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Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force

Margery Davies

A large proportion of the recent historical research about women in the labor force has focused on industrial workers, using their specific factory experiences as a model for viewing the class as a whole. On the other hand, relatively little attention has been given to clerical workers. This is surprising: in 1968 for example, over 40 percent of women in the U. S. labor force were employed as clerical and sales workers, while only 16.5 percent were employed in the industrial workforce. (1) This essay is a contribution to a discussion aimed first at clarifying the role of a "secretarial proletariat", and secondly at broadening the definition of the working class to include other than those in industrial production. In particular, there are millions of low-level clerical workers, most of them women, who form an important segment of the working class.

The essay is historical in scope and focuses on the feminization of the clerical labor force. Women now form the majority of the clerical workforce, but this was not always the case. How did women enter and come to dominate clerical work? How did the ideology with respect to women office workers change? What are the connections between a sexual segmentation of the clerical labor force and hierarchical relations in the office? The first step in answering these questions is to look at the "19th-century office". (2)

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY OFFICE (3)

> Mr. Vhole's office, in disposition retiring and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner, and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty floored dark passage bring the client to Mr. Vhole's jet black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning, and encumbered by a black bulk-head of cellerage staircase, against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr. Vhole's chambers are on so small a scale, that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. (4)

Two of the basic characteristics of 19th-century offices, in the United States as well as Dickensian England, are that they were small and staffed almost exclusively by men. Census data for 1870, for example, show that out of 76,639 office workers in the United States, women numbered only 1869; men were 97.5 percent of the clerical labor force. (5) With the exception of a few banks, insurance companies and governmental branches, most offices in the United States prior to the Civil War usually contained about two or three clerks. This is not surprising, since most capitalist firms were also relatively small until the last decades of the 19th century. For example, in "Bartleby," (6) Herman Melville described a Wall Street lawyer's office of the 1850's which consisted of the lawyer, three copyists and an errand boy.

The small size of offices at this time meant that the relationship between employer and employee tended to be a very personalized one. The clerks worked under the direct supervision, and often the direct eyesight, of their employers. Although the tasks of a clerk were generally well-defined — the job of the copyists in "Bartleby" was to transcribe legal documents — they were also often asked to do numerous other tasks by their employers. It was clearly the employer who set the limits of the clerk's job — there was no question here of the clerk being ruled by the inexorable pace of a machine.

The personal benevolence of an employer could go a long way toward making the hierarchical relations within an office more tolerable. An employer who spoke nicely to his clerks, let them leave early if they were feeling sick, or gave them a Christmas goose helped to create working conditions against which the clerks were not likely to rebel. By treating his clerks with kindness or politeness, a paternalistic employer was also likely to be able to get them to work harder for him.

This personalization of the work relationship between the clerk and his employer in the 19th-century office lies at the root of the phenomenon of employees being "devoted to the firm". A clerk who spent forty or fifty years of his life working for the same small office of an insurance company did not necessarily work so long and so hard out of a belief in the importance of promoting that particular company's kind of insurance. The source of the devotion of this hypothetical employee was much more likely the network of personal relations he had built up in the office over the years. It was probably more important to the employee to "produce" a good working relationship with his boss, with whom he was in constant contact, than to produce, for example, improvements in the insurance company's filing system. Needless to say that that good working relationship no doubt depended in part on the employee producing improvements in the filing system. But whether the employee cared more about the selling of insurance or his personal relationship with his employer, the end result tended to be the same: the clerk became a "devoted employee of the firm" who was not likely to rebel or go out on strike.

Not all clerks in the 19th-century office spent all their working days in clerical positions. A clerkship also served as an apprenticeship for a young man who was "learning the business" before he moved on to a managerial position. These young men were often nephews, sons, or grandsons of the firm's managers and owners — the "family business" trained its sons by having them work as clerks for a period of time. Most clerks, however, ended up with gold watches instead of managerial posts in return for their years of devoted service.

Thus the clerks in an office at any particular time came from different class backgrounds and were likely to have very different occupational futures. (Sons of entrepreneurs

A lunchroom in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York.

and professionals would work as clerks for only a short period of time before going on to managerial jobs. Men from the working classes, sons of artisans or low-level clerks, would probably work as clerks for the rest of their lives; few would be promoted to managerial positions.)

POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CHANGES

In the last few decades of the 19th century, American corporations underwent a period of rapid growth and consolidation. These changes, which marked the rise of modern industrial capitalism, had been signalled by developments in banks, insurance companies and public utilities; they had spread to manufacturing enterprises by the turn of the century. (7) As business operations became more complex, there was a large increase in correspondence, record-keeping, and office work in general. This expansion of record-keeping and the proliferation of communications both within and between firms created a demand for an expanded clerical labor force. In 1880 there were 504,454 office workers who constituted 3 percent of the labor force; by 1890 there were 750,150 office workers. (8) The number of office workers has been increasing ever since. (See Table #2) In order to fill the need for clerical workers, employers turned to the large pool of educated female labor.

As early as the 1820's, women had been receiving public high school educations: Worcester, Massachusetts opened a public high school for girls in 1824; Boston and New York City did so in 1826. (9) In 1880, 13,029 women graduated from high school in the United States, as compared to only 10,605 men. The figures for 1900 show an even greater disparity: 56,808 female high school graduates and 38,075 male. (10)

Until the end of the 19th century, schools were the main place of employment for these educated women. The feminization of elementary and secondary teaching had taken place with the introduction of compulsory public education and consequent increase in teaching jobs. In 1840 men were 60 percent of all teachers and in 1860 they made up only 14 percent. (11) Women were hired in education because they were a cheap replacement for the dwindling supply of male teachers. "As Charles William Eliot observed some years after the feminization of primary school teaching was largely completed: 'It is true that sentimental reasons are often given for the almost exclusive employment of women in the common schools; but the effective reason is economy ... If women had not been cheaper than men, they would not have replaced nine tenths of the men in American public schools.'" (12)

But teaching was about the only job that drew on the pool of educated female labor in substantial numbers. The "professions" — law, medicine, business, college teaching — both excluded women and did not employ large numbers of people. The 1890 census, for instance, counted only 200 women lawyers. (13) Social work was still the preserve of moral reformers like Jane Addams; the growth of social work as an occupation with government funding did not come until the 20th century. Nursing was beginning to employ some women by the end of the 19th century: in 1900 there were 108,691 nurses and midwives, although only 11,000 of them had become graduate nurses and achieved professional status. (14)

In the last decades of the 19th century, the situation was, then, the following. There were more women than men graduating from high school every year. These women constituted a pool of educated female labor which was being drawn upon only by elementary and secondary schools. Consequently, there were literally thousands of women with training that qualified them for jobs that demanded literacy, but who could not find such jobs. Excluded from most of the professions, these women were readily available for the clerical jobs that started to proliferate at the end of the 19th century. The expansion and consolidation of enterprises in the 1880's and 1890's created a large demand for clerical labor; the large pool of educated female labor constituted the supply.

WOMEN ENTER THE OFFICE

Prior to the Civil War there were no women employed in substantial numbers in any offices, although there were a few women scattered here and there who worked as bookkeepers or as copyists in lawyers' offices. (15) During the Civil War, however, the reduction of the male labor force due to the draft moved General Francis Elias Spinner, the U.S. Treasurer, to introduce female clerical workers into government offices. At first women were given the job of trimming paper money in the Treasury Department, but, they gradually moved into other areas of clerical work. The experiment proved successful and was continued after the end of the war. Commenting upon this innovation in 1869, Spinner declared "upon his word" that it had been a complete success: "Some of the females (are) doing more and better work for $900 per annum than many male clerks who were paid double that amount." (16) At the time, men clerks were being paid from $1200 to $1800 per year. (17)

Although women started to work in government offices during the Civil War, it was not until the 1880's that women began to pour into the clerical work force. In 1880, the proportion of women in the clerical labor force was 4 percent; in 1890 it had jumped to 21 percent. By 1920, women made up half of the clerical workers: 50 percent of all low-level office workers (including stenographers, typists, secretaries, shipping and receiving clerks, office machine operators, and clerical and kindred workers not elsewhere classified) were women. In 1960, 72 percent of them were. (See Table #2) This tremendous increase in the number of women office workers has changed the composition of the female labor force. While in 1870 less than 0.05 percent of the women in the labor force were office workers, by 1890 1.1 percent of them were. In 1960, 29.1 percent of all women in the labor force were office workers.

When women were hired to work in government offices in Washington during the Civil War, a precedent was established. This precedent facilitated the entrance of women in large numbers into the clerical labor force at the end of the 19th century. Women had gotten a foot in the office door in the Civil War, and the prejudices against women working in offices had already started to deteriorate by 1880. A second factor which eased women's entrance into the office was the invention of the typewriter. By the 1890's the typewriter had gained widespread acceptance as a practical office machine. (18)

Various American inventors had been working on "writing machines" since the 1830's. They had generally been thought of as crackpots by capitalists and the general public alike, and had seldom if every been able to get anyone to underwrite their attempts to develop a manufacturable machine.

By the early 1870's, an inventor named Christopher Latham Sholes had managed to produce a fairly workable machine. The Remington family, which had manufactured guns, sewing machines and farm machinery, bought the rights to start making typewriters. But they did not sell very well. People bought them out of curiosity for their own private use, but businesses were not yet willing to commit themselves. When asked to write a testimonial for the machine he bought in 1875, Mark Twain replied:

> Gentlemen: Please do not use my name in any way. Please do not even divulge the fact that I own a machine. I have entirely stopped using the Typewriter, for the reason that I never could write a letter with it to anybody without receiving a request by return mail that I would not only describe the machine but state what progress I had made in the use of it, etc., etc. I don't like to write letters, and so I don't want people to know that I own this curiosity breeding little joker.
>
> Yours truly,
>
> Saml L. Clemens (19)

People were curious about the typewriter, but it was not until the last two decades of the 19th century that businesses began to buy the machines in large quantities.

It seems fairly clear that it was not until businesses began to expand very rapidly that employers saw the usefulness of a mechanical writing machine. Changes in the structure of capitalist enterprises brought about changes in technology: no one was interested in making the typewriter a workable or manufacturable machine until the utility of having such a machine became clear. But the typewriter no doubt also gave rise to changes in office procedure. Writing was faster on a typewriter. The increase in correspondence and record-keeping was caused in part by the existence of the machine. For example, Robert Lincoln O'Brien made the following comment in the Atlantic Monthly in 1904:

> The invention of the typewriter has given a tremendous impetus to the dictating habit. (...) This means not only greater diffuseness, inevitable with any lessening of the tax on words which the labor of writing imposes, but it also brings forward the point of view of the one who speaks. (20)

The typewriter also facilitated the entrance of women into the clerical labor force. Typing was "sex-neutral" because it was a new occupation. Since typing had not been identified as a masculine job, women who were employed as typists did not encounter the criticism that they were taking over "men's work": In fact, it did not take long for typing to become "women's work": in 1890, 63.8 percent of the 33,418 clerical workers classified as stenographers and typists were women; by 1900, that proportion had risen to 76.7 percent. The feminization of low-level clerical work proceeded extremely rapidly.

It is important to determine why women wanted to become office workers. Most women at the end of the 19th century probably worked out of economic necessity. This holds true for the unmarried single woman of middle-income origins who worked until she married and was supported by her husband as well as for the immigrant working-class woman, single or married, who worked to keep her family from starving.

Clerical work attracted women because it paid better than did most other jobs that women could get. In northeastern American cities at the end of the 19th century clerical wages were relatively high: domestic servants were paid \$2 to \$5 a week; factory operatives, \$1.50 to \$8 a week; department store salesgirls, \$1.50 to \$8 a week; whereas typists and stenographers could get \$6 to \$15 a

TABLE #1

Stenographers and typists, for the United States
and by sex: 1870-1930

	Total	Male	Female	% Female
1870	154	147	7	4.5%
1880	5,000	3,000	2,000	40.0%
1890	33,400	12,100	21,300	63.8%
1900	112,600	26,200	86,400	76.7%
1910	326,700	53,400	263,300	80.6%
1920	615,100	50,400	564,700	91.8%
1930	811,200	36,100	775,100	95.6%

Source: Alba M. Edwards, Comparative Occupational Statistics for the United States, 1870-1940. Published as part of Volume IV of the Report on Population of the 16th Census of the United States. Washington, D.C., 1943. Tables 9 and 10. Figures for 1880 and on are to the nearest hundred.

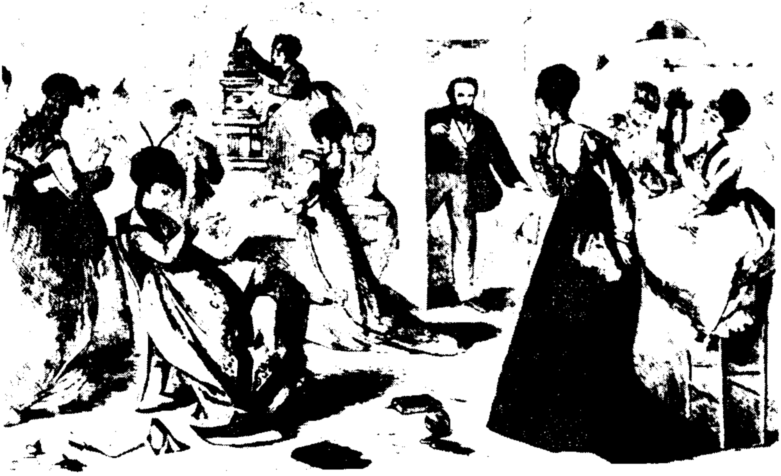
week. (21) Also, clerical work enjoyed a relatively high status. A woman from a middle-income home with a high school education was much more likely to look for clerical work than for work as a house servant or as a factory girl making paper boxes, pickles or shoes. And, as the passage below excerpted from The Long Day shows, a clerical position was coveted by working-class women who usually could find work only in sweatshops, factories or department stores.

The Long Day, the autobiography of Dorothy Richardson, is a good example of the way in which some 19th-century working women regarded clerical work. Richardson came from western Pennsylvania to New York City as a young woman — she is very vague about her background, but the hints she drops lead to the conclusion that she came from a middle-income family that had fallen into bad financial straits. For several months she went from job to job, making paper boxes, shaking out newly-washed laundry, etc. Her account of those days is told in a tone of dismay about the long hours and poor working conditions and a tone of contemptuous pity for the loose morality of the other "working girls". Richardson finally went to secretarial school and got a position as a secretary, clearly a step up in the occupational structure as far as she was concerned:

> I had often thought I would like to learn shorthand and typewriting. (...) I went to night school five nights out of every week for exactly sixty weeks, running consecutively save for a fortnight's interim at the Christmas holidays, when we worked nights at the store. (...)
>
> When I had thoroughly learned the principles of my trade and had attained a speed of some hundred and odd words a minute, the hardest task was yet before me. This task was not in finding a position, but in filling that position satisfactorily. My first position at ten dollars a week I held only one day. I failed to read my notes. This was more because of fright and self-consciousness, however, than of inefficiency. My next paid me only six dollars a week, but it was an excellent training school, and in it I learned self-confidence, perfect accuracy, and rapidity. Although this position paid me two dollars less than what I had been earning brewing tea and coffee and handing it over the counter, and notwithstanding the fact that I knew of places where I could go and earn ten dollars a week, I chose to remain where I was. There was method in my madness, however, let me say. I had a considerate and conscientious employer, and although I had a great deal of work, and although it had to be done most punctiliously, he never allowed me to work a moment overtime. He opened his office at nine in the morning, and I was not expected before quarter after; he closed at four sharp. This gave me an opportunity for further improving myself with a view to eventually taking not a ten-dollar, but a twenty-dollar position. I went back to night-school and took a three months' "speed course," and at the same time continued to add to my general edu-

> cation and stock of knowledge by a systematic reading of popular books of science and economics. I became tremendously interested in myself as an economic factor, and I became tremendously interested in other working girls from a similar point of view. (22)

However, despite the fact that women were pouring into offices at the end of the 19th century, they still met with disapproval. An engraving of 1875 shows a shocked male government official opening the door on an office that has been "taken over by the ladies". (23) The women are preening themselves before a mirror, fixing each other's hair, reading Harper's Bazaar, spilling ink on the floor — in short, doing everything but working. The engraving makes women working in an office seem ludicrous: women are seen as frivolous creatures incapable of doing an honest day's work.



The artist of 1875 shows the horrors that would follow if women were permitted to engage in office work.

Outright contempt was not the only negative reaction to the entrance of women into the office. Bliven cites the following passage from The Typewriter Girl, a novel by Olive Pratt Rayner whose heroine is an American typist fallen on hard financial times in London:

> Three clerks (male), in seedy black coats, the eldest with hair the color of a fox's, went on chaffing one another for two minutes after I closed the door, with ostentatious unconsciousness of my insignificant presence....The youngest, after a while, wheeled around on his high stool and broke out with the chivalry of his class and age, "Well, what's your business ? "
>
> My voice trembled a little, but I mustered up courage and spoke. "I have called about your advertisement.... "
>
> He eyed me up and down. I am slender, and, I will venture to say, if not pretty, at least interesting looking.
>
> "How many words a minute ? " he asked after a long pause.
>
> I stretched the truth as far as its elasticity would permit. "Ninety-seven," I answered....
>
> The eldest clerk, with the foxy·head, wheeled around, and took his turn to stare. He had hairy hands and large goggle-eyes....I detected an undercurrent of double meaning....I felt disagreeably like Esther in the presence of Ahasuerus — a fat and oily Ahasuerus of fifty....He perused me up and down with his small pig's eyes, as if he were buying a horse, scrutinizing my face, my figure, my hands, my feet. I felt like a Circassian in an Arab slavemarket.... (24)

The overtones of sexuality in the passage from The Typewriter Girl are hard to miss. The implication here seems to be that a decent girl is risking her morality if she tries to invade the male preserve of the office. Whether or not such sensationalism was backed up by many instances of seduction or corruption, the message seems clear: the office was a dangerous place for a woman of virtue.

Even in 1900, some people counselled women to leave the office and return to their homes, where they rightfully belonged. The editor of the Ladies' Home Journal, Edward

Bok, gave just such advice in the pages of his magazine in 1900:

> A business house cannot prosper unless each position has in it the most competent incumbent which it is possible to obtain for that particular position. And, although the statement may seem a hard one, and will unquestionably be controverted, it nevertheless is a plain, simple fact that women have shown themselves naturally incompetent to fill a great many of the business positions which they have sought to occupy. (...) The fact is that not one woman in a hundred can stand the physical strain of the keen pace which competition has forced upon every line of business today. (...) This magazine has recently made a careful and thorough investigation and inquiry of the hospitals and sanitariums for women, and the results verify and substantiate the most general statement that can be made of the alarming tendency among business girls and women to nervous collapse. No such number of patients has ever been received by these institutions during any previous period of their existence as in the last year or two. (...)
>
> I have recently been interested in ascertaining the definite reasons why employers have felt that the positions in their establishments were not most effectively filled by women. (...) In times of pressure women clerks were found to be either necessarily absent or they invariably gave out. The lack of executive ability was given as the main reason in positions of trust, and the friction caused by the objection of women subordinates to receive orders from one of their own sex. Pending or impending matrimonial engagements were also a very pronounced cause. The proprieties also came in for their share, the merchant not feeling that he could ask his female secretary or clerk to remain after business hours. The trader felt that he could not send a woman off on a mission which required hasty packing and preparations for travel

> at an hour's notice. Then, too, women do not care to travel alone. The newspaper editor felt that he could not give his female reporter indiscriminate assignments or send her out alone at all hours of the night. (...) Illness in the family, which would not necessitate a man's absence at the office, keeping the woman at home, was another reason. (...) And as I carefully went over the reasons each pointed to simply one thing: the unnatural position of women in business. It was not mental incompetence. But God had made her a woman and never intended her for the rougher life planned out for man, and each step she took proved this uncontrovertible fact to her. It was not man that stood in her path; it was herself. (25)

THE SHIFT IN IDEOLOGY

However, sixteen years after Bok used the pages of the Ladies Home Journal to admonish women to return home, another writer in the same magazine not only took for granted the fact that women worked in offices, but also found that certain "feminine" qualities were particularly suited to clerical work. "The stenographer plus" was described:

> I should describe the equipment of the ideal stenographer as follows: Twenty percent represents technical ability — that is, the ability to write and read shorthand and to typewrite rapidly and accurately; thirty percent equals general information — that is, education other than that in shorthand and typewriting; and the last and most important fifty percent I should ascribe to personality. (...)
>
> There are two kinds of personality — concrete and abstract: the one you can see, the other you can feel. The concrete side is that which the stenographer sees when she looks in the mirror. The stenographer who wins must look good — not in the sense that she must be beautiful, for dividends

> are never declared on pink cheeks and classic features; but she should make the very most of her personal equipment. (. . .)
>
> That other kind of personality — the abstract kind — is the more important element in the stenographer's equipment, for it involves her temperament. Thousands of stenographers stay in mediocre positions because they lack the ability to adapt their conduct to those fixed principles of harmony and optimism which must prevail in all big undertakings.
>
> A large employer of stenographic help said to me once:
>
> "I expect from my stenographer the same service that I get from the sun, with this exception: the sun often goes on a strike and it is necessary for me to use artificial light, but I pay my stenographer to work six days out of every seven, and I expect her all the while to radiate my office with sunshine and sympathetic interest in the things I am trying to do."
>
> It is the spirit in which the stenographer lives and works as well as the volume of her work that makes her profitable. She must be adaptable, agreeable, courteous. Perhaps no single word so underwrites her success as "courtesy"; this is the keyword in all of our new gospels of salesmanship and efficiency. Our great enterprises are showing us to what extent courtesy can be capitalized. (26)

Fortune magazine, in a series of unsigned articles on "Women in Business", carried the argument a step further and equated secretaries with wives:

> The whole point of the whole problem, in other words, is that women occupy the office because the male employer wants them there. Why he wants them there is another question which cannot be answered merely by saying that once there they take to the work very nicely. It is doubtless true that women take to the work nicely. Their conscious

or subconscious intention some day to marry, and their conscious or subconscious willingness to be directed by men, render them amenable and obedient and relieve them of the ambition which makes it difficult for men to put their devotion into secretarial work. But that fact only partially explains the male employer's preference. It indicates that women and by virtue of some of their most womanly traits are capable of making the office a more pleasant, peaceful, and homelike place. But it does not indicate why the employer desires that kind of office rather than an office full of ambitious and pushing young men intent upon hammering their typewriters into presidential desks. To get at that problem pure speculation is the only tool.

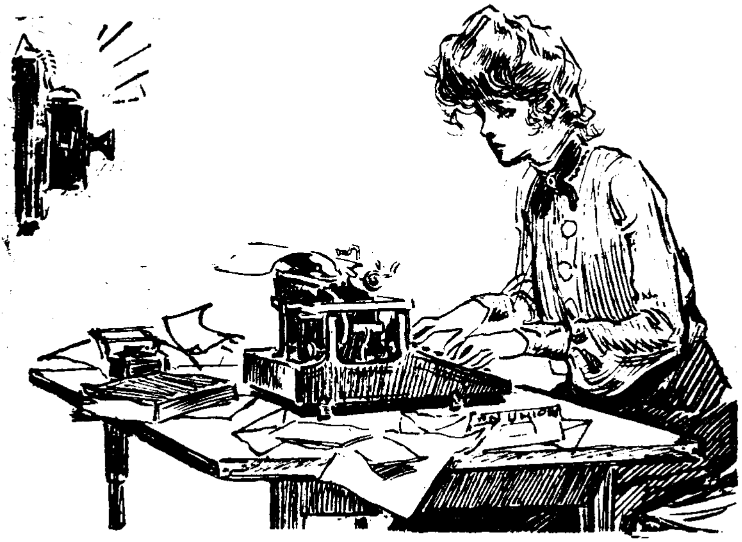
One might well speculate somewhat as follows: the effect of the industrial revolution was the dedomestication of women. In the working classes the substitute for domestic servitude was factory servitude. In the well-to-do classes, to which the office employer's wife belongs, the substitute for domestic responsibility was no responsibility — or no responsibility to speak of. Consequently, in the well-to-do classes, women were presented first with idleness, then with discontent with idleness, and finally with that odd mixture of rebellion and independence which changed the face of American society in the years that followed the War. In the process the upper-class home, as the upper-class home was known to the Victorians, disappeared. The male was no longer master in his own dining room and dreadful in his own den nor did a small herd of wives, daughters, and sisters hear his voice and tremble. He was, on the contrary, the more or less equal mate of a more or less unpredictable woman. And he resented it.

He resented the loss of his position. He regretted the old docility, the old obedience, the old devotion to his personal interests. And finding himself unable to re-create the late, lost paradise in his home he set about re-creating it in his office.

> What he wanted in the office was not the office mistress described at least fifty-two times a year by American short-story writers. His very pretty and very clever and very expensive wife was already mistress enough and to spare. What he wanted in the office was something as much like the vanished wife of his father's generation as could be arranged — someone to balance his checkbook, buy his railroad tickets, check his baggage, get him seats in the fourth row, take his daughter to the dentist, listen to his side of the story, give him a courageous look when things were blackest, and generally know all, understand all. (. . .)
>
> Whether or not any such speculative explanation of the male desire for a female office is sound there can be no doubt that the desire exists and that it is the male employer who is chiefly responsible for the female secretary. (27)

In 1900, the Ladies' Home Journal warned women that they could not stand the physical strain of working in a fast-paced business office, that business girls and women were apt to suffer a nervous collapse. But by 1916 the Journal was comparing the faithful female secretary to some heavenly body who "radiated the office with sunshine and sympathetic interest". It had not taken very long for the ideology to shift and for people to accept the presence of women in offices. Bok had argued in 1900 that women, by virtue of their "nature", were unsuited to the office. But only a few years later, the Journal came close to arguing that the "natural" temperament of women made them good stenographers. And by 1935, Fortune had concocted a full-fledged historical justification for the assertion that "woman's place was at the typewriter".

Women, so the argument went, are by nature adaptable, courteous, and sympathetic — in a word, passive. This natural passivity makes them ideally suited to the job of carrying out an endless number of routine tasks without a complaint. Furthermore, their docility makes it unlikely that they will aspire to rise very far above their station.



Thus their male boss is spared the unpleasant possibility that his secretary will one day be competing with him for his job.

The image of the secretary as the competent mother-wife who sees to her employer's every need and desire was a description which most fitted a personal secretary. Here certain "feminine" characteristics ascribed to the job of personal secretary — sympathy, adaptability, courtesy — made women seem the natural candidates for the job. Not all clerical workers were personal secretaries. For the large proportion of clerical workers who were stenographers, typists, file clerks and the like, another ideological strain developed, emphasizing the supposed greater dexterity of women. These workers were seldom assigned to one particular boss, but instead constituted a pool from which any executive could draw as he wished. In the case of these low-level clerical workers, personal characteristics such as sympathy and courtesy seemed less important. Dexterity — the ability to do work quickly and accurately — was much more important. Not long after the typewriter began to be used as a matter of course in business offices, people started to argue that women, endowed with dextrous fingers, were the most fitting operators of these machines.

Elizabeth Baker states that "women seemed to be especially suited as typists and switchboard operators because they were tolerant of routine, careful, and manually dextrous." (28)

WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE OFFICE HIERARCHY

Whether it was for the warmth of their personalities or the dexterity of their fingers, women came to be seen as "natural" office workers. Why did this ideology develop?

The ideology is obviously connected to the feminization of the clerical labor force. If women were employed in large numbers in offices, then it was not surprising that an ideology justifying their presence there developed. Women were originally employed in offices because they were cheaper than the available male labor force. As corporations expanded at the end of the 19th century, they were forced to draw on the pool of educated females to meet their rapidly increasing demand for clerical workers. But the expansion of capitalist firms did not entail a simple proliferation of small, "19th-century" offices. Instead, it meant a greatly-expanded office structure, with large numbers of people working in a single office. The situation was no longer that of the 19th-century office, where some of the clerks were in effect apprenticing managers. The expanded office structure, on the contrary, brought with it a rapid growth of low-level, dead-end jobs.

It was primarily women who filled those low-level jobs. By 1920, for instance, women made up over 90 percent of the typists and stenographers in the United States. (See Table #1) Women — whose "natural" docility and dexterity made them the ideal workers for these jobs on the bottom of the office hierarchy. By harping upon the docility of the female character, writers like Spillman in the Ladies' Home Journal provided a convenient rationalization for the fact that most low-level clerical workers in dead-end jobs were women.

It is important to point out that differentiating office workers by sex is not the same as dividing them into groups distinguished, say, by eye color. The sexual division of labor in the office — where men hold the majority of managerial positions and women fill the majority of low-level, clerical jobs — is a division which is strengthened by the positions which men and women hold outside the office.

When the ideology of passive female labor first manifested itself in the early 20th century, the United States was, by and large, a patriarchal society. Patriarchal relations between men and women, in which men made decisions and women followed them, were carried over into the office. These patriarchal social relations meshed very conveniently with office bureaucracies, where the means by which the workers were told what to do was often an extremely personalized one. For although the number of clerical workers was large, they were often divided into small enough groups so that five or six typists, stenographers or file clerks would be directly accountable to one supervisor. And if that supervisor was a man (as was generally the case in the early 20th century) and those clerical workers were women, it is easy to see how patriarchal patterns of male-female relations would reinforce the office hierarchy.

The segmentation of the office work force by sex thus promoted a situation where a docile mass of clerical workers would follow without rebellion the directives of a relatively small group of managers. The ideology that women, by virtue of their "feminine docility", were naturally suited to fill the low-level clerical jobs, can be seen as an important buttress of the stability of the hierarchical office structure.

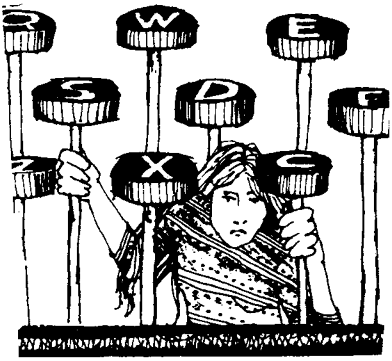


TABLE #2

Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force

		Bookkeepers Accountants and Cashiers	Messengers Errand and Office Boys and Girls (a)
1870	total	39,164(1)	7,820(3)
	female	893(2)	46
	% female	2%	.6%
1880	total	75,688(6)	12,447
	female	4,295(6)	228
	% female	6%	2%
1890	total	160,968	45,706
	female	28,050	1,658
	% female	17%	4%
1900(b)	total	257,400	63,700
	female	74,900	3,800
	% female	29%	6%
1910(b)	total	491,600	95,100
	female	189,000	6,400
	% female	38%	7%
1920(b)	total	742,000	99,500
	female	362,700	8,100
	% female	49%	8%
1930(b)	total	940,000	79,500
	female	487,500	5,100
	% female	52%	6%
1940(b)	total	931,300	60,700
	female	475,700	3,000
	% female	51%	5%
1950(b)	total	---------	59,000
	female	---------	10,600
	% female	---------	18%
1960(b)	total	---------	63,200
	female	---------	11,200
	% female	---------	18%

SOURCES:

For 1870-1940: Janet M. Hooks, Women's Occupations through Seven Decades, U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Bulletin #218, Washington, D.C., 1947. Table IIA: Occupations of Women Workers, 1870-1940; Table IIB: Occupations of All Workers, 1870-1940.

CONTINUATION OF TABLE #2

Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force

Stenographers Typists and Secretaries	Shipping and Receiving Clerks	Clerical and Kindred Workers (nec) (c)	Office Machine Operators
		29,655(4)	
		930(5)	
		3%	
		64,151(7)	
		2,315(7)	
		4%	
		219,173(7)	
		45,553(7)	
		21%	
		357,100	
		104,400	
		29%	
		1,034,200	
		386,800	
		37%	
		2,092,000	
		1,038,400	
		50%	
2,754,000			36,200
1,450,900			32,100
53%			89%
1,174,900	229,700	1,973,600	64,200
1,096,400	9,100	702,500	55,100
93%	4%	36%	86%
1,629,300	297,400	2,354,200	146,200
1,538,000	20,700	1,252,900	120,300
94%	7%	53%	82%
2,312,800	294,600	3,016,400	318,100
2,232,600	25,000	1,788,700	236,400
96%	8%	59%	74%

For 1950-1960: Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, United States Summary, Washington, D.C., 1960. Table 201: Detailed Occupation of the Experienced Civilian Labor Force, By Sex, for the United States: 1960 and 1950.

Footnotes for Table #2

(a) "Messengers, errand, and office boys and girls" includes "telegraph messengers" through 1900.

(b) Figures rounded off to the nearest hundred.

(c) N. E. C.: "not elsewhere classified".

(1) Census figures estimated, and 374 added because of undercount in 13 Southern states.

(2) Census figures estimated, and 2 added because of undercount in 13 Southern states.

(3) 70 added because of undercount in 13 Southern states.

(4) Partly estimated, and 494 added because of undercount in 13 Southern states. Figures do not include "Abstractors, notaries, and justices of peace," classified in 1940 in the group "Clerical Workers (n.e.c.)".

(5) Partly estimated, and 6 added because of undercount in 13 Southern states. Figures do not include "Abstractors, notaries, and justices of peace," classified in 1940 in the group "Clerical Workers (n.e.c.)".

(6) Estimated.

(7) 1890 and 1900 data partly estimated, and 1880 data entirely estimated. Figures do not include "Abstractors, notaries, and justices of peace", classified in 1940 in the group "Clerical Workers (n.e.c.)".

Footnotes

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1969 Handbook of Women Workers (Women's Bureau Bulletin #294; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 90.

2. Concrete information about female office workers is not easy to find. In a comprehensive bibliographical Guide to Business History, Henrietta Larson points out that "it is significant that the works dealing with the subject (office management) are concerned largely with "systems" and machines — the office worker has been left in neglected obscurity." (Larson; 1948; pp. 771-772)

There are a few analytical studies of office workers, the most notable of which are David Lockwood's The Black-coated Worker and C. Wright Mills' White Collar: the American Middle Classes. Grace D. Coyle focuses on women in offices and the kind of work they do in "Women in the Clerical Occupations" in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 143 (May, 1929); Fortune published a series of articles on "Women in Business" in 1935; the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor has issued a number of bulletins on office workers. In addition, there is quite a long list of books addressed to women which tell them how to be better secretaries: the main point of these manuals seems to be that women should be certain to please their (male) bosses and that they should be neat and accurate about any number of office tasks. And dotted throughout the prominent women's magazines are articles about the "business woman".

Finally, there are some fictional works which provide a certain amount of insight into office work. "Bartleby" (1856) by Herman Melville is set in a Wall Street lawyer's office of the 1850's and describes the men who work there as copyists; Alice Adams (1921) by Booth Tarkington is about the daughter of a white-collar employee who is forced to give up her hopes of joining the upper-class social clique in town, accept her own middle-class status, and finally climb the "begrimed stairway" of the local business college in preparation for becoming a "working girl".

But all in all there is very little information about the history of female clerical workers. However, there are bits and pieces of evidence upon which this essay is based.

3. For the purposes of this discussion the term "19th-century office" will be used to describe those office structures which existed prior to the widespread monopolization and bureaucratization of capitalist corporations, a process which was well underway in the United States by the end of the 19th century. "The modern office" will be used to describe the structures which developed after that bureaucratization. The description of the 19th-century office which follows is based primarily on David Lockwood's The Black-coated Worker and on C. Wright Mills' White Collar: the American Middle Classes.

4. Dickens, Charles, Bleak House (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1853), p. 415.

5. Hooks, Janet M., Women's Occupations Through Seven Decades (Women's Bureau Bulletin #218; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), Tables IIA and IIB.

6. Melville, Herman, "Bartleby" in The Piazza Tales (first published 1856; Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).

7. See Alfred Chandler, Strategy and Structure, Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1962. Also see Stephen Hymer, "The Multinational Corporation and the Law of Uneven Development" in Jagdish Bhagwati (ed.), Economics and the World Order, MacMillan Company, 1972.

8. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor. Special Report of the 12th Census: Occupations at the 12th Census. Washington, D.C., 1904. Data is for "number of persons engaged in specified occupations". "Office workers" includes bookkeepers and accountants; clerks and copyists; and stenographers and typewriters (typists).

9. Baker, Elizabeth Faulkner, Technology and Women's Work (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 57. Baker argues that girls were given high school educations because the number of women teachers was increasing: "Men were being attracted by business opportunities and skilled trades, and the phenomenal growth of public schools created an alarming shortage of teachers. (...) But relief from the scarcity of male teachers of course

required that girls as well as boys be taught." (p. 57) However, the fact that so many girls got high school educations in the 19th century still seems rather surprising; unfortunately, recent analysts of the rise of mass education in the United States do not remark upon it. (See Michael Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform, Cambridge, Mass.: 1968; or Samuel Bowles, "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor" in the Review of Radical Political Economics, Winter, 1971.) For more information about the history of women's education, see also Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, New York: 1929.

10. Data for high school graduates from Federal Security Agency, Office of Education; Biennial Survey of Education. Cited in the Statistical Abstract of the United States (1952), p. 121. One possible explanation for the fact that more women than men were graduating from high school at the end of the 19th century is the following: In the case of working-class men and women, the boys left school to work. The money they could earn was badly needed by their families. But if girls entered the factory labor force, their wages would be considerably lower than those of their brothers. This fact, coupled with attitudes that men were the more important breadwinners and that women's place was in the home, may have resulted in working-class girls staying in school longer than their brothers. At any rate, it is clear that figures on high school graduates must be broken down by class, and probably also by ethnic group, before the disparity between male and female high school graduates can be adequately explained.

11. Katz, Michael, The Irony of Early School Reform (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 58.

12. Ibid., p. 58.

13. Smuts, Robert W., Women and Work in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

14. Baker, Technology and Women's Work, pp. 62-63.

15. Sumner, Helen L., History of Women in Industry in the United States (61st Congress, 2nd Session, U. S. Senate Document #645; Bureau of Labor, 1911), p. 239.

16. "Women in Business: I", Fortune, XII (July 1935), p. 53.

17. Ibid., p. 53.

18. The following account of the development of the typewriter is based on Bruce Bliven, Jr., *The Wonderful Writing Machine*, New York: 1954.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

21. Smuts, *Women and Work*, p. 90. It is very difficult to find statistics about clerical wages at the end of the 19th century broken down by sex; Bliven and Smuts do not cite sources for their wage statistics.

22. Richardson, Dorothy, *The Long Day* (1905; reprinted in William O'Neill, *Women at Work*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 269-72.

23. The engraving is reproduced in Bliven, p. 73.

24. Bliven, *Wonderful Writing Machine*, pp. 75-76. Bliven gives no date for *The Typewriter Girl*, but the context of his argument leads to the conclusion that the novel was a late 19th century potboiler.

25. Bok, Edward, "The Return of the Business Woman" in the *Ladies' Home Journal* (March 1960), p. 16. I am indebted to Elaine Wethington of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and her unpublished manuscript, "The Women's Magazines and the 'Business Woman', 1890-1919" for this reference. Wethington points out that Bok did not shrink from also pointing out that office work was the "best paid and most respectable employment for young women"; he was quite happy to have his magazine reflect opposing opinions in order not to alienate any of its one million subscribers. Wethington's paper is extremely useful as a source for articles about office workers in the prominent American women's magazines.

26. Spillman, Harry C., "The Stenographer Plus" in the *Ladies' Home Journal* (February 1916), p. 33.

27. "Women in Business: II" *Fortune*, XII (August 1935), p. 55. It is interesting to speculate why it was in 1935 that *Fortune* published its defense of women in the office. It is possible that during the Depression there was some criticism of the employment of women as clerical workers when unemployment rates for men, the traditional breadwinners, were so high.

28. Baker, *Technology and Women's Work*, p. 74.

The United Front in America: A Note

Staughton Lynd

Debate has been joined about what happened in the 1930s. Memoirs by participants and articles by young scholar-activists seeking to understand and start again increase in volume. There is a serious danger that the discussion will become more acrimonious as it becomes more intense. Besides the generational confrontation between Old and New Left, with all its inevitable pain and ambiguity, there is the tendency of both the academic and Left political subcultures to turn differences into disputes.

It would be much easier if there were a persuasive model of how political radicalization might have occurred. That it did not occur on a significant scale is clear. Old Left organizers know this just as well as their New Left critics, and indeed knew it at the time. Wyndham Mortimer is said to have remarked that when he walked through a working-class neighborhood in Flint on Sunday morning at the height of sit-down activity, every radio was tuned to

Father Coughlin.

There is no persuasive model of a different path, only the brute fact that by the end of the 1930s the Left had not built a labor party or a mass radical movement, and that the largest organization on the Left — the Communist Party — was supporting President Roosevelt. A promising beginning, especially in 1934-1935, in creating working-class unity, had given way to a broad multi-class alliance of uncertain political thrust. Yet the alternative to what happened is not readily apparent.

Most radical organizers in the 1930s worked within the framework of a two-stage model of radicalization which had been bequeathed them by the Communist Manifesto. The first stage was the formation of industrial unions. A generation of American radicals of all persuasions simply assumed that industrial unions would be inherently more disposed to radicalism than craft unions, because they reached out to include the unskilled, blacks, women, those whose stake in the existing system was least, and because as large aggregations of working people they seemed destined for radicalizing confrontation between the class as a whole and state power.

The problem for this two-stage model when applied in the 1930s is that the second stage of radicalizing confrontation with state power did not occur. There was plenty of government violence, but it was almost entirely local. Not only in the 1890s but equally in the period after World War I (1), the national government smashed emerging industrial unions. In the 1930s the national government sponsored them. Roosevelt, wavering between rhetorical endorsement of the CIO and rhetorical neutrality toward it, remained the political beneficiary of whatever happened in the streets. Right after the Memorial Day Massacre in South Chicago, Steel Workers Organizing Committee lodges there passed resolutions addressed to their "beloved" president, Roosevelt.

True, liberal historians exaggerate the benevolence of the New Deal toward union organization. But radical historians are in danger of underestimating the difference between the national government which smashed the Pullman strike and the 1919 steel strike, and the national government which kept hands off during the Flint sit-down.

The paradoxical fact about the Wagner Act is that it affirmed both the intent to stop strikes and the undiminished right to strike in unequivocal terms. The Senate committee which reported the act, the text of the act, President Roosevelt in signing the act into law, and the Supreme Court in upholding its constitutionality, all emphasized that its main purpose was to stop strikes. However, the drafters of the act also rejected binding arbitration and in Section 13 and elsewhere protected strike activity. Their reasoning was:

(a) that a significant percentage of strikes occur because of "failure to recognize and utilize the theory and practices of collective bargaining";

(b) that collective bargaining is impossible without the right not to agree, that is, the right to strike in the event of an impasse;

and therefore (c) that to legitimize collective bargaining in order to prevent the occurrence of strikes requires the retention of the right to strike as an integral component of collective bargaining.

It was the hope of those sponsoring this legislation that strikes would decrease. In the short run, strikes increased and took the more militant form of sit-downs. But the national government stuck to its strategy of benevolent neutrality. It is as if the government consciously took its chances on militancy in order to be sure of forestalling radicalism.

At some point (whether before or after the governmental initiative seems still unclear), a part of the American business community endorsed this cooptive strategy and independently implemented it. The best-known example is the decision of United States Steel to recognize the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in March 1937. There has recently come to light a letter and memorandum from Thomas W. Lamont of the House of Morgan and United States Steel to President Roosevelt explaining the reasons for this change in policy. On November 3, 1941, Lamont wrote to Roosevelt as follows about United States Steel's decision four and a half years earlier.

> The Board of United States Steel had known for some months that M.C.T. [chairman of the Board] was gravely concerned over the steady approach of C.I.O. demands, especially as evinced in the disastrous strike in the General Motors plants. M.C.T. expressed to me more than once his fears that if full-fledged strike sic were sprung on U.S. Steel, it would cost our workmen $50,000,000 in loss of wages, our stockholders another $50,000,000, and might prove such a major crisis as to constitute almost a social revolution.
>
> Knowing this, I was not surprised when M.C.T. said he wanted to explain to J.P.M. [J. P. Morgan] and me the plan which he had evolved in his own mind. It was simply this: To sit down with Lewis and see whether he could reach an understanding with him that would avert the strike, that would accredit the C.I.O. as a leading bargaining agency, but yet would leave intact the principle of the open shop. I remember very well J.P.M. saying at once in effect that Myron was running the steel company; that Myron knew the labor relations better than he did. J.P.M. added that we all had to realize that collective bargaining had come to stay, and that of course he approved Myron's plan. Needless to say, that was my own view.
>
> In those days M.C.T. talked the whole matter over frequently with the Corporation's officers and members of the Board. Finally, at a large meeting with the presidents and vice presidents of all the subsidiary companies in New York he laid out his views. He left that meeting to keep an engagement with Lewis at his own home in New York, and within a week he had completed the arrangement. (2)

As a result of this sophistication on the part of the Federal Government and a part of American business, organizers working within the framework of the two-stage model of the Manifesto were left in the first stage without an obvious way to move on to the second. Trotskyists in Minneapolis, for instance, did valiant work in organizing the Teamsters Union, but got nowhere in building a political Left. (3)

The outstanding Left effort to deal with the unexpected circumstances of the 1930s was the Communist Party's coalition strategy of united and popular fronts. Al Richmond argues in his memoir that this strategy was not imposed on the American Party by Moscow, but was developed on the basis of American needs and experiences. (4) I think that for a time this was so, but in a somewhat different sense than Richmond suggests.

Richmond feels in looking back that a coalition strategy was needed to combat fascism, but that the Left erred tactically in the direction of "all alliance and no struggle". Similarly Arthur Kinoy sees "a distortion of the strategy of united front struggle against fascism". Kinoy believes that history had placed on the agenda of the Left in this country as in others "the blocking of the most reactionary section of finance capital from turning to open fascism". In Kinoy's view the American Communist Party pursued this correct objective incorrectly by "a growing reliance on the liberal wing of the ruling class whose political manifestation was the Roosevelt-led Democratic Party, rather than on the creation of an independent mass-based anti-capitalist people's party". (5)

Contrary to both men, I believe that the coalition strategy in the United States was to begin with a response not to the Right but to the liberal center. There was no fascist movement in the United States comparable to the thrust of the far Right in Germany, Italy, Spain, China, France. What happened in the United States was that the Communist Party, busy in building the small Left-dominated unions of the Trade Union Unity League, found itself isolated from the surge of spontaneous organization of local industrial unions after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933. Party members doing industrial organizing at a local level insisted that the national Party reorient itself so as to deal fraternally with independent unions and with new locals which had called themselves part of the American Federation of Labor for want of an alternative. Other

Left parties had similar experiences.

Between the harsh and isolating politics of 1929-1933 and the bland and self-abasing politics of later years there thus came about an intermediate episode, full of interest for the present. Roughly it may be dated from the coming to power of Hitler and Roosevelt early in 1933 to the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization in November 1935 and Roosevelt's second campaign in 1936. The strategy of the Left in that time was, as Richmond rightly emphasizes, experimental and localized. It was not mechanically adopted after some overseas initiative. The best summary phrase for what was attempted then — had it not acquired other, sectarian meanings — would be the "united front from below".

Minimally, this meant that rank-and-file workers associated with different Left tendencies should seek ways to act together against their common enemies. David Montgomery and Jeremy Brecher speak of the 1911-1922 upsurge when "the old lines dividing revolutionary groupings tended to break down, and their once-competing local members threw themselves into actual class struggle without regard to their former ideological and organizational hostilities". (6) Something like this also happened in 1933-1935. In contrast to the later 1930s there were no union bureaucrats with whom one could hope to ally. Rather the felt need was for people active at the grass roots to join forces in collective struggle. This was the spirit responsible for the local general strikes in Minneapolis, Toledo, and San Francisco in 1934.

It is important to recall that despite Roosevelt's great popularity when first inaugurated and again after the "second New Deal" of 1935-1937, in 1934 and 1935 there was much disillusionment with New Deal labor policy. The National Recovery Administration to which working people had enthusiastically responded in 1933 was renamed the "National Run Around".

There is no way that the working-class mood of those years can be considered anti-fascist. What was to the fore was a growing disenchantment with liberalism and with Roosevelt. Those who, like myself, did not experience that time can, I think, get a sense of it by recalling the mood of

SNCC activists and the northern black community in 1962-1964. Just as Kennedy was then criticized for rhetorically espousing civil rights, yet standing by while those who acted on his rhetoric were jailed, beaten, and killed, so on the bloody picket lines of 1933-1935 men wonderingly asked themselves: Where was Roosevelt?

What one observes in the general strikes of 1934 is a happy fusion of the intransigence of the Third Period and the ability to widen an action beyond its initial protagonists. The typical scenario was for one group of striking workers to be beaten on the picket line, and then for the entire working class of the locality to walk off their jobs in support. Trotskyists in Minneapolis, Socialists and Musteites in Toledo, Communists in San Francisco all appear to have acted in a manner that avoided the sectarianism of the years preceding and the opportunism of the years that followed.

Electorally, the thrust of the Left in 1933-1935 was toward a labor party (not a people's party). Throughout 1935 Communists and Socialists advanced this objective, Earl Browder and Norman Thomas appearing together at a Madison Square rally in the fall. The Central Committee of the Communist Party called for "a Labor Party built up from below on a trade-union basis but in conflict with the bureaucracy, putting forward a program of demands closely connected with mass struggles, strikes, etc., with the leading role played by the militant elements, including the Communists". The Party, its Central Committee stated, "should declare its support for the movement for a Labor Party and fight in this movement for the policy of the class struggle, resisting all attempts to bring the movement under the control of social-reformism". (7) As I have written elsewhere, the formation of local labor parties was endorsed by labor conventions and councils in Connecticut, Wisconsin, Oregon, Toledo, and Paterson, New Jersey; local labor party tickets were formed in San Francisco, Chicago, and Springfield, Massachusetts; and in October 1935, strong support for a labor party was voiced at the annual AF of L convention.

In November sweeping Socialist victories were recorded in Bridgeport, Connecticut and Reading, Pennsylvania. In

Detroit, Attorney Maurice Sugar, running for alderman on a Labor Party ticket, just missed election, polling 55,574. Speaking to an audience of 1500 in New York City, Farmer-Labor Governor Floyd Olson of Minnesota predicted that a national farmer-labor party would make a bid for power in 1936 or 1940. As 1935 came to an end the Seattle Central Labor Council endorsed and affiliated with the Washington Commonwealth Federation; a Farmer-Labor Federation was formed in Wisconsin; the founding conference of the South Dakota Farmer-Labor Party was held; and Vice-president Francis Gorman of the United Textile Workers announced that forces working for a national farmer-labor party would open an office in the near future. (8)

The popular-front strategy which replaced that of the united front from below produced a qualitative change. The change did not happen all at once. Although the Communist Party hoped for a Roosevelt victory in 1936, it did not formally support him, and indeed declared publicly: "Roosevelt stands for capitalism, not socialism." (9) As late as 1938 the Communist Party criticized "the inconsistencies and vacillations of the Roosevelt administration" and called for a "progressive realignment" based on beginnings such as the Farmer-Labor and Progressive parties of Minnesota and Wisconsin, the American Labor Party in New York, the Commonwealth Federations of the Pacific, and Labor's Non-Partisan League. (10) Nevertheless the direction of change was clear. In 1935 the Party's center of gravity was rank-and-file working people. By 1938 it was an amorphous coalition of so-called progressive forces.

The united front was based on the rank and file, not on a "left-center" coalition with union bureaucrats. The united front was improvised on the basis of American needs, rather than following an international line. The united front attacked the Democratic Party, instead of supporting it as after 1936. The united front was a response to the promises and failures of liberalism, whereas the popular front was directed at fascism overseas.

It may be, for reasons indicated at the outset, that there was no real possibility of a mass radical movement in this country in the 1930s. If there was such a possibility, the hope for it lay in pursuing to the end the strategy of the united front from below.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Ralph Desmarais, in work which he has only begun to publish, has emphasized that government repression of labor after World War I set understood limits within which all "responsible" labor leaders of the 1930s restricted their activity.

(2) Thomas W. Lamont, "Memorandum for the President: The Lewis Diatribe Against J.P.M. and M.C.T.", November 3, 1941, Personal File 70, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Larry Sharp, a history student at Northwestern University, called this material to my attention. We are all in his debt.

(3) Bill Nicklas, "We Help Our Own: A History of Local 574, International Brotherhood of Teamsters", unpublished Master's essay, Northern Illinois University, 1973.

(4) Al Richmond, A Long View From the Left (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1973), Chapter 8.

(5) Arthur Kinoy, "By Way of Explanation", unpublished political essay, Page 10. The point is restated in a condensed version of the essay, "A Party of the People", in Liberation, December 1973.

(6) See their articles in Radical America, November-December 1973.

(7) "On the Main Immediate Tasks of the C.P.U.S.A.", adopted by the Central Committee plenum, January 15-18, 1935, and published in The Communist, February 1935. I owe this reference to an unpublished Doctor's dissertation on the Communist Party by Virgil Vogel.

(8) "The United Labor Party, 1946-1952", in Liberation, December 1973.

(9) Communist Party of Wisconsin, "The Communists and the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation", October 1936, Page 20.

(10) Central Committee of the C.P.U.S.A., "The LaFollette Third Party", May 1938, Pages 10 and 26. Dorothy Healy was kind enough to send me these two pamphlets.

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Introduction to Ignatin

The following is a speech by Noel Ignatin given in Portland, Oregon in 1972. We are publishing it now because we see it as an important contribution to a discussion of racism and a revolutionary response to it. The Left is once again actively debating the meaning of racial divisions in the working class. We think this renewed debate is so important that we are publishing this analysis even though there is some disagreement among Radical America editors about several of Ignatin's points. Particularly, we do not all agree with his conception that white supremacy is the "key element in the popular acceptance of capitalist rule." Further, there is some disagreement among us about the concept of white skin privilege.

Nonetheless this speech has many strengths; we would here like to call attention to two of them. The first is Ignatin's insistence on a materialist analysis of racism. Racism is first a system of material discriminations against non-white people institutionalized in ghetto housing, inferior segregated schooling, and race-stratified employment. Racist ideology is then a rationalization and outgrowth of racist practices, not the other way around. Unfortunately an idealist analysis of racism continues to flourish even in the Left; racism is still often discussed as if it were merely a set of bad ideas foisted on the working class from above. In answering this idealism, Ignatin has drawn on his experience as an organizer to offer examples of how struggles against institutional racism can be fought. This leads us to the second of Ignatin's strong themes. We are in unanimous agreement with his insistence on the importance of building principled political opposition to the institutions and practices that perpetuate racism, even if it deprives the Left of some kinds of support in the short run.

Black Workers, White Workers

Noel Ignatin

In one department of a giant steel mill in northwest Indiana a foreman assigned a white worker to the job of operating a crane. The black workers in the department felt that on the basis of seniority and job experience, one of them should have been given the job, which represented a promotion from the labor gang. They spent a few hours in the morning talking among themselves and agreed that they had a legitimate beef. Then they went and talked to the white workers in the department and got their support. After lunch the other crane operators mounted their cranes and proceeded to block in the crane of the newly promoted worker — one crane on each side of his — and run at the slowest possible speed, thus stopping work in the department. By the end of the day the foreman had gotten the message. He took the white worker off the crane and replaced him with a black worker, and the cranes began to move again.

A few weeks after the above incident, several of the white workers who had joined the black operators in the slowdown took part in meetings in Glen Park, a virtually all-white section of Gary, with the aim of seceding from the city in order to escape from the administration of the black mayor, Richard Hatcher. While the secessionists demanded, in their words, "the power to make the decisions which affect their lives," it was clear that the effort was racially inspired.

At a large farm equipment manufacturing plant in Chicago, a black worker was being tried out for a repair job on an assembly line. The foreman had been harassing the man, trying to disqualify him during his three-day trial period. After two days of this, the majority of the workers on the line, black and white, walked off their jobs demanding that the man be accepted for the job. The company backed down and work resumed.

Later on, some of the same white workers took part in racist demonstrations at a Chicago high school. The demonstrations were called against "overcrowding" in an attempt to keep out several hundred black students who had been transferred to the school as a result of redistricting.

CIVIL WAR

The foregoing anecdotes indicate some of the complexities and contradictions operating within the lives and within the minds of the white workers in this country. On the one hand, displays of democratic co-operation and fraternal relations with black workers, and, on the other hand, examples of backwardness and selfishness which are unbecoming to members of a social class which hopes to reconstruct society in its image. What is taking place is a "civil war" in the mind of the white worker. In the community, on the job, in every sphere of life, he is being faced with a choice between two ways of looking at the world, two ways of leading his life. One way represents solidarity with the black worker and the progressive forces of society. The other way represents alliance with the forces of exploitation and repression.

I'd like to speak a bit about this "civil war" and examine some of what it means for the development of revolutionary strategy.

In order to understand the contradictory, often bewildering behavior of people, especially white people, in this country, we must take up two questions. The first question is — on what does capitalist rule depend?

There are groups, radical groups, which seem to operate on the premise that capitalist rule depends on the monopoly of guns and tanks held by the employing class and its ability to use them whenever it pleases against the exploited majority. This view explains why some groups put such great efforts into building alliances with all sorts of liberals to preserve constitutional forms of government. They hope, through these alliances, to limit the ability of the ruling class to use force against the people.

I do not share this view of the secret of capitalist rule. I do not agree that capitalist power rests, at present, primarily on guns and tanks. It rests on the support of the majority of people. This support is usually passive, sometimes active, but nevertheless effective.

COMPETITION AMONG THE WAGE EARNERS

I contend that the key element in the popular acceptance of capitalist rule is the ideology and institution of white supremacy, which provides the illusion of common interests between the exploited white masses and the white ruling class.

Karl Marx wrote that wage slavery rests exclusively on competition among the wage earners. He meant that the existence of competition among the working class is responsible for the continued rule of the employing class and the inability of the working people to overthrow it and establish their rule.

Why do people compete? They compete in order to get ahead. The fact must be admitted that, from a certain point of view, it is possible to "get ahead" in this society. Years and years of unquestioning loyalty and devotion to the company will, in a certain percentage of cases, result in advancement for the employee — advancement to a position of lead man, foreman, soft job, high bonus job, etc. Working people have various uncomplimentary terms to describe this sort of behavior. Yet large numbers of them live their lives in this way, and for a certain portion of these, it "pays off."

Because of the peculiar development of America and the nature of capitalist policy in this country, there is a special element added to the general competition which exists among all workers. That special element is color, which throws the competition on a special basis, that raises color to a special place in the competition among workers.*

All workers compete; that is a law of capitalism. But black and white workers compete with a special advantage on the side of the white. That is a result of the peculiar development of America, and is not inherent in the objective social laws of the capitalist system.

In the same way that some individual workers gain advancement on the job by currying favor with the employer, white workers as a group have won a favored position for themselves by siding with the employing class against the non-white people. This favored status takes various forms, including the monopoly of skilled jobs and higher education, better housing at lower cost than that available to non-whites, less police harassment, a cushion against the most severe effects of unemployment, better health conditions, as well as certain social advantages.

We're trying to explain why people act as they do, and particularly why white workers act as they do. White working people aren't stupid. They don't act in a racist fashion simply out of blind prejudice. There are much more substantial causes — the system of white-skin privileges — which lead them to behave in a selfish, exclusionary manner.

A black steel worker told me that once, when he was working as a helper on the unloading docks, he decided to bid on an operator's job that was open. All the operators were white. He had worked with them before in his capacity as helper. They had been friends, had eaten together and chatted about all the things that workers talk about. When he bid on the operator's job, it became the task of the other operators to break him in. He was assigned to the job, and sent to work with them on the equipment, and given thirty days to learn the job. It quickly became clear to him that the other workers had no intention of permitting him to get that job. They operated the equipment in such a way as to prevent him from learning how. Workers are very skilled at that sort of thing.

After two weeks one of the white workers came to him and said, "Listen, I know what's going on here. You work with me on Monday and I'll break you in." The person who told me this story agreed — at least there was one decent white worker in the bunch. Friday afternoon came around, and the white worker approached him. With some embarrassment, he admitted that he had to back down from his offer. "It's bad enough when all the guys call me a n----- lover, but when my own wife quits talking to me, well I just can't go through with it."

The man who told me that story never succeeded in getting that job.

What made those white workers act in the way they did? They were willing to be "friends" at the workplace, but only on the condition that the black worker stay in "his place." They didn't want him to "presume" to a position of social equality if and when they met on "the outside." And they didn't want him to presume to share in the better jobs at the workplace. Those white workers understood that keeping themselves in "their place" in the company scheme of things depended upon helping to keep the black worker in "his place."

They had observed that whenever the black people force the ruling class, in whole or in part, to make concessions to racial equality, the ruling class strikes back to make it an equality on a worse level of conditions than those enjoyed by the whites before the concessions. The white workers are thus conditioned to believe that every step toward racial equality necessarily means a worsening of their own conditions. Their bonus is cut. Production rates go up. Their insurance is harder to get and more expensive. Their garbage is collected less often. Their children's schools deteriorate.

This is how the white-skin privilege system works. If a small number of white workers do manage to see through the smoke screen and join in the fight together with the black workers, the ruling class responds with bribes, cajolery, threats, violence and pressure multiplied a thousand fold to drive the thinking whites back into the "club" of white supremacists. And the purpose of all this is to prevent the white workers from learning the black example, to prevent them from learning that if blacks can force concessions from the boss through struggle, how much more could be accomplished if the white workers would get into the struggle against the boss instead of against the black workers.

A common approach to the problem posed above is that of the white radical who goes into a shop which has a typical pattern of discrimination against black workers. Instead of directly taking up that issue, and attempting to build a struggle for equality, he looks for some issue, like speedup, which affects all workers to one degree or another. He aims to develop a struggle around this issue, to involve all the workers in the struggle. He hopes that in the course of the struggle the white workers, through contact with blacks, will lose their attitudes of racial superiority. This is the approach to the problem of unifying the working class which prevails within the radical movement today.

I don't think it works. History shows it doesn't work. The result of this sort of false unity always leaves the black worker still on the bottom. It always seems to be the demand for racial equality, the last one on the list, that is sacrificed in order to reach a settlement and celebrate the "great victory" of the struggle.

Present-day unions are, to a considerable extent, the end product of this sort of approach. It is black and white together on the picket line, and after the strike is over the white workers return to the skilled trades, the machining departments and the cleaner assembly areas, and the black workers return to the labor gang and the open hearth. Every "victory" of this kind feeds the poison of racism and pushes further off the real unity of the working class which must be established if significant progress is to be made.

There is no way to overcome the national and racial divisions within the working class except by directly confronting them. The problem of white supremacy must be fought out openly within the working class.

HUG THE CHAINS OF AN ACTUAL WRETCHEDNESS

Over eighty years ago, Tom Watson, the Georgia agrarian protest leader, wrote the following words, full of profound meaning:

> "You might beseech a Southern white tenant to listen to you upon questions of finance, taxation and transportation; you might demonstrate with mathematical precision that herein lay his way out of poverty into comfort; you might have him 'almost persuaded' to the truth, but if the merchant who furnished his farm supplies (at tremendous usury) or the town politician (who never spoke to him except at election times) came along and cried 'Negro rule,' the entire fabric of reason and common sense which you had patiently constructed would fall, and the poor tenant would joyously hug the chains of an actual wretchedness rather than do any experimenting on a question of mere sentiment . . . the argument against the independent movement in the South may be boiled down into one word — nigger."

These words are as true today as when they were first written. They apply with equal force to workers as well as to farmers, and the truth of them is not limited to the South. Ted Allen, a contemporary student of this problem, has put it that white supremacy is the keystone of ruling class power, and the white-skin privilege is the mortar that holds it in place.

There are two points in what I have been saying so far that are distinctive and that I wish to emphasize.

The first point is that, for revolutionary strategists, the key problem is not the racism of the employing class, but the racism of the white worker. (After all, the boss's racism is natural to him because it serves his class interests.) It is the support by white workers for the employers' racial policies which represents the chief obstacle to all social progress in this country, including revolution.

The second point is that this support has its basis in real conditions of life. It is not simply a matter of ignorance and prejudice, to be overcome by exhortation and appeals to reason.

The second question I wish to take up is: where does socialism come from?

TO IMPOSE ORDER ON CHAOS

In their daily activities working people express the drive to reorganize society so that they become the masters of production instead of the servants of production — the essential meaning of Socialism. I would like to cite a few examples of this striving of workers.

One of the characteristics of steel production is that it must be continuous: to stop the furnaces is a costly and time-consuming operation. (I heard a story that once in Colorado around 1912 the IWW pulled a strike at a steel mill and, instead of banking the furnaces, simply walked off the job. According to the story; that furnace stands today, over sixty years later, with a solid block of iron inside it, unusable.)

Steel is a continuous operation and has to be maintained that way. What the steel companies do is operate a system of three shifts, and a system of relief on the job: a worker can't leave the job until his relief shows up. The workers take advantage of this in various ways. There is one mill I know of in which the workers have organized a rotation system among themselves, in which they take turns calling off, allowing the person they are scheduled to relieve eight hours overtime in their place. There are a couple of dozen people involved in this, they have it organized in turns and it would probably take a professional mathematician several weeks of studying attendance records to figure out their system. It allows each worker to get an extra day off every few weeks, and then receive, in his turn, an enlarged paycheck — without working a single hour more than normal. You see, the company posts its schedule of work, and then the workers proceed to violate it and impose their own.

Of course they don't have everything their own way. When the absenteeism gets too severe the company cracks down and threatens reprisals, and the workers are forced to slack off for a while. Then, when the heat is off, they go back to their own schedule.

Another example. One of the characteristics of the capitalist scheme of production is the division between maintenance and production workers. This is universal under capitalism. There is one category of workers who perform the same operation minute after minute for their entire lives, and another category of workers who go around fixing machines when they break down. In the United States this division has been adapted to serve the system of white-skin privileges. White workers are generally given preference for the jobs in maintenance, which are usually easier, cleaner, more interesting and higher paying than production jobs.

The workers respond to this division in ways that at first sight seem bewildering. When they get angry at the company, production workers will not perform the simplest and most routine maintenance task. They will stop an entire operation waiting for a maintenance worker to change a fuse.

A black worker in maintenance, one of the few, told this story. He was called to repair a piece of equipment that had failed. Unable to locate the trouble, he called his foreman to help. The foreman was also unable to find the trouble, and so he called a higher-up. They stood around for a while scratching their heads and then decided to go back to the office and study the schematic drawings of the equipment to see if they would reveal the trouble. After the foremen had left, the black maintenance worker asked the production worker, who was also black, what was wrong with the machine. He replied that he had thrown the wrong switch by mistake and blown some obscure control device. He pointed it out, after swearing the maintenance worker to secrecy, and it was fixed in three minutes. His attitude was — no one had asked him what was wrong, and if they treated him like a dope he would act like a dope.

This is one side of the workers' response to the arbitrary maintenance-production split. On the other hand, they make efforts to overcome the barriers in their way, to master the entire process of production in order to express their full human capacities. Production workers do everything they can to learn about their equipment. On some occasions they go to great lengths to make repairs themselves without calling the maintenance department.

Maintenance workers also show this striving to break down artificial barriers. Many times they voluntarily grab a shovel or perform other tasks which are outside of their job requirements. But if the foreman orders them to do it, they will curse him and refuse.

These efforts by both production and maintenance workers to break down the barriers erected between them represent the striving of working people to master the equipment which makes the things they need, to gain control over the work process so that labor itself becomes a source of satisfaction to them.

There are many other examples that indicate the efforts of workers to impose their order on the chaos of capitalist production. If we want to know what socialism in the United States will look like, we should carefully study the activities of the working people today, because the ingredients of the socialist society appear right now in embryonic, subordinated ways.

THE ULTIMATE EXPLOITED

Now I must tie together the two lines of argument I have been pursuing so far, and pose the question — where does the black struggle fit into all this ? Please note : by black struggle I mean the autonomous black movement. I do not mean any particular organization, although a number of organizations are part of it. I am referring to the tendency on the part of large numbers of black people, especially workers, to find ways of acting together independent of white control and white approval, and to decide their course of action based simply on what they feel is good for black people, not what serves some so-called larger movement.

The elements of such an autonomous black movement exist. They are repressed and subordinated, just as the autonomous efforts of workers generally are repressed. The conscious and determined efforts of the white ruling class to flood the black community with drugs are one indication of the serious threat the black movement poses to official society.

In spite of all the efforts of the ruling class to suppress it, the black movement exists. How does it fit into the general movement of all the oppressed to revolutionize society? I wish to make three points.

First of all, the black workers are the ultimate exploited in this country. They have no possibility of rising as a group to oppress anyone else. In spite of what many whites think about such subjects as welfare, black people receive no favors as a group from the capitalist class.

In the second place, the daily activities of the black people, especially the black workers, are the best existing model for the aspirations of the workers generally as a distinct class of people. Other groups in society, when they act collectively on their own, usually represent partial and occasionally even reactionary interests. The activities of the black workers are the most advanced outpost of the new society we seek to establish.

THE CHALLENGE TO WHITE WORKERS

In the third place, the autonomous movement of black people poses a constant challenge to white workers to, in the words of the black publicist C. L. R. James, "take the steps which will enable the working people to fulfill their historic destiny of building a society free of the domination of one class or one race over another."

The black movement poses a challenge, not merely to white workers in general, but to those white intellectuals, workers or not, who regard themselves as in some sense radical or revolutionary. This is a challenge which, in the past, they have generally not lived up to. This challenge is not something limited to history either; it continually comes up, in new ways as well as old ones Let me offer a few examples.

The system of seniority was originally fought for by the unions as a defense against individual favoritism and arbitrary discipline by the boss. Through a fairly involved process, seniority has been adapted to serve the needs of white supremacy. The boss decided whom to hire first, and the seniority system placed the union label on the practice of relegating blacks to the status of "last hired, first fired." As black workers press forward with their demands for full equality in all spheres of life, they increasingly come into conflict with the seniority system and other devices which uphold white supremacy, such as certain types of tests, and so forth. The white workers often react defensively. In many cases they insist that their resistance is not due to any prejudice against black people, but is merely an objection to bypassing what has become the regular procedure for advancement. On more than one occasion, black workers have forced the employer to open a new job area to them, only to run up against the rigid opposition of white workers.

White revolutionaries must understand, and help the masses of white workers to understand, that the interests of the entire working class can only be served by standing firmly with the black workers in such cases.

Or consider the dispute over jobs in the construction trades, which reached a peak several years ago in a number of cities, and is still going on in some places. In Chicago it took the form of, on one side, a community coalition led by Rev. C. T. Vivian, a number of elements around SCLC and Operation PUSH and various diverse forces from among the black community and youth, along with, apparently, some financial backing from the Ford Foundation and the Chicago Northwestern Railway. The aim of the struggle was to gain entrance for blacks into the construction trades. The means used was to surround various on-going construction sites with mass picketing in order to stop work on them until black workers were admitted in proportion to their numbers in the city. On the other side was a united front of the construction unions and contractors. Of course their defense was that they do not practice racial discrimination; that black workers simply had not applied for or passed the tests for admittance.

What is the position of radicals to be in a case like this ? There have been arguments that the Ford Foundation and other such forces are using the black movement to weaken the construction unions and drive down the cost of labor. That argument is not without validity; it is difficult to believe that the Ford Foundation and the Chicago Northwestern Railway are unselfishly interested in the cause of black workers.

Some radical groups, from a lofty position of supposed objectivity, took it upon themselves to advise the black coalition that instead of directing their struggle against the admittedly unfair assignment of jobs, they should recognize the fact that there was a shortage of jobs in construction and should join with the unions to expand the number of jobs, which would benefit black as well as white and avoid the danger of "dividing the working class" as the present struggle was allegedly doing. This, of course, was merely a radical-sounding version of the argument given by the construction unions and contractors themselves, who would welcome any support from any quarter which offered to expand the industry.

The response of the black masses to this argument was to press forward the struggle to open those jobs up or shut them down. Their actions showed their confidence that it was they who were using the Ford Foundation and not the other way around, and that as for the problems of the construction industry, these could not be of concern to them until they became part of it.

Some listeners may sense the justice in what I have been arguing, and at the same time question its practicability. Wherein lies the basis for establishing solidarity among the working class? Is it possible to expect white workers to repudiate privileges which are real in the interests of something so abstract as justice?

POISON BAIT

The answer is that the system of white-skin privileges, while it is undeniably real, is not in the interests of white workers as part of a class which aims at transforming society to its roots. The acceptance of a favored status by white workers binds them to wage slavery, makes them subordinate to the capitalist class. The repudiation, that is, the active rejection, through struggle, of this favored status is the precondition for the participation by white workers in the struggle of workers as a distinct social class. A metaphor which has been used in the past, and which I still find appropriate, is that white-skin privileges are poison bait, a worm with a hook in it. To be willing to leap from the water to exert the most determined and violent efforts to throw off the hook and the work is the only way to avoid landing on the dinner table.

Let me offer a historical parallel. Back in the 1930's when people were organizing the CIO, one of the problems they had to face was that many workers in the plants had worked out a means of survival which consisted of gaining advancement for themselves in return for favors for the boss. Old timers still talk about how, back in the days before the union, if you wanted a promotion or even wanted to keep your job in the event of a layoff, you had to mow the boss's lawn or wash his car or give him a bottle of whiskey at Christmas. In order to bring a union into those plants, that sort of activity had to be defeated. It was undeniably true that those who washed the foreman's car were the last workers laid off. On what basis was it possible to appeal to the workers to renounce this sort of behavior which they felt was necessary to their survival ? The basis of the appeal was that it was precisely that sort of behavior which bound them and subordinated them to the company, and that the interests of solidarity of the entire work force demanded the repudiation of such individual arrangements.

The appeal fell on deaf ears until it began to seem that there was a real possibility of making some basic changes in those plants. Until the CIO was present as a real force, until the momentum built up, until people began to feel that there was another way to live besides mowing the boss's lawn, they were not willing to repudiate the old way. (The changes in the life of the workers in the plants brought about by the coming of unionism are described in a number of books. Permit me here to cite three : Brother Bill McKie, by Philip Bonosky, Wyndham Mortimer's Autobiography, and perhaps best of all, Indignant Heart, by Mathew Ward.)

Today, as a result of the CIO, in vast areas of American industry, any worker who was suspected of doing the sorts of favors for the foreman that were once taken for granted would be ostracized and treated with cold contempt by his fellow workers. (Some people may argue that the previous statement is an exaggeration, and that the spirit of togetherness and combativity has deteriorated over the years. To the extent that they are right, it should be noted that this deterioration is in large part due to the habit of subservience encouraged by the general acceptance by white workers of racial privileges.)

The time will come when the masses of white workers in our country will regard with disdain those among them who seek or defend racial privileges, in the same way they now have only contempt for someone who would wash the foreman's car in return for preferential treatment.

A POWERFUL MAGNET

Today the black movement represents an alternative to the dominant mode of life in our country, in the same way the CIO represented an alternative to the old way of life in the factory. The relations which black people, especially black workers, have established among themselves, and the culture which has arisen out of their struggle, represent a model for a new society. The black movement exercises a powerful attraction on all those who come into contact with it.

Consider the matter of the position of women and relations between the sexes. Black women, as a result of their struggle for freedom as black people, have achieved a great sense of their independence, not merely from one man but from men in general. This has forced black men to accept a degree of independence for women that is rare in the rest of the population. Anyone who has observed the changes undergone by white, Latin or Asian women once they go to work and come into contact with black women can see the extent to which the old way of women's unquestioned subservience to man has been undermined. The men may resent this process, but it is irreversible.

The rise in general working-class militancy, observed by everyone in the last few years, is directly traceable to the influence of black workers, who are generally recognized by all, including white workers, as the most militant and combative group of workers when it comes to taking on the company. The black workers are drawing on the experience they have gained in their struggle for national freedom, and are beginning to transmit the lessons of that struggle to the white workers with whom they come in contact.

The same thing is true also for the insurgent movement within the military, where the GI resistance, led by black GIs, reached such proportions that it forced major changes in official government policy.

This is true also for the insurgent movement within the prisons, where the resistance and courage of black prisoners has pulled whites into the struggle for decent conditions and human dignity.

For decades, politics, to white workers, has been a dirty word. It has meant nothing more than the right to choose every four years which gang of thieves is going to loot the public treasury for the next four. Beginning in 1955 with the Montgomery bus boycott, when an entire city organized its own system of transportation as well as of public discussion and decision-making through the direct participation of thousands of people, the black movement has created a new concept of citizenship and community. Continuing through the sit-ins, freedom rides, mass marches and urban rebellions, the black movement has given new meaning to politics, and helped the American people in general to rediscover their tradition of self-organization and revolt.

Many examples of this phenomenon could be cited from the only community in this country whose members greet each other as brother and sister. But the point is made : in spite of all the obstacles placed in its way, the black movement, expressed in the patterns of life arising from struggle, represents a powerful magnetic pole to vast numbers of workers looking for a way out of the mess which is modern life.

Recall, if you will, the anecdote with which I opened this talk : the case of the white workers acting in solidarity with the black crane operators. Consider the position of the white workers in that case. They are under conflicting pressures. On the one hand, they see a group of workers preparing to strike a blow at the company and, like all workers everywhere, they want to deal themselves in, to hit back at the enemy which is oppressing them. On the other hand, to join with the black workers in such a situation means turning against habit, against tradition, against their own status as racially privileged workers.

They are faced with a choice, between their identity and interests as whites and their identity and interests as workers. What was it that made that particular group of workers in that situation decide, in the words of black activist Charles Johnson, to be "more worker than white"?

Their actions can only be explained by the fact that, whether or not they express it in words, the black movement represented for them an alternative way of life, a way that was better and more attractive than the usual passive, subordinated life they were accustomed to. Anyone who has ever taken part in collective struggle knows that, regardless of how they may have acted afterwards, the experience left a lasting impression on them.

What about the tasks of revolutionaries, and in particular white revolutionaries, in regard to this vital task of unifying the working class around its class interests?

Things have changed in the last twenty years. It is no longer possible for any group which claims to be revolutionary to openly oppose the black movement. Not if it hopes to have any following. There are one or two groups in the country that do, but nobody pays any attention to them. The point today is to define the relation between the black movement and the general class struggle. And that is where the differences come out.

Everybody in the movement is opposed to racism, everybody chants the litany that racism is the greatest barrier to class unity. Every group puts out propaganda against racism and sincerely strives to win the workers to the struggle against it.

But what about those cases where the struggle of black workers and black people against racial discrimination appears to conflict with the desire to unify the largest possible number of workers behind what are called "general class demands"? For example, as sometimes happens, when the aggressiveness of black workers in pursuing their fight for equality tends to alienate white workers who might be willing to join with them in common efforts to achieve some reform of immediate and direct benefit to both groups? Then the trouble begins. And we must admit that some left-wing groups, especially those dominated by whites, are all too willing to set aside the special demands of the black struggle.

A BAD CHOICE

A recent example of this might serve to clarify the difference between the two approaches. At a large electrical appliance manufacturing plant in Chicago, one of the radical groups, the Revolutionary Union, sent a few people in. The radicals began putting out a plant newsletter which raised the issues of speedup, safety, low wages — all the various grievances of the workers — and also carried on a fairly aggressive campaign against racial discrimination, against the exclusion of black workers from the better departments, etc.

The group managed to build up considerable support, most of it among black workers, which wasn't surprising since black workers made up almost half the work force and were most victimized by the oppressive conditions the group was agitating against.

After some time had passed, the strategists in the group who, it is safe to surmise, were the white radical who had initiated it along with one or two newly radicalized workers from the plant, decided that, as a tactic, they ought to try and throw out the present union, the International Association of Machinists, which is one of the worst unions in the Chicago area, and bring in the United Electrical Workers union. That is the UE, the old left-led union expelled in 1949 from the CIO and still under what is called progressive leadership.

Anyhow, they took a group of workers down to the UE hall and met with the organizers there. The staff people were delighted that they were interested in bringing in the UE, but they observed that there weren't enough white workers in the committee. If they ever hoped to win the plant for the UE, they would have to involve more white workers in the organizing effort.

That was certainly a logical effort. And so, what did the group do? They went back into the plant and began campaigning for the UE, using the newsletter as their chief vehicle. But now there was a change. The main aim became to reach the white workers, and so the line of the newsletter now became: all workers unite, the boss makes no distinction between black and white, do not let race feeling divide us, bringing in the UE will benefit us all, our interests are all the same, etc. As for the exposures of racial discrimination and the campaign to abolish it in the plant, which had occupied so much of the group's attention prior to the decision to bring in the UE, that was laid aside in the interests of appealing to the broadest number of workers who could be won to the immediate goal, getting a better union.

What is there to say about a story like this? What is there to do besides shake your head? Doesn't this represent, in capsule form, the whole history of labor movement in this country — the radicalization of the workers followed by the capitulation, on the part of the leadership, to the backward prejudices of the white workers? How many times does this experience have to be repeated? Apparently an infinite number until we learn the lesson.

By the way, the upshot of the organizing campaign was that the group didn't succeed in fooling any white workers; they still considered it a black power group and kept it at arm's length. But it did succeed in cooling the enthusiasm of the black workers who were its initial base.

Was there an alternative course that could have been followed in the particular situation? I think there was.

NOTHING LESS THAN A TOTAL CHANGE

The alternative would have been to encourage the group along its original lines, determined to fight consistently against white supremacy regardless of what came up or came down. To develop the group as the core of a fighting movement in the plant that carried out struggles on the shop floor around all issues of concern to its members, including the issue of racial discrimination.

It's probably true that such a group could not have been a majority movement at the beginning, or perhaps even for a considerable length of time. Most likely, as the group pushed firmly against racial discrimination it would alienate some white workers who could have been won to it otherwise. That's a choice that has to be made. The group in the plant made the wrong choice.

I think that a group such as I describe, made up perhaps in the beginning almost entirely of black workers, could have developed as a center of struggle in the plant, and a center of opposition to the company and the rotten union. As time went on, it could have attracted to itself white workers who were so fed up with their situation that they were looking for radical solutions — and would even identify with a "black radical" outfit, so long as it seemed to offer a way out of the mess they were in. The very things which would make such a group repulsive to some workers would make it attractive to that increasing number of workers, black as well as white, who are coming to sense that nothing less than a total change is worth fighting for.

The course I advocate offers great difficulties — no doubt about it. It is likely that the repression directed against a radical group that relentlessly fought racial discrimination would be greater than against a more moderate group. It is possible that a group such as I describe could never have gained admittance into the UE. I freely concede all the difficulties. But then, whoever said that making a revolution was easy?

As for the alternative, the course that was actually followed, we know all too well where that leads.

The Politics of Population: Birth Control and the Eugenics Movement

Linda Gordon

INTRODUCTION

Feminists have been concerned with birth control for over a century because they saw involuntary child-bearing and child-raising as important causes of women's subordination. In the last half-century the technology of contraception and abortion has improved greatly, creating the possibility for the first time in history of making all motherhood voluntary. But the social ideas behind the birth control movement have changed very little in the last century. It seems wasteful, therefore, that so little is known about the history of the movement for the legalization and popularization of birth control. Today especially there are serious political misunderstandings that are sustained by this historical ignorance.

The feminist movement of the 1960's raised demands for legalized abortion and better birth control, but usually couched these demands in terms of the needs and options of educated women of the professional class. This emphasis is traditional: those women who first used birth control widely, and fought for its legalization, were those whose economic privilege gave them options for careers and life-styles preferable to child-raising. (1) Working-class and poor women have not had, and often still do not have, these options, and as a result they have sometimes perceived birth control as an issue peripheral to their problems. After all, it is not an excess of children that creates or sustains poverty and exploitation.

Severe as this class difference may be, it is one of the milder forms in which class differences have appeared in the birth control movement. A sharper form can be seen in the difference between the population control and the birth control movements. The distinction between these two movements, not widely understood, is essentially this: "birth control," a term first popularized by Margaret Sanger just before World War I (the most common terms previous to that included "voluntary motherhood," prevention of conception, and "prevenception"), has referred to reproductive self-determination by individual women or couples for individual purposes; "population control" has referred to a large-scale social policy of limiting births throughout a whole society or in certain social groups for the purpose of changing economic, political and/or ecological conditions. Modern population control thought began with Malthusian economics and the argument that population surplus kept the poor poor. Within the birth control movement, population control ideas were often presented simultaneously with demands for women's reproductive self-determination. At times population control ideas dominated, stimulating resistance from those who perceived them as justifying inequality and exploitation. The intermixture of population control and birth control ideas in the same movement naturally made this suspicion extend to the entire movement.

Racism and nativism among population control advocates deepened this suspicion. In the U.S. in the early twentieth century, chauvinism against immigrants and non-whites called into service population control ideas and schemes in efforts to lower the relative birth rates of those "undesirable" groups. The specific form of these schemes was eugenics, a theory of improving human "stock" by selective breeding. In the 1920's, the entire birth control movement was saturated with eugenics ideas. The resentment that these ideas produced among those branded "undesirable" naturally produced resistance to the entire birth control cause.

Today those who would argue that birth control is essential to women's liberation must grapple with these legacies. Suspicion of birth control as racist and elitist is based on actual historical evidence, and we should not dismiss it as simple sexist prejudice. On the other hand, we should not accept these suspicions as in themselves correct interpretations of the social significance of birth control. To convince those who harbor these suspicions, it is important to show that birth control and population control were different social movements with different social bases. One way to understand the difference is to look at the historical development of both. I hope that the following discussion of the influence of eugenics on the birth control movement will contribute to a fuller and more complex view of the problem.

THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1915 the issue of birth control came out into the public eye rather suddenly, as socialists and anarchists like Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger deliberately defied obscenity laws by distributing information on contraception. By late 1916 there was a nation-wide campaign of agitation and direct action for birth control. By 1917 there were national and local organizations, run almost entirely by women, devoted to the legalization of contraception. Most of these groups saw themselves as within the feminist tradition, concerned with women's right to reproductive self-determination. Less universally but in many instances these organizations were connected to the Socialist Party or to local socialist groupings. (2)

The ideas of the birth control organizations also included theories which pre-dated feminism and socialism. One was neo-Malthusianism : the argument for checking population growth artificially in order to increase individual prosperity. The English and American economists and social theorists who advanced neo-Malthusianism in the nineteenth century had at first been particularly concerned to check enmiserization and resultant unrest among the industrial working class; later they, particularly the English, extended their concern for pacification to the colonial populations of the Empire. A second source of birth control thought, particularly in the U.S., was utopian communitarianism. In many different forms the utopians' commitment to a planned society led them to include births in their planning, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Oneida Community, for example, practiced "stirpiculture," an early word for eugenics; the Oneidans tried to improve the quality of children by directing the mating of particularly "fine" human specimens and prohibiting mating (though not necessarily sexual intercourse) between less "outstanding" people.

The development of a feminist movement in the mid-nineteenth century added to these older views an analysis of the subordination of women in which involuntary child-bearing and child-rearing figured as an important cause of women's subjection. Their agitation for "voluntary motherhood," beginning in the 1870's, was limited by the prudish sexual fears and moralities that pervaded capitalist society at that time. (3) But in the first decades of the twentieth century there was a loosening in acceptable standards of sexual conduct, particularly in the cities, and public advocacy of mechanical contraceptive devices became psychologically and politically possible for reformers and feminists.

Still, birth control did not immediately become respectable. Not only was it illegal, but its militant advocates were occasionally arrested on obscenity charges, though none were heavily sentenced. Emma Goldman was the first active feminist campaigner for birth control, and the first to be arrested for it. By the outbreak of the First World War Margaret Sanger became the chief spokesperson for the cause. In her regular column in the New York Call, a Socialist Party paper, she began in 1911 to write about birth control, venereal disease and other previously unmentionable topics. In 1914 she published seven issues of a revolutionary feminist paper, The Woman Rebel, which advocated birth control, defended political assassination, published Emma Goldman, and attacked the suffrage movement for its irrelevance to working-class women. Sanger wrote that she saw birth control primarily as a means to alleviate the suffering of working-class and poor women from unwanted pregnancies, and in the long run she identified the demand for birth control as an important weapon in the class struggle. (4) Rejecting the path of lobbying and winning over influential people, Sanger chose direct action. In October 1916 she, her sister and a few other women opened a birth control clinic in Brownsville, Brooklyn; she and her sister were arrested, and the publicity around their trial and imprisonment gave them a public platform from which to present their ideas. (5) Largely through their influence, direct action became a part of the tactics of the large network of local birth control organizations that existed by 1917.

World War I, however, brought with it a sharp and effective attack on the American Left. One of the fatalities of the Rightward political swing of this period was the feminist movement. Although the woman suffrage organizations went on to victory after the war, they lost their Left wing — those whose analysis of women's oppression led them to demand social change more fundamental than extension of the franchise. In 1916 the birth control activists had been politically situated in the overlap between the Left wing of the feminists and the big-city, bohemian groups of socialists and anarchists. When both these political groupings were broken up, the birth control advocates — mostly of the professional class and some even bourgeois — floundered politically. Losing confidence in the legitimacy of the rebellion of women of their own class, they fell back into an orientation as social workers, in the tradition of the settlement houses. Their own class position often led them to isolate the birth control issue from other social and economic pressures working-class people faced; this separation made their appeals unconvincing to the working-class women they hoped to win over. The continued existence of organized feminism might have reinforced their inclination to fight for themselves (as the abortion movement of the 1960's and 1970's has been powerful because it has been essentially a movement of women fighting in their own interests). Without it, the birth controllers remained social workers, with the tendency to think that they knew best what was good for their "clients."

EUGENICS

The eugenics ideas which began to gain popularity in the late nineteenth century were not separate from any of the earlier sources of birth control thought. Indeed, eugenics attitudes — the optimistic view that the quality of human society could be improved by the breeding of better individuals — had attracted reformers of all varieties for nearly a century. Based on faulty genetics, early eugenics ideas were themselves largely utopian, speculations based on the assumption that acquired characteristics could be inherited. This assumption meant that there was no necessary opposition between environmentalism and heredity, and nineteenth-century eugenists believed that individual improvements acquired through an improved environment could be transmitted to offspring.

This hopeful orientation allowed two very different kinds of people to share an enthusiasm for eugenics. The dominant group in the late nineteenth century was radical reformers of the pre-Marxian socialist tradition, for whom the genetic transmittal of degeneracy was merely another argument for the necessity of social justice. (6) In smaller numbers nineteenth-century eugenics attracted professional and business men, for whom eugenics was more a theory of existing society than a plan for change; and the theory — that the "unfit," the criminal and the "degenerate" were the products of bad heredity — suited their desire to justify their own right to power, privilege and wealth.

The rejection of the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics changed the political implications of eugenics, and more conservative interpretations of its ideas became dominant. New genetic theories provided reliable methods of prediction, and therefore control, of the transmittal of some of the more physical traits identifiable, and thus stimulated a great deal of scientific research into human genetics. The first eugenics organizations were research centers, such as the Eugenics Record Office and the Station for Experimental Evolution. As eugenics enthusiasts developed specific political and social proposals for action, they established organizations to spread the gospel generally and do legislative lobbying particularly. The first of these was the Eugenics Section of the American Breeders Association, which changed its name to the American Genetic Association. Several other organizations were established in the next decade. (7)

From the time it conceived of actually controlling reproduction, the eugenics movement attracted backers from the ruling class. In an extraordinarily rapid change from its eccentric origins, by the early twentieth century eugenics was dominated by upper-class and professional men. The Eugenics Record Office was established by Mrs. E.H. Harriman. (8) The Station for Experimental Evolution was paid for by Andrew Carnegie. (9) Henry Fairfield Osborn, a gentleman scholar and chief founder of the New York Museum of Natural History, was a main financial backer of the societies; and starting in the late 1920's Frederick Osborn, nephew of Henry Fairfield, took leadership in the cause and financed a research program for the Eugenics Research Association. (10)

After World War I. the eugenics movement was a unique social coalition of radical reformers, academic scientists and capitalists. The money and influence those groups brought transformed eugenics into a mass concern in the 1920's, a cause which, like Progressivism as a whole, had simultaneously the characteristics of a reform and a conservative program. The eugenists identified themselves as crusaders for social reform, and argued their case with apocalyptic warnings (e.g., "race suicide"). They advocated techniques, such as contraception, marriage licensing and sterilization, often repulsive to traditional and religious people. On the other hand, the assumption of eugenics was that people's most basic characteristics are inherited, (11) an assumption in direct opposition to the environmentalism which had then been associated with most earlier American reform movements. Eugenists used the assumption to justify social and economic inequalities as natural; eugenics journals featured articles about "aristogenic" families, as if the existence of several noted gentlemen in the same family proved the superiority of their genes. Furthermore their definitions of what was socially worthy were, by and large, adopted uncritically from the dominant conventional standards of success. Like other Social Darwinists, the eugenists were enamored of the process of natural selection and the survival of the fittest which they believed it produced. They tended to romanticize the "health" of animal and pre-modern societies in which nothing interfered with these processes. (12)

As if sensing the contradictions that these attitudes would have produced if spelled out, the eugenists often equivocated in the terms they used. Starting from a scientific usage in which "unequal" merely meant different, they slid into a political judgment in which what was "different" became less worthy. They were similarly slippery in their use of the word "race," sometimes acknowledging that they referred to the white race, and sometimes claiming that it was the "human race" for which they feared. This double-meaning helped create popular confusion about the meaning of "race suicide," when it became a subject of widespread hysteria between 1905 and 1910. Whereas the phrase was at first used to attack birth control, many of the twentieth-century, post-Mendelian eugenists were in favor of birth control as a method of controlling the reproduction of the "less worthy" human stock. Thus their version of "race suicide" came to refer to two distinct problems : one, the decline in the death rate of the "unfit," a result of the welfare programs of the state; the other, the proportionately lower reproduction rate among the "better stock," while the "inferior stock" continued to have high birth rates.

The eugenics movement offered a two-part program to deal with the problem of "race suicide" : positive and negative eugenics. The former meant encouraging the production of more children among parents of "better stock," and encouraging the mating of people whose offspring would be likely to be "superior." The latter meant discouraging reproduction among those of "inferior stock," and prohibiting it by sterilization among the absolutely inferior or damaged. The precise social meaning of eugenics, then, depended on the definitions of such categories as "inferior stock." And these, as we have seen, were usually open to racist and elitist interpretations. The eugenists' discussions of "aristogenic" families was based on their confidence in the inheritance, and hence the predictability, of successfulness. "Among the 1000 leading American men of science," eugenist Paul Popenoe wrote, "there is not one son of a day laborer. It takes 48,000 unskilled laborers to produce one man distinguished enough to get in Who's Who, while the same number of Congregational ministers produces 6000 persons eminent enough to be included. . . . " (13)

Aristogenic stock was missing not only from the working class as a whole, but also from non-Yankees in particular. Here is a typical explanation of the problem from a standard eugenics textbook first published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1916:

> From the rate at which immigrants are increasing it is obvious that our very life-blood is at stake. For our own protection we must face the question of what types or races should be ruled out . . . many students of heredity feel that there is great hazard in the mongrelizing of distinctly unrelated races . . . . However, it is certain that under existing social conditions in our own country only the most worthless and vicious of the white race will tend in any considerable numbers to mate with the negro, and the result cannot but mean deterioration on the whole for either race . . . .(14)

Consider the following — typical — passage from Revolt Against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man by Lothrop Stoddard, one of the most widely respected eugenists:

> But what about the inferiors ? Hitherto we have not analyzed their attitude. We have seen that they are incapable of either creating or furthering civilization, and are thus a negative hindrance to progress. But the inferiors are not mere negative factors in civilized life; they are also positive — in an inverse, destructive sense. The inferior elements are, instinctively or consciously, the enemies of civilization. And they are its enemies, not by chance, but because they are more or less uncivilizable. (15)

The eugenics movement strongly supported immigration restriction (16) and contributed to the development of racist fears and hatreds among many Americans. In 1928, the Committee on Selective Immigration of the American Eugenics Society recommended that future immigration should be restricted to white people. (17) The movement also supported the enactment of anti-miscegenation laws throughout the South, (18) and Southern racists used the respectability of eugenics to further the development of segregation. (19)

EUGENICS AND THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT

The conservative, predominantly male eugenics advocates were not favorably inclined to the feminist birth control laws. Although there were some mutual interests, the differences — stylistic, social and political — between the two movements were far greater. Both advocated the legalization and spread of information about reproduction and contraception, but the eugenists preferred more permanent forms of birth control, i.e., sterilization. Both groups supported the spread of information particularly among the working class, but for very different reasons : the birth control advocates were by and large concerned to help working-class people; the eugenists were interested in reducing or stopping the reproduction of "inferior stock." (20)

When they turned their attention to "positive eugenics," the eugenists were usually directly antagonistic to the work of the birth controllers. To appreciate this conflict fully, one must remember that the eugenists were concerned not only with the inadequate reproduction of the "superior," but also with a declining birth rate in general. (21) As late as 1940, demographers worried that the net reproduction rate of the U. S. was below the replacement level. (22) Many eugenists clung to mercantilist notions that a healthy economy should have a steadily growing population. With this point of view, it is not surprising that eugenists found widespread birth limitation in itself fearsome.

In investigating the declining birth rate, demographers and sociologists had found out that one source of it was educated women. This was partly due to the general lower birth rate of the "superior;" but it was worse with superior women. In 1917 half the graduates of women's colleges in the U.S. never married. (23) An English study showed that where higher education of women was widespread the birth rate had fallen 15% from 1904 to 1910 alone, while there was no decline in counties without many educated women. (24) Eugenics magazines had been attacking higher education for women since the 1870's, and as they lost ground some of them had switched to attacking the "masculine education" of women — which meant training in things other than motherly and housewifely skills. (25) At other times it was women's work outside the home that was criticized. (26)

The eugenics analysis often extended to a general critique of the growing "independence" of women. It is true that women's independence, higher education and employment contributed to lowering the birth rate. But eugenists usually failed to see the actual social forms that translated increased opportunities for women into lessened desire for marriage and children — i.e., a division of labor that left women solely responsible for child-raising, and a pervasive male chauvinism that made men of most classes feel weakened by their wives' activities outside their homes. This independence weakened the "race" since it produced both a declining birth rate in general and a particularly dysgenic distribution of that decline. (27) Indeed, the most common eugenics position could hardly have been more anti-feminist, inasmuch as it viewed women primarily as breeders. (28) One eugenist wrote in 1917: "...in my view, women exist primarily for racial ends. The tendency to exempt the more refined of them from the pains and anxieties of child bearing and motherhood, although arising out of a very attractive feeling of consideration for the weaker individuals of the race, is not, admirable as it seems, in essence a moral one." (29)

Though the eugenics people by and large recognized the birth control movement as an enemy, the birth control people did not make the reverse judgment. Many of the leaders of the birth control movement found that they could gain from eugenics' popularity, and joined the campaign. There were many pressures, and some weighty reasons, for them to do so.

One reason was that many people of the Left were drawn to eugenics at the time. Socialists, feminists and sexual reformers nearly all approved of and used eugenics ideas in the first two decades of the twentieth century. (30) Focusing on negative eugenics, they endorsed programs which could lessen suffering through the prevention of hereditary birth defects and the improvement of pre-natal medical care for women. British Socialist, later Communist, Eden Paul expressed a common view among radicals when he wrote in 1917 that the "socialist tendency is to overrate the importance of environment, great as this undoubtedly is ...." (31) Some radicals noticed and criticized the elitist potential of eugenics. In 1920 American socialist Henry Berger could analyze the class basis of eugenics thus:

> Unfortunately eugenists are impelled by their education and their associations and by the unconscious but not less potent influences of the material and social interests of their class to look upon our present environment...as a constant factor, which not only cannot be changed but ought not to be changed. (32)

But this kind of critique was not nearly so common, even in Left periodicals and pamphlets, as general endorsement of eugenics programs and hereditarian logic. For example, few socialists questioned the existence of instinctive criminals. Particularly on the question of racial and ethnic differences, the Left did not offer an especially enlightened leadership. In the same article in which Berger identified the class function of eugenics, he endorsed the goal of using eugenics programs to improve the white race. (33) In a socialist collection of essays on birth control published in 1917 we find passages like this:

> Taking the coloured population in 1910 as ten millions; it would in 1930 be twenty millions; in 1950, forty millions; in 1970, eighty millions; and in 1990, one hundred and sixty millions. A general prohibition of white immigration would thus, within the space of about eighty years, suffice to transform the Union into a negro realm. Now although individual members of the Afro-American race have been able, when educated by whites, to attain the highest levels of European civilisation, negroes as a whole have not hitherto proved competent to maintain a lofty civilisation. The condition of affairs in the black republic of Haiti gives some justification for the fear that negro dominance would be disastrous. (34)

Like the rest of the Left, the feminist birth controllers tended to accept racist and ethnocentric attitudes. Like the middle-class reformers whom they also resembled, the feminists had a reservoir of anti-working-class attitudes. The American feminist movement had its own traditions of elitism, in the style of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's proposal for suffrage for the educated. (35) Many feminists had been active in the temperance movement, and saw immigrants and working-class men as drunken undesirables. Anti-Catholicism particularly had been an undercurrent in the women's rights movement for decades, born of Catholic opposition to prohibition and the Church's opposition to women's rights. Southern feminists used the fear of the black vote as an argument for woman suffrage, and were supported by the national woman suffrage organizations in doing so. (36) Birth control reformers were not attracted to eugenics because they were racists; rather they had interests in common with eugenists and had no strong tradition of anti-racism on which to base a critique of eugenics.

A second major reason for the birth controllers' sympathy for the eugenists was that the male-dominated Left had so little sympathy for the birth control movement. When Margaret Sanger became convinced, in 1913, of the importance of birth control for poor women, only Big Bill Haywood, of all the many radicals in her circle, gave her any support, and even he "did not feel that the small-family question was significant enough to be injected into the labor platform." (37) The Socialist Party, of which Sanger was a member then, resisted political agitation "along sex lines." (38) As Sanger herself put it, the Socialists' reply to her was "Wait." "'Wait until women have more education. Wait until we secure equal distribution of wealth.' Wait for this and wait for that. Wait! Wait! Wait!" (39)

EUGENICS AND THE CONSERVATIZING OF THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT

Because Margaret Sanger had begun her birth control work as a part of the Socialist Party, her personal-political transformation is a useful microcosm of the general transformation of the birth control campaign. Her transformation was not sudden, nor can it be blamed entirely, or even mostly, on her adoption of eugenics support. It is perhaps more accurate to say that her political changes made her more compatible with the eugenics movement. After her return from Britain in 1915 she no longer worked with the Socialist Party or any other Left multi-issue group. Declining to engage in anti-war propaganda, she not only made birth control her single cause for the rest of her life but also insisted from the beginning that it not be a class-based issue. Thus even as she campaigned to open an illegal birth control clinic in a working-class section of Brooklyn, she raised money from society women. By 1921 she had given up her earlier commitment to civil disobedience entirely and organized instead a lobbying and educational group, the American Birth Control League, also financed by donations from the very rich. In 1922 she married J. Noah Slee, an oil millionaire; his willingness to finance the movement gave her a great deal of individual control over its policies. (40)

Simultaneously with these developments Sanger's own propaganda gave less and less attention to feminist arguments for birth control and more to eugenical ones. "More children from the fit, less from the unfit — that is the chief issue of birth control," she wrote in 1919. (41) (What better slogan could there be for raising money from the rich to pay for a clinic in Brownsville, Brooklyn?) In her book, The Pivot of Civilization, published in 1922, she urged applying stockbreeding techniques to society in order to avoid giving aid to good-for-nothings at the expense of the good. She warned that the masses of the illiterate and the "degenerate" might well destroy our civilization. She avoided racist uses of such terms as "inferior stock" but warned of dangers to "our way of life." (42) In Women and the New Race, published in 1920, she put together statistics about immigrants, their birth rates and literacy rates, etc., in a manner certain to increase racist fears. "...foreign-born mothers gave birth to nearly 62 per cent of the children born in Connecticut, nearly 58 per cent in Massachusetts ..." — a long list of other states followed. (43) "...an overwhelming proportion of the classified feebleminded children in New York schools came from large families living in overcrowded slum conditions, and...only a small percentage were born of native parents." (44) Sanger did not identify herself as a eugenist. Rather, by her use of the eugenists' favorite evidence for birth control she tried to suggest that the birth control movement could accomplish the ends of the eugenics movement.

In 1922 Sanger went to London for the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference. She was its only female honored guest. The conference was dominated still by fear of over-population, not eugenics; only one out of its nine panels was devoted to eugenics; but none was devoted to birth control, nor did Sanger raise this point of view as a woman's right. (45) In 1925 Sanger brought the Sixth International Conference to New York under the sponsorship of her American Birth Control League. The planning of the conference was primarily done by ABCL women.

Yet the main impact of the ABCL's control was to push the conference closer to eugenics thinking. Not a single session was chaired by a woman; only one out of every ten speakers, approximately, was a woman. The first two sessions were on eugenic and neo-Malthusian subjects — it was not until the second day that there was even any mention of feminist reasons for birth control. Four out of the total of eleven sessions focused specifically on eugenics, none on women's problems.

Meanwhile the propaganda of the ABCL was becoming more concerned with eugenic issues. The introductory brochure used during these years lists as point #1 of "What This Organization Does to Inform the Public," publishing and distributing literature and conducting lectures "on the disgenic effect of careless breeding." The program of the ABCL included a sterilization demand and called for "racial progress." (46)

Sanger's magazine, the Birth Control Review, published eugenics articles from its inception in 1917. In its pages Paul Popenoe, one of the chief spokesmen for the American eugenics establishment, criticized the propaganda of the birth control organizations because it was not sufficiently based on eugenic considerations. (47) There were frequent contributions from the leaders of eugenics, and their racism grew steadily more outspoken. In 1920-21 the Review featured a long series of articles by Dr. Warren Thompson on "Race Suicide" which were expressly nativist and anti-Negro, using the common theme that the foreign-born were increasing more rapidly than the Anglo-Saxons, thus threatening our "civilization." (48) In September 1923 the Review editorialized in favor of immigration restriction as something "reasonable and eugenic." (49) In that same year the Review published a study on "The Cost to the State of the Socially Unfit." (50) In 1920 Havelock Ellis reviewed Lothrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy — favorably. (51) Perhaps a favorable review of this book should not be surprising, since Stoddard was at this time on the Board of Directors of the American Birth Control League. So was Clarence C. Little, another openly racist eugenist. President of the Third Race

Betterment Conference, he justified birth control in the pages of the Review as an antidote to the "melting pot," a means of preserving the purity of "Yankee stock." (52) Also closely involved with the ABCL and writing regularly for the Review was Guy Irving Burch, a director of the American Eugenics Society and leader in the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies. He supported birth control, he wrote, because he had long worked to "prevent the American people from being replaced by alien or Negro stock, whether it be by immigration or by overly high birth rates among others in this country." (53)

The Bettmann Archive

Margaret Sanger Selling Her Birth Control Review *in the Streets of New York, 1915*

The practice of the clinics of the ABCL and other groups reflected some similar influences. Many of the clinics, for example, conducted eugenic inquiries into the hereditary backgrounds of women who came to them for help, going back two to three generations, and presumably advising the women as to the desirability of their having children. (54) In 1925, responding to suggestions from her eugenist supporters, Sanger reformed her clinical records to show the nationality, heredity, religion, occupation and even trade union affiliation of patients. (55) A review of the work of seventy birth control clinics in England and America, published in 1930, proudly showed that the clinics reached a disproportionately large number of working-class women, and claimed a eugenic effect from doing so. (56) It is interesting to read, in this context, Sanger's own understanding of the relationship between eugenics and her birth control work:

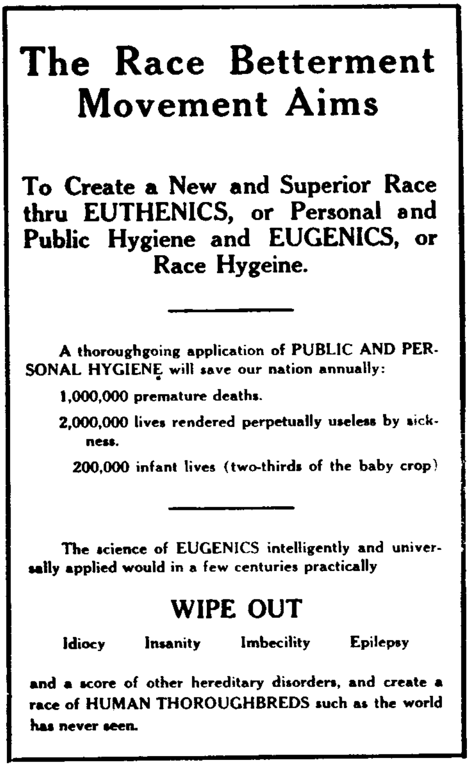
> ...eugenics without birth control seemed to me a house built upon sands. It could not stand against the furious winds of economic pressure which had buffeted into partial or total helplessness a tremendous proportion of the human race. The eugenists wanted to shift the birth control emphasis from less children for the poor to more children for the rich. We went back of that and sought first to stop the multiplication of the unfit. (57)

Thus in one paragraph is condensed the full transformation of Sanger's birth control politics : the poor, "buffeted into partial or total helplessness" by economic pressure, are re-christened the unfit.

With such an attitude towards the poor underlying the work, it is not surprising that the clinics encountered difficulties in teaching working-class women to use birth control properly. Some such women were unteachable, Sanger and several other birth control leaders agreed. For example, "the affectionate, unreflecting type known to housing experts, who, though living in one room with several children, will keep a St. Bernard dog." For these women, sterilization was recommended. (58) Another area in which the snobbery of the birth control workers was manifest was in their attitude towards working-class men. They projected an image of these husbands as uncontrolled, uncontrollable, sex-hungry, violent aggressors, with no regard or respect for their wives, who could not be expected to agree to using contraceptives — or, perhaps more to the point, whose reasons for hostility to birth control as pushed by the clinics were never taken seriously. (59) This attitude mirrored the dominant eugenics attitude towards the excessive breeding of the "lower classes."

One of the causes, or at least conditions, of the decline of the eugenics movement was that birth control had become a movement that could do the eugenists' work for them. Henry Pratt Fairchild, former President of the American Eugenics Society and author of The Melting Pot Mistake, told the annual meeting of the Birth Control Federation of America in 1940: "One of the outstanding features of the present conference is the practically universal acceptance of the fact that these two great movements [eugenics and birth control] have now come to such a thorough understanding and have drawn so close together as to be almost indistinguishable." (60)

By the end of the 1930's birth control had shed most of its feminism and general radicalism. The movement argued for family limitation on the basis of conservative social norms: the nuclear family and the traditional sex roles within it; motherhood as the necessary source of fulfillment for women; a male-centered approach to sex education which perpetuated, for example, fears about the dangers of promiscuity in women; unquestioning acceptance of marriage as the only, and ideal, sexual relationship. Birth controllers exploited white Americans' fears of the darker peoples, native- and foreign-born. And they adopted an increasingly imperial outlook, seeing themselves as responsible not only for spreading the gospel of the small family but also for offering the small family as a solution for poverty all over the world. Clearly eugenics did not cause this change. Rather, eugenics ideas were appropriate to the general conservative mood that took over the birth control movement. The largest single causative factor in that new conservatism was undoubtedly the disappearance of the feminist movement. It was feminism that had transformed the nineteenth-century, neo-Malthusian version of population control into the demand for voluntary motherhood, for human liberation. When the organized power of feminism declined, it was hardly surprising that birth control should be re-absorbed into a male-dominated population control campaign. But we are here tracing one single influence — eugenics — because it is a particularly poorly understood factor, and one exceptionally important to understand today.



The Race Betterment Movement Aims

To Create a New and Superior Race thru EUTHENICS, or Personal and Public Hygiene and EUGENICS, or Race Hygeine.

A thoroughgoing application of PUBLIC AND PERSONAL HYGIENE will save our nation annually:

1,000,000 premature deaths.

2,000,000 lives rendered perpetually useless by sickness.

200,000 infant lives (two-thirds of the baby crop)

The science of EUGENICS intelligently and universally applied would in a few centuries practically

WIPE OUT

Idiocy Insanity Imbecility Epilepsy

and a score of other hereditary disorders, and create a race of HUMAN THOROUGHBREDS such as the world has never seen.

EUGENICS AND PLANNED PARENTHOOD

In the late 1930's the eugenics movement lost popularity and prestige. Nazi eugenic policies strengthened a public identification of eugenics with fascist ideology and totalitarian practice. Scientific developments critical of Galtonian genetics stripped away some of the academic respectability that had earlier clothed eugenical racism. While the leading eugenists continued to function as a conservative sect, they lost much of their professional and popular following. (61)

Some eugenists tried to reinterpret their credo in more cautious ways. Guy Burch, for example, wrote in 1938 and 1939 about the decline in the quality of our population without using the word "eugenics." (62) The Journal of Heredity continued to run eugenics articles but produced an editorial expressly disassociating the magazine, for the first time, from the eugenics movement. The magazine was now prepared, the editors wrote, "to give favorable consideration to analyses that might demonstrate fundamental unsoundness in present eugenic efforts." (63) (A rather sidewise, but nevertheless damaging, admission of their earlier bias, and of the capitulation of a whole academic discipline to opportunist politics.)

As eugenics lost credibility, many of its advocates moved into other related fields. In part this was simply because they were unemployed specialists looking for jobs and new sources of recognition. But in part, too, they were men genuinely concerned with a problem — race deterioration — looking for other ways to solve it. The choice of many was to go into population control. In the early 1940's there were few organizations explicitly devoted to population control, and demographers were still divided as to whether there was any quantitative population problem, and if so, in which direction — too much or too little. The birth control groups had become increasingly concerned with overall population questions. The heavy influx of eugenist-demographers into this movement was as much a result as a cause of its transformation away from its earlier feminist principles. (64)

In 1941, during negotiations for a merger of birth control groups, two demands that were raised and won by the more powerful backers and the new leadership-to-be were that the new organization should have a male president and that its name should be changed to the Planned Parenthood Federation. These changes, which were carried out in 1942 over the objections of Margaret Sanger, (65) were of great political significance. Birth control became "family planning" — no longer a women's issue, no longer emphasizing the emancipation of women, but rather the construction of stable, middle-class style families, their 2.3 children carefully planned. The emphasis on and glorification of the family was an old genetics theme. (66) The emphasis on planning was part of the general movement of American liberals and conservatives towards accepting planning within the capitalist system. The planning idea was also intimately related to eugenics modes of thought: in terms of a concern with the qualitative as well as the quantitative aspects of population. The argument used to urge smaller families upon the American middle and upper classes was not that fewer babies would bring prosperity, but that fewer children would be happier, more productive citizens.

During the height of the eugenics movement, birth control advocates had been criticized for promoting dysgenic tendencies, since birth control propaganda was most effectively reaching just those who ought to be having more children. (67) The new ideology of planned parenthood was in part a defense against such attacks. It drew the focus away from the reduction of births and put it on planning and quality. The new line amounted to a rejection of the particular interests of women, subordinating those concerns to overall social planning. It went along with propaganda about the glory and satisfaction to be found in motherhood and "homemaking."

An important part of that process was that men took over the leadership of the Planned Parenthood Federation — professional and upper-class men. In 1940 Margaret Sanger had been kicked upstairs to being "honorary chairman." The President, the General Director, and all five Vice-Presidents became men; two of them were noted eugenists and authors of explicitly racist tracts — anti-immigrant and anti-black. (68) The only remaining woman on the masthead was Mrs. Mary Woodard Reinhardt, Secretary. In the 1950's some women began to regain entry to the board of the PPF, but they were society women such as Mrs. Albert Lasker and Mrs. Walter Rothschild, and they functioned mainly as sponsors and fund-raising names rather than as activists. (69)

EUGENICS AND POPULATION CONTROL

In the 1950's fears of over-population became widespread among university, corporate and government officials in the U.S. They responded by establishing a massive population control program, and in doing so essentially took over the powerful birth control organization — the Planned Parenthood Federation — and further obfuscated the distinction between birth control and population control in most people's minds. When population control began to command widespread support and significant financial resources, the majority of the living eugenists and funders of eugenics joined the population control programs.

Frederick Osborn, a leading eugenist, was the chief organizer of the Population Council, established in 1952. (70) He set up the first offices, organized both the demographic and medical programs, recruited the staff, and served as chief executive for the first six years. He also helped set up the Population Association of America. His cousin Fairfield Osborn later became a leader of Planned Parenthood-World Population. The Rockefeller Foundation was a leading funder of eugenics. In 1936 it joined with the Milbank Memorial Fund to give Princeton (Henry Fairfield Osborn's and John D. Rockefeller's alma mater) a grant to establish an Office of Population Research, which was a center of eugenics work and later, in the 1940's, a kind of sanctuary for eugenist demographers. Kingsley Davis, Clyde Kiser, Frank Notestein, Dudley Kirk and Frank Lorimer were all at the OPR. The Rockefeller Foundation then financed the Population Council, and these five men moved to the Council at its inception. Rockefeller also sent a man, Charles-Edward Amory Winslow, into the birth control movement as soon as it was made over into the Planned Parenthood Federation. Out of the ten men on the Population Council's demographic and medical advisory boards, six had been associated with the eugenics movement. (71) In 1955, in what was apparently an attempt to shore up the failing eugenics movement, the Population Council undertook to pay for the Eugenics Quarterly for the next three years if matching grants could be found.

The Population Reference Bureau, which had been set up in 1929 by eugenist Burch, was now made over into the population control model. It had earlier, according to Burch's own description, functioned mainly as a eugenics organization. (72) Burch himself had been particularly active in the campaign for immigrant restriction; one of the most persevering and fervent in his views, in 1939 he was campaigning against the admittance of "non-Aryan" children, Jewish orphans who were Nazi refugees, into the country. (73) Until the end of the 1930's Burch had financed the Population Reference Bureau out of his own pocket. (74) Then grants from Rockefeller came, and with them money from many other great foundations — Ford, Mellon, DuPont, Sloan, Standard Oil, Shell, among others.

Similar monies came in to other organizations now devoted to population control — the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Planned Parenthood-World Population, the Population Crisis Committee and the Committee to Check the Population Explosion most recently. (75) These population control groups were all descended, in a direct line, from the Planned Parenthood Association of America. In the publications of PPF throughout the 1940's and 1950's there was a steadily increasing emphasis on problems of world over-population. The first major landmark in the development of new organizations was the formation of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 1948. It was launched primarily through the energies of Sanger, and paid for at first largely by the Brush Foundation of Cleveland. Dorothy Brush was the IPPF's most influential American board member. The Brush Foundation and Mrs. Brush were both involved in eugenics work: she was on the Board of Directors of the American Eugenics Society. The first American representative to the IPPF was Frank Lorimer, also a eugenist. The IPPF received grants from the Osborns; its first offices were given, free of charge, by the English Eugenics Society. (76)

In 1961 the PPF spawned still another, even more highpowered, organization. It first launched a major fund-raising drive for population control work in the under-developed countries, the "World Population Emergency Campaign." At the end of the year the campaign was installed as a permanent new organization: Planned Parenthood - World Population, really a special division of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

A great deal of money had come into both the PPF and the IPPF from Hugh Moore of the Lily Cup Corporation, and not, apparently, without strings: Tom Griessemer, formerly a Moore employee, became head of the New York office of the IPPF in the 1950's, and Moore himself was a Vice-Chairman of PPF. Together with General William H. Draper, a former investment banker and also a PPF Vice-Chairman, Moore then set up the Population Crisis Committee in the early 1960's. Its purpose, in which it has succeeded amply, was to persuade the U. S. government to "assist" countries which receive U. S. aid to formulate population control plans. Moore later struck out on his own, establishing a mass advertising campaign in the name of the Committee to Check the Population Explosion. Unhampered by the restraint of academic advisors, Moore's line was much more hysterical than anything since the heyday of the eugenics movement: "How many people do you want in your country? Already the cities are packed with youngsters. Thousands of idle victims of discontent and drug addiction. You go out after dark at your peril.... Birth control is the answer....The evermounting tidal wave of humanity challenges us to control it, or be submerged along with all of our civilized values." (77) This rhetoric was similar to that used by eugenists in their campaign against immigrants or American blacks: "tidal wave of humanity," "civilized values" being submerged; crime, drug addiction, idleness, discontented youth attributed to excessive breeding, rather than to social inequalities.

The eugenics people slid into the population control movement gracefully, naturally, imperceptibly. Once the new alarm about over-population had smothered earlier fears about the declining birth rate, there was nothing to separate the two movements because there was no tension between their two sorts of goals. This is in part because the two movements — unlike the birth control movement — were basically the expressions of groups who were protecting privileges they feared to lose. A pervasive theme in eugenics propaganda was the necessity to preserve the hegemony of the most able of the old yankees. (78) This does not mean that the leaders were all of the upper class. Those who do not have great power and wealth to lose often have other things — status, position, privilege — which to them may seem worth defending.

Population control represents much the same thing on an international level. The 1960's, the period of the growth of population control sentiment, represented a period of acute realization, for many Americans, of the insecurity of our hegemony over the earth. Our numbers are small, compared with those who live "under" communism; our resources scanty, compared with the great destruction by pollution that industrialism has created; our political ideology far from irresistible, judging from the mounting opposition to it throughout the world. Population control programs were set up by those who have real power to lose (and, at first, paid for by them, until they were able to shift the main cost to the taxpayers), but they have by now been enthusiastically welcomed by many who merely have some small privilege.

Until the revival of feminism in the late 1960's, the population control programs ignored the feminist implications of birth control. Indeed, they were often openly hostile, for the cause of women's self-determination requires the right to bear children as well as the right not to bear them. The population control experts themselves understood the incompatibility of a feminist birth control movement with a population control campaign. Here a noted population control advocate and planner, J. Mayone Stycos, describes the development of population control out of the original birth control cause:

> For decades in the United States, small organized groups of courageous women have been insisting that the health and social welfare of the woman depend on the ability rationally to regulate the

> number and timing of her births. Such arguments received the degree of respect and attention normally accorded to small organized groups of courageous women in the United States. At the same time, however, a handful of less vociferous but more influential men of affairs began to be concerned about the economic and political implications of world population growth, and in particular, about the growth of the under-developed areas. Their fears included Starvation, Unrest, War, and Communism. While the means sought by both groups were identical, both the ends desired and the modi operandi were entirely different....The women were more concerned with American than with foreign problems....The men located the problem beyond American shores....They established philanthropic foundations, sponsored international meetings of scholars, set up news bureaus, and endowed chairs. While the two groups avoided each other as much as possible, when thrown together at an occasional conference, they regarded each other with the combined suspicions and hope of exploitation found only at a social function of Ivy League boys and townie girls. (79)

Though not critical of it, Stycos observes the close relationship between American male supremacy and imperial thinking. When the implications of contraceptive technology for those interests became clear, and the feminist movement became weakened, birth control was lost to those concerned with women's self-determination.

CONCLUSION

Population control and women's reproductive self-determination are not inevitably at odds. Our evaluation of a social planning that includes the birth rate should be based not on a commitment to an abstract individualism but on who does the social planning for what ends. Over-population in some areas of the world is a serious problem, although it is not the cause of poverty. Population control may be a reasonable part of any overall plan for economic development if it is democratically decided upon and administered.

Real democracy in population control, however, requires that women more than men must have the larger measure of choice. This is because women do the work of carrying, giving birth to and usually suckling the children; even more it is because in most of the world women still do almost all the work of child-raising. For women, reproductive self-determination is part of the material basis for liberation. Women must have, of course, the right to have children as much as the right not to. If women's desire for children interferes with a reasonable and democratic social plan to keep birth rates down, that problem ought to be solved as much as possible by offering women other alternatives for meaningful work and economic independence, not through coercion. That may not be a serious problem, however. Historical evidence suggests that women's control over reproduction automatically produced a population control effect. Women's emancipation has been an essential part of industrialization, produced by the weakening of feudal and hierarchical patterns of relationships. The shift of most workers from agriculture to wage labor made large families an economic liability; on farms young children cost little to feed and contributed to production, in the cities they cost much more and contributed much less. At the same time industrialization widened options for women, by increasing the need for women's participation in the wage labor force and providing them with education. Women responded by struggling to transform these new possibilities into real political and social power and sexual equality — through individual self-assertion and organized feminist and working-class movements. Thus two concurrent impulses for birth control — women's desire for reproductive self-determination and city-dwellers' desire for small families — were in fact two aspects of the same historical change.

Historically, these changes produced the development of efficient contraception. But industrialization in the nineteenth century frequently created rapid birth rate declines before widespread dissemination of modern contraceptives.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that many attempts to diminish birth rates through contraception without the background economic and social change have failed. Even in socialist countries, the continuation of peasant social organization perpetuates the incentive for large families. (80) On the other hand, while externally imposed population control programs do not work well in lowering birth rates, they often do serve to increase the cultural and economic domination of under-developed countries. These programs have been a means of placing foreign governmental and private corporate institutions in positions of control over social policy. Population control is a favored capitalist technique for pacification, since it is a program that promises to increase general prosperity without redistributing wealth.

Unfortunately, when the American Left came belatedly to perceive these functions of population control programs in the 1960's, it sometimes responded by condemning birth control programs. Such a simplistic view ignores women's self-determination itself as an important part of human liberation, as fundamental and as urgent as any other sort of increase in people's control over their lives and work. It cannot be postponed until "after" some other kind of revolution, while in the meantime women continue to be defined largely as breeders. Its postponement distorts socialist movements by perpetuating a hierarchical division of labor, immobilizing half the revolutionary classes, and leaving unchallenged some of the most destructive cultural aspects of male supremacy.

AFTERWORD: EUGENICS AND IMPERIALISM

Historically, pro-imperialist thought was common among eugenics advocates. In England, where the Empire was already threatened in the early twentieth century, leaders of both eugenics and population control movements enunciated the dangers of population growth to British control over its colonies. "...a reduction of the birth-rate among the poor and unfit...a strong scheme of Imperial defence...are the means by which the prosperity and security of our Empire will be best secured," said one population control leader in

1914. (81) In America, Theodore Roosevelt, a leading popular interpreter of eugenic ideas, frequently applied eugenic formulations to his foreign affairs pronouncements. His view was that the Anglo-Saxon "race" represented the best stock available, internationally; that a high birth rate among that "race" and an expansionist policy on the part of the government that represented that race were the policies most likely to lead to world salvation. (82)

Another part of the imperialist strain of eugenic thought was the application of Social Darwinism to the international sphere. Eugenists have always had an ambivalent attitude towards Social Darwinism. Their ideology was a rejection of laissez faire in favor of intervention to improve on natural selection; but they justified this intervention on the grounds that the process of natural selection had already been derailed by civilization. Their value system was always the same as the Social Darwinists' — equating "fitness" with success — but the eugenists were less sure that untrammeled competition would always produce the success of the fittest. This doubt led to a contradiction for the eugenists around the question of imperialism. On the one hand, eugenists sometimes thought it represented healthy competition and the civilizing role of the superior races; on the other hand the effects of warfare were dysgenic, since it killed off the best young men. (83) Population control, used by stronger nations as a pacific form of control over weaker ones, is a satisfactory resolution to this contradiction. More, it is a logical development of the whole gamut of eugenic attitudes : a conviction of the international cultural superiority of the Anglo-Saxons (sometimes including also the Europeans of Latin descent) combined with an acute sense of the world-wide responsibility of the superior to defend civilization against the "revolt of the under-dog," combined with abhorrence of war and a commitment to planning and scientific control.

Eugenics and imperialism were also closely related in that they were connected to the same American racism. At the turn of the century, in this country's openly imperialist phase, the American established press told the people of the Philippines, for example, that they were inferiors who should welcome the blessings of our civilized rule. In the first two decades of this century, much of that racism was transferred to foreign immigrants, mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe, but including the Irish. After immigration restriction, racism was rechanneled in part towards American blacks, responding to their large-scale migration from south to north within the U.S. This stage of American racism corresponded to the eugenics movement: population control directed against the internal population. In the 1950's and 1960's much racist fear and suspicion was redirected overseas, focused on Asians, Latin Americans and Africans, even while they remained in their own lands. It was only logical that this period saw the growth of a population control drive largely directed abroad.

FOOTNOTES

1. See my article, "Voluntary Motherhood," in Feminist Studies, Winter-Spring 1973-74.

2. This conclusion is drawn from material in the Margaret Sanger papers at the Library of Congress and Smith College. This judgment does not contradict the conclusion of David Kennedy in his Birth Control in America (New Haven: Yale, 1970) that the national movement, run out of New York and directed by Sanger, began attracting wealthy liberal women almost immediately. The left-wing connections I am concerned with here are those on the "grass-roots" level, in the many birth control leagues that sprang up all over the country.

3. This does not mean that contraception was not practiced in the nineteenth century. In fact there was widespread use of douches, male withdrawal, abortion and vaginal pessaries to prevent or interrupt pregnancy.

4. The Woman Rebel (NY: March-October 1914): Sanger, "English Methods of Birth Control," pamphlet, 1915, in Sanger Mss., Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

5. The best biography of Sanger is Kennedy, Birth Con-

trol in America. These events are also described in Sanger, An Autobiography (NY: Norton, 1938) and Sanger, My Fight for Birth Control (NY: Farrar and Rinehart, 1931).

6. Margaret Sanger, for example, thought of the origins of eugenics as exclusively associated with these reformers: "Eugenics, which had started long before my time, had once been defined as including free love and prevention of conception....Recently it had cropped up again in the form of selective breeding," she wrote in her Autobiography, p. 374.

7. The best general secondary work on twentieth century eugenics in the U.S. is Mark Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963); see also Leonard Ellman, "The American Eugenics Movement, 1905-1925," unpublished Harvard B.A. thesis, 1963; and Donald K. Pickens, Eugenics and the Progressives (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1968).

8. Pickens, p. 51.

9. Ibid.

10. Haller, p. 174.

11. Nothing in the genetic theory they relied upon, even as it progressed from the less sophisticated Galton to the more sophisticated Mendel, provided any basis for judgment about the relative impact of heredity and environment in producing characteristics such as feeble-mindedness, insanity, laziness, and other common eugenics bugaboos.

12. For more discussion of the politics of eugenics, see also John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925 (NY: Atheneum, 1965), Chap. 6 and 10.

13. Paul Popenoe, The Conservation of the Family (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1926), pp. 129-30.

14. Michael F. Guyer, Being Well-Born: An Introduction to Eugenics (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1916), pp. 296-98.

15. New York: Scribners, 1922, p. 21. Emphasis in original.

16. Haller, pp. 55 ff. Eugenists were pushing immigration restriction as early as 1914; see, e.g., articles by Stanley Gulick and Robert DeC. Ward, in Proceedings, First

National Conference on Race Betterment (Race Betterment Foundation, 1814).

17. 4th Report, Committee on Selective Immigration, AES, June 30, 1928, p. 16, in Anita Newcomb McGee Mss., Library of Congress.

18. Paul Popenoe and Roswell Hill Johnson, Applied Eugenics (NY: Macmillan, 1918), 1925 edition, pp. 294-97.

19. E.g., the Virginia State Board of Health distributed a pamphlet among all Virginia schoolchildren entitled "Eugenics in Relation to the New Family and the Law on Racial Integrity," published in 1924. It explained in eugenic terms the valiant and lonely effort of Virginia to preserve the race from the subversion of the nineteen states plus the District of Columbia which permitted miscegenation. It concluded, "Let us turn a deaf ear to those who would interpret Christian brotherhood to mean racial equality."

20. Popenoe, Conservation of the Family, Chapter XI for example.

21. For examples, Edward Bernstein, "Decline in the Birth-Rate, Nationality, and Civilisation," and R. Manschke, "The Decline in the Birth-Rate," in Eden and Cedar Paul; Frank Notestein, in Birth Control Review, April, 1938; Haller, p. 79; Frank Lorimer, Ellen Winston, and Louise K. Kiser, Foundations of American Population Policy (NY: Harper & Bros., 1940), pp. 12-15.

22. Lorimer, Winston and Kiser, p. 15.

23. See S. J. Holmes, The Trend of the Race (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1921); Popenoe, "Stanford's Marriage-Rate," Journal of Heredity, Vol. 8, 1917, pp. 170-73; H. G. Bunker, "Coeducation and Eugenics," ibid., pp. 208-14; Haller, p. 79, for representative statistics.

24. S. H. Halford, "Dysgenic Tendencies of Birth-Control and of the Feminist Movement," in Eden and Cedar Paul, pp. 233-34.

25. E.g., Dr. Jon Alfred Mjoen, Chairman of the Consultative Eugenics Commission of Norway, in Eugenics, Sept. 1930, II, 49, 323-26; editorial in American Breeders' Magazine, 1911, II, #3, 225; Popenoe and Johnson, pp. 383-84; A. Lapthorn Smith, "Higher Education of Women and Race Suicide," in Popular Science Monthly, 1905, pp. 466-73;

William Goodell, "The Dangers and the Duty of the Hour," in Transactions, Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland, 83rd Annual Session, April 1831, pp. 71-87.

26. Frank Notestein, in Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, Oct. 1931, IX, #4, 181, for example. Also see the publications Practical Eugenics and Eugenics, passim.

27. E.g., Hankins, ibid.; editorial in American Breeders' Magazine, loc. cit.

28. E.g., Scott and Nellie Nearing, Woman and Social Progress (NY: Macmillan, 1912), Chap. 1.

29. Halford, p. 238.

30. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Scott and Nellie Nearing, Ellen Key, Havelock Ellis, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Emma Goldman, Kate Richards O'Hare among many others.

31. "Eugenics and Birth-Control," in Population and Birth Control: A Symposium, ed. Eden and Cedar Paul (NY: Critic and Guide, 1917), p. 134.

32. April-May 1920. See also J. B. Eggen, "Rationalization and Eugenics," Modern Quarterly, III, #3, May-July 1926; Eva Trew, "Sex Sterilization," International Socialist Review, XII, #11, May 1913.

33. Berger, loc. cit.

34. Ludwig Quessel, "Race Suicide in the United States," in Eden and Cedar Paul, p. 118.

35. Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences, ed. Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch (NY: Harper & Bros., 1922), letter of Dec. 20, 1865 to Martha Wright for an early example.

36. Aileen Kraditor, Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920 (NY: Columbia, 1965), Chap. 7.

37. Sanger, Autobiography, p. 96.

38. Mari Jo Buhle, "Women and the Socialist Party, 1901-1914," in Edith Altbach, ed., From Feminism to Liberation (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1971), p. 81.

39. Sanger, Autobiography, p. 93.

40. Kennedy, pp. 98 ff.

41. Birth Control Review, May 1919, p. 12.

42. pp. 177-78.

43. NY: Brentano's, p. 34.

44. p. 41.

45. Report, ed. Raymond Pierpont (London: Heinemann, 1922).

46. Brochures in Sanger papers, American Birth Control League files, Sophia Smith Collection.

47. I, #3, 1917.

48. IV, #8 through V, #3.

49. VII, #9, p. 1.

50. VII, passim.

51. IV, #10.

52. Quoted in Kennedy, p. 119, from Birth Control Review, Aug. 1926, pp. 244-57.

53. From an unpublished letter, quoted in Kennedy, ibid.

54. Caroline Hadley Robinson, Seventy Birth Control Clinics (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1930), p. 44.

55. Kennedy, p. 200.

56. Ibid., Chap. IV.

57. Sanger, Autobiography, pp. 374-75.

58. Robinson, pp. 50-52.

59. E.g., Sanger, Autobiography, p. 401; or Sanger, Motherhood in Bondage (NY: Brentano's, 1928), passim.

60. A copy of the speech is in the Sanger Mss., Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

61. Haller, pp. 180 ff.; Pickens, Chap. 11.

62. Birth Control Review, 1938-39, passim.

63. April 1933, Vol. 24, #4, 143.

64. In 1940, for example, the Federation hired eugenist Guy Burch and his Population Reference Bureau to lobby, research and propagandize on the population aspects of birth control. The Federation did so despite having been told by academic eugenist Warren Thompson, of whom they inquired, that Burch was unreliable and an extremist. Burch was, apparently, supported by Sanger, who had originally helped him to set up the PRB and again in 1939 personally wrote the Birth Control Federation asking that he be hired. Burch's relations with birth control people are discussed in papers in the Norman Edwin Himes papers, American Genetics Association file, Countway Medical Library; and in the Sanger papers, Sanger-Burch file, Sophia Smith Collection.

65. Kennedy, pp. 255 ff.

66. Consider Popenoe's Conservation of the Family, throughout.

67. E.g., Halford, loc. cit.; Himes Mss., American Genetics Association file, Countway Medical Library; Popenoe in Birth Control Review, March 1917; Lorimer in ibid., 1933, p. 229.

68. Dr. Richard N. Pierson, President; Dr. Woodbridge E. Morris, General Director; Vice-Presidents were Dr. Robert Latou Dickinson, Henry Pratt Fairchild, Frederick C. Holden, Clarence C. Little, and Charles-Edward Amory Winslow. Little and Fairchild were eugenists. Winslow was closely associated with Rockefeller family enterprises. This and all the following information about the personnel of the Planned Parenthood Federation are from PPR Annual Reports and the Who's Who.

69. One significant exception was Mrs. Robert Ferguson, President of PPF in the mid-1950's. The daughter of Learned Hand, she was herself a leading supporter of eugenics, on the Board of Directors of the American Eugenics Society.

70. This and all the following information about the personnel and financing of the population control groups are taken from the annual reports of those groups and from Who's Who.

71. Davis, Kiser, Notestein, Lorimer, P.K. Whelpton and Allan Guttmacher. Dudley Kirk, Demographic Director, and Warren Nelson, Medical Director, also came from eugenics work.

72. Burch to Himes, Aug. 24, 1934, Himes Mss.

73. Burch to Himes, June 30, 1930; Burch letter in the Washington Post, May 1, 1939; in Himes Mss.

74. Burch-Himes correspondence, Himes Mss.

75. Steve Weissman, "Why the Population Bomb Is a Rockefeller Baby", Ramparts, May 1970.

76. Dorothy Brush Mss., Sophia Smith Collection.

77. New York Times, May 11, 1969. Although the more academic Population Council and the Population Reference Bureau did not formally endorse these ads, many of their leaders did. Eugene Black, of the Planned Parenthood Board of Directors and once Vice-President of Chase Manhattan and head of the World Bank, signed the ads; as did Frank Abrams, former Chairman of Standard Oil of New Jersey (owned by Rockefeller) and a director of the Population

Reference Bureau. Of 58 regular signers of the COPE ads, 36 were previously part of the population control establishment, 14 others were closely associated with Planned Parenthood, and 4 of the remaining 8 were close associates of the Rockefellers. See William Barclay, Joseph Enright, and Reid T. Reynolds, "The Social Context of U.S. Population Control Programs in the Third World," unpublished paper presented to the Population Association of America, April 17, 1970.

78. Pickens, passim., and especially Chap. 7.

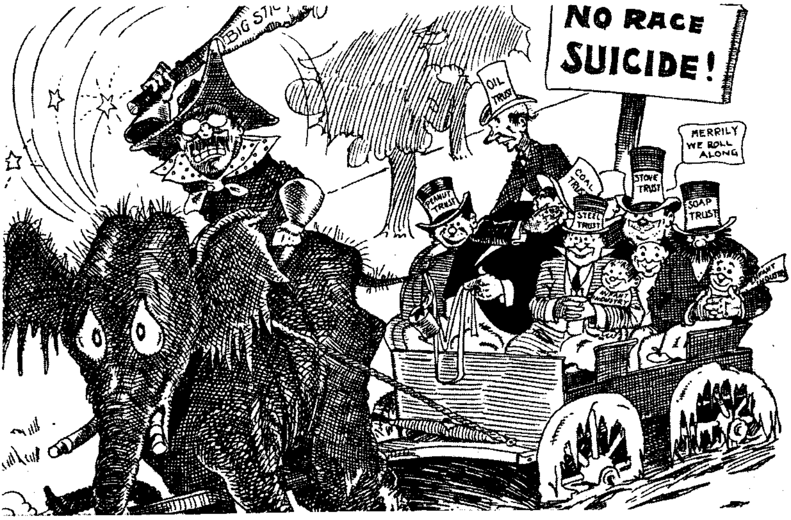
79. Quoted in Franklin T. Brayer, ed., World Population and U.S. Government Policy and Programs (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1968), p. 25.

80. For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Jan Myrdal, "The Reshaping of Chinese Society," in Contemporary China, ed. Ruth Adams (NY: Pantheon, 1966), pp. 65-91.

81. C. V. Drysdale, "Empire and Birth Rate," a speech before the Royal Colonial Institute, 1914, Widener Library pamphlet files.

82. Pickens, p. 129; see also T. Roosevelt in Outlook, Sept. 27, 1913, pp. 63-4.

83. E.g., in Popenoe and Johnson, Chap. XVI.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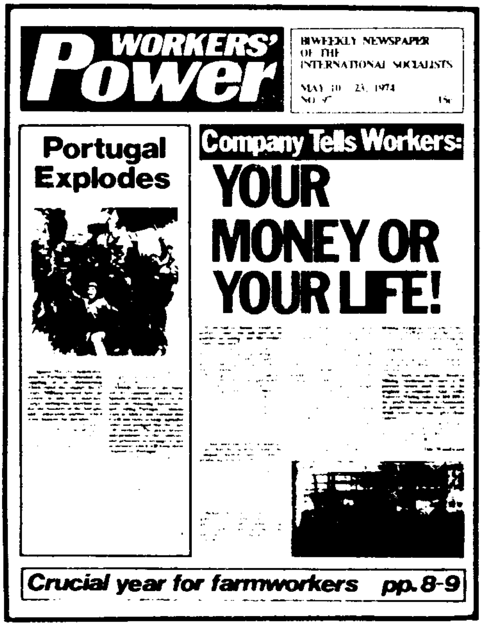
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Work in America:

Encounters on the Job

Stan Weir

JUST A MATTER OF GLOVES

The local union officials told us later that the Regional Director of the International Union had a fit when they told him we had a sit down strike. He wanted to know all our names when he found out the issue was cotton gloves. The nature of the work in our department required that we wear them. Each of us wore out a pair every two days. Until we quit having to buy them ourselves it was our constant gripe.

After I was elected steward I went to the foreman and asked him to get gloves for us. I had no official power to bargain with him; that was the committeeman's job. But I argued hard. He didn't take the opportunity that I offered him to do something for the men. "I'll tell you the same thing I told the last steward: The company's protective-clothing program does not include gloves".

Copyright Stanley Weir

I knew this was a lie and that there were exceptions. I remembered that gloves were supplied to the utility men in the department I had transferred out of the year before. During my relief break that afternoon I returned there long enough to pocket a new pair of gloves that luckily lay unattended on the utility men's bench. They were worth far more than the cup of coffee I had sacrificed to obtain them. I told the story to my friend who worked next to me and gave him the gloves. He passed them to the next man and repeated the story. Soon the entire group knew about the foreman's lie.

Instructions were sent back to me: I should ask the committeeman and file a grievance; I would be backed all the way. The next time the foreman passed within hailing distance I made the formal request. He took his time, but finally made the necessary phone call to the department where the committeeman worked.

Two hours later the committeeman casually walked into our work area. After a chat with the foreman he got to me: "I hear you guys want gloves. Gloves have never been supplied to anyone who worked in this department." After some discussion he was still hesitant. Finally he agreed to file a grievance, but only if I wrote it up. He handed me his book full of forms, and I complied. While I was doing this the line stopped suddenly. At the same instant most of the men were gathered around us. The tall skinny kid who had just gotten back from the Army, but was always letting you know he was from Maud, Oklahoma, was the only one who spoke: "We don't intend that this should take long to iron out." The committeeman started to say something, but thought better of it. They had made their point. They dispersed. In a moment the line was moving again. I never learned who had hit the switch.

The next morning a Kentuckian with five years in the department came in with four dozen pairs of new gloves in all sizes which he offered for sale. Several of us gathered around him. There was mention of trouble in the parking lot "come quitting time", but mainly we shamed him into withdrawing his wares.

The Shop Committee met with management every Thursday. On Friday the foreman issued gloves to us while we got into our coveralls. We were jubilant. The old Portuguese who the other old-timers said was one of the best stewards they ever had in the early days of the union came to me and confided: "You're doing all right, Red. It's a job for a young man. I'm going to retire soon. The men are all behind you. Now they're saying it's okay that you got up at the union meeting the other night and spoke in favor of bringing Negroes into the plant. A few even say you're right, there's no other way."

A week later the company began to renege on the gloves. Word had gotten around. Other departments wanted them. Our foreman was replacing ours every third or fourth day instead of every other day. He said the company was having trouble with the supplier. I called the committeeman again and filed a grievance against the tardiness. This time he did the writing.

A few mornings later several men came to me just as I was returning from my relief. They held out their hands. The gloves on them, like mine, were almost palmless. "We've had enough." "We're walking out." "We shut off the line." I looked down the aisle in the direction of the time clock. The rest of our group was about to punch out.

A runner was dispatched to retrieve them "on the double". Three minutes later we held a meeting. The whole department gang was present. I opened the discussion: "Anyone who clocks out will at a minimum lose wages. Gloves are tools and if...." They were already far ahead of my speech. At least four of them finished it for me:

"Can't work without tools."

"That's right, but we're available."

"We'll stay right here."

"When they ask us, we'll all say that we're just waiting for tools."

I was simply the first one in the group who had become objective.

It was agreed that we would all gather at the weakest spot in our line of unity, where Kentucky and his two partners worked. I left them there pitching pennies and laughing. The foreman wasn't in his office. He had gone out of the department on an errand when he saw us gathering. The incident was still only minutes old.

I picked up the foreman's phone and got our committeeman. I explained our action. He answered that it couldn't be done. I said that it had been done and that he should go direct to the plant manager and demand immediate satisfaction of our grievance. He said he would be right over to see us and hung up.

Our stoppage had to be spread to the other departments. It was our (and my) only protection. We couldn't wait the thirty minutes we had calculated it would take for the shortage on the line that we were creating to shut down the assembly lines in other departments that were fed by ours. It had to be done sooner, before management could organize.

If we could just shut down the department that followed ours, the rest would go like dominoes. I told a fork-lift driver who was going in that direction to tell Luis Guido in the next department that I wanted to see him right away. I knew this man; among us he was a star. He had led the 1936 "sit-in", asking the man who was plant superintendent in those days inside to negotiate and then holding him as hostage after ordering the plant gate welded shut. He had always refused to be local union president. He didn't like high offices. He had many times been a steward and chairman of the Grievance Committee. But in or out of office he was our top leader.

I watched the fork lift move down the aisle and finally turn in at the place where the old-timer worked. His short thick form appeared in the center of the aisle moments later. I made signs to tell him what had happened. From his long experience and my pantomime, he understood. I was sure of this five minutes later when he reappeared, swinging a large sledge hammer to signal me that they were shut down. They had somehow felt the shortage we had created in less than half the figured time.

I was free to return to the safety of the group. The penny pitching had stopped, the jokes were thin. Someone sighted the assistant plant manager with two men that none of us recognized. I walked part way out to meet them and waited. The gambling had started again, immediately behind me. The three visitors in suits nodded to me courteously, but didn't stop. They passed me and the game, walked the full length of our line, and made their exit, chatting.

For the next hour and thirty-nine minutes we were entirely alone. Our isolation ended when the foreman returned for the first time. He carried a carton the size of an apple box, Christmas wrapped, complete with ribbon and bow. Without looking at us he laid it on the concrete floor in the opening we made for him. He opened it carefully, removed a gross of new gloves bound in bundles of six, placed them in neat rows, and gestured for us to help ourselves. No one moved. He didn't return our stares. We couldn't hear exactly what he said when he turned to leave, but it was something about our being children and deserving to be treated as such.

Each man took one pair from the pile and then we went together to the coke machine. After we all drank we returned and took our places, someone hit the switch, and the line moved for the first time in two hours and eleven minutes. At lunch time in the cafeteria we all got kidded about needing so much rest. We told them that they had got the benefit of it too, and that we bet none of them had turned it down.

"THE MEXICAN"

Zala hadn't lived many years in Los Angeles, but had been working in the warehouse longer than any of us. He was a good worker, the best. He didn't drive his fork lift fast, but he was never behind and he helped us. He had highpiled all our stock in related tiers and knew the sequence by heart. After he began eating lunch with us, and without letting the boss know, he made drawings so that we could find the right stock by ourselves if he was absent or busy elsewhere in the warehouse.

After coffee break one day the boss told him that he would have to give up the fork-lift job and go back to filling orders with a cut in pay. It turned out that the boss had a brother-in-law who needed a job. It can happen in a non-union shop. And then too, Zala didn't have citizen's papers or even an entry permit. He finished the day driving his lift almost recklessly, shuttling back and forth between the piles at top speed. That night as he punched out on the time clock he served notice that he was quitting "as of now".

The next day was hell. None of the stock was in its accustomed place. We had to make three times the number of trips up and down an aisle of tiers to fill an order. We were very obviously running, but getting more and more behind all the time. The boss had a fit. When he started yelling at us we all told him that the new driver just didn't have what it took. No one mentioned Zala all day, or the next, or the next. By Friday there was still no improvement.

We came in Monday morning and Zala was on the fork lift, rehired, and everything was piled so that the drawings he had made could be used again. They had paid him overtime to come in the day before and restore order.

RELIEF

Twice each day, as stipulated in the union's contract with the company, we got twelve-minute relief periods — once during the first and again during the second four hours of the shift. Utility men, in turns, would take over our jobs during these periods. The task was their principal and almost sole function. In every department of the factory the ratio between their number and the amount of men each of them was assigned to relieve was determined by dividing the relief minutes contractually allotted each worker into four hours. One or two workers were deducted from the quantity each utility man was assigned, depending on what portion (determined by time study) of his work day was consumed in travel from worker to worker.

Moments after a shift began the utility man in our department would relieve the man who was the last to be relieved during the first four-hour period of the preceding day. It was the same in all departments. When that man returned the utility man moved several yards down the line to the second man, and so on in rotation until all had a turn. The system was designed in such a way that the last man returned from his break as the lunch whistle blew.

When production resumed after our forty-two minute lunch period, the process would start anew. But it was begun at a different place on the line in order to supply variety. The next day the second man relieved at the beginning of the previous day's shift was first, and the man who was third on the first day was second. In eighteen days the cycle was completed and a repetition began — the first man was first again. Thus each individual worker got his relief mid-morning or mid-afternoon once every eighteen days.

Once on a swing shift my after-lunch relief turn fell in the last hour before quitting time. Nevertheless, I decided to escape my department for a good portion of my allotted minutes. I calculated that if I hurried I could reach a coke machine in the Trim Department that was a little over one hundred yards and a stairway away. Unlike the vending machine in our department, the Trim Line's had root beer in it. I planned to begin my return trip immediately after extracting my drink from the machine, but at a more leisurely pace and on a different itinerary. I would consume my drink enroute.

I reached the stairs, and halfway down I paused. From the landing I had a full view of a long section of the Trim Line. Below me the almost-finished products moved steadily along, shiny paint and chrome exteriors completed. The doors of each car were wide open and the interiors empty. The installation of dash panels and frames that hold the upholstered seats was in process. My attention was attracted by a foreman in white shirt and black tie and two men in suits arguing with one of the line men. He was not working, he had refused to perform his operation on the car passing in front of him. The next man also refused to work on that particular car. Likewise the next man. And so it went, untouched, with the foreman and a growing number of supervisory personnel following and demanding that it be given its scheduled number of parts.

I completed my descent of the stairs, ignored the soft-drink machine, and followed the disputed vehicle at a safe distance. Every man confronted by both it and the men in suits (who now numbered almost a dozen) pointed at the center of the car's floor and made essentially the same statement: "There's nothing in the union contract and there's no law that says I have to work in or around that condition." I moved in close enough to look inside, and a glance showed that someone back down the line had been unable to wait and had seriously, mountainously, and successfully relieved himself.

A few more yards and refusals down the line, management realized how senseless it was to continue their demand. The point where the cars were completed and driven away to Inspection was only a short distance ahead. They called several utility men who followed the car to the end of the line and pushed it to one side, but the utility men also refused to conduct the necessary cleanup. One of the supervisors who had left the scene earlier returned with hose and bucket, found a water outlet, connected the hose and directed a hard stream at the target on the car's floor. One of his colleagues ran to the opposite side of the car. He tried to utilize one of the doors as a shield, extended the bucket as far from himself as possible and attempted to make it catch the cause of the dispute.

The hastily organized cleanup crew and sympathizers exited. The man with the bucket at arm's length led the column. The hose was left behind. The car was eventually taken back to the point on the line where its assembly had been interrupted, and placed on the conveyor. Its completion was then resumed. Loud laughter was audible, but it did not come from any of the participants in the incident at those times when they could be seen. Straight faces were barely maintained when between cars, but once inside the next car the "crackups" took place, again and again.

I ran all the way back to my department by the direct route. I was late, but quieted criticism of my tardiness by arranging to give up the first relief due me on the following day. When the story I had to tell became known, it more than made up for any hardship I had caused the men in my group. It wasn't often that our department had the benefit of an eye-witness report of an important event in another department, an event to be told and retold, several days' antidote for monotony. And secretly, we envied the men down in Trim. They had been given an opportunity to make a decision.

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Rebels in the Ranks:

A Review Essay

James Green

RANK AND FILE : PERSONAL HISTORIES OF WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZERS, edited by Alice and Staughton Lynd (Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, Mass., 02108, 296 pages, hardcover-$12.95, paperback-$3.95)

With all of the recent publicity surrounding Studs Terkel's fascinating new book, Working, there has been a tendency to ignore another collection of interviews of greater significance to the Left. Rank and File : Personal Histories of Working-Class Organizers has been lovingly compiled and skillfully edited by Alice and Staughton Lynd, whose earlier books about anti-war activists (We Won't Go and The Resistance) established them as leading chroniclers and historians of contemporary radical movements.

Terkel's new interviews with various kinds of working people again demonstrate his uncanny ability to discover and to listen sympathetically to ordinary folks with interesting and important stories to tell. The sensitivity and sympathy of the interviewer encourages the people in Working to talk quite profoundly about the oppressiveness of their work. As a documentary history of alienation in contemporary capitalist society, Stud's Terkel's new book is both moving and convincing.

However, the workers' stories collected by the Lynds provide a depth that Terkel's rather fragmentary interviews often lack. First of all, Rank and File contains more than interviews; its editors have collected a series of remarkable "personal histories" that provide the reader with a greater understanding of the working people involved than is the case in Terkel's interviews about job experiences. We learn where these organizers came from, who their parents were (often quite important) and why they decided to fight back against their bosses. The workers interviewed by Studs Terkel focus largely on the boredom of their jobs, the meaninglessness of their lives, and the lack of recognition they receive, while the organizers interviewed by the Lynds are more interested in describing how they struggled than in explaining how they suffered. As a result, Rank and File is the more interesting book for activists because it shows how individual workers fought together to overcome alienation and oppression.

The collection includes twenty-two personal histories of working-class organizers, most of whom were active in the '30s and '40s. The three women interviewed offer unusual perspectives on the working-class history of those decades. Unfortunately, there are no women among the workers interviewed who were organizing in more recent years. Nevertheless, Rank and File is the best work of those published by radical historians who have been collecting oral histories in the past few years. Staughton Lynd, who has done a great deal to popularize this kind of rank-and-file approach, has argued that oral history, or what he has called "guerrilla history", can eliminate the elitist biases of professional writers and encourage people to do their own history. (1) Started in the 1930s by W. P. A. workers interested in recording the stories of the toiling masses (2), oral history has been resurrected by radical historians who were disgusted with elitist history and interested in revealing the "hidden" history of working people. The Lynds' collection of personal histories should serve as a model for future work.

The title of the book is significant. As the editors point out in the introduction, "rank and file... refers to workers on the job, not paid union leadership" and "rank-and-file activity means people on the job taking whatever action they think is necessary, doing something for themselves rather than waiting for someone else to do it for them." The Lynds see the reawakening of this kind of activity as a sign of a return to "the militancy, the democracy, and the local autonomy which flourished in the [CIO] organizing period" and then "faded away or was crushed." In the most basic sense their collection of personal workers' histories uncovers the "democratic impulse" in the people that was lost to the labor movement after World War II and reappeared in other movements of Blacks, students, and women. Clearly the Lynds have found political direction through their discovery of rank-and-file democracy among working people. The men and women they interviewed are described as "travelers who, after long journeying, still believe that all men and women can live as brothers and sisters, still affirm that democracy must be made to work in the plants and offices where Americans work." Alice and Staughton "found them encouraging friends" in seeking their own way "from the movement of the 1960s into the very different kind of movement which the 1970s will require."

One of the most interesting themes that runs through these interviews concerns the importance of historical traditions in workers' lives. Both Christine Ellis and Stella Nowicki, resourceful Communist organizers in Chicago during the '30s and '40s, talked about the influence militant coal miners had on them in their youth, while Sylvia Woods, a Black U.A.W. leader, inherited her militancy from her father's strong trade unionism and from her friends' Garveyite nationalism. Wayne Kennedy, a railway clerk, witnessed deep personal hatred based upon "railroad history" (for example, older union men who never spoke to the "scabs" who came into the shops during the 1922 strike). "You'd think the Pullman strike was yesterday, the way the old timers would talk about it," he declares. Their personal histories were filled with various conflicts and strikes that defined who their buddies were. "They hated the engineers because historically the engineers never supported the other workers," according to Kennedy. "Class conflict just dominated everything."

In some ways, the strength of these traditions justifies the kind of oral history work Alice, Staughton, and other radical historians are doing. History clearly matters to people, especially when it involves the communities and industries in which they live and work. And this can go back a long way. One historian's interviews with shoe and electrical workers in Lynn, Massachusetts revealed that working people there still talk about the great cordwainers' strike of 1860 as though it had occurred in 1960! The militant traditions, radical ideas, and personal attitudes inherited by the workers in Rank and File from grandparents, parents, relatives, and old timers they met in the shops and on the streets made a difference in their lives. One wonders if this sense of historical consciousness is more common among rank-and-file leaders than it is among regular workers who do not become active as organizers or agitators. Some recent interviews seem to suggest this (3), but more sensitive talks with men and women on the line need to be done before we can be sure that historical traditions help to create militants.

If Rank and File contains suggestive information about why certain working people become organizers, it says little about why the same people often become socialists. But if, as the Lynds suggest, the people they interviewed were "forced to deal with the question of radicalism", they do not tell us very much about this in their stories. One can understand the desire of the interviewers and those they interviewed to avoid sectarian hassles, but if Rank and File has a weakness, it is the lack of information it provides about why militants become socialists.

One of the book's strongest contributions lies in the very suggestive information it contains about organizing strategies. For example, Christine Ellis recalls how she entered the Chicago ghetto in the early 1930s with another organizer from the Unemployed Councils and intervened successfully in an attempted eviction. Her anecdote captures the remarkable courage and resourcefulness as well as the sheer bravado of the early Communist organizers. There are other gripping accounts of organizing experiences, but they do not reveal many new tactical ideas. Most of the organizing described here involved hard work on the job (or at several jobs in the same plant) along with many other hours outside the plant distributing leaflets, making the rounds to ethnic clubs and workers' homes. In fact, these organizers stress the importance of community support in strikes far more than most labor historians of the '30s and '40s. For example, during the first sit-down strike launched by Akron rubber workers in 1936, a supporter named Burr McCloskey found that "community solidarity was pretty well impressed" on him. It was a lesson he carried through to the next decade when he and other Akron workers organized one of the strongest local labor parties in the U.S. (4)

However, in Rank and File we learn as much about the working conditions (the speedup, the dangerous machines, the tyrannical foremen) that drove the workers to organize as we do about the tactics the organizers used. As Stella Nowicki recalled of her early days in the meat packing industry:

> The meat would be so hot and steamy your fingers almost blistered but you just stayed on. In 1933-34 we worked six hour shifts at 37 1/2 cents an hour. We would have to work at a high rate of speed. It was summer. It would be so hot that women used to pass out.
>
> We started talking union. The thing that precipitated it is that on the floor below they used to make hot dogs and one of the women, in putting the meat into the chopper, got her fingers caught. There were no safety guards. Her fingers got into the hot dogs and they were chopped off.

Since many rank-and-file organizers were thrust to the forefront in crisis situations like this, there is not much discussion in this book of what is traditionally known as union organizing. However, Rank and File does have a lot to offer modern-day militants beyond the information it contains about the nuts and bolts of organizing a union.

Some of the most revealing comments in the book relate to job actions and other forms of resistance which, according to Bill Watson, amount to "counter-planning on the shop floor". (5) For instance, a meat packer explains how she and her sister workers set a limit on bacon production at Swift and Co. by training newcomers not to exceed 144 packages per hour.

> They maintained that limit and they did it without a union. One smart-aleck girl came in there and she was going to show them and go beyond that number because she wanted to earn more money; all the bacon that she got from the girls further up the line was messed up and scrappy and she'd have to straighten it up to put it in the package. She couldn't make a hundred packages an hour. (We took a loss just to show her.)

The women in Stella Nowicki's packing plant also befuddled the time checker by "using a lot of extra motions" when a time-motion study was in progress. "When he wasn't there, we eliminated all those motions and did it simply," Stella recalled. "There is always a faster way to do something, a simple way where you save time and energy." And the older, more experienced women would show the way to new women who were willing to learn. There was "a tremendous relationship of solidarity" in Stella's plant, but in the pre-CIO years the women workers there "weren't about to join a union" because they thought they could protect themselves without a union that would cost them "a buck a month".

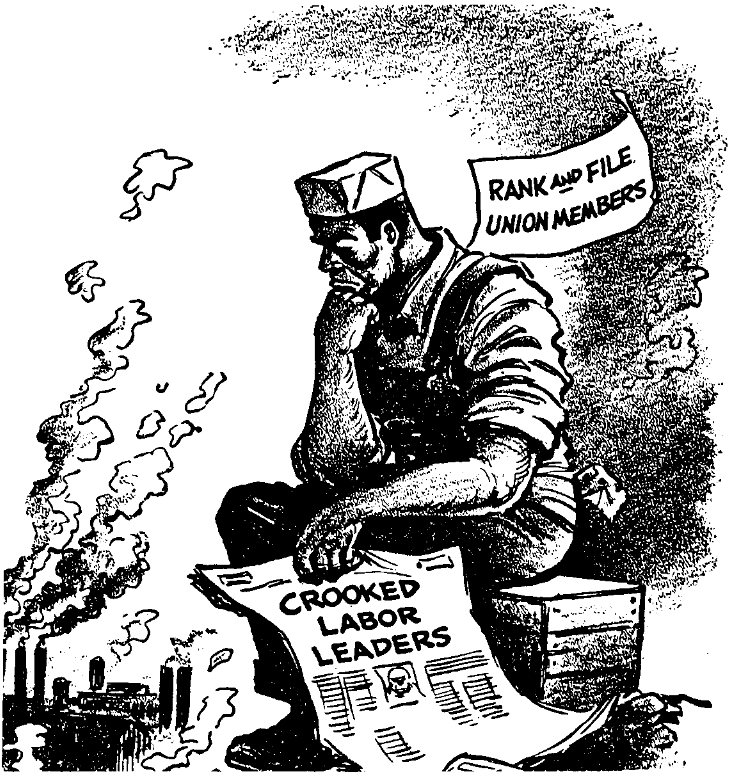
Stan Weir also describes some of the job actions in which he participated as a sailor and an autoworker. (Other descriptions are included in his work vignettes appearing in this issue of Radical America.) Weir offers a fascinating account in Rank and File of how he discovered the "informal work group" after years of formal organizing for left-wing unions and parties. After making friends with the nearby workers on his shift, Weir said that a social work-group formed. Without having a specific politics, this "family at work" had an identity and a solidarity that made possible an unusual but "meaningful" kind of collective activity. Unless this "family at work" and its "factory subculture" are understood, he argues, the actions of workers on the job are impossible to comprehend. "By and large," Weir continues, "the radicals' conception of the masses was a metaphysical one," an abstraction which ignored the specific problems of workers in their own subcultures. Too many radical organizers in search of "mass issues" that will appeal to a so-called "mass worker" have not spoken to the "realities of people's lives as individuals" and as members of work groups and subcultures.

Weir's theory that the Left and the union bureaucracy have ignored the informal work group ("where the muscle of the workers is") is especially provocative because it is not an abstract theory; it flows directly out of Weir's work experiences and those of many other people who tell their stories in Rank and File.

Stan Weir's criticism of the unions' official leadership is echoed (often in much stronger terms) by other workers contacted by the Lynds. In fact, discontent with the labor bureaucracies is the most pervasive theme in this book. The editors and authors insist in the introduction that they are not "anti-union", but clearly they are all militantly opposed to the undemocratic officialdom that reigns in most unions today. The tragic story of union bureaucratization is told in many of these personal histories, but Jesse Reese, a Black militant who organized for the CP in steel, describes it most vividly when he says that "today we have in our unions a pet dog", led by company caretakers who have fed the dog red-bait and then pulled out his teeth with the no-strike pledge. "Your dog don't bark no more for you," Reese concludes. "So the only thing you can get to win now is a cat, and it's got to be a wildcat, organized as a blanket matter...to keep from being exposed."

This theme is taken up quite forcefully by other steel workers like John Sargent and Nick Migas who led militant local opposition to the Murray and McDonald national leadership. Their fellow worker, Mario Manzardo, an organizer in steel during the late '30s who saw his union become a "training ground" for some supers and foremen, put it beautifully in commenting on David McDonald's autobiography Union Man:

> He claimed everything in the first person: "I did this, and I did that." He didn't do any of these things. It was all done by other people, mostly local leaders, rank and filers, radicals among them. He didn't single-handedly organize. This is history twisted around....History is where you show that workers through their militancy, their picket lines or their demands or their continuous agitation, forced an issue.


RANK AND FILE UNION MEMBERS
CROOKED LABOR LEADERS

Burr McCloskey, an Akron rubber worker, was one of several rank and filers who pointed to the coming of the automatic dues checkoff as a key turning point which made "unionism an adjunct of the company". This point was reiterated by Jordan Sims, a Black autoworker at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue axle plant. In retrospect, Sims sees the dues checkoff as "a major sell-out". "That's what bureaucratized our unions...and completely dissociated them from the rank and file," because after the checkoff came in the union reps "no longer had to come down and hustle your dollars ...."

It is interesting to note that Sims and Sylvia Woods, an older Black militant who was influenced by Garveyism, both joined the U.A.W. "only for what it could do for black people". They both came into the union with a deep mistrust of the white leadership and of white workers in general, but Woods remained active in union politics until she retired and Sims remains active today because, for better or worse, the unions are an important arena of struggle for Black workers.

Many of the personal histories in Rank and File document the power of the bureaucratic union leadership and the weakness of the democratic rebels down in the ranks. But the book does not leave the reader pessimistic. In fact, it ends with the stories of three enthusiastic Miners for Democracy recorded shortly after Arnold Miller's victory in the U.M.W. presidential race. Although there are growing doubts that the success of Miller and his reform slate will lead to real democratic control over the U.M.W. by the rank and file (6), there is no doubt that the movement represented by the Miners for Democracy struck an important blow against corrupt, bureaucratic trade unionism. It also reveals that the strong tradition of rank-and-file militancy described in the Lynds' book is alive and well today.

Rank and File may not offer clear-cut "historical lessons", let alone a set of "rules for radicals" active today, but it does provide a great deal of encouragement to working people who want to make their own history; it does this simply by introducing them to a remarkable collection of militants (long ignored by labor historians) who charted the way others must follow if the history of the coming decades is to belong to the working class.

FOOTNOTES

1. Staughton Lynd, "Guerrilla History in Gary", Liberation, Vol. 14 (Oct. 1969).

2. The W.P.A.'s most ambitious oral history project, the collection of old slaves' personal histories, has recently been published by Greenwood Press in a multi-volume series edited by George Rawick.

3. There is not a great deal of historical consciousness reflected in Terkel's recent collection of interviews, quite a contrast from his earlier oral history of the depression, Hard Times. The same is true of the Nader group interviews, The Workers, edited by Kenneth Lasson.

4. For a fuller study see Staughton Lynd, "The United Labor Party, 1946-1952", Liberation, Vol. 18 (Dec. 1973), pp. 38-46.

5. Bill Watson, "Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor", Radical America, Vol. 5 (May-June 1971), pp. 77-85.

6. See, for example, Ward Sinclair, "Miners for Democracy: Year One at the U.M.W.", Ramparts, Vol. 12 (June 1974), pp. 37-42.

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