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The Rise and Fall of the Union



By James Boggs

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In the last twenty years an industrial revolution has been taking place in the United States at a pace faster than that of any country in the world, transforming social layers of this country on a scale never before dreamed of. So fast has this industrial revolution been developing that 60 percent of the jobs held by the working population today did not even exist during the First World War, while 70 percent of the jobs that existed in this country in 1900 don't exist today. Not only have work classifications been fundamentally altered, but the work force has multiplied from 20 million in 1900 to 40 million in 1944 to 68 million today. The change is not only in numbers. Over 20 million of those working today are women, and by 1970 it is expected that women workers will have increased to 30,000,000—a work force of women which will be one-and-a-half times the entire work force of 1900.

The United States has transformed itself so rapidly from an agricultural country to an industrial country, and as an industrial country has undergone such rapid industrial revolutions that the question of who is in what class becomes an ever-wider and more complicated question. Today's member of the middle class is the son or daughter of yesterday's worker.

When I was a child, my mother's chief ambition was to learn how to read and write, because if she had been able to read and write she could have become a first-class cook for some rich white people. That, for her, would have been success and the realization of what was, for her and in her day, a high ambition. Her ambition for me was that I should obtain an education so that I would not have to do the things she had to do. In America, more than in any other country, the revolutions

in the mode of production have been accompanied by changes in the composition and status of classes. Today most workers in the plant have been to high school and quite a few have even been to college. All either plan or wish to send their sons and daughters to college—their sons so they won't have to work in the factory on what they call a dull and automated job; their daughters (get this!) so that they won't have to marry some bum but can make their own living and be free to decide whether they want to marry or not marry, unhampered as they have been in years gone by, when the big aim was to raise a girl so that she'd be able to meet and marry a good hard-working man who would provide for her and the children.

America is therefore at the stage where no class is a homogeneous segregated bloc as in the early days in Europe when, fresh out of feudalism, everything was controlled by a few large owners of estates and factories, while the rest of the population were the direct servants of the ruling class, whatever the form in which they worked for it. Nor is it like the United States in the period before the Civil War when, in the South, you had the big landowners with millions of slaves watched over by a few straw bosses, while in the North you had craftsmen in small shops, farmers, and textile millworkers. Nor is it like the 1920's when the farms were being mechanized and the rural population was pouring into the big cities to man the machines and the assembly lines of the mass production industries that had grown up since the First World War.

In the 1930's, with the country in a deep economic crisis, the old craft unions went into a state of decline, and people in panic and disillusionment began to create new forms of organization. They were spurred on by an administration which called itself the New Deal and which, in order to save the country from total collapse, initiated certain reforms, thereby creating an arena in which the people could act. This led to a wave of further social reforms and the birth of the CIO which at that point was the biggest social reform movement that had ever taken place in America. Radical groupings for the first time had a mass force in action within which they could propagate and agitate for their theories and ideas, ideas which

were predominantly based on European concepts of organization, and on Marx's, Lenin's, and Trotsky's theory of the class struggle. Thousands of young intellectuals, most of them the sons and daughters of European immigrants, began to take part in and become part of the labor movement. At that time the validity of their approach was strengthened by the fact that the bulk of the American workers were still "raw workers" and not at all articulate—sharecroppers, auto workers, textile workers, rubber workers.

What has transpired since then? The sons of the factory workers and coal miners have become teachers, engineers, draftsmen, scientists, social workers. In fact today, even the radicals no longer think of their children replacing them on the assembly line, or with the pick and shovel in the coal mine, or behind the tractor. Today the largest bulk of organized workers in this country is made up of truckers, dispatchers, etc., in the transport industries. The other large bulk, mainly unorganized, is composed of teachers. There is a growing army of technicians and engineers who today have the same status in industry as did the plumbers, carpenters, and skilled workers in yesterday's industries. That is all they are, nothing more, nothing less.

Even in the South this transformation is taking place and not only among whites but among Negroes. There are many tens of thousands of Negro youths in the colleges today, and they are the ones leading the freedom struggles in the South. They are the sons of ex-GIs, men who have worked in the steel mills, on railroads, in factories, in the mines, but are determined that their children shall not follow in their footsteps.

Today the working class is so dispersed and transformed by the very nature of the changes in production that it is almost impossible to select out any single bloc of workers as working class in the old sense. Today something like 15 percent of industrial employment is in war industry—in the production of missiles, tanks, guns, rockets—and the men and women in these industries hold all kinds of positions. Some of these positions in years gone by would have classified them as middle class; some make salaries that exceed those of the executives of some corporations. The sons and daughters of

yesterday's ditch-diggers are today's engineers, scientists, tool-makers, electronic specialists, nuclear physicists, school teachers, social workers, time-study men, cost-analysis experts, laboratory technicians, hospital nurses, secretaries to big executives, as well as typists, file clerks, dictaphone operators. Only the mothers and fathers are still left in those jobs which were once considered the testing ground of the pure working class. And each year these pure working-class jobs become fewer and fewer as automation moves in and takes over.

However, it is not only diversification of work that has changed the working class. The working class is growing, as Marx predicted, but it is not the old working class which the radicals persist in believing will create the revolution and establish control over production. That old working class is the vanishing herd. There are only 12 million of these production workers left in American industry, out of a total work force of 68 million. Moreover, since the Negroes were the last hired into these bottom jobs, over 30 percent of these 12 million production workers (or about 4 million) are Negroes. So the Negroes, whom the radicals do not ordinarily think of as workers, form a large proportion of this working-class force which is usually considered as the revolutionary force, while the native-born whites who have been able to move up with every change in production are less and less inside the working-class force.

By examining the history of the CIO, the industrial revolution, and unemployment, we can get some idea of the revolutionary changes that have so rapidly developed in America, directly leading to changes in the nature of work, the social composition of various strata of the population, the classes within it, and the culture of the population.

The CIO came in the 1930's. It came when the United States, which had fought in the war of 1917 and built up large-scale industry out of the technological advances of that war, was in a state of economic collapse, with over 12 million unemployed. The workers in the plant began to organize in the underground fashion which such a movement always takes before a great social reform—in the cellars, the bars, the garages; in the same way that the Abolitionists had to organize—a

minority against the sentiments of the community. Involved in getting the movement under way were Communists, Socialists, wobblies, radicals of every type, along with preachers and a new layer of militant workers. Sitdown strikes erupted all over the country. All auto workers, except those of Ford, were involved, and the movement spread to allied industries.

To grasp the social significance of the CIO it must be clearly understood that the workers in taking hold in the plants did not take power. They only took hold of the plants. They did not take over the state government, or the national government, or the city police, or the National Guard, or the army. But in their struggles with the police and often with state troopers, they mobilized that section of the population which was not directly involved but which felt it also had a stake in the struggle. People from all strata of the population began to support these struggles centering around the workers and often to participate in them, both physically and financially.

It should also be clearly understood that all the workers did not act as one, nor did they all sit down as one, nor did they all join the movement as one. When the sitdown movement began in the shops, some workers stayed in while others went home and waited to see how it would all come out. The great Ford plant at River Rouge, where more workers were concentrated than in any other plant in the country, did not erupt at all. It was only four years later, in 1941, that the Ford Motor Company was brought into the union. It is necessary to realize that more workers were organized *into* the union than themselves spontaneously organized the union. The struggle for the union was also the battle against the scabs. There were workers who had to be forced to join by those who had seen and felt the benefits of this great social organization.

From 1935 to the entry of the United States into the war in 1941, we saw in this country the greatest period of industrial strife and workers' struggle for control of production that the United States has ever known. We saw more people than ever before become involved and interested in the labor movement as a social movement. Those who worked in the plants under a new Magna Carta of labor, the great Wagner Act, not only had a new outlook where their own lives were concerned. They

also had the power to intimidate management, from the foremen up to the top echelons, forcing them to yield to workers' demands whenever production standards were in dispute. When management did not yield, the workers pulled the switches and shut down production until it did yield. So extensive was their control of production that they forced management to hire thousands and thousands of workers who would not otherwise have been hired. Yet it should be remembered that even at this point, at the height of its greatest power at the point of production, the CIO never solved the question of unemployment. It took the Second World War to put back to work the millions who had been unemployed throughout the 1930's. At the height of CIO power, we had more unemployed than we do now, both absolutely and proportionately.

The first serious contest of the CIO came in 1938 and it expressed itself in contractual language in 1939. That was when the union agreed with management to outlaw sitdowns inside the plants.* The workers, not to be outdone by the union contract, quickly devised a new way which would later prove to be the path of opposition to both union and management. They began to walk out *without union authorization*. In 1939 and 1940, with the shadows of war hovering over Europe, the contract stated that the union would not cause or instigate sitdowns or walkouts in the plants. The NLRB was set up in Washington and then, following Pearl Harbor, the War Labor Board. The union leaders gave the government the no-strike pledge, and there followed one of the biggest debates that has ever taken place in the union over the question of whether or not the unions should abide by this pledge. Although thousands and thousands of militant workers, realizing that their newly won freedoms were being curbed, put up a protest, the CIO and all the other unions except the miners' succumbed. But throughout the war, the workers continued to wildcat over production, even though many had sons in the armed forces. It

* When I speak of "the union" without further qualification, I mean, unless the context indicates otherwise, the United Automobile Workers (UAW). This union displays in clearest form the main trends and developments in the CIO as a whole, and in addition it is the union I know best from long personal experience.

was here also that the union leaders began to use other forces from outside the unions, including members of the War Labor Board, to persuade workers to return to work for the sake of the war effort.

However, in the flux of the Second World War, the workers created inside the plants a life and a form of sociability higher than has ever been achieved by man in industrial society. For one thing, the war meant the entry into the plants of women workers, Negro workers, Southern workers, and people from all strata, including professors, artists, and radicals who would never have entered the plant before, either because of their race, sex, social status, or radical background. With the war going on, you had a social melting pot in the plant, a sharing of different social, political, cultural, and regional experiences and backgrounds.

Side by side with what was taking place in the shop there was also growing up the union organization and what is today the union bureaucracy. With only one problem at hand—to keep the workers at work—the labor leaders began to sense their power. Yesterday workers at the bench, they now sat at the table with management and with representatives from Washington. If in Washington, on the top level, Roosevelt was clearing things with Sidney* and vice versa, on the local level labor leaders with thousands of workers under their control were also feeling their oats. These labor leaders often used the radical intellectuals as advisers in strategy and tactics. They found these radicals useful in presenting a militant face to the workers. On the eve of the war, the union bureaucracy received the union shop contract which required every worker in the plant to become a member of the union. For the first time the political machine of a plant was organized by the union itself, and the company set up private rooms in the plant for union officials.

Throughout the war period the workers continued to defy the union on its no-strike pledge to the government. Thousands upon thousands of unauthorized strikes took place. (In 1943

* The phrase "Clear it with Sidney" originated at the Democratic Convention in 1944 when Roosevelt said labor leader Sidney Hillman should be consulted on the choice of a vice-presidential candidate.

and 1944 alone, there were 8,708 strikes involving 4 million workers.) These strikes took place over such issues as the right to smoke a cigarette (the companies for the first time were forced to allow workers in the big plants to smoke so that tobacco chewing was no longer necessary); the right of management to fire guys who were accused of sleeping on the job, or who laid off too much, or who didn't keep up with production; the right to eat on the job, read on the job, and even to cook on the job. Although workers officially had no right to strike, they achieved by these unauthorized strikes such human rights in the shop as to give them the ability to utilize their talents as never before and the opportunity to develop such an understanding of production as no group of workers in history has ever had the leisure to acquire. With the War Labor Board settling the matter of wages, the union leadership spent most of its time at the bargaining table trying to finagle job classifications which would bring a few cents more, hoping thereby to prove to the workers that they were doing something. It was only the miners' union under John L. Lewis which officially took any position with regard to workers' rights during the war. It did this by calling the only strike of national significance, the strike which brought into the labor movement the "No Contract, No Work" slogan.

It made little difference to management, which was making record profits through the government's cost-plus contracts, how many hours workers worked or even how many workers were on the payroll. So corrupt were both union and management that a government study at Packard Motor Company revealed hundreds of workers sitting around and gambling while others worked. The workers were frozen on the job and had no way to leave unless they could harass management into firing them. So some of the more ingenious workers carried on individual wildcats, refusing to work in order to be fired, whereupon they would go to another plant for a few cents more. In this way many workers moved from job to job and saw the inside workings of many plants.

Then as suddenly as had come the war, came V-J Day. An era had ended and a new era inside the union movement began. The control of production and the human relations in-

side the plant which the workers had achieved were now shunted aside by the union. The struggle was shifted from the plane of relations on the job to the economic plane, where it had never been up to then. For although the coming of the CIO had meant wage increases for most workers, these increases had not been big. The average wage in the plants throughout the war was \$1.00-\$1.25 an hour. It was the long hours of work which made the paychecks big enough to meet the black market prices and the rising cost of living.

The great General Motors strike of 1945-1946 was the opening gun in the new vicious circle in which wage increases and fringe benefits would be won by the union and hailed as great social progress, only to be followed by concession of some part of the control over production which the workers had won. But flushed with the freedom they had gained inside the shop during the war, the workers almost unanimously supported the early postwar strikes for economic benefits. It was not until 1948 when the union gave management the "security clause," handing over the right to run production as it saw fit, that dissension began to spread.

Reuther had come to power in 1947 and with him a new kind of labor statesmanship which was to set a pattern for the whole CIO. Riding the crest of popularity of his "Open the Books" slogan (which he had raised as director of the 1945-1946 GM strike), Reuther pushed aside all the militants and radicals who in the sitdowns and during the war had built the UAW up into a model for the CIO. The historic escalator clause which the Trotskyites had projected and GM had rejected in 1946 was now accepted by GM. A new pattern of a sliding scale of wages was adopted which became the foundation of the union's "Sliding Scale of Socialism" strategy. The year 1948 also saw the further development of the union's Political Action Committee, whereby the schemers of the Reuther bureaucracy and the CIO leadership in general hoped to take the militancy away from the shop and focus it on the halls of Congress—to do through legislation what the workers had not done through the sitdowns, exercise political power.

In 1950 the UAW launched its historic pension scheme, and the 117-day Chrysler strike took place. In the contract

which emerged from this strike, Reuther (to use one of his favorite phrases) "nailed down" a scheme for the workers to get pensions and holiday pay. It was with this contract that the workers began to realize how nailed down they really were to the company and how they were being made into a part of it. The contract evoked from the workers, particularly the younger ones who were unable to see any benefits for themselves in the pension schemes, the first serious opposition from the ranks. The pension pattern quickly spread to other unions. Again the UAW had established itself as the model for the labor movement.

But 1950 also brought something else—the 5-year contract. GM hailed it as a guarantee of five years of industrial peace. From the workers' standpoint it was the beginning of the stalemate, and a rash of wildcats began which were to continue until the expiration of this contract and even up to the expiration of the next contract, in 1958. During these eight years, from 1950 to 1958, the workers used the wildcat as a defensive weapon to fight off encroachment on their control at the point of production, while the companies gradually wore them down with the help of the union.

During this period, management's strength began to assert itself in conjunction with the Republican administration in Washington. The economic pace of the country was beginning to slow down as Truman's "police action" in Korea was being brought to an end. But the United States was still moving from a welfare state to a warfare state: the Cold War was on, the McCarthy era was here, and the radicals and militants were on the run, pushed out by Reuther's insistence that all opponents were "parlor pinks." The Taft-Hartley Act, enacted under Truman, the friend of labor, was now being enforced by Eisenhower. Merger of the AFL-CIO to centralize labor's strength was being talked about everywhere. No one said that the CIO, which represented the most radical point yet reached by labor in the United States, was now going back to join those whose only contribution to the labor movement had been the conservatism of business unionism. All that mattered now was a bigger organization. Strength was measured by size.

The wildcat movement reached its peak in 1955. In that

year the Ford and GM workers, who up to that time had more or less supported the Reuther machine, believing that thereby they were supporting unionism, erupted in nation-wide wildcats while Reuther was still celebrating the "Guaranteed Annual Wage" contract (which was to turn out to be only a supplementary unemployment benefit). The wildcatters all over the country raised the slogan of "Specific Local Grievances" and forced the union to give them the right to local strikes over these grievances. For the first time Reuther and his associates were really scared. They had been warned by the workers that control of the machine was one thing and control over the workers quite another, that a contract between the union and the company is not necessarily a contract between the workers and the company.

However, a new force had now entered the picture, a force which the union had given up its claim to control when in 1948 it yielded to management the sole right to run production as it saw fit. With the decline again of auto production after the Korean War, and with the signing of the 1955 contract, management began introducing automation at a rapid rate.

Automation is a change in the mode of production which is more radical than any since the introduction of the assembly line. But unlike the assembly line, which was to increase the manufacturing work force over what it had been, automation is an advanced form of technology which replaces individual human controls with electronic controls. What had already happened to the coal miners with the mechanization of the mines was now catching up with the CIO in chemicals, rubber, steel, glass, autos, machinery, etc.

As the companies began to step up their pressure for higher job standards from the workers, the union itself began to try to persuade the workers that automation would provide more jobs for them. Caught squarely between the union contract and the company, the workers continued to wildcat against every attempt to reduce the work force, but each time they were forced to return by the union officials. New plants with new automated machinery began to spring up all over the country. The work force in the old plants was broken up,

scattered to the new plants. Thus the machine shop work which had been done by 1,800 at the old Chrysler-Jefferson plant was now being done by 596 in the new Trenton, Michigan, plant which supplies not only the old plant with machined parts but all the other plants of the corporation. Layoffs followed by the hundreds as more was being produced not only by the new automated machinery but by forcing workers to tend more of the old machines—man-o-mation. With the building into the automated machines of more controls, thus reducing or eliminating breakdowns, even skilled workers were no longer needed for repair work.

The workers wildcatted, held meetings of their locals, voted not to work overtime, all in an attempt to stem the tide. But the union continued to send them back, and so the layoffs continued, reaching into every section of the plant, and including office workers, time-keepers, and paymasters. As the office workers found their places taken by IBM machines and computers, high-heeled and silk-frocked women began to join the production workers on the picket line.

Finally, after 137 wildcats at U.S. Rubber in one year and 700 wildcats in the Chrysler plants in three years, the union agreed with the company that any worker who wildcats should be first warned and then summarily dismissed. That put an end to wildcatting. Then came what was for all practical purposes the end of the union when, in 1958, under the pressure of the company and for a period of four months, the union insisted that the workers continue on the job without a contract. Meanwhile, the company introduced new work standards when and how it pleased, daring the union to strike. When the 1958 contract was finally signed, there were few workers in the plant who did not realize they had returned to fully company-controlled plants. Time-study men and work layout specialists roamed the plants like sniffing bloodhounds, spying, taking pictures, watching over the workers' shoulders, while the shamed union representatives hid behind pillars or in the toilets.

The cooling-off period which the union had devised in the 1955 strike over local grievances was now in full contract effect. After a certain number of workers' grievances had been

accumulated, a strike vote could be taken. Then a 60-day wait was in order. Then, if the International Board considered the grievances worth a strike, a strike might be held, etc., etc. Meanwhile, the company was free to keep the work standard in effect and get out all its production.

So ridiculous has the union become as a workers' organization that in 1958 when the contract with Chrysler was being ratified on a Sunday, the union authorized the workers to take a strike vote on the next day.

Once again the workers devised a method to hit back, but this time not against the company. In December, 1958, the unemployed began to picket both the plant and the union against overtime. When this happened, the union, in cooperation with the company and the courts, saw to it that a ruling was handed down that any picketing by the unemployed of a plant is in violation of the contract. Not satisfied with this outlawing of actions by its unemployed members, the union at its next convention decided that unemployed workers could only retain their membership and the right to vote if they reported to the local union during the last ten days of each month. Thus the union has itself drawn the line between the employed and the unemployed. Today unemployed workers march around the Chrysler plants protesting overtime, but the union does not allow them to do so during hours when the workers are actually going into the plant. They may only march when the workers are already inside working.

All that is now left to the workers is the picketing of the union itself.

From 1955 until today the workers have made it absolutely clear that man does not live by bread alone. They have insisted that the question of wage raises or money benefits in any form is not what concerns them but rather the conditions of work in the shop. In 1961 the union bureaucracy negotiated new contracts with the "Big Three" and American Motors. If you take the word of the workers themselves, you will see that not one of the issues that they consider the major ones was settled by the new contracts. The overtime which they insisted must go and the shorter work week they wanted have been tossed out the window. In fact, before the ink was dry on the

new contracts and before the workers had even ratified them, the plants were scheduling six days a week, ten hours a day. Not only was nothing done to improve working conditions. Management now had another three-year contract under which it can legally pursue the merciless speed-up and intimidation which have been developing since 1955. Even the small representation of stewards and committeemen which workers retained at Chrysler has been reduced. At American Motors wash-up time has been cut out. Faced with the question of unemployment and accepting it as permanent, the union has now embarked on an all-out program to ease as many workers out of the plant as possible, through severance pay, pensions, increased unemployment benefits. At the same time, it is pushing a profit-sharing plan to incorporate those still left in the plant into management itself. When American Motors workers made it clear that they didn't want the profit-sharing plan, the union manufactured a new definition of democracy: the holding of one election after another until the workers vote the way the union wants them to vote. Joining hand in hand with management, it conducted an intensive educational program to brainwash the workers into line. At General Motors, where local union after local union, with the Pittsburgh local in the lead, refused to go back to work until their local grievances had been settled, the International simply brought all dissident local officers to Detroit where, together with management, it whipped them into line. In the Chrysler set-up, where the Twinsburg, Ohio, stamping plant is the key to continued production, the International came to a settlement with the company over the *unanimous* opposition of the entire local bargaining committee.

The UAW is just one union among the major CIO unions. But it has been considered the most advanced, the most progressive, the model of the labor movement that arose in the 1930's. If this is what the UAW has done, it is not difficult to imagine the state of the other CIO unions which failed to reach the heights of militancy and social advancement of the UAW.

Thus, after 25 years, the UAW has given back to management every right over production won in the movement of

the 1930's and the war years. Today the workers are doing in eight hours the actual physical work they used to do in twelve. At 6:30, a half hour before the day shift begins, you can see workers setting up their operations so that they will not fall behind during the hours for which they are paid. They are afraid to go to the toilet, to get a drink of water, to take time off to go to the funeral of a relative. If they refuse to work overtime, they are written up and sent home on a regular working day. They are afraid to walk around with a newspaper in their pockets for fear that they will be accused of reading on the job. Whenever the company wishes to work the men more than 40 hours a week, all it has to do is "schedule" overtime. Here is an example of how "scheduling" works: Recently a worker at one of the Chrysler plants refused to work through lunch when asked to do so by the foreman. The foreman took him to Labor Relations. The Labor Relations man asked the foreman, "Did you tell him the work was scheduled or did you just ask him to work?" The foreman replied that he had only asked the worker to work. Whereupon the Labor Relations man said, "Next time tell him the work is scheduled, and then if he refuses you can fire him because we have the sole right to schedule production as we see fit."

Anyone listening and talking to workers in the auto plants today can tell that the workers are through with the union. In the early days of the union, the most common expression in the shop was, "Now that we have a union we don't have to take a lot of the stuff that we used to take." Now the expression is, "When we had a union we didn't have to take this stuff." For over four years now it has been obvious that the workers themselves have drawn the curtain on the era of the union.

When the situation has reached such a stage, all questions of what the union should have done or could have done, or what some other leaders might have done or should have done, or what might have been achieved if some other policy had been followed—all these questions become completely irrelevant and abstract. To continue to think in such terms is to repeat the mistake that the Trotskyites made for thirty years as they tried to formulate an alternative policy and leadership for

Stalin, while Stalin himself was going ahead and building not only the Russian bureaucracy but a Russia which no longer bears any resemblance to the Russia of 1917.

The end of the CIO is not necessarily due to the advent of automation, although it is automation which has made clear its helplessness. It is due to the fact that all organizations that spring up in a capitalist society and do not take absolute power, but rather fight only on one tangential or essential aspect of that society are eventually incorporated into capitalist society. *The fact, the key to the present situation, is that from the beginning the union did not take absolute control away from the capitalists.* There was no revolution, no destruction of the state power. The union itself has therefore become incorporated into all the contradictions of the capitalist system and is today fulfilling the same functions for the American state as the Russian trade unions do for the Russian state.

But what about the experiences that the organized workers have had in the last 25 years and what is going to happen to the workers who were organized into the CIO, now that automation has arrived and the assembly-line system and mass production by mass production workers are coming to an end as the typical mode of production?

First of all, these workers have undoubtedly made certain very substantial gains not only for themselves but for society, as all workers have who have carried on the class struggle.

The CIO movement gave the American public its first real taste of class consciousness and social thinking, establishing in the American mind for the first time the idea of democracy on the job, in the factories, the offices, and every place where people work. The whole idea of human relations at work, which has since become the subject of innumerable studies by industrial relations experts, is the product of this movement. The CIO, in conjunction with the war and the activities of the Negroes themselves, established a framework within which Negroes could fight for equality inside the plant. It has done the same for women workers. Over the years it has provided a focal point for the energies of tens of thousands of idealistically minded young people who found in the labor movement a cause that they could serve. The theory that America has a

class structure, so long disputed, was finally recognized after the CIO was organized. It was the CIO movement, and following it the Second World War, which established the production worker as a citizen of American society rather than just a beast of burden.

But the question is: What is going to happen to the workers who established these values now that automation is cutting so sharply into their ranks? What is going to happen to the steel, auto, rubber, aircraft, coal workers, who are today the vanishing herd? This is a burning question, not only to these workers themselves but to all who for so long have looked to these workers to save American society as a whole.

These workers will not just fade away, although their numbers will be constantly diminishing both relatively to the rest of the working population and absolutely as older workers die or are pensioned off and no replacements are hired. Those who remain have undergone a very rich economic experience. They are not only educated in the meaning and nature of modern production, but through this they have acquired a certain wit which they will use to evolve tactics of self-defense, prolonging their tenure as long as possible. They have also had a very rich political experience—with the union, with management, and with the government—from which they can draw as they join other strata of the workers in the struggles which will inevitably develop as the pressure is transferred to these new workers. But above all, they have learned a great lesson for all future workers: the lesson that those in whom they put their trust to serve them have wound up as their masters. From now on these workers are going to fight these new masters every step of the way, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating, but always antagonistic. Their fights will clarify for the new revolutionary forces what a struggle entails.

But what about all the unemployed? What will society do about them? This would be one question if we were talking about a socialist society. It is another question when we are talking about a capitalist society, which is what the United States is today. The capitalists will take care of them. The capitalists, you say? Aren't they the most inhuman people on

earth? Aren't they the ones whom these workers have been fighting tooth and nail all the time?

Here is one of the greatest contradictions of capitalism itself. Today the capitalists have to feed these untouchables instead of being fed by them. Faced with an economic crisis or industrial change, as after a war or when a new mode of production is introduced or when the market is glutted with goods, the first thing that the capitalists say is, "We have a cushion." What is the cushion? It is the very thing that these capitalists refused to give for so long and which the workers forced them to yield only by long and bitter struggles—social security, pensions, severance pay, unemployment benefits, supplementary unemployment benefits, charity, welfare. But the capitalists are not going to pay for these, you say. You are so right. The workers have paid and are still paying for them.

Today over 100,000 UAW workers are on pension—the product of the new method of silent firing which the companies have devised to get rid of one set of workers without having to hire new ones. Even more coal miners, steel workers, rubber workers, iron ore workers, railway workers, have been eased out in this way. In fact, the railroads have made the process clearest of all. They will hire no new firemen, they say, but those still working can continue to ride like dummies in the cabs until it is time for them to retire. In the auto shops one of the methods of silent firing involves the use of the physical rating code. Workers are required to take a physical examination each year and are coded accordingly. Any worker over 60 who cannot keep up with production is forced to retire on the basis of physical fitness. Those under 60 are laid off, draw unemployment benefits until they are exhausted, and then go on social security disability.

What about those millions of unemployed who have never been called back to work and have exhausted their compensation? Well, the government can periodically extend compensation a few weeks longer whenever it fears these unemployed may be getting desperate, and then finally there is welfare, where the bulk of them wind up. But won't this cost the state, the country, the city, the manufacturers a lot of money to take care of all these people? But the people pay for that also,

through taxes on those still working. It is among these taxpayers that the tempo of revolt is accelerating.

What about the young people to whom the doors of industry are closed because there are no more semi-skilled jobs and because they have not been trained for the new technical jobs? There is always the mass army, the mass peacetime army which, like automation, we didn't have in the United States in earlier periods. This army, the biggest peacetime army in the world, is the modern equivalent of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's. It is the place where a part of the unemployed youth are now regularly dumped and where periodically even some of the employed are transferred in order to make room for others to take their jobs. Only now it is not civilian, it conserves nothing, and it is paid for out of the taxes of those still working and excludes the most handicapped and underprivileged—the illiterate and the physically unfit.

It is clear that this growing army of the permanently unemployed is the ultimate crisis of the American bourgeoisie. But the American bourgeoisie is a powerful bourgeoisie, and it will take every step in its power to moderate, cajole, temper the revolution which this condition will undoubtedly provoke. It is also clear that the most organized workers in this country, the members of the old unionized strata, the vanishing herd of production workers, have learned that in the actions they will take or may take from now on, they will have to be joined by other forces. Today, the problem of control over production and the solution of their specific local grievances will have to be dealt with by larger sections of the population. These are now, more than ever before, questions which require the taking on of the union, the city government, the state government, and the national government. That these workers can or may revolt is not the question. Even one worker can revolt. But workers are not fools. They want to win sometimes too, and this is true of American workers more than of any other workers in the world. When they struggle, they like to know that they can achieve some immediate success. And understanding the structure of society as they do, they know they are going to have to join with others in order to win. They will have to move on a scale of revolt powerful enough to smash the union, the com-

pany, and the state which, under the guise of national security and national defense, denounces every move they make on their own behalf as irresponsible and irreconcilable with the system itself.

Why don't they take over their own organization, their union? Looking backwards, one will find that side by side with the fight to control production, has gone the struggle to control the union, and that the decline has taken place simultaneously on both fronts. As the company regained control of production through bargaining with the union and through automation, the workers have been losing control of the union. So that just as the workers today know that they have to challenge more than the plant management for control over production, so they know that merely taking over the union today would gain them very little. Historically, workers move ahead by the new. *That is, they bypass existing organizations and form new ones uncorrupted by past habits and customs.* In the 1930's the workers did not take over the AFL. They formed the CIO, a new organization, adapted to the new forms of industrial struggle. It is also significant that when the AFL and the CIO finally joined together in 1955 with the aim of strengthening the American labor movement, they did not become stronger but rather declined in numerical membership and influence. Millions of workers in the South have never been organized by the unions and never will be because the unions no longer have the social power to overcome the resistance of the Southern industrialists who control the local sheriffs, judges, police, politicians, and agents of the federal government. Millions of unemployed have been run out of the unions because they are afraid that these unemployed may explode in some action that would disrupt the cooperation between union and management. Thus with every day more people who can be classified as workers are outside the labor organizations than inside them.

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