WOMEN AND LABOR ACTIVISM

YALE STRIKE · COMPARABLE WORTH MINERS' STRIKE SUPPORT REPORTS FROM BRITAIN, ITALY, & CANADA

Staff: John Demeter.


Cover: Design and illustration by Nick Thorkelson.

Vol. 18, No. 5

September-October 1984

Radical America welcomes unsolicited manuscripts, but can return them only if sufficient postage is included. Writers may also send abstracts or inquiries to Manuscript Coordinator, c/o Radical America.

RADICAL AMERICA (USPS 873-880) is published five times a year (bimonthly except for a single issue March through June) by the Alternative Education Project, Inc. at 38 Union Square, Somerville, MA 02143 (617) 628-6585. Copyright © 1984 by Radical America. Subscription rates: $15 per year, $26 for 2 years, $10 per year for unemployed, retired, or fixed income. Free to prisoners. Add $3 per year to all prices for foreign subscriptions. Double rates for institutions. Bulk rates: 40% reduction from cover price for five or more copies, U.S. distribution by Carrier Pigeon. Typesetting by Gay Community News. Typos and mistakes by Alfred E. Newman. ISSN 0033-7617.

Second class postage paid at Boston, Mass. and additional post offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to RADICAL AMERICA, 38 Union Square, #14, Somerville, MA 02143.

RADICAL AMERICA is available on microfilm from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and indexed in Alternative Press Center Index, P. O. Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218. It is also indexed in America: History and Life, Sociological Abstracts, and Women’s Studies Abstracts.

RADICAL AMERICA is a member of the Alternative Press Syndicate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEEP, BEEP, YALE'S CHEAP</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at the Yale Strike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldo Cupo, Molly Ladd-Taylor, Beverly Lett,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and David Montgomery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPARABLE WORTH, INCOMPARABLE PAY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Issue at Yale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GENESIS OF CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN FEMINISM</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Barkan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LETTER</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITALY:</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class Militancy, Feminism, and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Union Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca Beccalli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY, COMPROMISE AND REVOLT</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Italian Workers' Movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Brodhead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE'LL BE HERE RIGHT TO THE END... AND AFTER</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and the British Miners' Strike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loretta Loach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POEM</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Eisenberg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARING THE SHOP FLOOR</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Men on the Assembly Line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan Gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Women Workers, Feminism and the Unions

Margaret Cerullo with Roslyn Feldberg

The prolonged and militant strike of clerical and technical workers at Yale University this Fall inspired this special issue on women and labor. The strike seemed to us at Radical America to raise challenges on several important levels. The extent of disruption was stunning: service and maintenance workers went out in sympathy for the full 10 weeks of the strike; classes were forced off-campus into New Haven movie theaters, restaurants, apartments; the Yale “community” fragmented as students, faculty, alumni debated the strike; unusually strong faculty, student and community support went to the strikers — in the form of tuition strikes, moratoria on classes, teach-ins, honoring of picket lines, and boycotts of academic and social events. Not since the student movements of the sixties had the campuses been such intense sites of rebellion. Now a fundamental critique of the university was emerging centered around the figure not of the student but of the woman worker.

The devalued position of women in the world of paid work was a central issue in a strike which made “comparable worth” a key demand. With the Reagan administration denouncing comparable worth as “looney tunes,” and the Yale administration intransigent, a confrontation of national significance was in the making. Getting information from the mainstream media about the strike, despite, or because of its significance, was extremely difficult.¹ This
led *Radical America* to hold a public forum in Boston, addressed by members of the union, and student and faculty supporters, which we are printing in this issue.

The forum, along with the other articles, raised questions for us about the connections between feminism and women’s changing relationship to work and to workplace organizing. As research has underlined, despite women’s steadily increasing participation in the world of work, sexual segregation in the labor force has remained strong, and women’s earnings if anything have stagnated relative to men’s. But the facts of this injustice do not explain women’s rebellion to it. The articles we are printing in this issue all explore the concerns which are fueling women’s rebellion to their place in the world of work.

In order to make this challenge, the articles suggest, women have had to depart from the form and content of traditional workplace organizing. The resistance by men to such initiatives reveals hidden dimensions of the structures which keep women in their place. Stan Gray, for example, in “Sharing the Shop Floor,” writes of how the meaning of work as a male preserve versus simply a place to earn money, was revealed when women attempted to enter “non-traditional” jobs in a Westinghouse plant in Hamilton, Ontario. The exclusion of women emerges as central to the confirmation of manhood that the world of work provided, and it becomes clear that more than economic privilege is at stake in men’s defense of their workplace preserves.

While Gray helps bring into focus the significance of women’s efforts to enter non-traditional jobs, the Yale forum and the related article by Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei explore the emergence of “comparable worth” as a challenge to the devaluation of women’s traditional work. Debate is beginning to sharpen about the political content of “comparable worth.” Does the assumption that there is a value of labor that derives from the content or work, for example, carry elitist assumptions about the “worth” of different kinds or work? Does comparable worth challenge or reinforce the sexual division of labor? Proponents argue that the equalization of pay and conditions in traditionally women’s fields will break down the sex-typing of occupations. But, while we have clear historical examples of women moving into traditionally male occupations such as clerical work, we have as yet no examples of the reverse process, even in relatively high paid occupations such as nursing. Amott and Matthaei’s article takes up some key aspects of these debates as well as explaining the mechanics of comparable worth, and the recent history of judicial, legislative and collective bargaining approaches to achieving it.

While many of us at RA had questions about comparable worth the Yale strike helped clarify its significance. As the discussion at the forum indicates, comparable worth became an expression of women’s changing consciousness of the skills embodied in their work and of the fact that certain jobs have been traditionally devalued because they were associated with women. Comparable worth challenges both the idea that women’s work is worth less than men’s and that women need less than men. It calls into question a nuclear family ideology which prescribes women’s economic dependence on men, and treats women and children without access to men’s wages as aberrant or ‘incomplete’ families. This ideology, long false to many women’s situations, nonetheless functioned to inhibit women from claiming the right to economic autonomy.

Some have suggested that the source of women’s changing consciousness is in fact women’s increasing need for equal wages, as the number of female-headed single parent families increases, and women’s poverty along with it. But, while women’s poverty is certainly more visible, more widespread and perhaps even more acute, increased need doesn’t automatically create transformed consciousness or worth. It seems to us that women have tended to develop a consciousness of themselves as women, as well as a willingness to challenge women’s place, not as an automatic result of being at work or being in need, but in particular kinds of workplaces or through activism in other unions. Let us explore each in turn.

Yale offers a particularly stark example of how women in contact with men as co-workers, but especially as bosses, not only see the different treatment that men and women regularly receive, but also are in a position to demystify
the male world of work, prestige, and power. As secretaries and dean’s assistants, working in labs, libraries and galleries, women at Yale see men’s weaknesses; they know the faculty members and administrators they work for can’t spell, get turned down for grants, aren’t prepared for classes or meetings, sexually harass students. The emergence of women’s consciousness at Yale also recalls Sara Evans’ discussion which linked the emergence of feminism to women’s prior activism in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left. It was in the course of organizing a union and sustaining a strike, rather than simply from being at work, that women at Yale gained a sense of power and value. This experience, in tension with the denial of their work and skills by Yale, deepened the clerical and technicals’ definition of what was at issue.

David Montgomery suggests that the issues and tactics of the Yale strike may offer us new models for “strikes of the future.” He is certainly right to point to women’s centrality to the future of the labor movement. In this country at a time when union membership in general is falling (from 22.6% of the labor force in 1970 to around 18% today), the percentage of women members has grown (from 21% to 27%). Women are influential in those areas where there has been union growth over the past decade (health, the public sector, clerical and service work).

Old fashioned tactics may be ineffective in a situation in which employers are apparently willing and able to sit out long strikes. The unexpected threat (used at Yale) to go back to work, as well as to leave it, may be the kind of creative tactics workers will need. In fact, as we look at the history of women’s participation in union activity, we may begin to see that whenever women have organized themselves, their tactics have broken with traditional forms. From the Ladies Auxiliaries’ activities involving theatre and entertainment to clerical workers in the 1930s jamming switchboards so that management scabs couldn’t do their jobs, to the public ‘awards’ given by organizations like 9 to 5 (for the worst treatment of secretaries), women have brought a complex understanding to the dynamics or workplace organizing.

Secondly, comparable worth also represents a challenge to traditional union strategies which have replicated capitalist assumptions about the legitimacy of skill-based job hierarchy, a fact that may explain the long historical hiatus since comparable worth was first proposed by a woman unionist on the War Labor Board in the 1940’s and its current consideration.

The particular shape of the struggle at Yale points to ways in which women-centered unions will need to redefine union demands, structures, and tactics. Unions’ own survival may force the replacement of the traditional question “Why don’t more women join or become active in unions” by a new and more radical one: “What would unions have to look like for women to become involved in them?”

The development of feminist consciousness out of the experience of union activism is not particular to the U.S. Bianca Beccalli, in her article “Italy: Working Class Militancy, Feminism, and Trade Union Politics” documents women’s entry into the sphere of paid work and their involvement in trade union activity. Yet, unlike the U.S., the Italian women felt legitimate in focussing politically on personal life issues as part of their union activism.

In the 1970’s trade-union feminists sought a space for women to clarify their distinct experience and needs as women within the trade union movement, as part of mounting a challenge to the male world of work and power, rather than simply seeing integration into it as it now exists. Joanne Barkan’s “The Genesis of Contemporary Italian Feminism” analyzes the sources of this particularly interesting experience. She describes the growth of feminism
out of the Italian New Left, including its initial rejection by working class women and the Italian Communist Party. She focusses on the struggle over abortion through which feminism gained political visibility and legitimacy, and transformed political debate in Italy. Beccalli focusses specifically on the spread of the militant feminism embodied in the national abortion struggle into the trade unions.

Of particular interest, Beccalli questions the long term effectiveness of the form feminism took within the trade unions. The women's choice to create a separate space to pursue their distinct needs, according to Beccalli, resulted in no direct challenges to trade union structures and traditions. In the end, the women were confined within the space they created. She suggests that rather than an emphasis on gender difference, a focus on equality is a surer route for women to seek power. Women's demand for simple integration, in a context of economic crisis and a diminished left, may hold out radical potential. In their effort to maintain and extend their position in the world of work, women will sustain a consciousness of how power works and what it takes to dislodge its hold. Yet, again, the question for women workers may be, "What would unions have to look like for women to remain active in them?"

The insights from the autonomous women's organizing within the union may prove helpful in redesigning and uprooting the male-dominated forms.

Finally, the discussion of working class feminism in Italy and the publication of Joanne Barkan's recent book, Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Workers' Movement Since 1945 (from which we are excerpting) also provides an unexpected occasion for us to return to an old Radical America interest in the development of the Italian left since the "Hot Autumn" of 1969. Frank Brodhead's review of Barkan's book provides an occasion for a former editor to look again at the relevance of the Italian debates about trade union democracy and the role of the Communist Party for leftists in the U.S. as we confront the eighties.

Footnotes

1. Jack Bishop (Village Voice, December 11, 1984) documents the Yale administration's authoritarian efforts to curtail the media's access to the campus.
5. This question frames a paper by Roslyn Feldberg, in process.
Through the efforts of a union movement that began 15 years ago, clerical and technical workers at Yale University and their union, Local 34, achieved a contract with the university on January 21, 1985. The resolution of the dispute with Yale was possible only after a ten week strike during the Fall semester, including withdrawal of services by Local 35, service and maintenance workers at Yale. Local 35 ratified their contract on January 28. Key victories in the contract were wages, year-round job security, dental, and medical benefits. The average wage increase was 35 percent over three years. A step-system in the reform of the salary structure makes a significant step towards correcting some of the long term salary discrimination against the c and t’s, 82 percent of whom are women. For example, black women will receive significant increases since they tend to have the most years of service. A seniority credit, or bridge in years of service, allows workers to take time off without penalty, which implies the ability to take maternity leave. Labelled, “Public Enemy No. 1” by Manhattan Group economists, comparable worth was not specifically addressed in the details of the contract. Due in part to the national attention this concept received during the Yale strike, it is now on labor’s agenda, as well as a key part of the broader program for women’s equity, in and outside the workplace.

What follows is an edited version of the transcript of a forum on the Yale strike sponsored by RADICAL AMERICA in Boston on Dec. 6, 1984. The forum occurred at a critical juncture in the contract struggle when the strikers had made the decision to go back to work, temporarily if necessary, over the six week holiday recess. Two union members, a faculty member, and a graduate student at Yale discuss the far reaching impact of the strike in the Yale and New Haven communities. They detail the creative organizing strategies of Local 34 and their supporters, and the precedents the success of the union set, even in the midst of the struggle, in terms of women’s work and women’s lives.

Special thanks to Karin Stallard, graduate student in American History at Yale and former RADICAL AMERICA intern, for help in setting up the forum, and to Local 26 Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Employees for hosting it. RA editors Elizabeth Francis, Deb Whippen, Ken Schlosser, Ann Withorn, Virginia Bullock, Margaret Cerullo and Marla Erlien shared the transcribing and editing of the forum.
Beverly Lett is a public services assistant in the Art and Architecture Library at Yale and has been a member of the negotiating committee. Molly Ladd-Taylor is a graduate student in American Studies at Yale University and works with The Wages for Housework Campaign. She was active in student support for the union. David Montgomery teaches history at Yale University. He is the author of Workers’ Control in America. Aldo Cupo is a lifetime New Haven resident, raised in an Italian-American working class family, with a BA in English from Southern Ct. State College. He intends to become a full-time organizer.

Beverly Lett: What we have seen in the streets of New Haven recently is the culmination of a fifteen year struggle to organize the clerical and technical workers at Yale University. Two other union elections were lost before we won ours. After the last election was lost, Local 35, which represents the service and maintenance workers at Yale and has about 1,000 people, decided they needed more clout and that they would put resources and staff toward helping us learn how to organize. The question that we were asked when we first started was “What can you do to help?” It wasn’t, “Sign a union card.” It was, “How can you help us get to more people?” And we built a structure very carefully. It took a lot longer than we thought it would.

Building a Structure

At Yale there are 220 buildings, with some of those buildings having a couple of departments in them, with two or three people in each department. Other departments have a couple of hundred people. All told, there are 2,550 people in the bargaining unit. With that kind of complex structure, we had to have a structure for the union which reflected it. We had to build a grassroots leadership, with leaders in every single workplace. Now we have what we call the rank-and-file staff, a group of about seventy people, which also includes students, a faculty member as well as union members, who take major organizing responsibilities for various areas near where they work. They work with the steering committee and the contract committee and the decisions are made in that group of seventy people; it’s not a union leadership that makes the decisions and we’re puppets.

In May of 1983, we won the union election by 39 votes, which was a huge victory. We started that summer after we won, putting together contract proposals. We used those, along with surveys and questionnaires to organize more people to join with us.

We started negotiating in October of 1983. We were also involved in raising people’s expectations, in helping people to recognize that this is a union that is primarily women, and to help them feel that their work is really worth something. The negotiations are still going on, but last April, we were able to force the University to agree to a partial contract, which covered most of the major language issues: union security, health and safety, promotions and transfer, job descriptions and classifications and the grievance procedure. After we agreed to the partial contract, during the summer we attempted to continue negotiations for the economic issues. At that point not having so many issues to deal with, we could focus on the economic discrimination against women and minorities. We worked on helping people to understand that negotiations don’t simply take place in one room; they take place in the offices, in the labs, and in the streets.

In September, we were forced by the University out on strike. The first phase of the strike lasted ten weeks. In mid-November, we started discussing a plan called “Home for the Holidays,” “Taking the Strike Back Inside,” or “Hell for the Holidays” — something along
those lines — which was an answer to the num-
ber of problems which we were facing on the
street, as well as a chance to catch the university
off-guard again. First, Local 35’s contract
comes up again on January 19, and we need the
strength and the will to support them and their
contract, since they have supported us and have
honored our picket lines for ten weeks. Then,
there is always the problem of attrition, people
just dribbling back to work. It’s particularly dif-
ficult for some of our people since we make so
little money (the average clerical and technical
at Yale makes $13,400). Coupled with a strike,
we’re facing hardship.

“Beep, Beep, Yale’s Cheap”

The factors that have strengthened our strug-
gle have been the unity between Local 35 and
Local 34, blue collar and white collar workers,
the support of the students and the faculty, and
the disruption we’ve been able to create at Yale.
In addition, the support of the New Haven com-
community has been widespread. In New Haven,
there’s been a great deal of support from the
Black community, from some churches down-
town, from other labor unions. New Haven is
different from Boston or Cambridge. Yale is a
weight in the middle of New Haven. Everybody
is extremely eager to see us win so that they can
win because there are plenty of people in New
Haven who are trying to get Yale to pay some
taxes, or money in lieu of taxes to the city. We
have a bumper sticker that says “Beep Beep,
Yale’s Cheap — End Economic Discrimination
at Yale.” People drive by all the time and are
constantly beeping their horns. We feel the sup-
port from the community when we’re out there
on the picket lines, and everybody is driving by
beeping horns. Before the partial agreement last
time, we did some actions at lunchtime, and one
of the things that got Yale to realize the disrup-
tion was that with all of us standing outside
there we just heard horns for about an hour.
One member of the negotiating committee said
she was walking home one day and passed some
kids break dancing on the street to the tune of
“Beep Beep, Yale’s Cheap!”

The struggle, now the strike, has changed our
family lives as well as our work lives; women
standing up at the workplace are also standing
up at home. Many women in Local 34 are single
mothers who have been struggling to support
their families. And the strike has been so con-
suming that the community and families are
galvanized to support the women who are out.
For example, there was a demonstration of
children of the strikers.

The question now has been how can we con-
tinue to do those things in the face of the loss of
some of our major support: when the students
and faculty are going to go away for the
Christmas recess. How can we take the struggle
and keep it alive? The idea was, and it’s a unique
idea, to take the struggle inside, to go back to
work for six weeks, and if both contracts are not
settled by mid-January, we will go back out on
the street. The point that I really want to get
across is that this struggle is a long-term strug-
gle: it started fifteen years ago and it’s going to
continue until the university recognizes the ne-
necessity to recognize us as human beings with the
right to a better life for ourselves.

“I gave them my final offer. Now what do they want!”
Molly Ladd-Taylor: One of the things that has made the union successful is that they have organized the entire community, not just the workers. I’m here as a witness to that fact. The key word of the strike has been “organize.” There are hundreds or organizers on the Yale campus now — students as well as union members.

I want to talk specifically about student and faculty support. I think students have supported the union for two reasons. The first is that the strike completely disrupted university life. That disruption forced students to confront the union’s issues, and they pressured Yale to negotiate, so that their education could be resumed. The second reason for student support is that sex discrimination exists on all levels at Yale (and society). Tremendous numbers of women students supported the striking workers. When we asked undergraduates to sign petitions, about 80 percent of the women would sign, and maybe 15 per cent of the men. There is a real “gender gap” in union support. First, let me talk about the disruption at Yale.

Withdrawal of Services

The Yale administration really underestimated not only the support that clerical and technical workers would have from the rest of the community, but the extent to which the withdrawal of their services would dramatically disrupt the university. There are about 2,500 workers in the bargaining unit, about 1,600 of whom have been out on strike, and an additional 1,000 service and maintenance workers — Local 35 — who went out with them. The prolonged strike has hit Yale hard. Financial aid and admissions are in chaos. The libraries have been severely hurt. The art gallery has shut down. The dining halls are closed, except for one which was staffed by scabs. The gym has shorter hours.

In the beginning of the fall, we undertook a massive effort to move classes off campus, in order that the rudiments of education could go on without people being faced with crossing the picket line. About 500 classes were moved off campus, and were meeting in people’s apartments, in restaurants, and movie theaters. (People complain that they can’t see to take notes because everything’s dark; everyone eats popcorn while they are in class.) Many classes have a different location every week, so each week you lose half the class because they went to the wrong location.

Yale has been in quite a turmoil. Research has for the most part ground to a halt. The scabs in the libraries can’t find the books. Education, in a fundamental way, has really been disrupted. And the withdrawal of Local 35 hurt too. Bathrooms are filthy, trash piled high in hallways, and the grounds are a mess. The closing of the dining halls has been significant particularly for undergraduates, for much of their social life is centered there. So despite administration propaganda, students have deeply felt and suffered from the withdrawal of services called by the strike and by Yale’s failure to negotiate seriously.

Yale terribly underestimated the impact of clerical and technical employees withdrawing services. It believed that clerical (largely women’s) work was marginal and easily replaced. This was a critical error on Yale’s part. One of the main jobs clerical workers do, particularly the administrative assistants in the departments and residential colleges, is help people adjust to Yale, making life easier in a myriad of ways, such as helping people find their way from point A to point B, and organizing the university’s social life. Without those services, the tension and difficulty of daily life increased for the students and faculty on campus.
"You Can't Eat Prestige"

The Yale "community" that the administration prides itself on so much suffered tremendously during the course of the strike, and in fact that's been a major strategy of the union. It's not so much to stop scabs from coming to work, or to prevent students from crossing the picket line, but to go after the glorified "public image" of Yale, that Yale depends on to fundraise, to recruit "quality" students and faculty, to reaffirm its prestigious reputation. The strike has exposed what's truly behind the image of a harmonious Yale community. It's become very clear to everybody on campus that the Yale "community" is really a handful of white men (and one white woman) who run the administration. An extraordinarily few people make decisions, and students and faculty don't have any voice in what goes on at Yale. It's not just the clerical and technical workers or the service and maintenance workers. Now we have students talking about, "Well, we need a union." Graduate student teaching assistants say, "Hey, you know, TA salaries are pretty low," and the faculty is saying, "Well, we don't have a faculty senate."

"Challenging the Unchallengeable"

As Locals 34 and 35 have been out there, pushing people to take a stand, and as more students, teaching assistants and faculty have voiced their support, we have found that so-called academic freedom and free speech does not really exist at Yale. The Yale University handbook says that we should "think the unthinkable, mention the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable," but many gestures of solidarity with the union have been met with threats.

At the beginning of the strike, six cheerleaders went to the first football game wearing "Settle" pinned on their sweaters, and were called into the coach's office and threatened with being thrown off the team. We sat down and talked with them and said, "Well, what do you do in a situation like this, when you've been threatened? You organize. You come together, and you confront it." So they went on TV, and the next day the administration backed down. They're still out there wearing those sweaters.

Graduate students in computer science were threatened with being fired and losing their stipends if they didn't do c&t work, and they organized. This has happened throughout the entire campus. Undergraduates held sit-ins in the library to expand library hours, and they were threatened with suspension. Over 100 students filed a class action suit against the university for breach of contract. 115 students withheld tuition and put it into an escrow account managed by local clergy, because they were not getting the kind of services they paid for. On Jan. 14, the first day of spring semester's classes, 31 students sat in at President Giamatti's office, and basically held four of the university's top officials hostage for two hours.

At one point during the strike, Yale offered free meals to freshmen because so few people were crossing the picket line to go into the one dining hall that was open. We decided to have a picket line inside the building, but the administration threatened students with suspension if they went inside a building wearing a sign. So we went inside a building wearing signs, and we are still here.
One of our most successful organizing actions was a three-day general strike. We held it just before Thanksgiving vacation and about fifty faculty members and lots of teaching assistants cancelled classes. There was a lot of student support for the general strike; between two-thirds and three-quarters of the nursing school went out to support the moratorium, as did about 20 per cent of the undergraduates. Many departments in the humanities, the divinity school, the school of management, and the law school basically shut down for those three days. Shortly before the moratorium, we had the largest faculty meeting that’s been held at Yale since the Black Panther trial (1970). They voted (by raising their hands in front of the administration — their bosses) on binding arbitration, which is advocated by the union. It lost narrowly.

Women’s Work

One of the most compelling aspects of the strike has been the gender gap among the supporters. There is a correlation between predominantly female departments like nursing or English, and where there is lots of support for the union. One of the reasons for this is the impact of the women’s movement, and the consciousness already developed around issues posed by the strike. Yale’s clerical and technicals are paid very low salaries — the average is less than $13,500 after 6 years of service, and women and minority workers earn less money even though they tend to have more years of employment. Like many women who are students at Yale, I was a clerical worker before I entered graduate school. Many
students have been clerical workers during the summer, and we harbor no illusions about where a lot of us will end up after Yale.

Further, the process of organizing has brought to light an understanding of comparable worth. Local 34's strategy has not been to say, "I'm a secretary and I should make as much as a truck driver," but rather, "I do important work and it is not valued." As women began to organize at Yale and to talk to each other, this process enabled them to see and to feel good about their work when before it had seemed invisible. The fact of economic discrimination is something we all know we will face wherever we go, as long as women earn 59 cents on the dollar for every man in this society. So the women at Yale know that the c&i's are out there fighting for us.

The other reason for the gender gap is the way women students and faculty are treated at Yale. Although it's difficult to get hard figures, it is clear women on the faculty face a comparable situation in terms of salary. Also, only 5 per cent of the tenured faculty is female, and that percentage has declined over the last five years. By and large, women faculty are more supportive of the union than men faculty, but there are so few of them and women faculty have much more to lose in terms of speaking out in favor of the union. There is also a lot of sexual harassment and violence against women (often by Yale men) which the administration hasn't taken seriously. Women are realizing that it wasn't because of Yale's benevolence that Yale got to be coed in 1969; it was through people out on the streets, through the women's movement organizing.

Women students identify with the clerical workers and are fighting for them because the strike has thrown light on the treatment we receive at Yale, and shown that women can fight Yale and win. Campus women's groups like the Women's Center and women's peace groups have thrown many of their resources behind the strike, and national organizations like NOW and Black Women for Wages for Housework have come to New Haven to show their support. One of the most exciting things about the strike is that we've formed a group of women from all the different sectors of campus; faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and clerical work-

ers are coming together to organize, recognizing the leadership that the union of clerical workers has provided us. We are coming together around our common interests as women and to fight economic discrimination, which affects all women no matter where we are.

Strike of the Future

David Montgomery: One of the most important things to think about in this strike is the way in which it's serving as a preview for what many of us are going to go through in different settings in years to come and serving as something of a trial run, for tactics and strategies that are going to be necessary in the struggles the labor movement faces from this point on.

This is a strike of the future, first of all, because it's taking place in such a hostile setting, starting from the preaching from our beloved occupant of the White House and going on, alas, through many of those who ran against him. It's the same notion that our salvation lies only in the marketplace, and in the strivings of each individual, as a selfish dog fighting against each other selfish dog, the length and breadth of this land. Nobody can forget PATCO to this day as the opening signal for those who step out of line by acting collectively. Nothing, it seems to me, moves more directly against the whole selfish thrust than what's been going on right here at Yale. First and foremost, the workers here have formed this union, and taken as their major target a wage scale based on the market standards of a society in which every occupation predominately staffed by women is lower paid than jobs that are predominately staffed by men. There is no way that any individual can do a bloody thing about this. The only change that can be made has to be a change within that structure itself and it has to be a collective undertaking.

Secondly we know that the city of New Haven, according to the census, is one of the poorest cities in the United States. Indeed, New Haven's real claim to fame is that the income gap between the city and the surrounding suburbs is the biggest in America. This means that, when authorities are asked about the low scales faced by minority workers at Yale, the answer (provided constantly in our lovely rag the Jour-
nal Courier) is that, indeed, the large numbers of minority workers in low paid positions is evidence of generosity by Yale, because it provides employment to underqualified people. Those who formed Local 34 and those in Local 35 who went out in sympathy think that this is a bunch of crap. They see that the only possible way to change the low wages at Yale is by collective action. But they've also shown, through all the studies that they've carried out, that it's not just the question of the university basing its low scales on the low salaries generally paid to women and to blacks, but also that the salaries are low even by New Haven standards, even below the local clerical and technical salaries for the region of New Haven. Yale stands at the bottom of the market.

The people at Yale decided they've had enough of this kind of generosity. They've had enough of "subsidizing" the engrossing of the university's endowment. They are tired of a net profit of thirty-five million dollars, which the university turned last year, only to then turn around and hear the university say that there is no way that it can do anything about the earnings of its clerical and technical workers. Most important then, especially in the context of our hostile political environment, Yale's clerical and technical workers have shown that changes can still be made through union activity. Secondly, this union has taken the basic patterns of the wage segregation in this country head on and said that something must be done about that at Yale. Third, they have used new and effective techniques of doing it.

Act Like A Gila Monster

We cannot forget that the members of Local 34 proved that it was possible to pull themselves together and win a collective bargaining election in this day and age. That in itself was quite an accomplishment. Remember that in 1983, less than half of all the NLRB elections were won by unions, and in bargaining units of more than 2,000, less than 10% were won by unions. So for those of you who say "only 39 votes," this is no small achievement. It was impressive to pull together a victory in a unit of this size, in this day and age, against the whole battery of techniques that every company uses against whomever is trying to organize. Even more significant, a major strike was mobilized against an institution that's very difficult or even impossible to hurt financially over a short period of time. It's not like a manufacturing concern, whose sales could be shut off, and boom, the money stops, the squeeze is on them, they gotta talk. It makes you think, of what, for example, insurance workers all around America will be up against, as they unionize more and more. Or the problems hospital workers face as more and more professional managerial associations come in, or even about manufacturing firms, all parts of multi-plant companies, which can easily shift their work from one place to another. We begin to see that everybody is increasingly faced with this same situation. What do you do against an outfit that is so hard to hurt?

What has been demonstrated here is first and foremost you act like a Gila monster. Have you
ever seen a Gila monster? A Gila monster comes out of the desert and bites, and it never lets go. The victim can shake and jump and scream and stomp, for months, years, on end. And this has to be the essence of any union tactics today. The old Sam Gompers game of "Pull the plug; shut her down lads; and wait until the company comes and talks," doesn't work against an enemy like this. This doesn't mean you give up. This means that enormous imagination has to be brought to play. Partial agreements can supplement or replace complete contracts. Democratic involvement of the whole membership is vital, so that everybody knows what's going on, and yes, begins giving a new meaning to democracy. What lessons all of us at Yale have had, just from watching this union in practice! Instead of just throwing a question on the floor, for people to debate out of nowhere and make a decision, the question is debated for days or weeks, before a meeting takes place. So, by the time people come together, everybody knows what he or she has to think about that question.

Before this last decision to go back was made, the whole bloody university had turned into one big debating society. It was clear that more intellectual activity took place at Yale last week than all the rest of its history combined: in every street and every bar, and every restaurant, all up and down that area. And this was absolutely necessary, because you can only use tactics like this if everybody understands what's going on, and everybody is involved in the decision. You can't just have a telegram go out from John L. Lewis, and have this sort of in-and-out strategy taking place. So here, the lessons that have been demonstrated are imaginative — and there's been something new every single week on those picket lines. There have been great non-violent demonstrations, massive arrests of participants, and rallies in which other people have come from other areas of the Northeast, all of which gave constant support. Anyone who has been on strike knows that there is nothing that gives a boost quite like seeing 20, 30, 50, a hundred people from someplace else come marching in to say, "We're with you." That physical presence makes all the difference in the world. And this is what has made it possible, it seems to me, to make such an imaginative maneuver as has just been done.

The extraordinary thing is that Yale was completely baffled by this decision of the strikers to go back to the job. The administration went bananas. There's only one sort of tactic that they could possibly use to stop that sort of thing: a lock-out. But how could Yale's administration lock out its employees, and then turn to the students and say, "We're promoting your education"? Now this one was tough. They were confused, and the strange thing is that the first increase in the money offer made since September came in response to the threat of the workers to go back to work.

Also, it's important to remember that in each stage of a struggle like this the dynamics change, because soon Yale got the wavelength, and now they've got a new strategy: attempting to persuade everybody that now that they're really back, it's all over. And out great newspaper again has big editorials, "Well it's finished. Isn't that nice? There's nothing more to do." Clearly the workers on the job will be there organizing each other to carry on the struggle through this stage, at work and in the future, to carry it on and go off work again, if need be.

What is important here is this constant sense of total involvement of the membership, first of all. Secondly, the amazing solidarity, that the members of Local 35, maintenance and custodial workers of Yale, have demonstrated, with more than 85 per cent of them staying off for ten weeks, in support of the members of Local 34. And this kind of solidarity, as you heard, was a decisive consideration in the minds of the people who decided to go back together, so that they
could always stick together, as one unit that fights together. It means imagination, solidari-
ty, democracy, always reaching out, as Molly described, to everyone else in the community, to the students, to the faculty, to the entire region, to make this battle everybody’s fight.

It is crucially important to lend every possible support to this strike, not only because raising wages of clerical and technical workers at Yale is going to give an enormous boost to similar workers all around the New England area, but also because this is a strike of the future, and this is a place where the tactics and strategies, which many of you are going to have to use again and again in the battles to come, are being tested out.

**Aldo Cupo:** Our union is very unconventional. Along the way, we’ve built the union through a series of many different programs. The very first program was to build the organizing committee. I remember I first had a lunch meeting in the Naples Pizza restaurant where I was expecting the organizer to hand me a card so that I could sign it. I said, “Okay, I’m ready to go, where’s my card?” And he said, “Well, we don’t have one. We don’t intend on having any for a while. What we want to do is organize.” So I listened to him and it made sense to me. It made sense that the union wasn’t something that was going to drop from the sky, that I sign a card and send it in. It made sense that if I wanted to get a union at Yale, then I’d have to do some work.

**“Standing Together”**

I slowly began to set up more lunch meetings and get people in my building who didn’t know or trust the organizer, but did trust me because I’d worked with them for four years. I’ve been at Yale about seven, eight years now. That was the very first program: build the organizing committee. And when we’d reached a certain point, about a year into the drive, there was another program which we called “standing together,” and it culminated in a list of 400 people going public, which is something that had never happened at Yale. The members of the organizing committee signed a public statement, which said “Standing Together, We Are Local 34.” And then there was a long page of names. It was a very exciting time, and it brought about a big issue that people have struggled with all along, and that is the issue of organizing as pushing. Pushing people one step past where they thought they could go. Pushing workers to stand up and be tough.

Many of our organizing committee members started out by saying, “Well, all right, I’m for the union. I’m crazy. I will do anything for the union. I will sign my name publicly; the boss can fire me; I don’t care. I’m proud of being from the union, but you’re not going to ask me to get my co-worker to stick her neck out.” And we said, “Wrong! We are going to ask you to get your co-worker, not to stick her neck out, but sign and go public, because that saves all of our necks.” From the very beginning of this union, it’s been debates, discussions, and tough actions that brought with them a lot of controversy, but which rested on the basic belief that, if we push
each other and struggle with each other and respect each other, ultimately what we do is push Yale. When members say to me, "I don't like being pushed," I reply, "It beats being crushed."

The High Road and the Low Road

We continued on, organized and eventually broke down a lot of the fear people have about what it means to be in a union. We were facing the immense wealth and power that the university has. Anybody who's been there for any amount of time just knows in their bones what an opponent you're up against at Yale. We were clear that in organizing we were always taking the high road. In contrast, Yale has always taken the low road. And when I say the high road I mean that we've never been afraid to get together and make some very difficult decisions. We've never been afraid to lead people. We've never been afraid to encourage people, basically to say that we're worth something.

On the other hand, Yale has responded to our efforts to better ourselves and to organize, by hiring two of the nastiest law firms. One was a local law firm in Hartford, which tried to squash our attempts to have a union election, and now they have hired Sayforth, Shaw, Fairweather, and Geraldson, one of the top union-busting law firms in the country. When asked about the issue of comparable worth, one of Yale's top administrators said, "I wouldn't know about the comparable worth of a secretary to a truck driver seeing as how I've never held either job." A long series of comments such as that show how Yale has consistently taken the low road, trying to squash people's freedom of speech, and the community, trying everything that they could to just hold onto their immense wealth and power. In the face of this, organizing has really mobilized us so that, as David said, we're just a force that keeps coming at 'em.

On April 3rd, after we had voted to go out on strike, we had a month interim period. We had taken a resounding strike vote; over 1300 people in a vote of 1500 people decided to go out on strike. So we gave the university a month to bargain. They didn't do anything until the last few days, when all of us in the workplace wore buttons which said, "I do not want to strike, but I will." We had many different actions, at lunchtime for example, where a thousand people would attend. But key was that secretaries, lab technicians, and library workers were challenging their supervisors. They stood up and took their supervisors on so that there was no mistake that it was John Wilhelm or another leader, but that it was the people in the workplace who were really, really ready to go and fight.

We have said that in dealing with Yale we had an arsenal of weapons. One of those weapons was the withdrawal of services that a strike brings, but that's only one amongst plenty of others which showed the university that we were going to fight, were determined to fight and that we would continue to fight until they recognized us as equals at the bargaining table. A lot of people didn't understand that one of the key problems at Yale was that they would not bargain with us. It's been over a year now, and they still dictate a stance, and once every few months they move six-tenths of one per cent on something and claim they've compromised. Despite that frustration, we've proven that once we start to bargain on something we achieve a settlement which can be seen in the partial contract achieved in April.

The programs, though, have always built on taking our strength and spreading it out so that we get stronger every day. We won by 39 votes in a unit of close to 2600, yet 1500 people voted to go out on strike. More people voted to go out on strike than voted for the union. So this has already shown that, as we keep building, we can move to the rest of the Yale community. Plenty
of Yale students and faculty who had been dubious of the union were turned around by the administration’s rigidity. In fact, we usually find that Yale has been our best organizer.

Control and Disruption

We used to think that what moved the university was embarrassment, hurting their national image. But we now see that the key was disruption, and pushing the university to the point where they lost control. Once we were out on the street Yale thought, “OK, they’re out.” They’re causing hell. Disruption is going on, but we now control the inside.” The union used to have a lot of control on the inside, because of the grievance procedure and the strong stewards and organizers in the work place. With a strike, those organizers were gone, out on the street, where they couldn’t get at anyone. We decided to start reaching in, into the workplaces, to pull supervisors out for lunch and to ask, “What are you doing to end the strike? Are you going to sit back here while your team says that they’re not going to compromise?” Secretaries took their doctors out and said, “Do you know that I make $13,000 while you’re this doctor at the medical school, pulling in all this money?” A lot of the doctors didn’t even know that and were shocked to find out. We continued to stir the campus up, even from the outside, because we found that Yale begins to move only when they feel they’re losing control.

Now we have voted overwhelmingly, about 800 to 200, to take the struggle back inside, which is another way of ripping the control right away from Yale. When I first heard this plan I liked it as a contingency with Local 35, because the University had tried to force them back in, since they didn’t have specific language in their contract allowing them the right to respect the picket line. The university brought Local 35 to arbitration in order to force them back to work. We thought if 35 was forced back to work, then we would go back in solidarity and then all come out together again when their contract was up in mid January.

But the more we thought about Yale’s strategy to sit us out during the six weeks of Xmas recess, we realized, “Hey, let’s turn the tables.” We went in, because at this point using the strike as withdrawal of services was not to our best advantage. We have the right to do that because we have a partial contract. And we are going to be doing our jobs; we’re not proposing sabotage or slow downs or anything like that, but we’ve been telling all the supervisors that we’re going to be challenging them, asking them out to lunch, pushing them. And we’re going right back out in January, if they don’t get off their asses and do something.

That’s been the struggle up to this point. Outsmarting the enemy, using our brains as well as our strength, organizing and pushing the rest of the campus to isolate the administration. At times this has become very difficult. It’s often very hard to identify who in the administration

---

WHY NOT ARBITRATION?

Sex and race discrimination

The fundamental economic problem which Local 34 members are determined to address is that we are not paid the real value of the work we do, and are not paid living salaries.

In addition to that basic problem, however, Yale’s discrimination is emphasized by the inequalities even within the clerical and technical group. Yale pays clerical and technical women significantly less than men, even though the women have worked at Yale longer.

**YALE SALARY DISTRIBUTION BY SEX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>No. of Full-Time Employees</th>
<th>Average Years at Yale</th>
<th>Average Years in Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>$14,056</td>
<td>367 (18%)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>$13,290</td>
<td>1724 (82%)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, black clerical and technical employees at Yale are paid significantly less than whites, even though the blacks have worked at Yale longer.

**YALE SALARY DISTRIBUTION BY RACE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>No. of Full-Time Employees</th>
<th>Average Years at Yale</th>
<th>Average Years in Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$13,563</td>
<td>1733 (83%)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$12,644</td>
<td>292 (14%)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further breakdown by both race and sex shows that Yale follows the classic pattern of discrimination in America: white men earn the most, followed by white women, black men, and black women.

**YALE SALARY DISTRIBUTION BY RACE AND SEX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>No. of Full-Time Employees</th>
<th>Average Years at Yale</th>
<th>Average Years in Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>$14,324</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>$13,406</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Men</td>
<td>$12,813</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Women</td>
<td>$12,503</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: other racial groups are not listed separately here because no other group includes as much as 2% of the work force.)

---

Local 34, Federation of University Employees

**Come to our rally**

**Friday, September 21, 5:00 p.m.**

Behind Woolsey Hall

makes the decisions. Mostly, it’s people who don’t even live in New Haven, so the Yale administration operates like an absentee landlord. It becomes very frustrating, but the more we keep going the more we keep isolating that group, and the more people we win over the more people will have a sense of empowerment. As Molly said, the grad students are feeling that maybe they ought to have a union, and maybe we ought to have a voice in what happens to the endowment. That’s when Yale starts to get nervous.

SUPPORT DEMAND-SIDE ECONOMICS

And help Radical America continue to grow and publish.

Consider:

Becoming a sustainer ($50/year) or giving a friend or relative a gift subscription (1 Year for only $10 for present subscribers). Or you can just send us a donation and enable RA to continue sending free subs to prisoners and reduced rate subs to the unemployed. Pester your local or school library to get Radical America or ask your local bookstore to consider carrying RA. Write us for details or promotional copies to pass on.

Copies of articles from this publication are now available from the UMI Article Clearinghouse.
Mail to: University Microfilms International
300 North Zeeb Road, Box 91 Ann Arbor, MI 48106

MOVING???

Don’t forget to take Radical America with you! Drop us a card with your old and new address in plenty of time so that we don’t incur postage due bills and you don’t miss an issue.
A central issue in the Yale strike was "comparable worth." Local 34, 82 percent women, demanded pay increases on the basis of the argument that their clerical and technical work receives lower pay than other jobs at Yale which require a comparable level of skill, training, and responsibility — because it is done by women. For example, clerical workers average $13,424, compared to $18,500 for Yale truck drivers. After one year of work, a lab assistant is paid $10,208, compared to $14,394 for a dishwasher. This the workers claim, is unjust, a not-so-subtle form of sex discrimination. As the largest group of predominantly female workers to strike over the issue of comparable worth, Local 34 is at the forefront of the feminist-inspired battle for "pay equity." What follows is an introduction to the concept of comparable worth, and a discussion of its strengths and limitations. We feel that comparable worth can contribute to a socialist-feminist agenda by raising fundamental questions about the worth of work and by increasing the income of many women workers. Nonetheless, it suffers from the limitations of any piecemeal reform and needs to be pursued as part of a broader program of demands.
The Emergence of the Comparable Worth Strategy

When the Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibited unequal pay for equal work and the broader Civil Rights Act of 1964 set affirmative action into motion, many assumed that the gap between men and women’s wages would close. Instead, the average salary for a woman working full-time year-round remained roughly 60 percent of the salary earned by a man. The constancy of the wage gap in the face of anti-discrimination legislation drew attention to the fact that women and men rarely hold the same jobs. Traditional sex roles and outright sex discrimination by employers and workers have had the result of excluding women from most occupations other than homemaking and its labor market extensions. Those paid occupations open to women shared low pay, few opportunities for advancement, and often centered around nurturing and serving others. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, over 40 percent of all women workers were concentrated in 10 occupations, most of which were over 70 percent female — for example, nursing, secretarial and clerical work, teaching, and food service. In contrast, men, especially white men, had more job options and more opportunity for high pay and promotion. For instance, stock clerks, predominantly male, earn more than bank tellers, who are predominantly female, and registered nurses earn less than mail carriers. As a result of this occupational segregation, legislation prohibiting unequal pay for equal jobs failed to address the heart of pay inequity between the sexes: men and women earning unequal pay for different jobs.

The idea of comparable worth was devised to raise women’s wages in female-dominated occupations up to the level paid in male occupations of “comparable worth.” Also known as pay equity, comparable worth means that jobs deemed to be of “equal value to the employer” should pay the same, regardless of their sex or race-typing. The first wage comparability case before the courts was based on race. However, subsequent attempts to apply the Civil Rights Act to non-identical jobs have focused on wage differences origins from gender-based job segregation.

Some of the first attempts to broaden the concept of equal pay emerged during World War II, when unions such as the UAW and the IUE fought differential pay for men and women workers in order to prevent an overall reduction in pay scales and to generate greater unity between men and women workers. Since then, the ranks of pay equity advocates have grown and a more feminist construction has been placed on the concept. Women’s rights groups, working women’s organizations and unions representing women workers are currently pursuing three strategies for achieving comparable worth corrections to pay inequities based on sex or color: litigation, collective bargaining, and legislation. Often a combination of these strategies is utilized by pay equity advocates.

Litigation. Prior to a 1981 Supreme Court decision, the courts were uniformly unfriendly to charges of sex discrimination in pay across different jobs. In Denver, where nurses charged discrimination because the city paid them less than tree trimmers and sign painters, the judge ruled against the nurses, arguing that the doctrine of comparable worth was “pregnant with the possibility of disrupting the entire economic system.” In 1981, however, the Supreme Court ruled that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act could be applied to prohibit wage differences in similar, but not identical, jobs. Since then, there have been lower court decisions, such as one in the state of Washington, which have awarded back pay to women whose jobs have been systematically undervalued.
Implementing Comparable Worth

The primary mechanism for implementing comparable worth in wage structures is the job analysis/job evaluation study, and efforts for pay equity usually involve ridding an existing study of inherent sex bias and/or demanding a formal job evaluation study where one does not exist.

Job evaluation studies were in use long before pay equity advocates recognized their potential in comparable worth struggles. Generally speaking, most large, bureaucratic firms and state agencies do not negotiate a wage directly with each employee, but rather assign an employee to a particular rung of a job ladder. The worker’s position on the job ladder determines his or her wages. Workers in the same job would thus receive the same salary, while workers in different jobs would be paid differently. To determine pay scales, large firms use fairly systematic job analysis/evaluation schemes, often prepared by outside consultants. The first step of the study analyzes jobs through examination of job descriptions and, sometimes, discussions with workers. In the most common type of evaluation, known as a point-factor system, points are assigned to each job on the basis of criteria (factors) such as skills, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. In the final stage of the process, dollar values are assigned to the points in each category. The same procedures, and often the same consultants, are used for job evaluations in pay equity cases. In smaller firms, the process is much more informal, but rankings of jobs are still undertaken.

Despite the aura of objectivity surrounding these studies, there is no objective way to determine the relative productivity of jobs. Due to the division of labor, a myriad of different workers contribute to the output of any product, and it is impossible to distinguish their different contributions. How can one technically measure the relative importance of dieticians, nurses, or pharmacological staff to a hospital? Normally, hospital administrators pay market wages — the amount needed to attract workers — and infer the relative worth of these different workers from their wage rates. Job evaluation

Collective Bargaining. A variety of unions, including AFSCME, CWA, IUE, SEIU, UAW, UE and others, have adopted pay equity as a goal in bargaining, as well as in membership education and lobbying. Most efforts have focused on public employees, largely because information on pay scales is more accessible, and state agencies may be more vulnerable to public pressure brought through community-labor alliances. Local 101 of AFSCME in San Jose, California is one of the public sector success stories. These city employees, who won pay equity raises for women workers employed at a Massachusetts General Electric plant.

Legislation. Many states have adopted legislation calling for a pay equity study of state employment, and others, including California, Minnesota and Washington, have passed statutes which require public sector wages to be set on the basis of comparable worth. In Idaho, a law which assigns pay in state positions on the basis of skill and responsibility has produced a 16 percent increase in pay for female clerical workers. Other states have begun to raise wages in predominantly women’s jobs without explicit recourse to comparable worth. In New Mexico, for instance, over $3 million was appropriated in 1983 to raise the wages of the lowest paid state employees, over 80 per cent of them women, even though a job evaluation study has not yet been completed.
studies, on the other hand, attempt to determine relative productivity of jobs apart from the market. To do this, they must subjectively choose a set of factors and weights. There are many ways in which sex, race, and class bias can enter into the calculations.

One critical area is the selection and definition of factors to be evaluated. For example, it is common to define responsibility as supervisory responsibility over other workers, machines, or money. In this case, child care workers would receive low points for "responsibility" even though their jobs entail enormous responsibility for children under their care. Similarly, skilled activities such as nurturing and guidance are rarely counted, causing traditional women's jobs to receive lower points than men's jobs. Boredom from routinized work is not commonly considered worthy of point as an adverse working condition, although outdoor work and heavy lifting are.

Another critical area is the weighting of different factors, accomplished either through the number of points allocated to each factor or by the method which assigns dollars to points. This has the effect of determining the relative worth of different factors, and generally involves sophisticated statistical techniques such as multiple regression analysis. In effect, consulting firms specializing in job evaluations rely on previous correlations between existing pay scales and measured factor points to predict for new clients what a job's salary should be. From the perspective of the employer, the best point rankings are those which duplicate the existing pay hierarchy as closely as possible, since this seemingly "objective" technique can then be used to legitimize pay differentials. This means that job evaluation schemes usually embody existing pay practices, complete with sex, race, or gender bias. For example, the maximum number of points assigned for responsibility may be 2000, while adverse working conditions are awarded only a maximum of 200 points; this would ensure that managerial jobs pay more than service or operative jobs.

Despite these biased methods, current methods of evaluating jobs can still be used to win pay raises for those in "undervalued" work. For example, most studies have found that male and female jobs with equal point evaluations are paid differently because of the weighing of different factors mentioned above or because firms use different ranking schemes for different types of jobs. In these cases, legislation or bargaining agreements mandating equal pay for jobs of equal point value (under the same ranking scheme) can achieve somewhere between five and 25 percent pay increases.7

Much more can be won by eliminating bias from the technique. This requires wide access to information about existing or contemplated job evaluation studies. We need to disseminate information on how consulting firms such as Hay Associates, which serves approximately 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies,8 conduct their studies, and we need to bargain for input at all stages of the evaluation process. The more we involve ourselves in the technique, taking power from the technocrats, the more success we will have. Progress has already been achieved in this area. Most unions have staff members who are experts on the technique and feminist proponents of comparable worth are currently at work expanding the definitions of factors so
as to recognize the value of women's traditional work skills. (One of the most important redefinitions has been the inclusion of responsibility for children as a compensable factor.) More work needs to be done to rid the method of race and class bias.

How Radical is Comparable Worth?

While comparable worth directly challenges sexual inequality in the labor market, it may also have the potential for other radical change. Comparable worth promises to undermine male supremacy outside the labor market as well. Feminists have long noted the way in which the lower wages of women have reinforced the traditional nuclear family and women's responsibility for unpaid work in the home.

As long as women are denied access to men's jobs, and few women's jobs pay a living wage, women are under strong economic pressure to marry. Married women's financial dependence upon their husbands contributes to sexual inequality within marriage. The economic costs of leaving or being left by one's husband are illustrated by the high percentage of women heading families on their own who live in poverty. The risk of poverty is highest for women of color; in 1982, 56.2 percent of black and 55.4 percent of Latino families headed by women were poor.

In addition, comparable worth subjects the pay structure to scrutiny it rarely receives. Conventional economic wisdom argues that in the "perfectly competitive market economy," workers are paid according to their "marginal product," that is, according to their contributions to the production process. (In graduate school, one of our teachers built models which assumed that women were 60 per cent as productive as men, justifying this with the fact that full-time women workers earned on average, 60 per cent as much as men!) Comparable worth debunks such convenient rationalizations of the pay structure, and the sexist assumptions they both reflect and create, by showing that the force behind pay differences has not been productivity differences but rather power and discrimination. Thus, it presents a radical critique of our system of income distribution through the "free market," and presents an alternative way of achieving what the market had promised: the distribution of income to workers according to their contributions in a manner which is fair and incentive-creating at the same time.

Finally, while comparable worth does not directly attack occupational segregation by sex, it may do so indirectly. On the one hand, by making traditionally feminine jobs palatable to women, comparable worth may reduce the incentives for women to seek entrance into male-dominated, more privileged jobs. On the other hand, as traditionally feminine jobs begin to offer wages comparable to those of masculine jobs, more men will find them attractive. Also, as women begin to fight for and expect working conditions comparable to those of men, they may find men's jobs more desirable, and be more willing to fight to get them.

Broadening the Comparable Worth Agenda

Comparable worth gains effectiveness and constituency when combined with other progressive demands.

Conservative economists have warned that raising wages for women's work would create uncontrollable inflation. While firms will try to increase their prices (and state agencies, their tax revenues), the inflationary impact would depend upon the magnitude and speed of the pay equity adjustment, as well as the ability of firms and governments to pass on the costs.
(This, in turn, depends upon the degree of monopoly power and citizen resistance to tax increases.) Finally, inflation is not the worst of all evils, and can be limited by the use of wage-price controls, long a demand of progressives.

What is more worrisome are the other possible reactions of firms and state agencies to an increase in the price of women's labor: automation, elimination of state programs, and runaway shops to countries in which women still provide a super-exploitable labor force. Already, computerization is threatening clerical workers and job flight has created massive structural unemployment in the U.S. In order for comparable worth struggles not to exacerbate these problems, they must be pursued in conjunction with demands for job security, retraining, and plant-closing legislation.

So as to aid all undervalued workers, pay equity must also be extended to include comparisons between comparable but racially-segregated jobs. Even this extension will not solve all workers' problems. Workers without jobs will not benefit, nor will workers in those jobs calculated to have the least worth. Since these are the main job problems faced by men of color, comparable worth offers little to them. Raising pay for women in certain jobs reduces inequality between women and men on the same level of the job hierarchy, but increases the relative poverty of those at the bottom of the hierarchy. Their problems can only be solved by a more comprehensive restructing of work and by a deeper and more radical discussion of the worth of work.

As currently practiced, the doctrine of comparable worth accepts the idea of a hierarchy of workers, more or less "worthy" on the basis of some objective criteria. However, as radicals become involved in decisions about what factors should merit higher pay, we may well begin to question the rationale for the hierarchy itself. If the discussion of what makes work worthy is extended to the grass roots, we may well determine that all jobs are equally worthy. We may decide that workers in unskilled, routinized jobs may be doing the hardest work of all, for such work saps and denies their very humanity. Why should those whose jobs give them the most opportunity to develop and use their abilities also be paid the most? The traditional argument—that higher pay must be

**********
CORRECTION
In RADICAL AMERICA Vol. 18, No. 4 there was an editing error in the authors’ biography for “Shared Dreams: A Left Perspective on Disability Rights and Reproductive Rights” by Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine. The bio should have read: Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine are members of Committee for Reproductive Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) and both work with the Women and Disability Awareness Project. Adrienne Asch is a member of the National Federation of the Blind.

**********
THANKS!
RA’s annual fundraiser-party, a “Counter-Inaugural Ball” on Jan. 26 was a huge success and we thank all our loyal friends and subscribers in the Greater Boston area for their support.

The Editors

It’s a Good Thing I’m Not Macho

“... she raises into metaphorical significance the struggle of women to do whatever kind of work they choose, to survive encounters with disbelief, hostility, and machismo, and to change those attitudes. ... in addition one can find here the symbolic resonances that bring one back to reread a work of literature many times. ...” from the foreword by Denise Levertov

Available for $7.95 from Whetstone Press, 94 Green Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, 617-524-7909. Please add $1.25 shipping and handling for 1-2 copies, and $0.25 for each additional book. Massachusetts residents add $0.40 Massachusetts Sales Tax per book.

Whetstone Press is a union letterpress printing and publishing collective.
THE GENESIS OF CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN FEMINISM

Joanne Barkan

The origins of the new feminism in Italy date back to the late 1960s when the mass political movements were taking shape at the universities. Enrollment was rapidly expanding, and more of the incoming students were women. By 1967–68, the female portion of the university population was about 36 percent, a sizable jump from less than 29 percent in 1962–63. Many young women had their first political experiences in the student movement and in left organizations, especially the New Left parties. They acquired skills in political analysis and in organizing. But they also found themselves frustrated by the subordinate position they occupied in relation to men. There was a pervasive indifference to their particular interests and needs as women. They were “angels of the mimeograph machine” (angeli del ciclostile), doing behind-the-scenes support work for those (mostly men) who had a public presence as leaders, speakers, and writers. For the women involved, it was not much of an improvement over the traditional female role as angel of the hearth. They also objected to the rigid hierarchies of power in the New Left parties. They criticized the “old-style,” undemocratic ways of doing politics.

Over the course of several years, a large proportion of these women activists came to see themselves as feminists. They eventually concluded that the sexually mixed organizations sti-
fled the politics they wanted to develop. They resigned from the parties to form loosely structured, local collectives and consciousness-raising groups where they could couple radical ideology with new organizational forms.

The mid-1970s were a time of enthusiastic exploration and theoretical growth for the feminists. They published journals and newspapers, set up cooperatives and archives, ran bookstores, theatres, and women's centers. Among their most important efforts were the women's health counseling services (consultori) which they organized in many cities and towns. Through the consultori, the feminists provided information on birth control, abortion, mothering, and health problems. They saw this alternative health service as part of the struggle for self-determination and women's control over their own bodies. In all their activities, the feminists took up themes that the left and the labor movement had largely ignored. They criticized the sexual division of labor in society; they explored the relationship of class oppression to sexual oppression and the autonomous nature of the latter; they assigned reproductive rights a preeminent place in the struggle for women's liberation. The movement was anti-capitalist. According to adherents, feminism was revolutionary in its potential to transform economic, political, and cultural norms.

The feminists criticized the older women's groups, especially the Communist Party-dominated Union of Italian Women (UDI), for adopting tightly structured and hierarchical forms of organization. According to the feminists, these groups had not seriously considered the need for separatism and financial independence from male-dominated institutions; they had maintained a false division between what were considered personal questions (such as sexuality and the family) and political issues. For the feminists, UDI's conception of women's emancipation was too narrowly focused on formal equalities. They also argued that UDI fell short in its approach to issues such as divorce, abortion, and birth control for fear of alienating traditional Catholic forces.

Conscious of being small and homogeneous, the feminist movement did not want to remain an isolated ghetto of young, educated leftists. Since they were particularly interested in reaching out to working-class women, feminists began doing grass-roots organizing. They set up health counseling services in working-class neighborhoods. They put together educational slide shows and took them into small towns and outlying communities. They began publishing material that would have a wider appeal. The grass-roots efforts increased their contact with other women and produced a useful exchange of ideas in some locales.

Many working-class women reacted negatively to feminism at first. The politics of sexuality, separatism, and consciousness-raising were new to them. They felt confused, afraid, even offended. UDI members responded in much the same way. They were often antagonistic and competitive. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was especially wary because the feminists confronted topics that were highly controversial among Catholics and conservatives. The Party at that time was trying to minimize its conflicts with the Christian Democrats. Some New Left groups embraced feminism on a theoretical level, although many male members reacted hostilely to the notion of separatism. Men from one of the groups (Lotta Continua) stormed a separatist march in Rome in 1975, but the other organizations respected the decision to organize events and projects for women only.

The Abortion Campaign

The divorce referendum in 1974 gave feminists a new opportunity. They were able to raise the issues of women's dependency and the roles of the Church, marriage, and family in the context of a national debate. But it was the abortion controversy that made feminism a significant social force in Italy. The struggle for abortion rights convinced large numbers of women to adopt a feminist perspective. It also brought the various political factions within the women's movement — feminists, UDI, libertarians — into a productive, although often combative, relationship.

The campaign began in the early part of the decade as pressure grew to repeal the Fascist regulations which were still the law of the land. According to this code, abortion was permitted only in cases of rape or incest. For religious,
cultural, and political reasons, there had been no effort to educate extensively about birth control or to make contraceptives easily available. In fact, until 1971, another surviving Fascist law forbade the advertising and sale of contraceptives. The result was recourse to illegal abortions. It was estimated that 1.5 to 2 million illegal abortions were performed in Italy each year.²

In the mid-1970s, some feminist groups became involved in providing abortion services for women. They helped run an illegal clinic in Florence and arranged flights to Britain where abortion was allowed. They worked on these projects with the Movement for Liberation of the Woman (MLD), a women's organization linked to the small Radical Party. Both MLD and the PR were influential in catalyzing the divorce and abortion campaigns. Their ideological position was libertarian, and they devoted most of their energies to single-issue struggles. MLD, whose membership was sexually mixed, viewed women's liberation primarily in terms of civil rights. This outlook put MLD at odds with the feminists on many points, but tactical alliances were still possible.

Responding to the pressure to legalize abortion, the Christian Democrats supported a new and very limited law rather than have all restrictions on abortion abolished. The other parties put forward proposals, none of which was acceptable to the feminists. So on December 6, 1975, 50,000 women marched in Rome to demand full abortion rights. It was the first appearance of a mass feminist movement in Italy. The separatist event (in which UDI refused to participate) captured the attention of the media. It forced the left, especially the PCI, to begin to take feminism somewhat more seriously. By April 1976, the number of women

*The first women's demonstration in Rome, March 1972.*
marching in Rome had grown to 100,000 and included UDI. The impact was strong enough to bring down the government.

After the June 1976 election, Parliament continued working on abortion legislation that most activist women regarded as inadequate. But the various political groupings within the women's movement could not agree on an alternative proposal of their own. Women holding a libertarian position argued for simply repealing the Fascist laws. This would have legalized abortion. The majority, however, maintained that the legal right alone was not sufficient. They wanted a law providing for completely state-financed abortions on demand so that poor women would have the same rights in practice as wealthier women. Emphasizing the right to self-determination, the feminists argued that the decision to have an abortion should belong to the woman alone and not to doctors or judges. Furthermore, they wanted abortion to be just one part of a comprehensive health care and welfare system that not only met women's needs but was also controlled by women.

For the next two years, the abortion legislation was entangled in the complex negotiations over Communist participation in the government. The Christian Democrats proposed one provision after another to weaken the draft law, and the Communists went along with some of the limitations. During the spring of 1978, feminists and UDI members joined together in demonstrations outside Parliament to protest the PCI's compromises. This was one indication of how UDI had become more autonomous of the PCI during the abortion struggle. The organization had also begun to adopt an increasingly feminist viewpoint.

In June, Parliament finally passed one of the more progressive abortion laws in Europe. It provided for state-financed abortions within the first 90 days of pregnancy for any woman over 18 years of age. The reason for seeking an abortion could be health related, economic, social, or familial. A doctor or recognized health facility issued the permission for an abortion after examining the woman and discussing alternatives with her. The women's movement considered the law only a partial victory because certain provisions fell short of desired goals. For example, formal authorization for an abortion still rested with the medical establishment; the lawmakers also raised the age for abortions without parental consent from 16 to 18 years; they stipulated that doctors had to perform all abortions in hospitals and specially authorized clinics.

The Evolution of the Movement

In just a few short years, the abortion campaign had become a powerful force that involved tens of thousands of women directly and touched many others. It also gave many women their first contact with feminism. The mass media greatly amplified this exposure. There were feature reports on feminism in newspapers and magazines and debates on television and radio. The result was that a new and more critical consciousness of the condition of women in Italy filtered through society, influencing how women saw themselves and their lives. This did not mean that millions joined the feminist movement as activists, but it did mean that many women identified or agreed in large part with feminism.

In the meantime, the movement ran into theoretical and organizational difficulties. There was an ongoing debate in the collectives and groups on these unresolved issues: the autonomy of the feminist movement and its relationship to state and political institutions such as Parliament and the parties; an adequate organizational structure that would provide coherence but not reproduce old hierarchies; the
relationship between individual needs, private life, and activism in the movement; the focus of future activity. At first, many feminists turned their energies to the serious problem of implementing the new abortion law. About two-thirds of the doctors in state institutions and entire staffs of Catholic hospitals declared themselves conscientious objectors and refused to perform abortions. (Some of them, it was found out, were still doing clandestine abortions for high fees.) Feminists organized sit-ins in hospitals to protest the situation. They also helped set up the neighborhood family planning and health centers which had been promised by law. But they found that the local political powers and party cadres often dominated the process and absorbed the new health facilities into the existing institutional framework. Because of their informal organization, the feminists were at a disadvantage when dealing with the bureaucracies.

By the end of the 1970s, many of the early consciousness-raising groups, collectives, and coordinating committees had disbanded. Others were operating at a lower level of activity. There was less attention focused on the movement as a national phenomenon. Feminism had developed during a time of general political mobilization. This environment had provided ideological stimulation, organizing opportunities, political interlocutors, and recruits. Once the mobilization had ebbed and the left had suffered defeats, the feminists had to adjust to a less dynamic context. Many of them spoke of a serious crisis, but others insisted that, despite difficulties, the movement was still very much alive at the local level. There was evidence that it had spread to provinces and small towns where feminism had never before been present. Women there were responding to their immediate needs. They came together because they were concerned about specific problems or shared an interest or simply wanted to be with
other women. The impact of feminism had not ceased, but new women were finding different ways to incorporate and use it.

As in other Western countries, the great significance of feminism in Italy was to awaken new attitudes and perceptions. The change in consciousness continued to transform social relations even when the movement itself was less visible. There were two striking examples of this in the early 1980s. The first was the national referendum on abortion. The Christian Democratic Party, the Vatican, and the Italian Movement for Life were unwilling to let the abortion law stand. Assuming that the more conservative political climate and the disarray of the left would give them an advantage, the Catholic forces threw themselves into a campaign to repeal the 1978 law. The neo-fascist party, MSI, also supported repeal. But the referendum held in May 1981 showed that most Italians endorsed the important reform. The vote was 68 percent in favor of the law and only 32 percent against. The sentiment in 1981 affirming a woman’s right to choose motherhood was even stronger than approval for divorce had been in the 1974 referendum. Moreover, the pro-abortion vote was equally heavy in southern, northern, and central Italy. The Alto Aldige, a German-speaking alpine region, registered the only majority in favor of repeal.

The second example involved the women’s organization, UDI. At its national convention in May 1982, the participants confronted the issues of delegated democracy and UDI’s hierarchical structure. Adopting a radical alternative, they essentially dissolved UDI as a centralized national organization. There would be no more full-time functionaries, no unified political line, and no privileged relationship with any of the left parties. A national office would still be open, but it would be staffed on a rotating basis. There would be open general assemblies called by members rather than meetings of delegates scheduled by leaders. In addition, UDI would no longer accept financing from the left parties.

The decisions were the result of an analysis in which UDI’s leaders acknowledged they were losing members. The organization was having difficulty attracting young women and feminists. At the same time, UDI’s leaders recognized the existence of a dispersed and largely unseen feminist movement which, they believed, did not identify with any national organization. By decentralizing itself, UDI hoped to link up with that movement. It also decided to make one of its publications an open magazine which could be used as a voice for the entire feminist movement.

The convention decisions were risky as well as radical, and not everyone supported them. But many UDI members had changed during the course of the 1970s, arriving at a point where they wanted to abandon what they saw as traditional and hierarchical forms. In addition, they no longer wanted a close affiliation with male-dominated parties. It was a perspective not unlike that of the New Left women who had founded the first feminist groups. At that time, UDI had been one of the political forces that criticized, fought with, and distanced itself from the feminist. A decade later, the oldest women’s organization in Italy undertook a sweeping self-transformation based on an understanding of and commitment to feminism.

![Italian Women's Guerilla Theater](image)

**FOOTNOTES**


Joanne Barkan works as a writer and editor in New York City. She lived in Italy and has written on Italian politics, economics, and social movements for many American publications including Radical America.

LETTERS

To the editors:

Boas Evron's essay, "Holocaust: The Uses of Disaster" (RA, Vol. 17, No. 4) seems to have poked some raw liberal Zionist nerves. So much the better; the howls of outrage confirm Evron's diagnosis of Israel's illness and illuminate other basic issues as well.

Paul Berman's letter (Vol. 18, Nos. 2-3) is an especially rich outpouring. Followers of the career of the modern Golem, Ariel Sharon, will get a good laugh from Berman's defense of Israeli morality: "Israel has of course been responsible for several horrible massacres. But doesn't it strike you as significant that the officials directly responsible for the most recent of these massacres were demoted or sacked, not promoted and honored?"

Demoted, indeed. But Berman not only entertains, he enlightens as well. Objecting to the term "genocide," which Boas Evron never used but which the RA editors mentioned in one unfortunate phrase, Berman lays down the following principle: "A genocidal country is one with no right to exist. The forces of the world should descend on such a country and partition it — as happened to Germany — or should acquiesce to a neighboring country seizing control — as happened in Cambodia. If Israel truly were genocidal, then it too would have no right to exist."

Powerful stuff! Evidently, there is some level of state crimes against humanity at which foreign intervention becomes a moral imperative. Let us agree to reserve the term "genocidal" for the planned, physical, wholesale extermination of a people — which does not describe Israel's conduct toward the Palestinians up to now, nor for that matter Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jews from 1933 to 1939. But if, following Berman, we stipulate that there is some line of conduct beyond which a country's "right to exist" is called in question, then doesn't it make sense to draw that line at some point short of actual physical genocide? Should we wait until actual death camps are in use, or even under construction, before action is proposed?

Let me take it one step further. Let us suppose that a country is behaving in such a fashion as to pose the clear and present danger, perhaps not of mass exter-

mination, but of mass expulsion and final expropriation — and a threat of large-scale massacres falling short of genocide — of a subject people. Does that situation, perhaps, call into question the country's right to exist? And even if that extreme conclusion is unwarranted, can we at least insist that the country's superpower patron and its co-religionists are under some moral obligation to stop funding and covering up for the process leading toward these criminal acts?

This is the question I would like Paul Berman to answer. No doubt, as a leading moral theorist, he would draw the line differently than might a prejudiced Palestinian expelled from his land. But I want Berman to tell us: where do you propose to draw the line concerning Israel? If Israel annexes the West Bank and Gaza, thus completing the seizure of historic Palestine, will Israel still have the same right to exist? Or will it be the obligation of the world to impose a new partition so that Palestinian rights can be secured? Wouldn't it be wise to act before that kind of choice is irreversibly imposed? And doesn't that suggest that leading moralists like yourself should be demanding an end to the U.S. subsidy of Israel that underwrites the annexation of the Occupied Territories and the "several horrible massacres" (your term) that Israel has perpetrated inside and outside its present borders?

Let me be clear. Unlike Berman, I don't endorse the idea of outside powers carving up countries that engage in criminal behavior. Rather, I look to the struggles of the Palestinian people and of progressive Israelis, and their international allies, to resolve the conflict. What I want to know from Berman, really, is what side he's on.

David Finkel
Detroit, MI

***

• SPECIAL BULK RATES •

For classroom, study group or organization needs, consider using bulk copies of RADICAL AMERICA's special issues such as "The Mel King Campaign and Coalition Politics in the 80s" with discussion of the 1983 Boston Mayoral Campaign and the national black electoral movement (Vol. 17, No. 6-Vol. 18, No. 1); "Special issue on THE ENVIRONMENT" (Vol. 17, No. 2-3); "The Greens" (Vol. 17, No. 1); "Facing Reaction: Special Issue on the New Right and America in the 80s" (Vol. 15, Nos. 1-2); and "RADICAL AMERICA: a 15 Year Anthology" (Vol. 16, No. 3); send for a complete listing of back issues and pamphlets and for our discount rate schedule.
ITALY: Working Class Militancy, Feminism and Trade Union Politics

Bianca Beccalli

At the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, a wave of working-class struggles changed the structure of Italian trade unionism and had a profound impact on Italian society and politics. The strike rate was the highest among the Western countries (if one excludes the isolated peak of the French May), and so was the increase in unionization: 60 percent between 1968 and 1978, bringing the overall rate up to 46 percent. This wave of militancy was the result of both changes in the composition of the Italian labor force and such wider social and political trends as the student movement. Trade unions were ready to play a leading role within the new wave, even at the expense of undergoing a radical renewal.

The changes in the Italian working class had begun during the fifties with the massive migration from the South to the North, from the economically backward areas of the country to the more industrialized ones1, of a new generation of young, unskilled workers. Although new to both industry and the unions, they were seeking representation. They were the new collective actor in the cycle of strikes in Italian industry. The unions, which had previously organized mainly the skilled sectors of the working class, were weak and did not have much to lose. They too were looking for representation and for new power, wherever it might appear.

When the wave of strikes began, the unions therefore tried to assume the leadership. The

This article is a slightly edited and revised excerpt from a longer essay which appears in Alice Cook, Val Lorwin, and Arlene Daniels, eds., Women and Trade Unions in Eleven Industrialized Countries (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984) and is reprinted with permission of the author and publisher.*

price was a radical change in their organizational structure and policies. The workers were internal immigrants, in contrast to the guest workers of other European countries, and thus difficult to ignore. Through their numbers, they markedly influenced union policies. Changes in trade union policy included a new emphasis on equality (a solidaristic wage policy, with flat-rate wage increases, and a reduction in the range of the skill categories were both introduced in 1969) and on the hierarchical organization of work, the division of tasks on the shop floor, and problems of health and safety. Basic changes in trade union structure were also instituted. A new emphasis was put on union democracy: the workplace meetings were given formal power, and a new workplace structure — the shop steward’s council — became the basic unit of trade union organization. The influence of the students’ movement was evident in both the form and the content of the unions’ political action: against authority and the division of labor; for equality; for direct action and participatory democracy. The influence was not only cultural; interactions between workers and students (and, later, the New Left) took place at the factory gates, in the streets, in meetings, and in various organizations of students and workers. All of this is at variance with what happened in other countries where conflicts or, at best, distance between labor and the new middle class social movements have been much greater. As we will see below, however, women were marginal to this process of renewal.

By the mid-1970s the extraordinary workers’ mobilization was over. The unions had become strong. The traditional characteristics of Italian unionism — centralization, politicization, weakness — had changed: the unions had achieved a high degree of control over the workforce; they were strong at the workplace level vis-a-vis the employer and at the national level vis-a-vis the state. The institutionalization of this new strength set off a different mechanism, producing a renewed centralization in place of participatory democracy and more influence for the political parties in place of union autonomy. At the rank-and-file level, the commitment to unity and equality were gone, and the fragmentation of old and new interests and demands pushed the unions more and more into the role of mediators. A policy of compromise at the factory level developed at the same time that the “historical compromise” of the Communist party more and more influenced trade union politics at the national level. Yet the mobilization had some lasting effects. First, the power and privileges of the older, skilled workers had been shaken, and women, as a new and weak component of the workforce, did not have to face a powerful structure of interests based on craft and seniority in the unions. Second, an extensive network of activists had been created during the years of extraordinary collective enthusiasm. Radical trade union politics had become a crucial part of their lives. Within this group of activists, trade union feminism would develop.

**Feminist Mobilization Inside the Unions**

The late seventies and early eighties witnessed a great change in women’s participation in the labor market. A much discussed peculiarity of the Italian labor market — the low and falling participation rate of women — began to change in the early seventies, and in 1981 the rate stood at 26 percent, still much lower than that of other industrialized countries, but definitely increasing. Of the total increase in employment between 1972 and 1981 (1,757,000 workers), women accounted for 1,348,000, more than three-quarters. (Female unemployment also increased strikingly, from 9.6 percent in 1974 to 14.4 percent in 1981, as against a male unemployment rate of 5.4 percent in 1981.) The biggest increases in employment occurred among women of child bearing age, between twenty and forty-four years, whose participation rates had been the lowest in international comparisons. Women not only returned to work after age thirty-five but stayed in their jobs in the younger and most fertile age cohorts.

Women were involved in the process of mobilization in the unions and yet were marginal to it. The few quantitative data available on women’s participation in unions in Italy illustrate this pattern of participation and exclusion.

Most sources agree on two basic facts: First, a women’s membership in unions is roughly
proportional to their participation in the workforce, though there are variations in some sectors. CGIL* research shows that women made up 29.3 percent of its membership in 1977, when there were 30.2 percent of the workforce. Second, despite this high unionization rate, women's representation in union hierarchies goes down as one goes up the bureaucratic ladder. If one excludes the unions' technical and secretarial personnel (overwhelmingly female), women almost disappear: they are 6 percent of full-time officials in the CGIL and 1 percent of the national leadership of all unions.5

The present state of research on women in trade unions makes some data difficult to interpret. Among unpaid officials, and even among full-time paid ones, women tend to be younger than men: recent recruitment probably played a role in this, but one should also take into account the tendency of women in the older age cohorts to drop out of the workforce. Women officials are also, on average, more highly educated than male ones.

The recruitment of women in the seventies was exceptional; it probably more than equaled the recruitment of men. We do not know how much this influx altered the previous sex composition of the unionized workforce or the union leadership, but it was in absolute terms remarkable. Compared with that of other industrialized countries, the rate of female unionization in Italy is high, and the "cooling off" through which women are discouraged from seeking leadership roles operates on top of a high level of rank-and-file participation.

Women were an important component of the unskilled workforce that formed the backbone of the new movement, and they also made up a large proportion of the office workers in industry who in these years organized and struck for the first time. They were visible in strikes and demonstrations and mass assemblies, but they rarely had leadership positions or took the floor in meetings. As long as the wave of collective enthusiasm lasted and the new trade union identity was being built, women's marginality was not even perceived. It was only in the mid-seventies that this situation changed.

Around 1975 the first "collectives" of women trade unionists were formed. The
original initiatives were taken at the local level: in Milan and Turin first, then in Genoa, Padua, and Rome, groups of trade union women organized to discuss their problems in the big factories or the union headquarters. Who were these women? Who took the initiative? What were the problems they discussed? What kind of action did they take?

“New Feminism” and the Unions

The initiative to form working women’s collectives was usually taken by women who belonged to or had been influenced by the New Left or the “new feminism,” or both. Often they were union officers or rank-and-file militants; sometimes they were students or young teachers “external” to the labor movement. In either case, aligning themselves with working women was their way to combine a socialist with a feminist orientation.6

The new feminism developed in the first half of the seventies, when the first wave of middle-class feminism began to influence the second wave of working-class feminism, both indirectly, through the movement’s high visibility, and directly, through feminist militants who brought the message into trade union circles. A parallel with the student movement’s influence on the working class struggles of the late sixties is evident. There is also a parallel in the formation of the two waves of feminism. The hard core of the feminist movement of the early seventies was made up of students who had participated in the 1968 movement. The larger themes of 1968 were to become central to the feminism movement as well: critiques of the division of labor and authority in society and the family and of the “cultural production” of society.7 These themes were in fact soon abandoned by the emerging New Left; when the students’ mobilization of 1968 gave way to the workers’ struggles of 1969, the student militants shifted their interest to the factories. In the face of an exceptionally militant working class, the students singled out and exalted classical “Marxist-Leninist” theories of strategy and organization from among the movement’s broad array of critical ideas. Several organizations grew out of this process, differing in the details of their ideologies but similar in their organizations structure, in the style of their militancy, and in the marginal position offered to women. Women realized their marginality only when a creeping crisis developed in these small organizations, which combined extremely high levels of participation and total sacrifice of personal life with short-term revolutionary expectations. Even before the official failure of the New Left project in the political elections of 1976, collective critiques had begun to appear in 1973 and 1974, accompanied by individual withdrawals. Feminism was the most important of the critiques, combining a stress on radical ideological and organizational innovation with a return to some of the original ideas of 1968.

The “political” origin of the new feminism has been pointed out in other cases: in particular in the U.S., where the emergence of the new feminism out of the Civil Rights movement and the New Left has been carefully analysed.8 Broad structural changes are certainly in the background, but participation in a specific political experience can be crucial in creating a feminist mobilization. Such a connection is evident also for trade union feminism. The first feminist collectives developed in the areas of greatest working-class militancy — the industrial unions, especially the engineering unions — not the traditionally female sectors of the economy, such as clothing and textiles, where unions were not particularly militant, or in the areas where women were newly employed, such as services, which were marginal to the struggles of the early seventies.

Groups of women began to meet in some of the large plants in the North and in several of the big cities. The women involved had participated intensively in union work and in the political struggles of the preceding years, and their discussions were in the beginning often addressed precisely to this experience. The central theme of discussion was the experience of working women who were activists in the unions; it was not simply the general problem of working women. This latter problem inevitably was raised in the women’s collectives, but it never occupied center stage: it was the analysis of the political experience of trade union activists which was predominant.

Much of the language and many of the techniques used by these groups were borrowed
from the new feminism, and the style of discussion was similar to that of consciousness-raising sessions. The basic rule was separatism — a real break with the tradition of working-class organizations. The discussion would usually start with the personal problems of participants and then go on to deal with the recent failures or present shortcomings of political movements. This small group developed an analysis of the daily lives of the participants, focusing particularly on the frustrations encountered in the search for a new identity through collective political experience. Trade unions were criticized in terms of their own explicit values. For example, the unions had through the years of militancy and organizational upheaval emphasized equality, but hierarchy and an unequal division of labor were the reality women faced as union activists. Feminism provided the instrument for analyzing personal power relations in the daily life of work and politics, disguised as they were by ideology, and demonstrating the reproduction of patriarchy in the unions and the workplace.

they tried to imitate this male model in order to escape their marginal role — to "count." Their practical, affective orientation found no place except at the margins of union activities. If women did not want to deny "their emotional side, their orientation towards satisfying needs, their desire for tenderness," they could "keep others company; cheer them up or soothe their spirits; chant slogans at the head of a march, pass out leaflets, or smile at passersby to gather support; arrange the chairs and keep the papers in order; or generally supply social services." If they wanted to count, they had to deny their deep inclinations. Marginal but integrated, or "mutilated" in order to count. "There are very few possibilities of extracting a viable individual life out of these crushing alternatives. A few can manage, and they are extraordinary women, who maintain a fragile and wearying equilibrium with great intensity and an uncommon humanity." The internal conflict of the women militants — which they called lacerazione, or "laceration" — was at the center of impassioned debates: union politics could not be changed if women ignored this conflict or put it aside. How could one build mass participation on a "laceration"?

According to the militants' analysis, the difference between men and women should not be
denied but, on the contrary, recognized and built upon. Picking up on the message of the new feminism, they saw women not only as victims of discrimination, but also the embodiment of an alternative approach to life and politics. Consequently, they concluded that women should not demand a bigger share of the pie; rather, they should develop their alternative approach. “Equality of opportunity” for women was dismissed as a goal; the solution, instead, was to change the rules of the game for both men and women. Although the protest against discrimination had been important in bringing these women’s collectives into existence, now their answer to the problem of inequality within the labor movement was not more participation or more “opportunities,” but a new collective experience in which the goal of change in personal relationships would not be deferred and means as well as ends would be emphasized. The result of this analysis was that women confronted the unions with a request for autonomy.

The Success of Feminist Unionism

In the confrontation between feminists and the unions in the late seventies, the women won their basic demands for an autonomous network of women inside the unions. Only self-analysis and the experience of an autonomous, decentralized, nonbureaucratic structure, they insisted, would allow the growth of a movement of working women capable of bringing about real change.

Initially, the demand met considerable resistance. Union leaders, especially Communists, considered separatism a threat to working-class unity and feared that the loose and informal character of the women’s organization would make central control of class unity difficult. The new movement’s ideas were equally disturbing: the radical critique of gender roles challenged — in different ways — both the Catholic and the Communist unions. The Communists had always intended gradually to “modernize” the family, but never to question it. They were cautious in raising sexual and family issues, so as not to upset their delicate relationship with the Catholic world, and suspicious of radical feminism, which they thought of, correctly, as connected with the New Left.

Between 1975 and 1978 the network of women’s collectives spread rapidly. Coordinating committees were formed at the local and national levels, starting in 1977 with a national coordinating committee of women shop
stewards in the engineering union. The rise and growth of the movement became generally visible in that year when women workers by the thousands marched in separate sections of national union demonstrations. (Separatism in demonstrations was obviously disapproved of by the hardcore trade union members, as much as separatism in organization.) The left wing of the unions directly supported the growth and legitimation of the women’s groups. By the end of 1978, the new role of women in the unions was recognized, and the unions opened a debate — still going on — on the precise forms the autonomous women’s structures should take. Feminist ideas — the critique of the family and gender roles, the emphasis on sexuality and emotion — were officially accepted into trade unions discourse. A few years earlier this would have been unthinkable. The recognition of women moved from the area of innovative union militancy to that of organization. In the most recent stage of this process, the CGIL in 1981 decided to convene a national conference of women shop stewards and union representatives, the first CGIL women’s conference since the equal pay agreement was signed and the women’s commissions in the unions were dissolved twenty years earlier. Addressing the over two thousand enthusiastic participants, the Communist head of the CGIL and general secretary of the federation of Italian unions, Luciano Lama, acknowledged the importance of sexual politics above and beyond the struggle for equality and against economic exploitation.

The network now includes small firms and small cities and to some extent the South, but the composition of the movement has not much changed with its expansion. Its spread has followed the pattern of militant unionism. Participants continue to be mainly rank-and-file activists, white-collar employees rather than manual workers, young union officials, and politicized intellectuals and housewives outside the unions. The presence of “outsiders,” important in the initial phase, later became still more important, thanks in particular to the unions’ educational program under the “150 hours” agreement, an adult education program that developed roughly parallel with feminist unionism and considerably influenced it.

The program, a typical product of the new unionism of the early seventies, was the fruit of a 1972 collective bargaining agreement that allowed workers to use up to 150 hours of their paid working time to participate in courses in the public education system. Up to 2 percent of the workforce in a productive unit could leave the job in order to take courses. The courses were not intended to benefit the workers individually — the hours could not be used, for instance, for vocational training — but to encourage the development of a new collective consciousness. There was massive participation in this educational experience. The teachers were, at least in the cities of the North, largely drawn from among the militant students of the late sixties, and the program was at first a national experiment in political education. Official estimates suggest that in Milan over fifty thousand workers took courses between 1972 and 1982.

The released-time courses had a special importance for women. In the mid-seventies courses for women only treated various aspects of women’s condition: the history and sociology of the family, health and sexuality, work, and politics. They were taught by women (often by feminists) and attended by housewives and students as well as union members. The courses were based largely on self-analysis, although they included contributions by experts, and the general approach was exactly the opposite of the “training for leadership” that dominates trade union women’s education in other advanced capitalist countries. These courses were not designed to make it easier for women to enter the male world by giving them the general knowledge, the technical expertise, and the assertiveness they lacked; rather, they were meant to strengthen women through knowledge of and pride in their difference. The first five years of the 150-hours program roughly coincides with the development of feminism in the unions. The courses often led to the formation of women’s groups and so helped support the network of trade union feminism.

Initially the new feminism in the unions focused less on pursuing specific external goals than on winning recognition and building a new collective identity. Along with the 150-hours courses, public agitation for abortion rights and other issues and the consciousness-raising activities of the women’s collectives were significant as both means and context, producing a remarkable and successful cultural growth. A number of factors help account for the success of the movement. The trade unions, particularly their left wing, were open to influences from outside the labor movement, and many working women and union activists were
exposed to the ideas of the New Left and the feminist movement. Later, when the cycle of working-class militancy and trade union renewal was over and the process of bureaucratization and detachment of the leaders from the rank and file had begun, feminism provided women militants with a theoretical basis for collective reaction.

Problems of Feminist Unionism

Women had won the right to tackle their own problems with their own tactics, outside the normal channels of union activity. This victory had, however, another side to it: namely, the normal processes of union decision making remained intact. At the end of the seventies, women had no more influence than before on union politics or policies, even those pertaining specifically to women. The greater cultural sensitivity of the unions toward women’s concerns did not reflect a change in practice. Women had gained a space for themselves within the unions, but they remained confined within that space. The larger goal — rising from a recognition of women’s difference — of producing changes in union politics and society at large remained blocked.

The basic dilemma of feminist strategy is whether to give priority to equality or to demands based on the differences between the sexes. Consider two issues that have divided the movement in Italy: work schedules and non-traditional jobs.

The question of part-time work has been particularly divisive.14 Feminists and the union left generally agree on the desirability of reducing working hours of both women and men, but not on the desirability of allowing part-time contracts. The more “emancipatory” or “equality-minded” component of the feminist movement opposes part-time work, since it tends to confirm women’s inferiority and ghettoization; the more “difference-minded” component favors part-time work, on the grounds that it allows women to satisfy their needs for both income and time with children. The controversy has produced a change in the usual pattern of alliances between feminists and trade union leaders: the left-wing leaders, who have in the past defended the “heretical” experiments of the feminists, oppose part-time work as a concession to the employers, while the moderate leaders support it as part of a more flexible trade union policy. (This position is also consistent with a conservative view of
women's role in society.) The debate has become confusing, and the movement seems to be stuck. In 1979 some important women's coordinating committees came out against part-time work, reflecting their general left-wing allegiance. Later, both feminists and union leaders changed their positions as a result of the economic crisis. Provisions for part-time contracts have actually been introduced in the main national collective agreements, under certain conditions: the choice of part-time work must be voluntary and revocable; part-time jobs must provide all the rights and benefits of full-time contracts; and such work must not be reserved exclusively for women. There have also been attempts to regulate part-time contracts by law. But these developments have been neither controlled nor directly influenced by the debates and the efforts of the trade union feminists.

A similar difficulty has emerged with regard to the problems of women in nontraditional jobs. At the end of 1977, an equal opportunity law was passed in compliance with the recommendations of the European Economic Community and without lobbying by the left-wing parties, the unions, or the women's movement. The law opened to women jobs that had been segregated on gender lines; it canceled many of the protective regulations governing women's work, and it made discrimination against women in hiring illegal. Because the law delegated some aspects of its implementation to collective bargaining, the unions and the feminists in the unions were forced to take a stand on it. The unions were favorable in principle to hiring women for nontraditional jobs, but were not ready to spend much energy to implement the law, which would have required them to establish and support lines of action against discrimination that the law did not explicitly provide. The feminists, for their part, were divided on the prospect of an "equality" that was full of disadvantage. Because the law tackles discrimination only in the hiring process and does not provide for new professional training for women or for mechanisms to reform career patterns, "equality" meant in most cases only access to low-level jobs. Left-wing union ideology suggests that women should enter the nontraditional jobs, including the heavy and dangerous ones, and thus bring about changes in the workplace that will be useful to men and women; this they describe as using women's unique abilities on behalf of general change.

But this view is overly optimistic: the chances of changing the workplace in the short run are small, and in most cases women must take the job as it is or leave it. Hence, working women face a basic dilemma: does equality come first, even when it means additional burdens for women? Why should women struggle to get into heavy, dirty, and risky jobs? Why should they push to work night shifts, which ideally should be abolished for men too? Is this the best way to use women's "unique abilities," or should women try to preserve their protected status? As a result of these uncertainties, the feminist impact on union policy toward the equal opportunity law has been modest and limited to a few individual cases.

The conflict between women's special needs and equality partly explains the impasse the movement now faces. Other conflicts concern the means of political action and the movement's structure. The women of the movement chose to organize themselves separately and in a different way: to reject the division of labor, hierarchy and delegation, negotiation and compromise that characterize normal union politics. They chose likewise not to seek more power under the existing power relationships, but rather to develop a movement in which women could put into practice new forms of social relations. A "movement style" organization obviously runs many risks: for example, ineffectiveness due to the failure to bring its influence to bear at opportune moments through the right channels and declining participation due to the difficulty of maintaining a balance between the personal and the political. There are likewise the problems of representing large groups without formal mechanisms of representation, and hence the risk of a growing gap between the movement and those it represents. Italian trade union feminism experienced this whole array of problems.
By 1980 the movement had started to decline, and the previous mixture of collective and conflictual action and the development in small groups of an alternative style of interpersonal relationships had disappeared. Some of the women who had discovered through the movement their needs and the legitimacy of such needs in the face of self-sacrifice, instrumentalism, mediation, and goal deferment required by trade union organization left the public arena altogether. They often moved to a radical redefinition of their lives through divorce, different work, or different social relations. At the opposite pole from this retreat, however, new initiatives for equality and power for women are emerging. Trade union activists who are pursuing these initiatives are not "speaking for themselves" on the basis of their own needs, as their predecessors did. Instead, they tend to address a wider constituency of working women, and hence the problems of representation and effectiveness—in both the trade union and the workplace—are crucial.

Challenges for the Eighties

In conclusion, two aspects of the structural changes in the relationships between women and work deserve special attention. First, the increased participation of women in the labor market does not imply a decline in the sexual segregation of the workforce. Politics and legislation have not contributed much to counteract the market forces maintaining sexual segregation. The Italian women's movement was not strongly or single-mindedly oriented toward equal opportunity, and although the equal opportunity law of 1977 opened to women some previously segregated jobs, it lacked clear rules for implementation, monitoring, and enforcement.

Second, the social basis of the unions is changing very fast. A new population of women workers, with new demands for representation, confronts the unions in the 1980s. They are different from the working women of the mid-seventies, when union feminism developed. They often work in nonindustrial, nonmanual or nontraditional industrial jobs. They are more likely to be mothers with young children, and they are usually better educated. They are different culturally: their political socialization was not shaped by direct contact with the big post-1969 wave of union militancy, and their female identity was not defined through direct contact with

the new feminism as a political movement, although they have been indirectly influenced by the movement's fallout, its social diffusion, and its reinterpretation through the media.

Feminists in the unions face a difficult challenge in the 1980s, as they confront these structural and institutional changes as well as a bad economic climate. There is, first, the danger that the collective identity that was formed through the movement in the late seventies could become a mere subculture. If it is to be the basis for further political action, some fundamental readjustments to the new population of working women will be necessary; union feminists cannot just speak for themselves, as they did in the first years of the movement. The difficulties involved in defining goals and choosing means bulk large in the face of the new, wider constituency.

On the other hand, this new constituency offers opportunities to the trade unions and feminism. Although working women in the eighties have advanced some way on the road to emancipation, a large, diffuse demand for equality and promotion remains untapped and still seeks representation. The economic crisis has deepened this demand, since the defense of women's jobs and general prospects at work has become a major test of equal treatment. And aside from the demand for equality, there are remnants of the discontent and impulses for change that the movement expressed in its early years, sentiments that likewise remain to be tapped.

Given the pool of unmet, unrepresented demands, radical innovation through trade union feminism remains a live possibility. Between the retreat of trade union feminism into a marginal subculture and the simple economic defense of women's sectional interests, there is still room to maneuver. What happens to this possibility will depend considerably on the receptivity of the unions themselves. Unions everywhere face serious challenges that the economic crisis only exacerbates. The shrinking of the traditional industrial base for unionism, the end of "affluence," changes in the composition of the labor force, all affect the future of industrial unionism. The trade union (and academic) response to these problems, in Italy as elsewhere, has focused on "mastering the crisis," generally on the terrain of relations between unions and the state. Possibilities for mobilization and the representation of interests outside the economic sphere have not received the same attention.
In the face of similar difficulties, the unions of some countries have poor prospects of altering their organizational policies or their priorities in collective bargaining. The Italian case, however, seems rather hopeful when compared with such relatively consolidated and rigid systems as that of the United States. Italian trade unionism has maintained its tradition of political openness — a tradition that may well aid its adjustment to changing conditions and changing needs. Partly because of its late development, the Italian trade union movement, may now be in a more favorable position to work out modern union policies, including ways to respond to new demands from women. The story of feminism and the Italian unions is not at all closed.

FOOTNOTES

1. It is estimated that between 1951 and 1971 upwards of 5 million people left less developed agrarian areas for the industrial centers.


3. It should be noted that skilled workers in Italy had never been entrenched in organizations such as the craft unions in Britain or the U.S.: the Italian tradition of class unionism, even when it was de facto based on a rank and file of skilled workers, had always worked as an impediment to these tendencies, and the recent cycle has further contributed to a loss of privilege.

4. National statistics on union membership with a breakdown by sex are still unavailable. Only in the last few years have attempts been made to gather the relevant information, and these are limited either to a single union confederation or to a single region.

5. For the CGIL, see Biagioni, Palmieri, and Pipan, Indagine sul Sindacato, p. 277, table 4. Even this figure overstates the decision-making power of women inside the CGIL, since full-time women officials tend to be more numerous in collegial bodies (6.5 percent) than in positions with executive authority (4.3 percent). See M. D’Amato, “Il lavoro della donna: movimento sindacale e partecipazione femminile,” Sociologia del Lavoro, no 3 (1978).

6. For a description of the combination of influences out of which Italian trade union feminism developed, the best source is a book by two participants: Flora Boccio and Antonio Torchi, L’acqua in gabbia (Milan: La Salamandra, 1979). A review of the book and some excerpts from it were published in Feminist Review (Spring, 1981).


8. See, for example, Sara Evans, Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left (New York: Random House, 1979).

9. The quotations in this paragraph come from Bocchio and Torchi, L’acqua in gabbia, p. 99 (my translation).

10. By “left wing” I refer generally to the industrial categories, especially the metal workers, where the left-wing CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori: Confederation of Italian Trade Unions) is particularly powerful and where the new militant unionism took root and often had the support of a majority of union members.

11. The picture in the early eighties is somewhat different. Participation in the courses has declined, and their character has changed as a result of the economic crisis and different union priorities.


13. See Laura Balbo, “Women’s Access to Intellectual Work,” Signs 6 (1981): 763-70, which underlines the value of these courses in helping women to develop intellectual and cultural activities.

14. See Intercategoriale Donni di Torino (Interunion Women’s Committee of Turin), La spina all’occhiello (Turin: Musolino, 1979), and Bocchio and Torchi, L’acqua in gabbia.

15. The minister of Labor at the time was a Christian Democrat, not particularly favorable to the unions or women’s work. There are curious parallels between the passage of this law and the passage in 1964 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in the United States. For an analysis of the background to the law and international comparisons, see T. Treu, Lavoro femminile e uguaglianza (Bari: DeDonato, 1977).

16. One such failure concerned the demand for forty hours of parental leave. This demand was one of the few put forward by union feminists that embodied their goal of promoting general change through attention to women’s special needs. The women’s coordinating committees asked that forty hours of paid leave from work be granted every year to parents, either mothers or fathers, to take care of children under ten. This would not only meet an immediate need of working women, but also (at least with paid leave) challenge the division of roles in the family. Nurturance, the feminists claimed, is a basic and fulfilling human experience of which men are deprived. In 1979 the demand was included in some important local and national union platforms, but in the first round of bargaining it was dropped everywhere. The representatives of the feminists were too weak to defend it against other priorities: weak in relation to their own social base, since the demand had been put forward more by activists than by the rank and file, and in relation to union leadership, to whom they appeared only as isolated individuals.

17. An extreme case, and a symbolic one, is that of Flora Boccio. A trade union officer since the mid-sixties, and the central figure of trade union feminism in Milan, she left office, wrote a book, went to live in the countryside, and late became a filmmaker for Italian television.

18. Research on the life histories of working women who attended 150-hours courses shows that the courses — that is, the contact with trade union feminism — have been in-
Bianca Beccalli lectures in sociology at the University of Milan. She was an activist in the New Left in the 1960s and early 70s and taught some of the first feminist 150 courses for working women.

LABOR'S JOKE BOOK

Edited by Paul Buhle

A history of American labor humor from the nineteenth century through the present. Sixty-four pages of gags, puns, rhymes, comics, cartoons and short shots that will send theforeman into convulsions! No holds barred! An injury to one boss is an injury to them all!!!

- Cartoons from American artists: Steinbliber, Konopacki, Art Young, Fred Wright & many more.
- Interviews with labor artists and humor columnists.
- Short fiction rib-tickling funny by T-Bone Slim & others.
- Jokes off the shop floor & picketline, limericks off bathroom walls.

$3.95 (paper) February, 1985
Order from: WORKERS' DEMOCRACY
P.O. Box 24115
St. Louis, MO 63130

Summer Institute in Reproductive Technology

This summer institute is primarily designed for people concerned with social issues arising out of the new reproductive technologies. Technical information necessary for an understanding of scientific and medical dimensions of the issues will be provided, but the program is geared mainly toward the non-scientist.

The program begins Sunday evening, July 21, 1985, and continues through Friday afternoon, July 26.

TOPICS

FETUS AS PATIENT: Legal and ethical dimensions.

NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE: The Baby Doe dilemma.

ABORTION: The eroding right?

PARENTHOOD THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, surrogate mothers, etc.

CHOOSING OUR CHILDREN: genetic screening, sex preselection, hormonal theories of gender.

FORMAT

The program will combine informational lectures, slide shows, films, and videotapes, with ample opportunities for small group discussion of these issues.

FEES

The all-inclusive price of tuition, room, and board is $275. Friday night accommodations may be arranged for an additional fee.

PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Janet Gallagher is Director of the Program in Civil Liberties and Public Policy at Hampshire College.

Michael Gross is Coordinator of Special Program Development at Hampshire College

INFORMATION:

Michael Gross
Hampshire College
Amherst, MA 01002
413/549-4600, ext. 561
STRATEGY, COMPROMISE, AND REVOLT

Viewing the Italian Workers’ Movement

Frank Brodhead


In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many North American New Leftists looked to the industrialized countries of Europe, rather than to the revolutionary struggles of the Third World, for lessons and inspiration. We did so because in Britain, France, and Italy there had occurred a fusion of a youth or student movement with a radicalized workers’ movement which, however tentative, was far more substantial than our own achievements.

Perhaps the most important lessons for the movement in the United States came from Italy. There the “Hot Autumn” strike wave of 1969 seemed to signal an important and exciting change in the ways that the industrial working class was organizing itself; and we looked for affinities in our own country, particularly in the black workers’ struggles in Detroit and other cities. Subsequently, the emergence of seemingly new kinds of leftwing parties in Italy, “Leninist” but far more innovative and libertarian than the pathetic dogmatism of our “new communist movement,” seemed to provide an alternative possibility for our movement as well.

Despite the importance of the tactical and strategic innovations of the Italian workers’ movement, this experience has gone largely unrecorded and unanalyzed. Thus the publication of Joanne Barkan’s Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Workers’ Movement
Since 1945 is particularly welcome. Written in a clear and accessible style, her study paints a thoughtful picture of the postwar development of the Italian labor movement. While the book naturally focuses on developments in the industrialized cities of the North, particularly in the auto factories of Turin which produced so much of the leadership of the radical workers’ movement, Barkan also pays close attention to changes in the composition of the working class as it affected women, white-collar workers, and workers in the less well developed areas of Italy. Barkan’s historical analysis is buttressed by many excellent photographs, and the final quarter of the book consists of interviews with Fiat workers in Turin.

The Transformation of the Working Class

An important strength of Barkan’s book is its analysis of the social and organizational changes in the working class in relationship to changes in technology and the organization of production. In few countries have these changes come as swiftly as they did in postwar Italy.

In 1945, the Italian labor movement began its recovery from the devastation of World War II and the effects of three long decades of fascism. The immediate postwar years are today called the “hard years,” a decade or more in which economic recovery was achieved by holding wages low while high profits and US Marshall Plan aid revived and transformed the economy. Meanwhile, tens of millions of US dollars flowed into the pockets of conservative politicians in Italy, and the exclusion of the Communist Party (PCI) and communist-led workers’ unions from power were made a precondition for continued US aid.

Economic recovery, however, helped to create the conditions for the reemergence of the labor movement. Particularly in the North, the development of a modern industrial sector brought millions of new workers from the South and other underdeveloped parts of Italy. These sudden concentrations of new, unskilled workers transformed the structure of both the working class and the trade unions, as assembly-line and automated production replaced the more craft-oriented ways in which work had been organized. “Under the new system,” writes Barkan, the skilled workers were both fewer in number and more isolated. Many of them did auxiliary tasks such as maintaining and repairing equipment. Most of the semiskilled and unskilled workers were tied to the assembly lines. Yet rather than permanently estrange one worker from another, this more rigid system of production generated a new kind of solidarity. A group or team of workers in close proximity to each other and involved in similar tasks faced the same problems and came to recognize common interests. (p. 54)

These informal or “homogeneous” work groups became the basis for the revival of the Italian labor movement and gave it its radical direction. “In the reorganized factories,” notes Barkan, “the work groups became the source of a new kind of rank-and-file mobilization. Much of it was spontaneous and took the form of work stoppages and collective protests around issues that came up day by day—speed-ups, temporary layoffs, changes in scheduling, or problems with peacework incentives.” (p. 54)

This change in the composition of the working class and in working-class self-organization, of course, did not take place at once or in all parts of Italy; but in the decade between the late 1950s and the late 1960s these developments can be seen as the fundamental mainspring for the many changes taking place. The Catholic Church, particularly under John XXIII, developed an “opening to the poor,” while the Christian Democrats were forced to create an “opening to the left,” sharing power for the first time with a socialist party. A student movement and a New Left created a radical youth movement similar in many ways to that in the United States, while the enthusiasm and debate created by the Cuban, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions fostered political debate even within the Communist Party.

The “Hot Autumn” of 1969

These changes set the stage for the “Hot Autumn” of 1969, when some sixty national labor contracts came up for renewal. As a result of the changes in production and self-organization described above, by 1969 developments on the shop floor had created a rank-and-file unity
which overcame the divisions fostered by Italy’s multi-union structure; and joint strike committees—unity from below”—were the order of the day. By all indices the level of class conflict in Italy reached historic levels in 1969, as five and a half million workers—more than 25 percent of the labor force—walked off their jobs. The response of the employers and the state was harsh: 13,000 people were arrested in the course of the strike wave, while some 35,000 workers were fired or suspended by their employers. The wage gains won by the working class represented an enormous transfer of wealth from one class to another; but there were a host of other gains as well, varying from one industry to another. Many of them would seem strange to North American unionists either because they were won here a long time ago or because they were ideologically far beyond the goals of unions here. In particular, there was a strong drive for equality of treatment, initiated by the “new” and unskilled workers but permeating most of the working class. “The underlying concept,” writes Barkan, “was that of a united working class, one no longer divided by skills categories, wage differentials, regional origins, age, or sex.” (p. 71)

The radicalization and recomposition of the Italian working class was also reflected in new forms of self-organization and struggle. Italian workers, unlike those in the United States, have traditionally conducted short strikes prior to (and often to bring about) negotiations with management, rather than to strike in the US pattern of long strikes while negotiations take place. Even so, tactical innovation flourished in 1969 and 1970. In the “checkerboard strike,” successive groups of workers in the same plant would strike and then resume work, disrupting the flow of production. In “hiccup strikes” one plant after another would conduct short, plant-wide strikes. The Italians also employed “working to rule,” which inevitably led to disaster on the production line. Perhaps the most appealing strike form developed during the period, however, was what was called praticare l’obbligativo, or “putting the objective into practice.” As Barkan states, “If the workers wanted shorter hours, they stopped work early; if they wanted the right to assembly, they began holding assemblies; if they wanted better safety conditions, they set up those conditions.” (p. 79)

Containment and Retreat

The events of the “Hot Autumn” and its immediate aftermath represented enormous gains for Italian workers, and a life-threatening challenge to Italian capitalists and their government. Between 1969 and 1973, for example, wage costs per unit in Italy increased by 47 percent: three times the increase achieved by French workers, twice the gains of German workers, and a gain even greater than that by the massive upsurge of British workers. In an export-oriented economy such as Italy’s, such wage gains represented a severe attack on the profits of capital; and the concessions employers were forced to make in the area of “management prerogatives” were equally threatening to future rates of profit.

A particular strength of Barkan’s book is her analysis of the counter-attack launched by capital and its allies to contain and reverse the gains made by the workers. One response, of course, was the employment of terror and the
organization of neo-Nazi groups to create a "strategy of tension" by which the Italian people in general could be induced to support the strengthening of the state's repressive apparatus. Even more important, especially in the auto industry, was the introduction of automated production techniques (including robots) to replace workers and/or to make certain assembly-line tasks less arduous. A further tendency has been to disperse and decentralize production: "a direct response to the workers' movement that began in the late 1960s" (p. 153). Finally, and perhaps most important in crippling the workers' movement in the mid-1970s, the industrial recession initiated by rising oil prices both undercut the labor movement and gave capitalists little choice but to regain control of production and to refuse wage increases. Thus the working class became increasingly divided, in the 1970s, between those workers who remained within the protections afforded by stable employment and industrial unions, and those workers who were marginalized in weakly organized or precarious industries.

These changes provided the context for perhaps the most important—and most problematic—issues Barkan discusses: the role of workers' organizations, particularly the trade unions and Communist Party, in containing and repressing the workers' movement. This issue is far from simple and cannot be adequately addressed here. But two Italian debates illustrate both the nature of the problem and its importance to a US audience.

The first concerns the tensions between rank-and-file democracy and traditional trade union leadership as it emerged in the debate over the election of delegates to workers' assemblies in the factories. As the Italian workers had been organized by three different trade unions in the postwar period (whose divisions were compounded by the fact that each union was associated with a different political party, thus transferring parliamentary divisions to the shop floor), an important achievement of the rank-and-file movement of the 1960s was to form unitary strike committees at the plant level. By 1972 a survey found that such councils existed in about one-third of workplaces sampled.

The fate, and ultimate bureaucratization, of these assemblies is an important story which will be familiar to students of the CIO. Initially an assembly in which all workers participated, especially during strikes or moments of high tension, the assemblies soon became representative bodies, to which departments or primary workgroups sent delegates. (Such developments were opposed by organizations like Lotta Continua with the slogan, "We are all delegates!"). Soon delegates came to be increasingly associated with one of the trade unions, and in turn supported a contraction in the number of delegates chosen, with the consequent increase in the number of people represented by each delegate. Thus delegates became increasingly separated from primary workgroups, and became more and more removed from the rank and file as the task of delegate became more of a full-time job. Additionally, many primary work groups lost "their" delegates: women and smaller departments became particularly excluded from shop-floor politics.

Barkan writes that "some transformation of the council system was probably inevitable as the workers' movement dropped back from its high point of activity" (p. 87). Perhaps. But it is also apparent from the material she presents that the Italian unions were concerned to contain and absorb the newly unleashed energy of the working class as much as they were concerned to use this energy in a common struggle against employers and the state. In the end, of course, a less than clear-cut picture emerges. The more radical creations of the new workers' movement were absorbed into the traditional trade union structures, but these structures themselves were transformed. The barbaric tyranny exercised by employers on the shop floor was modified by the "civilizing" achieve-
ments of the workers (first described and given its proper importance by Marx in Ch. 10 of *Capital*, “The Working Day”). Workers became more secure, and their rights were incorporated in legal changes that amounted to the establishment of a modern system of industrial relations.

A second Italian debate of great importance to US activists concerns the Italian Communist Party. Again, this is too complex to adequately reproduce here; and while I think that Barkan is occasionally too “judicious” in her treatment of the left criticisms launched against the PCI, her treatment of the Party in its relationship to the workers’ movement, the state, and particularly the needs of capitalist development is helpful and insightful. For throughout the decades covered by Barkan’s study the PCI has played a dual role. On one hand it has attempted to achieve a hegemony—and a representative function—over the Italian working class in the interests of a broad, anti-fascist unity. On the other hand, the Party has consistently subordinated even the hint of a revolutionary program or strategy to the requirements of that broader unity. This has inevitably included the imperative of maintaining a “strong economy,” i.e., increasing the rate of exploitation and the amount of surplus value transferred from the working class to the largely corrupt and incompetent capitalist class of Italy.

This is particularly important for an understanding of the Party’s adoption of the strategy (or, some maintain, mere tactic) of the “Historic Compromise,” by which the Party would attempt to enter the government in alliance with its historic antagonist, the Christian Democratic Party. This policy, which led from disaster to disaster in the late 1970s as the Party lost popular support by attempting to line up the working class behind the meanderings of the Christian Democrats, was rooted, as Barkan observes, in the Party’s economic analysis. “For the time being,” she notes,

Party leaders accepted the imperatives of capitalist production, including the maximization of private profits. They argued that Italy’s economic woes were due in large part to the parasitic, inefficient, and speculative nature of Italian capitalism. Whereas the PCI had formerly seen the multinationals and monopolies as a primary source of the problem, the new policy presupposed an accord with all productive sectors—monopolistic and competitive (p. 117).

In essence, the Party became the party of capitalist development in Italy, proposing to restrain wages in the more advanced industries (particularly in the North), and to use the surplus achieved to foster the development of the South while providing needed social services. On a much larger scale, of course, these are the policies of the heirs of Stalin wherever they are in power; and while Barkan’s study is an excellent beginning, the relationship of the Italian and other communist parties to capitalist development remains to be addressed. (It is too bad that *Visions of Emancipation* does not contain much of the analysis developed by Italian groups to the left of the PCI in the early 1970s about why the Party found itself trying to mobilize working-class energies for capitalist development.)

![Toni Negri with his daughter, and his mug shot](image)

Semiotext(e) 9.

The outcome of these contending forces and interests, as we have noted, is a working class once again divided: between men and women, between North and South, between unionized and nonunionized, between never-employed young people and older, “stable” workers. That is, a working class very much like our own in many ways, simultaneously immersed in a culture of consumerism and, for many, falling real wages. Barkan concludes her study with a series of interviews with workers in Turin, most of whom work at Fiat. These interviews,
thoughtfully conducted and nicely written, show that the attitude of Fiat workers span a wide range between radical and conservative, but that all of them have been deeply influenced and changed by the cumulative experience of their decades of struggle. The interviews were conducted before the great defeat of the Fiat workers in the strike of 1980; but I would like to think that Palmerio still believes that “the bosses have their hands on the levers now, but tomorrow we will,” and that Sandra stands by her confident prediction that, “It will take time for the workers to control the factory and be autonomous in running it. But someday it will be possible.”


Feminism and the left

For years, the left has been telling the women’s movement what its politics should be. Now, three women who have long been active in both movements are telling the left what it must learn from feminists.

Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, in Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the making of socialism, suggest that many progressive groups fail because of their oppressive internal structure. The women’s movement, on the other hand, has found important new ways to approach political theory and practice. These feminist methods can be integrated into political organizing, say these women. In fact, they must be integrated, and they show how it can successfully be done.

To order

Ask for this book at your favorite store, or use this coupon to order by mail.

Enclosed is $_____ for ____ copies of Beyond the Fragments. (Prices postpaid: One copy, $7.50. Two or three copies, $6.50 each. Four or more, $6.00 each.)

name ______________________________ address ______________________________

city, state, zip ______________________________

Return with payment to:
Alyson Publications, Dept. P-35, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118
WE’LL BE HERE RIGHT TO THE END... AND AFTER

Women and the British Miners’ Strike

Loretta Loach

The 1984 miners strike will go down in history as a crucial and bitter dispute. It is already a year old and the government and coal board have remained steadily intransigent. But it will also be recorded as a turning point in the lives of hundreds of working class women who have surfaced amid this strife and have shown a capacity for organizing that has offended the pride of many a miner. In the following article reprinted from Spare Rib, the British feminist monthly, two such women are interviewed.

Bobby and Sue come from a small pit village called Bentley in South Yorkshire. They are sisters and their family have been part of the mining community for over 100 years. The decisions that affect their lives and those of other working class communities are remote from them. ‘It happens down in London’ said Sue, the youngest of the two. ‘It were nothing to do with us. We imagined that people in London thought we were still in clogs and flat caps. We’re northerners, you’re southerners. When you had snow down in London we’d say ‘well they’ve got everything else, they may as well have that as well.’ Before, we didn’t used to care two sods what Margaret Thatcher were doin’ with oil or price of oil, now we do because it affects us.’ ‘Put it this way,’ says Bobby carefully, ‘you read more and you’re more wary of what you read. At one time I didn’t care about coal. I were a wife, those things didn’t concern me,

This article is reprinted from the October 1984 issue of Spare Rib, the British feminist monthly. Spare Rib’s address is 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1, England.
but now we’re taking some of those things on.’

Until the moves to safeguard their livelihoods, Bobby and Sue have never been involved in anything even distantly political. Their action, like those of other women in the coalfields, grew out of the practical needs of the community, but through their energy and initiative they and the other women who make up Bentley Women’s Action Group have created a profound and unprecedented change in the essentially male culture of the mining community.

‘Now when we’re in pub we sit with the men and join in instead of chatting about kids and the home and things. We can sit with ’em and talk about pit. We want to know about things, about what’s happening in the union.’ ‘Some mornings I’ve been picketing before him and I’ve come home and he’s done the housework.’ ‘I’ve always thought well, men do thinking. But I speak my mind now more than I’ve ever done. I’ve always been outspoken but I’ve never pushed myself.’

The women are now central in the community, they have extended their influence to every area of village life, even the sacred male institution of Sunday cricket has been brought within their remit. ‘By weekend we’ve no money left out of Social and we don’t do meals in kitchen, that’s the time when you can get depressed. So we’ve organized games on Sunday. Women play men at cricket and rounders.’ How have the men responded to that? ‘You know, you’d think we were playing test cricket at Lords. They take it so seriously, you know, “we’ll show them women.”’ ‘One day’ Sue said imitating them ‘they said “if there’s any cheating we’re not playing anymore.”’ They even make us mark it officially on sheet — Bentley Women’s Action Group versus Bentley pickets. They made us wear bloody pads and they couldn’t stand it if a woman hit a good one.’

How Did It All Start?

‘We went on a rally for Women Against Pit Closures and said if anyone is interested in setting up a kitchen let’s get in contact with one another. Our first meeting were about five weeks into strike. We thought kitchens were a good idea because we women could then play a part and keep everybody together. We’d be able to feed everybody so we could keep fighting against pit closures, but we didn’t expect it to last as long as this. At first you only got men in for food, women never came, they thought it were only for men, now they come, and kids. Everybody sits in with everybody, women don’t just sit together. We talk about everything: picketing, what’s been happening — they should have strike headquarters down at kitchen because everybody’s there.’

When I arrived at Bentley pavilion just before lunchtime the kitchen was just preparing to dish up. There were about five women and two men in there, one being a retired chef who offers his services freely in support of the strike. Do men help? ‘They do come in and wash up for us,’ said Bobby. ‘If we’re busy they’ll muck in. They’ll do shoppin’ and sweep floor. Before if they’d been asked to do those things they’d have said “who she bloody talking to,” now they do it — don’t get me wrong, you can’t change ’em in 22 weeks but they do it.’

But getting men to help seems to them undignified and compromising. When the group was first set up, the union offered them £50 (roughly $65 U.S.). The women chose to regard it as a loan saying ‘we want to be self-supporting we don’t want nout to do with NUM. We wanted our own control. Can you imagine having men, they’d say “I think you can do it like this or you can just have this,” we didn’t want none of that. We wanted to have money, we wanted to have control of the place. At first we said let them go picketing, we’ll feed ‘em all, we don’t need them, we’ll do it ourselves. We’ve made every decision as far as running the thing is concerned.’ Whilst wishing to be independent of men they do not rest content with the arduous labour of ‘women’s work’ in the kitchen. They wanted more involvement in the dispute, they wanted to go picketing and initially they were met with stubborn resistance. ‘When they wouldn’t let us go picketing we all got together and played hell with the union. The treasurer of the union local wasn’t keen at first and he said we weren’t on the books anymore’ (that means you are not covered by the NUM if you are arrested) ‘but that were just a threat.’ Bobby laughs. ‘They hate to think that women’s getting top dog of ‘em.’

Bobby is the sort of woman who believes
things can only be achieved if you contribute every bit of yourself to the fight. It’s not a position, that’s just the way she is, pushed strongly and powerfully by the emotional waves of the strike. The first time she went picketing was a mass picket at Harworth colliery. ‘I was petrified. I’d never seen so many police, you just don’t in a little village like this. It was a weird feelin.’ Then, you only have to see one scab and police talking into their machines and down the line goes the whisper, ‘They’re coming’ and you just erupt. There was no stoppin’ me, I broke through and got over the other side of the road because it was near scabs. At first they wouldn’t let me through, it was too dangerous, but I said I’d catch a bus round there if they didn’t. First time on a picket line and I turned two blokes back. I’ve told ‘im she said, nodding in the direction of her husband, ‘If you’d have let women go picketing in the beginning you’d have got through to them long ago.’

Have you ever seen a woman on a picket line when you watch TV?’ asked Sue, who now takes it in turns with her husband to go picketing, so one of them can look after their two young children. ‘It never shows women on a picket line, the camera seems to stop dead at women. If the Notts women saw Yorkshire women on a picket line they’d think differently about the strike. When Anne Scargill got arrested the cameras went mad. Don’t get me wrong, I think she does a wonderful job, but there’s plenty of ordinary women doing the same but the tele ignores them.’

Standing Up To The Men

Through their activity, the women have experienced the more general oppression they feel in relation to men though they would not refer to it as such. ‘We’ve stood up for ourselves. We’ve stood up to them. Like, we say we’re going to London. At first it were “can we go to London,” we used to think that we should give a few days notice; break it to them gently and get housework and washing done. Now sometimes you get a phone call two hours before you’ve got to go and we just drop everything and it’s “I’m off to London.” ’ The action group is a place where, apart from business, the women exchange stories about the men’s reaction to what they are doing. The example they give to each other provides the momentum and opportunity to overcome some of the traditional passivity and timidity in the home. One woman bargained with her husband to be allow-
ed to go to London for a rally. She exchanged sex for his permission. When she mentioned this to some of the women in the group she said 'I thought, what the hell am I giving in to him for,' recognising what she was doing in order to keep him quiet. In the beginning they were asking. Now they are just doing. 'If it's an issue we're fighting on' said Sue 'If the husbands say no, they come back and tell us and we will get on to them and say 'what do you bloody mean no.' There'll be no comeback because he knows it would come straight back to the group. When we first met in a pub it were 'Oh he'll not let me go to a pub and we'd say, ask him, and if he said no we'd be on to him.'

The Bentley Women's Action Group and no doubt others like them, has rivalled the union as the key organizing vehicle in the community. The implications of this for women hardly needs emphasizing. Out of the material need to provide food their energy has been released and they have drawn strength from the powerful role they now play in things. Through their impulse, challenges are being made to myths and assumptions cherished for centuries in the mining community. Mr. Scargill may walk on water but he does so because unknown to him, the imagination and initiative of women is providing the scope and thrust of this rebellion. 'Margaret Thatcher didn't bargain for us. Can you imagine what would happen to strike if Kitchen fell through — they're depending on us.'

'I think women wanted a say before about coal issue, about strike. But nobody has ever let them, nobody has ever, ever wanted to listen. The NUM being all men; they wouldn't listen, no-one is ever allowed near when there's a meeting, even kids aren't allowed near. Keith took Neil, he's only ten, when I was in London. They turned him out. They wouldn't speak in front of a non NUM member and everyone looked round wondering who they were referring to.' 'You see' said Bobby 'we're trying to change all this not just in Bentley.' The women believe they should be allowed in union meetings when they are discussing business which concerns them. 'This strike has been on for 24 weeks and we've done everything the men have, we've done more, we've done kitchens, speaking, rallying, picketing, the only thing we haven't done is go down pit and we intend to do that when the strike is over.'

**Men's Jealousy**

Are some of the men jealous of the trips to London, the meetings, the sheer excitement of being active? Bobby's husband has been in the NUM for 22 years and he said to her 'you've done more mouthing in 22 weeks than I've done ever, the whole time I've been in the union.' Sue said, 'They'd never in their wildest dreams have imagined that we would be where we are today. They thought we'd be saying "we've got to have help." They make remarks, like when we got union mini bus to go to Nottingham they said "bloody marvellous they can get mini bus when they want." And if we had committee meeting in pub we'd stay for a drink after, that niggled them at first. When we got to kitchens the day after we'd have confab, 'out said last night when you got home? were it alright? Aye, nought mentioned.' A lot of the men have gone for women's action groups but we're not scared, we've got gobs, we'll use 'em.'

Unsurprisingly, hesitation and lack of confidence characterised the early days of women's involvement in the strike and this was felt as much in relation to 'educated' women in London as it was to men. 'When I first went to London' said Bobby 'I expected to be laughed at, the way I spoke, the way I am, but I made some friends and that gives you more guts to do what you're doing. It's not really me, speaking in public, I get nervous but I think well, we are somebody and we've got to do it. If more women could see and hear women such as me who'd not had a right good education they'd see
they could do it and we'd get on much better.' Sue, the more business like of the two, normally speaks at union meetings. 'I make notes beforehand. I don't go into great detail. I say what I've got to say and that's it.' She mentions proudly her sister's capacity to rouse an audience. 'She makes 'em cry. I mean, she jumps around from one thing to another but it's all her, from her heart, it's truth.'

When they visited women's groups in London the Greek Cypriot women met them with a table of food, £50 donation and the warmth and understanding of another community who had faced strife. Maria, one of the workers, said 'Our community are very sensitive to issues like these, they have a long history of struggle, and they relate to it straight away.' Bobby thanked them, shook all their hands and embraced them, their kindness had moved her to tears.

Through the experience of the Bentley women the language of politics has woven its way, giving shape and meaning to the wealth of things they are encountering. 'Do terms like sexism have any meaning for you?' They paused. 'Oh you mean men slaggin' off women? Yes, they'd shout things at women on picket lines and we'd go up and say 'we're not here for stuff like that.' It makes 'em think. Sue believes that one of the reasons women have had the confidence to speak out is because of Greenham Common. 'It was only women that made peace camps, it was the women that made a stand for peace. I know men agree with it but it took women to get up off their arses and do something before things moved.' Bobby mentioned a rally where 'even the men' gave a standing ovation to a woman from Greenham. 'They're brilliant those women.'

'The line up here was that they were scruffy lesbians and there were lesbians in one camp and junkies in another. I know they do that, I know they do have lesbians there, but they're fighting for a cause. I could see that and people shouldn't slag 'em off for what they do.'

'I'm not a feminist,' said Sue 'I don't know though, I've got feminist views on some things. I read your magazine, I agree with some of it but I'm not what you are, you're too feminist you are, but when they appeal to you' she gives an example 'like when police called you (Bobby) a fucking lesbian on the picket lines you were say-
stick together and we’ve said that after the strike we can’t let it go, and when we meet we always say don’t forget it’s our fight and we’ll be here right to the end and after it. We no longer stand behind men, we stand with them.’ It has given them all confidence. ‘Linda who lives up the road, we took her to London and she hardly opened her mouth. She does now. If she hears anyone pullin’ us down she’ll stand up to ‘em. Her mom has said, ‘God, this has really brought you out of your shell.’ We’d have all cracked up if we’d not had the group.’ Such a long dispute like this places an immense strain on the women and their relationships. Managing on social security, worrying about feeding and clothing a family, arrears on HP payments can all prove too much. ‘One woman in the group split up from her husband, she’d got three little kids and it got her down, she’s gone home to her mom.’ For the most part, the existence of the group lessens the feelings of anxiety and isolation that all of the women feel. By sharing day to day problems some of the pressure is relieved. Have things changed in the home at all? ‘Yes, Kit’ (Bobby’s husband) ‘has to do more. This morning I thought, I can’t shop I’m too tired, and before I knew it he’d looked to see what was needed and gone. Any other time it would have been me saying, ‘go for a loaf, duck.’ ‘It’s the same if we go to one of our houses for meetings, none of us make tea we say to ‘em, put kettle on, love.’ Do you think that after the strike the changes that have taken place will go back? ‘I don’t think any of us will allow that, it will be job share. The women have had a good thing, they’ll not go back to it especially the young lasses.’

But this is not a normal time for the people of Bentley. It is an exceptional period of industrial and social militancy. If the women have the confidence and energy to continue organizing after the strike, their bargaining power in relation to men will no doubt diminish. Being politically involved in matters relating to the men is one thing but when it comes to issues independent of them will they be so tolerant?

Nevertheless things in the coalfields of Britain will never be as they were prior to the strike. The working class women in these communities have, through intense personal struggle realised some of their strength and potential. ‘We can’t lose this close bond. Instead of asking a bloke we have asked each other. It’s brilliant. We’ve fought for this. After, we might join the Labour Party and form a women’s section. I’ve told yer we’ll be here right to the end and after.’

HAS YOUR SUB EXPIRED?

If you have received a renewal notice recently, please don’t hesitate and send it in with your payment right away. You won’t miss an issue of RADICAL AMERICA and we’ll get some financial resuscitation! Here’s what your mailing label looks like:

02/29/85 O185 OU1 1000000
JAMES STARK
93055 E. EDEN
PASO ROBLES CA 93447

The circled number is the last date of your current subscription. We have kept longtime subscribers on beyond the end of their subs. So, when you renew, please include enough payment to cover the issues you have been receiving since your last payment. If you have any questions, call or write the office.
SUBSCRIBE NOW TO

RADICAL AMERICA is an independent socialist-feminist journal that has published continuously since 1967. Articles feature the history and current developments in the working class, the role of women and Third World people, with reports on shop floor and community organizing, the history and politics of radicalism and feminism, and commentary and analysis of current socialist theory, popular culture, and social movements.

Name ____________________________________________________________
Address __________________________________________________________
City ___________________ State ______ Zip _____________________________
Cut out this box and mail to: Radical America
38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville, MA 02143

☐ $100.00 Supporting subscriber*
☐ $50.00 Sustaining subscriber*
☐ $15.00 One year sub (Six issues)
☐ $10.00 One year sub (Unemployed, retired rate)
☐ $26.00 Two year sub
☐ Add $3.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions

PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER
Make all checks payable to Radical America

Yes, send me ☐ “Facing Reaction”
☐ “Dreams of Freedom”
☐ “15th Anniversary Retrospective”
☐ “Workers Struggles” $6.50 ($21.50)

*Checks for $50.00 or more are tax deductible and should be made payable to Capp St. Foundation and sent to Radical America at the above address.
Quitting Time

Tommy's wife, waiting in the car with two small children, calls to me as I leave the shop:

—How's it going?

—Fine!

—How are Tommy and the other guys to work with?

—They're okay.

—They don't pick on you for being the first girl?

—No. They've been pretty good.

—That's good. I told Tommy if he gave you a hard time, I'd punch him out.

Susan Eisenberg
Through the Ceiling, Maiden Voyage

Sliding
under an airduct, then
scrabbling crab-like along pipes and crossbars—
my flashlight breaking
the darkness, my bodyweight
placed gingerly (not to fall through)—

I ask the stillness,
has another woman passed before me?
to witness this
pulsation of building life:

arteries of plumbing pipes branch across
electric nervelines sinews of metal
secure airducts
pumping coolbreath/warmbreath
to the skeletal
framework of iron beams.

How many times I have passed
under ceilings
unaware
unsuspecting.

Susan Eisenberg

SHARING THE SHOP FLOOR

Women and Men on the Assembly Line

Stan Gray

On October 25, 1983, a group of women factory workers from Westinghouse came to the United Steelworkers Hall in Hamilton, Ontario. They spoke to one of the forums on Affirmative Action sponsored by the Ontario Federation of Labor.

The women told about decades of maltreatment by Westinghouse. They were first confined to job ghettos with inferior conditions and pay. Later, when their "Switchgear" plant shut down, they fought to be transferred to the other Westinghouse plants in the city. They had to battle the obstruction of management which wanted to exclude women. Some of their brothers in the shop resisted as well, but others helped them out. They won, but when the recession hit, they were systematically weeded out, laid off regardless of seniority, and left with little or no income protection in their senior years.

The Challenge

I have worked at Westinghouse for the past 10½ years and went throught the various battles for workplace equality. As I listened to the women that night, I thought of how much their coming into our plant had changed myself, my fellow workers and brother unionists.

This article is a revised version of one that appeared in the June 1984 issue of Canadian Dimension, Suite 801-44 Princess St., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1K2 Canada.
One way unions can improve in this area is for male unionists to self-critically review these events and learn from the achievements and errors made along the way.

The Westinghouse women had to come on their own behalf. The male staff officials of their union had blocked the women's committee of the labor council from presenting their brief. They claimed it was inaccurate, since the problems weren't really that bad and, at any rate, the brief didn't credit these male officials with leading the fight for women's rights. But the women's committee refused to include their rewritten and sanitized version.

And so the Westinghouse women had to come and tell their own story first-hand. When that union did give a brief of its own, it presented a theoretical and historical discussion of male-female relations and situated it in the context of the global class struggle — making no reference to Westinghouse or Hamilton or any women it represents.

This kind of thing happened in other cities and with other unions. It indicates that the official union support for affirmative action is a bit deceptive. The policy briefs and unanimous convention resolutions tend to mask a male resistance within the unions and on the shop floor that doesn't surface publicly.

Too many men pay lip service to the battle against sexism and leave all the real fighting to the women. I was one of those unionists who for years sat on the fence on these matters until certain sharp events in the shop pushed me off the fence. I then had to take the rhetoric very seriously and try to fully deal with these issues in practice.

Male unionists need to openly confront chauvinism with their brothers in the shop and in the labor movement. This is needed in order to give meaningful help in the fight for sexual equality.

But it is important for another reason: sexism is harmful to working men. It runs counter to their interests and undermines male trade unionism. The progressive men in labor have to speak up and say so, analyze the various aspects of chauvinism in their own way and speak to the men about it from a male perspective. The process of seriously grappling with these issues has made many men better unionists.

The following account therefore focuses on the men rather than on the women's battle, tells about the debates and struggles among the men on the shop floor at Westinghouse. It tries to concretely bring out the men's issue and the male interest in the fight against sexism.

My education on the problems of the Switchgear women began in November 1978 when I was recalled to work after a layoff. We had just been through a very bitter 5 month strike. We went back to work defeated, having gained little.

The union* represented 1800 workers in 3 plants. Its various divisions produced Turbines, Motors, Transformers and Switchgear equipment. I had worked at the Beach Rd. plant where I was laid off out of seniority after the strike, a victim of an anti-union vendetta of the company taking advantage of the strike defeat and work shortage.

I was later recalled, but not to my old job. Rather, it was to an all-female department in the Switchgear plant 7 labor grades below my original one. The company was trying to keep me out of my old plant . . . and also, it seemed, to humiliate me.

The plant was mostly segregated. Jobs had been designated, either male or female, and many departments were all-male or all-female. The women were on a separate seniority list with their own job titles and grades, and those were inferior in wages to the male ones. That system of dual wage rates and dual seniority lists was enshrined in the collective agreement — for decades signed and enforced by both company and union.

At Switchgear I heard the grievances and complaints of the women. They worked at more demanding jobs in terms of monotony, speed and work discipline. They got lower pay for that, were frequently laid off while junior males stayed in; they were denied chances for promotion and training at more skilled work. In their eyes, the majority of male workers were treated like privileged babies by the company and would not help them out.

---

*The union here is the United Electrical Workers, Local 504. The UE in Canada is a contradictory phenomenon, its militant rhetoric rarely matched by its concrete practice. Nevertheless, the chauvinism described here is by no means unique to the UE.
Their complaints also applied to the union, whose leadership was thoroughly male. In frequent conflict with that leadership, they accused it of sanctioning and policing the inferior treatment of the women. The union would never fight for them, on grievances or in other arenas. It was often in cahoots with management to sweep the women's complaints under the carpet. The leadership was insensitive to the problems and concerns of the female members.

From the first day it was obvious to me that the company enforced far harsher standards with the women. They worked harder and faster, got less break time and were allowed less leeway than the men. When I was later transferred to the all-male machine shop, the change was from night to day.

As for the union, the Men's Club that ran it made its views known to me very early and very clearly. The staff rep had made his spurs in that Switchgear Division. He told me the first day that he himself would never work with women. He proudly said that he and other labor leaders of his political persuasion drink at the Wellington House, the one remaining all-male bar in Hamilton.

The local President was in Switchgear and he was very upset when he heard that I was seriously listening to the complaints of the women workers. Their gripes were usually frivolous and unfounded, he stated. He told me that he always just listened to their bitching, said "yes, yes, yes ..." to their faces, and completely ignored it all afterwards. (This was exactly what the women told me he did.)

I had just been elected to the Executive in a rank-and-file rebellion against this Old Guard. The President seemed to assume that a common male bond would override our differences.

I had already learned to be skeptical about the leadership's statements on their women members. During the strike I had been in charge of the "warehouse squad," a secondary picketing operation that had substantially damaged the company. We were told by the leadership that the women wouldn't be able to perform on the squad — they had children, family duties and weren't very militant. We ignored this advice and recruited a group from Switchgear. This largely female squad became one of our best shock troops in stopping scab traffic throughout southern Ontario.

When I persisted in talking to the women and taking their complaints seriously, the leadership started to ridicule me. The Chief Steward began calling me "the Ambassador"... to the women. He said that he and the President were now happy, in fact, that I was there and speaking to the women. This would save them from that distasteful task. They could from now on just speak to me and get the women's bitches relayed to them.

The new contract had for the first time integrated the male and female seniority and wage lists. This was due to the fact that it was now several years after the passing of the Ontario Human Rights Code which prohibited such discriminatory practices. The integration of the lists had recently been included in the union's bargaining demands. It had, however, never been stressed by the union and only flipantly treated in negotiations. That year Westinghouse and other companies in Hamilton had moved to abolish the separate lists. Given the new laws, they had strong reasons of their own for eliminating official segregation.

In 1979, the company announced it planned to close the Switchgear plant and decentralize production in smaller towns with cheaper wage rates. For the women, this posed a serious threat. The contract applied to 3 plants, but except for a part of the Motor Division at Beach Rd., all areas were bastions of male jobs. Would the women be able to exercise their seniority and bump or transfer to those jobs, or would they find themselves out in the street after all those years?

**Divide and Conquer**

Thanks to shop floor pressure by the guys, I had been recalled to my old Department at the Beach Rd. by fall 1979. There was then a lot of talk and worry in the plants over the prospect of large-scale transfers from Switchgear. When the first ones began, there were some bad incidents with male departments shafting the women. They refused to show them the jobs or hassled them in other ways.

Some of us once tried to have a full discussion of these problems at a Stewards' Council, but this attempt was a flop. The leadership was
in no mood to openly discuss and confront sexism. A lot of raw nerves had already been touched. In typical fashion, the leadership’s bully-boys went after us. With a lot of shouting and breast-beating, they blamed the women for the problems, and threatened us for implying the union leadership needed a new approach.

Having been frustrated in handling the problems through the union structures, we were left to our own resources in the shop. The Transformer Division I was in was all-male, and its management was determined to keep it that way. There were some managers who were well known to be dedicated opponents of any women ever setting foot in their domains.

As steward, I insisted to management that the Switchgear women had every right to jobs in our department, at least to trial and training. Their seniority entitled them and we wanted them in our plant. This ought to be done in an orderly manner rather than competitively, i.e. the open jobs in Transformers to be posted in Switchgear and a gradual series of transfers rather than bumps.

Management was opposed, but they had a problem: the Switchgear women had legal and contractual rights to those jobs. Management therefore developed a strategy of Divide and Rule. Use the women in a provocative manner to push the male workers to keep them out. Foster splits. Present the women as a threat to the men’s jobs and livelihood and get the hourly guys to do management’s job for them.

Management had a secondary objective here, which was to break our shop floor union organization. Since the trauma of the strike and the post-strike repression, a number of stewards and safety reps had patiently re-built the union in the plant, block by block—fighting every grievance, hazard and injustice with a variety of tactics and constructing some shop floor unity and network. We had been doing this in the teeth of the opposition of both company and union, whose officials were overly concerned to get along peacefully with each other and have everything calmed and controlled. Fostering war of the sexes in the plant was a weapon in management’s counteroffensive against us.

For months before the anticipated transfers, foremen and their assorted rumor-mongers stirred up the pot with the specter of the Invasion of the Women. Two hundred Switchgear women would come and throw all the Beach Road Breadwinners out in the street. No one's job would be safe. Day after day, week after week, we were fed the tales: for example, once it was that 14 women with 30 years seniority each were coming to this department in 8 days and no male would be protected. Better start thinking now about unemployment insurance.

The first transfers in one department were some fiercely individualist women determined to keep their new jobs. When the men hassled them, they fought back. When the company told them they had to out-produce the men to keep their jobs, they did so. There was vicious fighting between the men and women. Both sides ended up ratting on the other to the boss, the “militant” steward included. The men were furious and sexist about it; they went all over the plant to warn others against allowing any “cunts” or “bitches” into their departments.

That department was next to mine. I had fought for the women to be called into the jobs opening up in our “iron stacking” area. The union’s Business Agent had insisted the women couldn’t physically handle those and other jobs. But I won the point with the company and we were next on the list. The major women’s influx would start here.

For weeks before their arrival, the department was hyper-alive, everyone keyed to the Invasion of the Women. I was approached by one of the guys who said that a number of them had just discussed the problem. They wanted me, as their leader and steward, to go to the company and tell them the men didn’t want the women in here and are prepared to fight to keep them out.

That moment was a personal watershed for me. As I listened to him, I knew that half measures would no longer do. I would now have to take the bull by the horns.

I had been dealing with male chauvinism over the years in a limited fashion. As a health and safety rep, I had to constantly battle with some men who would knowingly do unsafe acts since it was “manly” to do so. In the inside-out mind of the male chauvinist, such dangerous work somehow affirmed his masculine superiority. The bosses certainly knew how to use guys like that to get jobs done quickly and unsafely.
They would also thereby roll back the gains we had made in safer procedures in the department.

With a mixture of sarcasm, force, and reason, I had been arguing over the years, "It's stupidity not manliness to hurt yourself; use your brains—don't be a hero and cripple yourself; you're harming all of us and helping the company by breaking the safety rules we fought so hard to establish, rules that protect all of us...."

From this I was familiar with how irrational, self-destructive anti-collective the male ego could be. Also, I had learned a great deal from the women's movement over the years, and this included a never ending struggle with my own sexism. On and off, I would have debates with my male co-workers over women's liberation and related topics.

But all this only went so far. Now, with the approaching Invasion and the Great Fear that gripped the department, I had to deal with an angry male sexism in high gear. I got off the fence.

I told this guy: No. These women from Switchgear are our sisters and we had fought for them to come into our department. They are our fellow workers with seniority rights and we want them to work at Beach Rd. rather than get laid off. If we deny them their seniority rights, it hurts us, for once that goes down the drain, none of us has any protection. It's our enemies, the bosses, who are trying to do them out of jobs here.

And with that reply, the battle was on. For the next few weeks the debate raged hot and heavy, touching on many basic questions. Workers from other departments in the plant
came over joining in.

Many men made the accusation that the women would be the bosses' Fifth Column and break our unity. They would side with the foremen, squeal on us, out-produce us and thereby force speed-ups. The women were our enemy, or at least agents of the enemy, would be used by Them against Us. And many pointed to the experience of the next department, a situation that festered and worsened every week.

The reply was that if we treated the women as sisters and friends, they'd side with us not the boss. Some of us had worked in Switchgear and knew it was the men who got favorite treatment. The women were treated like dirt by the company. Our own shopfloor unity left a lot to be desired and so some of us sarcastically pointed out all the squealing and kow-towing to the boss that many of our male co-workers engaged in. You could be sure the women were not our equals in this area at least.

We had common class interests with our sisters against the company. This was in the protection of seniority rights and assuring that the Switchgear workers, male and female, got jobs at other Westinghouse plants rather than get thrown out in the street after 20 or 30 years of service.

It was easy to tease guys with the contradictions that male double-standards led them to. They were afraid the women would over-produce and result in speed-ups—yet at the same time insisted the women wouldn't be able to physically perform our "man's work"!

Either they could or they couldn't, was the answer to that one, and if they could, they deserved the jobs and it would be up to us to initiate them into the department norms. We insisted on the right to trial and training for ourselves—to deny the women a chance to make out would hurt us. If they're so inferior, as you say, that will show and so you've got nothing to worry about. Besides, it was always brought up, no women could ever out-scab such and such a male in production.

Many of the guys said that the women would never be able to do certain of the heavy and rotten jobs. As steward and safety rep, I always jumped on that argument: We shouldn't do those jobs either. Look how long we've been fighting to make them safer and easier for ourselves. Well, they answered, the women may be able to do certain jobs, but not all of them.

Right, I would say, and how many guys in here only do certain of the jobs? Haven't we all fought to protect older or sicker or injured or potbellied or whatever guys, from certain of the tasks they can't do and still keep their rates? There were enough cases of diabetes, heart problems, asthma, back injuries, etc., around the department. Stewards had even fought for exemptions for guys who found certain things personally distasteful.

If the women can't do certain jobs, we treat them the same way. We don't victimize people who can't physically do everything the company wants them to. We protect them. As our brothers. And as our sisters.

Some claimed the women would never be able to do the tanking—hard work in confined spaces, haven of the macho crowd. Nonsense, it was proclaimed, they have smaller and more agile bodies and so can tank easier. They're natural tankers.

In picking at the irrationalities of the sexist double-standards, the guys were being pushed to apply their class principles—universal standards of equal treatment. Treat the women just as we treat brothers regarding work tasks, seniority, illness, etc.

**Countering Sexism**

Part of this fight to self-identity with the women as co-workers was the battle against calling them "cunts" or "bitches". It was important to set the public standard whereby the women were labelled as *part of Us*, not *Them*.

Male sexist culture strives to degrade women to nothing but pieces of flesh, physical bodies, mindless animals . . . something less than fully human which the males can then be superior to. Such name-calling carried the connotation, in this context, that women were in a different category than Us and so merited different and inferior treatment.

I wouldn't be silent with anyone using these sexist labels and very aggressively pushed the point. Eventually everyone referred to "the women".

After a while we established a bias in the department with most of the men. Having the
women in, or giving them a chance, was the right thing to do by any standard of fairness, unionism, solidarity, of the values and principles we respected, of the basic human decency that distinguishes Us from Them.

The focus shifted to other areas. Many men came back with traditional arguments against women in the workforce. They belong at home with the kids, they’re robbing the male breadwinners of family income and so forth. But other men didn’t agree with this. Most of the guys’ wives worked, or had in the past. A family needed at least two wage earners to get by these days. How can you deny for others what you need for yourselves?

Some men answered that in bad times a family should have only one breadwinner and so all would have an income, share it fairly. Fine, they were told, let’s be really fair and square, half and half; you go home and clean the house and leave your wife at work. Alright, they countered, they could tolerate women supporting a family on their own being at work, but not single women working. Fine, I picked out 4 single men in our department and proposed they be immediately sacked.

Fairness and equality seemed to triumph here too. The guys understood that everyone who had a job at Westinghouse deserved equal protection. But then, some men developed a reaction. As one, Peter, put it, “I have no respect for any woman who would come in to work here in these rotten conditions.” (The names of the plant workers referred to here are not their real ones.)

The come-back was sharp: What the hell are you putting up with this shit for? Why didn’t you refuse to do that dirty job last month? Don’t you deserve to be treated with respect?

And: is your “chivalry” going to protect the women by restricting them to minimum wage jobs, like slinging beer where they get their asses pinched and harassed for 8 hours? Or working in textile sweat shops? Is that the Woman’s Pedestal you’d like to put them on?

As Invasion Date approached, I got worried. Reason and appeals to class solidarity had had a certain impact. Most of the guys were agreeing, grudgingly, to give the women a chance. But the campaign had been too short, fear and hostility were surfacing more and more. Looking at similar situations in other plants, it was quite possible we’d have some ugly incidents the first day or two. This would set up a pattern.

A unionist’s first and bottom-line priority here had to be to work to guarantee the women their right to a job. If all the men weren’t fully convinced that this was the proper thing, then at least they could be forced to behave the right way. Much of the male hostility had been kept in check because myself as the official steward was so aggressively fighting the issue. I decided to take this one step further and use some intimidation to enforce the basics of public behavior.

In a tactic I later realized was a double-edged sword, I puffed myself up, assumed a cocky posture and went for the jugular. I loudly challenged the masculinity of any worker who was opposed to women . . . A real man has nothing to be afraid of, wants strong women, welcomes women’s liberation . . . . Any man worth his salt doesn’t need the crutch of superiority over his sisters . . . stands on his own two feet, fears no female. A real man lives like an equal, doesn’t step on women, doesn’t degrade his sisters, doesn’t have to rule the roost at home,
be a dictator, in order to affirm his manhood. Real men fight the boss, stand up with self-respect and dignity, rather than kick our sisters and wives as scapegoats.

I was sarcastic and cutting with my buddies: This anti-woman crap of yours is a symbol of weakness. Stand up like a real man and behave and work as equals.

There was a lot of play-acting here. I’d outdo some of the worst guys, in verbal intimidation and physical feats. Then I’d lecture them on women’s equality and welcoming our sisters next week.

I zeroed in on one or two of the sick types. I physically threatened them if they pulled anything with the women. They were told to stay away.

All of this worked, as I had hoped. It established an atmosphere of intimidation on the issue. No one was going to get smart with the women. Everyone would stand back for a while. Some would co-operate, others would be neutral watchers. The psycho-sexists would keep out.

This tactic was effective because it spoke directly to a basic issue. But it was also effective because it takes a leaf from the book of the psycho-sexists themselves.

At Westinghouse as elsewhere, many of the men are less chauvinist and more sensible than the others. But they often keep quiet in a group context. They allow the group pattern to be set by the most sexist bullies, to whose style of woman-baiting everyone at least gives in to. The psycho-sexists achieve this result because they challenge, directly or by implication, the masculinity of any male who doesn’t act the same way. Your manhood is on the line if you don’t gloat at the pornography or ridicule the women or join in the harassment. All the males, whatever their real inclinations, are intimidated into acting or talking in a manner degrading to women. The more moderate men don’t speak up or challenge the sexist bullies, afraid of having their masculinity questioned.

I had done the same thing, but in reverse. I had challenged the masculinity of any worker who would oppose the women, and I scared them off.

The Day The Women Arrived

The department crackled with tension the morning The Women arrived. Two of them, to start with. The company was evidently scared by the volatile situation it had worked so hard to create. They backed off from a direct initial confrontation—they assigned me to work with the women, along with my younger helper George.

The women were very uptight and on their guard. Betty and Laura, in their late 30’s, were expecting trouble. They were pleasantly shocked when I said matter-of-factly that we would train them on the job. They were overjoyed when I explained that the men had wanted them in our department and had fought the bosses to bring them here.

It was an unforgettable day. Men from all corners of the plant snuck near the iron stacking area and spied on us. I explained the work and the drawing to the women and we set about our tasks. We outproduced the standard rate by just a hair, so that the company couldn’t say the women weren’t able to meet the normal requirements of the work.

The strategy was to do everything to get over the hump of the first few days. I knew that once the guys got used to the women being in there, they’d begin to treat them as people, not as WOMAN, and the hysteria would go away. It was critical to avoid incidents.

I forced the guys to interact with the women. For example, I pulled over one of the male opponents. I introduced him as Bruce the slinger who knew all the jobs and was an expert in lifts and would be happy to help them if asked and could always be called on to give a hand. This put him on the spot. A big smile, and then, “Sure, just ask and I’d be pleased to show you anything, and to begin with, here’s what to watch out for and...”

The morning went by. No incidents. At lunch tables, then, they all asked George: What’s the verdict? What’s it like to work with a woman? (No point asking me, I was prejudiced.) George looked at them all and thoughtfully pronounced: “There’s no difference working with a woman, I guess it’s the same as with a man. Except that you have to watch yourself that you don’t swear.” Silence. (Betty constantly voiced her amazement at the men of this department:
she said it was the only group of guys she knew who never swore.)

From then on it was easy. More guys began to talk and interact with the two women. They started to see them as Betty with 4 kids who lived on the mountain and knew wiring and was always cheerful; or Laura who was a friend of John's uncle and was cranky early in the morning and drove 3 friends to work and could easily operate the crane but had trouble with the impact gun and liked to heat up meat pies for lunch... and so on.

After all, these men lived and worked with women all of their lives outside the plant—mothers, sisters, wives, in-laws, friends, daughters, girl friends, etc. Having one of their gender at work was no big deal once they got over the trauma of the invasion of this Male Preserve. Just like helping your sister-in-law hang some wallpaper, or changing the snow tires with your daughter, or laying some new carpet with your neighbour.

That first day, the women didn’t want to eat at the same tables as the men. They were wary of them and would rather be alone. We went after the foreman to get proper tables and chairs for the women, to have their own area on the iron floor. And then, over the next days to get them all the proper facilities—lockers, hand soap, tool boxes, etc.

On Day 2, their female friends from the Motor Division came to check things out. They were proudly told that this department was okay, the guys accepted us and were showing us the jobs. We could stay here. Tell everyone. Their network spread the news to the women in the other plant—try to get into this department, these guys will help us.

More and more women came in the next few months. And were integrated with minimum fuss. The same thing happened in several adjoining departments. Quickly, men and women related to each other as people and co-workers, not as enemies. Relations became friendlier, working together. People to people: rather than Man vs. Woman, it was John, Mary, Sue, Peter, Alice, George and Laura, etc.

That Christmas, we had a big party at someone's home—men and women of the department, drinking and dancing. The photos and various raucous tales of that night provided the basis for department story-telling for the next three months. And this was repeated the next few Christmases.

Was this, then, the Peace Between the Sexes? The integration of men and women as co-workers in the plant? Class solidarity triumphing over sex antagonism?

Not quite. Although they were now together, it was not peace. The result was more complicated... for now the War Between the Sexes was being extended from the community to the workplace.

**Male Workplace Culture**

As our struggle showed, sexism co-exists and is often at war with the class consciousness and trade union solidarity that develops among factory men. Our campaign was successful to the extent it was able to sharply polarize and push the contradictions between the two tendencies in each individual. With most of the men, their sense of class solidarity triumphed over male chauvinism.

Many of the men had resisted the female invasion of the workplace because for them it was the last sanctum of male culture. It was away from the world of women, away from responsibility and children and the civilized society's cultural restraints. In the plant, they could regale in the rough and tumble of a masculine world of physical harshness; of constant swearing and rough behavior, of half-serious fighting and competition with each other, and more serious fighting with the boss. It was 8 hours full of filth and dirt and grease and grime and swear—manual labor, a *manly* atmosphere. They could be vulgar and obscene, talk about football and car repairs. Let their hair down.

The male workplace culture functions as a form of rebellion against the discipline of their society. Outside the workplace, the women are the guardians of the community. They raise the kids and enforce some degree of family and collective responsibility. They frequently have to force this upon individualistic males. The men would rather go drinking or play baseball or do their own thing while the women mind the kids, wash the family's clothes, attend to problems with the neighbors and in-laws, and so on.

Like rebellious teenage sons escaping
mother’s control, male wage earners enter the factory gate; there, in their male culture, they feel free of the restraints of these repressive standards.

The manly factory culture becomes an outlet for accumulated anger and frustration. But this is a vicious circle—for the tedious work and the subordination to the bosses in the plant is in large part the very cause of the male worker’s dissatisfaction. He is bitter against a world that has kept him down, exploited his labor power, bent him to meet the needs of production and profit, cheated him of a better life, makes the daily grind so harsh.

Working men are everywhere treated like dirt; at the bottom of the heap, under the thumb of the boss at work, scorned by polite society. But, the men can say, we are better than them all in certain ways—“man’s work”. Physically tough. The women can’t do it, the bankers and politicians neither. Tough work gives a sense of masculine superiority and this compensates for being stepped on and ridiculed. There’s some ways we’re better than all of that Fine Society.
Not all working men, of course, share these attitudes. All one can say is that it is more or less true for a sizeable portion. Furthermore, this male workplace culture is not one-sided — it contains a fundamentally positive sense of class value. The workingmen contrast themselves to other classes and take pride in having concrete grasp on the physical world around them. The big shots can talk fancy and manipulate words, flout their elegant manners. But we control the nuts and bolts of production, have our hands on the machines and gears and valves and wires and lathes and pumps and furnaces and spindles and batteries. We're the masters of the real and the concrete, manipulate the steel and the lead and the wood and the oil and the aluminum. What we know is genuine — the real and specific world of daily life.

Workingmen are the wheels that make the society go round, the creators of social value and wealth. There would be no fancy society, no civilized conditions, if not for our labor. The male workers are contemptuous of the mild-mannered parasites and scornful of the soft spoken vultures who live off our daily sweat: the managers and directors, the judges and entertainers, the lawyers, the coupon clippers, the administrators, the insurance brokers, the crooked legislators . . . all those who profit from the shop floor, who build careers for themselves with the wealth we create. All that social overhead depends upon our mechanical skills, our concrete knowledge, our calloused hands, our technical ingenuity, our strained muscles and backs.

The Dignity of Labor

But society treats us like a pack of dumb animals, mere bodies with no minds or culture. We're physical labor power, the intelligence belongs in the management class. Workers are sneeringly regarded as society's bodies, the middle-class as society's mind. One is superior, the other inferior. One is fully human, the other is less than human, close to animals . . . society's beasts of burden.

The male workplace culture tends to worship this self-identity of vulgar physicalness. It is as if the men enjoy wallowing in a masculine filth.

Sexism undermines and subverts the proud tradition of the dignity of labor. It turns a class consciousness upside down by accepting and then glorifying the middle-class view of manual labour and physical activity as inferior, animalistic, crude. When workers identify with the savages the boss class sees them as, they develop a contempt for themselves.

It is self-contempt to accept the scornful labels, the negative definitions, the insulting, de-humanized treatment. The cartoon-like stereotypes of class chauvinism: the Super-masculine Menials. The factory goons. The industrial sweathogs.

Remember Peter: he said he couldn't respect a woman who would come here to work in this hell-hole. It's obviously a place where he felt he lost his own self-respect.

My reply to him was that he shouldn't put up with that rotten treatment, that the men deserved better also. We should be treated with dignity. Respect yourself,—fight back like a man, not a macho fool who glorifies that which degrades him.

Everything gets turned inside out. It's seen as "manly" to be treated as less than a man, a strictly physical, instinctual creature.

Another contradiction: this is precisely how sexist society treats women: mindless bodies, pieces of flesh, "biology is destiny". You would think that male factory workers and the women's movement would be natural allies . . . they would speak the same language.

They share a common experience of being used as objects, de-humanized by those on top. Men in the factory are treated not as persons, but as bodies, replaceable numbers, commodities, faceless factors of production, pieces of capital to be shuffled around at will.

The working men's and women's struggles revolve around similar things. The abortion campaigns, for example: reproductive freedom and the right to control your own body. Is this not what the fight for health and safety on the shop floor is about? To have some control over our bodies, not let the bastards do what they want with our life and limb, to wreck us in the search for higher profits.

The demand for reproductive freedom of Choice—is this not somewhat like what the right to refuse unsafe work is about? Let us
decide.

Male chauvinism turns working men away from their natural allies, away from a rational and collective solution to their problems, diverting them from class unity with their sisters into oppressors and degraders of their sisters.

Robbed of their real manhood, they get a false sense of manhood in lording it over the women.

Many men at Westinghouse felt they were fighting a losing battle anyhow in trying to keep the women out of our department. Times had changed. In this day and age you couldn’t stop workplace integration. It was happening everywhere, the law was on their side, most of the wives and daughters worked, the Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) across the street was now hiring women, etc. Also, new technology was eroding the heavy manual labour. You saw the engineers and rate-men redesigning the jobs-making them simpler, easier, more standardized, taking the strength and skill out of them.

**Playing The Foreman At Home**

Many men compensate for their wage labor status in the workplace by becoming the Boss at home. Treated terribly in the factory, he plays foreman after work and rules with authority over the wife and kids. He thus gains at home that independent status he loses on the shop floor. He becomes a part time boss himself. The women are his servants and this becomes key to his identity and sense of self-esteem. Working-class Patriarchs — rulers of the roost.

This sense of authority has an economic underpinning. The male worker’s role as Primary Breadwinner is critical — the economic function of his paycheck is to give him power over the family and status in society. And it also makes him the beneficiary of the woman’s unpaid labor in the household.

A wage laborer not only lacks independence, he also lacks property, having nothing but his labor power to sell. Sexism gives him the sense of Property, as owner of the family. His relation to a woman (wife or girlfriend) is critical. She is his sexual property. Workers who have nothing can find fulfillment as owners. As Elvis sang, “You are my only possession, you are my everything.” This domination/ownership of a woman becomes basic to how he sees himself.

All of the above are powerful individualist pressures, the traits of the business class: foreman of the family, man of property, possessiveness. These elevate the wage earner above the category of downtrodden common labor, deflecting him away from the road of collective struggle with his brothers and sisters to change their conditions.

Capitalism is based on competitiveness and encourages everyone to be better than the next guy, to rise up on the backs of your neighbors. Similarly the male chauvinist typically seeks superiority over others, of both sexes. Males tend to be competitive, always putting down one another, constantly playing one-upmanship. Men even express appreciation and affection for each other through good-natured mutual insults.

Sexist culture undermines the working-class traditions of equality and solidarity. It provides a recruiting ground for labor’s adversaries. Over the years at Westinghouse I had noticed that a high proportion of workers who became foremen were extreme chauvinists—sexual braggarts, degraders of women, aggressive, individualist, ambitious . . . ever willing to push other workers around.

Male competition is counterproductive in the context of the shop or union, where we ought to cooperate as equals and seek common solutions rather than be always bickering and out-doing the other guy. The male ego makes for bad comradeship, bad brotherhood. It also makes it difficult for chauvinistic men to look and deal objectively with situations. Their fragile egos are always on the line. They have to keep up a facade of superiority, are unable to handle criticism, no matter how constructive. Their chauvinist crutches makes them subjective, irrational . . . and unreliable. And often self-destructive, as with men who want to work or drive dangerously.

Male workingmen pay a high price for the very limited material benefits they get from sexist structures. It’s the bosses who make the big bucks, have the big egos and enjoy the real power from the inferior treatment of women.
The Next Round

For the first few months after the Invasion, the women worked mainly in the iron area. They proved quite capable and competent. Soon Betty emerged as the informal group leader and co-ordinator, even the men taking the lead from her.

The next battle was to assure that the women would get a crack at the more skilled and high-paying assembly jobs up the floor. When these became available, the company moved to exclude the women and tried to promote junior men. We had a new fight on our hands.

Unlike before, the women were there to speak for themselves and take on their varied opponents. Also, there were now stewards in other departments who would back up the right of women to equal opportunity. The shop floor was less hostile, many of the men being quietly sympathetic or neutral.

The fight was done more collectively. As their steward, I often sat at the women's lunch tables and we plotted and conspired in common. We discussed every step of the campaign, made common strategies, acted as a group, assigned everyone a special task after these sessions, etc.

The bosses did their own scheming and counter-maneuvres but were rattled by this determined collective activity they saw.

We pushed and won. The women were given training up the floor. They made out. They had broken another barrier.

In the midst of all this, the “Women Back Into Stelco” campaign was to have an anniversary rally on International Women’s Day 1981. I handed out their leaflets at the women’s tables. The women at the lunch tables all objected to their leaflet: we’re all for equal pay and opportunity but we’re no women’s libbers; who the hell do those women think they are anyhow, and so on. I jokingly said they were all hypocrites, since they themselves had just won a big fight for female equality. That’s different, they said, and so on. The lunch bell broke up our heated dispute and I left for my job up the floor. On my way back at 2 p.m., I passed the assembly area where the women were working. A Woman’s Day leaflet was pinned up on every transformer a woman was working on. The males were fiercely told that the poster stands for women’s rights, and that’s us and we’re here to stay and pity any man who tries to take these down! And the posters remained there for as long as those jobs were on the floor.

Around that time I saw a copy of Steelabour, the newspaper put out by the Canadian section of the United Steelworkers union. It had a big front page color photo of a woman miner. The article inside told of a movie the union had made about the fight of women out West to break into the previously all-male mines. The paper supported the movement of women into traditionally male jobs and said the union would distribute the movie to its locals.

I was quite surprised to see this. We had had to battle the union establishment as well as the company in our campaigns. I thought of how much easier it would all have been if our union had backed up its staff reps, used its considerable resources to promote workplace integration.

With such support, we would be capable, as the movie title put it, of “Moving Mountains”.

While all the men still maintained the women were inferior workers and could never do “men’s work,” they were generally cooperative with the women. There was, however, a continual bickering between the sexes, which occasionally turned nasty.

The foremen were always fostering sex divisions. They would tell the guys stories of all the mistakes the women supposedly made on the
job; or spread insulting sexist remarks about them. They would play games with the work assignments—reserve the worst jobs for the men, telling them the women couldn't do those. The men would thus have their self-superiority boosted and also resent the women's so-called privileges. The women would be grateful for not having to do those jobs.

Some of the supervisors became quite skilled at buddying up with the guys and forging common cause against the women. They developed a masculine solidarity with some and fed their ever enlarging male egos. They would thereby get those guys to break the safety rules, out-produce, rat on other workers and so forth. The male bond proved stronger here than the union bond and our collective strength suffered as a result.

The women acted as part of the shop collective. When we put in a department grievance against a boss doing hourly work on off-hours, the women were the first to sign and circulate it in their areas. The same with petitions, or grievances against the company revising job descriptions and lowering the rates.

**Woman's World**

As for myself, I was learning and changing a lot as a result of these experiences. The sessions at the women's tables affected me in many ways. They were good talks, peaceful and constructive, with no fighting and argument, no competition... all of us sensibly talking about a common problem and figuring out how to handle it as a group. It was a relaxed and peaceful half hour—even when we had major problems and serious differences.

This was a marked contrast to the male lunch tables, which were unusually boisterous and raucous during those months. There was a lot of yelling and shouting, mutual insults, fist pounding, throwing things at one another, making shocking noises.

When you ate at the women's tables, you sat down to rest and relax. When you ate at the men's tables, you sat down to fight.

I had read and heard a lot from my feminist friends about this so-called women's World of warmth, cooperation and friendship, constrained to the men's norm of aggression, violence and competition. Although I had always advocated women's liberation and respected the women's movement I paid only lip service, if that, to this distinction, and was in fact more often scornful of this "women's world". Sissy stuff. Over the years I had become a more aggressive male, which I saw as distinct from being a chauvinist or sexist male. In the world of constant struggle, I thought, you had to be aggressive or go under. We'll have peace and love in the new socialist society... some distant day.

As a unionist, it became very clear to me that the women almost naturally acted like a collective. And in those months of going back and forth between the men's and women's lunch tables, I took a long and serious look at this women's world. There was obviously something genuine there and it seemed to offer a better way. It also became obvious to me that the gap between the sexes was enormous and that men and women were far from speaking a common language.

It was an unnerving but pleasant experience to sit down among friends, no competitions and put-downs, not to have to watch out for flying objects, not be on the alert for nerve-shattering noises, in a non-threatening atmosphere. I learned from these experiences and developed some respect for this Women's World.

**A Women's Committee?**

Gender conflicts were breaking out all over the plants as the women progressively moved into male areas. Very often the men fought back and refused to train women. Here and there, all-male departments threatened to wildcat to keep the women out.

These conflicts intruded into the local union divisions and politics in the strangest ways. We had developed a rank-and-file caucus at the Beach Rd. plant, mainly stewards and other activists.

We were in constant and bitter conflict with the conservative Old Guard of the union. Initially, we were all male. The women's Invasion split us. Some of our stewards responded to peer group pressure and were in fact leading the anti-woman actions!
Unionism is not male bonding and so we had some sharp internal struggles over this. At the same time, a younger militant woman, Mary, joined us. She was a hell-raiser for women's rights in the plant. Things quickly came to a head in our group. Most of the men opted for women's rights, the strong sexists withdrew, we included a plank for women's equality in our program and Mary become one of our leading spokespersons.

One of our priorities was to set up a women's committee in the local. It was critical for the women to organize themselves into some sort of autonomous structure.

Such a women's committee would become an important force against the company in the shop. It would also better raise to the fore women's demands in the local, push the union to fight for equal treatment, paid maternity leave and other women's concerns. It would be a new way of combatting sexism among the male workers — in the shop and at local meetings, the men would have to deal with a group of fighting women unwilling to put up with the old crap.

The women's committee would also allow the women a forum of their own to develop a common outlook and strategy, to collectively develop their own priorities and policies. Over time a women's committee would develop independent and strong women's leaders, speaking and acting on their own behalf.

This would also remedy the lop sided development that had occurred at the Beach Rd. plant. The women who had come over from Switchgear were unwilling to get involved in the union, given their bad experiences with the hostile leadership. The defense of their rights had therefore become overdependent on a few male stewards, acting as "protectors" of the women. An autonomous women's organization would leave all that behind: women would represent women's interests, direct their struggle themselves.

With all this in mind, we set out in the fall of 1981 to get a local union women's committee, Mary in the lead, backed up by a group of women in the shop and our militant caucus. We knew it would be a tough fight, given the sexist and authoritarian nature of the old guard.

The battle extended over several months. The old guard was led by the union's national president and fought us tooth-and-nail. At some executive meetings and a number of tumultuous membership meetings, they railed and thundered against the very idea of a women's committee. It would split the membership, the problems were all imaginary, it was an anti-union idea, a form of separatism the union had always rejected, nothing but a foil to discredit our fine leadership, and so on.

Where they had the upper hand, this was railroading through with a lot of heavy-handed intimidation. At other times it was different. At one noteworthy membership meeting, for example, very large numbers from the shop attended and backed our position on this and other issues. The highlight was a long speech by Alice, a woman from my department. She blasted the leadership, recalled the many instances where they had refused to fight for the women, pointing to specific officials. Given that there were threats of expulsion by the old guard, she emphasized that all the women would back up any of our male shop leaders under the gun since they had fought for the women's rights.

The men and women of the shop floor had here forged a unity in struggle. Alice declared that none of the women would let the executive carry on like a dictatorship. When one of the bully-boys started his patented tactic of challenging his opponents to a fist fight, large numbers rose to take him on and the platform quickly changed the subject.

We were eventually defeated on this issue and no women's committee was ever formed. Over time, however, the leadership's public rhetoric changed. By 1983 most of the local and national officials had learned how to voice a non-sexist position on women's rights — without, however, doing much to advance that cause. The local president would occasionally boast of the success of women making it into nontraditional jobs at Westinghouse.

The Recession Hits

In the Spring of 1982, the recession finally caught up with us at Westinghouse . . . continuous layoffs in every Division. With that, we were in deep trouble.

We had made a lot of progress in the integra-
tion of the women when the work was plenty. On this issue, as on others, the shop floor had weapons to wield against the bosses—they needed our work and cooperation. But this leverage disappeared when the work got slack. Our bargaining power shrank. With production going steadily downward, the shop floor was robbed of the means to fight the company with. Our instruments of struggle were disappearing.

And once the spiral of layoffs begin, everyone is afraid for his or her own job and this concern overrides all others.

The company wasted no time in rolling back the clock. They vastly exaggerated the future job losses and overposted the surplus/layoff lists. They did this constantly, keeping workers on edge from day to day. They cut back on whatever inadequate seniority protection was in the contract. Junior workers stayed in while senior ones were often railroaded out. They manipulated job classifications, combined and recombined jobs, put people in categories such as “loan” to avoid seniority rules, refused trial and training periods, sheltered favorites and so forth.

Workers were pitted against workers. Everyone was in competition for the shrinking number of jobs.

The company had all the cards and it seemed futile to resist. You’d hold the fort in one area; protect 4 workers. The next week they’d arrange for massive shifts and those 4 plus 7 more would be ousted, their jobs abolished or bumped or whatever . . . or everyone put on short time. There was a lot of demoralization. The company made examples of fighters and protected the ratters. Everyone was being cowed into going along with the company, begging not to be axed.

The economy was in deep recession, there were no jobs out there, anywhere. Once out, you probably wouldn’t work again. People with 30 years seniority went out the door while others with 5 years stayed in. The contract and union were paper protection. Better roll with the punches, please the foreman or you’d be next.

With the power relationships so altered, the company assaulted us on every front. They revived their timeless dream of a “management-controlled plant.” They became arrogant and insulting to the militant stewards. They went after hard-won department traditions on wage rates and soon got people working at jobs above their labor grades. They shuffled people around at will. As the months went by, management gradually took back unto itself more and more of the power and authority it had been forced to give up to the shop floor over the years.

It was a tide you couldn’t stop. Bitterness and frustration were everywhere. Seniority meant nothing, all our time-honored rights were out the window. Resentment was also directed to union officialdom, who too readily went with the tide, leaving us defenseless against a vengeful management. When you really needed the union, it wasn’t there. There was a lot of despair.

Management retrenched on health and safety, given the fear that gripped everyone. With the hobs disappearing, workers competed with each other to be able to weld in the hazardous gases we had been struggling to get rid of. Those jobs became prizes, not ones to be refused. And the guy who battled for a month to be able to bump into the shipping floor was not going to refuse to spray the toxic leaded paint the moment he got the job.

The company went after the women. They were to be weeded out of the plant, despite seniority or skills. With few exceptions, they posted the women regardless of years of ser-
vice. They claimed these women had no trans-
ferrable skills and shunted most of them to the
least skilled job in the plant, "chip and grind." 
That job soon became almost a women's job
ghetto, or, more accurately, a revolving door as
more senior women came in and bumped out
the less senior ones. The company gave a nasty
twist here. This was the worst job in the plant —
 heavy, dirty, rotten, unpleasant. You'd
almost want to be bumped out of it. A few
women simply declined to exercise their seniori-
ty when they got their notices, being unwilling
to suffer through chip and grind.

The progress the men had made seemed to
vanish. From the first day of the layoff an-
nouncements, many of them rallied to the call
of Get the Women Out First. The harassers and
psycho-sexists came out again into the open and
campaigned full blast. They found many sym-
pathetic responses on the shop floor: protect
the breadwinners, all the women out before the
men. They had no right to be there in the first
place, displacing Heads of Families. Were these
men to be thrown out in the street and whole
families suffer while women occupy jobs that
are rightfully ours? They can't do the work
anyhow. No women should be allowed to bump
a male since they're not physically capable of
doing everything we can.

It was war of the sexes all over again, but far
worse in this context. The situation allowed no
leeway or give. There was some baiting of the
women. The atmosphere in the plant became
ugly at times, a hateful place to be in, for all
workers.

The company used the changed mood to try
to do a job on the shopfloor militants. In my
case, some of the guys loudly expressed their
anger at me for having helped bring the women
into the Division in the first place.

Devastating as its effect was, the recession
was not all powerful. We managed to win all
our health and safety battles in this period. The
plant continued to re-elect militants as shop
stewards. The guys in my department were
noticably more co-operative with the women

But the most interesting and telling re-
responses to the situation can be seen in how the
women acted as they were being given the gears
by the company...and what this provoked
amongst the men.

Some of the women gave in to the inevitable,
but many fought back and fought well. Jill was
slated for layoff and designated to bump into a
heavy job in an all-male department. Everyone
said she couldn't do the job; she herself was
convinced of the same. Besides, that manager
was the worst of any in keeping women out of
his department. Some of us persuaded Jill to try
the job. She didn't want to, but gave in — part-
ly to please us, and partly out of an obligation
to seniority principles and women's rights.

She had two weeks to learn. The guys were
un-cooperative. But Jill became more deter-
mined as the days went by and she discovered
that she was capable of doing that job. She got
angry that the bastards were trying to deny her
her right. Some of us pressured her male co-
workers and the steward. They began to co-
operate. Many of them pitched in, recorded her
successes so they would be future grievance wit-
nesses. Jill did well and at the end of the two
weeks, the manager reluctantly told her that she
had the job.

Big victory. Smiles all around. One week
later, the company arranged to have a senior
male bump her out. That department is still all-

This and similar incidents also show that
many of the men had obviously changed a lot as
a result of the women coming into our Division.
There was no going back to their previous out-
right chauvinism. Whereas years before they
fought the Invasion of the Women, they now
backed up Jill and other women in trouble.
Mind you, they had to be pushed and pressured
at first, and not all joined in, but it was nothing
like the resistance of years earlier. When the
chips were down, many men took their stand
with their sisters against the company ...

Maureen is a long service worker. While
junior men stayed in our department, she was
shunted to the dreaded chip and grind. But she
was furious about the whole situation and
decided to go out fighting. She is small and
thin, but managed to do the job quite competently. The boss then called her in and said that while she is doing alright, he is worried about her. Something might happen, he was nervous and so he would have to lay her off. Maureen put up a stink. The boss then said that there were certain extra-heavy tasks a woman would not be able to do. Maureen dragged him into the shop and in full view of all the men, demanded he try to do that task. He couldn't do it, and was shamed and humiliated. Okay, she said, if you can't do it, then don't hold it against the women.

The men had stood aside at first, but now quickly rallied to her side. They helped Maureen out and kept the bosses at bay, the union stewards in the lead. She kept the job ... and was bumped out into another plant ... to another chip and grind job. But she was able to keep that job, again with the co-operation of her male co-workers.

**Beyond the Workplace**

The women in the labor movement have made gains largely on their own, confronting their various adversaries with their organized collective power. The men have been very hesitant to give support and have sometimes opposed them. But unions were founded to fight for equal treatment for all workers; an injury to one is an injury to all. The men unionists ought to take on that fight for the sisters' advancement more forcefully and openly battle their foes — the employer and also the chauvinists, harassers, sexist bullies within our own midst. Sexism is anti-labor and it shouldn't be tolerated, even passively, by the men. Take them on like we take on the squealers, brown-nosers, back-stabbers in the shop — opponents of our common struggle.

All of this we do to aid the women who are the prime victims of sexist structures and behavior. But the fight against sexism is also a fight for the men. Sexism is destructive of the labor movement and the working man's struggle. It has led men to confuse their class interests, to side with the boss time after time, to seek false and illusory solutions to their situation as exploited wage earners, to escape the injustices of class by lording it over the women, degrading their sisters.

Sexism instills the ideas and values of the enemy class in our ranks. It ingrains false ideas of manhood and strength. It cultivates individualist attitudes and competitive behavior.
when what we need is collective struggle. It de-
ludes men and pushes them into irrational ac-
tions. It channels the men's anger and rebellion
along destructive paths — destructive to them-
selves as well as to their sisters.

This sexist madness is part of how capitalism
keeps the male workers in line, and as such men
have to openly fight it. It's anti-labor, anti-
working-class, it's our enemy. We should so
label it and treat it. In doing so, we are fighting
for our own liberation as well as that of our
sisters.

That fight goes beyond the workplace. The
sexist structures of family and community per-
petuate those at work. And the problems are in
those structures, those ways of living, not just
in men's heads.

One of these is the unequal sharing of com-

munity responsibilities, particularly in the rais-
ing of children.

Another is authoritarianism. Fear of authori-
ty keeps working men down. Good unionists
have rebelled against the authority of the boss
and the society, but they often re-assert that
authority over their fellow workers. Union of-

cce can sometimes become a power trip for

male Presidents, chief stewards, staff reps.
They want to run the union like the army. They
become our foremen, think like patriarchs.
This is harmful to the labor movement because it
is anti-democratic and restricts participation,
hibits the development of a self-reliant rank-
and-file, the source of real power. It is allied to
the style of "business unionism," where
authoritarian control and a passive workforce
are part of a sweetheart relation to the boss, the
staff rep substituting himself for a democratic
and active membership.

Authoritarianism does set union leaders
apart from the ranks. For example, rather than
openly discussing mutual concerns with their
brothers and sisters in the work force, such of-
ficials meet in secret and then hide their dif-
fences to confront the ranks and bulldoze or
"sell" united leadership positions.

The trouble is that these are methods we
develop to handle the company, our adver-
saries; with workers we discuss common prob-
lems as brothers and sisters. Such as approach
assumes that union officials have interests
separate from the membership. Officials ought
to lead, but their function is to serve the mem-
bership, not be served by them. We draw the
line of Us and Them between the workers and
employers, not between union officials and
workers.

I learned about the errors of authoritari-

anism through some of the experiences in the
shop. Over the years I had always seen it impor-
tant for union activists to be non-competitive
with fellow workers, to talk and reason as
equals, listen, learn, try to convince, make
common cause, tease in a spirit of friendship. It
was important not to put down, make fun of
others, or threaten and intimidate. Those were
the weapons you used against adversaries, not
Us. We're trying to build a self-confident and
open-eyed group of workers, and you can't do
that by humiliating or bullying or manipula-
tion. Nor by pushing people around. That's
how you fight your enemies.

I had taken a leaf from the book of the
psycho-sexists when I challenged the masculini-
ty of male fellow workers during the campaign
to get the women into our department. But I
also took a leaf from the book of the union
leadership. I was intimidating my fellow
workers. I was up against the wall and so lashed
out with the weapons of the union bully boys. I
used my position as steward and my resources
as a strong personality to cow and frighten the
guys, to push them into a position where they
behaved the right way.

It worked, in the short run. I didn't resort to
those methods again. I was disturbed by what
had happened and chose not to use those tac-
tics. Because all I would be doing was to rein-
force the sexism I was combatting.

Authoritarianism, intimidation, aggression —
these are a basic part of what sexism is all
about. You can't separate aggression from sex-

ism. Aggressive ways of relating to people is
part of what sexism is. To be a chauvinist is to
establish a competitive and power relationship
to your own people, to seek to dominate your
brothers and sisters. To treat Us as Them.

You can't combat sexism by reinforcing the
fear of authority, or by intimidating the men.
By becoming the loudest shouter at the male
lunch table. The peaceful women's lunch table
is stronger because it is noncompetitive and col-
lective. During the upgrading campaigns, I saw
the bosses were a lot more scared by the quiet women then they were by the mouthy men.

You can use force and authority to outlaw discriminatory practices and structures, but sexist attitudes cannot be fought with the weapons of authority. Authoritarianism is part of the problem of sexism and so it has to be challenged and undermined at the same time. The male anti-sexist fight has to be put within a democratic framework of rank-and-file interests.

In Ontario, as elsewhere, the affirmative action programs in the labor federations have had the backing of the male hierarchy, which is fine. But it is only part of the answer. Labor has to go beyond paper resolutions and beyond placing women in top leadership positions. The struggle against sexism has to be deepened where it really counts, on the shop floor and within the locals.

The militant men in the labor movement have to organize themselves and speak out publicly: express an anti-sexist position that reflects the mens’ experiences, that speaks in a masculine voice and develops its own unique language. Such a position would label sexism as anti-labor and show how it is harmful to the male wage earners. This rank-and-file male current would be distinct from the women’s voice but allied in the common fight.

Men need to speak to men about sexism. It is difficult for the women because they are confronting the men and are part of the problem as the men see it. The women have been the most dynamic part of the labor movement for the past two decades — they have-organized and theorized in new ways and taught all of labor. The militant working men have to learn from them and also confront on their own the big issues the women’s movement has raised — equal treatment, union democracy, non-competitive formats, humanizing the use of power, the relation between community and workplace problems, the family, sexuality and repression, authoritarianism. Those issues have to be debated amongst the men, in their own way, developing their own non-sexist answers.

The woman’s world has enriched and strengthened the world of labor in many ways. Men have to recognize and appreciate these contributions. Part of this involves recasting the conception of work and labor as something uniquely masculine, accepting and learning from the distinct methods, rhythms and styles of the women miners, assemblers, and machinists.

When the women first entered the coke ovens and blast furnaces at Stelco, many of the men threw their sexist male culture in the womens’ faces, pornography and all. If you want a man’s job, they said, you have to take this obnoxiousness. It comes with the work.

We have to declare that the pornography does not come with the work, is not part and parcel of masculine workplace culture. We have to develop and strengthen the tradition of the dignity of labor, not let it be warped and perverted by the indignity of sexism.

Workingmen share basic common interests with their sisters; when more of them recognize these, define and speak about them in their own way and act on these common interests together with the women, we’d then have the ability to start moving the mountains that stand in our way.

Stan Gray worked at Westinghouse for 11 years and he is now director of an occupational health clinic sponsored by Local 1005 of the United Steelworkers in Hamilton, Ontario.
Workers' Struggles, Past and Present

A "Radical America" Reader

Edited by James Green

Contents
Introduction by James Green

Part One: The Struggle for Control
The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism, by Harold M. Baro• Four Decades of Change: Black Workers in Southern Textiles, 1941–1981, by Mary Fredericksen• The Stop Watch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World, by Mike Davis• The Clerical Sisterhood: Rationalization and the Work Culture of Saleswomen in American Department Stores, 1890–1960, by Susan Porter Benson• Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes, by Mary Bularzik

Part Two: Organizing the Unorganized
Working Class Self-Activity, by George Rawick• Union Fever: Organizing among Clerical Workers, 1900–1930, by Roslyn L. Feldberg• Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, by Roy Rosenzweig• The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930s: The Case of Steel, by Stoughton Lynd• A. Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism, by Manning Marable• Organizing against Sexual Harassment, by the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion


Selected from the pages of Radical America, one of the few New Left publications originating in the 1960s to survive into the eighties, these articles are a rare combination of labor and social history written by engaged scholars for a popular audience, as well as contemporary studies of labor movement politics and workplace struggles written by worker intellectuals and activist historians. Long before mainstream scholars of American history, the writers in Radical America were focusing on the work experiences as seen from the shopfloor and on the special issues of women and blacks.

REGULAR PRICE $9.95
NOW only $6.50

with a new one-year ($15) subscription OR a one-year renewal to a present subscription.

SEND $21.50 BY CHECK OR MONEY ORDER WITH THE TEAR-SHEET ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE.

Temple UNIVERSITY PRESS
“RADICAL AMERICA: A 15 YEAR ANTHOLOGY” - Special retrospective with selection of articles that have appeared in RA since 1967: Black Liberation, Work-place Struggles, Feminism, Community Activism, American Left, Culture and Art.


“FACING REACTION” - Special double issue on the New Right and America in the 80s...Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 1981)...160 pages, illustrated.


Featuring: Interview with Carlos Fuentes; SPECIAL SECTION: Reviews of recent Radical History on workers, blacks, rural populists, auto workers and responses to industrialization; POSTAL WORKERS AND SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT by Peter Rachleff; PEACE AT ANY PRICE?: FEMINISM, ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND THE DISARMAMENT MOVEMENT by the editors; SOLIDARITY, COLD WAR AND THE LEFT by Frank Brodhead; E.R.A., R.I.P.-BUT HOW HARD SHOULD WE CRY AT THE FUNERAL? by Anita Diamant; and, poetry, movie satires and more.

Radical America (USPS 873-880)
38 Union Square No. 14
Somerville, MA 02143
ISSN 0033-7617

Second Class Postage
Paid at Boston, MA
and additional Post Offices