analysis look like if we took these domestic workers’ political messages and organizing efforts as seriously as we did those of male activists and social theorists?

Even more striking and noticeable than the increase of domestic work has been the emergency of the tourist industry. Tourism seems to be the Caribbean replacement for the world’s declining sugar demand. Sometimes the shift happens very explicitly, such as in the Dominican Republic last year when Gulf and Western, the hydra-headed American conglomerate, sold off more than 200,000 acres of sugar cane fields to American entrepreneurs who plan to turn the land into tourist havens. Already, by 1984, tourism had leaped ahead of sugar to become the Dominican Republic’s top foreign exchange earner.

Typically, this rapid rise of foreign-capitalized tourism is condemned by critics because it is turning the countries of the Caribbean into “nations of busboys.” That is, it is in the very character of these sprawling Holiday Inn chains to deskill their workers, institutionalize racism and keep crucial decision-making prerogatives in the overseas headquarters. Furthermore, the lengths to which Holiday Inn, Club Med, et al. will go to make their American, Canadian, French, and British patrons comfortable with familiar foods and decor ends up siphoning off whatever foreign exchange the friendly regimes may hope to keep for themselves.

But is it a “nation of busboys” that is replacing the region’s plantation society? Is this the most accurate way for us to make sense of the kind of transformation that is taking place in Grenada, Jamaica, Barbados, the Dominican Republic and other countries that Washington is trying to pull more tightly into its security orbit? Fear of becoming a “nation of busboys” may raise insecurities around manhood to nationalist political mobilizations but it may not reflect the real gender dynamics of tourism.

Observers who bother to put on their gender-glasses note that tourism is a blatantly feminized industry in its lowest ranks. Approximately 75 per cent of all the 250,000 Caribbean
tourism workers are women. Many of these women are seeking hotel jobs in the wake of jobs lost in agriculture. Many women are also in desperate search for income because it has been women who, even more than men, have had to find daily ways of coping with their government's decisions to give in to International Monetary Fund pressure to cut public services and raise food prices. In other words, one way we might understand how the Reagan administration is transforming American influence in the Caribbean is to trace the lines between the decline in foreign-funded agribusiness, the growth of tourism, imposition of the IMF austerity programs, and the spread of US control. It appears that each of these trends, as well as their underlying connections, are illuminated by taking the experiences of Caribbean women—as workers, as copers, and as challengers.

Women and "light industry"

Light industry is the newest economic sector to be opened up in the Caribbean and Central America. Much of this development is based on the lessons derived from Puerto Rico's earlier "Operation Bootstrap," a thoroughly feminized formula that depended on forced sterilization and making women's wages cheap. "Light industry" usually encompasses such labor-intensive forms of manufacture as used in garment and toy manufacture, food processing, and electronics assembly. Taking a page out of the textile industry's history book, light industry's executives have defined their operations' assembly jobs as "unskilled," requiring a high tolerance for repetition, without loss of precision, and thus low-waged and ideal for women.

Reagan's advisors are urging friendly regimes of what they now misleadingly call the "Caribbean Basin" (which includes Central America and Columbia) to accept more light industry foreign investment. The aim is not so much the promotion of Caribbean economic development or even American profits. Rather, the aim is to cement a security alliance between those weaker regimes and the United States with the glue of economic dependency. But this security scheme ultimately won't work unless the local regimes and American investors can attract women workers. This in turn will depend on their success in sustaining those myths of masculinity, femininity, motherhood, skill, and family which together make and keep women's labor cheap. Women who write plays about wife battering, women who risk overseas migration, women who unionize, women who demand more training, women who see single motherhood as a political category—these will not be the sorts of women that will guarantee the success of Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative and the security objectives the CBI is designed to serve.

But along with older light industries, corporate newcomers are taking up Washington's invitation, seemingly sure that the patriarchal myths can be kept alive.

Office work is becoming globalized. American Airlines has been in the forefront, shifting its reservations operations to Barbados. Thanks to the wonders—and cost-effectiveness—of satellite communications, companies in the insurance, banking, credit and...
reservations businesses have begun to look outside the United States for office workers. International lending agencies like the World Bank and the IMF have been enthusiastic. A Washington-based organization called the "Free Zone Authority" is currently urging Jamaica's Seaga regime to open up a "teleport." It has the added attraction of being only a stone's throw from Jamaica's tourist mecca, Montego Bay.

It is clear that it is the feminization of cheap labor, plus the legacy of English language in post-colonial countries, that is making this new stage in the global reach feasible. As one of the off-shore office work boosters told a journalist, "These workers are really good . . . Typing skills are impressive, and accuracy is about 99 per cent." They also can be hired at wage rates far below those paid their American counterparts.

Diana Roos, researcher for the national office of 9 to 5, says that American executives are still weighing alternatives. They are busy comparing the costs, productivity and controllability of three groups of women office workers: American women employed at the companies' own offices; American women contracted to do office work as home work in the suburbs (without the costs of overhead and in a setting that is harder to unionize); finally Caribbean and Asian (especially Indian) women working off-shore.

For American feminists this corporate strategizing presents at least two interlocking challenges. First, politically active office workers and their supporters must find ways to understand these global maneuvers that don't play into the hands of divide and rule union busters. Second, office workers and their supporters here and in countries like Barbados, the Bahamas and Jamaica will have to try to get the attention of women and men active in the anti-intervention movement. In the future, anti-intervention campaigns will have to be shaped out of an awareness of how women in the United States and other countries of the region
are being linked to one another in ways that could serve to smooth the way for Caribbean militarization or, alternatively, could permit them to subvert Washington's grand security scheme.

**Bases and patriarchy**

Feminists in the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand have described in alarming detail just how U.S. military bases have distorted the sexual politics of the countries. A military base isn't simply an instillation for servicing bombers, fighters and aircraft carriers or a launch-pad for aggressive forays into surrounding territories. A military base is also a package of presumptions about male soldier's sexual needs and about the local society's resources for satisfying those needs. Massage parlors are as integral to Subic Bay, the mammoth U.S. naval base in the Philippines, as its dry docks.

If Honduran and Salvadoran women meet with Thai and Filipina women, what common stories would they have to tell? What light would those common stories shed on what it takes for militarization to proceed?

Lucy Komisar, a freelance reporter, has written an account of how sexual politics in Hondurans are being fashioned so as to meet the alleged needs of the American military there. Komisar went to visit the shanty town of brothels that has grown up near the Palmerole military base, one of the bases used by the U.S. military in its series of “Big Pine” joint maneuvers. She found Honduran women serving as prostitutes to both Honduran and American soldiers. Her report revealed in microcosm what Honduran public health officials have noted more generally: that there has been a notable rise in the cases of venereal disease in Honduras in the three years since the start of U.S. military build-up. Hondurans refer to the particularly virulent strain of vd as “Vietnam Rose.” While the nickname once again wrongly blames the victim, it suggests that Hondurans see the Vietnamization of their country in terms of sexuality as well as money and hardware.

Lucy Komisar lets us hear from some of the people behind the statistics. First there are the young Honduran women, as young as 16 years old, who have been virtually kidnapped and brought to the brothels as captives. One woman who tried to escape was caught and returned by Honduran policemen. There are other women who on the surface seem to have come to the
brothels “freely,” driven by the need for money. They split their fees with the owners of the shabby cantinas where they conduct their business. But many of the women living on the fringes of the base fall somewhere in between. They have been drawn so deeply into debt to the men who supply their food and minimal housing that they never seem able to pay off their debts and gain their freedom.

The men involved are both American and Honduran. Komisar found that local policemen acted as the enforcers of the prostitution system. They in turn are controlled by Honduran army officers, a reflection of the growing capacity of the military to intimidate other Honduran institutions. American men involved are from both the enlisted and officer ranks. It may be the construction of militarized masculinity that is most responsible for American enlisted men’s belief that one of the prerogatives due an American male GI overseas is the sexual services of local women. It’s not clear yet how this presumption is being affected by the fact that, unlike Vietnam where most American military women were nurses, in Honduras American field units include several dozen women soldiers. So far the most common complaint that these women have had is that they have not been issued proper sanitary supplies. But where do American women soldiers go for their “R and R” when their male comrades head for the cantinas?

It would be wrong to imagine that this sort of sexual exploitation is sustained solely by Honduran military intimidation and diffuse American patriarchal culture. As is true in other base towns around the world, the system requires explicit American policy making. Komisar reports, for example, that it is American army doctors from the Palmerole base who routinely conduct medical exams on Honduran women working in the nearby brothels. Their job is to insure that American male soldiers will get access to the sex they want without jeopardizing the army’s operational readiness.

The Militarization of Gender

In our attempt to discover just how much militarization is a gendered process, that is, a process that won’t “work” unless men will accept certain norms of masculinity and women will abide by certain strictures of femininity, we might consider three other dynamics in addition to military prostitution. The first is rape. The second is military recruitment. The third is the ideology of national security. How far are each of these necessary for the American-sponsored militarization of the Caribbean and Central America in the 1980s? How far is each of these dependent not just on notions of gender but on patriarchal relations?


We can only be suggestive here, but we might at least raise the level of genuine political curiosity. For instance, it seems remarkable that there hasn’t been more curiosity, more committed political questioning about why male soldiers’ rapes of civilian women have been so widespread in Central America. Typically rape is listed among an assortment of repressive acts, as if rape were not qualitatively different both in its motivations and its repercussions. But in fact why do male soldiers in
Guatemala or Contra soldiers in Nicaragua engage in sexual assault on women so insistently? Is it one more product of masculinity militarized? Is it part of some self-conscious officer-level policy of intimidation? Of whom? Of the women themselves or of their husbands, sons, and fathers whose sense of male honor is tied up in their capacity to protect “their” women? Guatemalan army commanders have been quoted as saying that killing Indian women and children is part of a deliberate strategy of counter insurgency: the foundation of the Indian guerrillas organization is seen to be the “family nuclei”: therefore, whole families have to be murdered if the insurgency was to be crushed. But this still doesn’t explain the sorts of rapes and sexual tortures of women that soldiers engage in before they murder Indian women. Are we witnessing men acting as men or men acting as soldiers? Are we seeing men acting out of control or men acting in control? Some Latin American feminists now believe that we are seeing men’s masculinity being militarized for the sake of the controlled militarization of the larger society. If this is true, then we will have to focus our political energies here in the U.S. much more on finding out how soldiers are trained, what are the sexual assumptions woven into our soldiers’ training and the training we provide soldiers and police of other countries.

We will also have to listen more carefully to women and men in El Salvadoran and Guatemalan insurgent movements. Have the experiences of rape, direct and indirect, had different effects on their political mobilization? It may well be that a woman who herself has suffered rape by a government soldier or who has seen her mother or sister raped will think about power and injustice rather differently than her male comrades who either have not been politicized by rape at all or who have, but assign different meanings to that indirect experience.

Then there are the gendered politics of military manpower. When I hear that Barbados is expanding its military manpower, here are some of the things I wonder about. I wonder how it is that Barbadian standards of masculinity can be transformed so that the cricket player can be overtaken by the soldier (or the militarized policeman). Not all societies, and certainly not most of those in the Caribbean and even some in Central America (e.g., Costa Rica), so merge soldiering and manhood that

they become almost indistinguishable. Certainly it makes the military recruiter’s task easier if to be a soldier proves a man is masculine. But the two are analytically and historically separable. If they weren’t, governments would not need to waste their credibility by trying to enforce conscription laws.


So when the Reagan administration sets out to urge governments in the Caribbean and Central America to increase their numbers of soldiers it is asking them to engage in some tricky cultural maneuvers. Unless those regimes can count on young men enlisting simply to escape the despair of unemployment or the threat of repression—and both of these are available to Caribbean and Central American recruiters—they will also have to convince their male citizens that soldiering is the ultimate proof of manhood after all. They will also have to convince women in their countries that men who join the newly expanding armies are more genuinely “real men” than are men able to get decent civilian jobs. What is happening to Barbarian and Costa Rican women’s beliefs about masculinity? Are they changing in ways that will ease Washington’s militarizing plans? If women in these countries are resisting such cultural changes, then it is likely that their alienation from their governments, and possibly from the men in their lives as well, is intensifying.

Finally, we could perhaps understand militarization better if we looked at how “national security” is defined and how it is gendered. I think it is useful to try to figure out just how much militarization of any society requires its citizens to rethink what they need to feel secure. Feminists who have studied European and North American societies in wartime have shown the huge differences between the beliefs of men and women about what they need to feel safe. They have also revealed how governments intent upon legitimizing their expanded wartime powers have used propaganda emphasizing women’s need for protection and men’s duty to serve as protectors to win that legitimation.

There’s strong reason to believe that some of the same efforts might be needed if Caribbean and Central American regimes are to gain their people’s acceptance of the larger manpower quotas, greater security budgets, wider emergency powers, and more foreign bases on their soil that Washington is fostering. Does this mean that the U.S.-fueled militarization of these countries is dependent on an even more entrenched version of machismo? This may not be easy in the 1980s. Today there are more women in these countries raising children on their own, farming on their own, learning how to read and write for themselves, joining crafts cooperatives. These are not the sort of experiences that will encourage women to accept national security doctrines that portray them as the objects of male protection.

Sometimes when I think of U.S. militarization of Central America and the Caribbean I imagine a big map showing women in all these countries with arrows arising from some of us directed towards others of us. It becomes a visual portrayal of how the militarism of the United States and other countries need us all to behave as women. Otherwise their militarizing goals won’t be achieved. They need some
American women to feel protected by a massive arms build-up and by their sons and husbands in uniform. They need wives of soldiers to accept the extra duties of household maintenance when their husbands are on maneuvers in Honduras and El Salvador without worrying too much about the rumors they've heard about the Honduran brothels. They need some—not too many—American women to view the military as the place to prove their equality with men. Still, among American women, the military needs some Latinas, maybe new arrivals from war-torn Central America, to work in Silicon Valley's electronic factories making the latest electronic weaponry and other Latinas to see their boyfriends answering the army recruiter's call as a step toward Americanization.

In Central America and the Caribbean, militarization seems to require women to work for low wages for foreign companies or to support those companies' low-paid male workers by performing family work that is rewarded with no pay at all. It also requires women to do the stress-inducing juggling of household budgets so that the government can cut their social service budgets in order to live up to agreements with the IMF. If local poor women can't manage this demanding task, or if they refuse to privatize their economic struggles and instead take to the streets, then the U.S. fostered militarization will be jeopardized by faltering local governments.

As I think about this map the arrows become more dense, the connections between women more subtle and complex. But what this suggests is that we have just begun to understand how the relations between women and between women and men—in movements, in families, on military bases, on plantations—are the prerequisites for American-promoted militarization. Even with the fragmentary clues we now have we should be able to insist that gender in general and patriarchy in particular be made central topics in any movement dedicated to rolling back militarization.
The Spanish empire crumbled in the early 19th century, and Central America became independent in 1823. At first it was formally one united country, but by 1840 the five provinces (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) had all gone their separate ways.

In each country, politics had the same pattern: Liberals vs. Conservatives. The Liberals looked to Britain and the U.S. as models of economic progress (which they valued above everything else), while the Conservatives wanted a strong Church and a continuation of Spanish colonial traditions.

Francisco Morazán from Honduras and Justo Rufino Barrios from Guatemala were two important Liberal leaders who worked hardest for a united Central America. Under both Liberals and Conservatives, however, there was an immense gulf between rich and poor. The two parties simply spoke for two different groups within the privileged classes.

Into the middle of the Central American political struggles rode the North American adventurer William Walker, “the grey-eyed man of destiny.” He came to Nicaragua in 1855 as the head of a ragtag army of mercenaries under a contract from the local Liberal party.

Soon Walker was ruling the country, at first in alliance with the Liberals and then as a front man for southern United States slaveowners who wanted to annex Nicaragua as a slave state. Walker restored slavery, which had been abolished when Central America got its independence from Spain.

Walker’s government was recognized by the U.S., but he was defeated by the united armies of the four other Central American countries in 1857. He returned to a hero’s welcome in New Orleans, and later tried several other expeditions to Central America before being executed in Honduras in 1860.

WILLIAM WALKER (inset) began his campaigns in Nicaragua at the Battle of Rivas, 1855.
Coffee and bananas became important in Central America in the late 19th century. The best lands in the highlands (especially in El Salvador) were turned into coffee plantations. Displaced peasants, faced with starvation, planted and picked the coffee at extremely low wages.

On the Atlantic coast, U.S. companies gained huge tracts of land, mainly for growing bananas. Like the coffee owners, they paid low wages and made high profits. They dominated the local governments, especially in Honduras.

The United States became the most powerful foreign nation in Central America (replacing Britain) by the early 20th century. One country, Nicaragua, became a virtual American colony. The U.S. sent Marines there in 1909-10 to depose one government and install another, and then sent Marines again in 1912. This time they stayed until 1933.

An American coffee planter in Nicaragua wrote to the Secretary of State in 1931 that “Today we are hated and despised. This feeling has been created by employing the American marines to hunt down and kill Nicaraguans in their own country.”

In fighting against the legendary Nicaraguan guerrilla Augusto Sandino from 1927 to 1933, the U.S. forces used aerial bombing for the first time in the history of the Western Hemisphere, but they still could not capture or defeat Sandino. Eventually, opposition in Congress forced the Marines' withdrawal.
While U.S. troops were still in Nicaragua, they set up the flamboyant Anastasio "Tacho" Somoza as head of a new army called the National Guard. Not long after the Marines left, Somoza tricked the guerrilla leader Sandino into coming to the capital under a flag of truce, and had him killed. He soon made himself president.

By the time Somoza died of an assassin's bullet in 1956, he had made Nicaragua into a kind of private estate; he even owned nearly 1/6 of the country's land. His sons Luis and Anastasio, Jr. ("Tachito") held on to his power and added to the family fortune until "Tachito" was overthrown by popular revolution in 1979. His wealth was then estimated at a half-billion dollars—in a country where the average person got $700 a year in total income.

THE SOMOZA DYNASTY in Nicaragua was founded by Anastasio Somoza in the 1930s.

From 1944 to 1954 Guatemala, the biggest Central American country, enjoyed freely elected reform-minded governments under presidents Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz. They tried to make the country's Indian majority a real part of the nation's life.

The Arbenz government got in trouble with the U.S. when its land reform touched the mammoth United Fruit Company. The CIA formed a mercenary army which overthrew the elected government in July 1954. Guatemala has been ruled by the military ever since.

continued
The Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua finally came to an end on July 19, 1979. It was not easy: the National Guard fought so brutally that between 40,000 and 50,000 Nicaraguans died in the struggle.

The most powerful force in the new government was the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, which had led the armed rebellion. The “Sandinistas” insisted that a real social revolution, not just a change of governments, was needed.

With the aid of tens of thousands of volunteers, a massive literacy drive raised the percentage of adult Nicaraguans who could read and write from around 50% to 88%. The new government also dramatically improved health care, abolished capital punishment, and encouraged labor unions.
Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, shot while saying mass on March 24, 1980, was one of over 40,000 civilians killed by the military forces of his country. He was killed by a “death squad” the day after he called on Salvadoran soldiers to refuse to take part in the killing of unarmed civilians.

El Salvador is in some ways the most economically “developed” of all Central American countries, despite the terrible poverty in which most of its people live. It has a prosperous ruling elite, based on industry as well as export agriculture, that is determined to hold onto power. As strikes and demonstrations by urban workers and landless peasants grew in the 1970s, and a guerrilla movement began to flourish in the countryside, the Salvadoran military embarked on a repression which, after 1979, became mass murder.

Under the Reagan administration, the U.S. has given full support to the Salvadoran military. Most recently, the U.S. has been providing the planes, fuel, and training for an aerial bombing campaign that seems to be aimed at wiping out villages whose people sympathize with the guerrillas. U.S. pilots fly reconnaissance in this air war, in which 40 tons of bombs are dropped every month on a country the size of Massachusetts.

Thousands of Central American military officers have gotten U.S. training, mainly in the “School of the Americas” set up in 1950. During the 1980s, however, the U.S. has gone far beyond training.

Honduras, the poorest Central American country, suddenly has over a half-dozen U.S. bases. While money is lavished on military reconstruction, Honduran hospitals run out of such basic supplies as aspirin tablets for lack of funds.

Meanwhile, military aid to El Salvador has risen dramatically, and the U.S. has pressured Costa Rica (the most peaceful Central American country) to create an army. Military aid has been resumed to Guatemala, whose military rulers have killed an estimated 100,000 civilians since 1954. And the Reagan administration has created its own makeshift army, the “contras,” to carry out terrorism inside Nicaragua.

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AT ARMS LENGTH
Feminism and Socialism
In Europe, 1890-1920

MARIE KENNEDY AND CHRIS TILLY

The three decades following 1890 saw the growth of European socialism and feminism from collections of sects led by intellectuals to mass movements committed to political action. It might appear that these years offered a unique opportunity for the two powerful movements to work together. On the surface, it appeared that the two emancipatory ideologies and movements had much in common.

The socialists of the Second International (1889-1914) held that socialism would lead to the liberation of women as well as workers. "Women and the workingman have since long ago had this in common — oppression . . . There can be no emancipation of humanity without the social independence and equality of the sexes," stated August Bebel in the introduction of what was probably the most widely circulated socialist text of the time on the "woman question," Woman under Socialism. Similarly, many feminists called for a sweeping change in society. Hedwig Dohm, a German feminist, in an 1876 pamphlet, hailed "the struggle between the old gods and a new race of mankind. The god which must be overcome is that of monopoly, from whose almighty power the kingdom, the State, the Church, the classes and the sexes, draw their privileges, and which always supports and favours might. . . . The center of this action is Women’s Suffrage." Beyond the rhetoric, both

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Friedrich Seidenstucker, Germany, 1925.
socialists and feminists actively sought to organize and mobilize working class women.

But the apparent opportunity for coalition was not seized. The socialist movement and the women’s movement failed to make common cause. On the one hand, men remained the vast majority of the socialist militants. While the rights of women enjoyed mention in the program of most socialist groups, only a small minority of women and men made struggles for these rights a priority. On the other hand, the bulk of women mobilized within the feminist movement were middle class. The demands of the women’s movement remained determinedly reformist, despite the adoption of increasingly militant tactics in Britain and other countries. Many of the feminist groups made anti-working class arguments a part of their arguments for women’s suffrage and moral reform. Socialist and feminist groups became bitter enemies.

The opportunity for coalition in Europe — if opportunity there was — passed. By 1920, the socialist movement had splintered. The wing that formed the international majority had yielded its earlier radical visions and taken up a reformism which included little concern with women’s issues; the minority was too immersed in narrowly defined class struggle and the making of revolution to see women’s liberation as a central concern; and large numbers of socialists simply left the movement in confusion and disillusionment. The feminist movement had won its central demand — women’s suffrage — in a number of countries. But throughout Europe this victory was followed by demobilization and conservatism in the women’s movement.

We pose two questions here. Why didn’t these two movements for liberation find more ground for common work during the three decades of activity that followed 1890? Failing that, why didn’t socialist feminism develop beyond limited forms within the socialist movement? The answers to these questions are important to those of us who seek to combine socialism and feminism today. The interrelationship of class and gender raises theoretical and strategic questions which are unresolved in the history of the socialist and feminist movements in the three European countries we look at: Germany, Britain, and France. Where possible, we attempt to generalize and draw parallels across the three countries; mindful however that the histories are quite distinct.

Feminism as a Liberal Ideology

The women and men who made up the feminist movement in Europe around the turn of the century stood for a politics that was decidedly neither working class nor socialist. Feminists embraced the liberal ideals of individual responsibility for one’s actions, equality before the law, free competition on the basis of merit, civic and professional activity as part of the rights and duties of citizens — but tended to overlook the economic and social barriers that made these ideas inaccessible for working class women.

Where documentation is available, it appears that most of the leaders and many of the members of bourgeois feminist groups were from the middle class.4 Leisured women, housewives, professionals and teachers filled the ranks of the women’s movement. Virtually all of the leading figures had family ties to anticlericalism and/or Republicanism in France, left-wing liberalism in Germany, and liberalism or Labor politics in Britain. Feminism, it seems arose out of the contradiction between

Madeleine Pelletier.
the prevalent liberal ideology of individual rights and achievement, and the growing freedom of middle class men to act in accord with this ideology in terms of themselves, while restricting middle class women’s roles to wife, mother, and, sometimes, teacher. But nineteenth century feminists added something to liberal ideology: the notion that women would bring some special moral quality into civic and political life. French feminist Maria Deraismes stated this clearly: “By her constitution and the nature of her mandate . . . [woman is] the moral and pacific agent par excellence.” The theme recurred throughout the history of European feminism. Most of the feminists had little use for class-based socialism. Deraismes declared, 

Certainly it is not impossible to seize riches violently, but what remains inalienable, indivisible, immovable are the sources that produce them: talent, genius, knowledge, character, beauty, health, etc. These are riches that cannot be expropriated and cannot be held in common.6

Yet Hubertine Auclert, founder of the French suffragist movement, rejected this view and called as early as 1879 for a united front between socialists and feminists. However, her position remained an individual one never accepted by the vast majority of the French women’s movement. Auclert’s successors in the French Union for Women’s Suffrage aligned themselves with the Radical Party (a liberal, reformist party).

Similarly, in Germany, the feminists remained aloof from the German Social Democratic Party, and instead built ties with a variety of liberal parties. In Britain, where the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (the main feminist coalition of its time) was linked to the parliamentary Labor Party as well as the Liberals, this alliance was possible in part because Labor was itself quite liberal and reformist.

Finally, most of the demands of the feminist movement were of special interest to middle class women. Early feminist demands in all three countries focused on issues such as access of women to education and the professions, and the right of married women to own separate property. The anti-prostitution movement, which swept from Britain to France and Germany at the turn of the century, attacked state regulation of prostitutes, rather than demanding, as socialists did, that prostitutes be given
an economic alternative. The call for women’s suffrage marked common ground for women of all classes; however, the mainstream British suffragists consistently supported a property-based franchise, and by 1914 the vast majority of German suffragists had come around to the same position. Finally, bourgeois feminists in all three countries consistently opposed protective legislation for women workers, on the basis that it undermined progress toward gender equality. “Special treatment” for women in the factories appeared to the feminists to conflict with their demands for equal status in the professions.

In France and Germany, the liberal women’s movement never attained this level of working class participation — but there was no lack of well-intentioned outreach efforts. French feminists made a series of attempts to win over working class women between 1889 and 1900, and they actively supported unionization of women. But a contemporary observer commented, “The feminists have a paternalistic attitude towards working women . . .” Marguerite Durand, a wealthy feminist who published La Fronde, the world’s first feminist daily newspaper, explained in 1900, “Working women are the only ones yet to have shown bravery . . . it is they who will make the revolution for their bourgeois sisters.” To explain her own role, she added, “But what good are arms which flail about when there are no brains to guide them?”

Durand founded three unions — all company unions for the employees of La Fronde. Furthermore, she encouraged the members of her typographer’s union to take the jobs of striking printers in Nancy, since the printers had barred them from membership in the male printers’ union. As historian Charles Sowerwine points out, “The women had a good case: just before the strike, the male syndicat had obtained the ouster of a number of women typographers from a Parisian newspaper. But to most unionists, the action of going to Nancy constituted scabbing.” The demands of gender and class clashed. Durand’s choice was clear; the choice for French working class women was more clouded.

At the 1900 International Congress on the Condition and Rights of Women, organized by Durand and other leading feminists, the conflicts between working women and mainstream feminists became evident. Working women asked for a resolution proposing one day off a week for domestics; the bourgeois women protested. Middle class women objected to the inspection of the hours of work of minors, on the basis that “If you protect minors, no one will want to employ them and the result will be a great quantity of girls driven into prostitution.” Bourgeois delegates repeatedly attributed the problems of working class women to the drunkenness, laziness, and unfaithfulness of working class men. At the end

Feminism and Working Class Women

All of this is not to say that the feminist movement failed completely to include or reach out to working class women. In Britain, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies included some branches composed mainly of unionized working women, although these women were far outnumbered by middle class women in the Union as a whole. Working women saw the vote as a way of extending the power they had built up through unionization.
of the conference, feminist leader Maria Pognon accused the socialist delegates present of trying to create “a wall of hatred” between bourgeois and proletarian women.11

In Germany, class barriers were equally strong. Feminists made some efforts to bridge the gap with charity, if not solidarity. The German Union for Women’s Suffrage classified the poor with defenseless children and animals: “[The movement for] Women’s Suffrage opposes the exploitation of the economically and physically weak, it takes pity on children and tormented animals, it makes laws against cruelty to animals and the exploitation of their working strength to exhaustion.” In 1912, when the Berlin branch of the Suffrage Union held the first public procession to support suffrage in Germany, “A working class woman came up and said ‘How nice it is that rich ladies should want to work for us now!’ She received the reply that the suffragists were all working women who wanted to do their best to help their poorer sisters.”12 But by 1914 the Suffrage Union had turned to supporting a property condition on the vote for women — hardly a position designed to inspire working class support.

Socialism and Women

While feminists remained ambivalent about the role of the working class, the socialist movement moved to place that class in the center of its strategy. But the class-based socialists, who dominated the socialist movement from the late nineteenth century onwards, fell short of merging socialism and feminism in two ways. First, the leading socialist line on “the Women Question” held out a relatively narrow vision of the scope of women’s liberation, and subordinated that liberation to class struggle. Second, the official socialist commitment to women’s equality often remained a dead letter in the practice of most socialist adherents.

The socialists took in a whole gamut of positions on women’s liberation. At one end of the spectrum was the extreme anti-feminism and misogyny of English Social Democratic Federation leader Belfort Bax, who classified women as “midway between the child and the adult male” in biological, intellectual, and moral development, and concluded that “True equality involves that division of functions between the sexes best adapted for furthering the general

A family in the East End of London, 1912.
well-being." Marxism was used by Bax, and by many others who were less flagrantly anti-
woman, as a justification for ignoring women’s oppression and pursuing only class demands.

At the other extreme was Madeleine Pelletier, a doctor who died imprisoned in a French men-
tal hospital for performing abortions. Pelletier traveled through the range of socialists and
anarchist organizations in France between 1906 and 1930, searching in vain for links between a
revolutionary socialism and radical feminism that embraced reproductive rights as well as
women’s suffrage. She finally concluded that feminism had to be the top priority, above
other social struggles.14

The prototypical class-based socialist view was first espoused by Karl Marx and Frederick
Engels, and further elaborated by August Bebel and Clara Zetkin. Marx adopted the notion ad-
vanced by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier that the position of women was a measure of
the level of development of society. He and Engels made analogies between the exploitation
of women and that of the proletariat. In early works such as The Holy Family (1845) and the
Communist Manifesto (1848), they denounced the hypocrisy and oppression inherent in the
bourgeois family. Marx believed that capitalism’s tendency to draw women (and indeed children) into socialized production laid the basis for future equality. This tendency, he wrote in Capital, “by assigning as it does an im-
portant part in the process of production to women, young persons, and to children of both
sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of family and of relations between
the sexes.”15 However, Marx tended to negate this insight by conceptualizing the working
class as a collection of male breadwinners who supported their families.

Engels, in his 1884 work The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, used
anthropological evidence to argue that the oppr
ession of women originated with private
property, and that women’s subordinate posi-
tion has evolved with the economic organiza-
tion of society, which includes both “on the
one side, the production of the means of ex-
istence . . . ; on the other side, the production
of human beings themselves, the propagation
of the species.”16

Appearing six years before Engels’ book, but
presenting many of the same ideas in more
popular form, was Bebel’s Woman Under
Socialism. Bebel, a national leader of the Ger-
man Social Democratic Party (SPD) reviewed
the development of women’s status through
history. Like the proletariat, he said, women
were oppressed by capitalism. And like the pro-
letariat, they would only be liberated through
socialism. Bebel explicitly supported granting
the vote and full political rights to women, as a
necessary step in educating and mobilizing them.
Indeed, he expressed support for a full range of
women’s rights, including the right to sexual
satisfaction.

Finally, in 1889, Clara Zetkin of the SPD
connected theory with strategy in The Question
of Women Workers and Women at the Present
Time. She reiterated the claim that women’s en-
try into the industrial workforce created the
possibility of women’s emancipation. Female
labor in industry was both inevitable and pro-
gressive in its effects. But only socialism could
carry out the full liberation of women. "The first essential step in this direction was to organize the industrial woman worker, to educate her politically and economically, and to bring her into solidarity with the men of her class." It is important to note that although in practice Zetkin held that women should organize women, she did not theoretically put women in charge of their own liberation; women were to be mobilized for socialism, which in turn would liberate women.

Women’s Liberation and Socialist Strategy

Unfortunately, the emphasis on class in socialism brought with it a discounting of the strategic importance of women’s liberation, and particularly the importance of struggles in the personal sphere. From Marx to Zetkin, all the theorists agreed that women’s oppression was a subordinate part of the social (i.e. class) question.

This meant, first of all, that many socialist feminists refused to work with bourgeois feminists. Zetkin ruled out collaboration with the liberal feminists in Germany, and Louise Saumoneau shaped the French socialist women’s movement in accord with an even more extreme version of Zetkin’s view. A 1901 statement of the Socialist Feminist Union which was probably authored by Saumoneau declares, "Our direct adversaries are those men and women who . . . want in the name of a so-called sex struggle to enroll . . . the women of the proletariat, in order to make them auxiliaries of the women of the bourgeois class." The continuing contact between French socialist women and bourgeois feminists confirmed these inclinations. There were sensible reasons for refusing to work with bourgeois feminists in Germany as well. Zetkin complained that "The German feminists up to now [1900] have proven to be so muddle-headed, wishy-washy, weak . . . " (German feminists did not even demand the vote until 1902.) Zetkin’s colleague Ottilie Baader expressed doubt that the liberal feminists would ever be willing to cooperate with the socialists, and added,

"The area of our propaganda extends to the whole proletariat — large enough for our most strenuous efforts. Association with the bourgeois women’s movement would have divisive and confusing effects. The great mass of our female workers are not yet so self-confident that they feel as equals vis-a-vis the society ladies." But these practical considerations were frequently linked to the denial that there could be issues that united all women — the class division was simply too deep. Indeed, sometimes this concern led socialist feminists to downplay the conflicts between proletarian men and women. "Zetkin asserted that since men and women in the working class had no wealth, they rejected men’s privileged position in the family."

The bottom line was that when it came to a choice between the perceived needs of women and those of the working class, the working class took precedence. The suffrage issue provided one arena where these choices came up. La Femme Socialiste (Socialist Woman), published by Saumoneau, lauded the Belgian socialist women who dropped the demand for women’s suffrage in order to aid their party’s campaign for universal manhood suffrage: "These women, by placing above their own individual rights the interest of the Worker Party [which] is at the same time the interest of the proletariat of both sexes, have given all socialists an admirable example of solidari-
The British Labor Party, except for brief intervals, refused to support extension of the vote to women on the same basis as men (i.e. with property qualifications), fearing that such a measure would enfranchise propertied women who would vote Conservative. They advocated universal adult suffrage rather than “women’s suffrage first,” in spite of the massive support for women’s suffrage which included many socialists and unionists who saw it as the first step towards adult suffrage. The SPD was not forced into a hard choice between women’s suffrage first and adult suffrage, since there was in Germany no massive cross-class suffrage movement of the British type. They consistently agitated and voted for adult suffrage, and denounced expedient compromises of the kind made in Belgium.

Revolutionaries such as Zetkin in Germany and Saumoneau in France did fight for the right of women to unionize and to vote. However, these women tended to frown on attempts to reform the sexual division of labor or relations between the sexes — these were matters to be dealt with after the establishment of socialism.

The reformist socialists tended to be more hospitable to short-term reforms of various kinds in the position of women. British socialist women struggling for birth control reforms, from Annie Besant in the 1880s to Stella Browne in the 1920s, worked better with the Fabians and the Labor Party rather than the more orthodox Social Democratic Federation or the Communist Party of Great Britain. Within the German SPD, the reformist Lily Braun’s proposal to socialize housework by cooperative household arrangements was consistent with her vision of building “islands of socialism”; revolutionaries held that this work was a diversion. Unlike Zetkin, who denied a conflict of interest between proletarian men and women, Braun openly declared that the working class woman would have to struggle with the man within the family, because “the bourgeois philistine morality was so deeply ingrained in him.”

But while the reformists may have been more tolerant of these proposals, on the whole they devoted little thought to radically transforming sex roles and the family. Socialists both revolu-
tionary and reformist resolutely championed women's equality and their freedom to take part in all aspects of public life, but their image of women's specificity was generally quite Victorian: woman's nature was that of mother, nurturer, teacher. Common among many reformist socialists was a romanticization of women's "hemaker" role. "Women's final battle for freedom," wrote Katharine Bruce Glasier of the Independent Labor Party in 1914, "— what is it but the battle for the chance to do their own and mother work very well?" The reformists who took control of the SPD women's section in 1917 channeled the socialist women's movement into municipal welfare work.

Finally, even where theory was egalitarian, practice — especially the practice of most socialist men — did not follow suit. A German police agent commented on the SPD in 1907: "Most male comrades are not at all convinced of the future society with its abolition of the private home and prefer to keep their wives in the family and the domestic sphere, rather than see them step into the political arena to the neglect of their home." Male socialists countered socialist-feminist criticism with belittling humor, as in SPD member Ignaz Auer's jibe at Clara Zetkin in 1896: "If that is the oppressed sex, then what on earth will happen when they are free and enjoy equal rights?" Especially after the split in the Second International and the adoption by the communist parties of tightly disciplined Leninist forms of organization, the reformist parties were more flexible than the revolutionary parties: they allowed more latitude in the ideology and practice of their members. On the one hand, this resulted in a lower overall commitment to women's struggles in the reformist parties; on the other hand, the latitude allowed socialist feminists to find political spaces within which they were able to work.

A final measure of the limits of socialist feminism is that the socialist parties organized women in much smaller numbers than men. Among the socialist groups we are examining, the German Social Democratic Party reached the highest female enrollment, at 16 per cent (175,000 women) in 1914. The French socialist movement trailed with an estimated 2 to 3 per cent women.
Socialist Feminist Movements: Successes and Failures

In Germany, Britain, and France, socialist women's movements were built in different forms and encountered different fortunes.

In Germany, the working class women's movement was exclusively linked to the SPD. The movement grew to become the largest socialist women's movement in Europe, for three reasons. First, women were banned from participating in political organizations before 1908, so that the socialist women's organization was compelled to remain functionally separate from the party. This allowed the socialist women to work out forms of activity designed to attract and accommodate women. Second, the SPD was blessed with outstanding women leaders such as Zetkin, who enjoyed the support of Bebel and other party leaders, and who drew on a relatively rich German socialist theoretical legacy of attention to the women question, exemplified by the work of Engels, Bebel, and Zetkin. Third, the German socialist feminists articulated women's issues within what historian Jean Quataert calls a "tight class framework." This made the feminism acceptable to male socialists, and allowed the SPD women's section to address a wide range of issues affecting working women.

Each strength was associated with a weakness. When it became legal to merge male and female sections of the party in 1908, socialist feminists were no longer able to maintain the autonomy of a women's movement. Furthermore, the years in separation (and the constraints of operating under the eyes of a police force prepared to disband any explicitly "political" organization of women) had hardened a distinction between "political" issues and "women's" issues that carried over into the unified party, resulting in the trivialization of women's issues.32

The central role of Clara Zetkin and her associates became problematic as the majority of the SPD shifted to reformist views. Zetkin and the women's movement as a whole came under attack as a stronghold of radicalism in the party. Zetkin and other leading socialist women left the SPD in 1917 to help form the German Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) — taking with them the majority of the socialist women's movement — but they never again had the kind of base that existed in 1914.

Finally, the hard shell of narrowly conceived class analysis blocked socialist action on important issues such as birth control or household cooperatives. It set the stage for the resubmergence of women's issues beneath urgent class issues of governance and revolution taken up by the SPD on the one hand and the USPD, and later the German Communist Party (KPD) on the other, during the Weimar years following 1918.

*Meeting of striking clothiers and tailors, Paris 1901, on front page of "Young Parisian."
The French socialist movement subordinated sex to class even more strictly than did the SPD, but lacked the features that attracted women to the German party. France was not favorable terrain for socialist feminism. The anti-feminist views of Proudhonism had a strong hold on the French working class. Also, the French republic appeared fragile. Even the mainstream feminists of the late 19th century held back from supporting female suffrage, fearing that conservative, church-dominated women’s votes would bring down the republic. Many socialists used the same reasoning; at the same time, they increasingly looked to electoral activity (from which women were excluded) as a source of power.

Perhaps even more important, the French socialists believed that the principle of equality precluded the special or separate treatment of women in the party. When the various French socialist factions united into the French section of the Second International (SFIO) in 1905, they did not feel it necessary to form a party women’s group — and did not do so until eight years later. The ascendency of Louise Saumoneau as the key socialist women’s leader reflected and deepened this determination to relegate women’s issues and needs to secondary status. Although Saumoneau worked to organize working women, she firmly opposed any special status for women in the party, and basically saw working women as simply a special group of workers. The result of all these factors was that French socialism attracted few women during this period.

Britain, unlike Germany and France, had a strong bourgeoisie and a history of early transition to democracy. The bourgeoisie was able to maintain hegemony through democratic forms, and to incorporate many reforms demanded by the working class into the structure of capitalism. In short, Britain had a relatively large political space for liberalism, which substantial portions of the feminist movement and the socialist movement jointly inhabited.

The greatest confluence of socialist and feminist politics in Britain took place during the great women’s suffrage campaign of the 1900s. The two most clearly defined centers of the British socialist movement, the Social Democratic Federation and the Parliamentary Labor Party, did not work with the women’s suffrage movement (except in the case of Labor, during limited periods). But there was a large working class suffrage movement that included male and female members of the Independent Labor Party, trade unions, cooperatives, and indeed even members of the Social Democratic Federation and the Parliamentary Labor Party. The socialism that permeated this
movement was a native, pragmatic strain that was more committed to women's rights than either the narrow, one-sided variety of Marxism held by the SDF or the increasingly liberal parliamentarism of Labor. It allowed cross-class alliances that neither socialists nor feminists in France and Germany were willing to undertake.

Why Socialist Feminism Failed to Blossom

Why did socialist feminism remain so ideologically, strategically, and practically limited within the socialist movement in Europe?

One possible explanation is that women, including working class women, were more conservative than men, and therefore simply did not play much of a role in socialist politics. This view was commonplace among European socialists.

But many situations, and many women, contradicted this generalization. During the Paris Commune, women actively organized, advocated for their collective needs such as equal education and day care, and played a wide variety of roles, including that of agitators. The 175,000 women who joined the German Social Democratic Party certainly were not held back by conservatism. In any case, the socialist movement could have made the "backwardness" of half of the population a major target for education and mobilization — but it didn’t.

A second possible explanation is that both the men and the women of the European working class were essentially non-feminist or anti-feminist, so that the socialists at worst reflected their base, and at best, held more advanced positions than most of their base.

Since the attitudes of ordinary working class people, and particularly working class women, are not well-documented, it is hard to reach definitive conclusions about this explanation. However, we believe that the attitudes of working class women and men must be seen as dynamic — changing as much in response to changing conditions of life as to prevailing ideologies. Consider two feminist issues: women's right to control births, and the question of whether "a woman's place is in the home." As the standard of living of the English working class rose in the late 19th century, infant and child mortality fell, and the "economic utility of children" declined (due to compulsory schooling, protective legislation, and the assurance of social welfare support). Consequently, more working class women practiced birth control — using techniques that had been available since 1800. But the rising working class standard of living in Britain also went along with advocacy of a "family wage" for men which assumed that women belonged in the home — even though women in increasing numbers were working outside the home.²⁹

From these examples, it is clear that the attitudes and actions of working class women and men towards feminist issues changed over time, that these issues were embedded in an economic context, and that a single set of economic and social changes could lead to different consequences for various feminist issues.

In our view, the most important factor in the shortcomings of European socialist feminism was the power of the ideology of the ruling
class. There are three aspects to this. First, the “founding fathers” started out with important limits in their vision. For example, Marx’s analysis of capitalism constantly focused on the male worker, not on the work of women inside or outside the home; thus Marx implicitly adopted a very Victorian set of assumptions about the way sex roles were and should be.\(^3\)

Second, male trade unionists, who occupied a central place in the European socialist movement, tended to have a view that one theorist calls “proletarian anti-feminism” — which combined fear of competition from women workers with conservative views of a women’s proper role and produced an iron-clad determination that women should stay in the home.\(^4\) Women unionists made up only about a tenth of the labor movement in France, Ger-

**Epilogue: Victory and Decline**

Socialism and feminism won major victories after World War I. The vote for women was instituted in Germany and Britain in 1918. Reformist socialists were brought into the governments of Germany and France, as a defense against forces further right and left. But a threshold had been crossed.

The feminists were divided by the war. The more left-wing bourgeois feminists in Germany and Britain took a pacifist stand, while mainstream feminists supported their governments. Redbaiting and other attacks on feminism from the right increased the pressure on feminists to move towards more conservative and patriotic stands.

After World War I, feminist divisions collapsed. In Britain, the feminist movement was so focused on the issue of women’s suffrage that it was left with nowhere to go when the vote was won for women over 30. The German movement became more and more conservative, harping on themes of nationalism and

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*Otilie Baader.*

*Alexandra Kollontai addressing Second International Conference of Communist Women, June 1921.*
eugenics, campaigning for censorship of "obscene" materials and against prostitution, and denying that men and women were equal. French suffragists were stymied by legislative opposition to suffrage, and lost momentum.

World War I also precipitated a split in the socialist movement. The socialist groups who allied with their own warring governments were at odds during the hostilities. But more fundamentally, the Second International divided over the issue of support for one's own government on the one hand, or internationalism and opposition to all sides of the war on the other. Underlying this split was the more deeply rooted difference between reformist and revolutionary approaches. Following the war and the Russian revolution, the parties did not reunite as many expected; instead the break between social democracy and communism was confirmed.

Zetkin and Saumoneau, whose strict class stands had been necessary to formulate a feminism that was acceptable within socialism, followed their class stands and went with the left wing. Zetkin took with her the majority of the German socialist women's movement. However, it was estimated that the party had already lost 100,000 women — over half the 1914 total — by 1916. Women's participation was fragile under the strains of war and internal dissent.

The socialist women did not stop organizing women. But while SPD women mobilized other women for social work, and the female militants of the USPD led women in protests against wartime shortages, both factions were largely setting aside the issues specifically involved in women's emancipation.

But the de-feminization of socialist women's politics was also a result of the socialist split itself. The bulk of the organized working class stayed with the reformist socialist parties. Even in France, although the majority of the French socialist party (SFIO) voted to join the Comintern, this wing of the socialist movement dwindled after the SFIO split in 1921. So when women like Zetkin left the reformist parties along with the other radicals, large numbers of working class women lost their strongest voices for socialist women's liberation. The women who now led the social-democratic women's movement generally championed a relatively weak version of equal rights, and had little left to demand when the post-war years brought the string of female suffrage victories.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary women found themselves increasingly isolated. Divorced from their power base, and swept up by the voluntarist notion that the time was ripe for small vanguards to work towards imminent revolutions in virtually all countries (an idea promoted by the Third (Communist) International
through 1922), the female radicals were compelled to downplay women’s issues in order to make common cause with their comrades. Lenin’s famous admonition to Clara Zetkin in 1920 says it all:

The record of your sins, Clara, is even worse. I have been told that at evenings arranged for reading and discussion with working women, sex and marriage problems come first. They are said to be the main objects of interest in your political instruction and educational work. I could not believe my ears when I heard that. The first state of proletarian dictatorship is battling with the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world. The situation in Germany itself calls for the greatest unity of revolutionary forces, so they can repel the counter-revolution which is pushing on. But active Communist women are busy discussing sex problems and the forms of marriage — past, present, and future. They consider it their most important task to enlighten working women on these questions.  

Furthermore, in part because of the split, the 1920s were a time of general retreat for socialism. Not only large numbers of women, but large numbers of working men withdrew from the movement as it was split from within and attacked from without. Both radicals and reformists were thrown on the defensive, especially after the failure of insurrectionary attempts in eastern and central Europe between 1918 and 1921.  

Thus, by 1920 feminists and socialists lacked either the capacity or the will to mobilize masses of women around issues of women’s liberation. Some social changes were, nonetheless, irreversible. As of the 1920s, European women were integrated into the political system and the system of union representation — although France lagged behind Britain and Germany on both scores, and women everywhere remained “second class citizens.” These advances occurred when the women’s movement had largely demobilized, but were consequences of earlier struggles. Not until the late 1960s would there again be a large women’s movement in these countries, let alone a large radical or socialist women’s movement.

Conclusions

Why didn’t the feminist movement and the socialist movement work together in late 19th and early 20th century Europe? The evidence from France, Germany, and Britain is that class divisions between the two movements were paramount. The bourgeois feminist movement was, on the whole, exactly that: bourgeois in composition, liberal in ideology. The socialist movement was mainly working class in composition. Each was pursuing a class-based agenda. The chief exception was cooperation on suffrage in Britain, a nation in which liberalism was relatively strong and socialism was particularly reformist.  

The two movements were also divided by gender. The feminist movement, which in its formative years probably included as many men as women, became a movement led and largely populated by women. The socialist movement remained male-led and male-dominated. While the feminist movement was
organized around women’s rights, the socialists reflected a strong streak of proletarian antifeminism based in the skilled, unionized section of the working class.

Given that the two movements were for the most part not willing or able to work together, the socialist movement was the more likely one to expand to deal with issues of both class and sex. While the liberal feminists spoke of moral and social regeneration of all of society, the situation of the working class was of peripheral concern for them. Most socialist groups, however, spoke up for the liberation of women. This was a consequence of the growing weight and activism of women in the workforce, of the conscious role of women like Clara Zetkin both inside and outside the movement, of an ideological formation that drew on utopian and other radical traditions and sought to project the overthrow of all exploitation and oppression.

Sylvia Pankhurst addresses a meeting in the East End of London, 1912.

Yet socialist mobilizations of working women fell short of fusing class and sexual politics in two ways. First of all, the commitment of the socialist parties to a narrowly defined class politics led them to sidestep essential issues of women’s oppression (the transformation of the family), and to sacrifice women’s interests on other issues (reproductive rights, suffrage in some cases). Second, the mobilizations took place in the context of larger socialist movements that were male-dominated and inconsistent in implementing even the limited party line on women’s liberation.

Within these limits, two models showed significant success in organizing working class women: In Germany, the SPD organized working class women around a sharply defined class perspective, but within a relatively autonomous section of the movement with strong female leadership. In Britain, the working class women’s suffrage societies organized women as part of a cross-class coalition focused on the single issue of suffrage.

These successes, and the failure of French socialist feminism, reflect two facts. First, the social setting in each country created a separate set of possibilities. Liberal democratic Britain was different from autocratic Germany, and both were different from France with its combination of church-dominated conservatism and volatile revolutionary ideologies. And second, the strategies and tactics chosen by socialists made a difference. Autonomous organization of women within the socialist movement (Germany) or in parallel to the socialist movement (Britain) characterized successful mobilization of working class women.

The separation of the struggles of the working class from the struggles of women in Europe of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is history. Women and workers still have oppressions to overcome. Perhaps we can use that history to construct new possibilities.

FOOTNOTES

3. We use the word “feminism” in two senses. We use it to refer to bourgeois feminism, which was indeed the meaning of the term as used in the period under study. We also use it to denote support for women’s liberation — that is, support for economic, social, and political equality for women (although not necessarily an end to distinct roles for the sexes, since so few people advocated this during the period in question). This leads us to call “feminists” any number of socialists who would have rejected the label, since it carried a bourgeois connotation at the time. To avoid ambiguity, we often refer to bourgeois or liberal feminism (using the first meaning) and socialist feminism (using the second). For the purposes of this paper, we define as radical feminists those (both socialists and liberals) who believed that women’s liberation must start at once on all fronts.
and who held a global view of women's oppression that included the personal sphere. Whenever we use the term “anti-feminist,” it denotes opposition to equality and emancipation of women — not just to the feminist movement.


10. Ibid., p. 80.


14. Marilyn J. Boxer, “Madeleine Pelletier,” in Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern, European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Not all revolutionary socialist/radical feminists found it necessary to give up one or the other ideology. In Russia, Alexandra Kollontai, who ended up in the left wing of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party, held a wide range of radical feminist positions — including a deep concern with sexual liberation and the transformation of the family. However, both her socialism and her feminism proved too radical for the Bolsheviks, and she was isolated politically after 1921.


20. Ibid., p. 103.


22. Quataert, op. cit., p. 104.


28. Pierre-Joseph Proudon, a French utopian socialist theorist of the mid-19th century, summarized his view of women’s possible roles by saying: “Prostitute or housewife, no other choice.”


31. Thonnessen, op. cit.


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THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS AND THE SOUTHERN TRUST
Legal Repression and Worker Response

JEFF FERRELL AND KEVIN RYAN

"Capitalist law and order means law forced upon the workers by order of the capitalists."

Between the years 1910 and 1914, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) — a broad-based, radical union of southern lumber workers — battled the southern lumber trust in the woods and mill towns of Louisiana, Texas, and the South. By its very existence the Brotherhood merits the attention of those seeking to recover a radical tradition in the United States; as Melvyn Dubofsky notes, "Southern labor history has always been something of a puzzle. Few studies have been written about labor organizations or of working-class discontent below the Mason and Dixon line." It is the nature of the Brotherhood's existence, however, that assures its place in a tradition of humane and courageous U.S. radicalism. To begin with, the BTW built blacks, whites, Chicanos and other groups into a united front against the southern lumber trust. Perhaps one-half of the BTW membership was black, and included among these members were union leaders such as William Henry, D.R. Gordon, and J. Bonier. Chicanos also participated in, and vigorously supported, the union. When, during the conflict, the American Lumber Company attempted to identify all its employees by race and union status, the note "Presumably Union (All Mexs. are)" was placed beside the name of one M. Salinas, and comments such as "Big Union Negro" and "Strike Originator" beside the names of various black employees.
Women were likewise accorded full membership in the BTW, and filled key leadership roles in the critical Merryville strike. Under the guidance of strike-leader Fredonia Stevenson, women picketed at the mill and train station, ran the BTW soup kitchen, and carried on the battle against scabs and other anti-BTW forces after male BTW members were deported from the town. In addition to racial minorities and women, the Brotherhood included the region’s population as a whole in its struggle. It brought farmers and small merchants into the union, and incorporated both these groups and various progressive organizations in a wide ranging network of support. This concern for building an inclusive radical union was shared with the larger organization with which the BTW affiliated in 1912: the Industrial Workers of the World. The Brotherhood shared with the IWW another key characteristic as well: a propensity for innovation, courage, and humor in battling economic, legal, and ideological repression. Although this article touches on BTW’s inclusive character, it does so in context of this final thrust: BTW’s development of bold and innovative strategies and tactics in response to pervasive legal repression.

Background to Struggle

The battle between the Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the southern lumber trust grew out of a national social setting dominated by labor/capital conflict. Under the leadership of the IWW and other labor organizations, miners were striking against coal companies in West Virginia, Arkansas, and Colorado; railroad workers were battling major railroad lines; the steel and textile industries of the North were being aggressively organized; “free-speech fights” were erupting throughout the country; and lumber workers were engaged in major strikes throughout the Northwest. Regionally, the organization of the BTW in 1910 built upon a foundation laid in a previous decade of hostility between much of the area’s population and the lumber corporations intruding upon it. Virtually since the first movement of Northern (and Southern) lumber companies into the region prior to the turn of the century, resistance developed, not only in the form of strikes and other organized activity, but in a more generalized antipathy towards the large companies by workers, farmers, and small business people. During the period of the Brotherhood’s battles, the region also saw numerous strikes by railroad workers and longshoremen, and an IWW-led strike of maritime workers in New Orleans.

The conflict between the BTW and the southern lumber trust evolved also in the context of the trust’s systematic control of its workers, amid workers’ rebellion against such control. Workers faced long hours of dangerous work, during which the lumber companies utilized “scientific management” and other techniques to produce maximum efficiency and control. For this labor, workers were paid irregularly, and most often in company “scrip” which could be spent at the company store or cashed at a discount. In fact, by holding paydays months apart, the companies forced their workers to accept interim payments in scrip, channelling workers’ purchases to the company commissary. Paychecks were further decreased through a series of forced deductions. Away from the job, workers lived in carefully controlled “company towns” or camps, which were often fenced and patrolled by a company police force. Here, they paid exorbitant rent for company housing, sent their children to company schools designed to socialize children into efficient and compliant work roles, and attended company controlled churches and YMCAs which taught similar lessons. As the BTW began to focus workers’ rebellion against these systems of control, the lumber companies responded by further “stockading” towns, and increasing their force of guards and gunmen. The legal repression examined in this article can be understood only in light of these broader systems of control, and workers’ responses to them.

As this complex and often violent five year conflict between the BTW and the southern lumber trust developed, it became increasingly intertwined with the region’s criminal justice system. In response to the Brotherhood of Timber Workers’ organization in 1910 and growth through early 1911, the southern lumber trust worked through the Southern Lumber Operators’ Association (SLOA) to
begin in April 1911 the use of "yellow-dog" contracts — contracts in which lumber company employees pledged that they were not, and would not become, BTW members — and blacklisted any employee refusing to sign or otherwise found to be a BTW member. Despite this, the Brotherhood continued to grow, not only in Louisiana and Texas but throughout the South, and in July 1911 the SLOA began a general shut-down of lumber company mills in which Brotherhood members were employed. From July to November 1911 the mills remained closed, and, although unemployed Brotherhood members suffered physically and financially, BTW agitation and influence continued to spread. In November 1911 the owners began a three-month process of reopening the mills and, with effective "yellow-dog" hiring procedure and extensive blacklist, claimed the death of BTW. During May 1912, however, the Brotherhood held its second annual convention, began the process of affiliating with the Industrial Workers of the World, and launched a new round of organization, agitation and strikes, including a strike against the Galloway Lumber Company at Grabow, Louisiana.

Increasing hostility between BTW members/supporters and lumber company thugs and officials during June and early July, 1912, climaxed with the Sunday, July 7, "riot" at Grabow. Returning to DeRidder from a meeting at Carsons, Louisiana, a crowd of BTW members and supporters led by BTW president A.L. Emerson stopped at the Galloway Lumber Company mill at Grabow. As Emerson began to speak, shots were fired — apparently at him and into the crowd from the company buildings — with members of the crowd returning fire; a number of those present were killed or wounded. Following the "riot," Emerson and approximately sixty BTW members and supporters were arrested and indicted for murder, and jailed at Lake Charles, Louisiana. Brotherhood members and sympathizers protested the opening of their trial on October 7 by boycotting work as part of the "union holiday." Approximately a week after the defendants’ acquittal on November 2, the mill owners forced a strike at the American Lumber Company in Merryville, Louisiana, a BTW stronghold. In what the media called the "First American Soviet" and "The Commune of Merryville," the Brotherhood had built a network of support which included merchants, farmers, and workers in other industries. Despite this, the company reopened its mills in January 1913 with scab labor, and in conjunction with the local Good Citizen’s League and deputy sheriffs began a series of beatings, arrests, and deportations which culminated in mob violence against striking BTW members on February 15-19. That April, A.L. Emerson was also attacked and beaten by a mob at Singer, Louisiana, and in May submitted his resignation to the Brotherhood’s third annual convention; by July, the Merryville strike was lost. The Brotherhood’s final attack on the southern lumber trust — the "Sweet Home Front" strike near Pollock, Louisiana — was begun in December, 1913, and ended in August, 1914.

The Structure and Process of Legal Repression

The criminal justice system played a major role in the battle between the southern lumber trust and the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, and legal repression a major role in the trust’s
attacks upon the Brotherhood. The trust’s manipulation of the region’s legal system took a variety of forms. Lumber companies’ domination of “company towns” was complete, and rooted in both economic and political power. An investigator for the United States Commission of Industrial Relations, David J. Saposs, found that the companies controlled not only private and public property in the towns, but public office-holders and the voting process as well, and concluded that

Anyone desiring to exercise the simplest right, which in ordinary peaceful American communities is regarded as natural and unquestioned (such for instance, as the use of public streets), must fight for them in these industrial towns. . . . The form of government in these communities is avowedly absolutistic.

Another investigator reported that, at Pineland, Texas, “the company store is the only one permitted to do business . . . on a large scale,’’ and that “land, houses, hotels, churches and schools are owned by the company, and its will is above the law.” He thus concluded that “the lumber communities of the Lone Star State are as far removed from freedom and democracy as though time had rolled back to the days of Ivanhoe.” Even a lumber industry journal acknowledged in 1912 that, at Bogalusa, Louisiana, the Great Southern Lumber Company’s general manager “is the law and order, except where some violent breach of law occurs, then a deputy sheriff is called to maintain the peace.”

An important component in this legal and political hegemony was the extensive participation of southern lumber trust members in political institutions. Between 1900 and 1915, for example, members of the trust served as aldermen or councilmen in Texarkana, Beaumont, and Orange, Texas, and Alexandria, Louisiana; as the mayors of Alexandria, Bogalusa, Vivian, and Zwolle, Louisiana, Orange and Beaumont, Texas, and Fourche, Arkansas; as state representatives or senators in Texas, Louisiana, and Kansas; as the governor of Kansas; as U.S. Congressmen from Illinois and Michigan; as U.S. Vice President; and in a variety of positions ranging from county attorneys and supervisors to university regents, state board of education members, and presidents of state and national conservation organizations. These lumbermen thus not only dominated local politics, but influenced state, regional, and national affairs; they sponsored pro-lumber industry legislation, influenced regulatory affairs, and worked with the governors of Louisiana and Texas and other political figures. This work resulted, for example, in the Louisiana state militia being sent to the aid of the lumber companies three times during the 1910-1914 conflict.

This legal and political power of the lumber companies in their “company towns” and in the region as a whole resulted in a number of specific abuses. As noted above, access to “company towns” — often in their entirety the private property of the lumber companies — was controlled not only through police power, but by fencing sawmills, workers’ housing, and entire towns. This “stockading” of towns was reported throughout the region, with even the United States Post Office enclosed and controlled by the company in one case. Saposs reported that

Some of these towns are not even incorporated so that they are the private property of the company. Almost invariably the residence quarters are unincorporated and fenced in. This, it was admitted by the officials, enables the company to deny admittance to those that it cannot control. By owning the ground and buildings the company has undue power over the inhabitants, no matter who they are.

A resolution sent from the 1912 BTW convention to the Governor of Louisiana likewise reported,

Particularly, we call your Excellency’s attention to the conditions existing at the towns of Fullerton, Rochell, Elizabeth, Fields, Oakdale, and Cravens, La., and which system is being rapidly spread over the entire State, where the timber and lumber workers in many places are being practically held as peons within barbed wire enclosures [and] where there is no law except the will of the Lumber Trust’s imported thugs and gunmen. . . .

This “stockading” was utilized, of course, to deny BTW organizers access to the commun-
ities, and the workers who resided in them. To further retard BTW organizing efforts, officials in Merryville, DeRidder, Carson and other Louisiana towns prohibited street gatherings and public speaking. Where board fence and barbed wire stockades and legal prohibitions failed to keep out BTW organizers, workers were held in their quarters by company guards during the BTW meetings, and threatened with dismissal and blacklisting if they attempted to attend. If despite these many controls workers were found to have become union members or activists, they then faced summary eviction from their company housing.

Perhaps the most significant legal abuse by the lumber companies was their direct involvement with local police forces. This involvement took two forms. First, the lumber companies often appointed and paid local police forces, which in turn served the companies by herding men to work, harassing independent merchants, intimidating citizens, and even circumventing arrests so as not to deplete the labor force. Second, lumber company guards and gunmen were deputized throughout the region during the conflict period. Early in the strike at Merryville, for example, a local sheriff deputized American Lumber Company gunmen, and an American Lumber Company list of employees included one H.H. Swindell as a company

"Planer Grader" and "Deputy Sheriff, who made Grabow arrests." The Kirby Lumber Company even received regular reports from one of its paid spies who was also a local sheriff. A BTW resolution thus correctly referred to "Sheriffs, who are either owned by the Lumber Trust, or are themselves officers of the organization, deputizing hundreds of thugs in the name of the State of Louisiana."

In dealing with the BTW, of course, these "company" police and deputized company guards enforced the law in a most remarkable fashion. Throughout the conflict, BTW members were arrested and jailed for violation of a plethora of local, state, and federal statutes; among the charges were "intimidating labor," "being a dangerous and suspicious character," "obtaining money under false pretenses," embezzlement, vagrancy, and murder. The charge of "intimidating labor" was common, often in conjunction with battles between BTW members and scab laborers. Also common were attempts to enforce segregation laws so as to shatter black/white solidarity within the BTW; the BTW faced the threat of injunction against an integrated convention, attempts to jail black BTW members for "unlawfully meeting in the same hall with white men," and intimidation from local sheriffs. For the leadership of the BTW, legal harassment was
particularly thorough. By March, 1912, BTW president A.L. Emerson reported that he had been arrested four times, on charges including “enticing labor, polluting in public, and obtaining money under false pretenses;” and by May of that year — before his arrest following the Grabow “riot” — Emerson reported that since January 1, 1911, “I have been arrested five times. Placed in jail once. Placed under bond twice. Paid three fines. And am under bond now.”

The southern lumber trust likewise utilized its paid police and deputized guards to suppress the ideology of the BTW, while at the same time systematically disseminating its own. Local police often denied Brotherhood speakers from using public areas, and disrupted BTW assemblies. In May, 1912, for example, A.L. Emerson reported that “I have had 37 speeches broken up by the companies and their pimps,” and in June of that year BTW speeches at Carson and Bon Ami, Louisiana, were disrupted by deputy sheriffs and lumber company officers. Those selling or subscribing to the BTW newspaper, the Lumberjack, were also hounded by the authorities.10

As might be expected, the vigor of the local police in harassing the BTW was complemented by police inattentiveness to the crimes of the southern lumber trust. During the conflict there surfaced innumerable reports of beatings, floggings, shootings, attempted lynchings, and “water cures” — the pummelling of a restrained man with a high-powered jet of water. In addition, the assassination of H.G. Creel was attempted; A.L. Emerson was severely beaten; and Emerson, Covington Hall, and other BTW leaders received numerous death threats, all with little or no police response.11 In fact, company gunmen in many cases clearly instigated such violence to achieve two goals beyond simple intimidation: to direct the blame for the violence towards the BTW, as a justification for legal suppression; and to goad BTW members into retaliation, which would then precipitate further violence and legal sanctions. Moreover, local police were utilized to protect the operations of the southern lumber trust during the conflict. At a July 4 Brotherhood gathering, for example, Covington Hall reminded the crowd of the company spies present, and A.L. Emerson noted

that southern lumber trust leader John H. Kirby spends too much money in paying Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs to protect these spotters." At that very gathering a Kirby Lumber Company spy posing as a photographer was found out; in his report to the company, he noted that he was in fact protected from the angry unionists by one Sheriff Stevenson. In another case, Kirby instructed one of his associates to have "Hooker . . . get in touch with the Sheriff of Newton County . . . and see that suitable deputies are detailed" to protect a Kirby Lumber Company barbeque.

The Brotherhood's Response

In battling the lumber trust, then, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers thus faced not only the vast economic power of the trust, but a vast array of social and political controls. In this context, the BTW survived to fight the southern lumber trust aggressively throughout a five year period. To do so, the Brotherhood developed a number of broad strategies in dealing with the trust and its legal power. Central among these were secrecy and deception, and practical and ideological confrontation.

Secrecy and deception enabled the Brotherhood to minimize both economic and legal repression; to the extent that secrecy could be maintained, the Brotherhood could circumvent both the firing, eviction, and blacklisting, and the concomitant legal harassment, of union members. The BTW therefore worked "in the silent, quiet ways of the forest and swamps." The BTW's Constitution and By-Laws, for example, provided for the "secret work of the order," including various "guardians" and passwords. The importance of these passwords to the Brotherhood was evidenced in the following handwritten oath, entered as evidence in the Grabow trial of 1912:

I do hereby swear to my God and fellow man. That I will hold forever sacred the vow that I am about to take [sic]. And I will hold forever secret the signs, grips, tokens, and passwords. I will never wrong a brother by giving his name to any one not belonging to the order. And I will never wrong a brother by taking his place from which he has walked off for more money or better [sic] conditions. But will stand by him and protect him as long as he is in the right as long as life lasts. So help me God. [signed] D.E.

As can be seen in the oath, the Brotherhood was likewise careful to keep its membership rolls secret. Two survivors of the conflict — the first a BTW member, the second not — recalled distinctly this feature of the Brotherhood's approach:

Mr. Smokey: We all, I believe all of here is in it, in the Union.
Ferrrel: Was there any chance of getting fired for joining the Union?
Mr. Smokey: Yes, sir; oh, yea; you had to join it and keep it hid . . .
Ferrrel: Well, so . . . all you gentlemen were members of the union but you had to keep it quiet?
Mr. Smokey: Had to keep it quiet, yea; couldn't tell.
Ferrrel: Did some of the men you worked with . . . were they in the union, or was it other places in the state?
Duplissey: Well, you couldn't tell any, in other words, if you belonged to it and all, you mustn't tell, and keep all that a secret — that's one thing I didn't like at all.

The BTW tactic could also be seen in the reports of company operatives, which noted, for example, that at one camp "there are several Union men . . . but one cannot tell who they are," and that at another, "the foreman . . . is reported as having all union men working for him and sending in their dues secretly." The day-to-day process of organization and recruitment secrecy also protected the organizers, who travelled and worked in disguise. During the Brotherhood's formation, A.L. Emerson and Jay Smith travelled "in the guise of book agents, insurance solicitors and the like," and worked undercover at area mills. Similarly, a company operative reported pointedly that a Mr. LaFollette, whom he had met at a Lee's Mill union meeting, "told me he was selling soap, but he did not try to sell any at Lee's Mill." In November, 1912, the IWW's Industrial Worker even published a detailed account of union tactics which included posing as

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a gambler (with one’s winnings helping to finance the union), a company informant (who could then have non-union men fired), and an evangelist. The newspaper elsewhere reported that the union’s Grand Lodge officers, as well as organizers, were taking measures to avoid entrapment.

Many of the union’s meetings were also clandestine. “Night meetings” were held not only for the convenience of lumber workers, but to take advantage of privacy afforded by darkness outside the stockaded towns. An anti-BTW letter published in Southwest scolded Brotherhood members who “meet in the dark, on bridges and crossroads, [and] hold secret tryouts,” and later reports from company spies substantiated this claim. In one, an operative reported that the BTW “had a private meeting Thursday night in the country for the purpose of getting the brethren together,” and in another, it was reported that A.L. Emerson “held a private meeting with BTW members of Lee’s Mill only . . . and it was private; no one except members employed at Lee’s Mill being admitted.”

Interestingly, the BTW was able to utilize secrecy and deception to counter the economic and political power of the southern lumber trust in yet another way. During the conflict, A.L. Emerson noted that a BTW emissary sent to inspect certain “County Records” dealing with Emerson’s arrest and fining “was able to get hold of the books by reason of his friendship for some of the Janitor’s people. . . .” Similarly, Covington Hall recorded the “valuable information and tips” received by the Brotherhood not only from persons within the head offices of the lumber companies, but from within “the principal offices of the National Lumber Trust.” Even H.G. Creel — the union sympathizer and speaker — “got employment as a bookkeeper with the Iron Mountain Lumber Company” during the Sweet Home strike, “and passed out information when another crew of strikebreakers might be due, where it was to go, and where guards were posted.”

As Hall concluded, the BTW was everywhere and nowhere. It was ubiquitous and unseen . . . [a] semi-secret organization, with the usual passwords and grips so dear to Southerners. . . . [The owners] never knew exactly how many “red-card men” remained on the job.

At times the Brotherhood emerged from its secretive avoidance of legal repression to confront such repression practically and ideologically; as the five year conflict wore on, such confrontation became more and more common. In the preamble to its 1911 Constitution and By-Laws, the BTW was careful to note that

While demanding our rights, we, at the same time concede, that the employer is entitled to, and we promise him, an absolutely square deal in every sense which this implies. . . . Violence, in all its forms, shall be discouraged. Property rights shall be respected. . . . At all times, and in all things, we shall be glad to meet and counsel with those who employ us, and by the arts of reason, justice, and persuasion, try to convince them of the righteousness of our cause.

In the following years, however, such moderation was often abandoned in both word and deed. An IWW leaflet circulated in the region, for example, urged unionists to force mass arrests by violating injunctions, thus crippling both the legal system and employers. More common was the advocacy of violence in
response to legal and extra-legal repression. Hall, for example, reported that "... there was much talk of guns. Both sides indulged; we published a cut showing two crossed rifles, with this caption: 'The only argument a gunman understands.'" Moreover, BTW leaders at times counseled violence. The most militant BTW leader, Ed Lehman, argued that "to commit murder you have first to kill a human being, and a gunman or Burns' detective is not a human being." He further argued against the efficacy of non-violent tactics ("the might of folded arms") in response to the types of legal repression noted above:

These lumber towns are being stockaded, and gunmen put at their gates to keep the union out. As long as the gunmen stay there, the Union will stay out. It is up to the militant union men to see that the gunmen do not stay there. To hell with the might of folded arms!  

These attitudes found expression both in threats of violence and in actual confrontations. The threats themselves, of course, constituted a tactic of counter-intimidation even when not fulfilled. In May 1912, Covington Hall reported that "the boys in the forest and mills [have] notified the gunmen that they could shoot just as quick and straight as any gunmen ever did..."

A more direct threat was received by John H. Kirby late in the conflict. The threat — boldly but unevenly hand-lettered and mailed from New Orleans May 20, 1915 — was evidently in reference to the jailing of BTW organizer Charles Cline in San Antonio:

Gov. J.H. Kurby [sic]  

Get Klyne [sic] out or get ready for Hell. I have been sworn for this and its [sic] you or me. Liberty [or] death.  

During this same period — as the conflict dissolved into an "underground war... industrially and politically" — The Lumberjack even advertised a firm recommended by Mother Jones, which sold "a fine rifle for only $3.50!" Reports of incidents of violence throughout the conflict indicate that at least some of these threats were fulfilled. Perhaps the Brotherhood’s clearest and most thoroughgoing counter-attack came not through violence and threats of violence,
however, but through the defiance and delegitimation of the legal system in BTW ideology. Like the IWW with which it was affiliated, the BTW utilized this technique time and again to deny the legitimacy of the criminal justice system under which it suffered. Throughout the conflict, the BTW put forth a steady stream of prose and poetry aimed at exposing and condemning not only particular acts of legal repression, but the workings of a repressive legal system:

The only thing the capitalist class uses the State for is to mislead the workers into the belief that they have an equal show before the law. Law, Hell! What is law, but the will of the governing class, imposed upon the class that is governed? (Jay Smith)

"... To hell with the statutes and with laws, Made but to strangle Labor’s cause!

"... To hell with courts, in crime grown old! To hell with justice bought and sold! (from Covington Hall’s “The Fight Is On”)

An officer of the law is a walking delegate of Capitalism. (William D. “Big Bill” Haywood)

Damn the laws of the ruling class. We will have none of them. Capitalist law and order means law forced upon the workers by order of the capitalists. (Industrial Worker)

Thy deputies, gunmen and militia, they [are] after me;
Thou preparest a court martial for me
In the presence of mine enemies (from “The 23rd Psalm”)

Now if you fellows want to arrest me just do so and put me in jail. If you arrest me without a cause then we will see about it. I am not going to take any foolishness at all. I am going into these places and if you want to arrest me pop your whip. You can kill me but you can’t scare me. Now if you fellows want Mr. Kirby to know this write him. I want him to see it. (A.L. Emerson)

The confluence of these two broad responses to legal and economic repression — secrecy and deception, and defiant confrontation — could be seen in a third BTW response: sabotage. Following the lead of the IWW, the Brotherhood emphasized “direct action” in the workplace, rather than political action or other indirect means outside of work. Developed from the French anarcho-syndicalist, and integrated with the IWW’s notion of revolutionary industrial unionism, this “direct action” entailed a number of specific tactics, including various forms of temporary and on-the-job strikes, and intentional work inefficiency. The most controversial component of “direct action,” however, was sabotage — workers’ violence against owners’ property. Utilizing symbols such as the black cat (the “Sabo-Tabby Kitten”) and the wooden shoe (French workers supposed fouled machinery by tossing their sabots, or wooden shoes, into it), BTW and IWW leaders at times openly advocated sabotage, but most often urged such action through more indirect and elusive methods. During the conflict, a lead editorial in the Industrial Worker read:

Soup stops water from making steam in boilers.
Asafetida keeps patrons from struck theatres.
By working slow profits are greatly reduced.
Oil containing emery makes machinery strike.
Telling trade secrets wins battles for workers.
Accidents often are an aid in winning strikes.
Guerilla warfare always gets the bosses’ goat.
Ends that are revolutionary justify the means.

During the Merryville strike, the Industrial Worker published a similarly constructed notice:

Scabs!
Attention
Brother of Timber Workers
On strike at Merryville, La.
Take warning!
American Lumber Co.
Going crazy.
Everybody’s doin’ it!
Doin’ what? Nawthin’.

In addition, The Lumberjack published a poem — “Saw Mill ‘Accidents,’ By The Wooden Shoe Kid” — which detailed “accidents” with saws, engines, and pumps. Most remarkable was the following “warning to wayward lumberjacks,” pointedly entitled
“Don’t Do It, Boys,” and published in the Industrial Worker:

We are sure that no self-respecting lumber worker would ever resort to that terrible thing called sabotage. We wish to warn all workers against it.

You don’t know what sabotage is, you say? Well perhaps it is best to tell you so that you may take warning.

Sabotage in the woods might mean working slow on the job. You wouldn’t do that would you? Never. It is against the interest of Weyerhauser, Clark, Kirby and Long. You love these gentlemen, don’t you?

Sabotage may mean misplacing the tools where they are not easily found. Promise us that you will never do that.

Sabotage may mean that logs are cut shorter than the required size.

Sabotage may mean the driving of spikes into the logs or even into the trees. Terrible! No good, honest, Christian, gentlemanly logger would do anything like that. It isn’t good for mill saws.

Sabotage means lots of other things. We may mention them from time to time as a warning to wayward lumberjacks. We know that sabotage does not appeal to you.

Vote if you may, pray if you must, arbitrate if you will, and even strike — in the dull season after stockpiling and giving due notice — but never, never, use sabotage.

All loggers who will agree not to use sabotage please say “Aye.” Thanks. Now all saw mill workers who won’t use sabotage kindly hold up your hands. Your whole hands, please, Beg pardon! We forgot that saw mill workers don’t have whole hands. But you won’t use sabotage either, will you? Splendid!

For the love of your boss and the glory of your soul don’t use sabotage.

When such instructive “warnings” led to sabotage, the BTW and IWW reported these activities, but again in the language of innocence. In a report to the Industrial Worker, for example, Covington Hall noted that “many strange and wierd things are happening throughout the timber belt.”

For instance, the log cutters made a demand for 60 cents per thousand feet and when it was refused all special bills in some mysterious manner ended up three inches short and the work had to be done all over again; trees began to show a tendency for absorbing spikes into their interior against which the saws protested by going up in the air; then, in backing up the log carts, the nuts would run off the spindles and fall in the creeks and other places where they could never be found, so that everything on the job had to come to a standstill; the flanges on the car would break off on the curves and all the logs go back into the woods instead of going to the mills as they should; fly wheels became mentally unbalanced and would] jump their jobs; and many other strange and mysterious things happen, why, no one knows.

During the Merryville strike, the Industrial Worker headlined further “Strange Actions in the Souther Lumber Camps,” and recorded as well their effects:

A logging engine decided to dodge a deep curve which skirted a deep, wide barrow pit, and take a short cut across the field. But the engine failed to put its train hep to this flank movement and on account of this lack of solidarity, an injury to one proved an injury to all, and in a few moments engine, cars and logs were soon a mass of tangled wreckage. An engine, with a few cars of scabs and gunmen, was proceeding lawfully on its ladylike way from the woods to town, one raw and gusty evening when lo! and behold, a giant pine at side of the tracks suddenly grew tired of standing, and resolved at this psychological moment to utilize the slowly moving engine directly under it as a pillow, which it did, amid rending of iron and steel. We strikers are at a loss (?) to account for all these immoral, not to say unladylike, actions on the part of the bosses’ sacred property. How sad it is, when even inanimate machines strike on their generous (?) employers. It’s a damn shame!!

The sabotage of lumber company property, then, embodied both the Brotherhood’s orientation towards secrecy and deception, and its determination to defy and confront the southern lumber trust. While sabotage was clearly a defiant attack on the southern lumber trust — and clearly illegal — it was both advocated and carried out in such a way as to minimize detection and subsequent legal prosecution. Sabotage — which IWW leader “Big Bill” Haywood labeled “the law of the workers” — was designed to circumvent the
law of the owners."\(^4\)

Two additional strategies which were part of the Brotherhood’s overall battle with the lumber trust were also useful in countering legal repression. First, as previously noted, the BTW maintained and utilized throughout the conflict a widespread network of support which included farmers, small merchants, workers in other industries, and progressive organizations and publications. More than once, this network aided the Brotherhood in its legal battles. In the spring of 1912, for example, E.F. Presley was elected mayor of DeRidder, Louisiana, on a joint BTW/Socialist ticket. Following his election, he attempted to protect BTW members and socialists in the area, and fought area lumber companies. Later in the conflict, when three BTW members were on trial following the Sweet Home strike, “farmers and lumberjacks poured into Colfax [Louisiana] . . . [and] proceeded to hold a mass meeting in the street [and] denounced in hot terms the ‘arrest and persecution of our boys,’ as they styled it.”\(^5\) Second, the BTW taught its members independence from “leaders” and “bossism,” and encouraged in members “the art of thinking and acting for themselves.” In “A Parable,” for example — composed by IWW/ BTW organizer E.F. Doree, and circulated throughout the region — a mill “boss” warns a union spokesman that “I can have [the union’s] leaders sent to jail,” and the spokesman replies, “I think you will find that we are all able to lead and for every man you sen[d] to jail . . . you make a hundred union men who never thought of it before.”\(^6\) In the aftermath of the Grabow “riot” — with part of the union’s leadership in fact “sent to jail” — the BTW was forced to employ this strategy, as well as the other strategies outlined above, in an effort to survive the most severe episode of legal repression it would face during its five year existence.

Grabow and Its Aftermath

The southern lumber trust’s initial strategy for breaking the BTW involved closing sawmills where the BTW was strongest, reopening them with only those workers who signed non-union pledges, and blacklisting from the lumber industry those who did not sign. These closings were also designed to augment the trust’s larger manipulation of the lumber market through curtailment of production. When, by the spring of 1912 the BTW was not broken, and prices and demand for lumber had continued to rise, a second strategy was developed: keep sawmills struck by the BTW running with scab labor, and break the BTW financially. The Grabow “riot” of July 7, 1912, was not, according to lumbermen, a riot precipitated by the BTW. Instead, according to the BTW and its supporters, the Grabow incident was engineered by the southern lumber trust in an attempt to assassinate BTW leaders and destroy the union. Certainly, circumstantial evidence points to the latter conclusion. The day before the incident there was an attempted assassination of H.G. Creel, and by most accounts the first shot fired at Grabow hit a man next to BTW president A.L. Emerson.

Whatever the causes of the Grabow “riot,” however, the arrest and trial of BTW leaders following the incident was clearly designed to cripple the union. Although a coroner’s inquest found mill owner John Galloway “personally responsible” for the death of one man, only BTW members and supporters were arrested and held in the Calcasieu Parish Prison at Lake Charles, Louisiana. Although authorities denied A.L. Emerson the right to speak for publication after his arrest, and forced him to issue a denial of jail conditions, he managed to report to the editor of the socialist newspaper *The Rebel* that “I have been sick mentally for some time. There is so much noise in here that one can hardly think.”\(^7\)

Prior to the trial, *The St. Louis Lumberman* noted that

The non-union men and the lumbermen are said to have employed the leading talent of the South to prosecute the men whom they charge with murder and anarchy. They have expressed their determination to break up the practices which have caused them great annoyance for the past three years, and they are ready to take up the battle now in earnest.

During the trial, lumber leader M.L. Alexander added that he was “not at all satisfied with the general conditions of the territory at the present time and if those men are acquitted, unionism
will become more open and pronounced at every point and the fight will be a hard one."
The southern lumber trust and its allies therefore did everything possible to prevent acquittal, and to drain the BTW's finances in the process. Prospective jurors were mailed a fake IWW leaflet designed to prejudice them against the BTW; witnesses were mailed threatening letters. "All active for the defense were threatened with death or beating," and, as a result of Burns Detective Agency work, three BTW/IWW organizers were arrested, jailed, and charged with bribery and intimidating witnesses.8 Imprisoned BTW members were also threatened by Burns detectives in the employ of the southern lumber trust. Moreover, the trust pressured regional newspapers during the trial to the point that it could report to its members that "all responsible papers in this section are now handling the details of the trial in a very conservative way . . ." and even considered "secur[ing] a representative paper . . . to take up and publish the true facts regarding this situation."99

The trial itself featured a prosecution openly funded by the southern lumber trust and aided by the Burns agency, and a presiding judge (Winston Overton) with a history of pro-lumber and anti-BTW decisions. Some eleven years earlier, Judge Overton had in fact served as toastmaster at an honorary banquet for U.S. Congressman A.P. Pujo, later to become chief prosecutor in the trial. Not surprisingly, Judge Overton consistently granted prosecution motions and denied those of the defense. The St. Louis Lumberman reported prior to the trial, for example, that "in the charge given the grand jury by Judge Overton before submitting this case he repeatedly charged the members to investigate the possibility of a conspiracy," and during the trial the southern lumber trust reported to its members that "the prosecution has been the victor as to every [defense] objection offered." In addition, Overton granted a key prosecution motion to sever the trial of nine defendants from the remaining forty-nine, and ruled that defense witnesses could not return to their homes while waiting to be called. The support of these witnesses while in Lake Charles, coupled with the costs of the trial as a whole, all but emptied BTW coffers. Although the southern lumber trust finally failed to gain the conviction of the BTW defendants, it did succeed in using the trial to disable the union financially. By the time the trial ended, "pressing debts"

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Industrial Worker, December 26, 1912.

**THE REASON**

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were being cited, and two months later the BTW could claim "exact they $30" in its treasury.40

What few BTW funds remained were exhausted by the Merryville strike, which the southern lumber trust precipitated soon after the acquittal of the Grabow defendants by firing from the American Lumber Company at Merryville those employees who had testified for the defense at the trial. That the owners had been planning to attack the BTW at its Merryville stronghold was obvious. As early as August, 1911, C.B. Sweet wrote John H. Kirby that "the Merryville plant will possibly have their experience after our trouble is settled," and a November 13, 1912, telegram from E.P. Ripley to J.W. Terry — the Santa Fe Railroad officer in charge of the plant — quoted S.H. Fullerton's recommendation:

Possibly easiest and quickest way [to] clean up M. [Merryville] would be to sell timber to neighboring mills, ship out your manufactured lumber at M. and let that town do without a manufacturing plant. Central Coal and Coke Company, Kirby Lumber Company, Pickering Lumber Company, Long-Bell Lumber Company, and Gulf Lumber Company could buy this timber at a price per thousand feet that could be agreed upon. If this could be arranged, timber could be cleaned up quick and citizens of M. be given object lesson which they would not soon forget. At meeting held [at] St. Louis few days ago this course suggested to some parties, and it was thought could be arranged . . ."41

The St. Louis Lumberman thus noted the "cleaning" that was being done "to get rid of the Brotherhood," and the Kirby Lumber Company did in fact begin filling orders for the American Lumber Company. During the strike, American Lumber Company gunmen were deputized, street meetings and public speaking were banned, BTW leaders were arrested, deported, and jailed for "intimidating labor." Strikers were beaten by a mob led by the Good Citizens' League and deputized gunmen, the BTW soup kitchen was destroyed, and Union Hall was raided and ransacked, and transients were compelled by local courts to work for the company. By the end of the strike, the lumber trust's goal of bankrupting the BTW was realized. SLOA Report #168 noted that the financial report to the May, 1913, BTW convention revealed "cash on hand, April 30th, $120.08, with scheduled liabilities amounting to $7,696;" and Covington Hall recalled that "we were financially flat broke" during the strike, and that "as the Merryville union had been, toward the last, the treasury of the [BTW], the loss of the strike left us practically bankrupt."42

For its part, the BTW called upon its full strategic arsenal as it fought to survive the Grabow trial and Merryville strike. In the tense aftermath of Grabow, the Brotherhood sought to minimize its legal repression through non-violent tactics. The Rebel, for example, quoted a Houston Chronicle report that "none of the arrested men offered any resistance. As soon as they were notified that they were wanted they agreed to come." Moreover, Covington Hall noted that he and other BTW leaders "worked night and day" to abort open revolt in the weeks after the incident, and that he and others active in the trial remained unarmed, despite the threats and harassment noted above. When to protest the opening of the trial the BTW declared a "union holiday" — during which union members and sympathizers were to boycott work, and gather to raise money for the trial — it therefore warned participants that

your mission must be a peaceable one. . . . All weapons must be kept at home. No guns or rifles will be tolerated . . . no one shall, upon that day, allow himself to become intoxicated and shall not enter into heated arguments that may cause trouble.43

As the situation unfolded, however, the Brotherhood fought back with all types of confrontational tactics. During the trial, for example, the Central Coal and Coke Company reported receiving anonymous letters threatening to burn its plant and kill its employees, and, according to Hall, "rank and file" unionists proclaimed that

you can do anything you like in your crooked courts but [the defendants] are not going to be hanged, and they are not going to the pen! . . . [if] we get the news of the boys' conviction over the wires we are marching on Lake
Charles and burning sawmills and lumber piles as we come; and what's more, God Almighty will see more sawmill managers, gunmen-deputy sheriffs and Burns detectives hanging to trees in Western Louisiana and Eastern Texas than he ever saw in one place in all His life! Now, convict them, G-D- you!

Hall claimed that, as a result of this threat, the prosecution "weakened, and was not so eager to convict," and that an anti-union group was reportedly armed and "in readiness to stand off the 'mob' in case of conviction." Also during the trial was born the secretive Clan of Toil, whose threats of vengeance in the cause of unionist deaths — "We mean to slug and kill you, man for man, rank for rank, officer for officer" — produced "a deciding restraining effect on the Trust gun-toters." Just after the Grabow trial, this tactic was again employed; a reporter for the New Orleans Daily Item who libeled the BTW in his articles was warned, "If you continue your lying about us as you are doing, we will not be responsible for your safety. Whereat he pulled out." Moreover, plans were made for "a general strike of the woods and mills" to pressure Emerson's release from jail, and as noted above, sabotage was advocated and practiced during the Merryville strike."

The BTW regularly utilized circulars and newspapers to attack legal and economic repression, disseminate its own information, and mobilize support. During the Grabow trial these efforts peaked. Prior to the trial Covington Hall was put in charge of publicity and immediately began producing and distributing weekly circulars. These circulars — signed "Committee of Defense, Brotherhood of Timber Workers" — contained detailed accounts of the Grabow "riot," jail conditions at Lake Charles, and the trial. They also included urgent appeals for aid addressed to the "People of Louisiana," "Fellow Workers," and "Negro Forest and Lumber Workers of the South" instructions for BTW members in the region, and, of course, uncompromising attacks on the southern lumber trust and the "impartial justice" being administered by the State of Louisiana. A second series of circulars signed "Jay Smith, General Secretary," contained similar reports and appeals for aid. Noting the wide distribution of these circulars and their effectiveness in raising funds and arousing sympathy, the New Orleans Times-Democrat concluded that the Defense Committee's purpose must be "to scatter the circulars all over the United States." In response to the fake IWW leaflet noted above, Hall even produced a counter-leaflet, "All About Bums, the Big Sensation," which parodied the fake leaflet, and earned Hall a contempt of court warrant. In addition, the "Emerson Defense Committee" published in The Rebel a satirical song which began "O we love A.L. and the
boys in jail," and poetry attacking the southern lumber trust's legal harassment and warning of retaliation was published in the Merryville Times and The Rebel.41

The Brotherhood was able to arouse sympathy, mobilize support, and generate much-needed funds not only through circulars, but through a remarkable network of progressive publications. In early 1913 both The Rebel and the Industrial Worker quoted BTW leaders as citing the Industrial Worker, The Rebel, the National Rip-Saw, Solidarity, The International Socialist Review, and The Coming Nation as "six great papers . . . deserving especial credit" in the battle to free A.L. Emerson and the other Grabow defendants. According to a BTW circular, prospective jurors in the Grabow trials were even "asked by the prosecution if they had read 'The Rebel,' 'The Rip-Saw,' or 'Appeal to Reason' . . . one juror being challenged peremptorily by the State because he had read one copy of 'The Rip-Saw.'" The New Orleans Times-Democrat added that a Brotherhood member arrested following Grabow told the arresting officer "Wait until I get my Rip-Saw and Appeal to Reason. I cannot go to jail without taking them papers with me," and when asked about his Bible, responded "No, these papers are all I want."42

This network of progressive publications was in turn tied into the Brotherhood's larger network of support. Hall, for example, noted that the majority of the BTW members jailed after the Grabow incident were "lumberjacks and farmers," and that the key factor in the union's trial victory was "the hostile solidarity shown toward the prosecution by the working men and working farmers throughout this section . . . ." Indeed, the BTW received funds from farmers throughout the region, and the support of the Farmers' Union; and after the acquittal of the defendants "all seven of the farmer members of the jury, and one restaurant keeper" fraternized with BTW members and supporters at a victory celebration!43 The BTW likewise received support from workers in other industries (including school teachers), and from various progressive organizations. Socialist locals throughout Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi condemned the legal proceedings, passed resolutions of support for the BTW, and sent financial aid. (The Grabow defendants even formed a socialist local while in jail.)
trade unions held protest meetings, helped feed defense witnesses, and celebrated with the BTW its trial victory. During the Merryville strike this aid continued, with area produce farmers and business employees joining the union, and small business owners posting BTW placards in their stores. Also during the strike, the Brotherhood further developed the innovative tactics it used throughout the five-year battle. The BTW picketed incoming trains, throwing leaflets to scabs and others inside them, women BTW members formed picket lines and attacked scabs with hat pins, and boycotted merchants who were members of the Good Citizens’ league. Additionally, they threatened to sue the town of Merryville for damages, and even engaged the mayor in fisticuffs.

Conclusion

Power entails the molding of consciousness so as to make the established order appear legitimate to oppressed people. Power, in short, is displayed in coercion, but also in ideology. In addition, the tools of power are employed in a context that serves to preserve the hegemony of the powerful even when the tools themselves are inadequate. Law is an integral part of this order of power and partakes of its complex character. It is both coercive and ideological, both an instrument manipulated by the powerful to achieve their purposes, and a relatively autonomous body of social practices that works without the conscious guidance of the powerful to maintain social order.

As the struggle between the BTW and the southern lumber trust illustrates, however, legal repression is a complex process involving the coercive and ideological machinations of powerful groups, the varied modes of response, and the structural limits to both oppression and response. The trust, confronted by a growing and increasingly powerful union, used the legal system to oppress timber workers when they threatened its continued hegemony. With regional and national connections, tightly controlled local towns and police forces, and a sympathetic court system, the southern lumber trust created around the BTW an environment of remarkably thorough repression. The creation of such a pervasively repressive environment was rooted, of course, not only in the trust’s ongoing interconnection with the legal system, but also in its willingness and ability, in a time of crisis, to exploit these connections towards specific ends.

Nevertheless, repression is not unidirectional. It is a dialectical process in which acts of oppression are met with clever and often successful reactions by the oppressed. A study of legal repression that focuses solely on how the law works to maintain the dominance of the powerful does not capture the complexity inherent in the operation of social power. Such an analysis implies that oppressed people are passive objects of the machinations of the powerful. “Top-down” analysis tends to suggest that oppression will be eternal, that repressive social orders are ultimately indestructible — or, what amounts to the same thing, that liberation can come only with the advent of some outside force not implicated in the social order. But studying power from the perspective of the victims of legal repression illuminates the possibility of transcending an oppressive social order.

In our example, the BTW responded to the trust’s instrumental and ideological manipulation of the legal system in a variety of ways. By maintaining a veil of secrecy around its operations and membership, by disguising organizers, by holding clandestine meetings, and by deceiving the lumber companies into employing union sympathizers, it was able to establish a powerful counterforce to control the legal and political environment. Moreover, as the struggle developed, the union moved from a policy of moderation to the advocacy and use of violence in response to repression. On an ideological level, the BTW (supported by a widespread network of sympathetic individuals, groups, and publications, sought to undermine the legitimacy of the criminal justice system by exposing the workings of a repressive legal order. They advocated (often in subtle and elusive ways) direct action in the workplace — temporary strikes, intentional inefficiency, and, most importantly, sabotage. Far from being helpless victims of an oppressive social and legal order, the timber workers were willing and able to fight back. The result was the escalation of the trust’s overt manipulation of the criminal justice system, and an escalation of violence.
that culminated in the Grabow trial.

In the Lake Charles courtroom the BTW won a pyrrhic victory. It earned the acquittal of the defendants at the cost of its own ability to continue the struggle against the trust. The Grabow trial thus shows the limits of the law's autonomy. The legal process was independent enough from the structure of power in the social order to allow for unpredictable results that cannot always be determined by the powerful, no matter how extensive their control. But — and here we see the structural constraints on the response of oppressed people — law served as only part of a complex of power relations that safeguards the interests of the powerful, often turning small defeats into systemic victory.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the system is a seamless web, a web in which we are inexorably trapped. Like all webs, the web of power has its weaknesses and its gaps. The legal order imposes constraints, but not absolute limits. It is powerful, not invincible. In five years of struggle against overwhelming odds, the Brotherhood was able to shake the structure of power, to find and exploit seams and gaps in the web of legal repression. The valuable lesson to be learned here lies not in the reasons for the BTW's ultimate failure. Rather, it lies in the insight, offered by the BTW's successes, into the weaknesses of the system and into the ways in which legal repression can be countered. The sort of vigorous and ingenious measures which the Brotherhood utilized to stagger the southern lumber trust can inform struggles against similar concentrations of power today.

FOOTNOTES

2. American Lumber Company listing in John H. Kirby Papers (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas).
3. For further information on the BTW, the southern lumber trust, and the overall context of their struggle — as well as details on specific topics discussed in this article — see Jeff Ferrell, The Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Lumber Trust, 1910-1914 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1982).
7. Southwest, October, 1912, p. 77; The St. Louis Lumberman (St. Louis, Missouri), November 1, 1911, p. 44; Industrial Worker (Spokane, Washington), April 20, 1911, p. 1.
10. A Louisiana politician also attempted to prevent The Lumberjack from being sent through the mails — see Covington Hall, Labor Struggles in the Deep South (unpublished manuscript, no date) pp. 215-218; The Rebel (Halletsville, Texas), August 9, 1913, p. 3.
11. Lumber companies also violated labor, wage, andpeonage laws with relative immunity, and evidently had “work for debt” agreements with local courts.
13. According to the operative's report, the operative was later fined $9 for a fight with a BTW member; see operative's report to Kirby Lumber Company, July 10, 1912 — Kirby Papers.
15. Industrial Worker, November 2, 1911, p. 1; Constitution and By-Laws of Brotherhood of Timber Workers (Alexandria, Louisiana: Brotherhood of Timber Workers, 1911), p. 11 — see pp. 3-5, 9-10, 13.
16. Undated document entered as evidence October 31, 1912, in Grabow Trial Records (Trial 6021), Calcasieu Parish Courthouse, Lake Charles, Louisiana.
17. Mr. Smokey interview transcript, April 26, 1980, DeRidder, Louisiana, p. 3; Sam Duplissey interview transcript, Apr 25, 1980, Alexandria, Louisiana, pp. 2-3.
18. Operative report to Kirby Lumber Company, June 16, 1912; operative report to Kirby Lumber Company, May 17, 1912 — Kirby Papers. The Brotherhood, of course, was as careful to protect recruits as it was regular members; in one speech, Emerson warned that All of those who want to buy our books, or join the Union come up [when] the meeting is over, and I will write you up,
MAMMOTH TENTH ANNUAL 
Socialist 
ENCAMPMENT 

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with the exception of the boys from Call 'front'; every one of you leave the building; one of Kirby's 'pimp's' is here from the front to turn you [in]; we will make arrangements to meet you later and take you into membership. . . . (quoted in operative's report to Kirby Lumber Company, June 16, 1912 — Kirby Papers).

19. Industrial Worker, October 24, 1912, p. 1; operative's report to Kirby Lumber Company, June 16, 1912 — Kirby Papers; Industrial Worker, November 28, 1912, p. 7.

20. Southwest, August, 1911, p. 23; operative's report to Kirby Lumber Company, July 10, 1912; operative's report to the Kirby Lumber Company, June 16, 1912 — Kirby Papers. Sam Duplissie recalls his adventures associated with these night meetings — see interview transcript p. 3.

21. Emerson speech typescript March 25, 1912, p. 7 — Kirby papers; Hall, no date, p. 191, 192, 193. A later report indicated a similar incident involving the Kirby Lumber Company — see Southwest, April 1915, p. 53.

22. Hall, no date, p. 128.


24. This tactic was also used in the 1912 San Diego free speech fight and elsewhere — see Jeff Ferrell, The Industrial Workers of the World in San Diego: A Study in the Complexity of Capitalist Domination (unpublished masters thesis University of Texas at Austin, 1977).

25. Hall, no date, p. 199. Hall also utilized The Lumberjack to generate political pressure.

26. Quoted in Hall, no date, pp. 154, 207-208; see p. 199.

27. Industrial Worker, May 30, 1912, p. 5.


29. Hall, no date, pp. 186, 199.


31. Industrial Worker, June 12, 1913, p. 2 — emphasis in original, and December 26, 1912, p. 8.


33. Industrial Worker, May 34, 1912, p. 3; February 27, 1913, pp. 1, 4; see New Orleans Times-Democrat, August 3, 1912, p. 3.

34. In Industrial Worker, February 27, 1913, p. 2.

35. Hall, no date, p. 195.

36. Industrial Worker, November 7, 1912, p. 4; "A Parable" circular in Kirby Papers.

37. New Orleans Times-Democrat, July 10, 1912, p. 1; The Rebel, August 10, 1912, p. 3.

38. The St. Louis Lumberman, August 1, 1912, p. 91; SLOA Report No. 133, October 15, 1912 — Kirby Papers; Hall, no date, p. 200, see pp. 156-174.

39. SLOA Report No. 130; B.J. Bonner to H.C. Fuller, October 21, 1912 — Kirby Papers.

40. The St. Louis Lumberman, August 1, 1912, p. 91; M.L. Alexander to C.D. Johnson, SLOA Report No. 128 — Kirby Papers; Industrial Worker, November 14, 1912, p. 2; Hall, no date, p. 178.

41. Sweet to Kirby, August 10, 1911, and Ripley to Terry — Kirby Papers.

42. St. Louis Lumberman, November 15, 1912, p. 56; SLOA Report, May 24, 1913 — Kirby Papers; Hall, no date, pp. 189, 186.

43. The Rebel, August 2, 1912, p. 1; Hall, no date, p. 199; The Rebel, August 5, 1912, p. 2 — emphasis in original.

44. Hall, no date, pp. 172-73 (emphasis in original), 173,
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1. details pile up like
dirty laundry: the Registry
loses my auto papers & the
woman on the phone barks
at me as if I’d forgotten
to take her on her morning walk.

I call the Rent Board, where
the woman is pleasant & vague;
call the gas company, where
people are systematically
arrogant & accusatory (& they
are all women, a company ploy
against gallant male rage);
call the plumber, who never
answers his phone. I finish
the typed pages of my course
assignments for the fall, an
apparent organization students
like, but which I do only so
I won’t have to think of it again,
as if the paper were thin metal
wires that keep my head attached.

2. details pile up like laundry
waiting to be hanged. is this
success? being settled down;
a lover who’s faithful to me,
whom I see most days after his
work & my chores are finished.

I — who once thought change a
virtue in itself, who loves the
seasons if not the cold, who thinks
the chartreuse leaves along the
highway more glowing than sunlight
on the car, who rides the train
along the coast, the subways in
the city — am settled, and — as they
say in Brooklyn — relatively happy.
implanted. rooted in the ground.

3. am I the white male who illustrates
the trickle-down theory of success?
do tiny droplets water my roots
while they leave others drifting
& unsheltered? is this success?
this relative happiness with
details piling up like fresh dried
laundry I haven’t put away? without
a labor union I’d make less, & unions
are being busted: pilots replaceable,
steeleworkers not Korean enough,
garment workers too expensive for
millionaires. these details are
the hassles of the vanishing middle
class. if I were black, or an Asian
woman with deft hands & weakening eyes,
I wouldn’t have to call the plumber
or the auto registry, I wouldn’t have
to worry who used my bathroom, just
who piled the shit outside my door.
if I had a door, if
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