

.....PROCESSED

WORLD.....

.....spring... 1981.....

55 Sutter St.
Suite 829
San Francisco, Ca.
94109

..hello out there.....

This is the first issue of Processed World. We hope it will serve as a contact point for office workers who are dissatisfied with their lot in life and are seeking something better. The current situation of most clerical workers, secretaries, and "processors" of various sorts is our starting place: meaningless work with little material reward in a deteriorating and self-destructive social system.

The opening article offers a compelling description of the individual mired (but not hopelessly) in Corporate Office Land. From there we go to the Blue Shield strike, which is still going on as we go to print. This trade union-based attempt of office workers to improve their situation has run up against institutional and strategic constraints.

The following article, "New Information Technology: For What?" has undergone intensive discussions among the writers and editors of PW. After a brief economic analysis of automation in the office it broaches the touchy subject of whether or not computers—and high technology in general—are inherently oppressive. Also discussed are some of our ideas of how a society based on free social relations can put new information technology to use.

Next is a short story about insurrection in San Francisco in 1987, beginning with the occupation of the Bank of America buildings by the workers inside. A review of the movie "9 To 5" concludes our first issue. Hollywood's attempt to address the reality of office work gets lost and

distorted in improbability and easy laughs.

We hope these articles (and those in other issues to come) will begin to challenge the assumptions upon which this society is built. At the root of this effort is our desire to live and take part in a radically different social system, a society which as yet exists nowhere on Earth.

These new forms of social existence begin with communication, with breaking down the barriers that isolate us and finding different ways to express our feelings and thoughts. With a shared understanding of the fears, desires, and pleasures of our daily existence, we can counter the false images and stereotypes encouraged by those who want to keep us in our "place."

In a world where so much of our time is wasted on boring tasks or ridden with anxieties, it is important that we experiment with ideas and activities that are in themselves enjoyable. Rebellion can be fun, and humor subversive. Only by cultivating our imagination and talents will we be able to find ways to shatter the existing order.

Write to us. Tell us about your situation—where you work, what conditions you work under, what kinds of resistance you are already involved in, how you coordinate your activities with coworkers, etc. And write to us about your dreams. What kind of a world would you like to live in? What would you do with yourself if you could do what you enjoyed instead of what you've been forced to do to make a living?

...MENU...PW/SF'81...

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“Oh brother, another day... and I'm gonna be late already. Maybe I should call in sick?..”

Manuscript Found In A Typewriter

There was a feeling of uncertainty involved in my returning to work after a long vacation, compounded in equal measures of disgust and relief. Disgust, because I had to submit once again to wage-labor in general and to the peculiar rituals of corporate life in particular. Relief, because my survival conditions were not going to be as precarious as I had feared earlier that week. Somebody who surrenders to a blackmail scheme must feel the same way: despite his attempts to reassure himself that he is doing the right thing under the circumstances, after all, consider the alternatives, what else can you do, and so on, he cannot conceal from himself the humiliation that lurks at the bottom of his stomach...

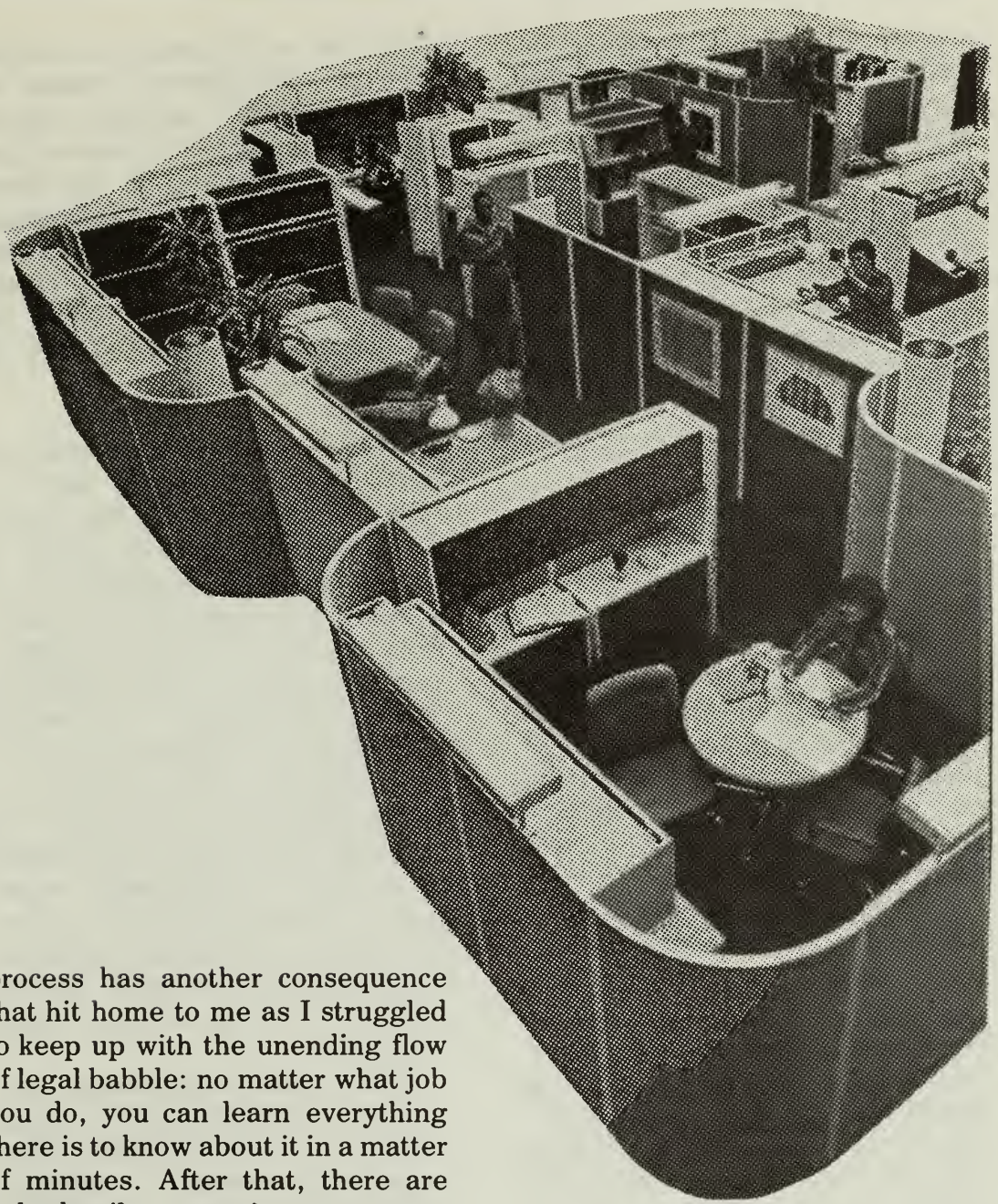
Still, there was more than money and phony security to be gained from going back to the nine-to-five boogaloo. Two months away from the routine had given me ample time to divest myself of the habits and rhythms this routine imposes on even the most rebellious individual. If I had to go back to work whether I felt like it or not, at least it would be with a fresh outlook. Since what is familiar is not known simply *because* it is familiar—since the pressures and constraints of daily life make it difficult for most of us to perceive their social-historical roots—distancing ourselves from the totalitarian im-

mediacy of work can help us understand it better, and hence subvert it. Why else do so many people fuck off on the job, if not to attain that distance?

The office in which I was to be working for the next few weeks was a franchising operation that contracted out secretarial services to clients, among other things. But I only found that out a few hours after I had begun work; immediately after I walked in, introduced myself to the supervisor, and found an empty desk, I was put to work transcribing a tedious legal document, dictated by a disembodied individual who sounded as if he made it a habit to speak with pebbles in his mouth.

What struck me about this was that my supervisor had tacitly assumed that what counted in this job—as, no doubt, with hers—was the *what* and not the *why*. You had a job to do and you did it. And since that unwritten rule obtained in every other corporation, regardless of whether this firm did management consulting, real estate speculation, or constructing nuclear power plants—what difference did it make if the purpose of it all was known? It came down to the same thing no matter where you worked. This attitude of passive cynicism has always seemed to me to be the most pervasive feeling in offices.

The uniformity of the work



process has another consequence that hit home to me as I struggled to keep up with the unending flow of legal babble: no matter what job you do, you can learn everything there is to know about it in a matter of minutes. After that, there are only details—sometimes perverse, sometimes complicated, but always insignificant in comparison to the basic structure of the tasks performed. About an hour after I had walked in, I felt that I had been working there for months, and I still didn't know what the company did in the first place!

Eventually, I was given some "in-house" work that allowed me to find out all I needed to know about the company's operations, which wasn't much. Management took great pride in being an

exponent of the "Office of the Future" concept, which was touted as effecting a radical transformation of conventional office relations and design. Since it is said that change begins at home, I looked around the office. It consisted of a series of cubicles with tall dividers; in order to speak to anybody, I had to stand up and peer over the partition. Each cubicle was unbelievably cramped; there were no windows; the ceilings were claustrophobically low; and fans spread the stale air

around equitably and democratically. The supervisor's fan was at floor level, a detail I discovered after almost shredding my pants leg in the blades. Most workers didn't even have a phone at their desks—no doubt, such a "privilege" would have been "abused" to the detriment of the productivity level. To plug in office equipment, I had to crawl under the desk and be careful not to bang the small of my back on the edge of the desk as I got up.

The message? Offices of the future = Now + More of the Same.

After a few minutes of dictaphone transcription, I gazed at the crabbed, stilted words that seemed to be flowing from my fingers even though they had nothing to do with me, and was uncertain whether I felt contempt, amusement, or utter amazement at what I saw. Perhaps one of the most powerful indictments that can be levelled against the business world is its bureaucratization of language. When we enter the office, we inherit a language that bears only a fleeting resemblance to the language we use in our lives. There is a certain irony in knowing that even as the written word is debased to an instrumental level, it is emphasized more and more as a tool of (pseudo-) communication. Discussions between people in an office don't become "real" unless they are "in writing." Such reified forms of interchange are enforced by the nature of the work itself; to judge by the majority of memos, reports, etc. that are "generated" (a suitably mechanical phrase) in offices, one would swear that the only matters that motivated the authors to write anything were the firm's image, prospects, and pro-

fits. The word becomes an accessory to concealment instead of expression. The extensive use of the passive voice in office-ese is an eloquent testimony to the domination of an impersonal bureaucratic code over ostensibly active human beings. Pascal's dictum "The self is hateful" could be emblazoned in stone tablets in every office.

"There is one thing I insist on here, and that's to get here on time. I had to fire my last typist because he was always coming in late, sometimes 90 minutes to 2 hours late. So keep that in mind." My supervisor was not an authoritarian person by nature; later on that day she spoke to me of her experiences in lesbian communes in a way that demonstrated her acute sensitivity to how people can dominate each other. She dressed in a most un-businesslike style. She was blessed with a crazy sense of humor and enough cynicism about her job to make it easy for me to be honest with her about how I felt.

And yet this same woman, with whom I would ordinarily feel some affinity, was able to assert what small-time authority she had been granted and dismiss somebody from a position. Of course, she had her reasons for doing it, the most convincing being that she couldn't be expected to do his work and her work at the same time, and she feared repercussions from her bosses. She was duly remorseful about what she had done, but claimed she had no choice. The sad thing is that she probably didn't, at that.

Hierarchy poisons every work situation in capitalist society; and in the office, which is founded on interlocking, mutually dependent

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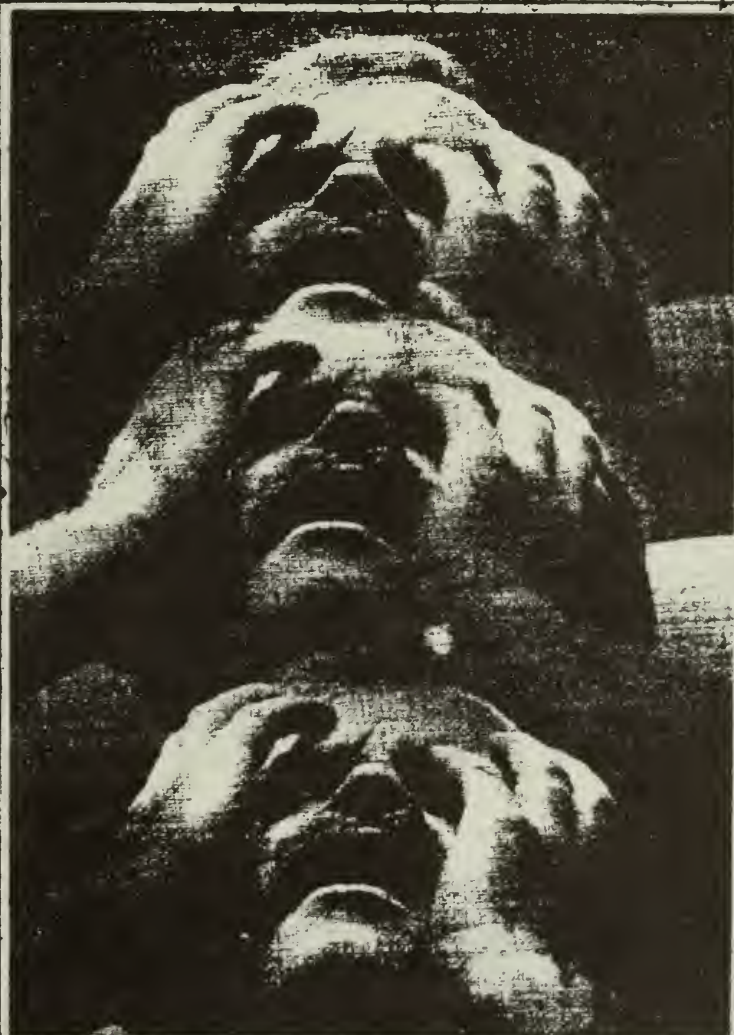
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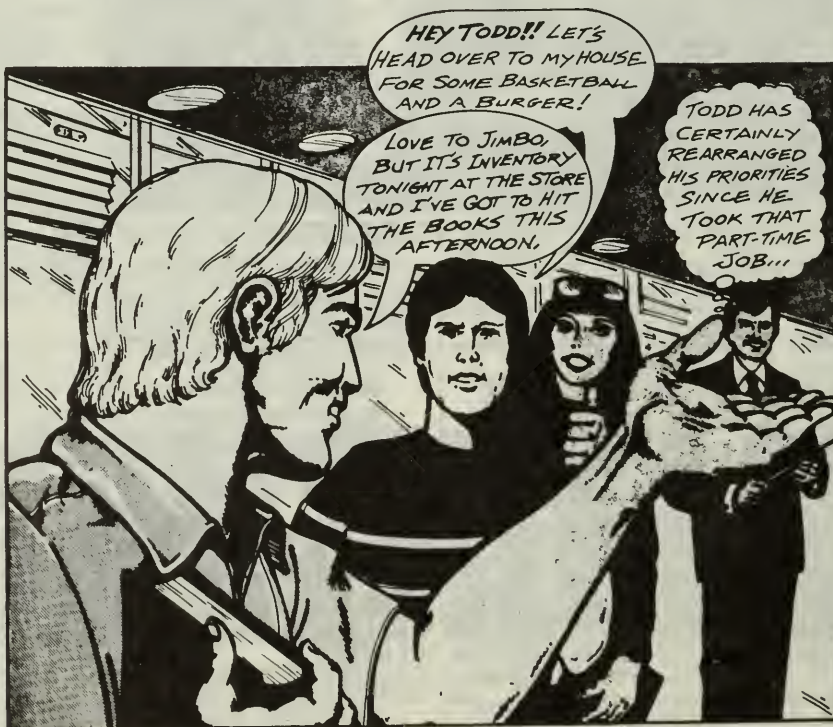
JOB HUNTING

divisions, departments, etc.(each imprisoned by its own chains of command), everybody is caught up in several simultaneous variations on the loathsome power-subordination theme. In a grotesque, democratized parody of the master/slave dialectic, there is always somebody taking orders from somebody else. Not surprisingly, people betray themselves in hundreds of different ways as they act out their prescribed roles. "Human relations" degenerate into a series of pre-fabricated scenarios with predictable outcomes. Even the most fair-minded and generous individual is not spared the corrupting effect of power, be her share in it ever so petty.

As the day wore on, I felt recurrent pains in my lower back; the typed material in front of me would become blurred from time to time as my eyes had to strain more and more under the harsh glare of the fluorescent lights. My head

pounded. I craved a stiff drink, or perhaps two or three. I thought I would weep for sheer frustration and rage at having to sit down in a tiny cubbyhole and transcribe bullshit, useless, pointless bullshit. The split between mind and body that even "easy" work demands—and which I was diligently reinforcing despite my better instincts (which in any case were all locked in a little compartment of my brain lest they interfere with the pace)—was breaking down. The inhumanity of wage-labor can only really be experienced when its effects permeate your entire being.

At last, it was time to go home. Stumbling out the door onto the dark streets, shivering in the chill of the approaching night, I looked up at the small patch of sky that the high-rises had not been able to block out. It had to be a quick glance lest I collide with a passerby. Suddenly, as I saw the skyscrapers with their hundreds of



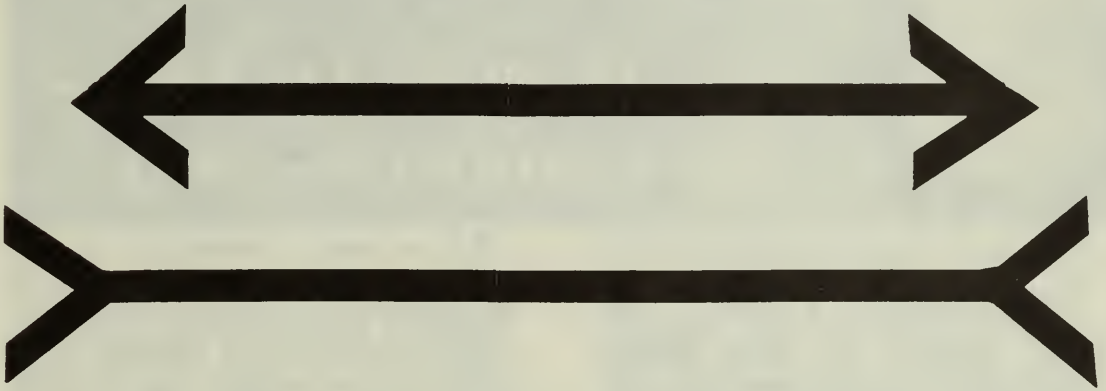
tiny windows behind which thousands of people spent a good portion of their waking hours, I was overwhelmed with a feeling that everything confronting me was permanent and unchangeable. Even assuming that office workers would one day challenge *en masse* the social rationale for this mess, how could freedom as I conceived

more people had to fight them. I myself had to admit that over the next few weeks, I would do little more than cope and attempt to preserve a minimum of self-respect. In that sense, I was no different from many other working people who did what they could to get by, without in any way falling for the bill of goods that the system

J. F. Batellier

The 8 Hour Day

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE COMPANY



FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE WORKER

It's a Question of Perspective

it flourish in such an evidently hierarchical environment, where it was so difficult to make one's voice heard over the roar of the traffic and the clatter of the office equipment? Real life, as always, was elsewhere.

On the other hand, the "elsewhere" remained to be created, and where better place to start than within the institutions that were designed to suppress even the merest talk of radical alternatives? Granted, many battles remained to be fought, and many

incessantly tried to sell them. From the many acts of resistance, however insignificant, that we would engage in to prevent ourselves from succumbing to resignation and boredom, a new spirit could very well emerge. And how funny it would be if that new spirit were eventually to break loose onto the world, to the consternation of all those who thought they had shut it up for good!

Christopher Winks



Office Workers On Strike San Francisco — 1981

Since December 8, 1980, 1,100 office workers at Blue Shield Insurance Company have been on strike. They are represented by the Office and Professional Employees International Union—Local #3 (OPEIU), AFL-CIO. The union is pressing its demands to retain its Cost-Of-Living-Adjustment formula for determining pay increases (which has been in effect for six years and would allow for a 14.7% wage increase this year); to reduce current heavy production quotas (initial claims processors are expected to handle 383 claims in each 7.5 hour shift!); to base the “average production measurement” on a four-day week to allow for a bad day; special rights for Video Display Terminal operators; and to improve pension plan provisions.

Blue Shield is demanding that no mention be made in the contract

of production quotas or standards, claiming that such a change would open these matters up to grievances and arbitration, thereby limiting Blue Shield’s competitiveness. Production standards, the company insists, should remain a management prerogative. Blue Shield was offering a 9.5% wage increase this year with a reopener clause for wage negotiations in the next two years. Since OPEIU Local #29 in the East Bay settled for 9.5% this year, 8% next year, and 7.5% in the last year with Blue Cross, Blue Shield has offered the same package. Also, some management “takeaway” demands (e.g. a shorter lunchbreak) were reintroduced, after having been dropped to avert the strike.

THE COMPANY

Blue Shield is facing an increasingly competitive market. Several

years ago, B.S. lost its contract to process Medi-Cal claims when they were underbid by a non-union data processing firm. Blue Shield is the only unionized insurance carrier in S.F. though they do have four other non-union offices in California in L.A., S.D., Woodland Hills, and Sacramento. At the time of the strike, S.F. Blue Shield was processing 52,000 claims per day, 37,000 of them under a federal contract for Medicare processing. Medicare constitutes a \$12-million-a-year business for Blue Shield, about 1.3 million claims annually. Though they have been processing claims at below-average cost in the past four years, they are expecting stiff competition from the numerous non-union data processing companies entering the market to threaten their Medicare contract.

As the only major unionized private corporate office in S.F., Blue Shield is on the front lines of the rising battle between management and the increasingly important clerical sector of workforce. This fact is not lost on Blue Shield, OPEIU, or the workers themselves. Blue Shield is clearly attempting to break the union outright or render it completely impotent.

THE UNION

OPEIU Local #3 won the right to represent the workers at Blue Shield in 1972 without serious resistance from the company. The 1,100 striking Blue Shield workers constitute $\frac{1}{3}$ of the membership of OPEIU Local #3. A small union with a tiny foothold in the enormous office labor market of San Francisco, OPEIU Local #3 is fighting for its life in this strike.

OPEIU is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, and it pledges allegiance to the labor laws of the U.S. in its constitution. These laws impose

severe limits on what workers and unions can do to achieve their demands (for instance, it is illegal to occupy a workplace). Their primary tactic in this confrontation with Blue Shield is the strike, a traditional walkout protected by National Labor Relations Act legislation. Out on the picket lines, however, workers no longer control the machines and data banks that are in their control daily when they are on the job. This divests them of the tremendous leverage they would have if they stayed in the offices and prevented their replacement by scabs.

THE BOYCOTT AND LABOR MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY

The second major tactic of OPEIU, in an attempt to gain support for the strike, has been to appeal to other unions for a boycott of Blue Shield insurance contracts. In fact, John Henning, secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO, has issued an appeal for all unions and union members to cancel their insurance contracts with Blue Shield if they don't give in to union demands. This threat is less than "toothless" since it is only possible to break these contracts upon their expiration. In any case the medical insurance contracts of unions and their sympathizers represent a relatively small part of Blue Shield's total business, the bulk of which is processing federal Medicare claims. The vast majority of workers, who are not in unions, have no say over their companies' choice of insurance policies, and their bosses are hardly likely to support a boycott. With the boycott tactic, the union remains peaceful and within the law, but much of the strike's energy and resistance is diverted into hopeless boycott work.

As usual the union has not attempted to mobilize the millions of AFL-CIO members to support the strikers at Blue Shield (or anywhere else for that matter). Local #29 (OPEIU) in the East Bay, a "sister" union, undercut the bargaining position of Local #3 when they recently accepted from

NAIVE UNION STRATEGIES:

Manipulation Or Misunderstanding?

The union accepts the "necessities" of the marketplace, i.e. that costs must be cut for Blue Shield to remain competitive. The union's strategy is to blame a "malfunc-



"Jeez, my stomach feels terrible. Three cups of coffee already and I still feel like going back to sleep. Oh shit, here comes the supervisor with more work."

Blue Cross a contract which says nothing about production quotas or work rules, and accepts paltry wage increases for the next three years.

Meanwhile, office workers represented by the same Local #29 were on strike for six weeks against the Alameda County Council of Building Trades Unions demanding cost-of-living increases (which they finally got). The Council of Building Trades Unions used their power to prevent the Central Labor Council (AFL-CIO) of Alameda County from sanctioning the strike. One picket line-crossing union bureaucrat even went so far as to admit that he and his fellow bureaucrats were just a bunch of "hot-air hypocrites who don't practice what we preach."

The separation and isolation of workers from each other is clearly being furthered by the actions of these Bay Area locals... so much for the "labor solidarity" of trade unions.

tioning data processing system" installed in '78 by another company called Electronic Data Services for the too-high costs and production quotas, and they are appealing to Blue Shield to cut the 50-cents-per-claim fee that EDS gets **instead** of lowering wages, and to get an improved data processing system.

It seems highly unlikely that Blue Shield would take such suggestions seriously. Demanding more efficient management or proposing viable economic solutions for the company obscures the basic conflict between profit motives and workers' interests. The union bases its strategy on the erroneous idea that the workers and the company have basically the same interest in the company's success. In reality, the company's success is measured by increasing profit margins. The main way of doing this is to cut labor costs by replacing workers with machines, lowering real wages, or trying to get more work out of each working hour on the job. These are the very measures that the workers are

striking against.

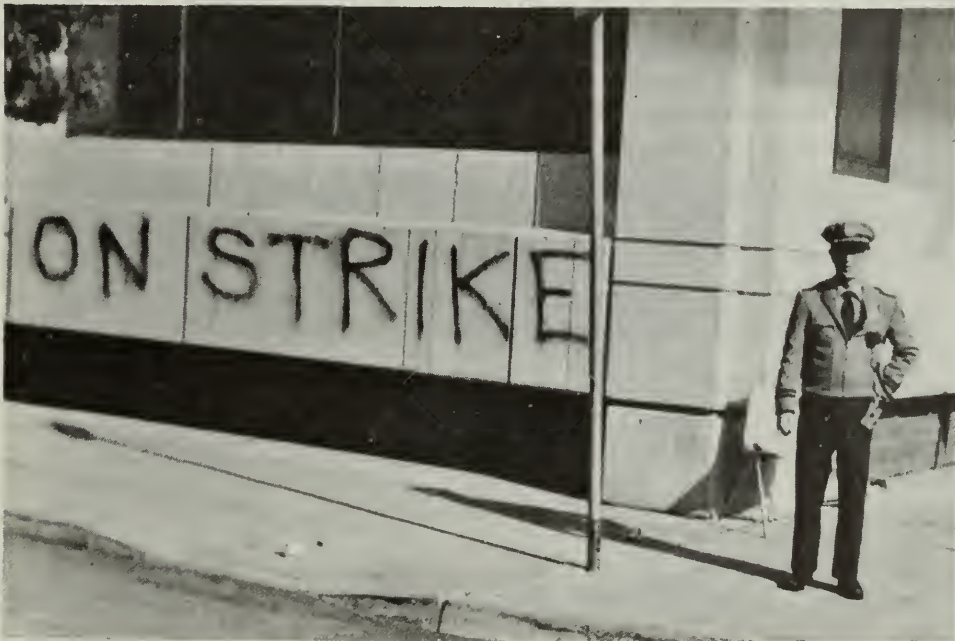
The union remains utterly naive in its political/economic perspective. In the concluding statement on their appeal for solidarity the union says:

“Since Blue Shield does have a federal Medicare contract, union labor should be upheld, not undercut.”

Can the government be relied upon to support workers against management? The answer lies in the history of the role of the U.S. government as strikebreakers (1934 Longshoremen’s strike in S.F., 1970 National Postal wildcat strike, invocation of Taft-Hartley Act in 1978 coal miner’s strike to cite only three examples out of hundreds). The National Labor Relations Act has been hailed as a progressive landmark of workers’ rights. But a closer look at the action of workers in

the industrial mid-East of the 1930’s suggests that the National Labor Relations Board was created primarily to contain widespread militancy (factory occupations and sitdown strikes). At the same time as they gained the “right” to bargain collectively, workers were deprived by the courts of their most effective means of fighting when workplace occupations were made illegal.

Since its beginning in 1935, the NLRA has been amended by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1948 which further limited workers’ rights to take effective action against their employers. The courts have repeatedly defined workers’ rights to take action for themselves in the narrowest possible context. Now, in 1981, Blue Shield justifies its measly wage offer by referring to the President’s wage guidelines as well as the pressure to remain competi-



**SHIELDING THE B.S. BUILDING
DURING THE 1980-81 STRIKE.**

tive for the federal Medicare contract.

No one should hold any illusions that the federal government (or the state or the city) is in any way on our side (though there may be some effort to bolster the sagging AFL-CIO in order to control the upsurge of angry strikes which is bound to occur in the next few years). With Reagan's inauguration, the federal government will move to front and center in the attempt to impose austerity and sacrifice on us "for the good of the country."

BLUE SHIELD WORKERS TAKE DIRECT ACTION

Blue Shield workers have tried to break out of the confines of the union's tactics. During the two weeks preceding the strike the workers engaged in a widespread slowdown on the job. Since the strike began, workers have spray-painted all over the Blue Shield buildings "On Strike". Superglue in the locks of automobiles of scab temporary workers and Blue Shield doors have also caused some difficulty for the company. On the 17th of December, a bicycle messenger who crossed the picket line to

Some ideas that came up during a discussion of the situation on the picket line included: cutting off the water necessary to cool the computer, thereby causing the computers to overheat and malfunction; also, the idea to cut off the phone connections with the building was raised. Some reluctance was expressed about taking such illegal actions, since the union would be blamed and would end up being tied up with legal and financial hassles (another example of how unions and labor laws constrain workers). Some strikers also wanted the union to bring in "some goons" to defend the picket line and prevent scabs from crossing them so nonchalantly.

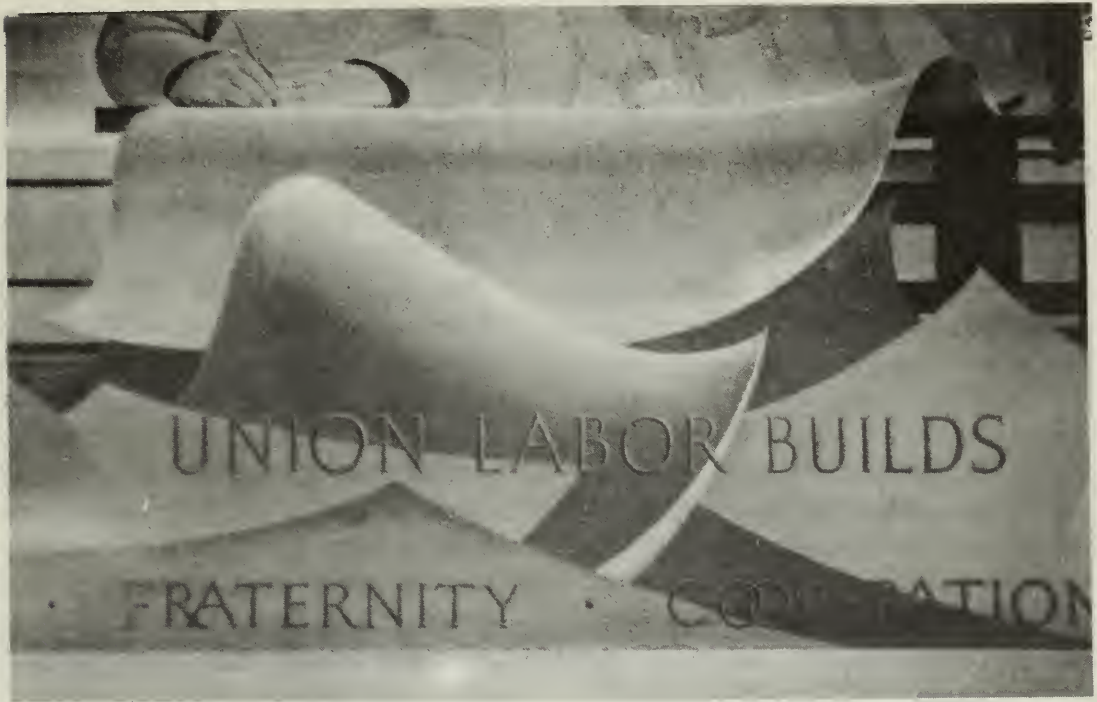
While force by **striking workers** (not hired goons) is invariably necessary to make some headway, even a military force of strikers would be inadequate if the struggle remains isolated in one office, company, or factory. Significant, permanent gains can only be the result of networks of supporting actions throughout the workforce.

Insofar as they purport to represent specific groups of workers, trade unions are based on the separation of different types of

Trade unions are based on the separation of different types of workers and industries

deliver a message returned to find his bicycle dumped in the street. He attacked one of the strikers and was beaten up, suffering lacerations and bruises. In mid-January a pile of claims waiting for processing was hurled out of the windows at the Grant St. office of Blue Shield.

workers and industries. It is becoming clearer that this is precisely what needs to be overcome. The isolation and separation of working people by sex, race, skill, job category, etc. is the single most useful tool that our "leaders" have in keeping us down. Trade unions,



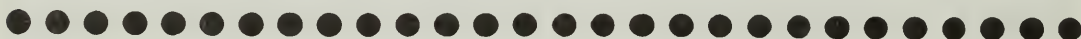
Behind this mural bureaucrats of the Alameda County Building Trades Unions stood firm for almost six weeks denying their office workers a cost-of-living wage increase.



while occasionally paying lip-service to this idea, actually play an important role in maintaining and prolonging this isolation. Until office workers begin to make common cause with each other and all production workers, strikes will remain defensive and weak, with little chance of success, regardless of the militance of the particular workers involved. Still, the more direct control workers in any particular enterprise take over their workplace, the more likely they are to win their demands.

standards to keep us working for them on their terms.

Waiting for government or management solutions to our worries will get us nothing but less of everything (except maybe war). On the verge of a very serious recession/depression, we will have to begin asserting our abilities to decide what we want and how we are going to get it. For those of us who work in offices the first step toward a better life is communication with each other.



“How am I going to make it through the whole afternoon? Hey Gladys, let’s go smoke that joint, eh?”



WHEN IN THE U.S. DO AS THE POLISH DO

According to *Business Week* (Jan. 19, 1981) workers’ real income has been falling since 1978—the longest continuous decline since WWII—and is likely to continue dropping in the next few years. But fewer workers went on strike in 1980 than in any year since 1965, despite the worsening living standards. For years unions have been bargaining away control over the work process (i.e. agreeing to speed-ups and “job redesigning” layoffs) for increased wages and benefits. Now that the system is in crisis, owners and managers are no longer offering the carrot of wage increases in exchange for increased control. Today, they are turning to the stick of unemployment and falling living

At the workplace our strength lies in our control over the massive quantities of machinery and data which are necessary to the continuation of existing institutions of political and economic power. We must not be fooled by anyone—politicians, union bureaucrats, or anyone else—who say we can get what we want through petitions, negotiations, or bargains with the existing order. For a world free from 9 to 5 drudgery and free from material scarcity and austerity, we will have to take over and transform the existing production/distribution/communication system. Polish workers have demonstrated this collective power—we must make preparations to use ours.

Lucio Cabanas

New Information Technology: For What?

“The computerized control of work has become so pervasive in Bell Telephone’s clerical sector that management now has the capacity to measure how many times a phone rings before it is answered, how long a customer is put on hold, how long it takes a clerk to complete a call... Each morning, workers receive computer print-outs listing their break and lunch times based on the anticipated traffic patterns of the day... Before computerization, a worker’s morning break normally came about two hours after the beginning of the shift; now, it can come as early

as fifteen minutes into the working day. Workers cannot go to the bathroom unless they find someone to take their place. “If you close your terminal, right away the computer starts clacking away and starts ringing a bell.”

—from “Brave New Workplace,”
by Robert Howard
Working Papers For A New Society
November/December 1980

Between the lines of the publicity for the “office of the future” we can catch glimpses of the treatment in store for office workers. Bell Telephone may be the



furthest along in automating office work, but this "future" is in store for hundreds of thousands of clerical workers as new technology gets installed.

In manufacturing, automation is already well advanced, though nothing like what's coming when the new robot technology gets installed. This makes blue collar workers a lot more "productive" than office workers. As the salesmen from Xerox and IBM never tire of telling corporate managers, the average industrial worker is backed by \$25,000 worth of equipment, compared to only \$3,000 for the average secretary and next to nothing for low-to-middle level managers.

With modern word processing equipment, one typist can do the work that previously took three. And in today's increasingly internationalized and conglomerated world, there is a lot of information to be handled. Everyday, millions of economic transactions are tracked by the corporations and the banks, and with each one comes the interminable complexities of a world choked by **MONEY** and its logic: billing, accounting, insuring, financing, advertising, researching what people can be made to buy. No wonder there has been a tremendous increase in the number of office workers. It is they who file, sort, type, track, process, duplicate and triplicate the ever expanding mass of "information" necessary to operate the global corporate economy.

As office employment has increased so has the cost of pushing around the continually growing body of bureaucratic detail. It has become high priority for management to reduce costs at the office by eliminating as many clerical

jobs as possible, and to gain as much control as possible over the ones that remain.

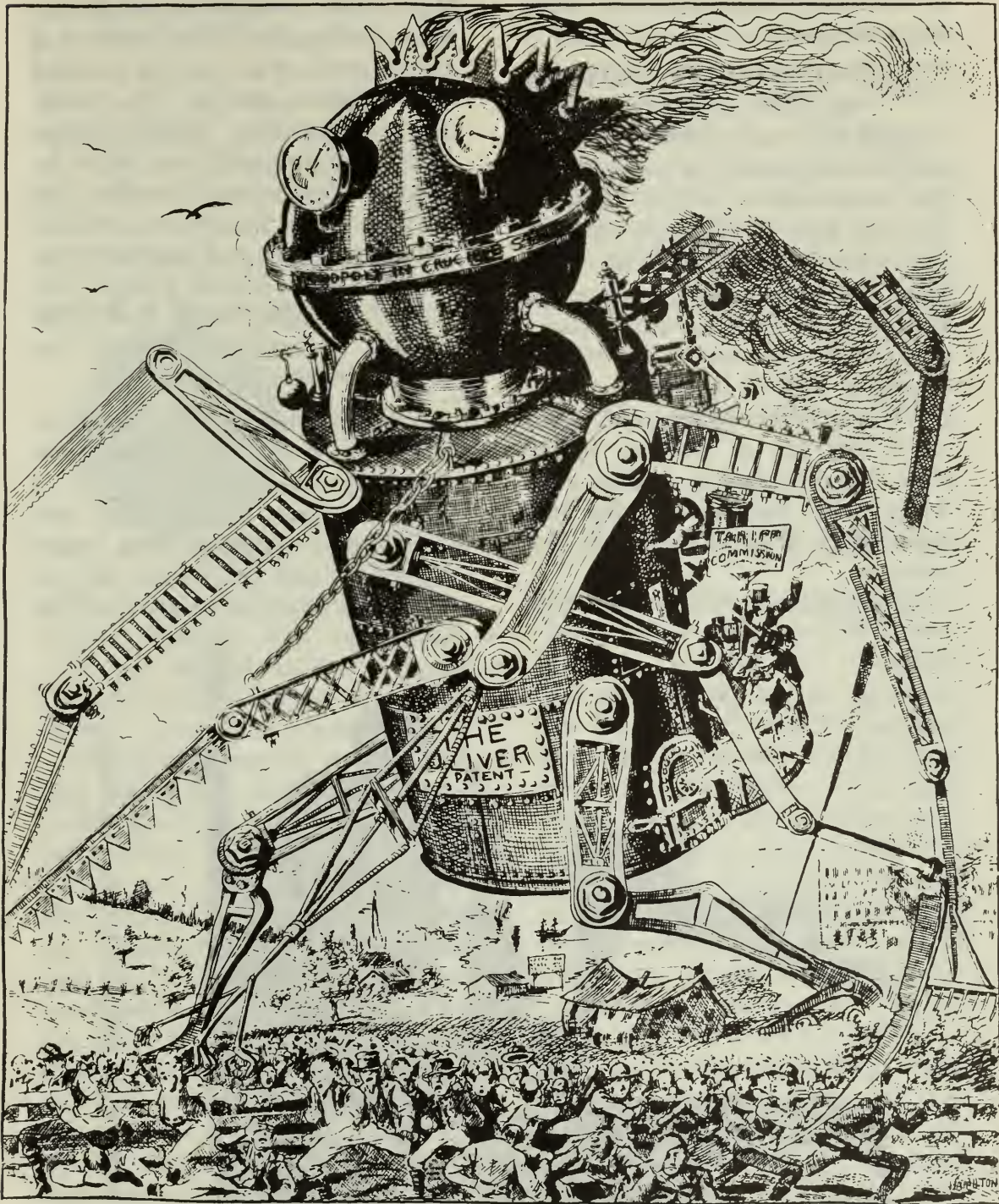
In the office of the future, even middle managers and computer programmers will become unthinking drones. Since they make their living by pushing information, they are prime candidates for "job redesign"—in other words, job elimination for many, tighter control and more boredom and repetitiveness for those that remain.

YOU CAN'T LAY OFF MACHINES, BUT...

As markets stagnate around the world, international competition sharpens. Faced with soaring prices for energy and raw materials, businesses of every variety are struggling to cut costs in order to maintain or expand their slice of a shrinking pie.

Between 1976 and 1980 companies that wanted to step up production were likely to hire more workers rather than buy more equipment. They were afraid to invest in new machines because they didn't want to be caught with excess production capacity in a time of economic slowdown. Unlike new plants and equipment, workers can always be fired, or, better still, they can be hired as temps.

Meanwhile, the cost of electronic control and data processing technology has been steadily dropping. Today they are "economical" on a larger scale than ever before and intensified competition gives wavering firms the necessary push toward automation. If your company doesn't use the new technologies it will be driven under by one that does, and if your country doesn't use them, perhaps because of union pressure to preserve jobs, it will be blown out



The Demon which is destroying the People: cartoon of 1882 propounds Frankenstein theory of mechanization ...workers are doomed to be replaced by robots.

of the market by Japan—or whoever else does.

UNEMPLOYMENT, AUTOMATION, REVOLT

Some computer industry mouthpieces still persist in proclaiming that the new systems will “create” as many jobs as they destroy. But this is a self-serving lie. The “business machine” and automation industries are rare islands of prosperity in an otherwise crisis-ridden economic picture, and they are, if anything, more automated than other sectors. In reality, large-scale unemployment unlike anything we’ve known since the last depression is just around the corner.

Automation isn’t new, and nei-

ther is the unemployment it creates. During the fifties, workers in auto, steel and mining waged bitter fights against the mechanical “job killers.” But the unions bargained away jobs and skills for improved wages and benefits. The result was a permanent pool of between twelve and fourteen million skill-less, jobless people, culturally, geographically and often racially segregated from the employed population.

Through the last two decades, this segregated “underclass” has provided management with a ready answer to unskilled and semi-skilled workers who resist speedups and takeaways. If you won’t do twice as much work for



For The Office Worker, Increased Anxiety, Supervision, Boredom

Increasing Market Pressures To Increase Productivity/Profits

half the real wage there's always someone out there hungry enough to do it instead of you. Added to this threat and the other well-known classic, the runaway shop, the new automation gives management a blackmail "triple whammy." Once powerful and militant groups of employees are

HOLDING ACTIONS

There are various ways to try to counteract the impact of the new technology and the economic forces behind it. Unions and workers' support organizations have proposed reduction of the work week with no cut in pay, demanded better working condi-



"It's only 3:35! Feels like its been at least two days since lunch."

bullied into accepting brutal cuts in wages, benefits and conditions, with their unions lending a hand. The current plight of auto and steel workers is example enough.

As unemployment grows and real wages fall distrust and competitiveness between employed and unemployed may prevail. But there are other possibilities. People who thought of themselves as "middle class" may realize that they can be dispensed with just as easily as the janitor, the busboy or the nurse's aide who live "on the other side of the tracks." The newly unemployed, who have been taught to expect opportunities for career and salary advancement that the system can no longer provide, may not passively accept being thrown aside like garbage.

During the last depression, unemployed people joined employed ones on the picket lines, while the employed helped the unemployed fight for better relief or against evictions. The new wave of unemployment may help to recreate such unity by minimizing differences of sex, race, skill and culture.

tions and more control over the work process, and resisted management-imposed job redesign. The methods of unions, however, are limited to the traditional end-of-contract strikes, interminable grievance procedures, or lobbying government for better labor legislation. (In the article on the Blue Shield strike, we discuss the need to transcend these methods with more aggressive, on-the-job action coordinated between workplaces.)

Successful actions on any of these issues are always subject to renewed attacks by management. While workers in a given office or factory may prevent implementation of a particularly loathsome technology, the pressures of survival will eventually force the company to take a harder stand. Even if massive social unrest succeeded in winning a four-day work week the wage gains would rapidly be taken back by inflation. Though it is certainly desirable to reduce time on the job and improve working conditions, no amount of "job humanization" will change the basically wasteful and useless nature of most work.

As long as the existing set-up endures there will be no end to the problems created by automation. In the short run, successful actions on particular issues will gain some breathing space and provide people with concrete experience in overcoming their separation and passivity. But in the long run the system itself will have to be challenged. A world where technological progress doesn't mean ever more suffering and loss of freedom will never be created by a system so paralyzed by its need for fast profit and centralized control.

COMPUTERS, WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

Though automation threatens livelihoods by eliminating and degrading jobs, there is nothing inherently bad about computer technology. In a different society, it could be used to improve our lives in all kinds of ways.

Consider how hard it is for blind people to live independently. Micro-processor-based technology can ease their isolation considerably by simulating the lost sense of sight. Already there is a reading machine built on a voice synthesizer and a powerful microcomputer which can read any clearly printed text at a rapid clip. The problem is that it costs \$30,000—the only individual who owns one is singer Stevie Wonder.

“Vision” systems are also in development. They work by converting a TV image produced by a small camera worn on the side of the head into a pattern of tiny painless needle pricks on the back. With a little practice, a blind person can learn to “see” that pattern well enough to walk around in crowds and manipulate small objects. These devices could be made available to millions for only

part of the cost of the MX missile system, or for the equivalent of Exxon's annual advertising budget.

FUTURE FEATURES

It is easy to question the warped priorities of modern society, but harder to see the deeper reasons for them. At root is what is most taken for granted—that in order to have things we must buy them; that in fact they are made only to be sold; that we can get things we need and enjoy only if we have money; that “advances” in technology are governed by competition for profit, markets, and credits; that decisions about how we spend our time and use our talents are dominated by concerns for “making a living”; that only officially sanctioned authorities have the power and capacity to make important decisions that affect our lives. In this system—which rules in the “socialist” countries just as it does here, though in a mutant, state-run form—everything counts first and foremost as a quantity of money, including our skills and time.

The result is that resources are allocated and products distributed according to power and wealth, rather than according to human need or desire. The fragmentation of the world into rival businesses, nations, social groups and individuals creates permanent irrationality—war, starvation, catastrophic wastes of time, energy and materials, misery of every description.

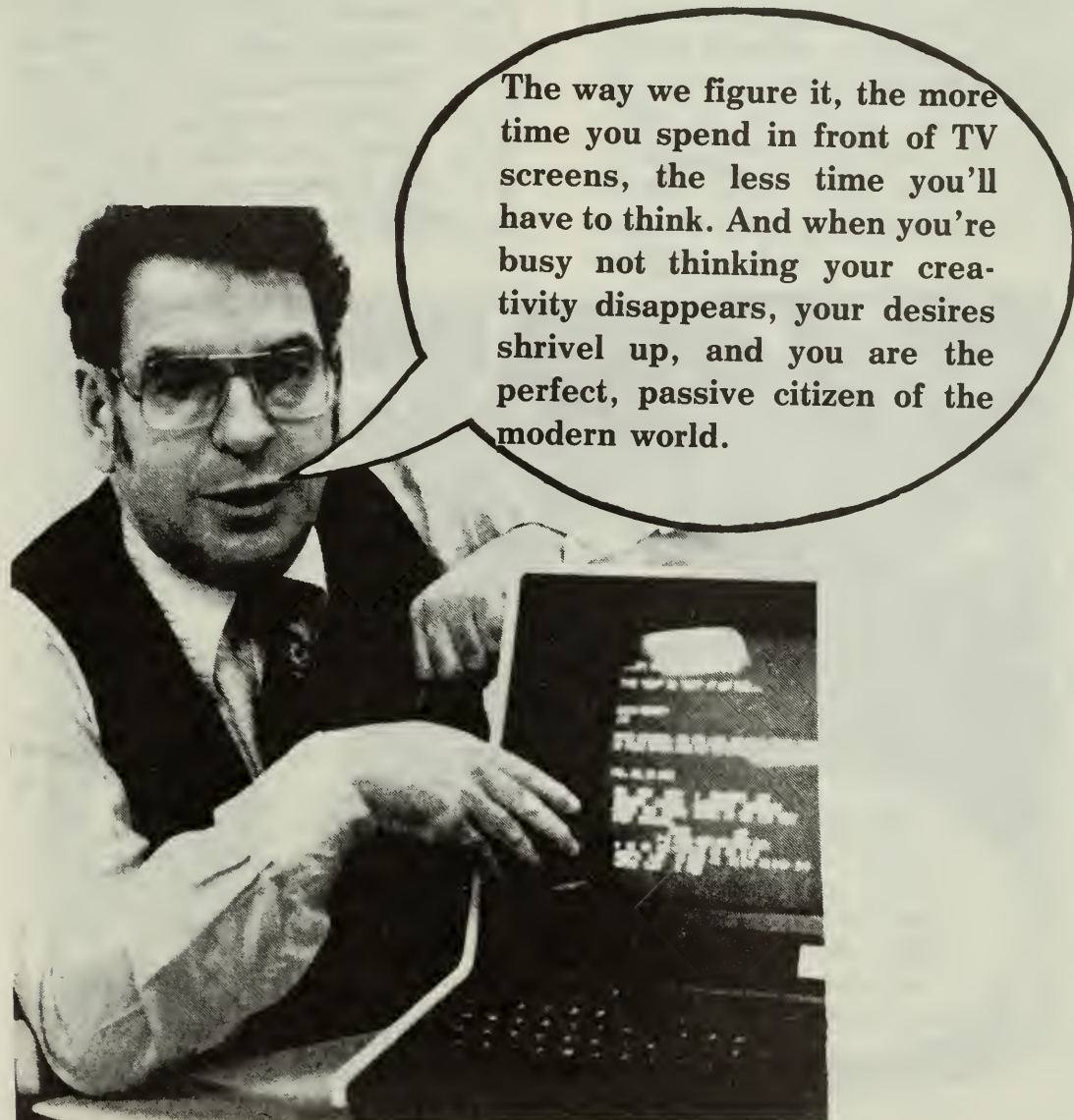
Suppose, though, that all sorts of people throughout the world decided to stop following the rules and priorities that govern society today. Their first actions would probably take the form of massive strikes and occupations something

like what has been going on in Poland, or among squatters in Europe.

But suppose people went beyond this and organized themselves into groups according to what they thought needed changing, and according to their skills and willingness to make those changes. These groups could begin to supply themselves and each other by direct communication about their needs for goods and resources. When they needed something they could contact the people who had information about it, or who worked in factories that produced it. Suppose, too, that the workers at these factories had

enough information to make informed decisions about where to send their products. Life would turn more and more on the conscious decisions of groups of people; the market would be circumvented, and money would become superfluous as a means of exchange.

Suppose this activity spread throughout society. Suppose the vicious forces deployed against it by those in power were successfully defeated, and the military, governmental, and corporate structures that control our lives were thoroughly dismantled. From now on, people would work, study, create, travel and share their lives

A black and white photograph of a man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, pointing his right hand towards a computer monitor. A large speech bubble originates from the man's mouth, containing text. The monitor displays some graphical information, possibly a data visualization or a software interface.

The way we figure it, the more time you spend in front of TV screens, the less time you'll have to think. And when you're busy not thinking your creativity disappears, your desires shrivel up, and you are the perfect, passive citizen of the modern world.

because they wanted to, for themselves and for others.


A movement capable of transforming society in this way would have immense problems to tackle. Two thirds of the world population is seriously malnourished or starving. Hundreds of millions are without decent housing, clothing, sanitation, medical care. Most are illiterate. Cities are desperately overcrowded, while huge tracts of land are rapidly becoming deserts. Water, air and soil are badly polluted.

Some of the work necessary to set things right will be dangerous, and some tedious. When the glaring problems are solved, new ones will arise. If people were free to do what they wanted and not forced to work, how would everything get done?

Part of the answer is that a great deal of work that is today required to keep the system going could be immediately done away with. Whole sectors like banking, insurance, and marketing—the three largest clerical employers—would

Soon, you won't have time for your incessant phone calls, your trips to the restroom, water cooler, and coffee shop. Soon, we'll have you doing the work of five secretaries, all for a mere \$125,000 investment.

Hey baby, love your coffee! And you're just gonna love the new machine you're getting from our company. You'll be able to work faster and do more... why you'll probably even get a \$100-a-month raise! Then it'll only take you six more years at 40 hours a week to pay off your debts.



Why won't these jerks leave me alone? I just wanna come to work, get my check, and go out and have fun when work is over. I spend too much time here as it is. Why can't this new machine make less work for me instead of more?

be unnecessary. Jobs designed merely to supervise and control the population would be eliminated. Millions would be freed to learn and share other tasks, along with the formerly unemployed.

Products would be made to last instead of to fall apart in a few years so that the owner has to buy a new one. Very quickly, this would reduce the amount of work that has to be done. Meanwhile, as many jobs as possible would be transformed to make them interesting, pleasant and safe. The unpleasant work that remained would be shared around, so that before long no one would have to do them more than a few hours a month.

But how would all this be organized? Who would decide how much time and resources should be spent on a particular project, and how scarce resources should be allocated? How can the rise of a new structure of power and hierarchy be prevented?

Obviously we can't foresee all the problems that might arise, nor propose definite solutions. However, it's reasonable to assume that the more people participate in decision making, the less chance there is of power concentrating in the hands of any particular group or groups.

This is where the new information technologies come in. At present, at least a third of all computer time in the U.S. is used for military and "national security" purposes—monitoring telephone, radio and TV signals, tracking U.S. and foreign military forces, industries and raw materials, planning for present and future wars. Much of the rest is used in the electronic transfer of funds from one corporate account to another. And all this information

is tightly guarded, placed under coded "locks," and made accessible only through an elaborate hierarchy of classifications and clearances.

However, in the context of a growing movement such as the one described above, operators and programmers could begin sorting through the immense computerized files. A lot of information, like cash flow accounts and secret dossiers, could be simply wiped. The computers used for spying can be put to other uses or dismantled. Inventories of actual goods, equipment and raw materials, along with any other useful or interesting data, could be kept, made public, and reorganized. With the design of the proper systems and the installation of easy-to-use terminals in accessible places, work groups, communities and individuals could continually update, index and tap into the growing pool of information.

Most production would be planned at the local level. Work groups could organize their tasks as they see fit. The amount of milk or bread needed in a region could be produced locally right there, eliminating fancy packaging and long transportation efforts.

But for other purposes elaborate plans would be required. Many projects would have to be coordinated at an inter-regional level. Computers can help here because they can digest enormous amounts of data into summaries that enable participating communities to set up the broad outlines of a plan: what products they need and how much, and what resources and skills they have available. Computers could match needs to resources and pinpoint potential surpluses and shortfalls.

Once plans were agreed upon,

communications systems could facilitate their smooth follow through. When conflicts and shortages arise many of those affected could be brought together "on line" to discuss strategies for their resolution. Potential suppliers could respond to shortages with information about available stocks and perhaps negotiate to expand production. Final discussions could be handled by phone or in person.

Of course, it's not the computers that are actually doing the planning, it's people. And no one really wants to spend a lot of time in front of a Video Display Unit or sitting through dreary meetings. So "planning committees" would probably be designated by communities to make analyses and suggestions that they would bring back for approval. The "planners" could be delegated on a rotating and recallable basis to ensure both that they do a good job and that their temporary responsibilities don't "go to their heads."

Decision making would be decentralized to the maximum extent, and everyone would have a chance to participate. Gradually, every area and community in the world that wants to join in could be linked together. The right mix of autonomy and interdependence could be approached in the context of a massive public discussion about the best ways of doing things.

In such a world automation, like computers in general, would mean something entirely different than they do today. Instead of being used to throw millions out of their jobs and squeeze more and more work out of the rest, it would be applied to eliminating necessary but repetitive and boring tasks, and to reduce the amount of less-than-enjoyable activity re-

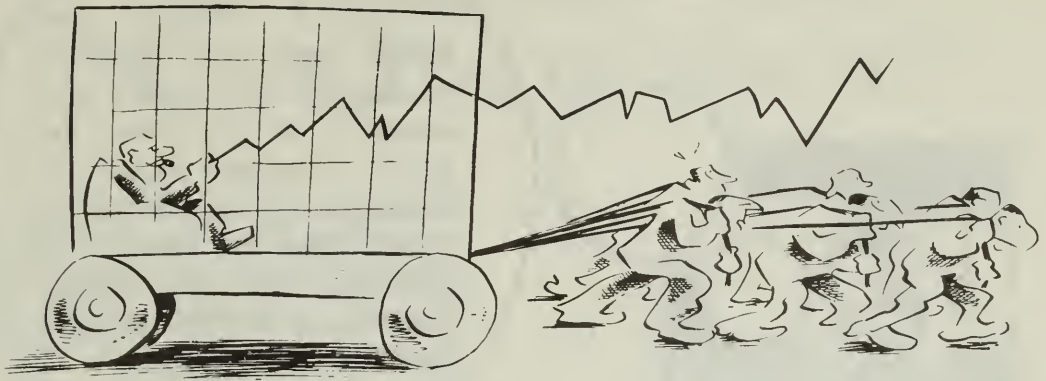
quired of everyone. The time freed could be spent learning, playing, socializing, travelling...

PROTOTYPES: NON-HIERARCHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

These may seem like totally unrealizable fantasies but they are as much part of the potential of the new information technology as the unemployment and degradation it engenders today. There have already been several attempts to demonstrate the hidden social potential of information technology by creating systems that take some first halting steps towards public access and community control.

One such system, named Cybersyn, was being developed in Chile until the 1973 (U.S.-backed) coup put the present military dictatorship into power. The idea of Cybersyn was simple: to install a computerized information gathering system that could be used to observe the Chilean economy in process, and to help predict the effects of various decisions upon it. Cybersyn was to be capable of producing detailed output, or of boiling down large masses of data into easily comprehended graphs and tables. In experiments done just before the 1973 coup, it was found that workers were able to use the system as easily as professional managers.

Cybersyn is **not** presented here as a model to be adopted. On the contrary, this system was built on request by a central government and was implemented in the context of a national economy intricately bound up in the world market, which functions on the basis of profit, wage-labor and military force. In its very conception, therefore, it was meant to accomodate centralized power and



J.F. Batellier

the money economy. These institutions (which eventually put a bloody end to the Chilean experiment) are precisely what must be abolished for any attempts to change society to succeed. Cyber-syn does, however, demonstrate the simple logistical feasibility of the widespread installation of easy-to-use computer communications facilities.

Today in the Bay Area, a related kind of system is being developed. "Community Memory" is being designed to facilitate the decentralized, non-hierarchical sharing of information, needs, skills and resources, or anything else that can be typed into a keyboard: philosophical or political opinions, recipes, personal advertisements. According to a Community Memory publication,

"Community Memory is...an open channel for community communications and information exchange, and a way for people with common interests to find each other. It is a tool for collective thinking, planning, organizing, fantasizing and decision-making.

"By being open and interactive, Community Memory seeks to present an alternative to broad-

cast media such as TV. It makes room for the exchange of people-to-people information, recognizing and legitimating the ability of people to decide for themselves what information they want.

"The projected incarnation of Community Memory is a broad dispersion of computer terminals in public places, such as community centers, libraries, stores and bus stations...

"The designers of Community Memory would like to see a world not broken up into nation-states, but one built upon many overlapping regions of concern: from household to neighborhood to interest group to work group, from geographical region to globe, where decisions are made by all those affected. This would be a world where power is distributed and governance is the process of collectively trying to determine the best action to be taken, via general discussion and complete dissemination of information. With this vision, the Community Memory system has been designed to be a communications tool for a working community."



Processed World has hired me for \$75,000/month to fly around the country in my Leer jet here, to assure corporate managers, government officials, and the police and military that this magazine does *NOT* advocate any illegal activities.

The new information machines are bringing changes that call for more than simple opposition.

WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO YOU WANT TO LIVE IN?

In a world where everything and everyone is treated as an object to be bought and sold, the new technologies—and most of the old ones for that matter—will inevitably create hardship and human misery. Whether it's the office workers at Bell Telephone or the women in Malaysia going blind assembling the integrated circuits for our new, self-tuning, giant

screen, stereo color TV's, someone always pays.

The new information machines are bringing changes that call for more than simple opposition. We must have some idea of what we want to do, and not sink completely into the politics of unemployment and workplace drudgery. The ease with which computers are used as instruments of social control cannot be allowed to obscure their liberatory potential.

Tom Athanasiou

San Francisco—1987 Would You Believe It?

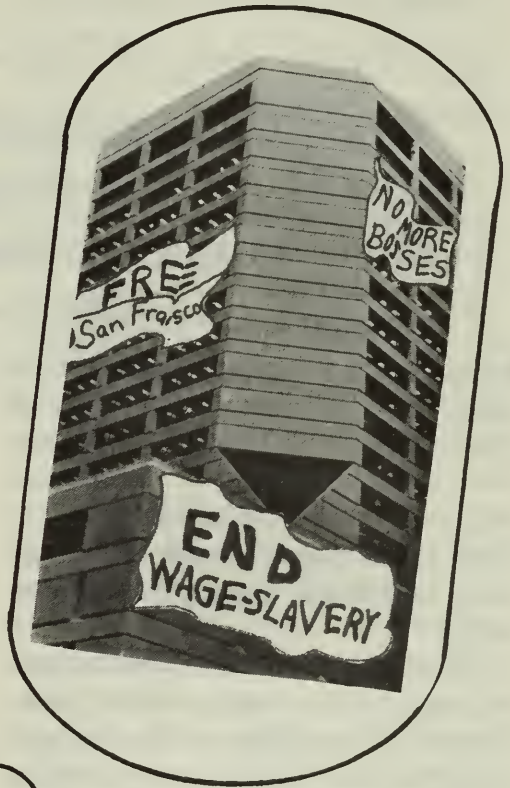
“I said GET YOUR GODDAM HIGH-HEEL OFF MY FOOT!”

She glared down at the fancily-dressed woman sitting next to where she was standing on the morning streetcar.

“What right do you have to complain about being crowded? You only paid 14 cents” sneered back the seated woman, who had overheard the younger woman’s explanation to her friend about how most drivers didn’t count pennies.

“Look lady, I don’t care if you’re proud of paying, it’s none of your goddam business how I got on this streetcar, so just keep your fuckin’ spiked heels away from my feet!!”

Willie Moreland felt the tension building in the streetcar as it whisked along underground. The two antagonists were separated as the crowd surged out and back into



the car at each stop, rearranging the mass of sweating, work-bound bodies. Willie could see people choosing sides by the expressions of interest or fear that flickered across their faces. Those who were interested eagerly craned their necks to see the latest outburst of a conflict that had been simmering for some time.

A couple of young Latino women

Everything seemed so different since the Bank of America office workers had taken over their buildings two days ago.

“I hope Fred, Jenny, and the others are OK in there” he thought to himself. Since he was unemployed he had time to carry a sack of canned foods down to the occupiers, as well as the outside press and 25 copies of the latest

Everything seemed so different since the B of A workers had taken over their buildings two days ago.

stood in the back, their voices suddenly rising above the buzz of conversation: “You! You never even gave us a minute! It was just non-stop data entry all day, everyday! You wouldn’t even let us go the bathroom except on our breaks!”

The businessman, his eyes darting about for a sympathetic face, turned ghost-white as he backed into the surrounding crowd trying to escape the wrath of his ex-employees.

“Look, I’m sorry you had a bad time at our company, but we have a business to run and we must get the most from our employees.”

“The MOST!! Shit, by the time you were finished with us everyday, we were too tired to do anything but go home and watch TV or fall asleep!”

The others on the streetcar, largely young office workers or unemployed, were enjoying the sight.

“Kick his ass!” someone shouted.

“Yeah, let him have it!”

Willie felt his mind racing.

issue of their own paper.

SPLAT! One of the women spit in her ex-boss’ face. As he swung to strike her he was pummeled to the floor by the blows of five surrounding passengers. They shoved the humiliated executive into the corner. Where a few weeks ago people had ridden to work sullenly, oblivious to the shared misery around them, today the tension reverberated amongst the tightly-packed bodies.

For a brief moment Willie remembered the past years’ organizing efforts, the apathy and hopeless cynicism that seemed to pervade most white-collar workers’ attitudes. The lack of enthusiasm during the unionization drives in ’84-85 had really depressed him for awhile.

After the unions had gotten in it was a short time before Willie realized there was good reason to be unenthusiastic about them. Except during the couple of months before a contract expired, all the union officials ever did was enforce the work rules agreed to in the contract and exhort workers to

increase their productivity. Even when there was a strike, the union would just pull their members out on to a picket line where they had very little leverage. Taking control over the data banks, machinery, and offices was outside of the legal limits set on union activity by the Federal government, and no "sensible" union leadership would risk the fines and jail terms that would follow any real militant activity by their membership.

Now, for the first time in memory, there was a direct challenge to the status quo by hundreds of white-collar workers, acting on their own. Bank of America workers were holding most of the executive staff hostage in the World Headquarters downtown, and controlled the administrative/data processing center at 11th and Market.

Jenny was exultant on the phone yesterday when she told Willie about the spontaneous walkout in one of the data processing centers, and how they had been joined by others throughout the building as they paraded through with the captured executives.

"Fred blew up at the supervisor when she kept hanging around behind him. He and two others

grabbed her and threatened to beat her up if she didn't back off. Terrified, she agreed to everything and soon *everything* was being demanded--things she had no power to agree to. That's when everyone walked out! It was fantastic!" she excitedly recounted.

In the past two days they had already erased or transmitted a substantial percentage of the records held in the building's massive computer memory banks (covering B of A's operations world-wide). Transcripts of the broadcasts were being made as quickly as possible, printed, and distributed around the area by the network. The broadcasts were coming over a short-wave radio transmitter put up on the 22nd floor, made by a couple of programmers and a maintenance man.

Willie found the details of the Bank of America's international counterinsurgency funding efforts interesting, but he was really excited by what his friends were doing. For almost 45 hours they had been destroying or erasing all records pertaining to personal and/or corporate wealth.

He remembered a certain cunning gleam in Jenny's eyes at the





last meeting when she said "One of the best things we could do is destroy a big chunk of the records held in the Bank. If we eliminate all those 'vital' numbers that provide the illusion of a 'real' basis for the status quo it's going to be a lot harder for anyone to re-take power based on this system. We have to figure out a way to directly challenge the money/wage-labor society, beyond our rather limited efforts to acquire free goods, housing, and transportation."

The train came to a halt at Powell Street and people poured out, boisterous and full of frenzied relief. From Hallidie Plaza where they came out, up to the Civic Center in one direction and to the Embarcadero in the other, Market Street throbbed with people. Hundreds of groups of ten to several hundred milled around, with people moving freely from one group to the next, discussing, arguing, screaming at each other.

Willie and the other fresh ar-

rivals from the subterranean artery were met by people from all walks of life: financial district clerks and secretaries, retail sales clerks, construction workers, truck and bus drivers, cabbies, Tenderloin winos, teachers, students, hippie street people, etc.

Willie entered a nearby circle of people.

"...2500 National Guard troops are on the way from Edwards Air force base near Los Angeles!"

"Aren't they the same ones who were in East Los Angeles and Watts last summer? Why are they coming here?!? There aren't any riots!"

"They'll use 'em on the Bank of America buildings and anyone who tries to defend them. And they'll go through the neighborhoods just to show people who's in charge!"

Faces tilted abruptly toward the distinct wap-wap-wap of an olive green military helicopter overhead. Leaflets fluttered down:

June 9, 1987
MARTIAL LAW DECLARED IN
THE CITY AND COUNTY OF
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

ALL CITIZENS ARE HEREBY INSTRUCTED TO RETURN TO THEIR DWELLINGS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA IS PREPARING FORCEFUL ACTION AGAINST THE TERRORISTS AND CRIMINALS WHO ARE SEIZING BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN SAN FRANCISCO. ALL HONEST AND PATRIOTIC CITIZENS ARE ADVISED TO RETURN HOME IMMEDIATELY TO AVOID UNNECESSARY DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY AND LIFE.

†† †† ††

Mayor Carol Rude Sliver, S.F.
Governor Thomas Broadley, Ca.

The police who had been all over downtown the past day and half were nowhere to be seen. The SWAT teams had gone back to the Hall of Justice.

Hundreds of groups of ten to several hundred milled around, with people discussing, arguing, screaming at each other.

Willie knew now that people had not bought yesterday's interpretation of events by the big dailies and TV stations in town.

San Francisco Examiner:
June 8, 1987 (Editorial)

Attempts to negotiate with the terrorists in the Bank of America buildings have thus far been

futile. No one inside seems to be able to speak for everyone and no specific demands have been issued.

There has been, however, a great deal of communication between the terrorists and the outside world via telephones and a short-wave radio station which they have commandeered...

...these communists are calling for something completely unrealistic and impossible to achieve—(from their broadcasts) “a world without the state-administered, capitalist austerity of the ‘Free World’ or the bureaucratic tyranny of the ‘Communist countries’... a world where people co-operate freely in providing for each others’ needs and desires without the constraints of wage-labor, money, or any kind of institutional authority.”—Imagine the foolishness!

...We hope this hostage seizure can be settled peacefully, though the agitated, rash behavior exhibited thus far leads us to fear the worst...

...Utopian visions have been around for as long as human society has existed. They are no

more realistic today than they were at the time of Jesus Christ.

Terrorism is unjustified whatever the cause, it cannot coexist with a free society, and must be thoroughly suppressed.

Some people began leaving down the side streets after the leaflet came down, but thousands remained, buzzing with anti-

pation. Some groups attacked the stone garbage receptacles. Fragmented pieces of stone, empty bottles, and various other objects were visible in the people's hands. Here and there handguns glinted in the morning sun.

* * *

Arriving at her job at 8:57 a.m., as usual, Frieda Johnson didn't realize what was going on just a few blocks away. She parked her car and went into the Pacific Telephone building at 3rd and Harrison. She knew about the

They are requesting our help in dealing with the terrorist seige at the Bank of America.

Barricades sprang up at nearly every intersection along Market and in many surrounding streets. Telephone booths toppled over, cars and buses were overturned, office furniture was brought out of various buildings.

"...and the Bechtel building, too!" exclaimed an elderly secretary, her eyes gleaming with excitement. "Y'know I've been dreaming of this for 32 years!"

"What didja say?" asked a young fellow from the Sunset who had just entered the circle.

"The Standard Oil building, the P.G. & E. building, and the Bechtel building at 1st and Market have all been occupied!!" she repeated proudly.

A big smile came across his face.

"My father called home from work and told us that they've occupied Hunter's Point and Bethlehem shipyards. The radio reported that P.G. & E. workers are sitting in at substations and the generating station on the Bay. I got a free ride here on the K-Ingleside. McAteer, Galileo, and Mission high schools have been taken over by the students, and so have USF and San Francisco State!!"

Feverishly excited, Willie yelled "GODDAM! It's a GENERAL STRIKE!!"

Bank of America building occupations but she hadn't heard any of the short-wave broadcasts or seen any transcripts, so she believed the TV and radio news reports about terrorists who had infiltrated the B of A staff. She had been a bit frightened about driving from the safety of her suburban home into work, only a mile from the B of A World Headquarters seige, but she was more afraid of losing her chance at the promotion to division manager which she knew would be decided soon.

As she entered the building she noticed several executives in the lobby, glancing furtively toward the entrance, urgently discussing something. Frieda always made it a point to discreetly ignore her superiors unless they spoke directly to her. She hadn't lasted this long or come this far only to blow her chances for further career advancement by butting into her boss' conversations.

"Oh Frieda, could you come over here, please?" called Frank Martin, her boss. "I'd like to introduce you to Seymour Taylor. You know John Gilles, our general manager."

"Yes, good morning Mr. Gilles, how do you do Mr. Taylor."

"Ms. Johnson, Mr. Taylor here

is an agent of the FBI. They are requesting our help in dealing with the terrorist seige at the Bank of America buildings. You will help him with whatever he needs” said Gilles.

“Of course” she replied coolly, though she felt apprehensive as she always did when working around law enforcement officials. This wasn’t the first time she helped out in such a way. The San Francisco Police Dept. had a series of small booths in which they carried out wiretaps. She had felt justified in helping them since they were primarily used to bust drug rings, but more and more in the past 3-4 years they served as listening posts on political communications between different people and groups. This made her feel uncomfortable since it was difficult for her to believe in the government’s claims about the dangerousness of these “subversive organizations.” She still remembered the lies of Vietnam and

Watergate, and the stories about McCarthyism her parents told her.

She took Mr. Taylor of the FBI up to the 7th floor. As they walked out of the elevator (it was now about 9:15 a.m.) Frieda noticed immediately that there were only about 20 of the usual 53 data entry operators at their terminals. She decided to get Mr. Taylor settled before dealing with the apparent sick-out.

They walked down the corridor and when they turned the corner they both started at the sight.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded Frieda of the group of data entry clerks who were gathered together around a desk which had a radio transmitting on it.

Taylor tried to bolt as soon as he saw the group standing around the desk, but he and Frieda were grabbed by several of the workers and put into chairs.

“Listen!” they commanded.

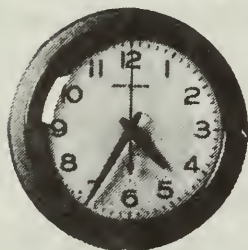


J.F. Batellier

This is the voice of Free San Francisco, broadcasting from high atop the former Bank of America building, renamed the Tower of Power!... And for now, we have the power here in our city. There are now 12 buildings under workers' control, the shipyards and Hunter's Point are occupied, the

didn't know what to make of it all—who were these terrorists and was it true what they said about all the new occupations? "Oh, why didn't I stay home today?" she wondered to herself.

"Well, Ms. Johnson, whose side will you be on?" asked Joan



"I wonder if I can sneak home early? I'm half asleep already anyway—they'll never miss me."

P.G.& E. workers have risen and electricity and gas are assured us, Muni workers are operating buses and streetcars for free, and we have reason to believe that supermarket and restaurant workers along with truck drivers are bringing in provisions from the Safeway distribution center in Richmond. Ten different high school and university campuses have been taken over by students. There are thousands of people out on Market Street and we've just been handed a Martial Law decree that has been dropped on the crowds—forceful action is being prepared—
(A FEMALE VOICE CUT IN, URGENTLY)

Listen, everybody who can help! Organize yourselves at your workplaces and in your neighborhoods. Arm yourselves! Gather together food, water, and weapons. Prepare to defend yourselves against National Guardsmen who will be here soon. We will never stand alone, call your friends and relatives and tell them what's going on!... Don't get killed trying to be friendly, but remember fraternization is probably our best weapon. We must reach and win over these troops...

Taylor squirmed as he tried to figure out a way to escape. Frieda

Chang, an employee of about 8 months in the data entry center. 'His?' gesturing with disgust at Taylor. "Or ours?"

"You'll never get away with this" said Frieda.

"Don't be ridiculous, we are deciding who's getting away with what now" said Walter Fortune, a black man with three children who had ended up here after being laid off from his job as a teacher in San Francisco for the second time.

"He's got a point there, at least for now" she thought to herself. Frieda had always been "pragmatic" (that is, sensitive and responsive to power) so she said "I guess you're right about that. I can say quite honestly that I'm not with him and will never be with the FBI or the government, though I'm not sure if I'm really with you either."

Walter, Joan, and the others broke into smiles. The plain truth was that they weren't exactly sure if they all agreed with each other. They had only been together as a work group for a short time. The longest anyone had been there was a year and a half, but most people only lasted a few months before they went on to something else.

The common feeling of isolation (which they all shared, each alone) was rapidly disappearing and a new sense of power was present among them. They realized something very important was going on and that they could be part of it. Many felt an almost child-like enthusiasm.

“Let’s go make sure they haven’t cut off the phones!” said Walter, and most of them hurried off to see what they could do.

“You’ll pay for this, Johnson!” threatened Taylor.

They left him handcuffed to the toilet in the men’s room on the 7th floor.

* * *

necessary, but no shooting unless you are ordered. Your officers have been carefully briefed on what circumstances justify the use of firearms--you will have to rely on your crowd control techniques.”

Jimmy Radile listened as the colonel tersely outlined their mission. He had only joined the National Guard about five months ago, and already he found himself in this important anti-riot unit. During his nineteen years growing up in Fresno, he had heard about riots on TV and they had seemed so distant. Now there were riots in San Francisco, somehow connected to those terrorists in the Bank of America buildings, and he was



Dayglo carpet squares humanize an otherwise impersonal office hallway

“All right men! Our job is to clear the streets and seal off downtown. The San Francisco Police Department SWAT teams will be making the actual assaults on the buildings held by these commie, anarcho-terrorists. We are going to assist them as

going to help restore order.

After his basic training and a few months on weekend-only duty, he was called to active duty for this special unit. A lot of the guys in the outfit were involved with putting down the riots in East Los Angeles and Watts last summer. Jimmy

vaguely remembered something about Guardsmen shooting unarmed citizens and burning some houses down with incendiary grenades.

“But everyone was acquitted and anyway, those people were going crazy! Somebody had to stop them before they destroyed the city. It was too bad about the excesses, but violence can only be stopped by stronger violence” he remembered his father telling him.

The briefing ended and the Guardsmen went out to the airfield and boarded the nine C5-A's which would carry them northwest to San Francisco. Jimmy's unit, code-named 'Red-eater' was scheduled to helicopter from the Alameda Naval Air Station over to Crissy Field on the north edge of San Francisco. From there, fifteen platoons of 50 each with a machine-gun on a jeep would fan out through Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown, Polk Gulch, and over Nob Hill towards downtown.

“Hey! Look at that!” shouted one of the soldiers, just as they passed over the Bay Bridge in Sikorsky helicopters. Jimmy and the others craned their necks for a view of downtown San Francisco to see what the fellow was gesturing at.

milled about. AC Transit buses headed out onto the Bay Bridge and parked broadside, already about six rows deep and growing fast. “ ‘Black-bouncer’ (unit 2) would have a tough time breaking through that logjam even with tanks and bulldozers!” thought Jimmy.

“Look at all those people!” exclaimed one soldier.

“And check out that bus blockade on the bridge!” yelled another.

“SILENCE!!” bellowed Major Bricknell, field commander for the mission.

“Back to your seats!” he commanded.

His stern demeanor was briefly animated by the strength of his delivery, but he immediately lapsed back into the bland grayness characteristic of career military men.

Jimmy's eyes quickly scanned the others to see if they felt as intimidated and fearful as he did. Most seemed sullen, but few looked as nervous as Jimmy felt. His nervousness was greatly increased by his certainty that 'Black-bouncer' would never get through the bus blockade on the bridge. “I wonder what those color banners were for?” he thought. “I hope they were right when they

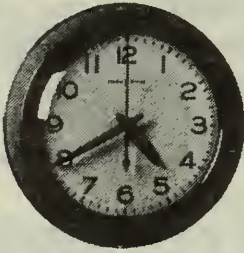
“I hope they were right when they told us in anti-riot training that most people will go home when we get there.”

From the top of Transamerica Pyramid, the Bank of America building, and a few others were enormous colorful banners flapping in the wind. Along the waterfront thousands of people

told us in anti-riot training that most people will go home when we get there” thought Jimmy, as he contemplated the sight of thousands of people around the waterfront.

A few minutes later they were disembarking at Crissy Field at the northern edge of San Francisco near the Golden Gate Bridge. It was now about 11 o'clock in the morning. After about 20 minutes

name he used to know in Saigon in 1970 in a back street south of Market. They were gonna rip 'im off but then they recognized each other so they settled for the half gram of coke he had.' Jimmy's



“Just 20 more minutes... I've gotta look busy so no one gives me any more work to do before leaving.”

they all assembled, and set out one platoon at a time. Jimmy's platoon, was the second to the last, of fifteen, stretched out eastward on Bay St., from Funston field past VanNess to Ghiradelli Square.

They encountered no resistance, only a few curious onlookers from windows and a few people scurrying down side streets as they passed by. “All honest and patriotic citizens should go home and tune in the TV to Channel 7 for further information and instructions” blared the public address system tape on each jeep. “Clear the streets! Martial Law is in effect! Clear the streets or you are subject to arrest!”

Jimmy walked about 20 ft. ahead of his jeep, his automatic rifle resting in his arms. He felt like he was in a dream--somehow he had gotten into a WWII movie but the scene was San Francisco. The streets were almost deserted while he thought about the warm sun on his helmet, the cool wind on his face, and the blaring speakers from the jeep.

“Hey, I heard there's a bunch 'o gooks in this town! My brother told me he met up with three Viet-

consciousness was invaded by the nervous babbling of another recent recruit, an 18-yr.-old kid from Modesto.

“Fuck you! Shut up!” said another fellow, even more uptight, on the other side of Jerry from Modesto.

On they went, turning up VanNess, past Lombard and Broadway. As they cleared the top of the hill at Washington St. they came to a sudden halt. Ahead of them from one side of VanNess across to the other was a solid line of people, arms linked, shoulder-to-shoulder. And behind the front line were thousands more, as far as the eye could see, and they were slowly advancing down VanNess toward platoons 14 and 15 of 'Red-eater'.

Jimmy was struck by the crowd--their earnest, excited expressions. These sure didn't seem like the raving commie, anarcho-terrorists they had been briefed about.

“This is 'Red-eater'-14/15 to 'Log Cabin', come in 'Log Cabin'. Facing thousands on VanNess, please advise course of action.” The platoon sergeant was frantically radioing in to the major the situation of his troops but aid and

orders were not forthcoming. The Major was too busy with the other units who were facing similarly overwhelming odds. Platoons #1 and 2 had already been overrun and had surrendered without a shot down on the waterfront.

The 100 National guardsmen and two jeeps with machine guns, stretched across VanNess, couldn't withstand the onslaught of these thousands, though they could exact a terrible price if the platoon sergeant gave the order to resist and fire. As the crowd came within a half a block their yells were clearly audible: "Don't shoot! We are not your enemy! Talk to us! Don't shoot! We have no arms! We won't hurt you! We are people just like you, not terrorists or rioters!"

Jimmy felt utterly confused, he was not prepared for this. Jerry from Modesto started crying to his right. "I don't wanna kill nobody" he sobbed.

The platoon sergeant yelled the orders "Use your rifles to hold back the crowd--don't let them pass." The crowd drew nearer, Jerry and six other young recruits threw down their guns and ran off to the rear, stripping off their uniforms as they ran. Jimmy, sweating profusely, clutched his rifle in front of him.

There was no more than 10 ft. separating the line of Guardsmen from the crowd. Jimmy found himself face to face with hundreds of people.

"Listen you guys, we want to be free!" said a middle-aged fellow with thick glasses.

"Why are you here? Who are you defending?!?" demanded a blond man with an earring in his left ear.

"Wouldn't you like to live in a world where you don't have to worry about how you're gonna

make a living, in a world where you have the freedom to experiment with life?" asked a young woman in overalls and a green turtleneck.

"Wouldn't you like to grow up without having to go through ten years of traumatic adolescence full of insecurity, fear, and sexual frustration?" asked a young man, not long past his own adolescence, only a year or two older than Jimmy.

By now the crowd was within arms reach.

THWACK!! 44-year-old Don Emory, a fireman from Visalia, smashed his rifle into the jaw of a leather-clad gay man. Immediately the crowd surged forward and shots rang out. Screams came from all around. Jimmy tried to hold the crowd back with his gun and began swinging it at the people who were rushing all around him.

BAM! BAM! more shots from the other side of the crowd. Blood was everywhere as Jimmy went down, choked from behind and pummeled by people all around him.

37 people died in the battle of VanNess Ave. including 23 Guardsmen. 115 more were injured, including most of the captured Guardsmen who were severely beaten before being brought to City Hall.

* * *

The San Francisco Commune lasted for five and half weeks before the city was successfully retaken by the U.S. Marines at a horrible cost in human lives: thousands dead and injured. Severe civil disturbances rocked twelve other cities during 1987, but none went quite as far in advancing a vision and a social experience of a world without institutional power, where people worked together without bosses and shared

What To Do In These Emergencies



SUSPECTED BOMB

- Don't touch the object.
- Report immediately to your supervisor or the police and security personnel.
- Alert co-workers to keep clear of the area.
- When instructed, evacuate the premises.



BOMB THREAT

- Listen carefully for descriptive traits of the caller.
- Report exact message to your supervisor.
- Do not cause unnecessary panic among your co-workers. It may be a false alarm.
- If necessary, evacuate.



CIVIL DISORDER

- Notify your supervisor or safety personnel.
- Remain detached so that the demonstrators do not become more aggressive.
- Evacuate, when advised.

From the Employee Safety Handbook in the Bank of America

everything without prices or money, and where the very idea of property actually began to lose meaning.

Jimmy Radile joined the defense of the city and had a significant role in seizing Crissy Field, the battle of Tank Hill in the Haight, and the battle of Russian Hill. He was killed on the 4th of July when the building he was living in in Polk Gulch was hit by an air-to-surface missile.

Frieda Johnson was a changed woman for three and a half weeks. She didn't return to the suburbs but stayed on and played a vital role in the phone maintenance group, and also helped out on shore watch. But as the government commandos slowly tightened the noose around the liberated zone downtown, her temporary residence was raided and she immediately surrendered, begging to be allowed to go home to her husband in Belmont.

The Bank of America buildings

were retaken finally without firing a shot. They had been completely gutted by fire and vandalism. As the city joined the revolt, the B of A employees abandoned the buildings to help in the more general efforts. When the commandos arrived they were met by some sniper fire from a few buildings nearby but the Bank of America buildings and the surrounding blocks in the Financial District and near City Hall were deserted. Soiled and torn banners hung limply from rooftops, and signs everywhere proclaiming "Free San Francisco" were ripped down by the troops.

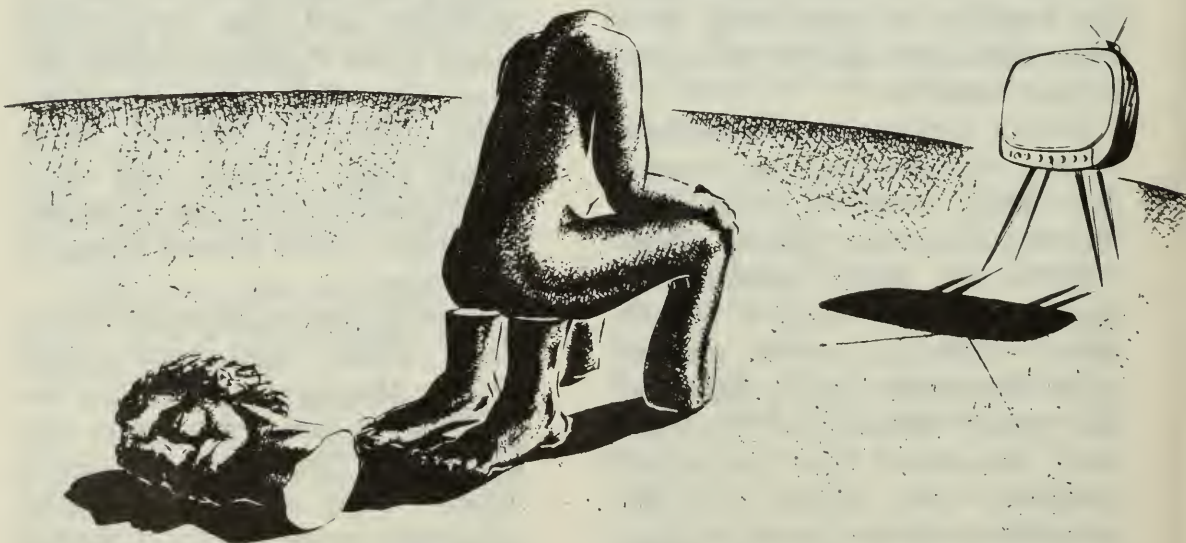
Most of the workers (including Fred, Jenny, and their friend Willie Moreland) survived the pacification and were never discovered as "The" Bank of America rebels. They all came to play important roles in the following years in the snowballing movement for social liberation.

9 TO 5: WE'RE SO PRETTY... PRETTY VACANT!

Nine To Five directed by Colin Higgins
story by Colin Higgins, Patricia Res-
nick, starring Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda,
Dolly Parton

When I went to see the movie the day it opened in San Francisco, I got the impression that, like me, many people in the audience were office workers, curious to see how the film portrayed a world that was very familiar to them. We'd been hearing about the movie for weeks, thanks partly to Jane Fonda's propaganda on its "feminist" themes, and its relevance to work-
ing women.

The action is instigated by the humiliations and frustrations suffered by women at the hands of their male boss. Three secretaries work in the same office of a large corporation: Dolly Parton, as a wholesome, down-home sex-bomb with a wholesome, down-home husband; Lily Tomlin, as a wisened-up, hard-working widow with a family to support and repeatedly frustrated executive ambitions; and Jane Fonda, as a marm-ish, naive middle-aged divorcée newly thrown into the work-
ing world when her husband jilted



her for his swinging secretary.

In several all-too-typical sequences we see how these women are wronged by their boss, a caricature of back-stabbing, slave-driving, male chauvinist idiocy. He constantly insults and offends his underlings and forces them to do demeaning favors for him. Worse still, he fires one unjustly

personality goes well with the wry, gutsy lines in her part, she delivers all her lines in the same flat tone. Ostensibly, the movie attacks the on-the-job sexist abuses that have been important targets for the women's movement. But the fascinations of Parton's figure were clearly not lost on the director. The way she is filmed, always in

The film's critique of sexual oppression is as shallow as Parton's cleavage is deep.

and covers for his own incompetence by taking credit for the ideas of the Tomlin character, who, by contrast, is super efficient and bright.

From the very beginning, though, poignant depictions of the miseries of office work are lightened up with absurd exaggerations and knee-slapping humor. The emotional impact of seeing one's own experience more or less accurately portrayed as a common plight is dissolved in hilarious fantasy. Not that zany farce and serious social comment can't mix. A play like Dario Fo's *We Can't Pay, We Won't Pay*, performed by the S.F. Mime Troupe last year, is one example. But socially-conscious comedy has to be careful of what it makes audiences laugh at, and *Nine To Five* isn't.

For instance, it doesn't take a feminist to see that Dolly Parton's casting is a classic case of spectacular exploitation. It was clearly not Parton's acting that got her this role. Although her charismatic

astonishingly high spiked heels and skin-tight tops revealing several inches of cleavage, is calculated to direct the viewer's attention to her voluminous chest.

In fact, the film's critique of sexual oppression is as shallow as Parton's cleavage is deep. The drooling sex-maniacal boss is masculine evil incarnate, and Parton, despite her provocative dress, is merely his upstanding, innocent victim. I don't mean to imply that women *aren't* sexually victimized, at work and elsewhere. But the reality of relations between the sexes is a lot more subtle. Sure, it's sad and frustrating that women can't dress in an even mildly "sexy" way, or show warmth and openness, without provoking unwanted aggressive come-ons or verbal harassment. On the other hand, women *are* often complicit in their own oppression by creating and using "sex object" images of themselves. But this film doesn't help us understand either problem.

The "fantasy" sequences--as if the whole film wasn't fantasy to begin with--are likewise two-dimensional. The three women get stoned and one by one describe how they'd like to avenge themselves on their boss. A potentially great device, both for showing the deep contradictions in worker's feelings about their collective plight, and for introducing possible resolutions to it, is wasted on silly wish-fulfillment.

Tomlin's fantasy, complete with Disney-cartoon animals and Tinkerbell glitter, at least has the grace to admit it's a fairy tale. But Parton's fantasy is a simple role reversal. She imagines having the same power over her boss that he holds over her in reality--the power to treat him like a slave and humiliate him sexually. As though we would be any freer if women were just as sadistic and sex-obsessed as men like him! Fonda's, where she appears as a cool slick "white huntress" whose bullets send video display terminals flying satisfyingly apart in showers of glass, isn't much better. For one thing, her acting is dreadful. Throughout the movie, she just can't help playing herself, which is not what the script calls for.

According to the hype, Fonda was a big mover behind this production. She has the reputation, especially since teaming up with Tom Hayden, of being the most "political" of Hollywood actresses. That she could have insisted on the political value of this film is another example of the depth of her political thinking. It isn't only that Fonda talked it up as feminist when it's so obviously sexist. The whole plot trivializes the situation of office workers, especially the resolution. The women kidnap their boss and chain

him in the bedroom of his mansion, while they transform the office to their liking. They bring in flowers, redecorate in bright colors, introduce flex-time, a day-care center, and an AA program for employees. These changes make everyone happy and result in a 20% increase in productivity, to the great pleasure of the Chairman of the Board. The movie ends triumphantly for the secretaries when the boss, ready to turn them in to the police, is forced to acknowledge and support the improvements and the indispensibility of his secretaries in front of the Chairman of the Board. As a reward, the boss is dispatched to Brazil on a special corporate assignment. Justice prevails and everyone lives happily ever after.

Once again, the problem is not so much that this is fantasy, but *how* the fantasy meshes with the more "realistic" themes in the movie. The way the secretaries go about getting what they want is so preposterous that top management's eventual benign acceptance of their reforms (except for wage equality) doesn't seem preposterous enough. More important, though, the film ignores the ways in which clerical workers are fighting to improve their condition in the real world. Instead, it focuses on the hilariously improbable adventures of three individuals. In this way it obscures the real nature of the conflict hinted at in the early scenes--the conflict between managers and workers in general, between *classes*.

The barriers which prevent workers from joining to fight for their desires, the forces which divide them and instill a sense of powerlessness and resignation are complex and operate at many levels at the workplace. They

involve the structure and nature of work itself: wage policies, job hierarchies, division of labor, favoritism, traditional paternalistic ideologies, misplaced loyalties and fear. The problems of office workers are not dispelled simply by replacing an evil, incompetent boss with a benevolent and efficient one, even if it is a woman. And contrary to the postscripts which sketch the futures of the three heroines, most clerical workers are chained to their form of employment with little chance of escape. Even the fulfilled aspirations of the triumphant secretaries are basically accommodations to the existing set-up: Tomlin gets her promotion, Fonda gets married again and presumably quits the workforce, Parton becomes--guess what?--a country-western star.

Despite its title, *Nine To Five* never questions the fact that most of us have to spend forty-plus

hours a week doing jobs which are of no value to us except as a means of survival. It criticizes bad bosses but not bossdom, bad working conditions but not the condition of wage-work itself. In this sense, maybe the Chairman of the Board's acceptance of the reforms engineered by the heroines isn't so preposterous after all. Daycare centers, flex-time, job-sharing and pretty offices may cost a little more, but if they cut absenteeism and stimulate huge increases in productivity, management will come around all right.

Finally, what is particularly offensive about this film is that it uses real problems--*my problems*--for purely escapist purposes. By presenting conditions which are a daily source of anxiety and despair to millions (and not only women), the film hooks its audience, but only to get a laugh. It exploits rebellious feelings of an increasingly important group of workers



If you won't fuck me, get outta my way, bitch! I'm goin' straight to the top of this Corporation! I'm going to be a Rich Man!



Forget it bub. You young business majors just don't understand... These new machines are designed to increase your productivity, too, and that means you will have to put in a good 30-40 years of monotonous work in sterile offices before you'll get the power and wealth you want. By then you'll be too old to enjoy it!




By pushing this button you can get the last 25 years of the history of clerical workers' attempts to improve their wages and working conditions. By pushing that one, you can communicate with other office workers in other buildings and plan the insurrection!

in a period of rapid change and emerging self-consciousness.

We can watch *Nine To Five* and go home chuckling to ourselves thinking about how these secretaries, whose concerns we can identify with, finally get their own. But we know very well, even though the movie does its best to

help us forget it, that tomorrow or the next day we're going to have to go to work just like any other day, and the all's-well-that-ends-well message has little to do with what we will have to face when we get there.

Caitlin Manning



I wish I didn't have to take orders from nerds like this! But (sigh) bosses and bureaucrats are everywhere... I think I'll talk to Carolyn and Lana and the other people working here and see what they think. And I'll read issue #2 of *Processed World* to see if anyone has sent in any good ideas about how we begin to change our situation together.

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**I want to be more productive
and efficient in my work.**

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and efficient in my work.**

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“This goddam subway! It’s so hot and jammed with people. I feel like I’ve been stuffed into a cattle car.”

