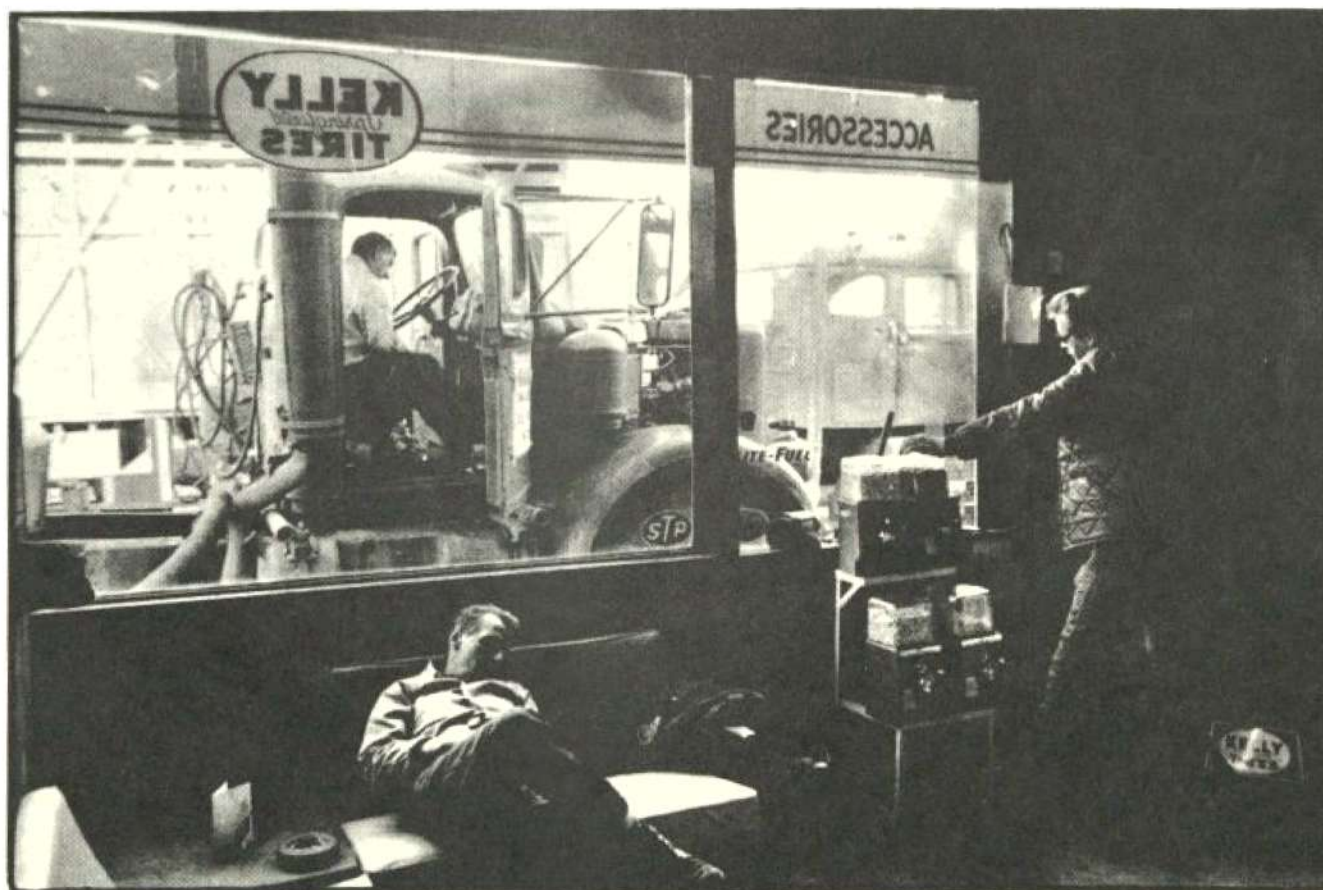


ROOT & BRANCH

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ROOT & BRANCH

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

Faced with the reality of making a living most people tend to establish a certain rhythm to their lives. This often means dividing one's life into compartments: for most people there is working and there is living. On the one hand, the worker is a producer who spends most of his waking hours doing dull monotonous work, who confronts the boss daily, who may engage in strikes, who is often willing to put aside abstract notions like "patriotism" or "the national interest" if they stand in his way. Off the job, on the other hand, he may be a perfectly respectable citizen, possibly a homeowner, who believes many of the myths about the "American Way". Off the job the worker is an atom, who probably does not socialize with the people he works with even if he knows them intimately, whose life revolves around his family and a small circle of friends, especially since the decline of neighborhoods in the big cities. As long as the job delivers enough in wages to maintain a relatively high standard of living, and as long as nothing off the job invades the little niches they have found for themselves, people seem willing to live around the contradictions in their lives and forget the price they must pay for material security.

If masses of people are going to act to change things, something must happen to shake them up on the level of their daily lives forcing them to find new ways to satisfy their basic needs. Radical propaganda is not enough to convince people of the need for change. The combination of an established routine, a fairly high standard of living, and the constant exposure to the mass media is simply too strong to overcome with mere words. It seems to me that barring some kind of major political crisis, an economic crisis remains the only thing which will force people to act to change society. And yet it will not necessarily take a catastrophic crisis to prod people into action since most people's standard of living hangs on the barest thread of credit which can snap at the first sign of unemployment. A few repossessions by banks and finance companies can have a sobering effect.

A crisis tends to unify a class by enabling people within it to see clearly the overriding interest they share with each other. A worker's whole life is disrupted by a depression. Speed-up, loss of over-time, lay-offs, or partial lay-offs result in a sharp drop in the standard of living. A crisis also means further decay of the cities and a decline in the overall quality of life. This unification of the fragmented lives people live can be explosive.

In the past year the country has entered a mild crisis and already we have seen a reaction on the part of many workers. The Post Office strike and the Teamster wildcat are two dramatic examples showing that the workers are quite willing to put aside both the law and the unions to take direct action in their own interests. The concern shown by the Auto companies that Reuther's death may spark "chaos in the plants" indicates that there is a fear in business circles that the wildcat might become a common tool of the workers.

But while the Teamsters' and the Postal workers' strikes are dramatic examples of the rumblings in the working class, many less spectacular things are happening in industries across the

country. A case in point is the New York fuel oil industry.

Until recently New York's oil drivers were not known for their militancy, but things have begun to change. While the shift in attitudes has translated itself into action on only one or two occasions, the general consensus of the men is that they have become more militant and that they will no longer be pushed around so easily. This change is worth discussing since it is fairly typical of what is happening in other places.

The 2,800 men of Teamster Union Local 553 drive for the numerous independent oil companies in New York. These companies are not attached to any of the national corporations and range in size from a few trucks to a few hundred. Together they deliver about 40% of the oil used in New York City. While there are a great many companies, there is a lot of interaction among the drivers at places like the large fuel terminals where trucks of many companies load. For most of the men the work is seasonal, they are bound by the contract to be available from October 15 to April 15 after which they can find work for the summer without losing their seniority. The amount of time a driver will actually work depends on the company and on his seniority. The average driver works about 20 weeks while the men with most seniority work most of the year.

The job consists of loading the truck and delivering the load. A driver is not required to make a set number of loads or stops if he is delivering house oil or oil used in small buildings. Instead he makes several stops with one load. The companies, often Neanderthal in their relations with the drivers, are continually after the men to work faster and sometimes play the drivers off against each other. ("Why did it take you two hours and him an hour and a half?") Besides the boss's harrassment, the driver faces the everyday difficulties of the job: driving a trailer truck or large straight truck in heavy city traffic and on narrow residential streets in any weather, the anger of motorists if the driver has to block a street to make a delivery, or the freezing temperatures of the waterfront where he has to load his truck. There is also the continual danger of spilling the oil if too much is put into a tank—if a driver has too many spills he can be fired. The men must also work extremely long hours. During the peak of the season a driver does little else but work, often ten or twelve hours a day, six or seven days a week. The pay rate is \$35 for an 8 hour day, time and a half for Saturday and double time for Sundays and holidays. In the middle of the season a man can take home \$300 a week or better.

The continual company harrassment (examples of which I will describe below) and the generally bad working conditions have been met with the opposition of some of the drivers for years. While the resistance takes several forms, the only type of organized opposition has been the insurgent coalitions, or slates of candidates which run against the local union leadership. These coalitions are not to be confused with rank-and-file caucuses since they are not open organizations but are composed primarily of candidates for the various positions in the local—President, Vice-President, Business Agents, Trustees, etc. During the last election one of the

coalitions nearly defeated the incumbent leadership. Since that time it has merged with another group and will probably win in next December's election.

To get its message across, the coalition puts out a monthly newsletter pointing out the failures of the current officials and offering suggestions for reforms. Like insurgent groups in other locals that aim at capturing the union machinery, the coalition never transcends simple trade-unionism nor does it ever advocate direct action. On the contrary, they constantly play down the potential for militance of the rank-and-file. Many of the opposition people have been driving for 10 or 20 years, have faced the day to day humiliation one faces and have seen the majority of the men passively accepting their fate. Predictably some of them have begun to feel a little anger and contempt at the passivity of the other men. What they don't realize is that their union militance is no real alternative and will generally be met with cynicism. The spirit of compromise inherent in trade unionism, the nature of bureaucracy which eventually sets itself apart and against the workers, and the temptation to sell out for money or status makes the unions a fraud. Most workers, I think, believe this even though, in lieu of an alternative they wouldn't give the unions up. As one driver said of the coalition, "I'll vote for them because they might be good for one contract, but I've got no illusions—in two years they'll be under the hat."

When I talk about the passivity of the workers I am talking about passivity about day to day problems. When contract time comes around things are a little different. In December 1968, No. 553 went on strike for ten days when the men overwhelmingly rejected a contract negotiated by the union. The union's reaction was interesting: in spite of the fact that 2/3 of the men had voted against ratification, the local leadership called the strike a wildcat—at least until they realized the depth of the feeling against the proposed contract. After ten days the men won another ten dollars over what had been negotiated. Even then the contract was ratified by a narrow margin.

The opposition coalition's increasing strength is one indication of a new militance on the part of the workers, but there is at least one other kind of resistance to management which is both widespread and common, that is individual acts. Individual resistance to the companies grows out of the particular type of relation the truck driver has with his boss. Unlike the factory worker who confronts the boss with or in front of other workers the driver has a much more personal relation with the boss. For example, if a driver should get on the bad side of a shipper, the person who gives out the work, he may find that he is getting all the bad or difficult jobs. The result is that the man feels he is being picked on and has a personal reaction. He will often slow down and say he was caught in traffic or held up in some other way. He may sabotage the truck by getting a flat tire or pulling a few wires. If he gets into a real fight he may just quit since it is easy for a truck driver to find work. This is especially true if he doesn't have much seniority. Clearly this type of response, personal and not collective, won't get anyone anyplace since it serves to perpetuate the divisions among the workers. Yet sabotage can become a very effective tool if it is collectivized, that is, if the men as a group decide to respond to company provocations with slow-ups and similar acts of sabotage. This collective sabotage can be a positive action, an experiment in the regulation of work by the workers themselves, adjusting the amount of work to the drivers' comfort rather than the company's profits.

The men are more concerned about the conditions of work than wages. In the mornings the men show up 15 or 20 minutes early to talk. Usually the conversation turns to new outrages by the company, or to how they beat the company in some way, or to what should be done to change things and

how. Recently the talk has become more militant and while it is difficult to pin-point the exact reasons for it without describing what is happening in the country as a whole, certain things stand out. First, the extensive media coverage of the black and student movements has, to a certain extent, legitimated protest. One often hears, "we're not going to take that, this is 1970, not 1930". To be sure, the more active approach is not automatically a good thing as the recent attack on demonstrating students by New York construction workers recently showed, yet hopefully objective conditions will force it in the right direction. A second factor responsible for the shift in attitudes at this company was the infusion of a number of younger workers with some new ideas who helped to crystallize much of the men's discontent and suggest new ways of dealing with problems. The episode I want to describe shows the nature of those new ideas.

On a Saturday last March one of the drivers was fired for taking too long on his coffee break. He had either been spotted or was followed by one of the company bosses who claimed he had taken an extra ten minutes. (Some companies, including this one, actually hire spies to occasionally put a tail on a driver to make sure he is not stopping anywhere.) There is nothing in the contract about coffee breaks but it is generally assumed in the industry, with the tacit consent of the companies, that the drivers are allowed fifteen minutes. After a discussion, the driver agreed to take a short lunch hour to make up the time. This was in spite of the fact that the boss was lying, for the driver knew he had not even taken fifteen minutes. The company man said he would let it pass with a warning. Later in the day, however, the boss returned to his office and found out that the man had had a previous run-in with the company some months earlier. Then he went back on his word and ordered the driver fired.

Monday morning there was another firing at the same company. This time a driver was fired for refusing to take out an unsafe vehicle. Throughout the season the man had been given either unsafe vehicles or ones that barely met minimum safety standards. Finally after a week in which he had at least one and sometimes two dangerous breakdowns every day, the driver refused to take out a truck which had leaks in the trailer, a broken window, bad tires, no windshield wipers, and a fuel tank which leaked through the vent (this drips fuel under the tractor wheels and causes poor traction). Some defects violated the contract. The defects had been reported numerous times but nothing had been done to repair them. The company told him that he would either have to take the truck out or punch out and go home since there were no other trucks available. The driver refused to do either since he felt he had a right to his day's pay even if the company did not have a decent truck for him. It is in the contract that if the company books a man and does not have either work or a truck available the man must still be paid. Instead, the company fired the man.

The two fired men then went to the Local headquarters on the recommendation of the shop steward. They explained what had happened to the Vice-President who told them in the manner of union officials the world over to "stay calm"—even though the drivers had shown no signs of excitement. He said a meeting would be set up with the Business Agent who covered the area, where there would be a meeting with the company and the men would have their jobs back.

The fired men had other ideas. First they made picket signs and picketed the yard. They explained their cases to the men, first verbally and then with a leaflet they wrote which explained the circumstances of their being fired and concluded with the following:

This harassment must stop—the time to fight is now. The union tells us to keep calm and go to arbitration. But arbitration is a dead-end street. It is a trick used by the Union and

management to prevent workers from taking real direct action to settle their grievances. We pay union dues supposedly so we will have some defense against the boss—why should the union be able to get off the hook by passing the buck to an arbitration board? We might as well forget the union and pay our dues directly to the arbitration board. Going to arbitration means going without a pay check for weeks and it means putting your fate into the hands of a board which is not impartial—few workers win in arbitration.

We are asking for action from the Union now—today. If we don't get action we are asking your support to help us get our jobs back and to get the pay we have lost as a result of these firings. We have heard a lot of talk from some of the men—now is the time to put up or shut up. What happened to us today will happen to you tomorrow. An injury to one should be an injury to all. Let's get off our knees and stand up and fight. We have the power to cage the animals that run this company. Without us not a single gallon of oil moves, not a single penny of profit is made. The choice is clear. Think it over carefully. Who wants to live in a world of gravelers?

Picketing and distributing leaflets of this kind is unheard of in the oil industry, yet the other men received them enthusiastically. Men that the coalition militants had said would never help came around offering encouragement and asking what they could do to help. The women working in the office promised to walk out with the men. The fired men said that if the meetings scheduled with the company for the next day, Wednesday, did not come off in their favor, they wanted the men to walk off. In any event, the fired men and their supporters in the company—they felt they could actually count on a little less than half the forty or so men who drive from this particular yard—and even outsiders, would barricade the driveway and stop the trucks. The way it looked now the fired men would have the support of most of the other drivers. This was a big change from a few months earlier during another dispute when the thought of a wildcat was frightening.

The next morning, before the meeting, the drivers again picketed the driveway, walking back and forth slowly, which only let the trucks out one by one. This caused the trucks to back up in a long line under the office window. It was hoped that this would show the company that the men would not cross the picket line unless the picketers wanted them to.

The meeting the next day was really surreal. The participants were: the company man, known as "labor consultant" (what used to be called a goon). He handles the labor difficulties of eleven independent companies, mostly in Brooklyn, and bills himself as a "hatchetman"; the Union Business Agent; the shop steward who firmly supported the men but who was forced to turn the cases over to the Business Agent because they involved firings; and the two drivers. Each driver met separately with the company. Each meeting followed essentially the same script. When one of the drivers explained his position and then said that the company did not care anything about the men, he was told that he was perfectly correct, the company was interested only in making money and didn't care about "little people who are nothing". What particularly enraged the labor consultant was that the drivers had distributed the leaflet. He claimed that the leaflet was grounds in itself for firing since it advocated ignoring arbitration, and because the contract specifies arbitration as the method of settling disputes the drivers were put outside the sphere of "protective activity". This is why workers can be fired for engaging in wildcats—they are breaking the Union contract. When he was told that the company had broken the contract by assigning a truck that violated the contract because it had broken windows and no windshield wipers he snapped back that he did not care about contracts, the oil had to be moved. All the while the Business Agent sat there trying to calm the drivers down. It was finally agreed that, because the company feared trouble, the drivers would get their jobs

back but not their lost pay (three days). The drivers decided to take the compromise settlement because they were not sure whether the men would act under the changed circumstances—and they felt it would be better to back down a little in order to be around to fight later.

The whole episode served a good purpose. First, the men were pushed to the point of walking out—something that had not happened before. Secondly, it clearly showed how bad the union was and that taking a militant stand might be the best way to fight the company. The two drivers and their supporters continued to hammer away at the need for direct action to handle disputes. There is more of a feeling of solidarity at the company and not just among the younger workers who were already sympathetic.

In the Fall, some of the men hope to put out a direct action oriented newspaper to spread the word. One of the men is also planning to run for shop steward when the present steward, who is running for local office on an opposition slate leaves in December. It is hoped that in this manner the actual job of a shop steward can be eliminated (except for the figure-head which is required by the Union structure) and replaced by a committee made up of all the drivers who will meet regularly. This is a good first step in building an independent movement controlled by the drivers to fight for improved conditions without intermediaries. The meetings should serve, also, to eliminate many of the petty squabbles and divisions among the drivers. Most of the men think it is a very good idea. The way such a structure would relate to the Union as a whole remains to be seen. The hard-core anti-Union militants, of which there are only a few, feel that it is impossible to oppose the insurgent coalition and that it is best to merely point out that it will be powerless to do anything to really change things since the District Council or the International would crush it. At worst it will become just like the present leadership. Nevertheless, if people are going to vote, they should vote for the opposition.

It might be thought that the anti-Union militants should have the same attitude towards the shop stewards as they do towards the local leadership. But these two levels of the Union seem to be different. Often the shop steward has little to do with the Union Local; there is little contact and often genuine hostility. The shop steward is not considered by the men to be a Union officer but as one of their own. After all, he's a worker on the job. But the fact remains that the steward functions as a mediator between the workers and the Union structure. He is there and you have to get rid of him.

The men hope to run a shop steward who intends to stop being shop steward, and to function as no more than the moderator of meetings of the drivers. Many of the drivers feel that this action will serve notice on the companies and Union that things should be different, and provide a concrete example for drivers in other yards. It should be noted that, while the events here are of little significance in themselves, confined to one yard, workers throughout the industry are in constant communication and the experience of this yard was known and discussed by workers throughout.

Perhaps this plan to abolish the shop stewardship by capturing it is a trojan horse. The men look upon it as an experiment. In any event, it is a step taken partially in recognition of the limits of the present fight. Many men still accept their fate as pawns between company and Union. They are not willing to break with the Union completely. The abolition of the steward's position will throw things in their laps, forcing them to confront their own problems on the job by relying on direct, collective action, rather than going with gripes to the steward.

The construction of a really independent workers movement will be a long term process. Only when the idea of an independent workers' movement spreads to other workers can

the drivers totally ignore the Union and rely upon alternative forms of action in every instance.

Next Fall should be a period of great activity. The elections are coming up and in December, the contract expires and there is little likelihood of preventing a strike. Since there is no doubt that the Union will do all in its power to shorten the dispute, this fight will force the men to rely upon their own strength if they will win anything significant. The experience of the past year will acquire a new meaning in the light of this concrete instance of the need of independent organization and coordination of the drivers. It will offer a real opportunity to generalize and strengthen the movement.

Mac Brockway

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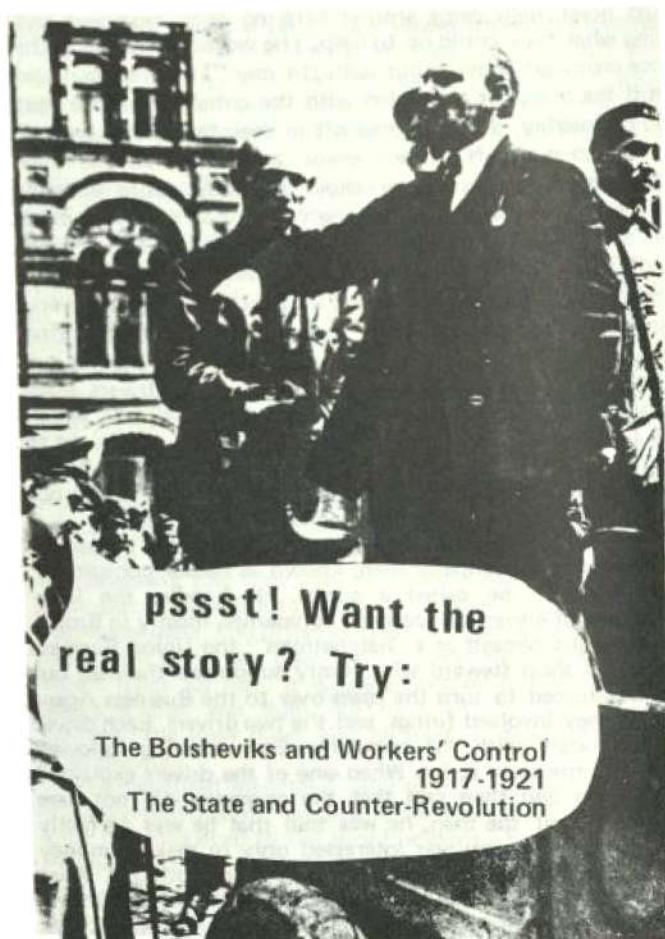
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AUTOMATIC PRODUCTION

All for the Best

The benefits of industrial society under capitalism are purchased at a terrible cost: the regimentation and dehumanization of labor, the distortion of human needs, global war, ecological unbalance. These facts are either denied by bourgeois writers, explained away as necessary evils, or glibly accepted as temporary problems subject to amelioration. This last group, so proud of its liberal willingness to admit to the existence of social problems, is known for its boundless faith in the ability of capitalism to solve problems.

Thus with what joy did they greet the "age of automation", "the new machine age", the "second industrial revolution". The machine which had enslaved mankind would now liberate it. With the same iron necessity with which the machine itself had supposedly ushered in the age of human mutilation, it would usher in the new age of human freedom.

So the Museum of Modern Art held an exhibit on "The machine as seen at the end of the mechanical age". John Kenneth Galbraith wrote a widely heralded book on *The New Industrial State* in which he promised the end of the class struggle by means of the automation of the industrial working class out of existence. It was announced that "automation may be a reversal rather than an extension of the first industrial revolution" because it would replace

large numbers of unskilled workers on drab, monotonous jobs with highly trained technicians in challenging, responsible assignments of keeping the fabulous machines running . . . The new technology may cure the evils of the old technology.¹

All the evils of capitalist industry which have been denied can now be admitted. But behind the frankness there is a self-assured smile. Don't worry. What the machine hath taken away, as we told you all along, the machine giveth. Capitalist industry transformed the worker into a mutilated human being, the performer of repetitious dull operations, a complement, a part of the machine. Automation will now reverse this process, by eliminating these dull, boring operations through complete mechanization, demanding higher education levels of those who continue to work. It is contended that unemployment is not a problem but that, rather, there is, and for some unspecified reason, will always be, a dearth of skilled labor. Unemployment is said to result not from automation but from low growth rates, caused by wrong government policies, either of too much or too little, and by "structural unemployment" which is generally due to the undereducation of the work force .

Two, Three, Many Industrial Revolutions

Automation is described as the second industrial revolution. According to Norbert Wiener, in *The Human Use of Human Beings*, the first industrial revolution was the replacement of



human brawn whereas the second is the replacement of human intelligence in labor. Leaving aside the fact that, if this were the case it would make even more doubtful the increase of demand for intellectual labor (in fact Wiener was most pessimistic concerning, at least the immediate results of automation), this view is a serious misunderstanding. The first industrial revolution was also the automation of intellectual labor. It rested upon the transformation of skilled into unskilled labor, of the craftsman into a mere hand who no longer guided and instructed his tools but was instead guided and instructed by the machine. While it also eliminated many kinds of heavy labor, the machine in general was used to transform work into a purely physical task. It might be said then that the second industrial revolution actually is the final elimination of physical labor in contrast to the first which eliminated mental labor. In fact, both developments occurred in each "revolution" insofar as they may be differentiated at all.

The tendency of capitalist industry is to displace human labor by the machine. All machines are automatic mechanisms operating to some degree without human guidance or control.



From the point of view of the worker, automation is simply the total elimination of the human being from direct intervention in the production process. The means by which this total mechanization is effected, whether through cybernetic devices, computers, or other means, is irrelevant insofar as its effects upon the labor process and life conditions of the worker are concerned. From the historical viewpoint of the working class movement, the introduction of new production techniques, such as cybernetic devices or new power sources, is not of decisive importance and does not warrant the title of a new industrial revolution. Rather, it continues the general effects of the first industrial revolution, that is to say, of the industrial revolution. This is of course hardly to say that these questions are of no importance, nor to deny the possibility of technical "revolutions"; it is merely to state the simple fact that automation and cybernation are continuances of the general tendency of capitalist industry.

The extent of automation is determined by the requirements of capital expansion and profit production which form its limit.² On the one hand, the goal of profit production, which is surplus-value, that is surplus labor, must ultimately conflict with the elimination of labor. On the other hand, the efficiency of automated processes is determined not in comparison with the total working-time but only with the necessary portion of the labor-time, that which the capitalist pays in wages.

The history of technology shows that in many cases machines were ignored or abandoned for a time when manual labor remained more profitable for the industrialists, with no consideration of the difficulty of the tasks thus retained.³

In fact, automation is today still a rarity in production, affecting only a few industries fully, such as some chemical processes.⁴ Labor is still cheaper than the gigantic investments required for fully automated processes. The limits of automation in the capitalist economy derive ultimately from the relative stagnation of that economy at the present time; a situation which seemingly cannot be overcome within the private property framework of the system as it exists.

The various spheres of industry are interdependent in the capitalist system. (This is, for instance, why a crisis and depression or a boom affects the economy as a whole.) In the long run, the transformation of one sphere of production through extensive new investment in automated equipment can proceed only to a limited extent unless this occurs in other spheres, throughout the economy as a whole. The piecemeal automation of the present time must eventually either come to an end or be accelerated throughout the system.

The situation is different in a state-controlled economy of the Russian type. In such a system, in which the ruling class, controlling the sum total of economic resources, can plan the allocation of capital for the system as a whole, automation could possibly continue indefinitely, while workers not needed for production could be kept employed in various forms of waste production. But in a mixed economy like that of the US, in which the government-directed sector is subservient to the private sector, this is impossible. Here the total capital can be dealt with practically only in the form of the private corporate capitals which make it up. There is no real planning of the economy as a whole; rather the individual corporations make investment decisions on the basis of their private profit requirements.

Given the stagnation of the capitalist economy at the present time, an acceleration of automation beyond its current limits would be possible only with the abolition of the mixed

economy and the substitution of a state-controlled one. (Indeed, the technical developments of the post-war period in Western Europe and the United States are in general a function of State spending, mostly of the military kind.⁵) Such a change of the form of production by the ruling class is now imaginable only as a response to a deep-going social and economic crisis from which genuinely revolutionary forces may also emerge.

Part Machine, Part Human

As long as automated techniques are introduced piecemeal, workers must continue to supplement machine operations. Insofar as workers continue to produce directly with machines, no matter how otherwise automated, they suffer from increasing subordination to the machine, boredom, stupification. As the machine takes over more and more of the intelligent functions of the producer, as of the physical activity—since mental and physical labor are always combined to some degree—the producer is more and more reduced to mindless activity.

Automation has not reduced the drudgery of labor. The very opposite is true.⁶

Those who work with automated equipment do not enjoy the fact that, as Marcuse has said, their work is transformed into "psycho-technical rather than physical labor."⁷ The worker is perhaps not exhausted physically. Instead he has no opportunity to use his body at all. In place of physical energy, he expends energy of tension. Both this lack of movement and constant tension contribute to disease and deterioration of mind and body.

Perhaps it is true in a few isolated cases that in the automated factory,

The worker is swung along by the form and rhythm of his work; the satisfaction this gives him can be highly productive.⁸

In such instances, the worker would have to be a very incidental component of the plant. In general, the worker, as in all capitalist industry, is not swung but driven, and the feeling is anything but satisfying or productive. For example, it is said that,

Petroleum refineries and chemical processing plants are so highly automated that everything is controlled by one or two operators, who certainly can also be replaced. If and when they are it will not be for reasons of cost but because they slow down the operation" (which is of course also a reason of cost).⁹

These workers, who form the upper limit of the speed of the production process must be under constant pressure to quicken their workpace.

An Example

It is highly instructive to examine the consequences of automation in one industry in some detail. Thanks to the US Department of Labor Bulletin No. 1437, it is possible to get a relatively complete picture of what is in store for the machine tool industry,¹⁰ once consisting almost entirely of highly skilled tool and die makers and semi-skilled machine operators. In this industry,

Numerical control permits automatic operation of machine tools by such means as a system of electronic devices (control units) and changeable tapes.¹¹

Reductions in unit labor cost requirements in machining operations range generally from 25 to 80 per cent, which more

than compensates the increased costs of numerically controlled machine tools. Almost all new machine tools are therefore of this kind. At the same time, profit costs prevent the full automation of this industry. We may let the Department of Labor speak for itself in describing "Changes in Content of Machine-Tool Operator Jobs."

The machine operator working a conventional machine tool is required to set up a machine including indexing of table or workpiece, select the cutting speed and feed; and keep adjusting the machine settings to achieve part specifications. Under numerical control, these duties are automatically carried out by coded tape instructions. The operator of the numerically controlled machine tool is responsible for tending or watching a highly automatic, costly piece of equipment as it goes through a sequence of operations. He loads the control tape, fastens the part in the fixture, and verifies finished part dimensions. When finished part dimensions do not conform to specifications, or an operating malfunction occurs, the operator of a numerical control machine is usually required to notify the supervisor or programmer rather than make the necessary adjustments himself.¹²

While the worker is thus reduced to this simple, dull activity, reduced from what was already a dull, mechanical job, companies demand highly skilled and trained workers, and perhaps even knowledge of programming techniques. In addition,

Some companies prefer to use highly skilled and experienced machine-tool operators on numerically controlled tools.¹³

As the skill content of the jobs fall, the skill level of the worker is expected to rise. The high formal requirements asked by the companies are used in statistics pretending to show rising skill requirements of work, despite the actual fall.

But the machine operator is the least skilled producer in this industry. What are the consequences of automation for the most skilled, the tool designer and tool and die maker?

Many of the decisions, judgments, shop practices, and precision machinery functions presently required of these highly skilled craftsmen will also be transferred to the planning and programming operations to be coded as instructions on a control tape . . .

The functions and skills of the draftsman and engineer-designer may be altered considerably as a result of various new methods of automating design being developed in conjunction with numerical control. . . . Techniques (which) produce a computer-captured model of the shape to be manufactured which can be converted readily into tape instructions for use on numerically controlled machine tools. When this occurs, it may affect the numbers of draftsmen required in the future. The principal duties of the engineer-designer will be the selection of design criteria and development of mathematical techniques for determining optimum design.¹⁴

Of course, these are not the limits of automation.

It is useful to briefly compare the changes of content in numerically controlled machine tool work in Soviet Russia. While Soviet sources make the same claims as US government and corporation officials concerning the enhancing effects of automation on work, the actual results also seem to belie the contentions. The machine operator, now liberated through automation, can

tend several machines at the same time. Where a series of machines is controlled by one worker the manual operations on one machine may be carried out while the other machines are working automatically.¹⁵

But, in case this liberated worker has too much free time on his hands,

On integrated automated lines the job of machine operator can be eliminated altogether, and the tool setter can perform the few operator functions that remain.¹⁶

In other words, as in US industry, a whole section of workers

become mere tenders of "the fabulous machines." Rather than a deliberate policy of the elimination of the destructive hierarchical division of labor between skilled and unskilled workers, following, for example, the suggestions of Marx, Russian industry has reproduced the hierarchical division of labor which prevails in all capitalist industry. Like the US spokesmen, they contend that this will be changed through the technical uplifting of all job categories through automation. In fact automation tends to reduce rather than raise job categories.

A Better World, Only Worse

Nor is this tendency confined to factory labor. In a study of the automation of office work,¹⁷ Michael Rose contends that,

Computerization tends to reproduce the consequences—more repetitive, 'routinized' and 'machine-paced' work duties for employees and more standardized service to the customers—of mass-production factory mechanization.¹⁷

According to Donald N. Michael,

While there is considerable feeling that cybernation is definitely displacing the unskilled (and in some cases reducing what were skilled jobs to unskilled ones), only recently has there been a growing awareness that cybernation challenges the job security of many workers customarily classified as skilled. For example, numeric control, the technology of guiding the machine tool by computer, is just beginning to make inroads into the skilled blue-collar community of metal workers, welders... and the like....¹⁸

Michael continues to list some of those who can expect to be replaced through cybernation: machine maintenance workers, clerical and office workers, middle management, engineers and others engaging in compiling information and issuing "expert" advice which can now be supplied through the computer and other cybernated equipment.

Michael notes that, due to automation,

White-collar workers are coming to recognize what blue-collar workers have long known: technological change introduces uncertainty. Many skilled persons will be subject to replacement by the latest cybernated device.... This means a continuing potential threat of downgrading or retraining for the skilled, and along with it the emotional difficulties of job insecurity which will be new to skilled workers.

... changes in organization within both plant and office, which are inevitable when computers and automatic production lines are introduced, change social relationships as well. Among other things, conversation on the job and other informal, social arrangements are often reduced during the working period because fewer people are needed to perform cybernated tasks and they may be physically separated. There are changes in the pathways to job promotion and the procedures by which efficiency is judged; these wipe out investments in time and experience which people have expected to be applied to their future careers. And with smaller work forces and fewer supervisory tasks, openings for job promotions are often sharply altered or reduced. These changes therefore destroy traditional expectancies about how things will be done and how people will be evaluated.¹⁹

In addition to the many other benefits which automation is bringing to the working population, a marked increase in shift work has been noted in recent years through the introduction of automation, as rising capital costs make the expense of idle machinery ever greater. In France, for example, the percentage of undertakings in the manufacturing industry which had introduced shift work rose from 8.7 in 1957 to 11.2

in 1959 and the percentage of workers in this sector who worked in shifts rose from 12 to 17 in the same period....

This increase is no doubt directly linked to the introduction of continuous processes, which are frequently automated, in a widening variety of operations.

In Britain as well,

The installation of large-scale systems of automated data processing has led to some night shift working in certain offices. As yet this development affects only a very small number of employees, but the number is likely to grow, though not to any massive extent. The introduction of on-line computer-controlled systems of manufacture and material processing is likely to have a greater influence on the development of shift working in the future. There is, however, considerable resistance from workers and some trade unions to the spread of shift working.²⁰

Attempts were expected to be made to exchange a four-day week for the introduction of shift work on week-ends and at night.

Thus for the majority of workers continuing to produce along-side of automated machines, automation promises no improvements, in fact the very contrary. It may be said that, despite all of this, the demand for highly skilled engineers, scientists and technicians will markedly increase with the development of automation.

The Redundant Brain?

Even if this were true, while there is no doubt that the absolute and even the relative number of skilled technicians and scientists has increased with the post-World War II technological development, it must be remembered that the increased skill levels of some technicians develops on the basis of the general fall in knowledge requirements and applications by workers in general. In every industry, scientific knowledge becomes the province of a small number of skilled workers while the majority is divorced from all intellectual activity. The computer industry is itself a recent example. Initially, in the immediate post-World War II period, all of those who 'worked with the machines' hardware were skilled maintenance men, capable of operating and repairing the equipment. As the industry became more developed, the technical training of these workers, and of all those who worked directly with the machines, was not kept up. Instead a new division of labor came into being with a handful of highly skilled computer repairers, and a large number of un- or semi-skilled workers who knew nothing of the operations of the machinery, and functioned merely as tape changers and in other mindless auxiliary capacities. Through the conscious policy of the creation of hierarchies, the machine which can replace skilled professional labor is serviced by full-time tape changers!

In general, automation continues the rising productivity of labor of the entire industrial development. This means that less labor is utilized to produce a greater quantity of goods. Included in the labor must be the education of the producers. While, for a truly free society, human beings must understand in order to control the scientific and technical processes at their disposal, a rising labor productivity which demanded increased labor time would be nonsense. It is precisely because rising labor productivity, including the development of technology, decreases the demands for training and for labor time in general that it is a potentially liberating force. Precisely this development under capitalism leads to the cheapening of labor which is the very goal of the capitalist process. The fact is that the computer has shown that intellectual labor is only labor.

and can be replaced by machinery as easily as any other kind of labor. Particularly under capitalist conditions where the skilled worker is assigned uncreative, restrictive tasks defined by the limited requirements of profits and war-making, mechanization of these jobs will continue. While the skilled workers' labor is differentiated from that of other workers often by only the degree of its boredom, the education factory is itself often only an element of hierarchy and discipline of the workers and technically trained. The university system also serves to cheapen brain work by mass production of students. In large part, the dissatisfaction of the "new working class" to which a number of radicals a few years back looked for their "revolutionary constituency" stemmed from the fact that these workers feel slighted in production. After years of technical training, they are generally faced with the choice of performing mechanical, proletarianized functions or else joining management. The reality of their position stands in stark contrast to their belief in their own self-importance. Often, as frequently emerged in the May 1968 events in France, the demands of these workers for control in production stemmed from their desire to have greater control over the other workers (See *R & B* pamphlet 3, *The Mass Strike in France*), to take what they felt was their rightful place as the technical masters of production. But a revolutionary movement of these workers, who are being unemployed today as well as proletarianized on the job, can develop only when they renounce any pretensions about their own importance in production and seek control as workers, that is, equally with all other workers.

As we noted, in order to actually control the machines and modern technology, human beings must understand them and a truly liberated humanity will require great knowledge and understanding. But these considerations do not define the requirements of capitalist technology. Production according to profit considers education to be merely a cost of production; education which can not be employed in the production of profits is sheer waste production and from this point of view is totally useless. Even if the absolute number of educated workers had to increase, it would not be great enough to compensate for the millions of unemployed and the denigration of those employed; but, in fact, there is even evidence that, just as automation may also lead to a general fall in the absolute numbers of productive workers, so will it lead to an actual fall in the absolute numbers of scientists and engineers. Cuts in armaments and space programs are actually leading to such results in the United States today.

Thus it has been said that

The control industry has 'closed the industrial loop' meaning that it has made intricate processes subject to computer control. It has now begun to close the 'intellectual loop', which will make the industrial operation subject to the control of management through a hierarchy of computers.²¹

Here is the dream world in which a few rulers' commands are transformed directly from will to reality without the intervention of human beings who look on as passive observers and recipients of the will of the gods. Under such conditions, however, as Paul Mattick has remarked,

capital would feed labor instead of labor feeding capital. The conditions of capitalism would have been completely reversed. Value and surplus-value production would no longer be possible.²²

Automatic Misery

As we have said, from the point of view of the working

class, there have been not two, nor three, nor four industrial revolutions but only one continuous crisis-ridden process of capitalist development which has generally deteriorating effects for the working population. Automation does not reverse the results of the first industrial revolution, but continues the stupefaction of labor, the insecurity of unemployment and work down-grading. "Giant robot brains" are not ironing out the "over-all complexities" of modern times but threaten rather to be instruments of human destruction. Automation is not eliminating the causes of class conflict but intensifying the crisis of class society. In short, automation, like industry in general, is not in itself a boon to humanity but is rather an instrument, an instrument which will be used against the workers until they seize control of it themselves. By seizing hold directly of production, the workers may abolish hierarchical and atomic divisions of labor and thus lay the groundwork for the abolition of labor itself.

The possibility of automation unfettered by capitalism is a real alternative now. This alternative holds up the spectre of the abolition of work, exposing the contradiction in the division of labor between managerial and managed function; or between predominantly intellectual and predominantly physical work. Automation, while reifying these capitalist conditions, potentially exposes the absurdity of the fetishistic belief in the incompetence of the mass of producers and the special nature of those who perform intellectual and managerial functions. So long as the producer was required to perform definite productive functions within the machine process, even total workers' control and equality could not release him or her completely from the limitations of industrial work. Automation makes the whole basis of the wage system into an obviously obsolescent and absurd form. Like all technology, automation opens the basis for a restructuring and freedom of human life, opens up a wide variety of options for the greatest human freedom; and like all technology, used under capitalist production at its lowest common denominator, it becomes an instrument of human mutilation.

Beyond Full Employment

Under capitalist conditions workers do not struggle first for the abolition of labor or even for the abolition of the wages system. First they fight to hold on to their jobs, or to defend their old positions in industry against the encroachments of capitalist technology. This they attempt to do through the old forms of "workers' organization" such as the labor parties and trade unions. However, these organizations are based upon an acceptance of the profit requirements of capital, while it is these requirements which demand the automation in the first place. At best, unions have managed to hold on to the jobs of members already employed, jobs which are closing up with retirement and workers leaving. At worst, as in the case of the United Mine Workers, the union receives actual payments to give the owners a free hand in automation. (In the case of the mine workers as well we see the destruction of health by virtue of the capitalist use of automation; through speed-up of the machines which kick up excessive amounts of dust. Here is the final irony, for potentially modern machinery could totally dispel the danger of work, and of mining, altogether.) In between are cases such as the West Coast Longshoremens. Here all "certified" workers were guaranteed pay for 35 hours work no matter how great automation. However, a great portion of

workers are not certified and these suffer the full consequences of automation. But even this stratification of privileges will not serve to overcome the full effects of automation

upon those who benefit from it now in the future.

The struggle, even to maintain jobs or to protect the given conditions can only take place through a movement which rejects the premises which make these demands appear realistic. That is to say, the demand to maintain the given conditions of wage-slavery can only be carried out through a movement which rejects the bases of the conditions of wage-slavery. Only through the seizure and running of plants and offices can workers force employers, even momentarily, to rescind those investment decisions which will displace the workers. What is at stake is not actually the demand to save jobs, or to retain the stupefying kinds of jobs presently carried out, but rather a rejection of the capitalist use of technology. Of course, workers today will and must fight for jobs, both to hold on to their own and to open up new ones. But as this need grows, the means by which it can be obtained can only be those which challenge the very bases of capitalist industry, posing the question of who determines production. A movement which could force full employment under capitalist conditions in violation of profit requirements is an impossibility. A movement around such a program might be capable of scaring, but not of destroying, the ruling powers. If the workers were prepared to implement such a program taking the full consequences into account, they would be fully revolutionary and therefore not interested in limiting themselves to the demand for full employment. Many socialists would for this very reason approve of this slogan, because they believe that programs consisting of demands of just this kind are needed to trick the workers into revolution. But a full understanding of the real conditions is precisely one of the things that a revolutionary workers' movement is about.

Thus the demand for full employment must give way to the demand for the abolition of the wage-system, for workers' control, for the abolition of the old division of labor, as means for the abolition of labor. The movement for jobs becomes the movement to abolish wage-labor through the means of class struggle which demands a practice which rejects the assumptions of the wage system and therefore of full employment. The means of factory seizures, general strikes, and operation of plants by the workers themselves which would have to be employed for a movement for full employment are not utilizable on a sustained basis by such a movement, for they demand a level of struggle which could be vigorously and consistently pursued only by a collectivity which has already gone beyond such limited demands. The workers must come to consciously reject the demand for full employment. Just as Engels noted that the demand "a fair day's pay for a day's work" must give way to the demand for "the abolition of the wages system", so we today must recognize that the movement for full employment must give way to the movement for the abolition of labor.

Automation will not naturally lead to the overcoming of the capitalist conditions; although it makes those conditions increasingly obsolete, it does so only as the consistent extension of those conditions. Only through the direct seizure of control of industry can the workers transpose the natural tendency of capitalist production by their conscious intervention, redetermining industry according to their own needs and

knowledge. Automation can be used in a liberating way only by human beings who are themselves liberated.

Joel Stein

notes

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2. Paul Mattick. "The Economics of Cybernation". *New Politics*.
3. Georges Friedmann, *Industrial Society*. N.Y. 1955. p. 174.
4. For a full treatment of the limits of automation under capitalism see footnote three above and the chapter on "Technology and the Mixed Economy" in Paul Mattick's *Marx and Keynes*.
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ITALY: THE STRUGGLES AT FIAT '69

Introduction

The following article is the first of a series to be published in Root & Branch on the labor struggles in Italy. For the past two years, Italy has seen an explosion of unrest among workers and peasants. Far from having abated, the movement has spread and deepened, enveloping more and more of the country in sustained agitation. The series will focus on inside accounts and analyses of worker struggles by participants or militants with close ties to rank-and-file groups. Besides providing hard-to-obtain coverage of this great upsurge and its meaning for Western Europe, the articles also will be of practical importance for American readers. The dynamics governing waves of unrest are sufficiently similar for all capitalist industrialized countries to allow many insights and lessons to be drawn from the Italian experience for application here.

This article is about the beginning of the struggles in the Fiat plants in Turin in the Spring of 1969. It is part of a taped interview with Vittorio Rieser, a labor organizer who participated in the 1968-1969 struggles at Fiat, and one of the key figures of the extra-parliamentary Italian left, associated with the groups of Lotta Continua at Turin. The interview was conducted in June, 1969, after the first round of work stoppages at Fiat, and it first appeared in Quaderni Piacentini in July, 1969.

Fiat is rapidly becoming the General Motors of Western Europe, outselling Volkswagen in the West European market. With a recent merger with the French Citroen and a major investment in the Soviet Union, a model factory city called Togliattigrad (the Russians' and Fiat's homage to the memory of the Italian Communist Party boss), Fiat is moving beyond its parochial but dominant role in the Italian economy to a commanding position in all of Europe. A crucial ingredient in its success was the skillful manipulation of its 140,000 man work force. Since the early 50's, the Fiat workers were passive, isolated and atomized, largely as the result of a two-pronged strategy of management: the weeding out of militants and the massive recruitment of cheap, unskilled labor from the South, uprooted and atomized by their new life in the North.

In 1969, this pattern of labor relations was shattered irrevocably. The explosion was brought on by many factors:

inflation that aggravated the already miserable living conditions in a city overcrowded by Southern immigrants; speed-up along the assembly lines that insured Fiat's ability to fill the expanding market; freshly arrived immigrants seasoned by struggles in the South; the example of the student movement. No longer could Fiat exercise control as the social crisis deepened in Italy. After years of dealing with a quiet, disciplined labor force—there were only 34 strike days between 1962 and 1968—the storm-clouds burst. Due to a continuous series of strikes and slowdowns, Fiat was producing 50,000 less cars per month by the summer of 1969.

As the workers became less intimidated and more hostile and openly assertive, the traditional paternalistic approach of management lost all effect and meaning. The central problem for Fiat became how to control and channel the workers' militancy in order to defuse the explosive situation. Concretely, this meant that the company, in violation of its traditional policy, had to accept the existence of a workers' movement, at least for the time being, and deal with it as an independent force. To crush it or ignore it would have exacerbated the situation because the workers were too strong and defiant. Instead, the choice was to foster an institutionalized labor movement that would harness, dissolve, and dissipate the elan and enthusiasm of the workers through a drawn-out process of negotiations.

The trade unions were made to order for this purpose. The main theme of this article is how the unions tried to muscle themselves into a position of authority and strength among the workers so as to have a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis the company. As late as the beginning of 1969, Fiat had kept union membership down to 6000, but under the impact of the workers' insurgence, the company hastened to recognize and negotiate with the unions.

This pattern happens over and over again. As workers pull together and begin to challenge the boss, the unions appear from without seeking to mediate. Today, in Western Europe and in the U.S., the unions, regardless of their political stripe, are centralized national bureaucracies that step into the worker-capitalist conflict as a third party. In earlier times, this was not true: the unions were often genuine rank-and-file organizations that were only as strong as the workers' sense of

solidarity. It is an important question whether such unions naturally evolve bureaucratic structures, but it is a question that only relates to new organizations that workers may create now. The existing unions, as a matter of fact, have reached that stage and when they enter a nonunion workplace, they think foremost of their own interests as mediators; they do not operate as the voice or representative of the workers. They inject themselves as buffers between the workers and their employers, offering benefits to each to justify their role. For the company, they guarantee smooth labor relations by removing the locus of conflict from the oppressive workplace—the arena of "unruly" mass direct action—to the more pleasant and manageable bargaining table and the slowly grinding grievance-settling machinery. They offer themselves to the workers as instruments that win concessions from the capitalists. Their appeal centers on the claim that only they have the ability, organization, and influence to win. The workers should hire the unions to be their agents, and the unions will accept dues as payment for valuable services rendered. All over Western Europe and the U.S. this cynical attitude is quite common; the gap between the rank-and-file and the unions has become so great that one rarely hears of talk of "our unions" by the workers.

Any self-respecting hired agent will try to limit the constraints placed on his or her initiative in order to freely exercise his or her judgment, even when carrying out someone else's purpose or intention. Not being so honorable, the unions invariably demand a monopoly of initiative and authority from the workers. These hired agents are really threatened by the active agency of the workers: it denies their usefulness to the capitalists if they don't have control over the workers and there is no need for their presence if the workers rely on themselves. Hence the invariable efforts of the unions to sabotage and destroy the confidence and initiative of the workers. This article discusses in very concrete terms how the unions actively fought the emerging solidarity of the workers by attempting to limit the strikes to certain shops and time periods, how they attempted to set in motion controlled strikes that weaken and ebb naturally, showing the workers, when the excitement has died down, that the unions are the only available weapons they have.

The company and the unions have failed to bring a trade union regime to Fiat. The situation was never in their hands to control. The struggles began under worker initiative and swept past the limits set by the unions. Since the beginning of 1969, the Fiat workers have broadened the struggle involving all of Turin. How the workers structured and organized themselves and the struggles, how these experiences have been assimilated, digested, and analyzed, what lessons have been drawn, and how the struggle is generalizing and spreading will be topics for future articles.

Steven Sapolsky

What was the situation at Fiat about two months ago before this cycle of struggles began? What were the major internal tensions? How were they different from a year ago? What was the reaction of the trade unions? What was different about the composition of the Fiat working class with respect to the past?

It is perhaps necessary to begin this chronicle with an account of last year's struggles. They centered on two principal demands: an annual distribution of the work week with alternating Saturdays off and the regulation of assembly-line speeds. In fact, this conflict marked a new moment, a step ahead both for the Fiat working class and obviously for the trade union line—actually the line of the trade unions since the three trade unions conducted this battle together.¹ From the workers' point of view, this conflict saw a compactness of participation, a level of political discussion, a capacity for organization, and an organizational solidarity, which in themselves were important elements with respect to preceding experiences at Fiat. From the trade union point of view, this was to be the first important struggle in which the trade unions concretely tried to assert themselves in a unified manner in the factory, both within the workers' organizations and as the recognized bargaining agent with respect to the *padrone* (boss). Trade union unity was attained for the first time on an important question by all four of the trade unions (including the SIDA²). As such it was the first step toward the formation of a trade union regime at Fiat divided into two parts: a large powerful trade union (even if formally divided in four) and a management sector recognizing the latter's importance. This respect was confirmed quite clearly by the spokesmen of Fiat's management (various interviews with Agnelli, etc.).

However, this struggle pointed to an unresolved contradiction, and one that is still unresolved concerning the entente between trade union and management. In order to effectively root itself in the factory and obtain a certain hold on the workers, the trade unions would have to carry the struggle much further than they were willing to do, both in terms of tactics and demands, and ultimately the results obtained. But this was not acceptable to Fiat's management and therefore not to the trade unions either. Once again the trade unions had to launch an apparently radical struggle, prepared on the basis of genuine consultations with the workers and built on issues they strongly felt. The outcome was three days of strikes distributed over a three week period and then followed up by long negotiations so that things could cool off again. The trade union organization then had to content itself with an unsatisfactory work week compromise, a twenty lire (3 cents) piece work raise, and purely formal concessions with regard to speed-up, i.e., communication of assembly line speed by means of cards and bulletin boards. And the whole thing is still an unresolved problem in the sense that the trade union for political reasons, in order not to break the rules of the "democratic political game" with Fiat, always had to begin genuine struggles and then break them off before they can actually re-establish an effective and organized relationship in the factory between the trade union and the workers.

For some time this struggle did not have an important following. The situation of the workers inside the factory degenerated, the productive growth of Fiat, above all in its export market, required increasing assembly-line speed-up. And here in fact, the trade unions lost face; the fact that the assembly line speeds were handed out on cards and posted on bulletin boards (the big victory of the year before) was useless.

In fact, often on the cards and bulletin boards were written speeds that were even faster than the ones the workers were doing. If the workers complained about excessive speeds and asked the foreman to check the cards, he would simply note that it would be better to keep quiet. If he were to go by the card, they would have to do ten-twenty-fifty cars an hour more. This, then was the first tangible trace of the trade union in the factory. The struggle had finished leaving deep traces of disillusionment in the workers instead of building the new support which the trade unions had hoped for. Even if the FIOM³ is making some progress right now at the level of the internal commission elections, it's only because at that level other solutions just don't exist. In the meantime, other things changed at Fiat. The steady worsening of internal conditions worked together with the struggle experience (during which the workers on the whole had acquired a certain confidence in their own initiative) to frustrate the workers intensely, but stimulating them to action as well.

The other important phenomenon, in addition to the growth of productivity and the tensions thus created within the factory, was the inflow of new manpower and above all of the large number of immigrants from the South. This was a particularly important fact, I believe, since this new wave of immigration could be paralleled to that of 1960-2 which seemed to have a decisive effect in determining the agitation of 1962, the occurrences such as Piazza Statuto and so on. In certain respects that experience repeats itself for the present immigrants: the arrival in a factory situation where the work is much harder than they had been led to expect; settling in an urban situation where both social and economic conditions are miserable; where the rent (if one can find a place) carries away a good part of the salary. In this sense their condition is exactly similar to that of previous immigrants. There is an enormous difference, however: the political conditions, both in the situations from which they have come as well as those they are entering are much more advanced. The new immigrants have behind them a series of recent struggles in the South with a genuinely radical political content. At Turin, they've found not simply an organizationally atomized situation which could erupt as in '62 into spontaneous outbursts (which quickly returned to an atomized situation) but a situation of much greater ferment within the factory itself.

Contact with the student struggles also contributed, if only in a general way, to the growth of the struggles of this year. This in part through direct contact with the students, but perhaps more importantly through an awareness, sometimes a bit mythicized, of the tactics and style of the student struggles. Both the uses of the assembly organization and violent and/or illegal tactics were important. With regard to the capacity for social penetration, the struggles of the high school students were very important because they touched directly a wide range of working class families. However, as far as direct contact with mass movements in terms of the direct impact of the student movement on the working class during its struggles, in the first year of the student struggle (1967-8) had perhaps a more important effect.

Two significant demonstrations were of primary importance: First, following the February general strike for higher pensions, which in reality was accepted and planned by the ruling class itself, came the strike protesting the deaths during the Battipaglia insurrection⁴ which had a particularly strong impact. The latter was obviously a political strike, the first outright rupture of the barrier which purportedly existed

between the Fiat workers and politics. The isolation and the resistance against trade union organizing on the part of the Fiat workers had, at least on the surface, elements of apathy and disinterest in politics which many took literally as an indication that the Fiat workers were interested only in their own problems.⁵ And when the political significance of a conflict at Fiat was seen, it was thought that any reference to general political struggles was useless, and that if relevant at all, political issues would develop as a result of, not as a premise for, Fiat strikes.

Instead, the Battipaglia protest strike demonstrates above all that the Fiat workers felt these general problems and they were ready to move. And here, I think, the presence of workers from Southern Italy played the decisive role. Faced with the Battipaglia events, the trade unions merely declared a three hour strike. But, this stroke of treachery and opportunism turned into a positive event. For it meant going to work for five hours and then leaving, not simply standing outside the factory gates. In sum, it meant challenging the internal factory mechanisms of control and repression for the first time. The strike had varying degrees of success and was not in fact a massive and homogeneous walkout. But where it succeeded it was an extremely important experience. As could be seen from in front of the gates and, above all, at the end of the second shift, there was immense confusion and agitation in the factory. The workers were excited with a sense of liberation, and of having acquired a new kind of battle experience.

The other important strike which passed almost unnoticed, occurred earlier, at the beginning of the year (1968) when Fiat's management tried to eliminate a regular Saturday afternoon off. On that occasion the trade unions, on the spur of the moment, proclaimed a strike, and practically all of the Fiat workers stayed outside the gates with unusual solidarity. It was not a well-organized strike and it involved a rather delicate issue, since the factory would have paid overtime for the Saturday work. It brought a strange reaction from the Fiat management which immediately closed the factory gates fearing perhaps an occupation of the factory. In this way, stealthily, the strike forces grew. In reality, it demonstrated a surprising potential explosiveness among the workers.

These were the two most important events before this last wave of strikes. We must not forget that, if this first wave was and is dominated by worker initiative, it was formally launched by an official trade union strike declaration.

These struggles correspond therefore to a plan decided on by the trade unions' upper echelons, a plan which has back-fired because of the combativity of the workers. The trade union plan was relaunched on the same path that had been left half-way in the contract struggles of last Spring because of the political conflicts within the trade unions. The plan is to attempt to establish for the first time organization and power within the factory by means of a series of negotiations on secondary although important themes relative to economic and everyday issues. This was to be done through a series of internal strikes which, it was justly thought, would have heavily affected Fiat's production and would have been able therefore to produce rapid negotiations and settlements of these issues. The issues were typical of integrative bargaining: the regulation of the advancement from one category to the next, the recognition of assembly line delegates, with, in reality, only consultative powers on assembly line speeds and work-squad grievances. These latter two were the most typical

demands, together with certain work shift regulations, and were therefore demands which at the level of the national contract negotiations could be met only in very general terms. At Fiat, the trade union wanted to face them immediately for several reasons: first, because it was the most favorable occasion for rapidly obtaining modest demands; secondly, because these demands could be negotiated only at the individual company level in a sufficiently precise way; thirdly, because getting these things at Fiat would have already given a certain direction to the national contract and would have made it possible there to codify as general rights what already had been won at Fiat and was being won at various other factories.

In summary, the trade unions' plan appeared to be quite rational. They hoped to put into motion between May, June and July a series of confrontations with relatively controlled instances of struggle that would heavily influence Fiat's production output. But at the same time, they hoped to rapidly arrive at negotiations and important concessions. The trade unions were also disposed to carry out, provided it be under control and confined to a carefully limited area, relatively radical tactics; that is, they were ready to use a more militant style than before precisely because it was sure that the trade unions could, in fact, obtain these new concessions. At the political level, Fiat management had already decided to make them, although these 'privileges' could not be taken for granted at the outset, in part because of the resistance of lower echelons of the Fiat management who would have to deal daily with these new gains in the factory. Therefore, it was assumed that a certain dialectical game between union and management would be necessary.

In reality, right from the start of the conflict, the trade unions appeared to be thrust aside. Fitting in with the trade union plans, the first phase began, not accidentally with the maintenance and repairs shops. These are shops of relatively skilled workers—for the most part natives of the Turin region (Piedmont) and fairly highly unionized—and the issues were limited to questions of job qualifications. But even here the agitation began in a way that the trade unions had not foreseen, i.e., directly on a political level. On the day of the Battipaglia protest, a strike assembly was held in the factory. One worker had spoken out with considerable energy. Soon after the worker was transferred. Shortly thereafter the workers spontaneously organized another assembly. They demanded that the worker be returned to his old place or they would strike. Fiat was forced to concede, and the worker went back to his old job. This kind of ferment was present in the shops when the trade union entered to call a strike. These were the premises.

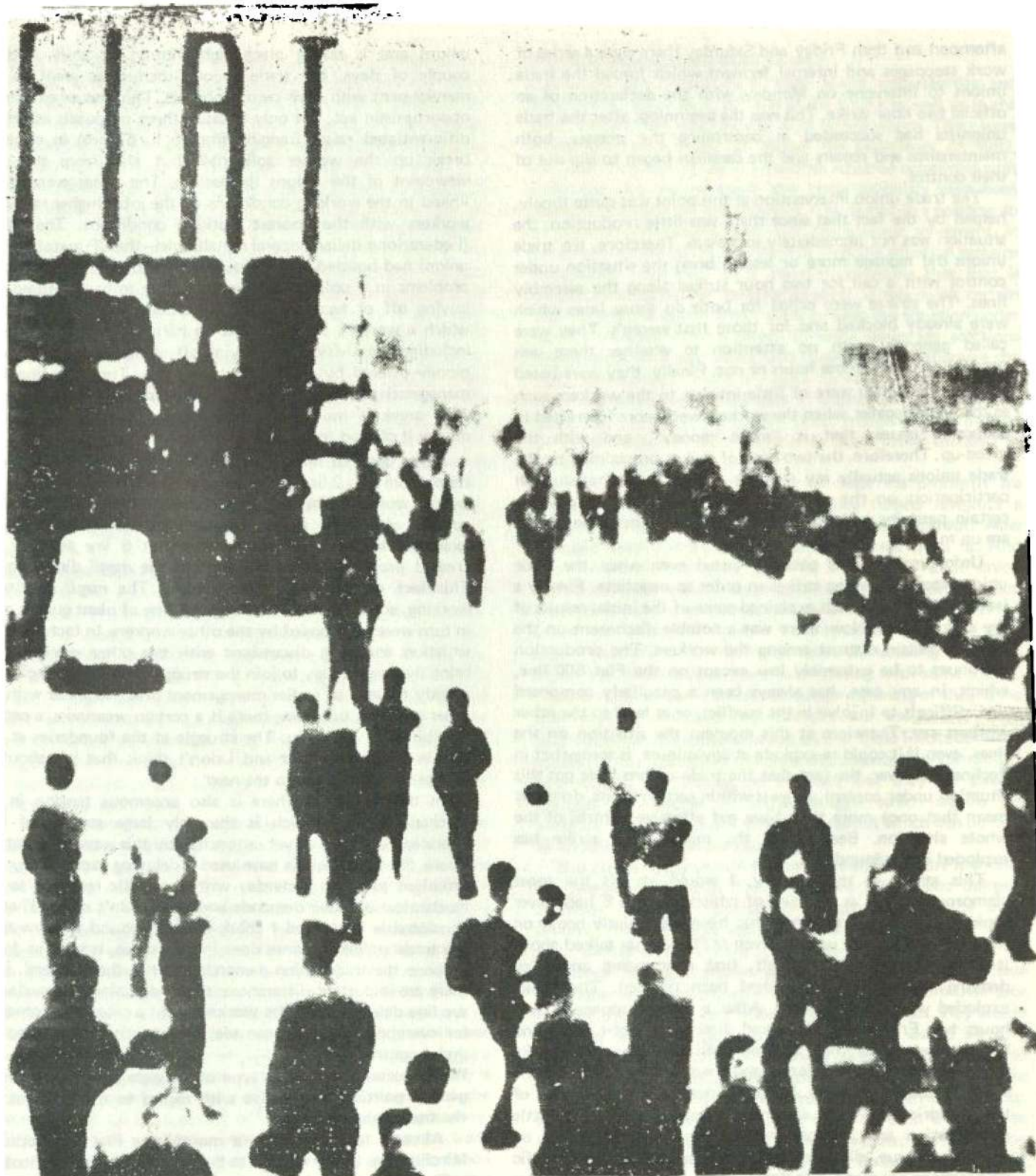
Before moving to an examination of the political responses a week by week chronology of the struggle would seem helpful.

The first men to go out on strike were the workers in the maintenance and repair shops which constitute a large complex of workshops: in all there are some six or eight thousand workers assigned to the construction and maintenance of the presses, the machines, etc. Shortly after that strike had begun, the workers at the large presses, also under the instigation of the trade unions, began to strike. Here we find a new element. Together with those on the large presses, the workers on the small and middle-sized presses began to strike. In addition, after a little while, shop 13, the *lastroffatura* operation right after the *lavorazioni di stampaggio*

lavorazioni walked out. These workers walked out on their own, without any orders from the trade unions, and apparently without formulating any demands. In reality, it is quite likely that they had formulated demands but that none of the traditional trade union channels were opened up to them. And therefore the strike of the press workers was, for most of its duration, accompanied by strikes of workshops close by and completely cut off from the trade unions. They had also had little contact with our own political work.

This strike which cut off the basic processes had practically blocked the terminal operations at the Fiat plant, i.e., along the assembly lines. For in addition there was a strike of the *carrellisti* (responsible for the transportation of materials) a category limited in numbers but essential to the internal linkage of the operations. In a majority of cases, the strikes were not for eight hours per shift but were rather articulated inside the factory. In general, the trade unions tended to call for two-hour strikes and the workers tended to do more, four and sometimes even eight. Sometimes they cut back production during the hours when they did work. Basically they tended to extend the length and intensity of the confusion. The situation in the maintenance and repair shops was more regular since the strike calendar of the trade unions was more or less respected. All in all the stoppages paralyzed production on the assembly lines giving way to a curious situation: there was a great deal of political ferment but active struggle seemed held up with the halt in production, as internal struggle was correlated with time on the job. In addition, if the political tension was increasing, above all in the vanguards, the immediate dissatisfaction wasn't too high because for the first time life was relatively easy. The trade union plan was clearly intended to cut off agitation in the maintenance and repair shops and on the presses before initiating the struggle at the assembly line where the tension was high. In fact, the trade unions were able to stop the action despite the opposition and difficulties. They were able to prevent any new sectors at Fiat, and particularly Fiat Mirafiori from entering the struggle soon enough and compactly enough to provide support for the battle at the maintenance and repair shops and the presses. The mechanics shop tried to strike but the trade unionists were able to dissuade them.

With strong disagreements among the workers, the agitation of the maintenance and repair shops came to a close with the concession of some rather paltry pay raises. There was an interesting aspect, however, in that there was a base raise which was differentiated by category (although within the categories merit raises tended to maintain the divisions created by the *padrone*): those with lower minimum salaries got higher raises, and those with higher minimums, lower raises. The agreement at the auxiliary presses was on the wage theme rather than on any advancement of category. At the presses, the results of the negotiations were genuinely paltry, with 9 lire (1½ cents) obtained on the piece work rate and the night shift requirement reduced from every third week to every fifth week. In addition, I think there was a 7 lire raise on the base pay. At this point the trade unions issued a ridiculous propaganda leaflet, which attempted to make the increase look much larger than it was. This statement was immediately and totally rejected by the workers. And in both cases, the decision was then approved by worker assemblies, in the midst of great confusion and a certain fatigue, with very precarious majorities. In fact, however, the union action helped curb the struggles in these situations and, obviously, in others where the



struggles were completely spontaneous. The same thing happened in the *carrellisti*. From the trade unionists point of view, this action was aimed at re-establishing a certain production normalcy, and therefore preventing the Fiat management line from hardening and posing general political problems. Thus, new negotiations could be initiated calmly. The most important of these were the assembly line negotiations. Here the

trade unions hoped to have accepted in principle the establishment of line delegates with certain consultative powers, power to open negotiations, and knowledge of certain aspects of the productive process—this principle could be generalized to the rest of Fiat and then outside of Fiat. However, the assembly line began to strike before the trade unions wanted them to, two Thursdays ago at the end of May. That Thursday

afternoon and then Friday and Saturday there were a series of work stoppages and internal ferment which forced the trade unions to intervene on Monday with the declaration of an official two hour strike. This was the beginning: after the trade unionists had succeeded in controlling the presses, both maintenance and repairs and the *carellisti* began to slip out of their control.

The trade union intervention at this point was quite timely, helped by the fact that since there was little production, the situation was not immediately explosive. Therefore, the trade unions did manage more or less to bring the situation under control with a call for two hour strikes along the assembly lines. The strikes were called for both on those lines which were already blocked and for those that weren't. They were called generally with no attention to whether there was production during those hours or not. Finally, they were based on demands which were of little interest to the workers such as the line delegates, when the workers were more interested in economic issues, that is "more money", and with the speed-up. Therefore, the two days of strikes proclaimed by the trade unions actually say a rather partial, somewhat sluggish participation on the part of the workers. They assumed a certain passivity saying: O.K., let's see what the trade unions are up to.

Unfortunately, this passivity lasted even when the trade unions stopped calling strikes in order to negotiate. Finally a leaflet was issued which explained some of the initial results of the negotiations. Now there was a notable discontent on the lines, a certain distrust among the workers. The production continues to be extremely low except on the Fiat 500 line, which, in any case, has always been a peculiarly composed line, difficult to involve in the conflict, or at least so the other workers say. Therefore at this moment the situation on the lines, even if it could re-explode at any minute, is somewhat in decline. However, the fact that the trade unions have got this situation under control, at least within certain limits, does not mean that once more they have got effective control of the whole situation. Because in the meantime a strike has exploded in the foundries.

This strike at the foundry, I would say, is the most clamorous yet. It is a strike of which L'Unita 6 had never spoken, and the veil of silence has been particularly heavy on the part of the trade unions. Even *la Stampa* has talked about it more than the official left, first announcing and then denying that an agreement had been reached. The strike exploded with great violence. After a work stoppage of two hours two Fridays ago, it passed directly to eight hours and has continued like that, at least until yesterday. The strike began at shop 2, North forge, and then rapidly spread to the shops of the South forge. Next it spread to shops 3 and 4 of the foundries. It was an extremely compact strike, with little politicization and internal organization—in the sense of an articulated issue, discussed in depth, around which specific preparations are made. The demands are very simple and clear: either a 200 lire (32 cents) increase of the base pay or promotion to the metal-workers classification which would bring a series of advantages in terms of both wages and work hours, and so on.

This strike developed completely outside of the trade

unions and is taking place eight hours per shift. After a couple of days, the trade unions themselves went to the management with their own proposals. This was an extremely opportunistic act, not only because these proposals asked for differentiated raises (ranging from 0 to 67 lire) in order to break up the worker solidarity, but also from the very viewpoint of the unions themselves. The raises were to be linked to the working conditions on the jobs: higher raises for workers with the poorest working conditions. The FIOM (Federazione italiana operai metallurgici—the CP metalworkers union) had boasted that it was the first to have framed health problems in a political contest, the first to have refused any buying off of health problems. Actually, in the moment in which a workers struggle must be halted, any means is good including the division and buying off of health problems with money offered by the Fiat management. This time the Fiat management's move was quite skillful, at least in comparison with previous moves, precisely because of the amount of money it offered to the several groups of workers.

When the Fiat management had offered differential wage raises from 3 to 2 lire, they were immediately told where to go by the workers. The fact that some groups of workers who actually do work under worse conditions (the *magli* for example) would receive raises of about 6 lire an hour has created problems. In fact, yesterday the *magli* didn't strike. This fact produced extreme tension. The *magli* continued working, surrounded by a protective ring of plant guards, who in turn were surrounded by the other workers. In fact the tense situation and long discussions with the other workers may bring the *magli* today to join the struggle again. The *magli* have already refused an earlier management offer, together with the other workers, but now, there is a certain weariness, a certain possibility of giving in. The struggle at the foundries at any rate is still on its feet and I don't think that it's about to collapse from one day to the next.

In the meantime, there is also enormous tension in the mechanics shops which is the only large section of Fiat Mirafiori which is as yet untouched by this wave of agitation. There the trade unions have used a delaying tactic. They had promised to come yesterday with a specific response to the mechanical workers demands and they didn't do it. There is considerable anger and I think that it's bound to grow since the trade union response does in fact arrive, it will no doubt propose the trade union demands and not the workers'. Here there are important differences: the trade unions as usual want the line delegates and the workers want a category promotion for everybody. As you can see, the situation is anything but under control.

What meaning does this type of struggle have from a more general political perspective with regard to management and the trade unions?

Already for more than a month, the Fiat production at Mirafiori has been reduced to below normal. These articulated strikes, by alternating the various phases of the productive cycle that are shut down, provoke an enormous drop in production and a general mix-up in the production phases. When there is a 24 hour or even much longer continuous strike some production is lost. But when the strike is over you can begin again and everything is coordinated like before the strike

began. Here instead, the articulated strike means that you are left with enormous unuseable reserves of certain automobile parts and a complete lack of others. Thus, it will take a lot of effort to restore production normalcy. This, we can already see now: the end of the strike at the presses has not signaled yet the return to normal production on the assembly lines.

This strike had put Fiat in hot water, and its management must come up with a rapid solution. It constitutes an extremely worrisome political phenomenon since it demonstrates conclusively that the internal tension which the management knew existed has gotten out of control. They had been counting on the fact that it would be channeled into an organized struggle, and have hastened to accept strong trade unions as the bargaining agents precisely so they would channel and control these internal tensions. But the internal strains are no longer repressed and atomized as they were before, nor are they gathered up and controlled by the trade unions. The Fiat workers have found the organizational capacity to struggle inside the factory, in some cases formally to gather with the trade unionists, but in reality by themselves through their own initiative. From the Fiat management's point of view, it is difficult to predict the end of this conflict. Even if it ceases physically at a determined moment, it can re-explode at any other. Fiat's political and disciplinary control over its working class has been suddenly reduced. And the apparent political alternative of a strong trade union organization now seems to be an extremely unreliable alternative. The tactics of the Fiat management up to now have reflected this uncertainty on the course of action. By committing itself politically to a solution based on a strong trade union organization in the factory, Fiat has followed, at least for the moment, the trade union dynamic of the struggle and what the trade unions have demanded. It has bargained quickly, and is continually more willing to negotiate as soon as a confrontation arises, hoping to conclude the whole affair with a fixed agreement.

At this point Fiat obviously had to begin to consider more radical solutions. Some of these would require going over the head of the trade unions. This is a rather frightening prospect to Fiat. One set of solutions would aim at conceding directly to the workers and passing over the trade unions by choosing the UIL or SIDA as bargaining agents. For example, they might concede wage raises as a down payment on the contract, to make an advance agreement without the trade unions in order to halt worker agitation. However, it would be difficult to know how the workers would react. But in any case, it would constitute a large political problem since it would mean returning to the old Fiat trade union policy in order to forge a step ahead in controlling the workers. The other possibility is even riskier: moving to more militant tactics, laying off the workers and calling a partial or total lock-out of the factory. This threat has constantly been used by Fiat (and the trade unions) as a scarecrow, but it has never been put into action since it would mean risking a general social uprising in which a whole series of tensions, which the Fiat management knows full well are in the city, would be released in uncontrolled forms. This would have enormous and immediate political repercussions, at the national as well as the local level.

Fiat has therefore played another, preferable card: to unite all these partial confrontations into a large, comprehensive contract-type agreement in advance of the regular contract, but subject to the acceptance of the trade unions.

And the retention of the trade unions?

Up to now, there have been many uncertainties and divisions within the FIM⁸ and in the FIOM, as well as in the play between the national and local organizations. There were those who were ready to repeat the experience of 1962, although in a new phase—to make an advance agreement with Fiat. But for the moment, the trade unionists have been negative. At least for the moment, Fiat is not in a position to produce a large package-deal with trade union agreement, in order to put the lid on the conflict. And the situation remains completely uncertain. It is therefore probable that Fiat is intently examining the situation to see if, at this point, certain signs of the easing off permit them to keep the situation under control without having resort to more desperate solutions which could have serious political repercussions. Otherwise the Fiat management might try again for an advance settlement with the trade unions, perhaps in a more suitable industry-wide form which would involve other companies and include the whole auto industry. Right now this is rather difficult to foresee.

From the trade union point of view the problems are somewhat the same. The trade unions helped revitalize a mechanism which has gotten out of their control. Now struggles begin where the unions don't want them to. And even where the struggles arise as a result of trade union initiative, they actually contribute little to re-enforcing their organizationally and increasing their hold on the workers. Often the struggles signal a new breaking away and even deeper laceration. On the other hand the actual goal toward which the trade unions have been moving with some success (though it is necessary to see the deeper meaning of this) is the establishment of certain new institutions in the factory. They now hope for the struggle to ebb so that these institutions will appear to the workers as the only instruments they can utilize. The unions are banking on the fact that they are passing through an episode of acute struggle which signals the maximum break with the working class but which can be used to establish such new institutions.

But here already several further contradictions are manifesting themselves because Fiat's response to the line delegate question has been particularly embarrassing for the trade unions. Fundamentally what Fiat is willing to concede is not very different from what the trade unions are asking. In substance the unions want worker representatives who have full rights at the information level and time off from their jobs to regularly obtain that information. But in fact they would have no decision making power and instead would serve to mediate worker response to speed-up (passing discontent on to the level of bureaucratic negotiation). This is in fact what was contained in both the union requests and the Fiat response. But the Fiat response has been made in such a way as to remove all ambiguity from this situation. In the union proposal every work squad would elect its delegate inside the factory and there would be a delegate for every 70 workers with, in addition, a vague hint at the possibility of delegate recall. There was a pretence to worker democracy fed above all by PSIUP, which stated: These delegates—who would not be useful to us in the trade union negotiation mechanism—in fact are, or could be, the representatives of the workers; therefore the best workers must be chosen, they must be subject to recall at any time and so on. This very tangible ambiguity has had the effect—as one can notice with regard to

many good on the spot militants—of creating in some a certain belief, certain illusions that this structure can be used by the workers. The way Fiat is conceding it, however, makes clear instead that such use will not be possible. This in the sense that Fiat is willing to accept a committee of four persons, which further would be composed of four members of the Internal Commission—one for each trade union; in addition there would be a complete trade union style separation: the four are paid by Fiat to do the work fulltime. Therefore, among other things, they wouldn't work any more on the assembly line and would be comfortably detached from the production process. This then is the central organism to which would be furnished all the data that the trade unions would have had made available to the line delegates. Supplementing these there would be 48 people who would not be called line delegates, but rather "experts"—one for every 250 workers. These "experts" would be nominated by the trade union who afterward could consult the workers. In this way one is not dealing with worker representatives but rather experts or consultants who could be blamed by the line committee whenever there were problems that involved the sector where those workers worked. In this case Fiat management would give these experts permission to take the time necessary (paid) to get certain information, to make certain contacts, and to participate in certain meetings.

It is therefore clear that this is a mechanism which, in addition to having only consultative power, is highly centralized and controlled by the trade unions with absolutely no possibility of even formal control by the workers. Above all it's rather difficult to understand why Fiat responded in this way; in terms of the trade unions' goal to develop a strong base, Fiat has done them a disservice. The most plausible explanation is that inside Fiat there exists fairly strong resistance to full concession to the institution of line delegates, above all at the low and lower middle management levels; even if in the long run in terms of Fiat's fundamental political plans it would be quite useful to Fiat, in the short run for the individual foreman it would be quite inconvenient. If the trade unions were able to show themselves to be strong, skillful and able to control the workers' struggles, the political advantages of these concessions would have been so evident that they would have put the higher levels of Fiat's management in the position of being able to impose these proposals in their most radical form.

The other possibility is that this is the first warning to the trade unions; either you show yourselves able to effectively serve as an instrument of control over the workers or Fiat will simply begin to ignore you. At this point the fundamental trade union strategy is to successfully overcome this extremely difficult phase of worker tension (which has fled out of their control) using it to obtain certain institutions.

The unions are at present trying a delaying tactic: attempting over a period of time to dilute the response through a long series of negotiations so that in the meantime the tension of the struggle has a chance to dissolve. This in addition to another tactic commonly used throughout the struggles of these weeks: direct repressive intervention of the trade unionists wherever a struggle broke out without trade union permission or went beyond the limits imposed by them. They went as far as actual threats: "We won't worry ourselves anymore with you; management will make reprisals and if you propose demands we won't support them anymore" and so on.

One could even note the following: at the level of physical

presence in front of the factory gates, there has been a certain differentiation between the intervention of the Communist Party (CP) and that of the trade unions; this seems to me to correspond to a more fundamental differentiation, not strategic but tactical, between the CP and the trade unions. The CP at this point has a great need for intense struggles as do the trade unions; but for the CP the problem is that these struggles constitute an instrument of political pressure toward its long term insertion into the official power structure while for the trade unions they are the instrument for obtaining certain instruments and certain forms of insertion *immediately*. Because of this the CP can permit the struggles to go beyond certain limits because this serves it as additional pressure. The trade unions cannot permit it. This explains why, for example, in front of the gates the youth of the FGCI have a line that is somewhat different and more "to the left" of that of the trade unions. However, this kind of dialectic is quite difficult to pull off even for the CP: for this reason *L'Unita*⁸ after having for a while participated in the conspiracy of silence, has tried to give more prominence to the Fiat struggles. But it has revealed an extreme uncertainty as to what political line to follow: that is, the CP officially can't exploit very far this tactical space to the left of the trade unions.

Vittorio Rissler

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notes

1. These include the OGIL, Communist dominated, the CISL, Christian-democrat (left wing) and UIL, an independent union.
2. SIDA—company union of the Fiat
3. FIOM—Communist union of metalworkers.
4. Battipaglia insurrection—insurrection of working class in southern town—south of Naples, suppressed by Carabinieri with several killed and wounded.
5. Fiat workers have a low rate of unionization.
6. FIM—Christian democrat union of metalworkers.
7. PSIUP—Partito socialista di unita proletaria—Maximalist Socialist party—split off from Socialists (PSI) in 1966 over position to adopt on Hungary. Usually works with PCI in Parliament, although independent at grass-roots level.
8. *L'Unita*—national daily of the Italian Communist Party.

ITALY:



WOMEN IN THE FIAT FACTORY

The following article was written by a Turin collective working on the problems of women employed by Fiat. It was published in Lotta Continua, February 1970.

Underlying this article is the idea that the significance of a fight in one department within a factory, for instance, or strata within the working class, in this case women, can only be understood in terms of the relationship between this particular point of struggle and others.

The importance of such an analysis is particularly visible in the case of a town like Turin, in which every aspect of social life is determined by the strategy of Fiat. An overwhelming majority of the labor force is employed directly by Fiat, or by companies like Alfa-Romeo, which are Fiat-owned. The public transportation system is run by The Company, in whose hands is a decisive part if not most of the town's real estate. The hospitals are owned by Fiat; the newspapers are under its

thumb. Turin is Fiat. One might even say that the North of Italy as a whole is under the dictatorship of the automobile, with industries and huge corporations like Pirelli (tires, rubber) strictly correlated with the auto industry, or the chemical plants at Porto Marghera (near Venice) controlled by the Fiat group. This dictatorship extends, moreover, to the South of Italy, by its control of the level of immigration to the "rich" industrial North.

In these circumstances, in which capital can attempt to coordinate its domination of the totality of life in a whole area, it is clearly necessary to understand and diffuse information about the interrelation not only between different departments of one factory, but between different sectors of production and even between the apparently separate but in fact connected workplace and "private" aspects of the worker's life. But the same task imposes itself in social/economic situations of greater complexity, and/or ones in which the capitalists are less able or willing to coordinate their attempts to make profits, than the one just described. The significance of recent Teamster wildcats, for instance, cannot be understood without reference to the relations between different and competing transportation industries; the role of transportation in the present-day economy; not to mention the general conditions of the American economy. Consideration of the struggles of blacks in a Northern city demands an understanding of the mechanization of agriculture in the South, the extent and types of employment of blacks in the North, etc., etc. The document which follows is an attempt to apply this kind of analysis to the struggles of women workers in Turin.

It starts by showing how Fiat tries to use the women to break the fight that workers—mostly men—have been carrying on in the factories, especially since 1968. It then describes the growing importance of women within the fight of the working class as a whole, both in the shops and in social life generally (family, housing, health, transportation, school, etc.)

This way of looking at the situation derives from and leads to a definite viewpoint on the way in which the militants of Lotta Continua wish to help the struggle develop: By showing how within the specific interests of men and women, old and young, skilled and unskilled, employed and jobless, the same common interest can be found, the basis for a class unity which does not suppress but which expresses the particular situations of different groups in the class which can be understood and acted upon.

M.I.G.

Double Exploitation

At the present time, women are being hired in great numbers in the Fiat factories at Mirafiori, Giggotto and Rivolta. They work together with men on the assembly lines, in the preparation department and stock rooms, executing tasks which had previously been done by men.

These women are used by Fiat as a reserve army of labor in extreme need of work at a time when workers coming from the South are beginning to refuse to work at Fiat. Since January, 1969, 11,000 men have quit work there, and the supply of labor from the South has decreased considerably.

Moreover, the owner does not want to run the risk of repeating the mistakes of Spring 1969 when he counted on the supposed passivity of the Southern workers. Now he knows that these workers, arriving with an experience of fights in the South, will no longer stand for his domination. In the struggles at the factory, they are often the most willing to fight and the most decided. Moreover the importing of new labor power from the South aggravates the social contradictions in Turin such as housing and schools whose explosive character contributed in a high degree to lead the Fiat workers to an understanding that they are exploited as workers both inside and outside the factory.

At this time, the owners and government cannot afford to institute badly needed social reforms although they must do so as soon as possible to proceed to the technological restructuring of the productive apparatus. The women who work at Fiat are, from the owners' point of view, technically and physically less efficient than male workers, but the owner does not expect maximum productive efficiency from them. What he is looking for at this time is an extremely docile labor force needing work very badly and therefore disposed to undergo physical and economical over-exploitation without revolt; a sure and loyal working force, who will break the unity and the solidarity of the Fiat working class which has been reinforced by the experience of autonomous struggle in May and June 1969.

Are the Women More Docile?

There are many reasons which cause the owner to think he can use the women for these purposes. Most of the women are recently hired and many are still in a trial period. As with most recently hired people, they are afraid to be fired and feel themselves to be in a very precarious position. Only a restricted minority among them went through the struggles of Summer and Autumn 1969, and they therefore generally lack experience, unity, and organization in opposition to the boss. However, the reasons that make them less disposed to fight derive ultimately from their condition as women.

The women who work at Fiat are a small number out of many women who are willing to work there. Those who want to work in Fiat plants include not only the women who are now working in other smaller factories, where they are in situations even worse than that of Fiat, and where they are very often hired without contract; but also the housewives, workers' wives who are disposed to submit to a double work, in the factory as well as in the home, to supplement the continually less adequate wage of their husbands. Those women who succeeded in obtaining jobs tend, then, to consider themselves to be privileged and are afraid to fight because of the enormous quantity of women who will take their jobs if they are fired. This fear is easy to understand

because the women are working not to get for themselves and their families superfluous things, as the bosses pretend. Starting from the assumption, in total contradiction with reality, that women work not out of absolute necessity but simply to get out of the routine and round out the already sufficient wages of their husbands, Pirelli, for example, proposed a four hour day—but for four hours' wages—since "this way the women have time to do the housework". This means that they want to institutionalize the unpaid work of women in the home, to exploit to the limit all the energies of the women workers with extreme speed-up in the factory, and then to discharge themselves of the social responsibility for social services like daycare, hospitals, etc. In reality, the women work because the father's and husband's wage is not even enough to satisfy the fundamental needs of the family.

Besides the objective pressures, the owner relies above all on the general subjective submissiveness of women towards work, which has its origin in their education and the role imposed on them in the family. The women continue to think of themselves as daughters, as fiancées, and as wives rather than as workers. They feel destined to affirm themselves and to develop something which one might call their congenital goals, not in the workplace but in the family. The strictly familial framework in which they see themselves makes them accept every condition of exploitation, factory work, as a parenthesis, its violence and exploitation a sacrifice to which they must submit in order to resolve the problems of the family. The women go on in the hope that they will be able to stop working as soon as possible: a wish in contradiction with the reality of the men's insufficient wages. In addition, they have lived from childhood on within the familial structure in which they are brought up on an individualistic basis (rather than the collective experience of the factory). When they escape from this to the factory they assume in their relationships with their fellow workers—men and women—the suspicious and closed off attitude they were taught to have towards the exterior world. It's much more difficult for them to unite with other workers and to feel solidarity with them than it is for men who have been raised since childhood with much wider contacts with the world outside the family.

Women in Factory Struggles

In the framework of the family the woman directly feels the effect of the struggles that her husband fights in the factory. At home, it is she who makes ends meet when the money is less and less.

But she was taught to think that the struggle in the factory, the direct struggle against the bosses and the decision about when and how these struggles are to be led, belongs to the man. During the struggle over the contracts in Autumn '69, the women workers of Fiat in general were very conscious of the responsibility not to break the solidarity of the workers and were convinced that they were fighting also in their own interest. But decisions about the struggles were always left to the men. This practice derives not so much from an illusion that politics is a masculine activity; but rather from the whole material condition of the woman. For instance, the husbands can meet together, discuss, organize the struggle, but the women, because of the role in which they are enclosed must run to take care of the house and kids. In fact, a very strong obstacle to the political emancipation of women is constituted in the internal division of labor in the proletarian family itself.

Another aspect distinguishing the political attitude and practice of women from that of men workers is their relationship with the union. They have nothing at all to do with it as a political and organizational reality; they feel it to be completely foreign to them, an institution which is, like the government and the political parties, totally unintelligible. This is both because women don't have the experience in general of work within the unions and because of the constant tendency of parties and unions to exclude the women from the tasks of organization and political direction.

During the last struggles at Fiat, the union called a meeting for the women who work on the drillpresses, inviting them to accept the unions as representing them before the boss for the solution of some problems specific to women, such as classifications and excessive speed-up, (something which the unions can no longer get away with with men). Nevertheless, in the last few days in the place where car interiors are made in the Fivolta plant, a department with a large majority of women, the women stopped work in a protest against speed-up, demonstrating their full capacity to fight in their own name.

The political goal of the boss in hiring women is to divide the workers. At this point the men workers reproach the women with taking their jobs away. In fact it is not by chance that the boss substitutes women for men in many jobs, putting the latter into jobs still more difficult than they had before. For example, moving women from small and medium sized presses to the big ones, or from Mirafiori (which is in the town) to plants which, being outside Turin, pose greater transportation problems. But all the workers reproach the women with being too hesitant in confrontations with their bosses and less capable of fighting. Where the women are mixed with men in many cases it has happened that they break the unity of workers by submitting to the rhythms and conditions of work without participating in the struggles against these conditions initiated by their brothers.

The present contradictions between men and women workers can be solved in a way that damages the owner.

In the factory the women escape the control of their fathers and their husbands and are becoming able to fight the problems of their working conditions in their own name, in equality with their brother workers.

The factory can be to the woman the first place of her socialization, the place where she identifies the problems of the others as identical with hers, and acquires the knowledge necessary to fight beside her brothers for the same objectives.

Women do work which is ever more identical to that done by men. Men and women workers now recognize that it is absurd that the women can be paid less than men since they do the same work. The men workers know that the women are less capable of doing certain types of work, yet they see these women working to the limits of their physical ability. So they understand that both sexes are equally exploited. The discussion that now develops among men workers about the problem of the low wages for women brings to the fore the necessity of fighting for the suppression of all types of job classifications.

Finally, the women—precisely because it is on their shoulders that the weight of the problem of children, housework, etc. mainly falls—still more than men are led to introduce the themes of the social condition of the proletariat into political discussions.

Living Conditions in the United States

I. Introduction

Why has social unrest grown in American society in the 1960's? What conditions is this unrest responding to, and what are the relations between these conditions and the forms of unrest? For some, the answer to these questions is obvious: the social movement arose when people looked around and discovered wrong and injustice everywhere, and decided to do something about it. But what made people aware of this injustice? Why didn't they do anything about it in the 1950's, when by all the standard indicators, poverty and oppression were worse in America than in the 1960's? Or have things gotten worse in the 1960's?

The main content of this article is a demonstration that in fact living conditions have deteriorated for several parts of the working class since the mid-1950's. These include youth, women, and blacks. In contrast, conditions for white, now middle aged men workers have improved, at least until very recently. These conclusions are reached by examining not only the standard wage and employment statistics, but vital and social statistics as well. Hence I argue that the unrest has grown out of a deterioration of living conditions.

Different conditions in different parts of the present and future working class have led to movements which are distinct in aims, rhetoric, and style of action; the student-youth revolution; the black and brown liberation movements; the wildcat strikes, led to a considerable extent by young workers; and the women's liberation movement. Since actual conditions have divided the workers, the people suffering the deterioration tend to see their problems not growing out of their social position as workers, but centering on their youth, sex, or race. The existence of a group of older white male workers, whose conditions continued to improve through the decade, reinforces these tendencies and provides the background for the concept that the "working class" has "become reactionary."

From this picture of the present, I try to discuss the conditions under which a general class movement might emerge. Without the growth of such a movement, the rulers will be able to divide and conquer as before, despite the deterioration of conditions and the rise of general but fragmented unrest. This discussion involves comparison with the statistics of past revolutionary situations. The present looks a lot like past revolutionary situations. But it has many of the same critical imbalances which made those situations abortive, the most important of which is the widening division within the working class.

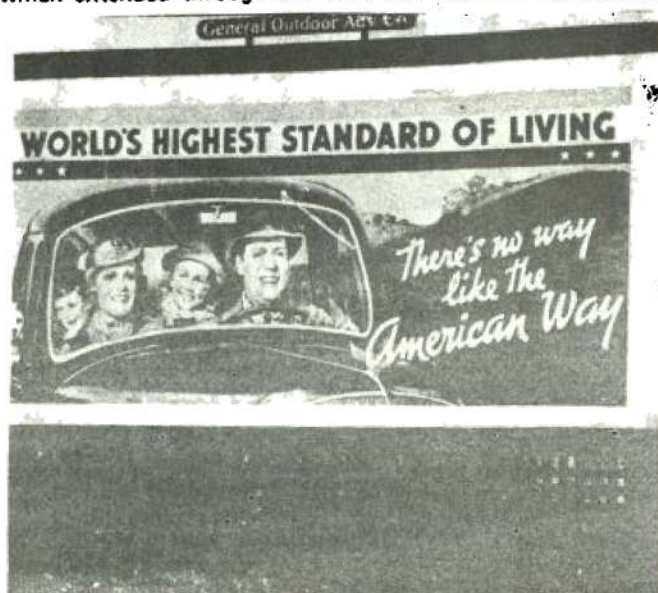
What has produced these changes in living conditions? These changes are the inescapable results and the essential preconditions of the course of economic change. But by this I

don't imply a mechanical relation, which is assumed by most leftists: deterioration of conditions comes only during depressions. For some parts of the working class, conditions get worse straight through the boom. This experience of depression within boom is now more widespread than in the earlier history of capitalism.

The treatment of economic movements here is just a sketch. What I try to describe are the relations between these movements and their social and biological consequences. I intend to develop an analysis of these economic movements themselves from their own proper perspective in greater detail in a future article.*

II. Conditions have improved for white men workers that are now middle aged.

To understand the position of white middle aged men now, we must go back to the end of the 'twenties and the Depression. At that time, young labor market entrants were few in number compared to the rest of the labor force, due to the cutoff of immigration and the long fall of the birth rate through the '30's. These young workers also had an educational advantage over the less literate older workers, due to the great upswing of high school education of the workforce which extended through the '20's and '30's. In the wave of



*The data on which assertions in this paper are based will be published in full sometime this fall as a book or extended article.

unionization that emerged in response to the Depression, the young workers often led in the struggle and became more organized than the older.

This contrast between young and old is evident in the vital and social statistics. Going into the Depression, the older workers suffered a specially disastrous decline of living standards. Their suicide rates reached a huge peak as unemployment rose, and those admitted to mental hospitals, drug addiction and alcoholism treatment centers were primarily these older workers. Younger workers suffered a rather mild deterioration in the Depression. Their suicide rates rose to less than half the rate reached in the slowdown before the First World War, and other indicators of stress show only moderate rises.

As unemployment was sharply reduced by the Second World War, the young workers were in great demand, due to their superior education and their relatively small numbers, which were further reduced by the draft. This group is at the core of the great surge of unionization which made its greatest gains in membership during the 1940's. Unions then served to win gains for their members and the tight labor market made it easy to extend unionization widely.

After the war, young workers benefitted not only from unusually high wages, but from the lowering of interest rates and easy availability of credit which comes at the end of long cycle depressions. Many were veterans, and have benefitted through the postwar period from this fact, by VA mortgages and other benefits. Within this group, the inequality of income distribution has been reduced through the upswing and most of the postwar period, as income for the lowest ranks rises more rapidly than for the higher-paid workers.

Thus this group had an exceptionally favorable labor market position, due to its relative numbers, education, organization, and timing relative to demand for labor in reaching labor market and marriageable ages. As a result, they were able to marry younger, and their wives, after the war, could remain out of the labor force, at home having children. Many more young people married as well (1940-57), bringing proportions married at ages 20-24 back to levels reached in rural America before the impact of industrialization in delaying and breaking down marriage. The birth rate reversed its historical trend downward and peaked in the baby boom of the midfifties.

The conditions for reproduction improved rapidly, as the infant mortality rate declined more swiftly than in any previous period, the fetal death rate fell, and the proportion of infants born at low birth weights and unfavorable gestational periods reached lows in the midfifties. Age-specific death rates, particularly death rates reflecting stress (suicide, cirrhosis of the liver, ulcers) fell rapidly for this group as well.

Higher wages and low mortgage interest rates enabled the white workers of this age group to move out of the central cities to the fringes, powering the housing boom of the postwar period, which peaked in 1950. This movement contributed to the rapid fall of death rates from infectious diseases, as people escaped the crowded old central cities. But the conditions in the cities improved at this time as well, reflecting a great boom in hospital building, active public health programs, and the general upswing of production for people's needs. This is evident in the conditions of the blacks who migrated to the cities from the South at this time. In contrast to the second great period of massive black migration, the sixties, conditions improved in the late forties for urban blacks.

As political repression and a slowly rising trend of unemployment developed after the war, the unions became more and more organs for protecting the position of workers already organized, rather than aiming at great new gains in either standard of living or scope of organization. After the midfifties, the proportion of the labor force unionized levels off and declines, as new labor market entrants are not organized. This pattern repeats the experience of the First World War and the twenties.

We will discuss the slowdown of the economy, 1957-63, and the boom, 1965-69, more later, but here we must note that the conditions for the whites of this small, highly unionized group continue good through this whole period. Their real after tax wages continue to rise, and the trend toward equalization of income within the group goes on, though at a slower pace. However, this improvement is won only at increasing costs. To keep ahead of inflation, higher costs of education for their children, rising medical expenses and finally taxation, the wives have been sent to work after having three or so children, increasing family income from this side. Death rates for this group, now aged 30-45, have levelled since the mid-fifties.

Against the background of these real conditions, the patriotism and lack of social or political consciousness among these workers is not hard to understand. Their conscious lives begin in the midst of a great collapse of the economy, but they have reaped a greater increase of standard of living on the upswing of the cycle than any other group of workers in the history of American capitalism. Because of their special position, they have been able to maintain or increase this standard until very recently. With homes and families already established, they are no longer free to try out new social arrangements to deal with new problems, and to them there seems to be no necessity for this innovation.

III. Conditions for young people are deteriorating.

In sharp contrast with this favored group, however, younger workers entering the labor market and marriageable ages since the midfifties have suffered a deterioration of living conditions. This reversal grows out of the slump in the production of things for people's needs after the early fifties. There are definite reasons, as we shall see, why this slump affected young people more than older people.

Housing construction peaked in the early 1950's, and has declined, with cyclical variations, since then. The housing that has been constructed is more and more high priced, responding to the demand of the middle aged workers and the uppermost part of the young income distribution. Three quarters of the new housing priced under \$15,000 is now mobile homes, recreating in a more affluent style the automobile camps of the Depression. Per capita protein, vitamin, and calorie consumption peaked during the Second World War or the late 1940's and have declined since then. Nutrition surveys show a rise of malnutrition in the postwar period, resulting in worse nutritional deficiencies among the American poor in the 1960's than in underdeveloped countries. The rapid expansion of medical facilities from the mid-thirties through the late forties slowed its pace thereafter and in many large cities, facilities have deteriorated to the present.

This decline in production for people's needs is part of the change in the composition of the social product which marks the fifties and the early sixties. The profit rate in productive investment declined steadily from the peak in the early fifties, slowing investment and producing a trend rise in unemploy-

ment rates. From 1957 to 1963, there was no net accumulation of capital in manufacturing. More and more of surplus went into military spending, consumption of the rich, advertising, and other forms of waste. These changes, punctuated by the rising trend of interest rates, speculation in stocks and land values, fit perfectly well into a classical model of the end of a long cycle. Had they continued without any compensating influences, the economy would have been in depression by the mid 1960's. As it was, the economy went through a slowdown similar in many respects to that just before the First World War, with unemployment averaging 6%, 1958-63.

But at this point, a number of influences came to operate which kept the economy from collapse. The returns of US imperialism abroad, including profits and cheapening of resources, were coming in at a greater rate, supporting profits here; a sharp upsurge of credit expansion in the private sector allowed new investment to proceed with increasing external financing, after the period of major reliance on profits for investments. After 1965, large government deficits resulting from Vietnam war spending also stimulated the economy, as did redistribution of taxation through tax cuts on invested profits.

But perhaps most important of all in preventing the collapse of profits in production were certain labor market developments which have resulted in the deterioration of living conditions for youth, women, and blacks. For reasons which we will analyse, each of these groups has developed as an enlarging source of cheap labor for the capitalists, reducing labor costs and temporarily staving off the downtrend in the profit rate.

While the long decline of the birth rate up to 1935 resulted in proportionally declining numbers of workers coming to labor market entry ages through the midfifties, the sixties see the children of the baby boom, 1935-57, begin entering labor market and marriageable ages. The first flood of their numbers swells the ranks of teenagers in the midfifties, and this movement combined with the stagnation of the economy results in a sudden large jump of teenage unemployment rates after 1957. Thereafter, successively larger numbers of youth reach labor market ages, completely reversing the previous demographic history of American capitalism. The unemployment rate of young workers goes from very low in the late forties and early fifties to consistently high, 1958-64.

While the slowdown of the economy resulted in a slowing of income rise for the highly-organized white group, for the majority of young labor market entrants, real after tax income falls from 1957 to 1964. Also, in contrast with the age group preceding it, inequality is growing rapidly in the young age group, reflecting the divergence of college-educated workers from high-school educated blacks and whites. The allocation of surplus to war and the running out of the educational-advantage for college trained workers after 1967 have confronted recent BA, MA and PhD graduates with a growing glut of their labor market as well.

The special position of the favored labor group had allowed it to gain greater and greater proportions of the social product through struggle as it moved into prime working ages in the midfifties. Sharp recessions, following one on another with greater frequency and at higher unemployment levels, 1949-61, did not suffice to break this power. With the influx of unorganized young labor in the sixties, more effective competition was introduced onto the labor market. Whole new areas of employment were created outside union lines,

reducing labor costs for the capitalists in some jobs to make up for the rising costs in others.

Although the repeated recessions and political repression did not suffice to achieve a cut in labor costs, these measures did serve to beat down the surge of unionization of new parts of the working class. By the midfifties, the union organization had been integrated into the lower levels of the control structure of the ruling class. With fewer gains possible, the leaders of the unions concentrated on getting job security for those already employed, against the risk of rising unemployment. Such security within the system depended on the creation of distinctions between different kinds of workers: middle aged against young (seniority), male against female, white against black, despite the performance of equal work. The other hierarchical structures of the workplace also took on this conservative, divisive character in the period of stagnation of the economy. This is a fundamental reason for the labor market weakness of new labor market entrants in the sixties.

These changes have also given a new lease of life to divide-and-rule tactics, as the eyes of new labor market entrants (especially blacks) are focused on the fact that a small part of the workforce is able to defend its position by excluding new members, rather than on the slowdown of job growth which lies behind this organizational change.

The drop in income and rise of unemployment for young workers resulted in a fall in proportions married among young people, which began for teenagers in the midfifties and extends to young adults in the sixties. Over age 30, proportions of women married are still increasing; under age 30, there is a decrease more rapid than in any previous depression. The decline in marriage is accompanied by the characteristic rise in illegitimacy, venereal disease, and even prostitution, again repeating the experience of past depressions. Birth rates come down at an accelerating pace from the peak reached in 1957, touching a point by 1969 well below the low of the 1930's.

Conditions for reproduction deteriorate as well, as evident in the rise of low-birth-weight infants, the shift of birth timing away from optimal periods of gestation, the rise of the fetal death rate, and the slowing of the decline of the infant mortality rate, from the midfifties through 1964. These changes come about both among whites and blacks, "middle class" youth as well as the poor, although at a greater rate for the low income workers.

Associated with the stagnation of the economy, 1957-63, infectious disease case rates rose from lows reached in the early fifties, peaking around 1963. At first, the incidence rises for all age groups, but increasingly in the sixties, as rates have come down for the middle-aged group, they have remained high for young people. This shift in age composition is also evident in mental hospital admissions and drug treatment center admissions rates, crime rates, imprisonment rates and death rates reflecting stress. For young people these rates are rising rapidly from low levels attained on the upswing of the long cycle; while for the relatively small, now middle-aged white male group, these rates remain low or have fallen recently.

The deterioration of conditions is evident in death rates as well. Since 1961, death rates in the age group 15-24 have turned up in trend, for both blacks and whites, after falling rapidly on the upswing of the long cycle. This upturn is more serious for males - a 25% increase to 1968 - but occurs among females as well. War deaths and other deaths outside the



United States are not included in this account. If they were, the upturn at 15-24 for males would be a 70% increase. This increase in death rate reflects the strong rise of suicide homicide, accidents and some infectious diseases such as pneumonia and influenza. The level of the suicide rate for young people has now risen well above what it was for this age group in the Depression, and is approaching previous historical highs.

This deterioration of conditions is concentrated in the large cities, particularly in the areas of the country, such as the Northeast, which have not received great shares of military spending. In contrast, the situation in the South and Southwest has improved through this period, though relatively more slowly for young people, because of the large concentration of military spending in these areas.

The expansion of education and the draft have absorbed the numbers and delayed the entry of the baby boom children to some extent. To this extent, the competition from this source has been less effective in sustaining the profit rate through depressing labor costs. But the political consequences of an even more rapid collapse of living conditions for a whole generation have been avoided by the rulers as well. The cost in taxation has been paid by the already employed workers.

Part-time and temporary employment have also risen, especially for the greater numbers of teenagers and young adults "kept off the streets" by high school and college. Again, this provides a convenient, flexible and cheap new addition to the labor force; but will there be full-time jobs for these youth when school is over? Young people are increasingly conscious of the fact that nothing special, and perhaps nothing at all is waiting for them outside of school. The army trains them to kill, and cannot guarantee a job when they get back. This growing uncertainty about their future combines with the industrialization of education and the proletarianization of their future work to make the schools an opening battleground for the struggle which is emerging from the conditions we have described.

IV. Women

We have pointed out how in the boom of the long cycle, women in reproductive ages withdraw from the labor force, and get married, stay at home and have children. As income rise slows, and as the burden of taxation increases, more wives past peak reproductive ages are sent to work to maintain the already established family's position. But as more and more women under age 30 are single, the labor force participation rate of young women has gone up even more rapidly. This rise reflects both the rise in single women and the increased competition in the young labor market as a whole, forcing young families to send the wife to work as well. Thus the economic forces of the evolving long cycle have resulted in a great upsurge of women's labor force participation in the 1960's.

Women workers have the advantage, from the capitalist point of view, of being a low wage group. In general, women receive little better than half what men do for the same work. The experience of the sixties repeats, on a larger scale, the experience of the twenties for women. Toward the end of the boom phase of the long cycle, women of all ages are brought into the labor force, while the labor force participation rate of men goes down. This trend continues right through the depression of the cycle, and is only reversed on the (postwar) upswing as women in reproductive ages withdraw from the labor market to have children. Like young people, women now serve to hold down labor costs and stave off a falling profit rate.

The present cycle has a unique twist in this aspect. The labor force participation rate of white middle aged men, the small group, has not fallen. The labor force participation of young men, black or white, has fallen rapidly since the late fifties; while the labor force participation rates of young women have gone shooting up. In addition to the effect of higher unemployment in depressing wages in the young labor market, increasingly sizable proportions of young men are without income altogether. Meanwhile, the influx of female labor of all ages has meant a rising trend of female unemployment rates. Like youth, women form an increasingly large proportion of total unemployment.

In contrast to the situation for men, there are only small differences in the deterioration of conditions for younger or middle aged women. Suicide rates for women of all labor market ages have increased dramatically, the fall of age-specific birth rates is only a little more rapid at younger ages than at older, and the deterioration of birth conditions is similarly only a little more marked for young women than older women. Income has risen less rapidly, on the average, for full-time employed women than for men since the late fifties, and again there is increasing inequality of the female income distribution, growing out of greater labor market competition.

V. Past capitalist experience is repeated in the 1960's.

If we put these trends into historical perspective, we find that they repeat - over a short time span - past capitalist experience. About 1830 death rates began to rise in the growing industrial cities, especially at labor market entry ages, and continued to do so until around 1875. The influx of immigrants - aged 20 to 30 - depressed the labor market and prevented large cyclical increases in wages. Living standards deteriorated as cities grew without adequate sewer systems,

water supply, transportation, or housing, and death rates from infectious diseases and stress deaths rose. The proportion of females married and the birth rate declined; the rise in women's participation in the industrial labor force begins at this time.

After 1880 this trend in urban areas is reversed. Death rates start to fall, particularly in childhood ages, as a result of immunization against specific diseases, installation of sewers, trash collection and other sanitary measures, purification of city water supplies, and a trend rise in real wages of city workers. After the depression of the 1890's this improvement of conditions becomes particularly marked. The proportion of women marrying at young ages rises, the birth rates in industrial areas go up, and the decline of infant mortality begins. These trends continue through the twentieth century, interrupted by the depression before the First World War and the great Depression of the 1930's, modified by the special factors affecting particular cohorts that we have discussed.

The changes of reproduction on the farm follow a different course. Through the 19th century, farm death rates were about half urban death rates; women married earlier and more women married than in the cities; birth rates were higher and infant survival better. The areas of most rapid rural settlement - the North Central - had higher incomes for people of migratory ages as well. Migration from the farm to the industrial cities did not become a large-scale phenomenon in America until the 20th century; up to that time the growth of the industrial labor force was largely supplied by increasing immigration and declining natural increase in the urban areas.*

Despite these favorable conditions, however, farm birth rates fall steadily through the nineteenth century. This reflects two things. First, land for expansion eventually got used up; the closing of the frontier comes gradually through the late nineteenth century, and with it, a change in the farmer's attitudes about how many sons he could produce with some hope of a good life. Also important was the creation of the national and international market for agricultural commodities. In the context of competition from ever-larger commercial farming and growing productivity, the family farm was squeezed out. In the initial phases of this process, more and more family income had to be spent on improving equipment and land, and less could thus be spent on children. Another way of seeing this same development is to note that the market moved in such a way as to extract a growing surplus from agriculture to support the growing industrial cities.

Up to 1910, per capita farm income generally rose, with cyclical fluctuations in response to the booms of urban demand for food and materials in the long cycles. But after that time, increased productivity and world competition caused it to fall, more or less steadily, through the teens and the '20's to the low reached in the depths of the Depression. This prolonged fall was accompanied by an even more rapid fall of farm birth rates. 1910 marks the cessation of net migration to the farm area in America; after that time, the rapid demise of the family farm supplies an ever-increasing internal source of industrial labor force growth. Responding as it does not just to the increase of employment and wages in

*The immigrants most often came from countries where a past rise in natural increase had combined with agricultural depression and slow capital accumulation to make a large part of the emerging labor force superfluous.

the cities, but to the forces eliminating the family farm, this source of labor power also can be out of step with labor demand emerging from capital accumulation.

VI. The blacks have suffered the worst decline of living standard.

This is especially true of the blacks. They were first squeezed out of the South by the establishment of the racist system there in the late nineteenth century, and migrated to the Northern cities during the First World War and the 1920's, in response to the demand for labor. This is the period of rise of venereal disease and precipitous decline of the black birth rate. The Depression sees the beginning of the breakdown of black marriage as well. While for whites, the fluctuation of birth rates has a large component of planning, for blacks, the changes in birth rates have been proportionally larger than for whites and much of this change has evidently been due to increase of sterility arising from disease and malnutrition.

Large government subsidies to agriculture and increasing prices on the upswing of the long cycle made farming once again profitable, and after the 1930's there was a large and continuing increase of agricultural productivity. But in the competition, both black and white small farmers were eliminated as viable units; and large capitalist farms increasingly reaped the benefits. Now less than 5% of the workforce is on farms. The people forced off farms supplied a big addition to city labor force growth on the boom. As we have pointed out, their conditions improved at this time, as is evident in the rapid decline of the black infant mortality rate, the upswing of black marriage and births, and the rapid decline of black death rates through this period, particularly for urban blacks.

But the early fifties mark the turning point to levelling or decline of conditions for the blacks, some five years before the turn for whites, and at a higher level of death rates. This is the point at which black infant mortality levels and in the northern cities starts to rise. The proportion of infants of low birth weight rises continuously through the fifties and sixties for blacks, to the point where it is now comparable to the proportions prevalent in the colonies of the free world empire - 15% as opposed to the suburban white rate of 6%. This rise is most serious in the Northern cities. The increase of death rates at labor market ages is also greater for blacks than whites since the early sixties, and has a larger component of infectious diseases. Black death rates are now comparable at most ages to the death rates of blacks in South Africa.

The fall of the black birth rate is as rapid as the white, and once again there is evidence that in many places, this is due to a rise in sterility. The breakdown of marriage and the rise of illegitimacy and venereal disease have accelerated for blacks in the sixties.

As among women, this deterioration of conditions is not confined to the young age group, although this is the group with the greatest deterioration. In many respects, conditions are now worse in many Northern cities for blacks than in the South. It is ironical that the only states in which black infant mortality has continued to decline rapidly are the states with development resulting from military spending.

After the forties, when black labor made great advances, the flow of labor out of the South has continued, but in an economy not generating sufficient jobs to keep up with their rising numbers. The blacks now move into central cities in

decay, where death rates are rising. They suffer unemployment at twice the white rate, and income in all occupations for blacks is little more than half what it is for whites. Welfare payments, taxed away from employed workers, allow some of them to exist, when in the South they might have starved for lack of work.

The welfare payments also sustain blacks as a large unemployed pool, and their emergence as a sizable low-wage urban labor force has made profitable the performance of many tasks that would have otherwise been eliminated or mechanized. To this extent they also serve to sustain the profit rate by counterbalancing with their losses the gains made by unionized white male workers. Much the same analysis applies to the Puerto Ricans that have immigrated to the big cities and the Mexican migrant workers whose importation was essential to the profitability of large agriculture until the latest wave of mechanization got under way.

VII. The boom of the Sixties.

The result of this reduction of labor costs was a temporary reversal of the downtrend of the profit rate, and thus an extension of the long cycle beyond the point at which it would normally have collapsed into depression. While I have pointed out that this extension was at the expense of growing parts of the labor force, it is important to evaluate the achievements of this expansion, if only because they represent to many the evidence of the triumph of Keynesian economics in controlling the economy.

This expansion has two parts: before and after the beginning of heavy Vietnam war spending. From 1961-65, unemployment averaged 5.5%, and all the trends in living conditions that we have described worsened. From 1966-69, unemployment averaged 3.7%. (Unemployment came down most rapidly for the small, highly unionized age group, less rapidly for women and youth, and hardly at all for black teenagers.) But as unemployment fell, inflation and taxation rose, abolishing the normal wage gains made after 1965. The total unemployment rates achieved even with the huge government deficits of the Korean war (3.0%) or World War II (1.6%). Thus the Keynesian triumph has amounted to a moderate reduction in unemployment and a falling real wage.

The picture in vital and social statistics is equally equivocal. From 1965 to 1969, the infant mortality rate, the fetal death rate, and the infectious disease case rates (except for the young) have declined. The infant mortality rate remains above that in many other countries, for which the declines of mortality have been continuous through the sixties and at a greater rate. The proportion of infants of low birth weight stops increasing, but does not decline, in this second period. Housing production appears to be levelling through the sixties, but with the pricing shift I have referred to. Per capita nutrient consumption has moved up, but it would require the continuation of this trend for five or more years to reverse the effects of the previous downtrend.

However, the movement of age-specific birth rates, death rates, and marriage patterns continues the trends established in the late fifties. The major deterioration evident in vital and social statistics continued unbroken, with a slowing or reversal in a few indicators. When these indicators are looked at in

various regions of the country, we find that in the parts that had the worst deterioration through the early sixties, there are no reversals.

The result of the saving in labor costs has been the extension of the long cycle beyond the point at which a depression would normally occur. Thus after the boom of the sixties, interest rates are higher, the profit rate lower, and the debt-dependence of capital expansion greater than before. The weaknesses of debt expansion are evident in the collapse of the Penn Central and the troubles of the Ling-Temco-Vought empire. In general, those parts of capital which expanded most rapidly through the sixties—those associated with war production—are now the most overextended and in danger financially. Special measures by the government, such as the proposed \$750 million loan to ailing industries, may help to avert a general financial collapse. But these measures will further increase taxation and along with the unchecked development of the long cyclic trends, will more and more choke off production for people's needs.

Although a general depression will probably be averted, even government advisers project an economy limping along at unemployment rates above 5% for a year or more, with the inevitable worsening of all the trends of deterioration that I have discussed. It is this prospect, of depression for part of the working class, combined with slow decline of conditions for the rest, rather than full scale depression, which should be the focus of attention.

This is especially true since the influx of youth, women and blacks will continue unbroken at least through the next decade, as past birth rate changes, decline of marriage, rising living costs for families and the elimination of blacks from the South continue to exert their effects on the labor market. As in the sixties, this will be a factor favorable to profits through continued cheapening of labor. But this means a more rapid decline of living standards for those who are the cheap laborers.

VIII. Comparison to Past Revolutionary Situations

How do these prospects compare to the situations in the past when working people have organized themselves to do something about the capitalist system? Examination of the statistics for Germany and Italy during and after the first world war, and France during the revolution of 1848 and the Commune of 1871 reveals certain common characteristics of past revolutionary situations. The economy is generally in chaos, not producing for people's needs, because of a crisis: war, depression, or both. Stress has risen for a period of years to high levels, as evident in the rise of death rates and particularly suicide and other stress rates. In all of these situations, this deterioration is most concentrated on the younger age group of workers. While in all the situations referred to, the worsening of conditions was much more dramatic than what has happened in the last decade in America, there are evident similarities, which will probably develop further in the 1970's in the same direction.

This experience is in contrast to that of the Depression in America. Then, the older workers had the worst shock, while for younger workers, the worsening of conditions was only

moderate and rapidly followed by the development of very favorable conditions. Now this picture is reversed. The part of the population—the young—which is most free to take an active part in struggle has already suffered a decline for over a decade, and if a depression occurs, will undergo an unprecedented increase of stress. If there is no depression, the same result will come more slowly.

There are other similarities as well. In all of these past revolutionary situations, the deterioration of conditions was less for middle aged people than for the young. In Germany, for example, the death rates for middle aged people rise only very little or fall, through the crisis, 1913-23; while for young people, death rates nearly double their prewar value through this period. This divergence corresponds to the widely different forms of political action taken by old and young at this time. The young swelled the ranks of the "crazy" left communists, against whom Lenin wrote his famous pamphlet, *Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. They rejected all activity within the electoral machinery or the trade unions, and were ready in spirit, but not in numbers, organization, or means, to seize power immediately and proclaim the soviet

republic. The middle-aged workers, on the other hand, followed the trade unions, which led general strikes against right-wing military takeover of the already existing parliamentary government. While they were ready to use the most powerful tactics, these aimed essentially at preserving the bourgeois system which they hoped could yield them further gains.

The depression within boom that has developed in America in the sixties has created a similar divergence, which is only thrown into higher relief by the impact of the draft on youth, particularly black youth. At various points, parts of the population feel themselves driven to rise against the system, unorganized, unprepared, and without any chance of success. The central question, for which there is no clearcut answer now, is whether the sluggish continuation of "growth" without depression will result in a sharp decline of living standards for the "protected" group of workers as well. If it does, the prospects of more unified class activity open up—prospects which may be suggested by the wildcat strike movement now developing.

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