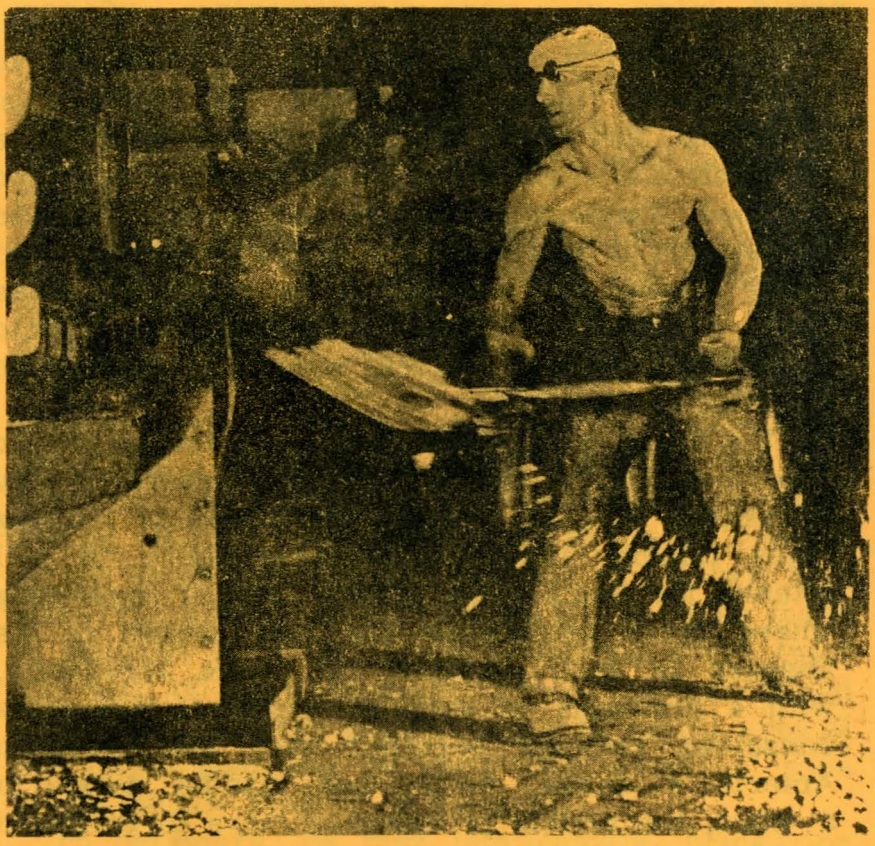
What's Happening to the American Worker



DAVID MONTGOMERY

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American socialists cannot hope to develop a valid theoretical perspective for our times without an accurate assessment of the present aspirations of this country's industrial workers. Without such a foundation, radical analysis of imperialism, monopoly capital, the subjugation of women, and Third World struggles, impressive as much of it might be, bears an eerie resemblance to good Nineteenth Century Mugwump critiques of the sins of the trusts: the illiberal and parochial lower classes are assumed to be reaction's mass base, and the stockholder's meeting or academic assembly provides the ideal forum for progressive agitation.

This essay will not attempt to depict the proper role for those of us who are not workers to play in helping to guide current tendencies in working class thinking toward a socialist vision. It will attempt the much more modest task of suggesting where those tendencies are now headed in the absence of such guidance, or, more accurately, with a minimum of socialist guidance (for some conscious radicals survived even the 1950s in America's mines, mills, and loading docks). In a word, the article is designed more to enlighten intellectuals about workers than to suggest how intellectuals might help enlighten workers. There is no possibility of rebuilding a mass socialist movement in America if those engaged in that effort accept the assumption that Harvey Swados described so well, that the "worker has died out like the passenger pigeon", or if "he is still around,

he is just like the rest of us—fat, satisfied, smug, a little restless, but hardly distinguishable from his fellow TV-viewers of the middle class." (1)

Recently the GE strike, the Wallace campaign, massive confrontations over lily-white hiring practices in the building trades, and the murder of Jock Yablonski have rudely reminded America's intellectuals that the country still has industrial workers, and that those workers still have their grievances.

To some extent the intellectual must be forgiven his ignorance. The labor leader did nothing to correct the image of the contented worker. On the contrary, union officials themselves appeared more often than not as posh and prosperous suburbanites preaching their "team" and "mutual trusteeship" programs to increase labor productivity and improve the employer's competitive position, racing off on government junkets to the far corners of the earth arm-in-arm with the CIA to help hold down the efforts of working people in other lands to improve their lot, loudly endorsing every twist and turn of the Government's most belligerent and reckless Cold War policies—not to recoil even at the futile slaughter of their own members' sons in the bloody jungles of Vietnam.

To outsiders, be they intellectuals, blacks, or poor whites, the labor unions appeared more often than not as conservative, even openly crooked champions of petty privilege, content to watch the ratio of organized workers to the total labor force (already well below one in three) slip lower each year, fearing to raise the feeblest public protest when their brothers in the building trades flagrantly collaborated with contractors to exclude

black men from membership and jobs, and satisfied to dissipate their vast political power in petty personal deals without the faintest shadow of even a local labor program against which they could test candidates.

To their own members the leaders of such unions looked little better. More than half America's union members are now under 40 years old. One fourth are under 30. If ever they do get themselves down to a local meeting, what do they hear about? The Bad Old Days. How rough it was before the union came, when those members were but kids, or not even born. What about them? The answer given by David McDonald is all too typical. Defeated in the 1965 elections for the presidency of his union he consoled himself with the thought that "there was little left to seek for my steelworkers except for periodic wage adjustments. We'd done it all." (2)

Think of it: the union had done all there was to be done. Certainly no one could deny that the American worker of today enjoys immensely more of the comforts and security of life than his counterpart of a century ago. And no one acquainted with the history of the last hundred years should doubt that what the worker has gained he won for himself the hard way, through his union struggles. (3)

But before we accept Brother McDonald's self-satisfied judgment, I want you to listen to two statements, written 80 years apart. The first is from the pen of George McNeill, a leading figure in both the Knights of Labor and the early AF of L, writing on the meaning of the labor movement in 1887. The second consists of a series of comments made to Harvey Swados by his fellow automobile workers in 1957.

First McNeill summing up the grievances of the workers in 1887:

"The bell that calls the weary, half-paid worker from his needed rest taunts him with each resounding stroke. The machinery that renders his skill and time of less value to himself and more to his master becomes the hated instrument of torture, its monotonous hum keeping time to his groans and curses. The mill, the mine, the foundry, and the roundhouse stand like giants, ever ready to swallow up his substance. With such feelings constantly present in the hearts of the laborers, unused to thought, disciplined only to act, what wonder that violence should spread like an epidemic from station to station, from mine to mine, and from factory to factory." (4)

Now compare that voice from the past with voices of the present—three quotations from men who worked with Harvey Swados:

Before starting work: "Come on, suckers, they say the Foundation wants to give away more than half a billion this year. Let's do and die for the old Foundation."

During the rest period: "Ever stop to think how we crawl here bumper to bumper, and crawl home bumper to bumper, and we've got to turn out more every minute to keep our jobs, when there isn't even any room for them on the highways?"

At quitting time (this from older foremen, whose job is not only to keep things moving, but by

extension to serve as company spokesmen): "You're smart to get out of here....I curse the day I ever started, now I'm stuck. Any man with brains that stays here ought to have his head examined. This is no place for an intelligent human being." (5)

Almost a century elapsed between the first statement and the last three, but some basic facts of life had remained unchanged. The worker was and is an instrument bought and used by other men for their purposes. His attitude toward his work was and is, to use Swados's words again, "generally compounded of hatred, shame, and resignation". (6)

Perhaps one thing has changed. George McNeill sustained himself with a dream of a beautiful future which the workingmen themselves were to bring about in America. "In this movement of the laborers toward equity," he wrote, "we will find a new revelation of the old Gospel. When the Golden Rule of Christ shall measure the relations of men in all their duties toward their fellows, in factory and workshop, in the mine, in the field, in commerce... (then) the new Pentecost will come, when every man shall have according to his needs." (7)

There is no such faith to sustain today's worker. Some will say: "It makes the time go quicker and easier when I keep thinking about that turkey farm I'd like to buy." The fantasies of others are less benign: "You get the feeling, everybody gets the feeling, whenever the line jerks everybody is wishing: 'Break down, baby.'" (8)

Basically today's worker survives by splitting his life into two watertight compartments, his job and his home. The job is the place of bondage to which he submits in search of money. The home

is where he hopes somehow to make life worthwhile with the goods that money will buy. Just go any day and stand by the time clock as the shift ends. See the men lined up with timecards in hand, waiting out the countdown for quitting time, then watch the mad dash to the parking lot for freedom and life. Then you will know what I mean.

But hold on a minute. Conditions on the job are certainly not the same as they were in McNeill's day. Two social forces have wrought great changes: the union and scientific management.

The successful spread of unionism to nearly 18,000,000 workers has significantly raised the income level not just of the members, but of millions of other workers for whom union scales have set industrial standards. Where unions have done their jobs at all seriously, they have provided their members with a precious sense of security. They supply a basic line of defense against abuse and arbitrary discharge, downgrading or suspension by management. They have put an end to industry's traditional practice of slashing wages at every downturn of the business cycle. They have done away with "packinghouse hiring", secured for the worker at least a minimum workday if he is called in, and even forced auto, steel, meat packing, and other industries to cut down on seasonal layoffs.

So important is this role of the union that, though most workers grouse about their leaders and their dues, stay away from meetings, and in fact take no part whatever in the life of the union, they have proven again and again in every major industry that they are ready to sustain strikes for many months rather than see their unions' power reduced. Jack Barbash was right when he wrote in 1961:

"For perhaps the largest number of union members the union serves a function, not a mission. The primary function of the union as these rank-and-filers see it is protection from unbridled rules of management. If he is not totally involved in the union, (the worker) does not, however, lack a deep-rooted perception of the protective function of the union." (9)

It has only been in the last 25 years that American big business has been content to curb unions rather than try to destroy them. The contrast between the two stormiest strike years in the nation's history shows the change. In 1919, 4,000,000 workers hit the bricks in the face of absolute refusal by capital to recognize their unions. They were crushed, and the next decade was the great age of the open shop "American plan" and the company union. When 4,500,000 organized workers struck in 1946, management chose not to challenge their determination to have unions, but rather to fence in the unions with the Taft-Hartley Law's prohibitions against secondary boycotts, sympathy strikes, political action, and radical leadership. In short, direct face-to-face collective bargaining was accepted, while actions of class solidarity were forbidden by law.

Since then it has been clear to the workingman that his union is officially tolerated, but always under a cloud of suspicion in the press, Congress, and law courts, and subject to an ever-increasing array of legislative restrictions. He knows that in the eyes of middle-class America his union is still not quite legitimate. Seeing school boards and hospital authorities resist the spread of unions to

their workers today on the very same grounds and in the very same way Little Steel and General Motors did a generation ago, the worker senses that his own union is still far from secure. Down in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, coal miners and laundry workers proved the point by staging sympathy strikes to support the unionizing efforts of their brothers in the hospital.

Side by side with the major, if insecure, improvement the union has brought in the worker's life must be placed the somewhat contrary impact of scientific management. The gospel of management reform preached by Frederick Winslow Taylor and his associates at the beginning of this century has directly touched every American worker, the union men and those missed by the unions alike. Through systematic application of industrial engineering American industry has achieved staggering levels of productivity, discarded the Nineteenth Century notion that low labor costs could be achieved only by low wages, and made possible a drastic improvement in the people's living standards even without any significant improvement in the shares distributed to wages and profits.

On the other hand, the American worker has paid a heavy social and psychological price for this progress. The essence of scientific management, as seen by Taylor himself, was to take the "initiative", the control over how the job was done, away from the worker and put it in the hands of management. Taylor described his method as "the deliberate gathering in on the part of those on management's side of all of the great mass of traditional knowledge, which in the past has been in the hands of the workman, and in the physical skill and knack of the workman, which he has acquired through years of experience". (10)

In other words, management picked the workers' brains, took from them their knowledge of how the job was done, then distilled that knowledge into engineering formulas that could be taught in college and handed it back to the workers in the form of orders. Taylor's associate Frank Gilbreth, pioneer of time-and-motion studies, instructed workers in "the one right way" to perform every assigned task. Another colleague, Henry Gantt, made it clear: "Learning to obey orders is often the hardest part of the workman's task." (11)

Let me make myself perfectly clear here. To introduce a systematic approach into the organization of production should have been an unqualified boon to the workers. Imagine the industrial engineer and the production worker pooling their knowledge, pulling in harness together and linking their different skills in common effort. Not only would production shoot up, but work itself would be all-absorbing—yes, even interesting and enjoyable. But that is not what happened. Today the factory is the scene of a battle of wits between the worker and the industrial engineer. The time-study man is the symbol of everything the worker hates. The main cause of wildcat strikes is not the demand of management that the workers produce, but its demand that they obey. "Management's right to manage" is the holy of holies of American industry.

The reason for the conflict is very simple and is well understood by every workingman. The industrial corporation exists to make a profit for its owners. No matter how eloquently the industrial engineers may claim to apply impartial, "objective" standards, they are hired by the company to increase those profits. Consequently the employer

insists that the power to make decisions about production must rest exclusively with him.

As George Romney said when he headed the Automobile Manufacturers' Association: "If the management representatives must talk to the union representatives before they can act or make a decision, then management has lost its management function." (12)

Perhaps the worker will be permitted to file a grievance about the orders given him, but while that grievance is winding its torturous way through proper contractual channels to an arbitrator, the worker involved must continue to do what he was told. How seldom it is today that a shop steward can even settle a grievance on the shop floor. Once the power to stop or slow down production was taken from the steward by the union contract and the company instructed the foreman to refer all grievances to the personnel office, the worker's protest against the decisions of "expert" engineers was referred to "expert" negotiators. The worker found himself right back where he started from. Somebody else makes the decisions about his fate.

The crux of the matter is that in the corporation of today the greater role a man plays in making a decision the less likely he is to be personally affected by that decision. The plant manager does not lay himself off when he installs new machines. And this "line of command" is justified today by the cult of the expert and the myth of complexity. The worker is told that only trained specialists can decide such issues. The clearest statement of this doctrine came from Frederick Winslow Taylor himself. Listen to what he said in 1912, and think of how this ideology pervades factories, schools, and government today:

"I can say, without the slightest hesitation, that the science of handling pig-iron is so great that the man who is fit to handle pig-iron as his daily work cannot possibly understand that science; the man who is physically able to handle pig-iron and is sufficiently phlegmatic and stupid to choose this for his occupation is rarely able to comprehend the science of handling pig-iron; and this inability of the man who is fit to do the work to understand the science of doing his work becomes more and more evident as the work becomes more complicated, all the way up the scale. I assert, without the slightest hesitation, that the high-class mechanic has a far smaller chance of ever thoroughly understanding the science of his work than the pig-iron handler has of understanding the science of his work...that the man who is fit to work at any particular trade is unable to understand the science of that trade without the kindly help and co-operation of men of a totally different kind of education...." (13)

This process of removing from the worker control over his work, then compounding the crime by labeling him too dumb to understand it anyway, is right now being carried to its ultimate development with the spread of automation. The historical process is quite clear. First Taylor and his colleagues studied the workers and learned from them how industrial jobs were done. Then they reduced that information to mathematical formulas which could be learned in engineering school and claimed only the trained engineer was capable of mastering such knowledge. It was World War II which added the next step, for in the search for a means to track high-speed aircraft for ground fire control, men learned that machinery can be directed by means of electronic impulses. Since any information which can be expressed in logical terms, such as a mathematical formula, can be translated into electronic impulses, it became clear that machines could be directed by computers. The worker's brain, it seemed, could be replaced by an electronic brain, and the expert assumed the task of programming that mechanism.

The worker now finds he needs a higher level of education than ever before to master the technical intricacies of his job, but he is denied the right to use his own mind to control what he is doing. He must anxiously watch his machine respond to the commands someone else programmed into it. Said one tape-controlled machine operator at Allen-Bradley:

"You have to keep your eyes and ears on it all the time. You have to know when a switch will fail or a fuse will blow and the thing will still be working. You have to be able to read blueprints

better than you did on an ordinary machine. When the fuse blows, the table will move but the spindle won't be working....You never know what the machine is going to do—before you did." (14)

This combination of the high degree of technical competence required by his job with the trivial nature of the decisions he is allowed to make lies at the heart of the workers' discontent today. The worker is keenly aware that he is no fool. He knows he can still outsmart the engineers on his own job, that he has his own private way of doing the job that is often better than the assigned way—or at least allows him some say in what he is doing, like banking parts, doubling up cuts, or sharing tasks on an assembly line with a buddy. Many workers will recognize this experience of a Westinghouse boring mill hand:

"A lot of times the programmer will come down and you'll say: 'What tools do you think I should use ?' He'll say: 'Let's use this tool, let's use that tool.' And actually he's picking up more from me than I am from him because I've been here 26 years." (15)

It is this daily experience at work which keeps alive the worker's class consciousness. Everything in his home environment, the press, the television, the installment-plan living, invites him to join the middle-class "consensus". The American Dream of opportunity and independence is dangled before him daily. But the instant he hits that time clock, Mr. Big lets him know: "Your ass belongs to me." For the next eight hours the lines of authority, the

lines of class, are sharply imprinted on every moment.

Many workers try to reconcile the two ends of their lives by devoting their lives to the goods they can buy. The desperate quest for meaning through houses, cars, and TVs drives them back to moonlight on a second job, so that there is never enough time to enjoy what they have bought. Many others lapse into self-hatred and self-contempt, believing that if they only had brains or "gumption" they could escape the trap of factory labor. They are failures, and since they have been taught any man worth his salt in America can get ahead, the fault must be their own. "The social order is thus protected," as Ely Chinoy said, "only at the psychological expense of those who have failed." (16)

The only alternative is to attack "the social order", and the brutal Red purges which followed both world wars have shown what troubles that course can bring on their heads. Furthermore most workers genuinely see no alternative that looks to them any better. A Milwaukee IAM shop steward spoke for millions when he expressed his dilemma this way:

"First of all I think capitalism is the best system and I am in full agreement with that. I would rather live under this than any other form of government working. But, it seems that companies put as the most important thing their product, stockholders, and things like that. And I say that what is produced is merely a product made of metal or wood or something like that. And actually the people working there have feelings and souls and one thing and another." (17)

The most common response to this dilemma is to lapse into cynicism. This attitude is above-all evident among the younger workers of today, those whose whole lives have been experiences in powerlessness and aimlessness and who have been so inundated with advertising and propaganda from the day of their births that they have developed a fine immunity to any kind of appeal for any cause whatever.

Many of the older workers, scarred by memories of their hunger and their struggles of the '30s, say the cure for youth's complacency would be a "good five-cent recession". In the words of a 53-year-old shop steward from International Harvester:

"I think the working people, they need a good whipping once to appreciate what they had, and to appreciate their union. Right now it don't seem that they appreciate it. Now, let's get back to the way people feel. They feel that they pay their three-dollar-a-month dues, they shouldn't have to attend meetings. They elect a steward, he will do their fighting for them, he'll do their arguing for them, he'll go to the meetings, he'll go back and tell them what went on, why should they bother about it? That's just about the feeling of a lot of people....And I would say that a good whipping once in a while would do them a hell of a lot of good." (18)

But younger workers turn a deaf ear to such warnings of the Bad Old Days—"pie in the sky talk" they call it, in a curious reversal of the older meaning of that phrase. Their minds are on their

mortgages and their installment payments. They will volunteer for any amount of overtime in the frantic effort to meet their monthly bills. Any work stoppage threatens them, interest rates threaten them, taxes threaten them, urban redevelopment threatens them. If they are white, they believe blacks threaten them. All these are seen as menacing the comforts they have worked so hard to put into their homes, and it is only for the sake of those comforts that they submit to the daily indignities from The Man at work. Herman's Hermits caught this mood when they sang: "The man with the cigar, I hope he doesn't push me too far." Here is an audience to cheer when George Wallace proclaims:

"I think there's a backlash in this country against the theoreticians who look down their nose at the steelworker and the paper worker and the communications worker and the beautician and the barber and the policeman and the fireman and the little businessman and the clerk and the farmer, and say you don't have intelligence enough to know how to get up in the morning and when to go to bed at night, and people are tired of theorists running their country." (19)

If the Wallaceite reaction is to be understood clearly, two points must be kept in mind. First, while Wallace recognizes and plays upon the workers' sense of alienation, his own program promises only to lead them deeper than ever into the social morass which alienated them in the first place. He parades before the workers second-rank or even imaginary enemies: the bureaucrat, the theoretician, the hippie. Mr. Big himself is never

mentioned. How silent Wallace remained during the GE strike. He identifies "The Establishment" with Harvard and Washington, not with General Motors and US Steel. Quite the contrary, he leaps to the defense of the very "property rights" which shield management's prerogatives to command and compel the worker to obey. Aware of the worker's fantasy of escaping to a turkey farm or a little business of his own, Wallace lures the workers deeper into this dream world to identify their own aspirations, as we saw, with "the farmer" and "the little businessman". Here is the demagogue in his classic role, playing on the grievances of the people in order to bind them even more closely to the social order which created those grievances. The leaders of the AFL-CIO sensed this fraudulent quality to Wallaceism in 1968, and quite properly attacked the Alabama Governor by exposing how badly he measured up against a genuine labor political program.

Second, as popular as the Alabama racist undoubtedly is in so many white working-class neighborhoods, his popularity has a remarkable tendency to disappear just when Wallace needs it most, on election day. I do not think this means his strength has been overrated. Quite the contrary, it means that when the ballots are cast, the workers are swayed by other threats which propel them back to the regular Democratic ticket. Those threats stem directly from the work situation, and in 1968 they were summed up in the person of Richard M. Nixon.

Nixon meant two things to the workers. The first was a freer hand to employers to attack union power. Workers correctly anticipated that the

Republicans would stiffen corporate resistance to labor. Remember Jack Barbash's point: the worker does not feel "totally involved in the union", but he does have "a deep-rooted perception of the union's protective function". Without it he would stand uttterly helpless before Mr. Big.

The other reason to fear Nixon was that he represented unemployment. There is some irony in this situation. Roosevelt and the Keynesians have by now pretty well convinced the workers that depressions can be avoided by means of intelligent government action. The rank-and-file fully supports the leaders of the AFL-CIO when they react instantly to the slightest downturn of the economy with calls for expansionist fiscal and public-works policies. But if most workers no longer think that crises of overproduction are simply unavoidable features of capitalism, if they believe government action can prevent them, then the logical corollary is that government action can also create them. They think Eisenhower did just that in 1958. They also know that Nixon's economic advisors believe "a little unemployment" is the only cure for inflation. To put it bluntly, they believe there is middle-class pressure in favor of putting workers out of work, and Nixon wants that middle-class vote.

These are the fears which led countless Wallace supporters in the ranks of labor to vote for Humphrey when the chips were down. The truly reliable voting supporters of Wallace were found largely in the upper middle class—prosperous and well-educated bigots, whose second choice would certainly have been Nixon himself, and for whom Spiro Agnew is now the knight in shining armor.

Both of these observations suggest that the

American workers' sense of their own identity and their own interests as a class remains a potent force in American life, that the current sociological vogue of dividing our society into a middle class (comprising the effective labor force) and an alienated poverty culture (attached to the world of welfare) is totally misleading. Furthermore, it is right at the place of work, where the sense of class is strongest, that American workers right now are responding to the present social crisis not with a new ideology or an elaborate political program, but with that form of practice which has historically been their trademark—direct action.

American labor has no mass-based Communist or Social Democratic party, no widely espoused ideology of a New Jerusalem, no intellectuals to speak in its behalf. It has, consequently, long been obliged to express all its needs and aspirations through union action. In this sense the famous Industrial Workers of the World, radical as they may have been, were simply manifesting the elementary facts of American life. In our present social order, dominated as it is by the military and industrial complex, computer control, and the elitist ideology of The Expert, the workingman is able to influence his own fate only by direct action. I repeat the point I made earlier: in today's corporation—let me say, in today's America—the greater the role a man plays in making a decision, the less likely he is to be affected by that decision. Those who decide that inflation must be fought by a hard line against wage increases and by "a little unemployment" will never suffer either a wage freeze or unemployment themselves. Those who are assigned the task of suffering can reverse the

"enlightened" decisions of the elite only by mass action.

Here is the significance of the General Electric strike, easily the most far-reaching struggle to be undertaken by American labor since 1946. The myth of labor's affluence was shattered by these 147,000 strikers averaging less than $7,000 a year during a period when the Department of Labor said $10,500 was needed for a moderate standard of living. In the doctrines of its former director of employee relations Lemuel Boulware, GE manifested the last word in the Divine Right of Management. Even a US Court of Appeals had declared in 1969 that the Boulware policies "amounted to a declaration... that not only the union but the process of collective bargaining itself might be dispensed with". (20)

The workers' response in the months just past took the form of a nationwide strike, mass picketing (often in defiance of injunctions) in mill towns throughout the land, the total repudiation of a back-to-work drive which used every device in the employers' book, and frequent instances of co-operation between university students and workers—something America had scarcely heard of since the 1930s. In GE's many new Southern runaway plants, the unions became the center of community life. Sympathy strikes became commonplace, despite Taft-Hartley. The 1300 workers of United Shoe Machinery in Beverly, Massachusetts, whose local union had never had a strike of its own, struck for 19 days rather than make parts for GE. Such grass-roots solidarity brought unity at the top, in the form of close co-operation among the 14 major unions involved. This co-operation embraced AFL-CIO unions, the

auto workers and teamsters of the Alliance for Labor Action, and the UE. Perhaps the most significant index of what happened was the return of the UE from its 20-year-old exile to an honored position of leadership, publicly acknowledged by the other unions.

The upshot was that GE was forced to bargain. The terms of settlement (in my judgment quite good) were not as important as the fact that this corporation had for the first time in more than 20 years been prevented from imposing its will—had been forced by direct action to come to terms with its workers. So infectious was the new spirit that the IUE reversed its own 20-year-old practice (embodied in its constitution) and allowed its members to vote on the agreement. Its biggest local, Schenectady 301, in fact voted no.

The new unionism which checked General Electric has many other manifestations today. As always, the keys to the vitality of a union movement are the extent to which it is engaged in organizing new recruits and the strength of its shop stewards. New organizing drives today are successfully reaching out in two directions: to white-collar workers and to service workers. In both areas mass picketing and militant, democratic unionism prevail. The sight of school teachers, hospital workers, and garbage men going off to jail for violent injunctions is becoming routine. The teachers are demonstrating that arbitrary authority is as common, and as intolerable, in educational hierarchies as it is in factories.

Hospital workers have been in the forefront of service employees. They too have brought old truths home to Americans. Despite Daniel Moynihan they

have made it clear that the basic cause of poverty is low pay. Despite all the efforts of poverty programs and university projects to upgrade the poor, unions like Local 1199 have shown that what the poor need is upgraded jobs. The fact that about a fourth of all full-time, year-round, non-white male workers earn less than $3500 per year is not the result of missing fathers or some mysterious quality of the black psyche, but the result of the pay American industry provides for the work they do. Service workers are learning that the only way the decision-makers, faced with middle-class protests over high taxes and service costs, will do anything about those pay scales, is if the workers use their organized power to make them do it. From Atlanta and Memphis to Pittsburgh that's what's happening.

While the strike of white hospital workers at Uniontown shows that poverty is no respector of color, there is no doubt that a great impetus has been given these new organizing drives by the black liberation movement. To see the interaction between the black community and the labor movement only in terms of black struggles against unions is very misleading. The fact that black America is made up overwhelmingly of industrial and service workers makes it inevitable that the new sense of militancy and dignity in the black community should influence increasingly the behavior of the union movement itself. Through black caucuses, revolutionary union movements like the one at Dodge, and introduction into collective bargaining of tactics developed on the civil-rights front this influence is already being felt. In such areas as Pittsburgh's hospitals, black workers are clearly leading the way for the whites to follow. It is safe to say that the more effective

black workers are in these new organizing efforts the more the white workers will be tempted to join them rather than oppose them.

The revitalizing of the shop stewards and other elected local officers as the direct spokesmen of the rank-and-file on the job manifests itself in several ways. The Steelworkers' current struggle to extend incentive payments in the teeth of defiant corporate opposition is clearly reinvigorating local union activity in this area. The whole thrust of management practice today is away from incentives toward such schemes as measured day work to allow absolute management control over rates of output and to perfect the integration of the workers' activity with the automated sectors of the plant. By pushing hard in the opposite direction the United Steelworkers, willy nilly, are mounting a battle for workers' control which has the strength of clearly meaning money in the pocket for every worker involved.

More apparent to the outsider is the current rash of wildcat strikes (usually over the manning of jobs, as in Sharon, Pennsylvania), sympathy strikes (like the shutting down of J & L to support the trainmen), and strikes in defiance of union officials (like that of the mailmen). In all these efforts the local and steward level of leadership is clearly asserting itself. In fact, the spread of conglomerates, or of super-corporations, and perfection of automation are bound to give increasing importance to wildcat and quickie strikes, just as they have already increased the incidence of pacts among unions for industry-wide strikes at the other end of the scale. If all grievances are saved up for the contract negotiations once every two or three years, the

modern corporation can easily prepare itself to hold out for months, to use supervisory personnel to man automated equipment, and to invoke government aid against the threat to national defense such massive strikes involve. On the other hand, precisely such automated corporate giants are peculiarly vulnerable to brief, unexpected work stoppages which can easily disrupt their intricate, computerized scheduling.

President Nixon knows it, too, and the new array of legislation his Administration is preparing is aimed directly at these emerging types of worker actions. Most drastic and most revealing of all is his proposal that workers be forbidden by law from voting on contract settlements. Remember how recently the thrust of anti-union propaganda in this country was that labor unions were too dictatorial and that the rights of members had to be protected by such measures as Landrum-Griffin? Now the same voices are crying that labor unions are too democratic—the members upset the decisions of the experts!

We are witnessing the reassertion of old truths about the relations among social classes, truths as old as the industrial revolution, truths which no amount of extolling of the "consumer economy" can change. But the new shape of our society (computer control, the conglomerate corporation, the black revolution, the women's liberation movement, the student revolt over the style of life, Wallaceism) is certain to give the new syndicalism attributes never before seen in the American labor movement. As always, the workers will have to find their own way. The leaders of the AFL-CIO could articulate their members' grievances and show how they form

a coherent whole reaching from the lunacy of Vietnam through the defiance by US Steel of the arbitrator's incentives award to the underpaid employment of the ghetto. But they won't. Here is another old truth. Carl Sandburg said it 34 years ago (21):

The people will live on.
The learning and blundering people will live on.
They will be tricked and sold and again sold
And go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds,
The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback,
You can't laugh off their capacity to take it.
The mammoth rests between his cyclonic dramas.

...

This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.
There are men who can't be bought.
The fireborn are at home in fire.
The stars make no noise.
You can't hinder the wind from blowing.
Time is a great teacher.
Who can live without hope ?

In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march.
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
keeps, the people march:
"Where to ? What next ?"

David Montgomery
University of Pittsburgh

Footnotes

(1) Harvey Swados, "The Myth of the Happy Worker", A Radical's America (Boston, 1962), Page 112.

(2) David McDonald, Union Man (New York, 1969), Page 324.

(3) See Robert Ozanne, Wages in Practice and Theory: McCormick and International Harvester, 1860-1960 (Madison, Wisconsin, 1968), Chapter 4.

(4) George McNeill, The Labor Movement: the Problem of Today (New York, 1887), Pages 460-461.

(5) Swados, Pages 118-119.

(6) Ibid., Page 112.

(7) McNeill, Pages 468-469.

(8) Ely Chinoy, Automobile Workers and the American Dream (Garden City, New York, 1955), Pages 71 and 94.

(9) Jack Barbash, Labor's Grass Roots (New York, 1961), Page 200.

(10) Frederick Winslow Taylor, "Testimony Before the Special House Committee", Page 40 in Taylor, Scientific Management, Comprising Shop Management, Principles of Scientific Management, Testimony Before the Special House Committee (New York, 1947). Each of the three books bound together has separate pagination.

(11) Henry Gantt, Work, Wages and Profits (second edition, New York, 1919), Page 156.

(12) Quoted in Neil Chamberlain, The Union Challenge to Management Control (New York, 1948), Page 3.

(13) Taylor, "Testimony", Page 49.

(14) UE Guide to Automation and New Technology (New York, 1969), Page 20.

(15) Ibid., Page 23.

(16) Chinoy, Pages 129-130.

(17) Sidney M. Peck, The Rank and File Leader (New Haven, 1963), Page 301.

(18) Ibid., Page 121.

(19) Quoted in Guardian, September 21, 1968.

(20) "GE Versus American Labor", Labor Today, IX (January-February 1970), Page 6.

(21) Carl Sandburg, "The People, Yes", Complete Poems (New York, 1950), Pages 615 and 617.

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