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THE AMERICAN OWL

PROPOSITION 13: BAD NEWS FOR PUBLIC WORKERS

Opposition to increasing real estate taxes imposed by local governments in the United States reached a critical point last June when voters in California adopted Proposition 13. The measure drastically cut property taxes and thereby slashed local government revenues. Proposition 13 has also strengthened the nationwide tax revolt; similar proposals will be put before the voters in many states in coming months.

However, Proposition 13 is a troublesome measure whose consequences may have little relation to the intentions of people who voted for it. The bill was supported by a mixed group of real estate developers, large corporations, and individual homeowners. The message homeowners intended to convey was frustration with soaring tax bills and wasteful government spending.

In the short term this group has indeed won both a symbolic victory - cheer for local democracy - and a financial gain. The question is whether this is worth the long-term loss of public services resulting from reduced public revenues. Critics of the bill say it is certain to cause population shrinkage and a loss of essential services such as schools, libraries, and hospitals. More time is needed, however, for a proper evaluation of these predictions, especially since California currently has

a large budget surplus to fall back on.

One already visible reaction to the spreading tax revolt in California and elsewhere is a toughening of public sector collective bargaining. Local officials have been demanding more concessions from the unions, and public workers have often resorted to strikes to resist massive layoffs. During the summer months strike actions occurred in cities such as Philadelphia, Cleveland, Kansas City, San Antonio, and Memphis.

In Memphis, police staged an eight-day wildcat strike that was soon joined by the city's firefighters. Within 24 hours the area looked like a war zone: a curfew kept people off the streets from 6:00 PM to 8:00 AM (later extended to 10:00 AM), more than a thousand National Guard troops were called in to patrol the streets, sanitation workers had allowed garbage to pile up, and sports and cultural events were cancelled. And this all occurred just as 600,000 Elvis Presley fans came to town to honor the singer's birthplace on the first anniversary of his death.

With such tight security there was only a small increase in criminal activity, though some looting did occur one night during a blackout which lasted for three hours.

Despite the Mayor's original refusal to negotiate, the strikers

had a victory in the end, and returned to work with sizeable wage increases. The strike also had historical significance, since it was in Memphis ten years ago that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated while lending support to a strike of black sanitation workers.

Most groups of public workers in recent months have been less successful than those in Memphis. Wage restraints attached to federal spending programs and Proposition 13-type controls greatly limit what city governments can afford. The situation is worsened by moves to limit spending at the national level, so that Washington cannot be depended on to make up for reduced local revenues.

In the long run, no doubt, both voters and public workers will suffer from reductions in municipal revenue unless money is found elsewhere. Reliance on the federal government will not provide sufficient funds and has the negative effect of hastening the trend toward fiscal centralization. The other possible source of funds is the private sector, but so far it has escaped voter attention.

In California, real estate investors have saved huge sums thanks to Proposition 13. True, some tenant groups have demanded rent reductions and citizen's groups have called on corporations to use some of their tax savings for public interest projects. But Americans are slow to demand that business pay its fair share. Yet without this additional money, everyone in the cities will suffer, not only the poor and public sector workers but the tax rebels as well.

THE NEW YORK NEWSPAPER STRIKE

Since August 9th the people of New York City have been riding the subways to work without the comfort of their usual daily newspapers. The *New York Times*, *The Daily News*, and *The New York Post* have been shut down by a strike of workers who

operate the papers' giant printing presses. So far little or no progress has been made during intermittent negotiations between the Printing Pressmen's Union and the publishers. Both sides seem ready to endure a long walkout similar to the 114-day strike of New York's daily papers in 1962 and 1963.

The pressmen's strike was the culmination of efforts by the ten craft unions and the Newspaper Guild (which includes editorial and commercial workers) to resist repeated management efforts to make widespread layoffs, speed up work, reduce benefits, and introduce the newest in newspaper production technology.

In the six months before union contracts expired, the publishers of the *News* and *Post* put out special experimental editions using executives and non-union labor. In May the *News* management unilaterally voided provisions of the Guild contract dealing with union membership requirements and grievance procedures. And when the Guild launched a strike against the same paper in June, publisher "Tex" James went ahead and produced an edition with non-union personnel. But this attempt to weaken the union was itself defeated after two days. The delivery truck drivers' union, which at first agreed to deliver the scab editions, broke that agreement with management following violent attacks on drivers and firebombing of trucks by striking workers.

The strike ended after a week and the Guild was successful in avoiding the worst of management's proposals. But the same issues emerged again in August, when the pressmen walked out in response to the posting of new work rules by the publishers.

Within a broader context, the current turmoil in New York's newspaper industry is part of a continuing labor-management struggle over the conditions of modernization. The owners are determined to use sophisticated machinery for what

at one time required the combined skill of hundreds of people. Production workers have been struggling over the terms of this transformation for decades.

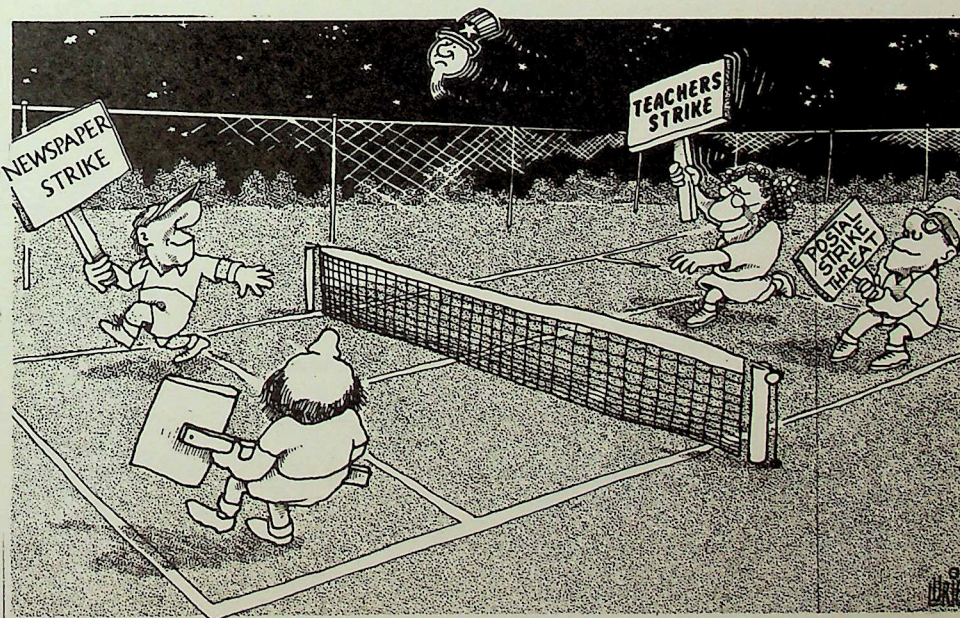
In July 1974 the publishers achieved a major victory when the once-powerful Local 6 of the International Typographers' Union signed an 11-year contract which gave management a free hand to automate, in exchange for lifetime guarantees for the union's remaining members. With this key union under control, the publishers then doubled their efforts to undermine the power of the other groups of workers as new photo-composition equipment was brought in to replace the old linotype machines and scores of workers.

This management strategy is by no means limited to New York. Newspaper publishers around the country have been acquiring the new technology and seeking to eliminate troublesome workers at a rapid rate. At the *Washington Post* the same executives who permitted the Watergate exposé crushed a pressmen's walkout in 1975-1976 and succeeded in replacing union members with permanent strikebreakers. And the *Post* management has refused to

negotiate with the Guild to replace a contract that expired two years ago.

At stake in the present newspaper negotiations in New York is, on one level, a traditional type of battle by workers against speed-ups and layoffs. But beyond that, the struggle here is significant in terms of the role that newspaper workers play in the process of redevelopment that business and government are promoting for New York. City planners have proclaimed that New York will soon become the pre-eminent communications city in the world. Most of the small amount of manufacturing will be eliminated, and new "knowledge industries" will take over.

For the planners this clearly requires modernization of the existing communications industry and cooperation from the relevant labor force in order to attract the desired investment. The newspaper showdown this Fall reflects a general aim by the publishers to weaken worker militancy, but thus far the workers have refused to give in. So New Yorkers will probably ride the subways *sans* news for quite some time.



"COMPANY TOWNS" IN SPACE

Some of the largest U.S.-based transnational corporations are on their way to becoming transplanetary as well. A forward-looking group of large companies, including Rockwell and General Electric, have accelerated plans for the development of industrialization in space. An \$8 billion space shuttle vehicle has been completed and is now being tested. Optimistic observers expect regular flights, which will orbit the earth, to begin in the middle of next year. An overall framework for the future of space industrialization is being developed by a special federal study group that will soon release a set of policy recommendations.

Besides the usual telecommunications purposes, the shuttle will be a facility for experimentation and small-scale manufacturing in fields such as processing of special metals, assembling of semi-conductors, and the separation of enzymes from cells. Such operations will take advantage of zero gravity, unlimited vacuums, super high and low temperatures, and plentiful solar energy. Initially the shuttles would carry three astronauts and four technicians, and missions

would run from about seven to thirty days each.

The space industrialization program is being presented as the key to the future vitality of American business, as the beginning of a Third Industrial Revolution. Many analysts are claiming that it will be a short jump from shuttle experiments to full-scale industrial space colonies--in orbit, on the moon, etc. One researcher in this area is already calling them "company towns."

The program has also turned the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which sells space on the shuttles, into the most expensive freight company in the world. Current rate estimates are: about \$18 million for the full shuttle storage compartment; or, for more modest budgets, \$3,000 for 1.5 cubic feet.

Officials say anyone can rent space so long as what you are doing is a bona fide experiment, is for peaceful purposes, and "is in good taste." So far nothing has been said about labor relations in space industry, but one can assume that wages will not be astronomical.

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THE SEABROOK NUKE & THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

For the past two years, the planned nuclear power plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire, has been the focus of the opposition to nuclear energy in the U.S. A series of demonstrations and occupations at the Seabrook site, ranging in size from a handful of people to nearly 20,000 last June, have brought national attention to the struggle. Yet the movement has not succeeded in preventing construction of the plant.

This fall, just as the political and legal challenges to Seabrook appeared to have failed, a new crisis arose for the Public Service Company (PSC), the main investor-owned electric utility sponsoring the plant. Putting aside the usual objections based on environmental risks, activists in New Hampshire built a movement to oppose efforts by PSC to finance Seabrook's rapidly increasing construction costs through sharp increases in electricity prices. The widespread opposition to the increases helped bring about the defeat of Meldrim Thomson--the reactionary governor of the state who is an ardent advocate of "nukes"--in November's election. The victor, Hugh Gallen, based his campaign on opposition to the higher rates. He vowed to support legislation outlawing the inclusion of the capital costs of construction-work-in-progress (CWIP)

in the rate base, the basis on which the allowed profits of utilities are computed. PSC insists it cannot continue to finance its share of Seabrook--whose estimated final cost has risen from \$800 million to \$2.5 billion--without CWIP. Thus, while construction continues on the plant (the first of the two planned reactors is about 13 percent completed), the future of the entire project is uncertain as PSC weighs the alternatives: selling part of its 50 percent share, seeking state guarantees for its bonds, fighting Gallen on CWIP, or giving up on Seabrook entirely. The anti-nuclear movement clearly hopes the last alternative will be the one chosen, but PSC probably feels it has too much invested in its big nuke to give up now.

The future of Seabrook must also be seen in terms of the current overall situation of nuclear power in the U.S.--which includes both the economics of nuclear energy and the strength of the anti-nuke movement.

The nuclear industry itself is facing a crisis which will probably reduce the role of nukes in the general capitalist energy picture. The demand for electricity has not been growing at rates sufficient to justify the huge costs of nuclear plants. The reason for this is that the general level of industrial pro-

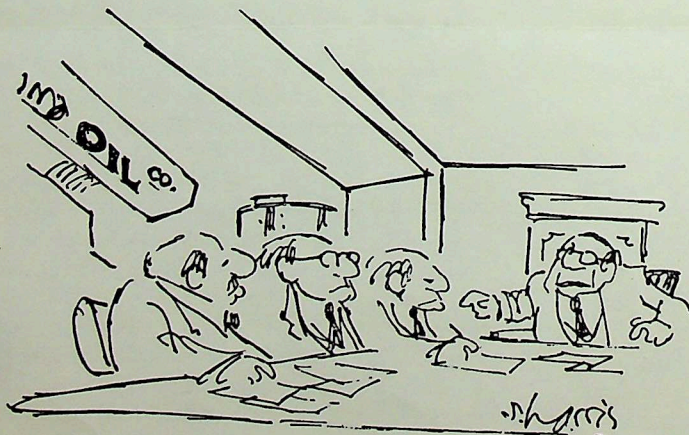
duction remains low as business continues with its "slow investment" strategy for coping with the political uncertainties of the current period. As a result, analysts now foresee only 200 reactors in operation in the U.S. by the end of the century (there are now about 70), instead of the 1,000 predicted five years ago. Orders for new reactors have slowed down to a trickle (4 in 1977), and many projects are being canceled. Some business planners are turning back to coal, despite the nightmarish labor relations involved in its production.

The anti-nuclear movement is also in a state of flux. In particular, the Clamshell Alliance, the coalition which organized the direct action against Seabrook, is facing both internal and external problems. The Ku Klux Klan and other rightwing groups have vowed to attack any new demonstrations against Seabrook, and there have been reports of increased surveillance and disruption of Clamshell and other anti-nuclear groups by police and private investigative agencies. On the inside, dissident Clamshell members are fighting the attempts by the de facto leadership of the Alliance to abandon militant tactics.

It is still unclear to what extent the anti-nuclear movement has contributed to the crisis of the industry. Yet what does seem clear is that the movement has gone as far as it can with the environmental objections to nukes: issues of radiation, waste disposal, accidental meltdown of a reactor, etc. The task now is to confront not only financial issues such as CWIP, but the political contradiction between the goal of reducing labor time and that of decentralizing control over technology. Much of the anti-nuclear movement has romanticized labor-intensive, "appropriate" (usually solar) technology and ignored the role of large-scale energy production, including nukes, in the shortening of the working day. The Left, at the same time, has acknowledged the movement as a legitimate part of the struggle against capital but has uncritically accepted socialist nukes. These positions are inadequate, for the issue is not one of a choice among technologies or simply the form of ownership of the means of energy production. The problem now is to determine how energy fits into the autonomous reorganization of working class power, how physical power relates to political power.

While it seems unlikely that nukes would be compatible with working class autonomy from the energy industry, solar energy, often presented as a panacea, would not automatically be.

U.S. corporations are already beginning to capitalize on solar in an effort to transform it into simply another area of accumulation. Business Week (October 9 issue) recently published a



"Our problem, once solar energy is in operation, is to find a way to have the citizens whose homes are heated by the sun continue to pay us every month."

cover story on "the coming boom in solar energy," reporting that the solar industry could grow from its current level of \$150 million to as much as \$20 billion in two decades. The story noted that "contrary to most impressions, the solar business is

not just a cottage industry; it includes corporate behemoths such as Exxon, General Electric, Lockheed, and Westinghouse."

The real issue is not whether we split atoms or collect sunlight, but now energy fits into the process of gaining more power over our lives.

THE NEW IMMIGRATION: FOREIGN CAPITAL SEEKS SAFETY IN THE U.S.

One dramatic symptom of the present crisis of international capitalism is the enormous increase in the level of foreign investment in the U.S. during the last five years. On the run from urban guerillas, kidnapers and general political instability in Europe and elsewhere, foreigners are turning to America as the land of safe opportunity, the pillar of private wealth and free-market enterprise. Whether or not this assessment of the U.S. is correct, foreign investment here jumped 50% between 1973 and 1976, and now totals more than \$30 billion. From plush Manhattan condominiums to suburban shopping centers to major chemical companies, the buying spree is continuing at a feverish pitch.

These investors appear to fall into two categories. First there are those who are seeking secure investments for their personal wealth or corporate cash. They include rich individuals, like German billionaire Karl Flick who feels much safer making his home in Colorado than in Europe, as well as small companies or well-to-do professionals. Common types of purchases in this category are corporate acquisitions, government securities, and large amounts of real estate. For example, in Western states much farm land has been acquired at high prices under agreements in which the original owner continues to manage the

property for the foreign investor. Many of these transactions are hard to detect, since buyers frequently choose to remain camouflaged through the use of banks, lawyers or corporations.

The second category includes companies which are moving production facilities to the U.S. "West German" cuckoo clocks are now being made in Virginia, "French" skis in Vermont, and "Japanese" zippers in Georgia. Such investors are attracted by an overall investment package which includes America's large market, labor costs which have been increasing less rapidly here than in other industrial countries, and tax incentives.

In order to attract this second group and the jobs they bring, State governments have devised aggressive selling campaigns. Twenty-three States have set up offices in Europe to seek out foreign investors, and many have placed advertisements in overseas business publications. Winning over an investor can require smooth salesmanship, promises of generous tax benefits, offers to pay for the training of workers and, in many cases, guarantees of a non-unionized labor force. Just as U.S. companies have moved South and overseas to avoid labor militancy, foreign companies coming here prefer to invest where union organization is weakest. For instance, when Michelin tire company decided to build a factory in the U.S., it

chose South Carolina, where only 8% of the labor force is unionized.

Even when foreign corporations have accepted the presence of unions, they have expected that the desire for jobs would induce a high level of worker cooperation. Just two months ago this strategy backfired in the case of a Volkswagen plant in Western Pennsylvania.

In addition to promises of tax incentives, the company was attracted to the area because of its large pool of experienced and skilled labor. After an elaborate hiring process, 2,000 employees were chosen and last April the assembly line was put into operation. Only six months later, on October 8th, rank and file workers voted overwhelmingly to shut down the line rather than accept the 3-year contract worked out for them by the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) and Volkswagen management. The strike action began when employees learned that the contract provided wages and benefits inferior to those paid by U.S. automakers.

Though this wildcat strike lasted only one week, its impact has been very great. For one thing, it has created doubts about the ability of American unions to guarantee stable and predictable labor relations. The UAW bargaining committee had approved the contract unanimously and expected no resistance by the rank and file. It was even more surprised than the company when the workers struck.

Second, the strike raises the possibility that workers will not agree to take less than the going wage in order to help foreign investors move in. Other foreign automakers, including Japan's Honda and Toyota, have said this could stop them from initiating production in the U.S.

In other words, this incident highlights the key problem with the belief that the United States is a safe place to do business: in many ways, the American worker is an unknown to prospective foreign investors. Unions here are not as ideological as elsewhere and, in parts of the country, they have been kept out altogether. However, this does not mean that workers are the docile, pro-capitalist lot that State governments are selling. The UAW is not the only union to be forced back to the bargaining table by angry workers; this year's coal strike was a powerful example of the strength of the rank and file in a different sector.

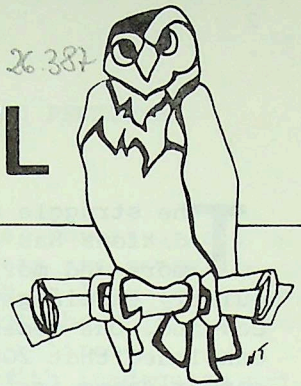
In response to such rebelliousness, U.S. companies have moved operations to Mexico, South Korea and Taiwan. Nevertheless, foreign companies now wish to invest in the U.S., and retain high hopes of finding cooperative workers. This indicates that much confusion exists in the minds of international investors concerning the safest path for capital to travel. They must now choose among increasingly unstable and undesirable alternatives.

When critical philosophers
point their finger at
~ reality, ~
Orthodox philosophers
study the finger.

--A WISE OWL

THE AMERICAN OWL

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WARNING: WORK MAY BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH

At the start of his film Modern Times, Charlie Chaplin portrays a factory worker who has trouble remembering that he is not a machine. The lunch whistle blows and the machine shuts down, yet the worker continues to move to the beat of the assembly line. After several moments he regains control of his body, though a visible factory twitch remains.

When Modern Times was made in the 1930's, conditions at workplaces in the U.S. were management's domain. True, if a worker was injured, small sums were available under state workers compensation programs. However, employers were almost never required to correct dangerous working conditions. Furthermore, workers compensation was limited to physical injuries. Emotional disorders like Chaplin's, and occupational diseases, were simply a part of the job for which the employer escaped all responsibility.

In the last ten years, management tyranny in this area has crumbled and business has been forced to compensate employees for a wide range of occupational disorders at skyrocketing rates. Damage suits involving mine workers alone cost industry an estimated \$1 billion in 1977. Workers compensation programs in many states have expanded and now allow benefits for any "job-related" malady. Employer costs for this program have soared and industry

executives complain that workers compensation has become an easy way for young workers to retire. No doubt, workers are far more sophisticated today and use whatever means available to escape the hazards of working life.

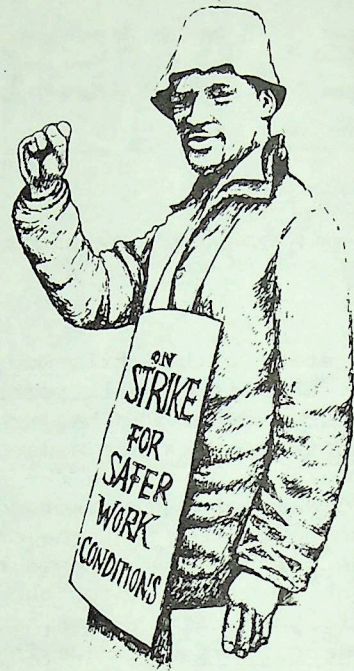
At the same time, the federal government, responding to mounting pressure, has enacted tougher legislation in an attempt to force business to improve working conditions. In 1970, Congress passed a law which recognized a legal right of workers to a safe place to work, and created an agency with authority to set safety standards and inspect all workplaces for violations (The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA). Due to underfinancing, OSHA's enforcement capabilities are close to negligible. Nevertheless, the agency has been under scathing attack from industry.

Unions, also, have found themselves unable to avoid the issue of workplace conditions. Rank and file militancy has made this a key issue in recent collective bargaining agreements, particularly in the mining, auto and chemical industries. Some contracts establish local safety committees and the right to refuse work under hazardous conditions. Other unions have insisted on the right to company-paid medical examinations, access to illness and injury data, and higher insurance benefits.

The struggle over working conditions has intensified as more and more hazards, particularly carcinogens, have been discovered. One recent federal report concluded that 20% of all future cancer cases in the U.S. will be contracted on the job. Other studies have established links between high noise levels and nervous disorders, toxic chemicals and asthma, pesticides and sterility. In fact, there seems to be no limit to the number of potential carcinogens and other dangerous substances.

Business has adopted a quasi-existential attitude toward all this, arguing that modern life is full of risk and exposure to some carcinogens is simply unavoidable. The warped logic of capital is evident in a recent proposal of the National Peach Growers Council. Acknowledging proof that exposure to a certain industry pesticide causes sterility, the Council made the absurd suggestion that this work be given to older workers and women who did not want to have children.

Worker militancy has prevented the implementation of such proposals and, in fact, has focused more and more attention on the non-physical hazards of work. Several workers compensation boards now award benefits to employees with a wide range of nervous or mental disorders. Two years ago, the Kentucky board approved compensation for a woman who sorted thread at a clothing factory for many years; her mental collapse, the board ruled, was due to the exacting nature of her work.



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Similar effects have been detected among large groups of workers in a single workplace. Not long ago, Business Week reported on an illness it called "workplace hysteria." Symptoms are labored breathing and nausea that strike in epidemic proportions, despite the absence of any immediate physical cause.

All this raises the question whether there is such a thing as a job free of health hazards. Not only is it likely that removal of all dangerous substances cannot be achieved, but phenomena such as "workplace hysteria" suggest that a major hazard is the labor process itself. The battle over conditions on the job will undoubtedly lead to a greater sense that there may be a fundamental contradiction between work and health.

AN AGING CONFLICT: THE POLITICS OF RETIREMENT AND PENSIONS

Amid continuing concern in the U.S. over the opportunities for entry into the active labor force (the issue of unemployment), there has been growing controversy surrounding the conditions of departure from the job; that is, the question of retirement. Last year, in a move that was supposed to show "the new political power of the old," the federal government raised the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70. The law prevents employers from forcing anyone younger than 70 to retire but it doesn't affect the freedom of workers to retire voluntarily at a younger age. The campaign in support of the law asserted the importance of work in delaying the effects of old age, while business opposed the law, saying it would restrict its ability to get rid of older workers with "declining productivity."

Overlooked in the debate was the fact that workers themselves have been struggling for years for earlier rather than later retirement. Industrial workers have led the way, and in some sectors workers can retire after 30 years as young as 55. In general, labor force participation by workers aged 50-64 has fallen steadily in the past 20 years, giving rise to a new group in the working class: the young retiree.

Yet there are contradictory trends, since many workers no doubt are unhappy about being forced to retire. This is largely a matter of money. The better organized sectors of the class have won pensions that provide decent (though never fully adequate) income levels, whereas lower-waged workers and housewives confront old age as a pe-

riod of even worse poverty. As a result, these workers are compelled to remain on the job as long as possible and for housewives there is, in fact, no such thing as retirement.

These workers with inadequate private pensions, or none at all, are dependent on the federal Social Security program, begun in 1935 in response to the struggles of unemployed and retired workers. S.S. has never been sufficient to meet the needs of retired workers, since: benefit levels are tied to one's former pay (thus reproducing the great wage inequalities of the active labor force); housewives are only eligible on the basis of their husband's waged work; and payments until recently did not rise automatically with inflation.

In addition, the funding of the system comes only from compulsory contributions by active workers and their employers (the state gives nothing). Active workers are thus put in the position of supporting retirees through reductions in their wage (taxes); and given the growing proportion of retired workers, this burden is increasing rapidly. There is much talk of the crisis of S.S. financing--including threats that the funds will be exhausted--despite the fact that benefits (maximums now are \$5610 a year for one person, or \$8415 for a couple) are still meager. Not surprisingly, the government has responded by sharply increasing the S.S. tax on active workers and proposing reductions in benefits and tighter eligibility requirements. But the attempts to cut benefits will face strong opposition, since older and retired workers have become more militant, organizing themselves into groups such as the Grey Panthers.

Pension plans other than Social Security have also been at the center of struggle. In last year's coal miner's strike a central demand was to end the two-class system of retirement, in which miners who retired before 1976 received only \$250 per month while later retirees got \$425. The workers also objected to the fact that employer pension fund payments were based on the amount of coal mined--which meant that wildcat strikes by active workers (which cut output) jeopardized the pensions of retirees. The miners failed to abolish these arrangements in the final contract, but the solidarity developed during the strike among younger, older, and retired miners will be crucial for the future of their struggle.

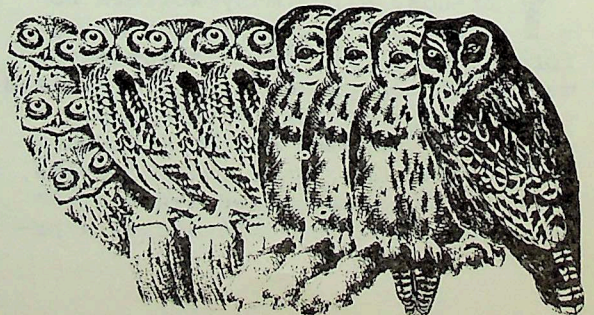
Pensions have likewise been a major element in the struggles of public workers, especially in New York. In the wave of militancy in the 1960's they won greatly improved benefits and continuous decreases in the amount they had to contribute to the funds. Not surprisingly, in capital's fiscal counterattack since 1974, public worker pensions have been one of the main targets, and many previous gains have been reversed. Moreover, the financial junta now managing New York has forced pension fund trustees to invest huge sums (nearly \$4 billion out of \$11 billion in assets) in New York bonds to "bail out the city." This has placed public workers in a position in which further resistance to austerity could threaten their pensions if the junta declares bankruptcy.

This issue of investment of pension fund money has gained more attention as analysts have noted that total assets of private pension plans (which are usually managed by banks and invested in stocks and bonds) are about \$500 billion, equal to 25 percent of the entire equity capital of all U.S. corporations. Some business writers have, on the basis of

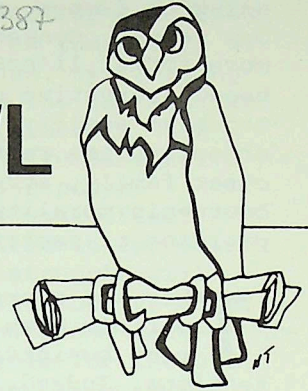
this fact, declared the advent of "pension fund socialism," in which workers are said to own the means of production and are supposed to be more concerned with corporate profits than class solidarity. The socialist movement has responded to this by arguing that workers should demand control of pension fund investment policy in order to use the money--which one advocate of this strategy enthusiastically calls "social capital"--for "socially responsible" investments such as the rebuilding of the abandoned factories of the older industrial areas. The socialists are thus following the logic of capital (exhibited most clearly in New York) in urging the use of "deferred wages" to replace investments abandoned by business because of poor profitability.

Besides the political problems involved in having workers subsidize the least profitable sectors (or any sectors for that matter) of capital, this strategy diverts the debate over pensions from what is the main issue: forcing capital to meet the needs of retired workers. The amount of money in the funds and how it is invested mean little to the retired worker trying to survive on a few hundred dollars a month. As long as pensions remain low, workers will be forced to choose between working until they drop dead on the job or retiring to a life of poverty and isolation.

A PARLIAMENT OF OWLS



THE AMERICAN OWL



SAVING THE SYSTEM: NEO-CONSERVATIVES ON THE RISE

During a time when French peasants were seizing power from the nobles, Edmund Burke tilted his pen in defense of tradition and inequality. Two centuries later, this same mission has been taken on by a small but influential group of Americans, comfortably rallying under the banner Neo-conservatism. The neo-conservative philosophy rests squarely on 18th and 19th century notions of republican government which called for limited government, well-controlled masses, and active involvement in public affairs by a self-appointed elite. America's problem today, as the "neo-cons" see it, is that the modern welfare state promised too much to too many, and this has led to social chaos and a crisis of authority. Back up! they say. The time has come to restore social order and reassert the legitimacy of conservative political, social and economic institutions.

There is nothing new in what neo-cons preach, yet their zeal has recently attracted widespread publicity, and suddenly their leading members are everywhere policy is being made. Daniel P. Moynihan, a prized pedant, is presently a U.S. Senator from New York. Irving Kristol, a founding editor of the neo-con journal Public Interest, is well-known for his regular contributions to the Wall Street Journal in which

he bolsters corporate morale (one column of his was entitled 'Businessmen of the World Unite!') and derides liberals for their intolerance of private enterprise. Several neo-cons have been members of the prestigious Trilateral Commission, including Samuel Huntington, Jr., who co-authored a Commission report called The Crisis of Democracy. Huntington's conclusion that the crisis of democracy was due to an "excess" of democracy fit in well with the neo-conservative teachings.

Other well-known neo-cons include Harvard professors Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell, National Security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and cold-war political scientist Robert Tucker, whose advice during the 1974 oil embargo was for the U.S. to invade the Middle East. His book, the Inequality of Nations, presents an unabashedly racist and chauvinist argument for dealing aggressively with the Third World. This view, along with staunch support for Israel and a near-rabid anti-communism, frequently appears in the pages of Commentary, a widely-circulated neo-con magazine.

For many neo-conservatives, it is not long since they abandoned liberal positions which advocated social engineering through government spending programs. But the social disruptions of the 1960s have discredited this approach and were sufficiently fright-

ening to dampen enthusiasm for serious reform. Consequently, more and more former liberals have joined the neo-conservative call for healing a troubled society. Key to their objective are restoration of the nuclear family, strong support for bourgeois morality, and strict repression of society's 'underclass.'

This, of course, is quite compatible with current business intentions. Indeed, neo-con arguments are the basis on which the imposition of austerity has been shrouded with an air of legitimacy. And hence, a happy symbiotic relationship has developed, in which advice on how business can protect itself is exchanged for generous financial support for individuals and organizations on the neo-con side of social policy debate.

One of these organizations, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), is the fastest-growing think tank in the country, currently enjoying support to the tune of \$6 million a year. Its purpose is to shower government officials and influential academics,

as well as the media, with a never-ending stream of tapes, journals and books.

AEI contains much of the pseudo-academic flavor which neo-cons relish. However, Kristol and others have also made themselves readily available to a wide assortment of business lobbies, including the important Business Roundtable. At lavish Roundtable

luncheons, top corporate executives, including Thomas Murphy of GM, meet with labor union officials and key politicians in order to further their increasingly similar interests. Such fraternities are right in keeping with the neo-con call for bolstering a ruling elite.

The 1970's partnership of rightwing verbiage and corporate resources has proven itself in battle. In 1978, its Congressional victories ranged from defeat of labor law reform to deregulation of natural gas prices. Across the country, crime control was strengthened through a widespread return to capital punishment and longer prison terms, while programs to track down husbands of women on welfare and get them to support their families, answered neo-con goals of restoring the family and limiting government expenditures.



Like all proud elitists, neo-conservatives regard popular movements as evil, and, as a direct corollary, those who further such movements are condemned for encouraging unreasonable expectations. A striking example of this appeared in an article published in *Commentary* magazine soon after the NYC looting spree in the summer of 1977. The author, Midge Decter, criticized

those who sympathized too openly with the urban poor. She wrote: "the young men who went rampaging on that hot July night were neither innocents nor savages; they were people in the grip of the pathology that arises from moral chaos. They were doing something they knew to be wrong but had been given license for, and had not been able to find the inner resources to overcome their temptation."

Neo-con concern over the growth of a 'new class' of traditionally cooperative people who are now willing to support fundamental changes, leads neo-con writers to direct much of their ire at young academics and government activists ('the regulators'). Neo-cons are simply not interested in relating to people outside the well-to-do and educated sectors of the middle class. Just as looting can be blamed on soft liberals, so the struggles for better housing, health

care and better working conditions are not accepted as indicators of the need for change. By limiting themselves to ideological attacks on the remaining liberals, the neo-cons evade the fundamental issues of class and power.

The question is what effect this aggressive disdain for dealing with popular struggle will lead to. In foreign policy, a neo-con emphasis on national self-interest led to a debacle for the U.S. government in Iran. It was only a matter of time before eruption overcame a regime installed by shortsighted policy and the CIA. An analogous strategy exists on the domestic front and it remains unclear how long victory will be on the side of the neo-cons and their corporate allies. For the time being, the problem for the rest of us is the absence of a movement of resistance strong enough to turn the tide.

OFF THE JOB: THE RENEWED STRUGGLE TO SHORTEN THE WORKING DAY

An important element in the growing rebellion against work on the part of the U.S. labor force is the increased pressure to reduce the amount of time spent on the waged job. People are pushing harder for a shorter working day, workweek, workyear, and overall worklife (through earlier retirement). As a result, union leaders--responding to autonomous worker moves to reduce work time through absenteeism--have finally resumed the official effort to shorten the workweek, a campaign that has not advanced much since the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act established a 40-hour workweek.

In 1976 the United Auto Workers Union signed a contract with Ford that included an extra seven "paid personal holidays" per year. The union claimed that this was a major move toward instituting a four-day week with no reduction in wages, though some Ford managers said privately that their objec-

tive in agreeing to the holidays was to control the high level of absenteeism in auto. Last year, leaders of the U.A.W. and other "progressive" unions formed the All Unions Committee to Shorten the Work Week, which stressed the role of a shortened work week in reducing unemployment. Business is still opposed to the proposal, saying it would raise labor costs 15 percent, while union leaders such as UAW head Douglas Fraser claim the rise would be offset by reduced unemployment insurance costs and high productivity.

Along with the efforts to reduce the length of the workweek for full-time jobs, more and more people have been cutting down their individual waged work time by seeking part-time jobs. The U.S. labor market now includes some 20 million part-time positions, and more than 18 percent of the labor force voluntarily works less than 35 hours a week.

On the one hand, the rise in part-time work is yet another reflection of the general refusal of work: struggles for higher wages have allowed many people to work fewer hours, and others use "off the books" work in the underground economy to lessen their dependence on their official occupation.

At the same time, business is increasingly using part-time workers to undercut or cope with the struggles of full-time employees. Managerial literature today increasingly speaks of the advantages of part-timers, including the greater flexibility afforded in work scheduling and in firing workers when they are no longer needed, reduced labor costs because part-timers receive limited health and retirement benefits, and part-timer's supposedly higher rates of productivity. In addition, offering part-time work is said to give employers access to large, new pools of labor, particularly housewives, students, and retired people. There is a factory in the black ghetto of St. Paul, Minnesota, that is staffed entirely by part-timers. The plant, which is owned by Control Data Corporation and which serves as a bindery for computer manuals, has two "mini-shifts": one in the late morning for mothers (including some women forced off welfare) whose children are in school, and another in the late afternoon for students after classes. Such an arrangement fits perfectly into the current capitalist strategy of replacing government payments to the unwaged with closely controlled private sector jobs which do not interfere with the activities of family and school.

Another aspect of both the refusal of full-time, permanent work and the quest by business for greater flexibility in dealing with workers

is the growth of temporary jobs. A huge industry has developed--estimated at more than \$1.5 billion and involving up to three million (mainly clerical) workers a year--consisting of firms that, in effect, rent workers to employers who need additional "manpower" for a limited period of time. The workers, many of whom are housewives returning to the waged labor force, remain employees of the contracting company although they work in the offices of the client company. They are thus not eligible for the same wage rates and benefits as the permanent employees of the client company, and it is only recently that the contractors have been forced to provide minimal health and retirement benefits for them. The advantages of this arrangement for the contractor (who usually charges the client 50 percent more than what is being paid the worker) and the client are so great that many clients are using "temps" in long-term positions. The result is that more and more supposedly temporary workers are receiving the minimal wages and benefits paid by contractors while doing what amounts to permanent work for the client company.

Yet again, as in the case of part-time work, many people seek out temporary jobs in order to have more flexibility in their own schedules. And although temps can be dismissed from a particular assignment at any time, so also can they quit whenever they like and resume work again elsewhere.

In general, then, what we are seeing is a progressive disintegration of the full-time, permanent job--as a result of both capitalist attempts to better control their workers and worker attempts to better control their lives. The real showdown will come when part-time and temporary workers join with full-timers in demanding reduced labor time without reduced wages and benefits.

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BATTLES ON THE LAND: FARMWORKERS & FARMERS FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

The streets of Washington and the fields of southern California have once again become arenas of struggle for the people who grow and harvest food in the U.S. In the past two months a striking farmworker was shot dead by police in California's Imperial Valley, and 2000 protesting farmers fought with police in Washington after blocking traffic with their tractors.

The strike in California, which was initiated in January by the United Farm Workers union against major growers of lettuce and several other crops, has been the most violent farm labor struggle of recent years. Police and company guards have assaulted UFW pickets with tear gas and attack dogs as the workers have tried to prevent strikebreakers from working in the fields. Also, the growers and their allies in the state urged Governor Jerry Brown to call in the National Guard to control the pickets. After he refused, the growers bought full-page advertisements in the major national newspapers, in which they denounced Brown and depicted the strikers as "marauding bands of armed rioters." UFW President Cesar Chavez has responded with a call for a national boycott of Chiquita bananas, which are sold by United Brands Co., parent company of one of the major lettuce growers the UFW is fighting.

The walkout, which has spread to more than 4000 farmworkers in Impe-

rial Valley and parts of neighboring Arizona, represents an important new phase of the UFW struggle: the effort to make wages and working conditions comparable to those in the unionized sectors of industry. The UFW is demanding wage increases of 40 to 100 percent (the average now is \$3.70 an hour plus piecework earnings) and substantial improvements in benefits. The growers complain that in recent years the pay of California farmworkers has risen at least 20 percent faster than the wages of other agricultural laborers and they insist that further increases will force them out of business. The companies apparently regard the current battle as decisive in determining whether fruit and vegetable production will remain a low-wage business. The growers have been on the defensive since 1975, when the UFW succeeded in pushing through the California legislature the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which for the first time guaranteed collective bargaining rights to farmworkers in the state. The UFW has become much stronger since the passage of the law and succeeded in signing a peace treaty with the Teamsters union, which had been taking over UFW contracts by intimidating workers and making "sweetheart" agreements with the growers.

Although the UFW gained protection and support from the liberal state government, it soon faced an inten-

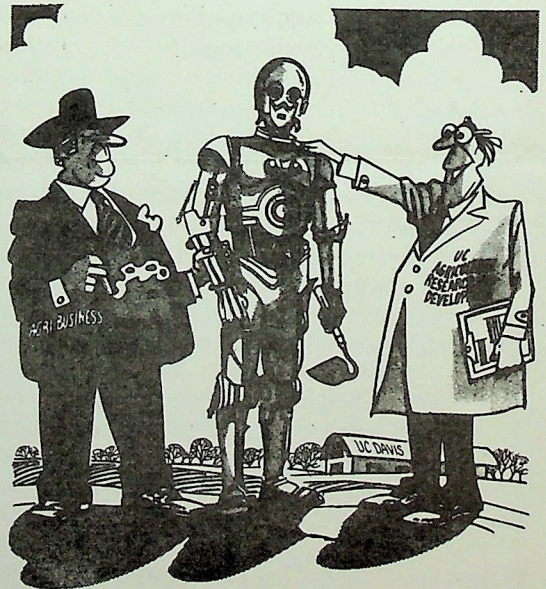
sified new assault on the part of the growers: a major new push for mechanization of harvesting. The mechanization of tomato-picking, in particular, had closely paralleled the growth of the UFW and the general increase in the militancy of farmworkers; this process accelerated greatly after the 1975 labor law. In addition to the automatic harvesters, the growers began to use electronic tomato sorters, immediately eliminating more than 11,000 workers. This transformation of production required the development of a new breed of tomato the machines could handle--ones that were virtually cubic in shape, had a rubbery skin, and had almost no taste. Rather than reducing retail prices, the machines made tomatoes one of the most expensive vegetables on the market; mechanization also accelerated the concentration of land ownership in California, since smaller growers could not afford the new machines and often had to sell out to the ever-expanding agribusiness companies.

Most recently, the development of mechanization for other crops has been moving ahead quickly, especially in the case of lettuce, the most profitable crop in California. Researchers have been spending millions of dollars perfecting futuristic devices such as one that shoots gamma rays into heads of lettuce to determine if they are ripe.

Much of this research, it turns out, is being done by the publicly-funded University of California. The university's Agricultural Experimentation Station has, in addition to developing the new machines and new breeds of crops, sponsored seminars for growers on ways to deal with farm labor, and university researchers have crossed UFW picket lines to test mechanical harvesters on farms being struck by the union. University officials have denied that there is anything wrong with this

kind of "pursuit of knowledge," but in January, at about the same time the lettuce strike began, a public interest group filed suit against the university, challenging the use of state funds for mechanization research and instead called for state compensation for farmworkers thrown out of their jobs by the machines. The suit also accused university officials of conflict of interest, since many of them are also executives or board members of various agribusiness corporations.

In addition to the battles over wages and job protection, the UFW has been hit with an internal crisis resulting from challenges to the domination of the union by Chavez. Criticism of the UFW president from within the union and among its supporters heated up in the summer of 1977, after Chavez returned from a trip to the Philippines. He had gone to that country upon the urging of Filipino workers in the union who wanted to publicize the struggle against the



Renault, Sacramento Bee
"It Uses the Short-Handled Hoe and Won't Join the United Farm Workers."

repressive policies of the Marcos regime. Chavez not only refused to criticize Marcos, even after returning, but had a friendly meeting with the dictator and accepted an award from a government that has banned strikes. Since then, Chavez has been charged with suppressing his opponents in the UFW and virtually running the union single-handedly. He has also been accused of doing little to support undocumented immigrant workers in the fields and of failing to help other farmworker groups. As a result, many UFW staff members and supporters have left the organization. One group of defectors went to Arizona and organized in 1977 the first strike of undocumented workers in U.S. labor history.

Significantly, as Chavez has made the union more bureaucratic, he has, at least until the current strike, gained more respect from the growers. Business Week reported last year, "Many growers give the union high marks for becoming more professional and business-like in its approach to bargaining and to resolving grievances. Says one grower who has more than 10,000 acres in the fertile San Joaquin Valley: 'The UFW is finally starting to act more like a traditional industrial union and less like a cause.'" The UFW organization, and Chavez in particular, is thus facing a crucial point in its history. The question now is whether the current lettuce strike represents a return to a more militant form of struggle, or whether Chavez is indeed going to make the UFW more and more like its old rival, the Teamsters union--a corrupt, authoritarian organization that acts tough but really has very cozy relations with management.

SMALL FARMERS. In political terms, the situation of small farmers in the U.S. is even more complicated than that of farmworkers. Whereas

farmworkers are clearly waged laborers employed by large agribusiness companies, the farmers are a strange mixture of worker, capitalist, and self-employed professional. Lately, more and more farmers have been acting like militant workers. As farm prices have fallen and yet costs of land, machinery, fertilizer, etc. have risen sharply, farmers have formed grass roots organizations to demand additional federal help in maintaining their standard of living. In 1977 a group of farmers in Colorado founded the American Agricultural Movement, which has grown rapidly in a series of demonstrations that culminated in the February blockade of Washington.

Essentially, the demand of the farmers is more federal help through adherence to a concept known as parity, which is defined as the relationship between farm prices and production costs which existed in the years 1910-1914, a period the farmers regard as one of reasonable prosperity. The farmers want price support policies to be revised to recreate the parity ratio today.

The greater militancy of small farmers is also a reaction to the acceleration of the old process of concentration of food production. Thousands of small farms every year are taken over by agribusiness companies or else converted by speculators into commercial or residential use.

Within these developments, the economic viability and political role of the small farmer are becoming more ambiguous. Militant farmers sent food to striking miners last year, but in many ways they have acted like small businessmen. It remains to be seen whether small farmers will be swept away by capitalist development, or whether they can, through their struggles, survive and play a key role in the process of transforming food production and distribution.

HOLLYWOOD DISCOVERS THE WORKING CLASS:

HARLAN COUNTY, BLUE COLLAR, NORMA RAE

Films in the U.S. that show people at work are rare commodities, and films that actually focus on the struggles of workers have been even more scarce and very poorly distributed. Consequently, the commercial distribution of the above films, all within the last three years, is quite significant. The three films all deal with a common subject: workers and unions.

Harlan County was the earliest of the three films and the only documentary. In 1973, miners at the Brookside mine in Kentucky went on strike after the coal operator refused to sign a contract with the newly formed local of the United Mine Workers. Independent filmmaker Barbara Kopple went down to film the miners and their families for the strike's duration, which turned out to be three years. The result of her work is powerful footage, including close-ups of the sheriff threatening workers, and lengthy filming of community meetings in which men gradually accept the need for women on the picket line as women demand equal participation in the struggle.

The absence of any narration allows the audience to concentrate on the relationships and battle unfolding. A strong point here is the film's community focus and the sense one gets that the fight will continue long after the strike is over.

Norma Rae is also about an attempt to start a union local in the South, only here it is a textile factory instead of a mine. The movie, based on the true story of a woman organizer at a J.P. Stevens plant, centers on the transformation of a young Carolina millhand into the prime militant of a major unionizing drive. But the movie is far removed from documentary flavor. Indeed, in his overly optimistic portrayal of how a large company

is defeated by a handful of people with no previous union experience, the director has almost created a work of union propaganda.

But apart from its shortcomings regarding union issues, Norma Rae is significant and enjoyable for its portrayal of a working class woman who is intelligent, self-reliant and outspoken. Whether protesting the "triple shift" (organizer, housewife and millhand) by flinging dirty laundry in her husband's face, confronting the plant manager with workers' demands, or talking openly about pre-marital sexuality, Norma Rae reflects many facets of women's lives.

Blue Collar is the most contemporary and provocative of the three films. The movie shows three workers, two black and one white, caught in the squeeze of union, company, government and marketplace oppression. One night they rob a local union office but come away with nothing but an accounting book which contains evidence of union corruption. They then decide to bribe the union with the notebook; when they do, the union has one of them murdered, co-opts another, and generates so much anxiety in the third that he seeks protection from the FBI by turning informant.

There is an assumption in the film that workers and criminals are not distinct and separate groups: hustling is what survival is about. This gets rid of the artificial morality that leads many to excuse tax evasion while condemning store robbery and is effective in raising the question of appropriate responses to societal pressures.

All three films have drawn large audiences. Yet it remains to be seen whether Hollywood will indeed abandon its notion that moviegoers are not interested in films about work.