

# PROCESSED WORLD 10



SUBVERTING HI-TECH!





# PROCESSED WORLD

10

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All of the articles reflect the views and fantasies of the author and not necessarily those of other contributors or editors.

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Here it is, the issue which begets the double-digit life of *Processed World*. Why do we keep doing it? The project began among a small group of friends, rebel artists, and marginal politicians, most of whom were doing time as office drones. We faced (and still face) the same predicament: useless and degrading work supporting a world system whose trajectory toward mutation, if not extermination, keeps screaming onward and upward. Even less inspiring is the ghetto of leftist opposition (old, new, or otherwise). None of this has changed much since *PW* first raised its head. But what has changed (to get back to the question of why we keep persisting) is the quality and quantity of responses and contributions to the publication. As the international contributors of this issue aptly illustrate, "we" are no longer a small circle of rebellious friends living in or around San Francisco.

*Processed World* is largely shaped by its readers and contributors (a separation we like to discourage). It is not difficult to see at least five kinds of people interested: clerical workers; high-tech workers like computer programmers and technical writers; rebel artists, independent radicals, and marginal wage workers (obviously many overlap into some or all of these divisions). This is by no means the total picture but even an analysis of this particular constellation has yet to be developed. Anyone interested?

*PW*'s first 10 issues reflect a broad agreement that the only solution to the varied injustices we endure is a total transformation of the traditional tactics and strategies of change. To that end,

*Processed World* has devoted attention to: workers' autonomy (as opposed to trade unionism); sabotage; and solidarity between the workers and public users of certain industries (e.g. mass transit, phone service, childcare, etc.).

*PW* was conceived as a forum for those who can creatively name their misery and contribute ideas on how to change a world based on it. Though we have connected with many new friends, and some have gotten involved in "doing *PW*," we have confirmed the obvious — there simply aren't hordes of fellow wage slaves who share the same outlook. The lack of a recognizable revolutionary movement leaves us somewhat isolated with our desires. Of course we do think *Processed World* and similar forums *might* contribute to some kind of promising opposition, based in offices, other workplaces, and beyond.

*PW* as a part of a commodity-dominated world cannot escape the general prison in which our liberatory energy is sucked into the vacuum of stupid work demanded simply for us to exist. Hey! — All you "sugar people," we are looking for YOU to help support our \$300/mo. rent habit!

While by all means, 'today is a good day to fight' all forms of domination, *Processed World* is utterly serious about doing it with a sense of humor. Hey! Joke 'em if they can't take a fuck!

\* \* \*

In this issue we feature several articles on the social consequences of high technology. The use of high-tech as a means of social control is being discussed from various angles today, but we have not joined the hand-

wringing over the realization of the Orwellian nightmare. Instead of focusing on the limited prescience of Orwell's 1984 scenario, the articles take up the question of how the dangers of high technology can be exposed, resisted and subverted.

"Don't PIS on me" gives an account of the battle between W. German managers and workers over the implementation of Personnel Information Systems (PIS's) which allow companies to monitor employees' lives in great detail. (We have also just received word from a Dutch group that is investigating the use of these systems in The Netherlands. Although there has been no publicity of PIS's in the U.S., these control systems are popping up in U.S. work-sites, too.

Distinctions between supposedly harmless uses of a PIS and its 'abuse' have guided the German unions in their negotiations on the new technology. It took the agitation of an ad hoc, autonomous group of workers to bring attention to the fact that *any* use of a PIS can be abused, and their efforts pushed the union into a firmer stance against their implementation. The article offers some chilling examples of how even the most apparently harmless information could be turned against workers and our centerfold includes concrete suggestions on ways to gum up the works.

The importance of autonomous workers' action, independent of official union activities, is stressed in Henri Simon's analysis of the computer strikes which took place in England in 1979 and 1981. (This article was edited for PW.) Simon points out that the British unions' interest in keeping close control over striking workers undercut the strikes' effectiveness, and consequently dovetailed with management's own concern for controlling the workforce. More flexible, democratic organization and coordination would allow computer workers to take advantage of their strategic position in production. Contrary to writers like David Noble, author of "Present Tense Technology," (published in the now defunct *democracy* magazine, and quoted in "Don't PIS on Me"), Simon does not believe that workers' opposition can be paralyzed by the dehumanization and centralization of

high technology. Whereas Noble has argued that the time is now or never to resist the effects of automation, Simon is optimistic about the emergence of new ways to fight against whatever forms of social control are devised.

In a sweeping panorama of daily life in Silicon Valley, Melquiades grapples with the question of why there isn't greater opposition to the high tech industry at its most vulnerable point — the "technical workers" who design and implement the new technologies. Melquiades exposes the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the high tech industry keeps its workers isolated, ignorant and on the defensive. This insider's account of the social consequences of high tech production puts to shame the fawning apologetics for the industry that recently appeared in *Mother Jones* ("Fast Times For Hi-Tech" Dec. '83 issue).

Fortunately for us, the non-conformity of some computer programmers goes beyond the casual attire that so impressed the author of the article in *MJ*. Melquiades goes on to describe the secret life of the "hackers" and "raiders" that stalk corporate centers, cracking a secret code here, trashing a program there. For Melquiades, these "deviants" hold the key to our future, by virtue of the knowledge and potentially subversive power that is concentrated in their hands.

"CLODO Speaks" is an interview with a French group of anti-authoritarian hackers and raiders who have been successfully practicing sabotage for several years. They conceive of sabotage partly as an ideological campaign against the mystique of computer technology, as well as a practical demonstration of its vulnerability in the face of determined programmers.

This issue's fiction, "Grumbles Down Below" portrays a typical SF corporate office scene, with an atypical response by the workers. Information on VDT disasters, a number of interesting poems and letters, and the exciting conclusion to "BAD GIRL" round out this longest-ever issue of *Processed World*. Keep your letters, articles, stories, and "Tales of Toil" coming!: *Processed World*, 55 Sutter Street #829, San Francisco, CA 94104, USA

# LETTERS

Dear Processed World,

I *used* to do office work in San Francisco, while I was a film student. Now I am "unemployed" in Boston with a B.F.A. degree. I won't go into all the reasons for the change of location; the point is that I am an 'ex'-office worker. As in NEVER AGAIN!!!

A friend who now lives in S.F. turned me on to PW and I knew this was something I needed — a source of support for my decision *never* to go back to that horrible scene (even if it means living on the streets, which I have done since then). I have read 4 of your back issues and they have helped me to understand better why I had to make this decision. It's certainly good to know there are so many other people who feel the same way. I have spent a lot of time wrestling with my mangled emotions about those jobs; trying to figure out just *how* they messed up my head.

The following piece is an example of my attempts to work these things out; I hope you can also appreciate the irony of the fact that I don't have a workable typewriter of my *own* to type it on, and that you will therefore accept this handprinted manuscript. (I also had to use both sides of the paper to save on postage.)

In Solidarity,  
Bridget Reilly — Boston

*Bridget, please write us again if you ever see this — we wanted to write back but you didn't give us an address...*

Excerpt from WHY I CAN'T SLEEP by Bridget Reilly:

... I wasn't listened to when I needed to be. That is really the root of it all. Convicted without a trial.

"Give me a CHANCE! for Chrissake! I'm only human! I only have 2 hands! I

can only do things so fast!"

They expected more of me than I could give and they punished me for not being able to give it. They screamed their demands into my ear till I was so nervous I couldn't think straight; my hands were shaking so I dropped what I was carrying; I couldn't do what they demanded because I was too nervous. And they said it was *my* fault. They didn't listen to my defense.

"If you'd be easier on me I could do it better!"

They would just rejoin, "We have no place for softies here. If you're not tough enough to handle the job, we'll find someone who can. YOU CAN BE REPLACED, YOU KNOW!!!"

Being able to "work under pressure" is considered a virtue in the employment marketplace. How many times do you see that in the Help Wanted ads? "Able to work under pressure."

I was "too slow."

I would give this as a reason why I couldn't remain a member of the proletarian workforce.

And they would rejoin, "You're just making excuses. If you really wanted to work, you could find a job."

I was "just making excuses" for "not wanting to work"! I have news for you people: I NEVER SAID I didn't want to *work*! I said I didn't want to crawl around on all fours and eat shit and say "Yes Sir" to some jerk with half my intelligence. If that's what they mean by "working," then no, I don't want to "work." But truly, people, I had thought working was something very different from that!

And incidentally, who *does* enjoy eating shit, I want to know?!

"Oh well," they say, "sometimes we have to do things we don't enjoy. Life isn't all a picnic. It's a sign of maturity if you can accept this."

Oh. So now I'm "immature" if I refuse to have my dignity attacked 40 hours a week. No one enjoys having their dignity insulted, of course, but "mature" people learn to put up with a certain amount of this in order to keep a roof over their heads. That's always the bottom line, in their way of "reasoning":

"You gotta have a roof over your head."

20th-century bourgeois logic.

And how many years have I chafed under their accusations of being a "failure" for not being able to conform

to this ridiculous system of theirs?

And look what it has done to my cerebral capacity, my creative power!!

And who cares what it has done?!!

I say it is a *crime* to break down a person's psyche this way, Dammit Dammit Dammit!!

PEOPLE, YOU ARE *GUILTY*!!!!!!

And the blood-sucker known as our landlord is their current representative. You know, the one who is trying to collect the rent I am no longer able to pay. The price of the "roof over one's head." *Now* do you understand better why I fear him and his kind?

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They will convict (evict?) me without a trial and feel quite righteous in doing it. Because it is all in the name of the System which their little minds have been trained to worship. Because they don't see ME at all!

"I am a person who cares for *life!*" is my last unheard cry. "Does this count for nothing?!?!!!!!!!!"



Dear Processed World,

Liked the article in PW9, *Against "Fairness" & Fares* by Lucius Cabins.

I don't ride MUNI as much as I used to. When they raised the fare from 16 to 24 bucks I got myself a bike. But when I was using it daily I hated like hell to pay the full fare.

I used to use old transfers before they developed the new random symbol-number coding system. But I was wondering — wouldn't it be possible to have a hip early morning radio personality do the people a service by announcing which symbol and number that was being used that day?

Just a thought,  
Ed — S.F.



Dear folks,

Lucius Cabins: Good MUNI piece — I'm glad you did it. A further thought on MUNI: As far as I know, San Francisco has never prosecuted anyone for possession or use of a fake fast pass. In fact, the police say they don't even have a statute under which to charge such an offender; the few times they actually have arrested anyone, the charge has been "possession of a forged steamship ticket," which is the closest thing they can find to a city or state ordinance banning the the use of a phony bus pass. I believe the statute is very old. Normally, the charge is dropped.

Keep up the good work,  
T.R. — S.F.



Dear Processed World,

As an environmental (and therefore political) lawyer, I read with great interest and satisfaction the articles by Bradley Rose ("Walling of Awareness") and Lucius Cabins ("Against 'Fairness' & Fares") in PW 9. In a slightly different context (the function of "environmental" laws in a capitalist economy) I had arrived at a similar conclusion, and was pleased to find agreement in a source I respect as much as PW. Clearly, any meaningful analysis or observation of why things are the way they are in this country is impossible without a healthy sense of the pervasiveness of our economic system. So what else is new?

Oddly, when I read PW 9, I had just picked up a book employing a similar analysis with respect to American city planning in general. The point of the book, made with appropriate academic flourishes, is that city planning, far from being rational or in the public interest, is really just another way in which society is organized to serve the interests of capital. (This is why most planning consultants are as much whores as are most lawyers.) Of course, we knew that too, but now we have a BOOK that says so. The book is "Dreaming the Rational City/The Myth of American City Planning," by M. Christine Boyer, MIT Press, 1983.

However, the question remains, what to do? Or rather, how to do it? One does one's best against the odds and sleeps well at least, but the best that can be hoped for is a temporary reprieve, and the system stays the same. Maybe, in a historical sense, things take care of themselves, and the time is not yet upon us. Beats hell out of me. If anyone knows, please let me know.

Which brings me, rather clumsily, to something I've wanted to write you about for months. It seems to me that information processors, bike messengers as well as those who sit in front of computer terminals, have a wonderful opportunity to commit really important sabotage, the costs of which will not be



passed on to the consumer. I speak of passing on information to parties for whom it was not intended. Next time you come across some confidential communication between, say, a drug company and a law firm defending them in litigation concerning the effects of some dangerous birth control device or mutagenic drug, remember, you have the opportunity to copy it and pass it on to the other side.

Never having been a messenger or information processor, I don't really know whereof I speak, but it seems to me that the possibilities for infiltration and subversion are endless. Of course this idea has also popped up now and then in PW, but effective action would require the development of an overall strategy for determining what sort of information is worth leaking, how to recognize it quickly, and who to leak it to. One (somewhat unrealistic?) possibility is a clearinghouse for this information, complete with copying facilities and a list of who is on what side of what current issue.

Fred — San Francisco

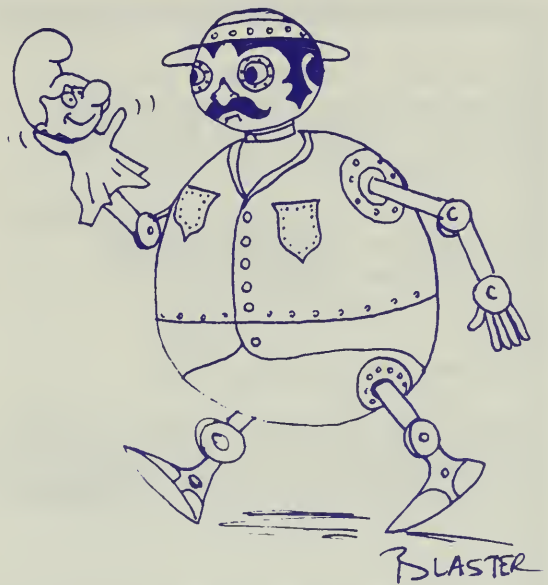
*Ed.: Good Idea!*



Dear PW,

The laST FEW months I've experimented with the temporary office work scene. What struck me most about it was the sickeningly sweet etiquette that all agencies employ; from the lilting voice of the receptionist to the saccharin interviewer who politely impresses how valuable you the employee are to the agency, and how very much they care about you (or worse yet they use a videotape machine to tell you the same); to the bloodless purges when they whisk you off a job without ever telling you you're being fired — less brutal than the loud knock on the door by midnight thugs, but no less effective in making sure that you disappear without a trace.

In my journeys through the temp world, I managed to drop loose journal



entries, like a trail to retrace my steps back through the labyrinth. Of the three excerpted here, the first two are untouched spilling during practice time for typing test at interviews; the third entry was composed without benefit of a typewriter.

\* \* \*

(1) What am I diing here, taking a typing test when I hardly even know how to type — I'm up here on the 13th floor with my misspleed words. Can you spell "authority" "management", "success"? Can you pour coffee into the xerox machine till it cooks? What is the true nature of success? Is it taking a dive from the 13th floor to a trampoline below and then parachuting back up again/?

Here I go.....remember a coulpe of weeks ago. Working at Macy the kind of terminal boredom that seeps into your bones the way below zero cold does, 5:30 pm came, and as soon as I hit the ground floor I start ed running for the exits—emerged onto the street, gave a whoop and yelled 'I'm human Again!', and all the passersby looked at me and smiled, as if they knew, 'he's been working at Macy's today.' Iwent to Telfords to pick up some clove cigarettes before they tured into pumkins, was walking fast up Kearny street, encountered a womanat one corner who

## MONDAY MORNING

*The coffee isn't as good with you gone,  
and the rain doesn't feel cozy, just cold.  
8:35. Work has sucked you down into  
the Metro's maw, and I'm next.*

*Oh, this is the way of the world, the world.  
Growing older, everything begins  
to center around a single word:  
Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!*

by David Steinberg

looked like someone I know, and she gave an enthusiastic hello and I responded with an equally enthusiastic hello, and she said, "NO, not you!"

\* \* \*

(2) Another fuckin'; Ibm selectric! I thought of using this machine to type my resume, but I don't think I have time, plus by abominable typing accuracy  $\frac{1}{2}\frac{1}{2}$  I ought to at least be able to start training myself to use my little fingers more, just like I'm trying to do on the bass guitar.

I like this machine a lot — wish I could steal it I could use the practice. What? Practice stealing or typing? Well, if I stole it, I could get practice doing both%! Such miserable weather outside—I kept dodging people's umbrellas—why can't these financial district types just learn to walk in the rain? It might actually soften up some of that head-processing that's become hardened in there since day 1. Is this a comedy/ in how many unnatural acts—that this is where I get all my practice typing, here in the life-forsaken financial district where I get to use the typewriters for free. Is anything else in the financial district free? Well, walking is cheap, I don't know if I'd call it free. Gos, this receptionist! (I'm at Volt) Did she learn to talk off of the t.v.? She's like a caricature of a syrupy receptionist, though I bet she can type better than me—better than that—I shouldn't complain—like this morning in the living room, unemployed Michael, and unemployed me just coming back from Food Stamps, while hippie dope-dealer roommate walks

in, sits plops on the couch, & starts counting his hundred dollar bills, right under our noses—I found it a tad bit insulting, like driving past those Bank of America "We got the money!" billboards this summer—why don't you rub our faces in poverty a little bit, but just a little bit—I'm not really complaining, just observing—on this, another one of my typing test/ loose journal entries—call me the Herb Caen of the financial district underground.

\* \* \*

(3) People don't like the word "fuck." It's unprofessional, or so my agency counselor told me after I used it while being hassled by a security guard when I showed up for my new job this morning. So I became the first job casualty of '84, pulled off the job less than two hours into the first working day of the new year. Temporary agencies remind me of old style Chinese marriages, where it's possible for a husband to lose face by any wrong thing his wife says or does. In this case, I can cause my agency to lose face simply by opening my mouth at a given moment, and leave the agency scrambling on the phone to save face and arrange a quickie divorce.

G.B. — San Francisco



Dear PW:

I found it interesting the number of letter writers who express the idea that technology is neutral. I'm sure that all agree that nukes aren't — but short of that ... Maxine's response was OK, but I think the point needs to be hammered home that the design of machinery, etc. incorporates the class relations and are aids in perpetuating the class relations. It's not that the essential idea of, say, the internal combustion engine, electricity or computers are themselves so capitalistic we must get rid of them, but that when concretized in commodity-form they are not only employed by capital (or sold to 'consumers') but also help ensure capital's power. I'm sure



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\* \* Send your name and address for registration details \* \*

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“TAKING A STEP BACKWARDS TO TAKE A STEP FORWARD”

you know this one — I just think that it needs to be emphasized. It means also that we won't, ultimately, simply be able to appropriate and use, but will have to appropriate, often re-design, sometimes junk, and then use — and this will take some time.

If the technology gets to the point where those transit passes can be replicated using recording tape, I hope

the idea reaches here.

M.N. — Boston

lll

Dear *Processed World*,

I work as a Library Assistant at the University of California, Berkeley. In case you didn't know, practically all of the traditional librarian's work is now

done on CRTs. Cataloging serial publications (what I do in my half-time position) is basically a programming activity now, since one must "code" the "worksheets" for subsequent input into a computer terminal. The traditional card catalogs have been replaced by computer-produced microfiche catalogs, and these in themselves represent a half-way point to a future, and totally on-line catalog. I am responsible for all the bibliographic searching (searching for catalog copy already in the database that has been put there by other libraries) for the material in my division, hence I spend anywhere from half to three-quarters of my time sitting at a computer terminal each day.

I have very mixed emotions about my position. Granted, working for the state is different than working for the private sector (I feel that I am working for the public good, and not for someone's personal gain), but the business element has begun to pervade the library, and there are now not just a few "dress for suckess" types running around.

Furthermore, I do not feel that computerization of library work is one-hundred percent bad. The time it takes publications from the point of receipt to the patron's hand as a fully cataloged item complete with call number and subject headings has dropped considerably. Since access is the name of the game, as it were, in the library world, this quickened rate of accessibility to the patron is almost worth the associated problems of worker welfare, etc. *However*, I *do* resent the fact that the University Administration resists the problems associated with CRTs, and I *do* resent the fact that people's interactions have been altered to the point of petty arguments about whose terminal is whose, etc., and I *do* often feel like smashing the terminals at the end of a long session of searching/inputting.

So, anyway, that is my position.

C.S. — Berkeley CA



Dear PW:

Since I met you last July I've moved to New Yawk City, where I am now staff editor of a "consumer computer magazine" for "educational, home and business uses of a new machine... and so I penetrate further into the belly of the beast, and as I go the PW critique/analysis of the world of work makes more and more sense... Of course, I've already tussled with my editor (who is sexist, infantile and a nurd — very sweet but the jokes he makes about Charo...) over style. He's a mother hen who wants to make his baby (this new magazine) a successful offspring of the publishing company's other horribly successful magazine... and where is the room for cultural critiques of computers in people's lives?...

So what am I doing here?.. it is still true that writing articles is inherently less boring than writing software user's manuals, although new products blurbs and reviews of programs that do tax returns at home aren't exactly fascinating. And it's quite remarkable how the editor dumps the routine shitwork on the women on the staff, and leaves the "fun" stuff for the males... I found myself reading *Games Mother Never Taught You*, expertly discussed in a PW a few issues back, just to understand what the fuck was going on around me. An evil book, that...

Of course my bad attitude shows here, and I wonder what outcome my move here will have — I know I'm fundamentally alienated from what I'm doing whereas my editor is happy as a clam about the whole thing — and it can only be a matter of time until he psychs that one out...

But here I am, cranking out copy... my one hope is to slip in my glimpses of another way of looking at the world by trying to get an article I'm working on on the ethics of software piracy published (I see them as the analog to graffitti artists, turning the whole concept of private property on its head), mentioning PW in the publications section of 'my' new products column,

etc...

Living in New York is quite something. The sexism, the money is all that matters, everyone is out for themselves. None of the Bay Area living lightly on the earth/ecological sanity stuff here. It is a city where there is no access to anything without money, and with a class/caste system that rivals anything a medieval city would have to offer. I find myself incredibly resentful that I cannot live on the salary I'm paid (because of my rent and utilities, which are both three times higher than the Bay Area)... I will have to moonlight. Dammit, it's enough that I put 40 hours a week into a windowless airless closet staring at a VDT! I've only been in NYC for about 6 weeks, and am reeling from the culture shock.

P.B. — New York



Dear Processed World,

This is a piece I wrote which I distributed via bathroom and inter-office mail to secretaries while working as a Kelly Girl for a big company...

*BEING NICE*

Almost everyone, unless they're very

lucky, or unless they don't care, experiences some conflict between Good (later to be known as "idealistic") and Crummy ("reality"). There is a conflict between what is moral and what gets the job done. In the world at large women are moral so men can go to work without feeling guilty.

Although women don't stay home and care for the cradle of morality much anymore because they have to make money, the situation works about the same way in the office. Women have a kind word in the morning, and it's expected of them. They make an effort to look nice. They feel bad when things go wrong. They put up the Christmas decorations, which are a little silly, but make amidst the beige feel a little better anyway. Women talk about things like parties and food and clothes, which often proves to men what they thought all along, that women can't really think about much that's serious. But nice words and pretty faces help men through the day. Without them, they might realize how heartless their efficiency and profit-morality can be. And they might not make it to happy hour, and might not be able to negotiate



million-dollar contracts for nuclear weapons basing systems without feeling bad.

Men also resolve their personal moral conflict in the office (if they still have one and haven't been completely numbed by company policy) by being nice. They don't have to be nice, and they know it. Sometimes they aren't nice at all and make demands without bothering to say thank you or please. But when they are nice it's really nice and they feel much better for it, even though it's something that's always expected of women. And women are very grateful.

Lots of times women don't feel so much better being nice because they have to be nice. It can take a lot of energy and patience sometimes to smile and say "of course" and do something that doesn't make any sense to you or to the world. And it can be very difficult to do a lot of detail work that the people you're doing it for don't think is very difficult. It's just word processing, and you're a word processor. It can be very difficult to continue to care.

Women don't get much out of being nice. They don't get paid as much, even though they take more of the burden. They don't get to go out to lunch for long, and the company doesn't pay for it. All they can do is spend a little time in the bathroom now and then. And wait for the weekend.

There is, of course, the possibility of not being so nice. That could make working a bit less pleasant, but at certain moments it might be appropriate. Like when there's an unreasonable request. Like when someone else feels like a mean bastard and wants you not only to take his feeling but to come back being nice.

Things aren't always so nice. Things

that the company does aren't always so nice. Sometimes by not being nice it makes those uncomfortable or upsetting things a little more clear. And makes what you think about them clear, too. And how you feel. Just because women are supposed to feel, it doesn't mean we can always feel good about things. Sometimes it's good to feel that things are really crummy...

And do something about it.

L.F. — S.F.



Dear PW:

US Government office workers are among the most processed anywhere, especially since Ronnie Ray-gun zapped the air traffic controllers. Ever since then the government employee "unions" have been meek as kittens (before that they were only as meek as pussy-cats).

Here at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (DHUD) workers have watched passively as virtually all housing programs for the poor were gutted. The predictable result is that we ourselves have been subjected to cruel and unnecessary "Reductions In Force" (RIF), obviously designed not to save money but to intimidate workers. In 1982, for example, some 8-10 employees were laid off using the RIF process but along the way about a hundred workers were moved around, down-graded and subjected to terrible psychic stress.

This year (1983) about 20 computer operators and an equal number of library workers are being RIFed. Not that there's any lack of work, of course, management has just discovered a new form of exploitation.

The process is called "contracting-out." The agency offers to sell these jobs to the lowest bidder. A number of

## Public Poetry Part II

### Headlines

Artists Banned From Universe

"We hired you to paint us a picture!"

by Linda Thomas

companies compete to see which can offer to do the work for the lowest possible price. None of them employ organized workers, of course, and all of them explicitly promise to browbeat, oppress and exploit their workers to guarantee no "labor unrest." Part of the deal is that anyone the DHUDs don't like will be fired — no questions asked, no hassles, no reasons.

You might have expected the employee's representative (AFGE) to protest, picket, or somehow fight to protect the workers' jobs. Nothing of the kind. The union let out hardly a peep — no voices were raised. Ray-gun has set the stage perfectly.

As a final note — the firings are scheduled to be effective on December 23rd, 1983. Merry Xmas!

On our new collective bargaining this year the only really positive note was the inclusion of a clause requiring some attention to the safety of Video Display Terminals.

Given the atmosphere in DHUD these days I would appreciate your not using my name.

KEEP IT UP!

G.F. — Reston, VA



Dear Processed World,

In an otherwise excellent analysis of the phone strike in issue #9 ("*The Line You Have Reached... Disconnect It!*"), Lucius Cabins should have gone further. Why expose the "moribund and obsolete strategies imposed by a decaying trade union movement..." without critiquing the pathetic 'demands' this union was fighting for. As the article noted, "AT&T overcame union demands for guaranteed job security..." and "No specific job protection guarantees were made." C'mon, the unions (and Cabins) should stop pretending and wake up to the modern world. Guaranteed Job Slavery (GJS) is a dinosaur that is now impossible and never was desirable. Guaranteed slavery at the same demeaning, stupid, dangerous job — forget it! The irony is that the

capitalists in their ceaseless drive for production efficiency strive to decrease human labor. Those fucking unions would keep us working like mules forever.

Regardless of the unions' nostalgic demands or wimpy concessions, new technology and automation are (and should be) obliterating jobs in all sectors. For instance, robotics is replacing people in some of the most onerous and hazardous jobs — die-casting, forging, paint spraying, arc welding, etc. Sure, management is only doing it for the reduced labor costs and quality control, rather than worker safety. But the unions never seek to eliminate such jobs, their business is to reform them to create the illusions that you aren't doing the same old, dirty shitwork. Instead of bargaining for GJS, why not accept the reality of technological displacement and fight for *Guaranteed Income and Benefits*? It is only fair that corporations should bear the social costs of massive layoffs including maintaining the standard of living for its "post-employable" workers.

If such a demand seems too 'unrealistic' for you, take a look at the Greyhound strike for a dose of pragmatism. Their thoroughly realistic demands boiled down to good 'ole GUS (Guaranteed Union Survival) — at any cost. For example, no amnesty provision for the strike activists, 100 of whom got the axe. This after caving into the same 7.8% wage cut (14% including benefits) union members originally rejected. For another example of union realism, ask the 15,000 steelworkers recently laid off how conceding to large wage and benefit cuts last year saved their jobs. What a cruel hoax! In neither case did the unions possess enough militancy or imagination to counter management's quest for quantitative concessions with qualitative demands.

Such a strategy of seeking reciprocal concessions was attempted (with partial success) by three unions representing workers at Eastern Airlines. Although workers took substantial wage and

# IF YOU VOTE, DON'T COMPLAIN!

there's only one logical direction  
IN  
The  
Global  
market:

The senior officers will groom a younger generation of managers for top spots

Government and industry,  
working together,  
**TO OPTIMIZE FINANCIAL  
PERFORMANCE**  
and increase bureaucracy...

## CHANGE LIFE, NOT LEADERS!

benefit cuts, in return they gained ownership of about one-fourth of the company and *effective veto power* over the formulation of a new business plan and financial restructuring program. They also gained unrestricted access to corporate financial information but gave up their boldest proposal in which workers would have the right to call managers before a "management review board" to challenge corporate decisions and policies.

Ironically, since unions can't deliver on the bread and butter issues anymore, all that is left are the qualitative issues

over the work process itself. Unfortunately, the most common tendency is toward worker co-ownership of a corporation (often headed for bankruptcy) without workers gaining actual power over workplace decisions. This brings us to the two crucial issues unions *should* be facing: gaining effective control of the labor process (e.g. how new technology is designed and implemented) and guaranteeing that the growing number of 'post-employables' retain their standard of living. Of course that raises the question of vision. Can unions imagine (much less advocate) a



world with less workers doing even less work? Can they conceive of destroying a system in which real workers' power is inconceivable? Most importantly, how much longer will workers keep believing unions are capable of acting in their interests?

E.C. — San Francisco

lll

Dear PW,

Lucius Cabins' article on the phone strike in PW#9 was interesting and informative. However, I disagree with his attack on unionism. Unions are not "capitalist institutions" as he states, they are clearly "workers' institutions." Unions are simply organizational forms by which we can fight collectively to better our lot. Fighting collectively obviously gives us more strength whether that fight be in a factory or an office.

I believe that the present day union leadership is an obstacle in any struggle between capital and labor. And I believe the unions are inadequate instruments for bringing about a real revolutionary change in society. But, let's not throw out the baby with the bath water. Let's get rid of our unions' misleaders and transform our unions into real class struggle organizations, not get rid of them.

Cabins counterposes "direct action" to "obsolete strategies imposed by a decaying trade union movement." He should read some labor history to find out about some of the "obsolete strategies" that unions can use and have used. He should read about some of the battles of the labor movement in the 1930's such as the San Francisco general strike, the Toledo auto strike and factory occupations and the Minneapolis Teamsters' strikes.

In Minneapolis, for example, the labor movement organized unemployed councils, had pitch battles with the cops — and won. They controlled the city for a time. They conducted traffic, decided what trucks would move in the city and what ones wouldn't. They made al-

liances with farmers' organizations so that the people of Minneapolis could eat. This was all done by the unions.

These and other struggles of that period led to the rise of the CIO and a better form of organization, the industrial union as opposed to the craft union. Millions of workers were organized into unions during this period.

However, after World War II, U.S. capitalism far outstripped its competition abroad, which had their economies destroyed or badly damaged by the war. It was the "American Century." There was a tremendous expansion of U.S. capitalism. This expansion allowed for concessions to be granted to the U.S. workers in an attempt to stop the growing radicalization in the unions. The government, in collaboration with the conservatives in the labor movement drove the radicals out of the unions and consolidated a conservative bureaucratic leadership that still hold the reins today. The rank and file accepted this because during this period of concessions, the "business unionism" of this leadership seemed to work.

Today the situation is different. In spite of periodic, minor upturns, the capitalist system is in a deep structural crisis. Dozens of third world countries are on the verge of default on their loans. A single such default could mean the collapse of the capitalist banking system. The banks are demanding that severe austerity programs be imposed in these countries so that their loans can be repaid. This, and other economic and political factors, have led to a dramatic increase in revolutionary struggles of workers and farmers throughout the colonial world.

In the U.S. the economic crisis combined with the increasing competitive ability of Western Europe and Japan, has forced the employers to go on the offensive against the U.S. working class and especially our unions. Concession contracts, worse health and safety conditions, increased racial and sexual discrimination and slashing of social services are the norm today as

employers try to increase their competitive standing and profits by driving down the living standard of the U.S. working class.

As a result, attitudes in the U.S. working class are changing. There is a questioning, a groping for answers. How do you fight concession contracts? How can we insure job security? Answers to these types of questions can only be given in broad political terms. The answers point to the need to change the whole social system to one where production is organized to satisfy human needs not for profit.

The changing moods in the working class can be seen by formations such as the Labor Committee for Democracy and Union Rights in El Salvador, or the endorsement by the AFL-CIO of the August 27 march for Jobs, Peace and Freedom when 20 years ago they refused to endorse the march whose anniversary this one was celebrating. Or the United Auto Workers opposition to the invasion of Grenada. Or the discussion around the formation of a labor party that has been taking place in the International Association of Machinists, the United Steel Workers and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and other unions. These developments are reflections of the changing consciousness of the U.S. worker, not enlightened positions of the tired union leadership.

It is through this radicalization that the unions' leadership will be changed and the unions can be transformed.

For radical minded people such as Cabins to abandon the labor movement at this point would be a serious mistake. The discussion taking place in the labor movement needs to be joined by people who have a perspective that can help workers draw revolutionary conclusions. In the immediate period ahead, there will be more, and more vicious, labor battles as the employers and their government try to break our unions. We must be prepared to defend our unions and to help the unions move forward to a better understanding of what needs to be done and to organize more workers,

especially in the new high-tech and computer industries.

Those who fail to see this and who attack the unions from the left as the employers attack them from the right may find themselves in the wrong camp in the battles to come.

J.L. — Cincinnati OH

Dear J.L.,

*Radicals have been trying to "get rid of our unions' misleaders and transform our unions into real class struggle organizations" for at least fifty years — since the formation of the CIO, in fact. Their results? Countless radicals burned out, "successfully" elevated in the union hierarchy and transformed by the pressures of the situation into bureaucrats in their turn. Your picture of union "conservatives" allying with the government in the 40's to drive out the "radicals" is grossly oversimplified. What is one to make, by this analysis, of such men as John L. Lewis or Phillip Murray, architects of the CIO, who often defied the government or the corporations, but crushed dissent within their unions?*

*You talk as if "class struggle" were inherently antagonistic to capitalism. Actually, it is a primary motor of capitalist development. The struggle of the 30's, safely contained within the framework of industrial unionism, helped lay the groundwork for the post-war expansion, "shaking out" smaller and weaker capitals and establishing the "Keynesian" system of industry-wide productivity bargaining mediated by the government.*

*Of course there was another side — the early control won over output and working conditions, the experience of self-organization, solidarity and defiance of authority, and so forth. This is the side of "class struggle" which is potentially revolutionary, because it creates the possibility of a collective challenge to the ruling order. But this kind of activity must either spread and deepen rapidly into generalized revolt, or else disappear, as the radical shop-floor practices of the early CIO disap-*

peared. Contrary to fond leftist belief, this disappearance is only secondarily the result of "bureaucracy" and "mis-leadership." Far more important was the simple re-adaptation of the immense majority of workers to the (revised) norms of proletarian existence, in exchange for improvements in wages and conditions. The present state of the unions is largely the result of this re-adaptation. Membership apathy breeds bureaucracy and no amount of "correct leadership" by itself will change this.

A new workers' revolt in the U.S. is certainly possible, but it will have little to do with the unions. In the first place, their entire structure (and the labor laws which they fought for and are defined by) is designed for winning

concessions in a time of worldwide capitalist expansion. As you point out, this time is past. Secondly, the new workers' struggles in Europe and elsewhere over the past decade have centered around refusing work rather than winning more money. The stupidity, pointlessness and obsolescence of modern work escapes the unions (and most leftists) completely, but they have been the main flashpoint of revolt, in the last decade. We aren't denying the eventual possibility of large-scale workers' organization; but it won't be "unionist," since it will be the organized expression of a movement which is attacking the wage system and the money economy much more directly.

— Louis Michaelson

# PUBLIC WARNING!!



Use of this product is a known cause of

**CONCESSIONAIRE'S DISEASE**



PW,

'IN CASE OF NUCLEAR ATTACK' [PW#8] of which I made about 30 copies was a big hit around the office and created decent conversation. A burly workman delivering furniture got quite a chuckle (in a very cynical-knowledgeable tone — he caught the absurdity) from it. Others liked it so we taped it in various strategic locations. I left PW #8 around for people to leaf thru. One person made another 15 copies to hand out to friends.

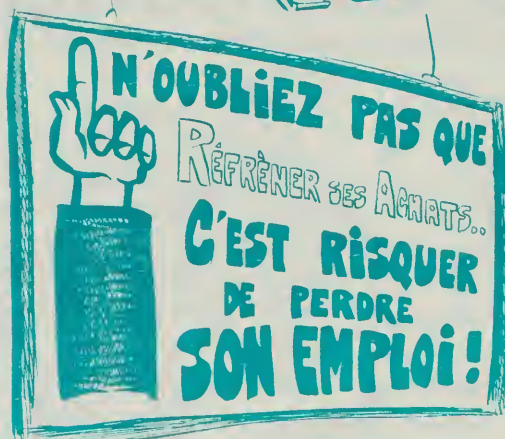
Then when PW #9 arrived I made copies of BAD ATTITUDE which I gave to potential or closet malcontents it

delivered certain sly smiles of clandestine solidarity.

Upon closer reading of #9 I ran across that very informative and thoughtful letter warning of potential CRT hazards. I copied THAT one too and left it on my boss' desk and he was duly impressed and is now going to buy any safety equipment available. But happy as that makes me it still makes me wonder about those millions of others with less sympathetic bosses.

I've thus created a bit of a stir fortified by your informative pages. Thanks for legitimizing my suspicions and my political diatribes from the past.

B.P. — New Jersey



NEVER FORGET: IF YOU STOP BUYING, YOU MAY LOSE YOUR JOB!



J.F. Batellier



# The Chips of our lives

As we walked along a ridge high above Death Valley, the desert heat rose and filled our pores. We were technical workers from Silicon Valley in search of quiet desolation. Suddenly, a boom filled the sky. A dark blue ("Navy?"), unmarked ("experimental?"), F-14-like craft ("Sure, the China Basin Naval Weapons Center is due west of here!") flew directly overhead at about 1,000 feet. Gaining altitude above the Valley, the craft dipped and spun, performing center stage for us all the amazing things its computer-driven, aluminum-alloyed geometry could do.

We took turns fixing this blue angel in our sights, countering its supersonic roar with the tight pop and lingering echo of our .357. Our bullets fell short of their target, heaving and gliding several miles across the Valley. The craft returned and buzzed us, but our smiles glistened in the late autumn midday sun. Secretly, we toyed with a force far more powerful than ourselves.

What we found at Death Valley was a noisy reminder of the death we thought we left behind in Silicon Valley: the nuclear missiles, the command and control devices, the big brother office automation systems,

and the simulated battlefields that technical workers create there. In the solitude above Death Valley that day, we had confronted one of their products on its own terms. How might we really confront the technological Leviathan in Silicon Valley — on our terms?

\* \* \*

Rush hour. A heavy metal San Jose radio station airs "career" slots for Valley corporations. An alluring voice describes the "unique ROLM culture" where "the future is now." ROLM workers design guidance systems for cruise missiles and office communication systems with surveillance features. Rush-hour-paced traffic signals inject more workers from San Jose's sprawling FMC Corp. into the queue of late model vehicles. FMC workers design and construct tanks, personnel carriers, and Pershing II launch vehicles.

At IBM, engineers joke uneasily about the next fatality on blood alley, an evil stretch of the U.S. 101 commute south of San Jose. They gripe about roving squads of security guards who randomly enter unoccupied offices to check for papers left on desktops. Too many "finds" get IBM engineers in trouble. IBM has recent-

ly contracted with the Air Force to streamline communications at the "Blue Cube," the U.S.A.F. Satellite Control Facility headquarters alongside Moffett Field near Mountain View. The Blue Cube commands and controls virtually every U.S. military intelligence and space navigation satellite as well as listening outposts from Greenland to Turkey.

Business is brisk at a Valley watering hole that discounts drinks to patrons sporting polo player logos on their shirts. Lockheed Space and Missile workers awkwardly avoid being overheard talking shop. They bitch about waves of security guards, elaborate screening devices, and fatal accidents in Lockheed's massive parking lots. Lockheed makes missiles to order. Most of the orders issue from the Lawrence Livermore Labs (LLabs). The LLabs house plutonium triggers and are nestled on a web of active earthquake faults a few miles inland from the Valley. Technical workers at the LLabs, which is funded by the Dept. of Defense and managed by U.C. Berkeley Board of

Regents, have designed virtually every U.S. nuclear weapons device since the Manhattan Project.

At the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in Palo Alto, researchers speak cryptically about new computers they will requisition to fulfill defense contracts. SRI workers do pure military R&D on VLSI (very large scale integration) computers for missile guidance applications; they also design tedious plans to load maximum firepower into C-130 transport planes for rapid U.S. troop deployment.

At 800 feet and lower over (unaware?) Valley residents, submarine-hunting, nuclear-depth-charge-equipped P-3 Orion aircraft cruise ominously, landing and taking off from Moffett Field every few minutes. At least twice in recent months, huge runway fires have gone unreported. Moffett Field is the Navy's western theater air operations headquarters and a NASA research center site.

The once fertile lands along U.S. 101 from Palo Alto south to San Jose absorb more R&D funding than anywhere else in the world. Silicon Valley



## CONTEK SMILE #1

We're Bill Kissit, Senior Systems Engineer. "I love the challenges Contek sets me," Bill says. Bill is currently working on a chip that will help track down naughty peasants in Central America.

# CONTEK

*"People Like You  
Helping People Like Us  
Help Ourselves"*

is also perhaps the most military-dependent economy in the country. Additional billions from banks, insurance conglomerates, and real estate speculators fuel the technology engine. The engine fans the practical fascination of technical workers — who build today's office-accounting, intelligence-gathering, and war-making technology.

The worklife revolves around an exchange. In exchange for relatively fat paychecks, skilled people design and develop new (or revolutionize old) technology that less skilled and less well-paid people manufacture and ship. For the corporate keepers of the exchange, the profits are immense, the competition often overwhelming, and the less said about poisoned water, clogged freeways, and military applications, the better. The technology produced by the exchange is some of the most sophisticated and hostile imaginable.

The exchange generates horrible consequences: a mutant culture, a toxic physical environment, and a contradiction: workers produce tech-

nologies that threaten their loved ones, and the rest of us, with imminent danger. Management is responsible for creating the contradiction, for making the "decisions." But the responsibility is shared by technical workers who, after all, design and produce the technology and often collaborate intimately with management in the process.

Technical workers here create useful adaptable technologies, too, but as a rule, only if corporate executives see a clear and sizeable profit. Individuals who can afford these technologies — like home computers — may take amusement or benefit from them. But in design and application, most Silicon Valley technologies reflect corporate and military "needs." And why not? Corporations and the Pentagon are by far the largest consumers of local technology. Its board-room-and-war-room conception intimately influences how all of us can use and are used by it.

The logic of this arrangement depends upon the loyalty of the technical workers who make corporate and



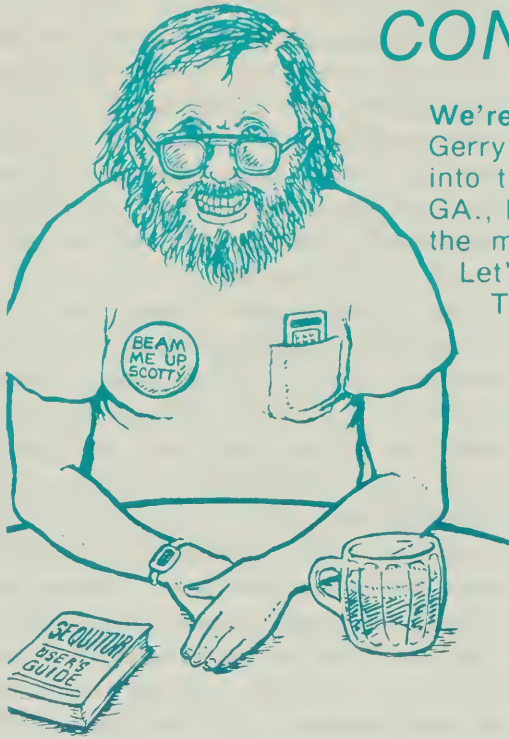
## CONTEK SMILE #2

We're Jack Twitchley, Systems Analyst, who pulls 45K a year and puts half of it up his nose. We don't mind, though. It keeps him busy. And when he gets too strung out, we'll fire him. There's plenty more where he came from.

# CONTEK

*"People Like You  
Helping People Like Us  
Help Ourselves"*

## CONTEK SMILE #3



We're Gerry Batts, Systems Programmer. Gerry likes his little joke: last month he broke into the central files at the Fort Benning, GA., Bacteriological Warfare Lab and wiped the memory. "All in fun," smiles Gerry. Let's hope he never makes any **serious** Trouble.

# CONTEK

*"People Like You  
Helping People Like Us  
Help Ourselves"*

military pipedreams into practical technologies. The engineers, scientists, and specialists (i.e., technical workers) are the key to understanding the ferment in Silicon Valley. Their labor is in most demand and least expendable to employers. Technical workers are the weak link. Rarely have so few held such enormous potential subversive power.

There are three categories of workers in Silicon Valley: "offshore" production workers, local production and office workers, and at the high end, the technical workers who design and support Valley technology. Locally, nearly 200,000 people work for high technology firms. The largest employers are the military electronics firms, like Lockheed Space and Missile in Sunnyvale, and semiconductor corporations, like giant chipmaker Intel in Santa Clara. Lockheed alone employs about 21,000 people at its Sunnyvale complex.

*Holding It All Together By  
Keeping Everyone Divided*

The working conditions for most local production workers are among

the most dangerous anywhere; it is appallingly worse for offshore workers, and generally safer for the engineers, scientists, and specialists like me (I'm a technical writer).

Worst off among Valley workers are the unseen offshore workers — the single women who assemble and package chips for Silicon Valley semiconductor firms in Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan. Most semiconductor firms employ roughly half of their workforce offshore. In exchange for 7-8 years of labor, these women receive as little as 30 cents an hour and a lifetime supply of occupational diseases.

Tragically, most local Valley workers are simply ignorant of their unseen offshore fellow workers. Offshore Valley employers, abetted by a virtual local media blackout on the topic, are tight-lipped on the details of their foreign operations: "loose lips, sink chips." (For background information on the untold story of Silicon Valley's offshore production workers see "Delicate Bonds: The Global



## CONTEK SMILE #4



We're Oprimida Menendez, Assembler. Oprimida's a real miracle worker — supports five kids and a laid-off husband on the mouse-droppings we pay her.

# CONTEK

*"People Like You  
Helping People Like Us  
Help Ourselves"*

Semiconductor Industry," Pacific Research, 867 West Dana St., Mountain View, CA 94041).

The division of labor among local workers reflects the Valley's status quo sexism and racism as well as the ferment peculiar to high technology companies. Production workers tend to be female, Chicano, Filipino, and Indochinese; entry-level pay varies from minimum wage to \$6-7 an hour. Office workers, until recently, were overwhelmingly female and white; now somewhat less white.

Engineers, scientists, and specialists tend to be male and white (including anti-Soviet eastern bloc refugees) with a sprinkling of Japanese, Indian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern graduates of U.S. technical schools. Entry-level salaries vary from \$22,000 to over \$30,000.

Perhaps the most conscious division between Valley workers is how they are paid; production and office workers are hourly wage workers — engineers, scientists, and specialists are salaried workers (many of whom sign their own time cards). The basic

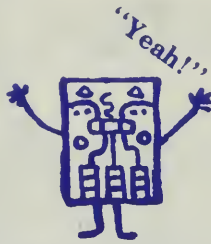
division is known in Valleyspeak as "non-exempt" and "exempt" status. Salaried workers are exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act provisions regulating the amount of overtime people can be forced to work. Their salaries theoretically reflect unpaid overtime. Wage workers are "non-exempt" from the overtime statutes. Their wage rates, generally half or less of salaries, climb to time and one-half for overtime.

The tendency is to lump high-salaried, exempt-status "professionals" together with sales and management types. But there is a trade-off. Management exploits technical workers' exempt status, often ruthlessly.

At a medium-sized company that I worked at for a year, management suddenly announced one day that it was now expecting exempt workers to put in ten hour days for the next six months. Many of us simply ignored the dictum, but others unquestioningly obeyed — initially.

At Intel, exempt salaried workers are informally coerced by management into working over 8 hours daily

"Elect me and there'll be  
Dip for every Chip!"



### Chips For President

and on weekends. IBM and Hewlett-Packard boast about job security, and a formal no-layoff policy. But IBM and HP demand regular intervals of overtime from their employees.

#### *Self-Destructive Production: Why?*

Why do technical workers often eagerly consent to design and produce the hostile and dangerous technology conceived by their corporate and government employers?

Part of the answer lies in the isolation that corporations build in to the exempt technical workers' environment. Pay, benefits, expendability, and exposure to physical danger divide hardware and software engineers, technicians, and technical writers from production and office workers. Many medium to large Valley firms maintain one set of buildings, lunchrooms, washrooms, and recreation facilities for exempt technical workers and another, less desirable, set for production workers. ROLM maintains its "MILSPEC" division at one site, and its office automation division and headquarters at another site .

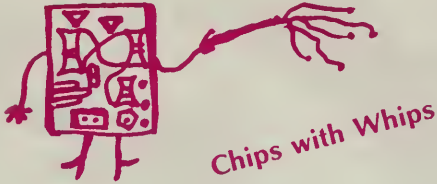
The hierarchy created by the division of labor adds to the isolation. Salaried workers have access to scarce technical knowledge; they design the commodities that make production workers' jobs an empty, alien process — deciphering blueprints, fitting mysterious chips onto mysterious green boards. This contributes to a subconscious relationship between production and design workers that takes familiar forms: out on the line, women's jobs depend upon higher-paid men who deliver the work.

The separation of a product's application from the workers who design the product imposes another crucial isolation. More and more, electronic and mechanical engineers and computer programmers are genuinely ignorant of the precise application of the products that they design.

It is now standard practice to divide design work on a task by task basis; hardware designers work on one board, or often one chip, at a time, unmindful of the application. A new, "structured" approach to programming formalizes a similar practice in computer software. Programmers write "slave" modules of code that perform relatively simple tasks, like counting transactions and storing the total in a certain file. Project leaders can assign an entire computer program design without explicitly mentioning that, for example, the Pentagon will use the software to refine an experimental missile. A project team can thus fully derive satisfaction from the intellectual challenge of successfully designing a product, yet not know what it will be used for. This way, all applications appear equal; there is no need — or desire on the part of management — for more than a handful of project leaders and marketing types to know about a final application.

Management benefits directly from this separation. Many people may not enjoy creating office automation technology and weapons systems that enslave and destroy life. But if the work appears as harmless as a game of chess and offers high pay, stock options, etc., well, so much the better for management. With clever deception, all of us are held hostage to the intimate division and manipulation of scarce skills.

Salaried technical workers are also often deeply divided amongst themselves. Everywhere I have worked, they have been unaware, for example, of each other's salary, since salaries are negotiated individually. At some

*"Beating the System"*

firms, I have heard that discussing salaries is grounds for dismissal. This makes it easier for management to hide pay differentials for women, minorities, dissidents, and those who are generally unaware of how high a salary they can plausibly negotiate. The mystery is celebrated in the myth of corporate "professionalism" that likens technical workers to lawyers and doctors — competing professional entrepreneurs with secrets to keep.

As a pre-Thanksgiving surprise in 1982, the illusion of "professionalism" was revealed when many of my fellow workers were greeted at their cubicles by grim security guards one morning. In a scene played over and over again in the Valley, the guards announced the employee's "termination," scrutinized the removal of personal property from desks and benches, and escorted astounded workers directly to the door, where final paychecks were waiting. This way, laid-off workers are informally held incommunicado until safely outside the workplace. That corporations relieve their highly paid technical workers in such a manner suggests that power such workers have to inflict immediate disruption and destruction. Before it was all over, 10% of the workforce had been "disappeared."

*Strange Fruit*

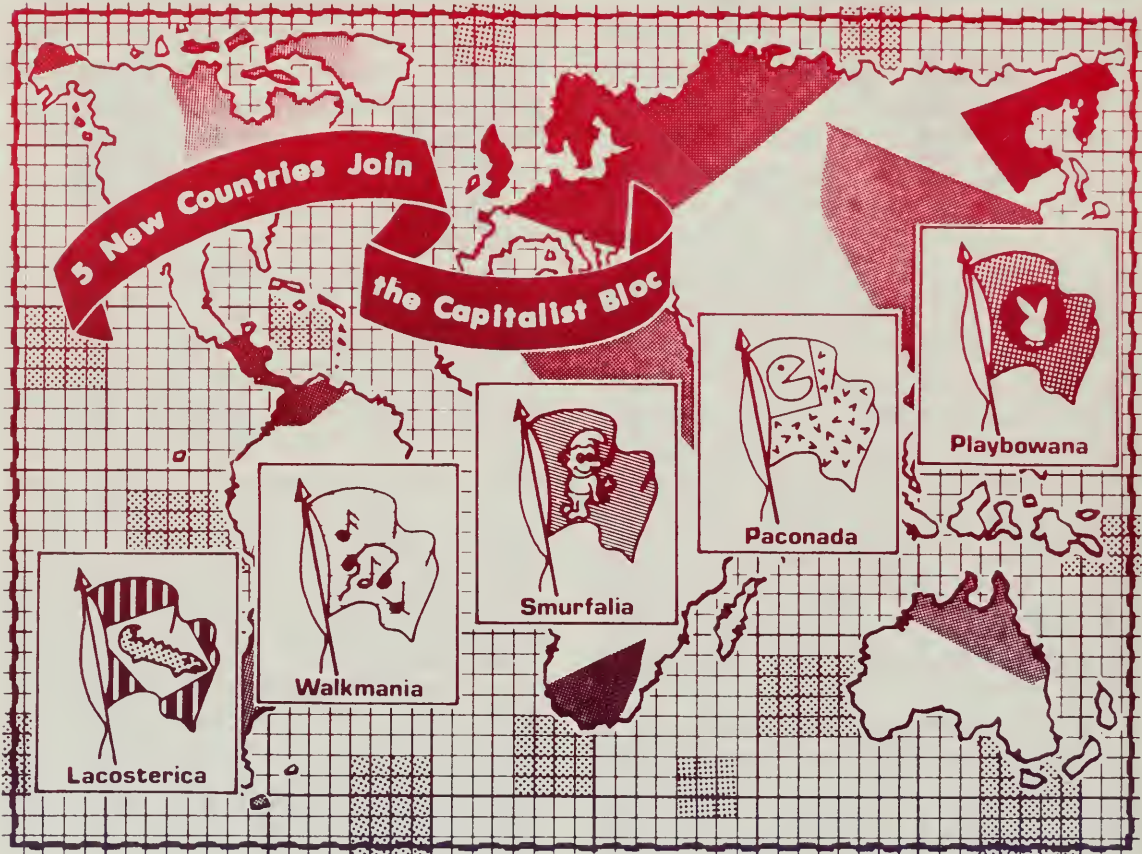
Many production workers are the daughters of migrant farm laborers who once planted, harvested and canned Valley fruit and vegetables. Today most of the fields are paved and the canneries torn down or auc-

tioned off, reminders of the sweeping, destructive power of the new technology. A new generation of production laborers works inside fluorescent hothouses amid gases and with chemicals that poison themselves and the water supply that once nourished the fruit and vegetables.

The chemicals deployed by the semiconductor industry are dangerous and persistent. Hydrofluoric and hydrochloric acids are used to etch chips; arsine and phosphine gases are used to give chips electrical properties; trichloroethylene (TCE) and 1,1,1 trichloroethane solvents are used to clean the chips. Other workplace chemicals here include benzene, chloroform and vinyl chloride. These have made the occupational illness rate for semiconductor workers three times that of manufacturing workers in general; all electronics workers experience a job-related illness rate twice that of the general manufacturing rate.

Valley corporations and private





*graphic by Valbar*

clinics notoriously understate the extent of human and environmental poisoning. In June, the California Department of Industrial Relations refused to accept occupational illness data submitted by several Valley firms. The state plausibly suggested that National Semiconductor, Signetics, Siliconix, and Fairchild were disguising the effects of toxic chemical exposure on their workers, explaining absentee rates as flu, colds, and non-work-related ailments. This summer, angry workers demonstrated at a local private clinic, claiming the clinic's doctors routinely ordered workers back to work the same day they checked in with on-the-job illnesses or accidents. The clinic collects its fees from local industry. It is standard for many Valley employers to "process" injured or ill employees at such clinics first, before sending workers to the hospitals covered by their fringe benefits.

The very substances that bring the processed sand called silicon to electrical life are destroying a delicate Valley environment and threatening workers at their workplace and in their homes with cancer and genetic mutation. The toll on the once rich Valley soil and environment is probably irreversible.

The Valley floor consists of intricate layers of gravel, sand, and clay that hold a precious water supply in underground aquifer. Before the post-WWII electronics binge, the aquifer and rich soil deposits combined to make the "Fruit Bowl of America," where half the world's prunes and a bounty of apricots, cherries and walnuts were produced. Today, underneath the suburbs, shopping centers, freeways, and industrial "parks," waste chemicals percolate through the porous upper layers like tap water through coffee grounds. Dangerous chemicals have been dis-

covered at no less than 56 sites in Santa Clara Valley. By its own admission, the state lacks the resources and obviously the will to make more discoveries.

Valley water is now an ongoing source of gallows humor. Many people no longer drink untreated Valley tap water, at home or at work. Others have learned the hard way. Miscarriages — and only time will tell what else — appeared in the vicinity of a major ground water contamination by Fairchild in San Jose last year. Recently, a private water supply company announced that it would no longer bother to drill new wells in a heavily populated San Jose area, so bad were the results of ongoing tests at existing and proposed well sites. Santa Clara county's outrageous ban on public disclosure of industrial chemical information reinforces the deadly habits of industries here.

Like L.A., many future and existing population centers in the Valley will have their water piped in. Local media and government units react to the news of poisonings by wringing their hands — and by approving vast new parcels of wilderness and agricultural areas south of San Jose for industrial development. (For confidential information on chemicals at your workplace, call the SCCOSH — Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health — hotline number: 408-998-4050.)

its doors indefinitely. The school's comparatively low teaching salaries are not attractive to Valley engineers. In 1983, the Valley's unified county school district was able to successfully claim bankruptcy (a first in post-WWII California) and deny a raise won by district employees.

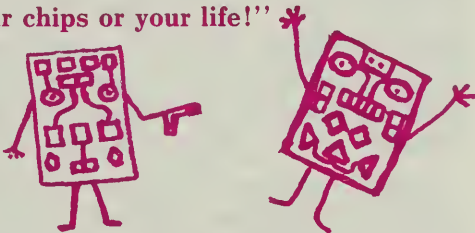
In recent months, shakeouts in the home computer industry (shortly after IBM and Japanese firms entered the market) caused huge and ongoing layoffs at Atari (1700), Victor (1650), Osborne (almost everyone) and elsewhere; in general, the slump in most non-military electronics companies caused nearly Valley-wide cuts in pay and benefits and layoffs. So tenuous are the good times here that a recent Association of Bay Area Governments study, citing crumbling roads, clogged sewers, contaminated water supplies and growing competition from Japan and Europe — warned of a collapse of Silicon Valley by the year 2000. Strange developments in a Valley that is showcased as proof that free enterprise and high technology promise future prosperity.

Today, the stage is set for many semiconductor workers' jobs to go the way of agricultural Valley jobs. State of the art wafer fabrication and assembly technology is rapidly approaching a point where entirely new automated labor processes are now financially and technologically feasible. Many production workers already experience the eerie feeling of wondering if the chip they package, the board they stuff, or the parcel they ship will be used in a missile, or a nuclear-powered submarine. Now semiconductor workers can legitimately wonder if the silicon they process will transform their job into a lower paycheck, an even more boring routine, or a job search.

The housing situation is literally impossible for tens of thousands of Valley commuters who dangerously clog local highways from mutant bedroom plots that sprout up in outlying

---

“Your chips or your life!”




---

*Corporate Cult-ure*

Paradoxes are plentiful in Silicon Valley. In the heart of technological affluence, the largest engineering school in the Valley (San Jose State) has announced it will probably close



lowlands or foothills. You must either inherit wealth or pool together two salaries to seriously entertain the idea of purchasing a home. Homes average over \$100,000 in most Valley "communities." Many two-income couples who buy homes instantly become poor homeowners.

Rental "units" in Santa Clara Valley range from \$450-\$575 for bachelor and 1-bedroom apartments — and even these are scarce. What you get is a relatively new, uninsulated set of paper walls tucked unimaginatively into a multi-unit slab. The units are as a rule cold, damp and mildew-infested during the winter, and unpleasant to come home to. Amid the presumed Valley affluence, people crowd into apartments and hand others down to friends and relatives to avoid the leaps in rent that accompany new leases. Landlord associations successfully defeated two recent rent control measures that made the ballot in Mountain View and Sunnyvale. As it is, rents increase 15-24% annually at my complex.

Thanks to the housing situation, Valley commutes are growing longer and slower at all times of the day. Forty minutes to navigate 6 miles of traffic is common. It is an hour or more for residents of bedroom com-

munities, one way! One of the reasons employers offer flex-time to salaried technical workers is simply to ensure that they will arrive at work. The Valley does have mass transit facilities — a thinly spread bus system and a workhorse train line between San Francisco and San Jose that has been in receivership for the last decade. Generally, a bike is dangerously out of the question. A car is a necessity.

The high fixed costs of housing and transportation in the Valley reinforce the attachment to paycheck. The result is tiers of wage and salary slavery; high-salaried workers, for example, who can afford their own home but little else. Valley residents pay dearly for pieces of the prosperity denied many others these days, but which were once within reach of most smokestack industry workers.

Well-to-do Valley youth cruise the streets in 4-wheel drive vehicles; Chicano youth bounce alongside in low-riders. Shopping malls, apartment units, duplex and single family ranch style homes... there is not much variety to relieve the senses in the Valley. There is little or no sense of community where one lives or shops. Even if you have money, there simply are not very many interesting things to do with it.

Quite naturally, drugs tend to fill the vacuum. Drugs for work, home, and play. During a recent holiday evening, authorities expected approximately 1300 dangerously drunk drivers on the road in the Valley. In \$300,000-home foothill communities like Saratoga, cocaine and quaaludes are discreetly sold in steak and ale houses. In plant parking lots, "crank" of every variety circulates among production workers. In the Santa Cruz Mountains that abut the Valley, approximately \$100 million in marijuana is harvested twice yearly.

Against a drab cultural and social life, "perks" like corporate-sponsored Friday-night "beer busts" and pastries and coffee every morning

create a semblance of warmth and friendliness. More than a few corporations are building country club facilities on premises. At ROLM, you can play racketball, tennis, basketball, volleyball, swim laps, lift weights, enjoy a steam bath, sauna, and shower, without ever having to leave work. For recent emigres, and there are many, a corporation can become something of an oasis from a hostile and racist Valley culture. The desired effect here is a company lifestyle that sinks a hook into technical workers whose scarce skills are indispensable to meet the competition. ROLM's is a calculated investment, and its executives are probably onto something: Valley job turnover rates are a notoriously high 29% to 35% annually.

### Subversion

It's Friday night. Four exempt technical workers have gathered in a motel-style apartment with a computer terminal, a modem, and the acquired instincts and phone numbers we could muster. On similar occasions, we have "owned" computers at universities in California and New York. My friends recently had their way with a small computer at a giant Valley chipmaker, finally trashing it just the other evening. Some of us also have lines to the computers at our own workplaces.

Tonight is special. We have just successfully connected to a huge computer belonging to a software lab of the world's largest corporation. I watch while professionals acquire privileged status, probe, and write several backdoors for future access. No trashing tonight.

Like most people, Valley technical workers grew up with little, if any, immediate exposure to open, collective rebellion against established authority. They are accustomed to taking risks — like drinking the water at their workplace — and to occasional individual rebellion — like quit-

### I SWEAR THAT CLOCK

Just as an animal is trapped  
I swear that clock is standing still  
If death is peace, then let it come  
If this is life, I've had my fill  
If sleep means dreams, then give me some

Someone still must play the slave  
And I sit bitch under my breath  
They steal my time and dig my grave  
While like a robot I behave

We work to live, and live to work  
We see the world through the tv set  
Never once letting loose to go berserk  
They praise us, thinking, "They're no threat"

The boss is just another link  
He tells us what is told to him  
He feels it as we start to smile  
Beneath his slime: the skin turns white  
The Light shines dim

By metal teeth, with no escape  
We bleed quite slowly through the days  
But this time man is trapping man  
And no one knows just who's to blame  
For all the iron claws have snapped  
And all the virgins have been raped

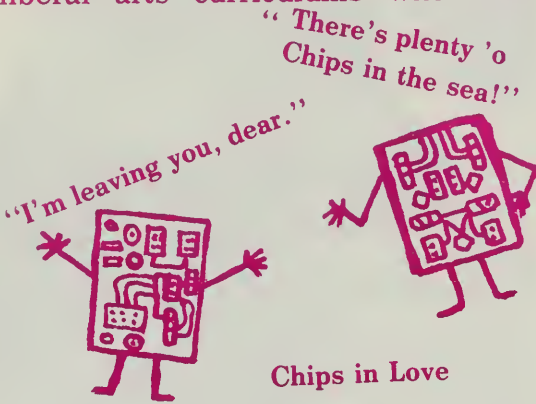
by Kurt Lipschutz

ting a job because of an unreasonable workload or boss. But they are largely unaware of the far more effective tactics of collective rebellion — tactics which generally reduce individual risks.

There is much truth to the stereotyping of engineers as conservative nerds with little or no social consciousness or overt human feeling. During the anti-Vietnam war movement, many of today's Valley engineers were cloistered in technical institutes or mathematics and engineering departments of universities. Others willingly accepted draft deferments in exchange for a classified job at Lockheed or Boeing. Today, many of these people are electrical and mechanical engineers who design anti-social technology and honestly believe

in a strong American defense against a heartless communist evil. After all, engineering grads have been conditioned to accept government technology requirements as their bread and butter since their school days.

There are also workers here who actively rebelled culturally and politically during the ferment of the late 60's/early 70's. Many were student radicals in high school or in university liberal arts curriculums who have



since found a living in computer jobs through retraining or self-training. Today these people tend to cluster in occupations such as computer operators and programmers, graphic artists and technical writers, and are generally open to subversive ideas. Then there is a whole new generation of youth, once again subject to draft registration, who are suspect of any kind of authority. It is from these latter groups that sparks of rebellion have begun to fly.

Hacking and raiding — illegal probing and sabotage by computer hobbyists — is a revealing phenomenon. Computer managers cringe at the thought of raiders breaking in. But there is generally no defense against it. The people who write computer software — including security protocols — are a deviant lot. Most programmers that I know either learn a system they've worked on well enough to break in at will, or install backdoors — private entrances — to systems. And the comradeships that develop naturally among programmers at work spill over into play. It is

commonplace for programmers to exchange the telephone numbers, passwords, and if necessary, backdoors to one or more of their corporation's computers. Often such gifts are in exchange for an illegally gotten source code to an operating system or some new program under development. Thus, on and off the job, many programmers have secret access to each other's systems — a kind of underground network.

The thought of high-tech sabotage repels some people because it can take anti-social directions that are terrifying. But the responsibility for hacking lies firmly within the system. Corporations who condemn the social irresponsibility of hacking but manufacture nuclear missile guidance systems richly deserve what hackers often give them: trashed disks, tape-worms, nightmares, and migraine headaches. Hostile technology is breeding strange rebellion, of which hacking is one obvious form. It is not the open, constructive activity that social rebellion can be, but it is an accessible form of rebellion around which a kind of counter-culture may emerge. That counter-culture can create a needed independence from the sterile and dangerous corporate culture that dominates the Valley.

It would be wrong to characterize all Valley technical workers as a complacent lot. The large and growing corporations that employ them tend to impose an increasingly irrational and rigid division of labor that makes even intellectually challenging work boring. The long, military-like corporate chains of command are natural breeding grounds for discontent.

Technical workers, especially exempt technical workers, have been spoiled by the many benefits and high salaries that they can individually negotiate due to the current high demand for their scarce skills. Technical workers may not give up these spoils easily when a greater supply of engineers and programmers makes



today's favorable labor market less so. They may even begin to discover their collective power. As it is, small, collective rebellions are already an unpleasant fact of life for Valley management. Increasing technical worker militance could clear the blurred line that currently divides and overlaps many technical workers and management here. But the prospects for battles between employed and employer cannot be confined to such one-dimensional workplace issues as salaries and benefits.


Another dimension is how conscious technical workers can become of the real social impact of their technology — not the glossy fairy tales depicted in trade and business magazines. For it is the technology here that makes the social power of dissident Valley technical workers potentially explosive.

If technical workers' loyalties continue as they are, there may be little hope for much of the rest of the world, so concentrated has the control of

technical knowledge become in so few brains. The technology itself has become so powerful that control over technical knowledge is crucial to the outcome of any sweeping social change. After all, who is better qualified to safely dismantle a missile silo, a breeder reactor, a chemical waste dump, or a Pentagon super-computer than the people who design, build and maintain such technology?

Society has endowed technical workers with concentrated power to liberate technology from the logic that currently dominates it. There are cities to rebuild and lives to remake. We have the power and practical imaginations to make lasting contributions to a new society of less work and more play for all; or we can play a tremendously destructive role in stacking the deck against these opportunities. This is not Death Valley — or doesn't have to be. Not if we begin to take responsibility for it — not if we begin to challenge the logic.

— Melquiades




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**NUCLEAR EVACUATION EXPRESS**  
SAN FRANCISCO AND SONOMORE COUNTY RTD

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 RIDE MUNI'S ARTICULATED BUSES—  
 Different destinations for each end  
 SPEED ACROSS the Golden Gate Bridge  
 Six lanes northbound  
 (No toll, except human)

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS**  
 On presentation of pass, bearer is entitled to board and ride any remaining Municipal Railway passenger vehicle, if less than 500 people are on board. Use subject to condition of roads and existence of bridges. San Francisco Public Utilities Commission reserves the right to supercede other passengers. Use will be no longer subject to any rules or regulations, other than expiration date: Time Zero plus two milliseconds

**WARNING: DO NOT EXPOSE THIS CARD TO RADIATION.**  
 Magnetic strip will not function.



## ON FINDING THE WORD "NIGHT" IN A LEGAL DOCUMENT

*Before a kind of TV screen with buttons to push, all  
unrelated to the beloved alphabet,  
and with a printer going nearby and much  
clucking and whirring  
and the steady hatchet of electronically and  
mechanically coordinated activities,  
I see words like "activities," "restrictions,"  
"committee," "commission," "employer,"  
"employee," "employee benefit," "evidence,"  
"value," "determination," "burden,"*

*going by, going by.*

*The same fifty to sixty words,  
by my estimation,*

*going by*

*in myriad variations  
over and over again.*

*In the middle of the page  
as the sun is setting  
outside of windows*

*I cannot see,  
the word "night" appears.*

*I do know and truly understand that*

*opinion evidence is the weakest and least  
reliable form of evidence. If it is rele-  
vant, however, it is for this Commission  
to determine its merit. Unless it bears  
a discernable relationship to the factual  
evidence presented in support thereof, sub-  
stantiation of which is part of the burden  
of respondent, it is of little probative  
value,*

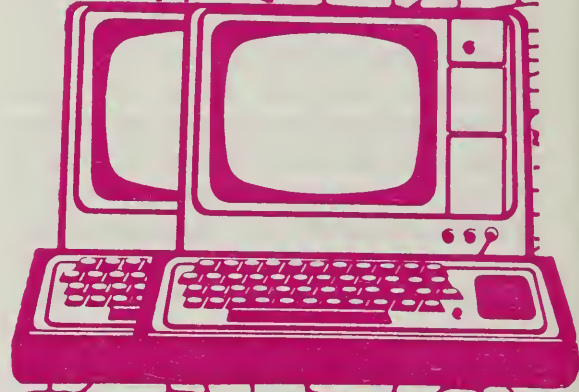
*for all I know this, the word "night"  
still provokes an illegal shudder of delight.*

*It is very real evidence.  
Night falls across the page;  
the stars begin to glow  
and a light rain falls from low clouds.*

*There is a crackling of leaves beneath the feet.  
Drops of rain slap into those  
leaves and make a growing thunder.  
The angel of my heart walks quietly beside me.  
No words are spoken and none are  
typed in on the horizon.*

*It is a special night of due process.  
I leave it for the proofreader to catch  
and give to someone else  
for attention and correction.*

by N.M. Hoffman





*Sporadic acts of sabotage against companies involved in nuclear plant construction began to take place in the region of Toulouse, France in mid-1979. This occurred at the height of vigorous, broad-based regional opposition to the construction of the GOLFECH nuclear power plant on the Garonne River. But the local anti-nuke movement reached an impasse in early 1981, when it became clear that GOLFECH would continue unabated. Despite, or because of this impasse, sabotage became more frequent and the targets more diverse.*

*In June 1983 a stolen bust of Jean Jaures, famous Socialist of the 1900's, appeared hanging by the neck from a tree in front of city hall. A "suicide*

*note," signed by Jaures and "edited" by the "Association of Mischief Makers," denounced the current Socialist government for repressive, authoritarian policies. According to the note, Jaures regretted a life wasted on the futile path of advancing the social-democratic cause, which had come to such an ignominious end.*

*In the following months, several attacks on Catholic bookstores and religious statues (including the bust of Pontius Pilate near the famous religious shrine at Lourdes), signed by a "Stop the Priests" campaign, protested the visit of the Pope and the "Vatican Multinational Corporation." That same summer a number of companies and governmental offices that*

were directly or indirectly involved in the GOLFECH construction suffered serious damage by explosion and fire.

While different groups, often with humorous names ("A Heretofore Un-

known Group") and punning acronyms, have claimed responsibility for these actions, the tone and content of their communiques reflect a common perspective. The "Committee for the

Liquidation and Subversion of Computers," known by its French acronym



CLODO (an untranslatable slang term which means something like "bum") has claimed responsibility

for six actions over the past three years, most of them involving torching or otherwise destroying computer centers. The most recent action occurred in October 1983 when the offices of SPERRY — a U.S.-owned computer manufacturer — went up in flames. Nearby, graffiti read “Reagan attacks Grenada, SPERRY multinational is an accomplice.”

Though CLODO’s emphasis on computer technology reflects a specific area of expertise and interest, they are ideologically close to the other saboteurs of the region: they claim to work as an ad hoc grouping, associating around particular actions and interests, and eschew the notion of themselves as a formal organization. They have no rigid rules and principles and tolerate considerable diversity among individual participants; they distinguish themselves from traditional left groups by their rejection of a “vanguard” role, their explicitly anti-authoritarian playfulness and a sense of humor that they wield as an ideological weapon.

One French newspaper described the saboteurs as part of an “anarcho-libertarian” movement that is based in Toulouse. In another “interview” with a group that conducted simultaneous “fireworks” at two sites of nuclear-related production in August 1983, “Groucho” explains:

“People talk a lot about the silent majority and it gets a lot of press. But there is also a muzzled minority that can only express itself through political and social rejection, because it rejects the sham of democracy. It doesn’t demand the right to free speech, the right to justice, the rights of man — it *takes* these rights, or at least it tries to. This minority exists, be it organized or disorganized, atomized in the social fabric, revolutionary or deviant. In our practice, we affirm its specific character. We have no illusions about the propaganda of ideas, but we support everyone who can no longer stand injustices and

contributes their little recipes to subvert a capitalized daily life.”

French authorities denounce the saboteurs as deranged and inhuman, always pretending that it’s only by chance that no one gets injured. In fact, the obvious caution demonstrated by this particular brand of sabotage (there have been no human casualties in the acts described here) is clearly distinct from the bombs in trains and other public places worldwide that continue to claim innocent lives in the name of this or that “liberation organization.”

The following “interview” was sent to the French magazine Terminal 19/84 (1 rue Keller, 75011 Paris FRANCE) and appeared in the October 1983 issue.

(In PW #5, Gidget Digit mentioned CLODO in her article “Sabotage, the Ultimate Video Game.” Limited information on their activities and ideas led to what I believe to be false, or in any case, premature, conclusions about the group’s ideas and practice (e.g., there is no evidence of an “authoritarian internal structure” in CLODO, as far as I can tell) .) — MH

## An End To Myths

**Why did you accept this interview?**

We’ve always felt that acts speak for themselves, and we decided to write a communique only because of a (presumed?) member of a so-called armed, and in any case ephemeral, organization tried to pass off our acts as something they aren’t. In the face of the propaganda of Power, which is particularly stupefying when it is about computers, and to end some myths about us, we felt some explanations have become necessary.

## Demystifying Computers

**Why do you do computer sabotage?**

To challenge everyone, programmers, and non-programmers, so that we can reflect a little more on this world we live in and which we create,

and on the way computerization transforms this society.

The truth about computerization should be revealed from time to time. It should be said that a computer is just a bunch of metal that serves only to do what one wants it to do, that in our world it's just one more tool, a particularly powerful one, that's at the service of the dominators.

We are essentially attacking what these tools lead to: files, surveillance by means of badges and cards, instrument of profit maximization for the bosses and of accelerated pauperization for those who are rejected...

The dominant ideology has clearly understood that, as a simple tool, the computer didn't serve its interests very well. So the computer became a parahuman entity, (cf. the discussion on artificial intelligence) a demon or an angel — but capable of domestication (computer games and telecommunications were supposed to persuade us of this) — anything but a zealous servant of the system we live in. In this way they hope to transform the values of the system into a system of values.

By our actions we have wanted to underline the material nature of the computer-tools on the one hand, and on the other, the destiny of domination which has been conferred on it. Finally, though what we do is primarily propaganda through action, we also know that the damage we cause leads to setbacks and substantial delays.

**Doesn't the spectacular, radical aspect of the destruction you cause seem a bit outrageous?**

These actions are only the visible tip of the iceberg! We ourselves and others fight daily in a less ostensible way. With computers, like with the army, police or politics, in fact, like with all privileged instruments of power, errors are the rule, and working them out takes up the majority of programmers' time! We take

advantage of this, which undoubtedly costs our employers more than the material damage we cause. We'll only say that the art consists of creating bugs that will only appear later on, little time-bombs.

To get back to your question — what could be more ordinary than throwing a match on a package of magnetic tapes? Anybody can do it! The act appears excessive only for those who don't know, or who don't want to know, what most computers systems are used for.

**Then how do you explain the fact that others haven't done similar things?**

To tell the truth, it's hard to explain! WE are in a good position to know that most computer workers really participate with their "work tools" and rarely use their gray matter to reflect on what they do (they generally would rather not know about it!). As for those who don't work with computers, they are unconcerned or they passively accept the dominant propaganda.

But that doesn't explain everything, and even those who do resist the soporifics of power are still scared of police uniforms!

### **Computers Could Be Used for Something Else**

**Aren't you really a bit retro, like the machine breakers of the 19th Cent.?**

Faced with the tools of those in power, dominated people have always used sabotage or subversion. It's neither retrograde nor novel. Looking at the past, we see only slavery and dehumanization, unless we go back to certain so-called primitive societies. And though we may not all share the same "social project," we know that it's stupid to try and turn back the clock.

Computer tools are undoubtedly perverted at their very origin (the abuse of the quantitative and the reduction to the binary are proof of this) but they could be used for other

ends than the ones they now serve. When we recognize that the most computerized sector is the army, and that 94% of civilian computer-time is used for management and accounting, we don't feel like the loom-breakers of the 19th Century (even though they fought against dehumanization in their jobs). Nor are we defenders of the computer-created unemployed... if microprocessors create unemployment, instead of reducing everyone's working-time, it's because we live in a brutal society, and this is by no means a reason to destroy microprocessors.

**Attacking Multinationals**

**How do you situate your actions in the context of France and the rest of the world?**

Computerization is world-wide. In the Third World, it helps to reinforce the ideological and economic domination of the West, especially the U.S., and, to a lesser extent, of local power. We therefore consider that our struggle is global, even if that sound exaggerated given the pin-pricks we actually accomplish.

**What are your projects for the future?**

Little by little the theory of computerization that we have been developing for several years is getting fleshed out. On the whole, though, it remains unchanged since computers are still basically being used by the same people for the same things. So there is no reason not to continue in the same direction. With more imagination, and at our own pace, even if the result is less spectacular than our previous actions. The rapid pace of automation and the forthcoming explosion of telecommunications opens a wider field of action and revolt. We will try to fight in these areas, knowing that our efforts are partial. There's room for all rebels!

**What are your chances of success? Aren't you afraid of getting caught?**

Our chances are fine, thank you.

We've got the motives and the ideas, and among the blind, the one-eyed are kings.

For more than three years a security court of the State (may it rest in peace) and several dozen mercenaries have been looking for us: their material resources are sophisticated but pretty insufficient and our last action against the information center of the Haute Garonne municipality must have shown them we know more about them than they know about us!

We are nonetheless conscious of the risks we run and the scope of the arsenal we are running up against.

May our next interview not be with a police magistrate!

Toulouse — August 1983

Translated & Introduced by Maxine Holz

Oh Clodo!  
I don't think  
we're in Toulouse  
anymore!





# CRIMINALS

The polygraph test, also known as the lie detector, is used by the ruling class — bosses and cops — to frighten the working class into submission, and to blacklist those who won't cooperate. Devices are then attached to the victim's body to measure the pulse, the blood pressure, the victim's electrical resistance of the skin, and the electrical resistance of the tongue. The polygraph is not fool-proof. It works best on people who believe in it. According to the federal Office of Technology Assessment, these are some effective ways to beat the lie detector.

**Physical Methods:** When you're answering truthfully, bite your tongue or tense your muscles to heighten your pulse rate and try to relax. When you're lying, try to relax.

**Drugs:** The tranquilizer meprobamate, known as Miltown, has helped liars beat the polygraph.

**Hypnosis and Biofeedback:** For people who have training in these techniques, they can be used to control the variables of the polygraph records, such as pulse rate, respiratory frequency, and skin conductivity, are altered by many stresses other than guilt over telling lies. Examples include fear, anger, embarrassment or guilt about something totally unrelated to the questioner's mind.

## HOW TO PASS THE LIE DETECTOR TEST

**IDEAS FOR ACTION AGAINST ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE & CONTROL:**

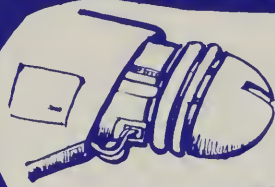
- When filling out forms that will probably be later fed into a computer, spell your name a different way each time (i.e. Karl Miller, way you can keep track of who's sharing what idea to be as reticent as possible. You really don't want to fill out that "Consumer Survey questionnaire." You, Mr. Bureaucrat, will you do if I don't tell you how many adults are living at my address?





# NEIN

to Personnel  
Information  
Systems



# DON'T PIS ON ME!

## Translator's Introduction

In Western Europe and North America, automation technology is putting a lot of people out of work. For the ruling class, it's decisions, decisions: Who to retain and who to lay off? How will discipline among the workers who are retained be maintained? How will large populations of unemployed be kept under control? What will be the relationship between employers and the state in the development of these control methods?

Computer technology used to automate offices and robotize assembly lines is being adapted to these problems. Information collected by the state, financial institutions, and employers is being computer processed into forms that can be quickly summarized, transmitted, compared and shared. Indeed, a whole new control technology is being developed alongside the automation industry.

In the U.S., the ramifications of this control technology have yet to be widely discussed, let alone acted upon. This is not the case in West Germany. Stopping the intrusion of control technologies has been an issue of public discussion and action there for several years. They even have a word — *Datenschutz* — to name as an issue the importance of preventing computer technology from robbing people of privacy and freedom. Many West Germans have already experienced the consequences of computerized state snooping. In the mid-70's a security net, cast ostensibly to crack down on the Baader-Meinhof gang, created a police state environment that few opponents of the status quo escaped (this theme has preoccupied German filmmakers, e.g. "Germany in Autumn," "Knife In The Head," etc.). In 1972 the government legislated the "Berufsverbot" policy, which barred anyone with oppositional political views from employment in the government or in education.

One focus of the W. German struggle against control technology has been stopping the introduction of 'Personnel Information Systems' (PIS) by employers. PIS systems are databases containing work-related and personal information on each employee. The following article is liberally compiled from three articles ("The Consequences of Personnel Information Systems," "Open Secret," and "Unions and Social Privacy") that originally appeared in the November 1980 issue of the West German magazine *Wechselwirkung* (Verlag Reinhard Behnisch; Mehringhof; Gneisenaustraße 2, 1000 Berlin 61).



### *The Case of ISA*

ISA is a Personnel Information System (PIS) designed to classify employees and workplaces. For every employee and workplace, an array of specific facts is gathered and stored. ISA, in its initial form, was intended to cover 300 characteristics and criteria for each workplace and employee. Data collected and stored on employees include:

- Employee training and education
- Intra-company career tracking
- Personnel Deployment and Development Planning
- Medical data

ISA provides profiles on groups as well as on single individuals and workplaces. But ISA is only the tip of the iceberg. A more extensive creation is being developed by Daimler-Benz [large auto manufacturer] and carries the acronym PSI. PSI integrates ISA data with information previously held by personnel departments. To do this, all available collections of personnel data are restructured and copied onto modern storage systems in order to be instantaneously accessible. This more

comprehensive system has the following additional capabilities:

- Payroll
- Personnel Capabilities Analysis
- Personnel Research
- Punctuality and Performance Reports
- Health Monitoring

A quick human-language software called CULPRIT is being developed for use by executives with no data processing background (requirement for using CULPRIT: knowledge of English). Access to PSI functions and databases is hierarchically organized: the higher the rank in the company, the wider the view.

In 1978 a union representative was informed of the development of ISA. In subsequent negotiations, the Daimler-Benz Board of Directors justified the system as a means of finding suitable, easier jobs for older, "proven" employees. But in order to find those jobs, they argued, they needed to perform an analysis on every job and every employee.

In the second half of 1979 the real story began to unfold. While the General Works Council [A factory workers advisory board, elected by

the workers themselves, with some "co-determination" rights. In Daimler-Benz's case, there is a General Works Council covering all D-B factories along with individual factory works councils.\*] for Daimler-Benz and the union's Board of Directors (IG-Metall) agreed to a trial run, a "poster" group [A general term, descriptive of tactics, for an autonomous, ad hoc group of workers] led a resistance campaign. By leafletting and writing articles for the factory newsletter, they convinced a majority on the factory Works Council to oppose ISA, chiefly on the issue of use of medical information.

When the Board of Directors of Daimler-Benz refused to grant the workers any voice in the matter, the council decided to protest and seek an agreement through a petition drive. Even with the summer holiday underway, around 9000 signed. As a result of this drive, the firm halted further implementation of ISA and agreed to negotiate.

Under pressure from the poster group, the Works Council sought the following conditions of agreement:

- That the system be restricted to the goal originally put forth, namely the deployment of workers with so-called "reduced capabilities."
- That the council's agreement [*Mitbestimmung*] be secured for every collection and use of personnel data.
- That medical information not be fed into ISA.

The conditions presented in the temporary agreement of February 1980 were almost exactly opposite those sought by the Works Council:

- No restriction to the original goal; rather, the company would have free reign to use ISA as it wished.
- The council would not be consulted for agreement [*Mitbestimmung*]; rather it would merely be "instructed and informed," even if the system was changed and the amount and type of information gathered was expanded.

The final agreement, settled on in early summer of 1980, scarcely differed from this temporary agreement. On July 1, 1980, the trial run of ISA was started again.

So in the end, did the opposition come to nothing? No, because it was the first conflict over the introduction of PIS into a large workplace. It showed the possibility of the social privacy debate [*Datenschutz*], previously led by liberals and technical specialists, being taken up by workers and unions, thereby changing its nature. The company pushed ISA to the limit because it knew the workers would be unwilling to go out on strike against an unknown quantity. However, when ISA's effects do become perceptible and as PSI is implemented, more workers will be willing to take strong counter-actions. The banding together of autonomous workers groups, technical specialists and media workers was an important, promising move towards more effective action in the future.



*Worse To Come*

Further developments in control technology contribute to the potential for explosive conflicts:

*Automated Monitoring of Movement:* Machine-readable identity cards can function like keys. These

cards can be used to control workers' access to each area of the worksite. Another PIS routine can draw a diagram of the workers' movements... Daimler-Benz is installing such a system at its computer center. [Bank of America, Pacific Telephone, Wells Fargo, and many other large San Francisco companies have similar systems in place in their data centers.]

*Automated Cafeterias:* on paying the check, the worker sticks the identity card into the cash register, a clerk registers the control numbers for the food and drinks, the system calculates the total and issues a cafeteria spending record, and the amount of the meal is automatically deducted from the next paycheck.

With no problem, a diet report can be issued on the employee — very interesting for personnel specialists, company doctors and insurance companies.

Most workers like to eat with their friends and acquaintances. A PIS computer routine can take the time registered on checks and calculate the order of entry into the cafeteria. This routine is known as KOMSART (Communication Structure Data — Employees) — in plain words: How often does who talk with whom?

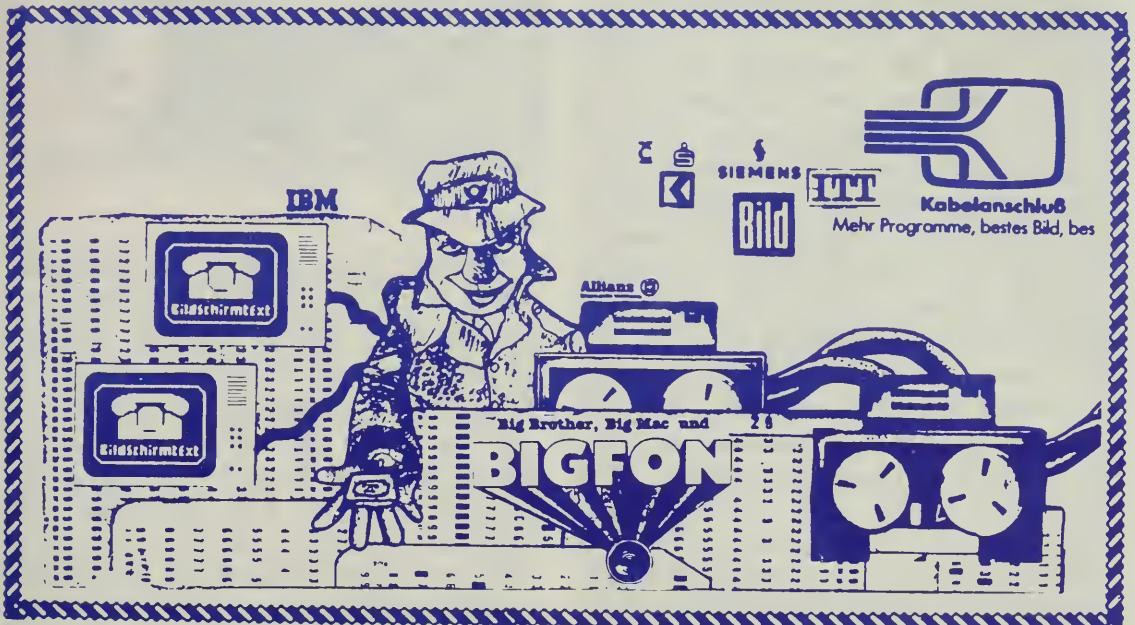
*Automatic Work Monitoring:* work-places are being equipped with machines that monitor work output. Time-study men and fat managers are a thing of the past: surveillance is continuous and approaches the thousandth of a minute in precision.

### The Role of the Unions

Quietly, one step at a time, a new kind of authoritarian control is being imposed on workers and on society at large. Complicit in this are the West German unions and their leaders, who like to be thought of as 'statesman-like'. Union policy on social privacy is snagged on distinguishing between 'normal' and 'abusive' uses of personnel data.

The 'normal' use of personnel data is permitted by law. This is the ordinary business use of information on the employee under the accepted conditions of wage labor: information on the employees, their activities, their wages, the concrete products of their work.

The 'normal' use of personnel information is distinguished from 'abuse' — such as the unauthorized transmission of data to a third party. This is the sort of activity that the law attempts to hinder, but usually in the interest of private enterprise, and



rarely in the interest of the employee.

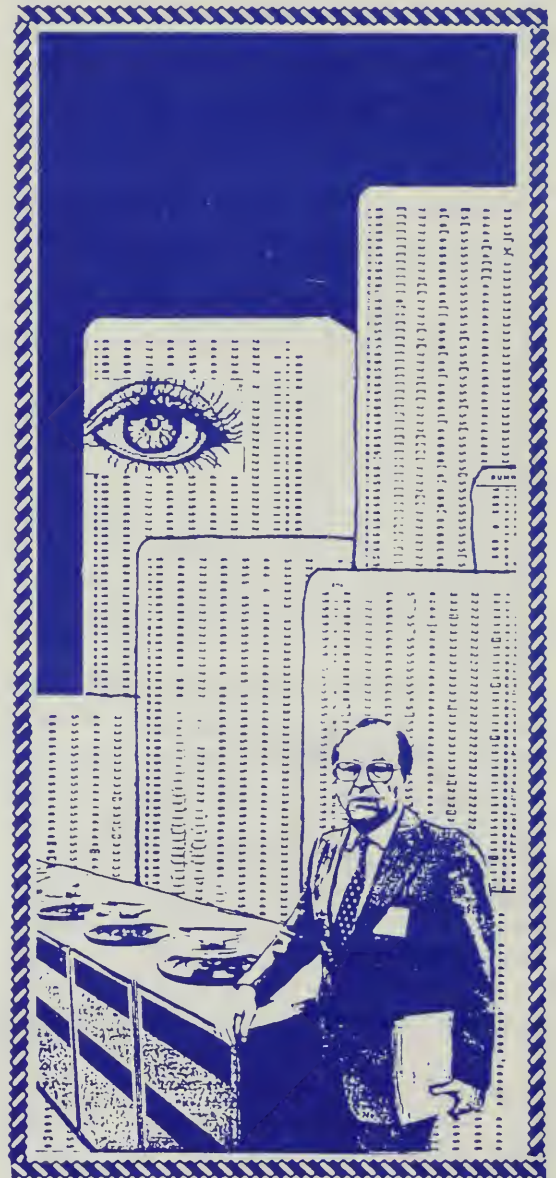
The line between 'normal' and 'abusive' use is fluid and in practice arbitrary. It fluctuates with changes in political conditions. In the Nazi period, information would be kept on whether someone was an alien worker, a prison or concentration camp detainee, 'Aryan' or 'non-Aryan' — normal data under the specific wage-labor conditions of that period, data the employers kept without any qualms.

Instead of such brutal distinctions, today's firm uses far subtler data. Of course information will be collected on whether a worker is German, Turkish, or Yugoslavian. Just as "naturally," firms have a strong interest in their employees' state of health (as the events at Daimler-Benz prove). Such information is relevant given the actual conditions of wage-labor in our time.

All data records commonly isolate and extract discrete characteristics from the personal and social life of the 'recorded' individual. The fact that a record may contain only a limited number of characteristics — e.g. the information needed for calculation and transfer of wages — may make it appear to be a minor problem. But data is being stored by social service administration, personnel information systems, and many other organizations. With the capability of rapid, flexible analysis and comparison of data elements, information processing can in principle draw new pictures of people or things. These so-called 'data shadows' are shaped more by the interests of the evaluator than by those of the evaluatee. This splintering of social and personal life into data elements and their reconfiguration for alien purposes parallels current industrial dissection and restructuring of the labor process. This restructuring is also generally accepted as normal and inevitable.

More and more, published statements by top union leaders maintain

that companies should only use personnel data in the course of the normal practice of work. But what is the normal practice of work except exploitation?



The DGB [national industrial trade union federation of W. Germany] has published a Social Privacy Manual which documents a series of abuses of personnel information by companies:

- A program allows the computer to print out a list of areas in which the women over 35 who work for the company most commonly live. The business discontinues its commuter bus service to these areas. The result:

most of the women quit “voluntarily” because they don’t have cars and can’t switch to the poorly-planned public transit system. In this way, the firm protects itself from anti-dismissal laws and gains the “co-participation” of the Works Council.

- Blacklists, naming workers who have made themselves unpopular with their employers by being active either in the union or in other kinds of opposition, are transmitted from company to company via computer. The employee, until now relatively protected by the practical difficulties of doing this, has been caught in the omnipresent net of data processing.

- Candidates for election to Works Councils, one of the most democratic institutions in West Germany, have for some time been watched by the secret police. This surveillance has been entrusted to commissioners who in the “Great German Period” before 1945 worked at deporting and murdering millions of people from all over Europe, including many unionists. How often have these officials dreamed of how much more effective they would have been for the Third Reich, if only they had had the new technology at their disposal?

The DGB has offered ideas for practical measures, too; for example, the appointment of privacy commissioners for individual companies, over which the Works Council would have veto rights. But the central point is still ignored — that is, that the exceptional ability of the new control systems to strengthen surveillance and manipulation stems from the present organization of work itself.

The unions try to defend “social privacy” against abuses from the new technology, but without acknowledging that the domination of work and workers by capital will always lead to such abuses. In other words, the union position refuses to recognize that relatively minor abuses lie on the foundations of a larger, more fundamental abuse. The unions try to

doctor ‘data shadows’ and leave the real patient and her condition out of consideration.

### *Beyond Good Behavior*

The unions are caught in their usual morass. They appeal to the state and eschew doing anything themselves. They refuse to initiate learning processes for the masses of employees and avoid aggressive public discussion on the problem of social privacy. Most important, they renounce autonomous action by the workers themselves. In their struggle against increased surveillance and control by the state, the DGB and the independent unions cripple themselves by ‘behaving.’ Only a few independent unions have managed to protest the monitoring of candidates to the Works Council by the secret police.

The establishing of “new technology”-based means of control and surveillance calls for new, enlightened responses by the unions. In that regard, political discussions should posit that the unions’ prevailing trust in the State is naive. A different

at the control point

stop  
he calls  
checklist at hand

find my dreams  
lined up  
in these books  
stories from Time

proceed carefully  
note  
longing grief hate  
for the data bank

every distortion  
corrupts the vision  
of my unstoppable  
future

by Gerd Unmack (translated from  
German by Mark Leger)

attitude must be developed, in which the workers themselves must defend and win back their democratic right to organize and their right to strike.

It is also absolutely necessary to build a 'second flank' of technical specialists to do research on behalf of workers, to have discussions on the significant dangers of these new developments, and to help mobilize workers in defense of their rights at work and in the 'political' arena. It is especially necessary to demonstrate the connection between political and workplace repression and the new technology. [A group representing a 'second flank' of the sort mentioned here is Forbidt, Eimsbuttelestrasse 18; 2000 Hamburg 50; W. Germany.]

#### *Translator's Conclusion*

*From these early conflicts and analyses, awareness of the dangers of PIS systems has grown. David Noble, in an article in democracy magazine, outlines some of the high points of the subsequent history:*

"The resistance to technology from below has forced the union officialdom to adopt an unprecedented stance of opposition to PIS. In 1980, the Public Services Union demanded that PIS systems be prohibited; in 1981, H.O. Vetter, former DGB president, acknowledged that 'we must not admit everything that is technologically possible.' Finally, in 1982, the Federal Congress of the DGB in Berlin, in a dramatic turn-around for this progressivist union, issued Resolution #7 demanding that PIS systems be forbidden by the state. But workers throughout Germany understand all too well that such union declarations, while important and indeed historic, will not in themselves suffice... Thus, the rank-and-file has begun to invent its own strategies. At the printing firm Bauer in Hamburg, for example workers have refused to distribute or sign information cards required by the company to build up its PIS database. (They realize, how-

ever, that such refusal is itself data that will find its way into the management machinery.) On the docks in Hamburg, workers have filed a class action suit against the company to try to get an injunction on the installation of a PIS. While realizing that this is only the beginning, the organizers of this action are using it to raise consciousness about the need to resist the technology (eight hundred workers signed the suit) and to question both the liberal and Marxist myths of salvation through technological 'progress.' "†

*Another thing that undercuts the credibility of union leadership is their own use of PIS systems. Using company databases, unions confirm wage rates of their members to make sure that they're not 'cheating.' Labor lawyers have also used these systems for research. In fact, Volkswagen even provided the Works Council with a terminal for their own use and on several occasions, IG Metall actively cooperated with the installation of PIS's. Union-owned companies have even installed their own PIS systems. Disgruntled workers are stuck with the usual predicament of fighting their 'official representatives' along with the company.*

*In America, we don't have quite the same fresh memory of totalitarianism that the Germans do. But totalitarianism can be subtle as well as unabashed. With its increased speed and accuracy of analysis and ability to efficiently compare and share information among employers, government agencies, and schools, the new technology could become the most insidious, hateful dictator the world has yet known. Now is the time to take steps, both small and large, on behalf of our freedom.*

— *Translated, compiled, and edited by Mark Leger, with editing help from*

*Lucius Cabins & Louis Michaelson*  
† David Noble, "Present Tense Technology: Part 3," *democracy* (Vol. 3, #4) pg. 83.



# IN CASE OF DIOXIN CONTAMINATION



1. Wash thoroughly. Rinse eyes, ears and nose with sterile water. Scrub body with wire brush or steel wool.



2. Take vitamin C; eat fresh fruits; save your apricot pits.



3. Stay away from rural swimming and camping areas. Drink bottled water. Avoid unnecessary breathing.



4. Destroy contaminated pets and dispose of safely (six inches of concrete on all sides).



5. Avoid releasing dioxin molecules into the air. Do not burn your home or other possessions.



6. Do not get too close to other people. Wear a surgical mask and rubber gloves while at work.



7. Use a condom for intimate contact with an uncontaminated other.



8. Purchase family burial cement.



9. Remain calm and pleasant. Remind everyone that chemical plant owners are having a nice day.

**Disclaimer:** There is no guarantee that following any of these precautions will prevent slow death from cancer after dioxin contamination. If you do all of the above, you may or may not survive. This geographical area may or may not continue to be inhabited. Life on this planet may or may not continue to exist. But the chemical companies will continue making profits until the very end. Remember: WITHOUT CHEMICALS, LIFE ITSELF WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE; WITHOUT THE PROFIT SYSTEM, LIFE MAY VERY WELL BE POSSIBLE.

**TWO REPLIES TO A TELEVANGELIST** by Adam Cornford  
(The following texts are excerpted from **Fundamentals**, a multi-media performance work in collaboration with Daniel Steven Crafts.)

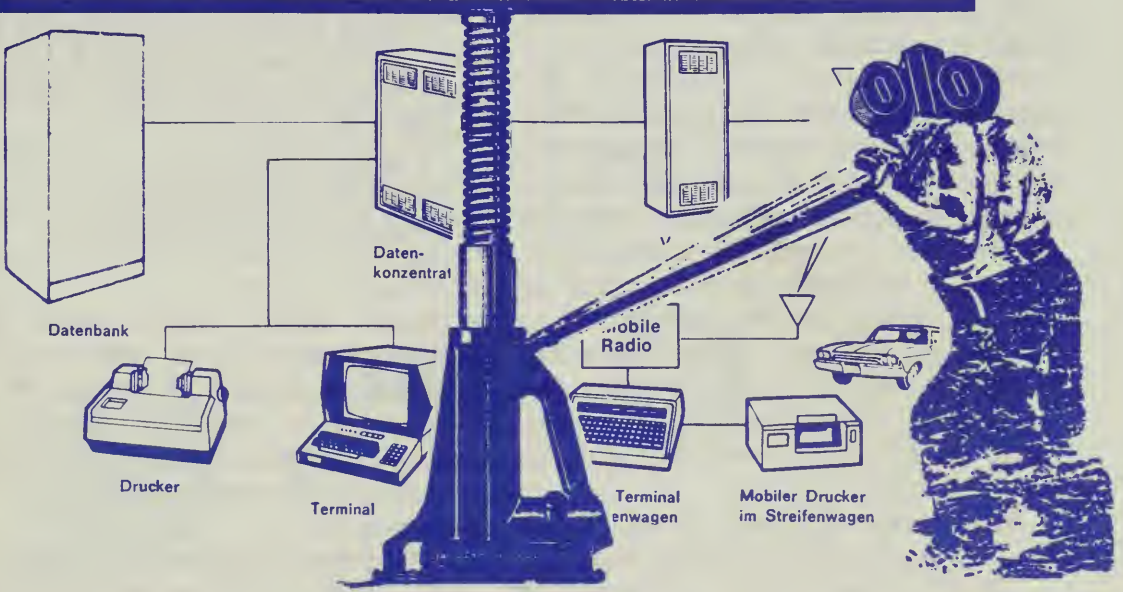


I.

But I have felt something like God  
like the God they talk about  
like being inside God's around-the-world body  
Once out on the loading dock with my clipboard  
the packages were sliding into the vans  
the invoices feeding through  
ahead of schedule for once  
everything was going like a quartz crystal watch all  
smooth quiet / shiny like it does sometimes  
I felt it all come together  
the whole order and purpose of it  
Headquarters way across the country in New York  
crawling with light / a glass wasp's nest above Fifth Avenue  
and the plant down South  
with those big black presses eating themselves  
clackety clackety clackety  
and the warehouse behind me  
and all the other offices and plants  
and warehouses all jammed with product waiting  
to go out  
Right then all of it dissolved into pure information  
this shining colorless message moving round the world  
I felt it slide through the purchase orders  
I felt it clack through the adding machines  
I felt it flash through the key entry  
I felt it zap through the invoices in my hand  
and all that just one little nerve-signal  
in God's around-the-world body  
money / blinking into product / into more money  
all of us making it grow / shining and colorless  
enormous / and grow more / forever and ever  
that must be what we're supposed to be doing  
making God grow

II.

He's all wrong about Hell  
 Hell would be the warehouse on a cold wet afternoon  
 the shift loading as usual / vans in and out  
 the phone rings in the office / the forklifts  
 whine backing up  
 but nobody says a word / nobody says a goddam word  
 everybody goes nonstop / flat out / right on the money  
 and all total strangers  
 No Charlie to piss blue about the schedules  
 no Beth to snap wise-ass like her gum  
 no Julio to smoke up the men's room / laughing  
 like a gone vertical hold  
 no bitching and fuck jokes over machine coffee  
 no baseball talk / strike talk / flashing out of the beer  
 after the shift  
 No after the shift  
 Just two in the afternoon / it's raining  
 and I can see my breath out on the dock  
 vans in / vans out / the phone always ringing  
 Nothing but that / forever



RESPONSE  $\lambda_2$



RESPONSE  $\lambda_1$

Figure 5 Earth features in two dimensional observation space

# Grumbles



# Down



# Below

---

Wednesday — 2:12

*A corporate information center at Bank of America. The attempt is to control: the decor is plush, it impresses and stimulates production; the light is fluorescent, it illuminates evenly and flatly; the air is filtered, it whooshes out of ducts; the people are paid and supervised, they work.*

Lupe's stomach growls. She is hungry. Susan, her boss, isn't back to relieve her for lunch. Lupe never has a regular lunch break. Besides the discomfort of working on an empty stomach, she can never make plans to eat with friends.

Mike stops by her desk. "You haven't had lunch yet, have you?"

"No. I called Martha at Schmidt & Hein. That luncheon thing that Susan went to was over at one. The bitch is probably out shopping with Irene for another dress to cover her ugly body."

"That's awful. How can..."

Lupe raises her eyebrows — office code for 'the boss is coming.'

Mike shuts up. "Well, I gotta go pay some bills."

Lupe grabs her coat and bag lunch.

"I'm out of here!"

Mike is outraged. He knows that it's illegal to delay lunch breaks that long. He looks up the law, photocopies it, and later that afternoon shows it to Lupe.

"I know it's illegal."

"I would say something."

"I know. I'm tired of this."

Thursday — 1:56

Susan finally comes back from lunch. Instead of as far away from the building as possible, Lupe goes to the breakroom to eat her lunch. She finishes quickly and uses the typewriter of an absent secretary to prepare a memo.

"Attached please find a copy of section 9 of the Wage and Hour Code as well as a copy of section 5.4 of the *Corporate Policies Guide*. Please note



that..."

Thursday — 3:15

Susan reads the memo and immediately buzzes her boss, Irene, the Directing Information Network Specialist.

"Don't worry. Come to my office. We'll talk to Employees' Assistance and get their advice."

Mike hears the bleep of the conference call 'squawk box' in Irene's office next door and listens.

Thursday — 4:46

"Lupe, Employees' Assistance dictated a response to your memo that Irene is going to present to you tomorrow. She's going to say that Susan has professional obligations that frequently require her to be out of the office between 12 and 2 o'clock. You are her support staff and have to work around her schedule. Since you, in their words, 'expressed an interest in having the meal policy clarified,' they're going to offer you two choices. You can either go at 11 everyday, or you can be more flexible and be prepared to go anytime before 2."

"Professional obligations my ass! If she's not out shopping, she's giggling over pasta salad with her girlfriends

or fucking Tom Provost. And they're still breaking the law. It says that a worker gets at least a half hour meal break after completing between four and five hours of work. Since we start working at 8:15, the latest they can keep me is 1:15. And what do they have to say to the fact that everyone else in this department can plan their lunch hour except me, even though there *are* people who can stand in for me?"

Friday — 10:20

"Lupe, Sam Walks at Employees' Assistance is an expert. How can you sit there and try to tell me that you know more about wage and hour law than he does?"

"But Irene..."

"Susan has a very busy schedule. Information specialists have many professional responsibilities. You either have to adjust or you'll be stuck with a solution that is inconvenient for all of us."

Lupe cannot speak an uninterrupted sentence. Irene is red-faced and shrill. She resents Lupe's "insubordinate" demands, — and she carries grudges.



*Tuesday — 11:23*

Lupe is out sick today. Mike walks past her work station. Irene is going through Lupe's cabinets.

"These should have been distributed two weeks ago! My god, if Mr. Prushing found out that we have been sitting on these, he'd have a fit!"

*Wednesday — 8:21*

"Lupe, Irene went crazy when she found those FB regs. She found some other backlogged mail, too. She's gonna come down on you today, some shit about 'corrective counseling' and probation."

"Shit! They cut the staff, pile on more work, ignore me and my problems, and now this! They've never gone through my work station before, why now?"



*Wednesday — 3:56*

"If at the end of this thirty day period, Lupe still has not improved, procedures will be followed to remove her from her current position."

Throughout the reading, Lupe stares disgustedly at Irene.

"Do you have any questions?"

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"Are you suggesting this is retaliation?"

"I'm not suggesting anything."

"If you have any questions about the content of this document, you may bring them up now. Before you go, though, I need you to sign at the bottom."

"I'm not signing this."

"Your signature merely indicates that this discussion took place."

"I don't sign my name to lies."

*Friday — 10:20*

A lawyer's office, a room in a renovated house in a still mostly seedy part of town. The walls are decorated with the usual professional credentials and a Nicaraguan poster depicting striking workers.

"They have improved on my lunch hour, but they're still erratic. They're watching me like a hawk — it's like working in a concentration camp. Even the other workers say they're getting harsher treatment."

"Unless they actually fire you, we don't have a very strong case to do anything. My advice is that you find another job. Certain aspects of the law may be on your side, but they've got the real power in this situation."

*Monday — 9:05*

"That was a big help. 'Find another job.' The market is tight. I'm not going to get a good recommendation from this place. And the next set of bosses is likely to be as bad as these."

"I talked to Roxanne in the archival center this morning. Their new boss, Earnest, is pitchin' to graduate Asshole Cum Laude from the Irene Frank School of Management. We should all meet and talk this stuff through."



Can you name  
these famous  
TV personalities?

Wednesday — 5:26

*The staff from the library and records center are sitting around a booth in a downtown gay bar. Other similar groups of people, mostly gay men and straight women, are scattered around the black, silver and smoky pink room. None are talking with the intensity of the seven people here.*

“What gets me are the little personal privileges that they demand. Alone, they’re nothing, but they add up. They’ve learned not to do something blatant, like ask us to get coffee, even though some of the secretaries still do for the attorneys. It’s the petty stuff — like when we’re all sitting down, doing our work, and Earnest asks us to close his door because a private phone call has come in or something. I mean, he could get up and close it himself, but Noooo!...”

“I hate how Irene returns files to me to put back in order after she’s read them. It’s not that much trouble to try to keep them in order as you go through, but she just can’t be bothered.”

“Yeah, Earnest does that, too. If we were to take a file that he had looked at and put it back on the shelf ‘as is,’ he’d get all mad the next time he looked at it, saying it wasn’t in ‘logical order.’”

“When I first came on, they told me that line 8 was my personal line. Irene took it away, saying she needed it for her own use, and I was making too many personal calls, anyway. So I use Mike’s line, but if I’m on it for more than a minute, or if it looks like I’m having fun, Irene comes on and interrupts. But then she turns around and talks to her boyfriend or this or that other person for a half hour, hour at a time.”

“What about those meetings?! Those things are fucking tea parties! Silea says that they’ll talk about cooking or dogs for hours, ain’t that right Silea? And they get pissed at us if we’re not working every minute.”

“Yeah, it bugs me how Earnest is always looking over my shoulder to see if I’m really working. When I come to work, I work, and he knows



that. Sure, I could work harder. But I don't want to go home so exhausted that I don't have energy to do anything else. And I don't need some asshole looking over my shoulder all the time!"

"When I was hired, they told me I'd only be filing for six months at the most. By then a legal secretary job would be opening up and I'd get that. Well, it's been a year and a half, and the only thing that's been promoted is that turkey op officer who made me that promise."

"Me, I don't give a fuck about getting ahead in this stupid corporation. I just want to do what I have to do to get my paycheck and go home to live my own life."

"Really! What kind of person gets into New Ways for Filing Papers!"

"I *would* like it if we could plan our own work. Or if they started training programs for us like the supervisors have."

"Train us to do or be what? Corporate ditz queens? What good is this work anyway? They don't make anything anybody could really use. At bottom, it's about keeping track of some rich peoples' bank accounts or stock portfolios."

"No. Silea has a point. I mean, you're right, but it never hurts to know what they're up to. And it can make the work more interesting."

"Training programs are OK, but we gotta push for the more immediate stuff..."

"Like the least work for the most money!"

"I hear that!"

"No, I mean like Lupe's situation. Having a lunch at 12 or 1 is basic. Keeping her waiting till 2 or 2:30 is wrong. I think we should try to deal with that."

\* \* \*

The tactic was chosen by common agreement. If Susan was late getting back from lunch, the workers would take turns covering the information

center. Irene would probably forbid individuals from doing this. In this event, the individual would ask, "Well, when is Lupe supposed to get her lunch?"

The workers would continue to relieve Lupe until the matter came to a head by Irene threatening disciplinary actions against them. At this point, all available workers would sit in for Lupe. (Mike would later buy a bottle of sparkling cider to keep in the breakroom fridge for just such an event.) Under no circumstances would the workers leave the worksite until Irene agreed to regular lunch breaks with no retaliatory actions against insistent workers. Instead, they would take a sit-in, sit-down, keep-cool approach.

They also decided not to let 'little things' pass uncontested. A file would remain disorganized after a boss had looked at it. Doors would not be closed at bidding. Attempts to interrupt telephone calls would be firmly rebuffed. Snoopers would be told to back off. Such contestations would by nature be spontaneous: everyone agreed to support each other as occasions arose.

\* \* \*

"But what if I ever want a recommendation from Irene?"

"Would you trust her to say something nice about you? Not me. Anyway, that's maybe and in the future. We've got problems here and now."

"Aren't you scared?"

"Yeah, but after a while, there's just so much shit you can take."

~~~~~

*The events and conversations of this story, except for the mechanics of the organizing response, are reconstructions of real happenings.*

— by Paxa Lourde



AREN'T  
YOU  
HAPPY?



Aren't you thrilled by your challenging, well-paid job?  
Aren't you ecstatic about your personal relationships?  
Aren't you deeply secure about our nation's leadership?  
Aren't you overjoyed with the comfort, safety,  
and friendliness of your home and neighborhood?  
Aren't you just like the happy family in the picture?

NO?

If, on the other hand,

- your job would put a speed freak to sleep,
- your pay barely keeps you in instant mashed potatoes and cockroach repellent,
- you live in a shoebox but pay enough rent for Hearst Castle,
- you and your husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend take turns having the headache,
- you get cold chills every time "our" troops score another stunning victory,
- you think the government is being run by maniacs with cash registers for brains,

Then JOIN THE CROWD at the

# End of the World's Fair

MAY 12, 1984

U.N. Plaza, parade to Dolores Park  
in San Francisco

Costumes, floats, theater, music, dancing, conversations  
**NO POLITICAL SPEECHES!!**

**Dress Wildly and come and protest/celebrate whatever you want**

For more information call 415-626-6048

.....

# THE UGLY TRUTH ABOUT...

# VDTs



## BIRTH DEFECTS

In 1980, 4 out of 7 babies born to VDT operators at the Toronto Star over a 3 month period had foot, eye, heart and throat deformities. In 2 years, 7 out of 13 Air Canada VDT operators miscarried. At the Federal Solicitor General's office, not one of 7 pregnancies of VDT operators in 3 years has resulted in the birth of a healthy, full-term baby. Four women had miscarriages, 2 babies had bronchial ailments and one was born premature. At the Defense Logistics Agency in Atlanta, GA, 3 birth defects and 7 spontaneous abortions occurred in 1 year among 19 pregnancies among Sears Roebuck VDT workers in Dallas, TX. These "statistical clusters" are extremely unlikely in the population at large. The US Center for Disease Control reported the chances of the Sears "cluster" at 6 in 10,000.

## CATARACTS

In 1977, two New York Times copy editors developed cataracts after using VDTs for one year. US National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health confirmed that the cataracts

.....

*Pandora Pennyroyal sent PW this VDT information. Being three months pregnant, she tried to limit her VDT work to 1 to 2 hours daily... and was fired. Her story has a "poor but happy ending." She was hired at a natural foods cafe, for "a bare bodkin above the minimum wage," slinging vegetarian hash with "all the right people," close to home. Good luck... and thanks for the info!*

were radiation induced, but refused to link this to VDT use. Radiation-induced cataracts have occurred more frequently among copy editors, clerical workers, air traffic controllers and programmers than among the general population.

## and MORE

Listlessness, headaches, muscular tension, high stress, skin rashes, eyestrain, insomnia, dizziness, indigestion and loss of appetite and depression are frequent complaints of VDT operators.

## ABNORMALITIES

The primary form of radiation from VDTs is in the extra-low frequency range. Studies of this type of exposure report interference with the growth of young animals, changes in blood composition in human and other animals, bone tumors, abnormal bone healing, and nervous system dysfunction. In addition to the low frequencies, VDTs emit radio frequencies, infra-red, ultra-violet and soft x-ray radiation. It is known that the eyes, reproductive organs and brain absorb radio frequency waves more quickly than other parts of the body.

## SAFE LEVELS?

Government has set "safe levels" of radiation exposure from VDTs based on the risk of fatal radiation-induced cancer. In other words, adverse health effects which are not fatal are a socially acceptable cost of this technology. The occupational exposure standard in the Soviet Union is 100 times lower than in the US...

Some suggestions for reducing the risk to health:

1. Try to get metal shielding around the cabinet, especially if the cabinet is plastic. They cost your employer approximately \$20-\$30 per shield, and they significantly reduce the leakage of low-frequency radiation.

2. Insist on regular rest breaks, and try to set a maximum operating time per shift, filling in the rest of the shift with more varied work. Make sure you take your breaks away from the terminal. Look away from your screen every half hour and focus elsewhere. Get up and walk around, to the restroom or wherever, every hour or so.

3. Make sure your machines are tested regularly for radiation leaks. Different models and different units vary greatly in the amount of emissions they produce.

4. Report any health effects, such as skin rashes, vision problems, or others mentioned above, immediately.

5. Pregnant women should try for reassignment during pregnancy.

6. If you have company-provided insurance, make sure it covers annual ophthalmological exams. Have a test before you begin your

VDT work so you can document any changes which develop. A "slitlamp biomicroscopy" is the test used for cataracts.

7. Try to get a machine with a detachable keyboard. Exposure decreases exponentially for every inch of distance you put between yourself and the machine. Varying the position of the keyboard also makes work easier on the wrists. Get the best lighting for minimum glare, and insist on a comfortable chair.

8. Avoid VDT jobs in large rooms with many terminals, such as at newspapers. The fewer VDTs around you, the lower the exposure you receive.

9. Organize with co-workers to resist productivity monitoring by keystrokes per hour, which is made possible by this technology.

10. Successful suits have been brought against employers by VDT operators, but accurate records of machine model numbers and time spent on them, as well as any symptoms you notice, greatly increase your chances of winning a court case, should that become necessary.

Write **Processed World** for other sources of information.



**WATCH THEM CAREFULLY!**

*Processed World, 55 Sutter St. #829, San Francisco, CA 94104 USA*



# COMPUTER STRIKES IN ENGLAND

In 1979, and then again on a larger scale in 1981, government workers in England went on strike for higher wages. Generally referred to as “civil servants” strikes, only a small percentage of government employees actually stopped working. These strikes were among the first significant collective actions by computer workers. In the 1981 strike, 3600 computer workers withheld their labor, striking on behalf of the half-million British government workers.

The '79 strike differed from the '81 strike in that the earlier one was against a Labour government supported by the TUC (the British union confederation — which was closely linked with Labour in trying to impose a “social contract” with a low ceiling for wage increases) and the latter one was against a Tory government apparently opposed by the unions. Therefore, the 1979 strikes were more often wildcats, whereas the 1981 civil servant strike was a well-organized union affair. Nevertheless, in both cases, the unions acted as good auxiliaries of the government (and of capitalism).

To understand the situation in England (where computer staff is often unionized) we have to consider

two crucial relationships:

- 1) the unions' attempt to include computer staff in their general strategy, i.e. to have tighter control over a too-autonomous rank and file;
- 2) the capitalists' attempt (via the government) to draw up plans to reduce or eliminate the impact of possible industrial actions.

In 1978, prior to the actual computer staff strikes, a Labour government report made recommendations to counter this eventuality. This report:

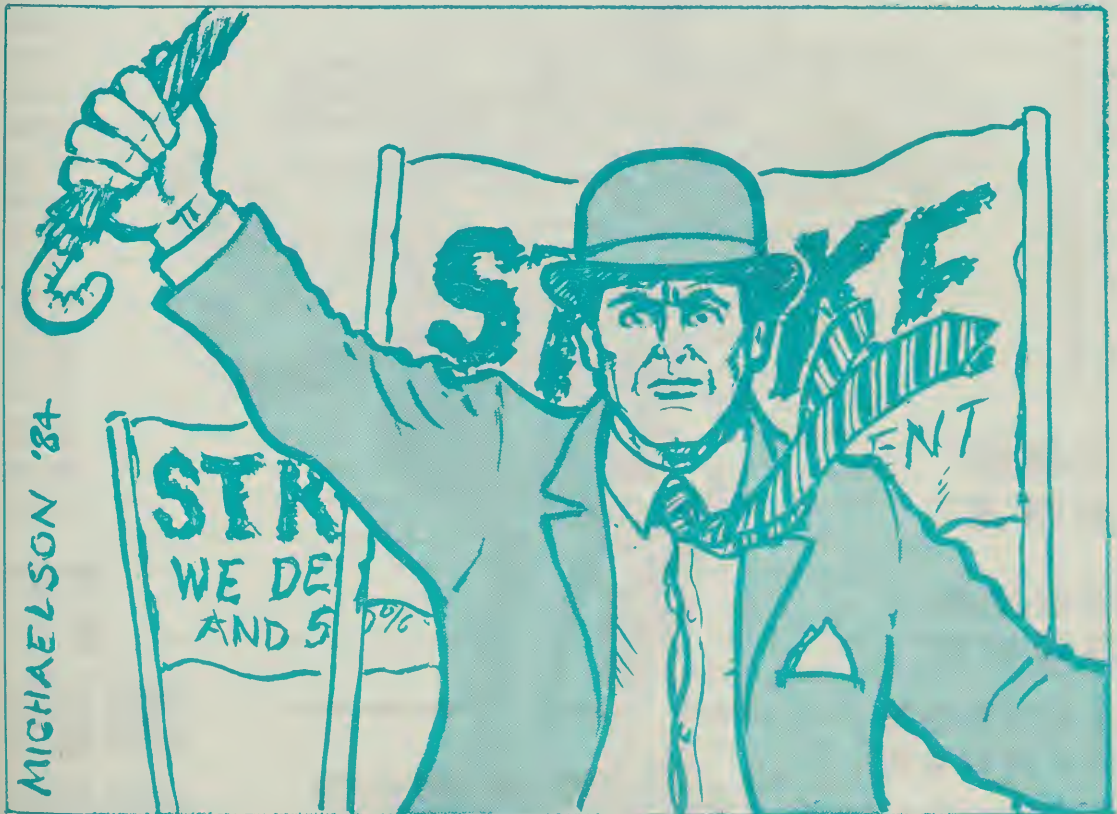
- underlined that “there is a possible threat that our own key computer operating staff could easily cause disruption disproportionate to their relatively small number, by withdrawing their labor.”
- investigated standby arrangements in the case of industrial action but revealed that “there are some circumstances in which effective alternative arrangements are impossible.”
- noted that computers could be “attractive targets for selected industrial actions in furtherance of a national dispute.”
- emphasized the need for “good industrial relations in this field.”

A series of local and very limited but nevertheless powerful wildcat actions began to disrupt computer work. The government and unions realized that computerization had vastly increased the potential for disruption by autonomous action. Both the government and the unions recognized the disruptive power of a computer strike. Each attempted to keep control over the actions of the computer workers in order to exploit their power. The government hoped the computer workers would help guarantee stability, while the unions hoped they could be used to pressure the government to concede to union demands.

In a strike, the computer workers could be most effective if they organized autonomously, even if part of a nationwide strike. The computer workers could exert more pressure on the government if they were acting independently of the unions, and if

their action is recognized and supported by other workers who then refuse to handle work ordinarily performed by the strikers.

Such a situation happened in early 1979 during the "winter of discontent," when a big wave of strikes pulled down a Labour government (to keep the balance, five years earlier another wave of strikes pulled down a Conservative government). The 1979 local computer strikes appeared in part as a rehearsal for the 1981 strikes, but were less "organized" by the unions and not centralized, so more autonomous. They involved computer staff in the Armed Forces, the Customs, tax collection, the Foreign Office, Department of Environment, etc. The strike even hit the Polaris nuclear base on the Clyde and blocked the monitoring of Soviet spy satellites and communications. All naval operations were affected because all the supplies, including fuel,



torpedos and missiles were computerized; tugboat use and health supervision were affected. Some sectors outside the government were also affected. A short stoppage by the computer staff in the Midland Bank caused a mess that took three days to clear (Midland owns Crocker Bank of S.F.).

The '79 strike revealed the danger for the system of relying on a small number of workers with access to complicated machines and private or secret data. As the *Financial Times* added (3/21/81): "Computer staff... tend to be less influenced (than other gov't. workers) by the paternalism" of the branches where they work.

The number of computers had grown rapidly throughout the 70's. During the '81 strike the government gave a full report of the extent of centralized computer use. More than 300 mainframes were used to collect taxes, pay benefits and to distribute

and supply services, mainly related to defense, and to the recording and manipulation of top secret information for the police and the military.

One important sector hit by the '81 strike was the tax department. The general aim of the unions (and certainly a strategy for the Labour Party as well) was to force the government to borrow more money, thereby wrecking its monetary policy. It was said that between 1/3 and 1/2 of the money normally collected did not go to the state during the 21 weeks of selective strikes. It is nevertheless difficult to know the effect of the strike in this regard because the state has ways to get around such problems.

The computer workers strike raised the prospect of other vital industries being disrupted by similar actions: the post office (in '79 a long strike halted all telephone billings in England for several months and it took



six months to clear the backlog), the banks (which use primarily one central computer to clear the checks), the gas utility, and so on.

Nine unions, all part of the TUC, were involved in the '81 strike. The size of the unions ranged from 200,000 to 8000 members and included both professional and non-professional workers' unions. The strike was strongly pushed by the workers. This led to a unique organization, very bureaucratic on one hand, autonomous on the other — what could be called a strictly controlled autonomy.

As the *Financial Times* wrote on 3/30/81: "Bureaucracy is virtually defined by the Civil Service — so it is hardly surprising that when civil servants go on strike the campaign of industrial action should be planned and organized in a highly methodical, bureaucratic manner." This way of thinking was indispensable to the organization because its aim was to manipulate people performing functions in a very hierarchical capitalist system. What bosses and unions have in common is the need to have a say everywhere and at every moment — and the power to impose it.

On the other hand, this organization answered the need of rank and file workers, scattered all over England, for coordination, links, and dispatching. It was a kind of central unit for the elaboration of a common strategy. As the unions were offering such a central unit, all the workers involved in the strike used it and didn't have to build one of their own. Thus, the situation appeared to be fully under union domination. This is always how things are these days: workers can't ignore the unions, and so must cope with them. The essential question in any strike is in the dialectic between the union interests and the workers' interests — in other words, how the strikers use the union-created organization in their own interest.

In the 1981 strike, the nine unions created a national Council of Civil Service Unions (CCSU) composed of top officials of each union. But the operational daily center was a Pay Campaign Committee (PCC) made up of official deputies which met every morning to review action and discuss fresh proposals from the local committees. This PCC had subcommittees in the main sectors of the strike (revenue collection, ports and airports, defense, communications, etc.) and was linked with 41 local coordinating committees through a Central Coordination Room operating in London ten hours a day. The local coordinating committees were set in computer centers and were supposed to carry out the strategy laid down by the CCSU.

What was this strategy? For the unions, the choice was between a rather diluted and ineffective civil servants' strike of indefinite duration and selective effective strikes in limited vital sectors. These sectors were mainly the computer centers all over the country.

For the unions, the selective strike appeared to be the most sensible choice. In reality it was not. The unions were reluctant to display their own weakness, and they didn't want to risk widespread strike action that may have been difficult to control. Moreover, they didn't have the funds to pay strike benefits to all the strikers in case of a general strike. Selective, very limited strikes enabled the unions to maintain control of the strike: the non-strikers appeared to support the strikers, and this solidarity was much touted.

But the real solidarity *in action* was broken from the beginning. Few actual strikers were involved in the day-to-day decisions and implementation of the plans and leadership of the strike. The most "dangerous" workers, the computer staff, were under tight control. As representatives of the striking civil servants, the

unions saddled them with a kind of 'moral liability.' With such a limited number of strikers, even militant ones, it was easier to bring autonomy to a standstill. At the end, after months of actions, even the most militant were fed up. This benefitted both the unions and the management. Fed up workers are less dangerous than confident workers.

In the organization of the strike, the unions kept the militancy of the computer staff firmly in their own hands. The 41 local coordinating committees, because of their local involvement, could have become some kind of autonomous bodies. But because they were rigidly structured by the union, the local committees kept an eye on the only real rank-and-file organ: the selective strike committee.

The computer workers did not rely that much on the unions and their organization of the strike, even if they seemed to follow them. In defiance of the unions, they sent delegates of the selective strike committees all over the country to meet other strikers so as to be fully informed of their actions and ideas. At some locations, militant selective strike committees were able to stop all live work, all program testing, and sometimes to prevent any goods from entering computer centers.

Such evidence of autonomous worker activity was not visible in the organized forms of the strike. The unity of the strike did not extend to all levels of the union organization. (For instance, the most important decision — to use selective strikes instead of an all-out strike — was taken by the unions' leadership.) Such real unity as prevailed was provided by pickets committees, local strike committees, or assemblies where they existed. These took collective votes on a lot of practical problems, breaking the divisions brought about by the unions' formal organization.

During the strike, a journalist wrote

that "the dispute has changed forever the nature of the Civil Service." He was wrong. The large-scale intrusion of computers into formerly protected sectors was the crucial issue. This computerization affected British workers' attitudes in general and those in government jobs in particular. The dispute was only the manifestation of this change — even if it was a revelation for the workers themselves. Though previously they had never thought of going on strike, they found it a "normal" thing from the moment they were out. The computer strike, in 1981 as in 1979, spread into a wide range of sectors where, as the same journalist said, "such action was considered unthinkable." This was another factor which concerned the government during the computer strikes.

Nevertheless, manifestations of autonomy stayed at such a rudimentary level that their effect, repressed by the union apparatus, faded away with time. Meanwhile the government had the opportunity (precisely because of this static strike) to build counter-attacks. The tax sector provides a good example. The two Revenue computers were halted by a selective strike; the Inland Revenue (British IRS) attempted to circumvent the strike by using banks to collect tax payments. Eight clearing-house banks were asked to do the work, but computer and clerical staff of these banks threatened to refuse it. The Inland Revenue evaded the blackmail threat by getting the big non-unionized banks (particularly the U.S. banks) to handle the payments.

In the end the strike was lost. On August 1, 1981, a narrow majority agreed to resume work with 7.5% wage increases instead of the 15% demanded, a very slight improvement over the initial offer. More important is what the strike revealed to the strikers themselves — their power of disruption in a highly centralized state and what they might dare to do



in their own interest.

This is also the important lesson that management has tried to grasp. It recognizes the need to decentralize administration in an increasingly computer-oriented society. Capitalist planners see some hope in this direction with the advent of microprocessor-based equipment in ordinary offices. They think it will, in the long term, reduce the necessity of centralized computer installations. Capitalism always tries to implement new techniques so as to eliminate the resistances developed through the use of previous methods. For now, however, investments are tied to the present centralized systems and it may be some time before the new techniques are fully in place.

The British government just agreed to a big order of 70 large computers,

3000 microcomputers, and 30,000 computer terminals to store and manage all the work concerning social benefits all over England (sickness, unemployment, pensions, disabled, child benefits). This increased computerization will expand state control over almost all the population. But it will also increase the power of the computer workers — not only because of the centralization but because of the possible use of the terminals for unforeseen communications. On the other hand, even if the implementation of microcomputers succeeds in eliminating present computer workers' position of power, new possibilities of struggle will eventually emerge.

— by *Henri Simon*



## TWO BRIEF CONFESSIONS BETWEEN TRAINS

. . . “Are you alienated,” he asked his friend.

“Of course,” his friend replied. “And cut off from my real self, and afraid of being subsumed by technology, and uncertain of the existence of a Supreme Being, and horrified by the excesses of modern culture and its vain motivations, sadly uncertain that human beings are essentially good (deep down), and routinely exist in a state of **shocked absurd numbness.**”

“I see,” he said.

“What about you?”

“I’m just like you; but since I’m addicted to alcohol, and am sexually obsessed, I don’t feel it.”

“That’s reasonable,” he said.

by **Ron De La Houssaye**

# BAD GIRL

©1984  
by Shirley Ann Garzotto



AND PLUCK  
HER BOOBS OFF,  
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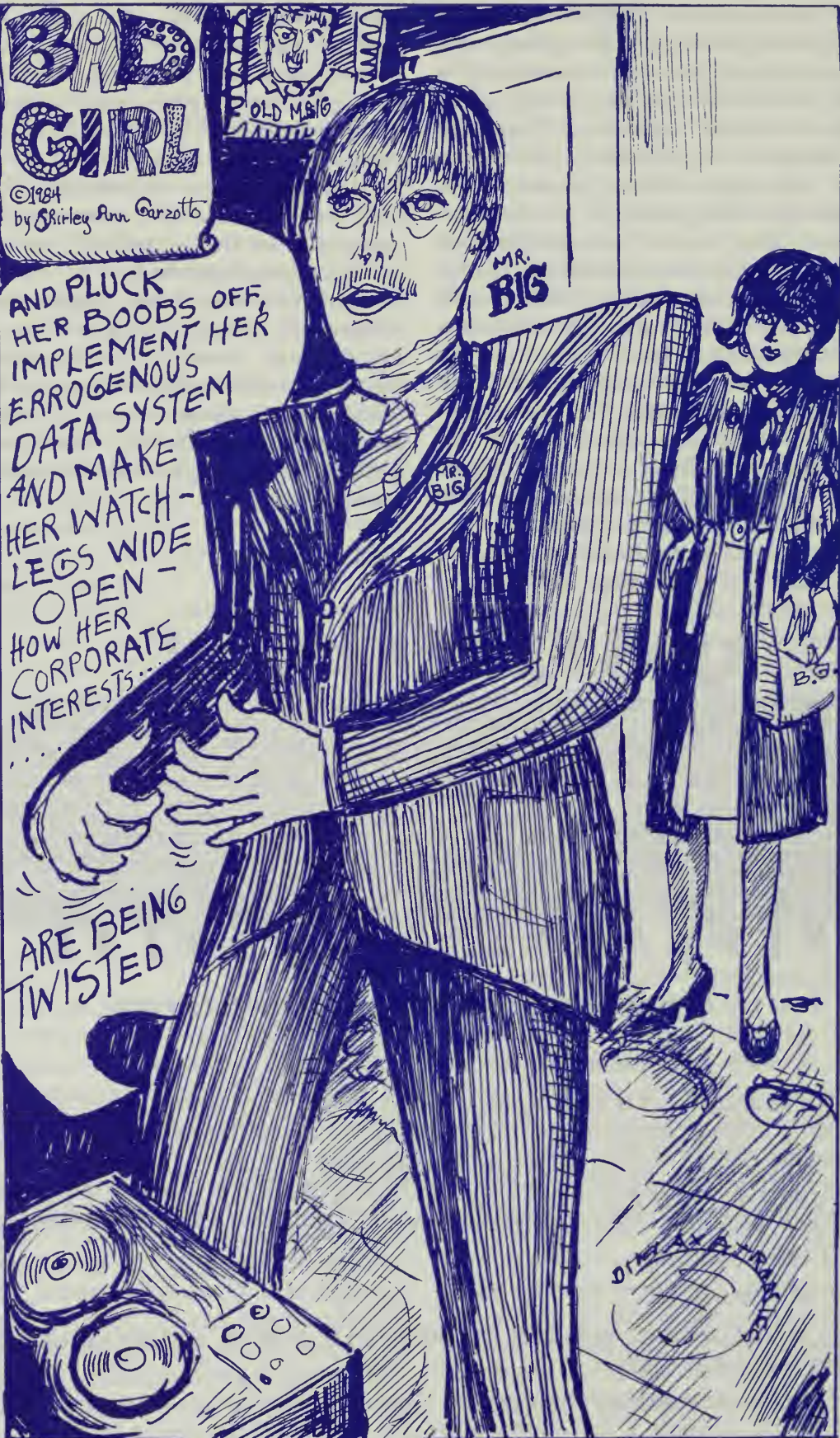
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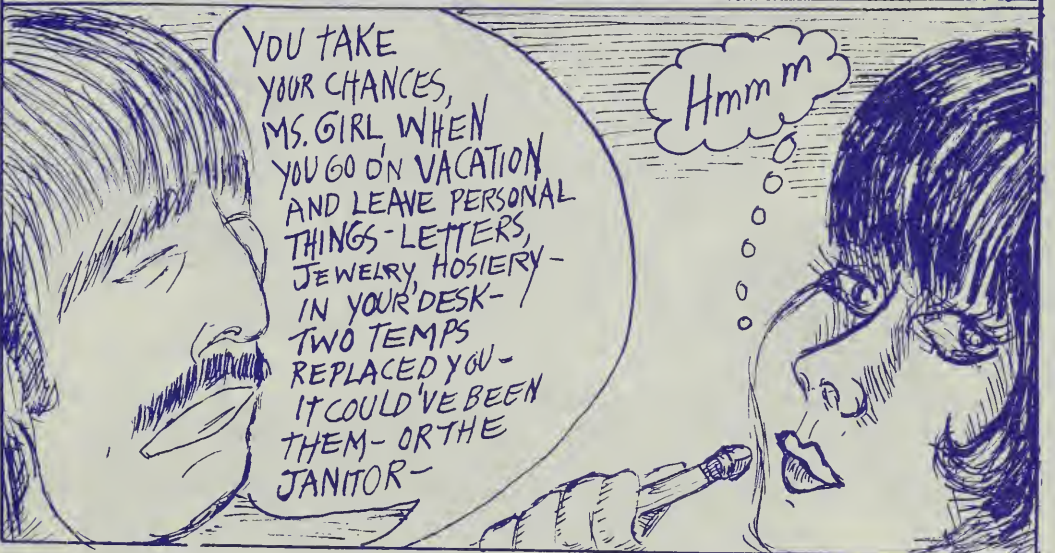
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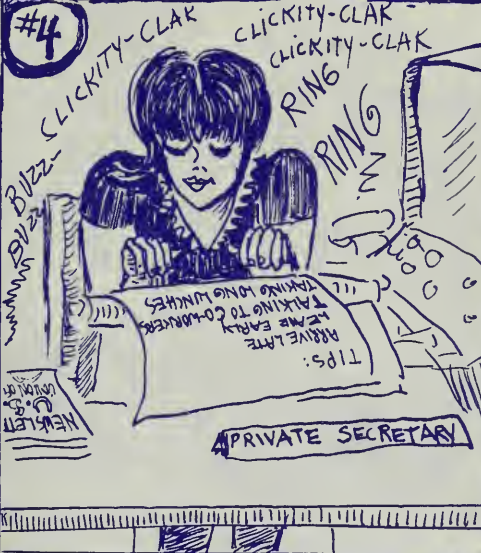
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*A Black slave once said to a traveler "the monkey is a very intelligent animal, and could talk if it wanted to; if it does not, that is because it does not want to be forced to work."*

Camillo Berneri, "The Problem of Work," in *Why Work?*

*Why Work?*, published by Freedom Press, 84B Whitechapel High St., London E1. Available through Bound Together Books, 1369 Haight St., SF, CA 94117, \$4.50

In "developed" nations everybody who isn't dependent on a waged worker or independently wealthy is either working, looking for work, or searching for a way to survive without working. Perhaps because work is such a given, surprisingly few people have written about work per se, and even fewer have asked the question "why work?". In less industrialized/automated countries where half or more of the population is directly involved with food production, the answer is obvious — one works to survive. But in developed nations like the U.S. where only 3% of the population works on the land, and the number of workers in other types of production is dwindling, arguments for the leisure society and some redistribution of wealth to the so-called 3rd World are more compelling. Fi-

nally a book has come out of Great Britain which looks at the occasionally useful but more often useless or harmful work which exists everywhere (the 3rd World has its share of bureaucracies, too) and does not lamely appeal for full employment while workers are increasingly being displaced by machines. Rather, it asks what work should continue to be done and how it can be arranged so that all share its benefits and have free time to use as they choose.

*Why Work?* is a collection of essays, edited by Vernon Richards, that explores the problems and pleasures of work, and offers ideas on alternatives and futures. A series of drawings by Clifford Harper, although somewhat stiff, use some charming details to illustrate what many anarchists believe would be the ideal organization of work in a post-industrial society. Interspersed are newspaper clippings and short articles, which amusingly illustrate some individual's attitudes towards work and their ways of coping with it. The book concludes with a series of (rather redundant) articles by Vernon Richards, originally published in the anarchist journal *Freedom* which argue for redistribution of wealth and work. On the whole the book is well rounded, thought provoking and highly recommended.

Introductory essays by Bertrand

Russell and William Morris, originally published in 1932 and 1885 respectively, are both well-crafted class-based analyses of the work ethic and the organization of work. Russell succinctly defines work as being of two kinds, "first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so." Morris notes that there are three classes of people in "civilized states": "a class which does not even pretend to work, a class which pretends to work but which produces nothing, and a class which works, but is compelled by the other two classes

to do work which is often unproductive."

Originally the idle rich promulgated the gospel of the nobility of labor to ensure willing workers and it eventually spread to the working class itself. This ethic persists despite technological developments which make it possible for everyone to work less and live more. Bertrand Russell points out that during WWI a fraction of the population was able to meet the basic needs of the millions of others who were shooting at each other or manufacturing arms. Nonetheless, society continues to overwork many of its members, often in the production of

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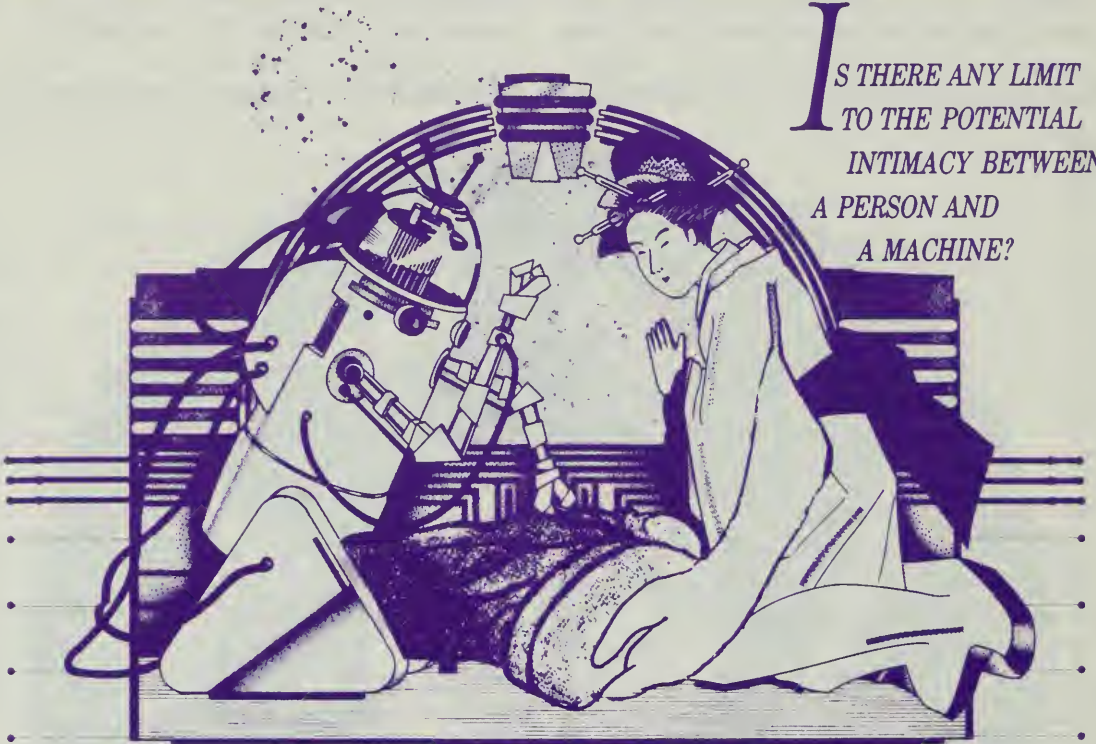
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goods that nobody really wants or in the so-called "service" sectors of advertising, billing and collecting for these useless goods, while others are totally unemployed and without income. Russell calls for everybody to work, say, 4 hours a day and encourages the development of non-passive leisure. Morris also favors the redistribution of work, but concentrates on the need to make work itself a pleasure. Morris includes pleasant surroundings, variety of tasks, control over the work processes, and pride in one's results as some of the factors

chosen and self-directed?

Camillo Berneri in "The Problem of Work" notes that for artists, scientists and a few other lucky individuals, "their work brings them such joy as to keep them from feeling weary." However, for the vast majority of people, work is exhausting, chiefly because of boredom. And the boredom is all the more excruciating in jobs, like most office work, that are repetitive and uninteresting and yet require concentration. Berneri concludes that for work to be pleasurable, "the duration of work must be pro-

**I**S THERE ANY LIMIT  
TO THE POTENTIAL  
INTIMACY BETWEEN  
A PERSON AND  
A MACHINE?



leading to pleasure in work.

There is a curious tendency nowadays to see work either as an absolute horror, stemming from Eve's Garden party and our fall from grace into eternal servitude, or to elevate work as our way to salvation, the way we can most fully realize our potentials. Often, the two extremes are held by the same person. When "work" is broadly defined it lends itself to these dichotomies. By "work" does one mean the slavery to machines and bosses inherent in most manufacturing and office jobs, or a project freely

portional to the effort involved" (including the effort to overcome boredom) and "everyone must be free to follow that productive capacity to which they feel most attracted." While an astronomer may work all night with pleasure, caught up in the excitement of a discovery, a book-keeper may find the job intolerable after a few hours of juggling figures.

It is Berneri's second point which gets a lot of people jumping up and down and pointing fingers at "anarchist idealists." If work is freely chosen, who will clean the toilets? To

leave the toilets dirty for a minute, some of the work which people would probably not choose to do could just as easily be left undone. For example, if everyone at the Bank of America decided they couldn't care less about just how much money Mexico owes American banks and quit tracking the endless permutations of capital on computers, society as a whole would be none the worse. Likewise, the people who currently make shoddy or useless goods could refuse to continue until there was some point to their labor and some hope of pride in their product.

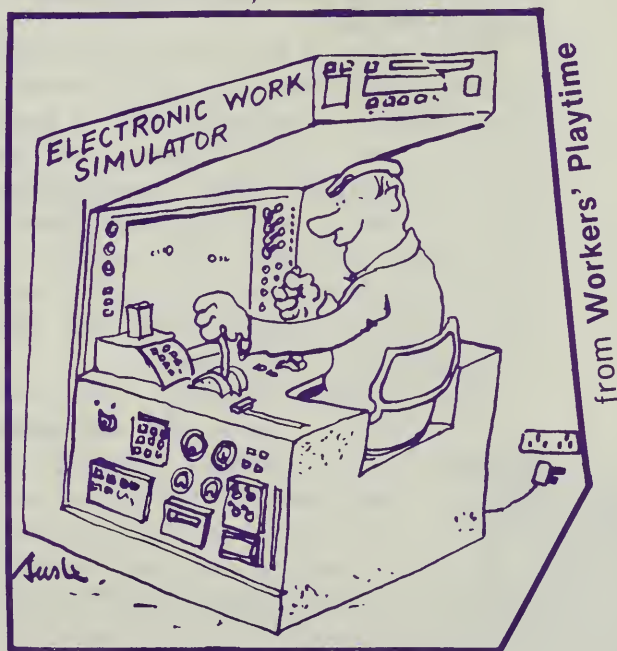
Beneri foresees problems in a transition to a society where work is freely chosen. He quotes Luigi Fabbri on "The Problem of Free Work" who says that "one of the dangers of the revolution will actually be the loathing for work which it will inherit from the society of today." While work may become lighter and less dangerous when workers are able to organize it for themselves, there will still be a need for work discipline and there will probably be some who choose not to work. Beneri believes that forcing people to work spells the end to a free society, and there should be "no compulsion to work, but no duty towards those who do not want to work."

In Tony Gibson's article "Who Will Do The Dirty Work?" we get back to the question of dirty toilets. Gibson claims that "such things as garbage collection, sewage disposal, rag picking, furnace stoking, etc. are unpleasant operations in contemporary society only because the men employed in them have not the power to alter the conditions of their work." With scientific research and technical skills these occupations could actually become pleasurable. Or could they? I think Mr. Gibson is overly optimistic on this point, and even a free society does not change the fact that some work is inherently unpleasant. In my utopia, work which is necessary but

no fun would be divided between everyone so that no one has to do it for very long. Or, alternatively, doing the dirty work could be made a condition for access to scarce luxuries.

While certain improvements in work can be made under capitalism, ultimately they are designed to improve productivity. Amenities such as ergonomically designed work stations and pleasantly lit factories do not change the fact that most people work long hours in total alienation from their labor and its products. To talk about truly pleasurable work, it is also necessary to talk about another kind of world where the profit motive has been summarily banished. Questions about other ways to organize work and society, and how to bring about this revolutionary change are not fully addressed in *Why Work?*, but this is not so much the book's failing as an indication of the depth and difficulty of the subject.

"Leisure in America" by August Heckscher and "The Other Economy As A Social System" by Denis Pym were the most interesting articles on alternatives and futures. Also included were Gaston Leval's article on collectives during the Spanish revolution which was rather dry and limited in focus; and an article on



Israel's kibbutz movement entitled "Reflections on Utopia" which was shockingly silent on problems within kibbutzes and their relationship to the far from utopian Israeli nation. Interestingly, both Heckscher and Pym do not posit sudden revolutionary change as leading to new ways of organizing work and leisure (as was the case with Spain, and to a much lesser extent with the Israeli kibbutzes) but rather point to alternatives that grow out of technological development and the displacement of the traditional blue collar sector.

Denis Pym uses the term "Other Economy" — without fully defining it — to refer to the economic arrangement many Brits have developed in light of their country's crumbling economy and perpetual high unemployment. Especially in working class neighborhoods, some people have dropped out of the formal economy altogether. Using their skills to repair and build, and their neighborhood contacts to find work, they are creating a counterpart to the highly mechanized and automated formal economy. According to Pym, the "Other Economy," which operates through barter and reciprocity, breaks down the now common giver/receiver dichotomy (e.g. doctor/patient, expert/consultee).

Pym's idea of who can be included in the Other Economy seems somewhat limited. Pym goes into a long tribute to the "local 'hero'" of the Other Economy which presupposes that the "hero" — a fixer with abundant social contacts who "prefers to define space and time his way" — is a man. As the editors point out, the description is highly sexist.

Pym rightfully criticizes "the electronic dream," since the computer industry with its current priorities on defense and personnel/personal control has "little relevance for living and community beyond the maintenance

of employment and its institutions." Yet his Other Economy has little to offer service workers who cannot fit the mold of the local hero. Pym calls for the "payment of a minimum wage to every adult citizen" so they could discover "those substantial work opportunities that already exist in the Other Economy." The social wage already exists in Britain. It's called the dole and it comes with hassles and humiliations of its own. Pym pinpoints a new and important development — the growing impetus for people to live on the margins of the cash economy — yet by supposing that the institutions of this society will sanction the Other Economy through the payment of a hassle-free minimum wage, or even that this would be desirable, he detracts from his argument. Likewise, in positing the co-existence of small-scale and highly-industrialized economies, he ignores the necessary antagonisms between them and the need to abolish institutions like governments and corporations and to change the thinking which created them.

"Few people think that 'to be free is to be [at] leisure'," as August Heckscher explains in "Leisure in America." Indeed, much free time is really anything but free if one includes time spent commuting, dutifully fixing meals, watching TV, and so forth. Yet in leisure, as in some of the work described in Pym's Other Economy', is the possibility of pleasure in freely chosen activity. Through taking control of our leisure and shaping our activities and commitments to suit our pleasures, as well as by perpetually expanding areas of personal autonomy, one catches glimpses of a world free from the coercion to work and open to many possibilities.

— by Helen Highwater



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