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Leo Huberman (1903-1968)

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

MONTHLY REVIEW will be celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of its founding in May (Volume I, no. 1 was dated May 1949 and went to about 400 original subscribers). By way of celebration we are planning a birthday party to be held at the Village Gate, on Bleecker Street in the Village, on the evening of Monday, May 14th. A highlight of the evening will be an informal roundtable on "The State of the World" featuring a group of MR/MR Press authors plus audience participation to the extent that time permits. There will also be entertainment suitable to the occasion. Our last birthday party, the 30th, took place in May 1979 and was attended by some 400 people. In the June issue of that year we wrote, "For us, and so far as we could judge for most everyone else there, the evening was an enjoyable and memorable occasion." We hope the 35th will be too. But if you want to be there, you should make your reservations early. Seating is limited, and admission will be by ticket only. Tickets are \$10.00 apiece, and applications will be filled in a first-come-first-served basis. A formal invitation will be mailed to New York area subscribers in a few weeks. If you expect to be in New York at the time, let us know.

The organizers of the next Socialist Scholars Conference, which will be held at Manhattan Borough Community College, April 19-21, have asked us to put together two of the many panels that will make up the program— one on Marxism and the religious left and the other on the USSR. We have contacted a number of prospective participants, all of whom have ex-

(Continued on inside back cover)

CRISIS ECONOMY: BORN-AGAIN LABOR MOVEMENT?

BY JEREMY BRECHER

The U.S. economy is going through a transformation that is fundamentally altering the situation of American working people. It is removing the majority of workers from relatively secure job structures and thrusting them into a semi-casualized labor market. It is destroying the existing bases of power for both union and non-union workers.

Such changes have occurred before. The transformation of the industrial economy in the early decades of the twentieth century virtually destroyed the craft unionism that had been the principal basis of the American labor movement. The Great Depression gave the coup de grace to a form of labor organization that had long been dying. But the obvious obsolescence of craft unionism also created the basis for a new labor movement, based on industrial unionism.

Today, the industrial unionism that originated nearly half a century ago appears practically as obsolete as craft unionism did in 1932. Working people will have to transform the labor movement, and create new kinds of labor organizations, if they

Jeremy Brecher is the author of *Strike!*, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, and, most recently, *Brass Valley*. This article draws heavily on a series of discussions in the Work Relations Group, a discussion group which has met periodically for several years to discuss the past, present, and future of work. Its members include Joan Greenbaum, Laird Cummings, Stan Weir, Jeremy Brecher, Zeda Rosenberg, Jill Cutler, Jim Weeks, Peter Rachleff, Keith Dix, Rick Engler, Janet Cahill, Robb Burlage, David Noble, and Susan Reverby. The author would like especially to acknowledge the contribution of Joan Greenbaum to the development of this piece. Only the author is responsible for the views expressed.

are to meet their needs in the new world economy. While the social and political dimensions of this process will be crucial, I will focus here on the economic aspects.

The triumph of industrial unionism in the late 1930s and 1940s was made possible by specific developments in American capitalism. Industrial specialization concentrated large numbers of workers from particular industries around large industrial cities—auto workers in Detroit, St. Louis, and Cleveland; rubber workers in Akron; steel workers in Pittsburgh and Chicago. A few large national companies dominated most major industries. Techniques of mass production and “scientific management” had made company production systems highly integrated, so that striking a key department could stop an entire factory, and closing a few key plants could cripple a giant company. Mechanized production meant heavy, long-term capital investment of a kind which made plants difficult to move. It was this set of economic and productive characteristics which made possible the sit-down strikes, backed by mass picketing by tens of thousands of workers, which forced steel, auto, rubber, and other corporations to recognize the CIO.

In the decades which followed initial recognition of industrial unions, most employers came to accept them as a bearable and in some ways advantageous phenomenon. With heavy, long-term investment in highly integrated, highly mechanized factories, employers could better afford increases in wages than they could disruptions of production. By creating a channel for grievances, unions helped maintain a high-morale labor force; by enforcing no-strike clauses in contracts, they served to discipline the workforce and prevent wildcat work stoppages. Stable unions which gave workers a stake in the existing system served as a bulwark against potential radicalism. Union political power was strong enough to make an all-out attempt at union-busting exceedingly costly. Finally, the continuing growth of the American economy during the era of industrial unionism, based largely on the expansion of military spending and of U.S. international ascendancy, made rising wages and benefits compatible with rising profits for American corporations. American business felt little need to terminate its marriage with the labor movement, even though it was based on necessity and convenience, not love.

During the three decades that followed the Second World War, a series of economic changes gradually undermined the power bases of industrial unionism. National highways and diesel trucks eroded industrial specialization, so that basic industries became gradually less concentrated. Combined with suburbanization, this reduced the dense urban working-class environments that had supported union organization; it also undermined the tie between workplaces and ethnic neighborhoods and other communities. White flight to the suburbs, together with black migration from declining southern agriculture to the central cities, and then renewed immigration from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, intensified the division of the working class along racial and ethnic lines. Automation and other technological changes destroyed many of the older union traditions, for example among printers and construction workers. The massive increase in clerical, sales, service, and other nonindustrial labor, the great majority of which remained non-union, made unionized workers a steadily shrinking proportion of the total labor force. Labor traditions were not successfully transmitted to a new labor force that was increasingly female, non-white, young, and nonindustrial. In the nearly half century since the rise of the CIO, the labor movement has probably made less adaptation to a changing society than has any other major American institution.

Meanwhile, American capitalism has been going through a reorganization perhaps as great as that which led to the demise of craft unionism early in the twentieth century. This reorganization has many features, almost all of which directly undermine the bases of industrial union power.

Internationalization of the economy. The companies which were forced to recognize the CIO were *national* companies, functioning in a national economy. Despite the benefits they gained from American world hegemony, they remained so at least through the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, they became increasingly international, not only in their marketing but in their production and their capital operations. By the end of the 1970s, at least a third of all profits of the 100 largest U.S. multinational producers and banks came from overseas. About 70 percent of manufacturing income in the United States

and other major industrial countries is earned by multinational companies that have branches, subsidiaries, or joint ventures outside their "home" country. This transformation was made possible in part by developments in communication and transportation technology. Satellites and telecommunication now make it possible, for example, for Ford to design a part in Detroit and transmit it instantly to Italy or South Africa, where it can be produced as easily as in Detroit. Jets have made it nearly as easy to move an executive or a spare part from one continent to another as from one region of the United States to another. Technological changes have made it possible to perform high-tech work in the United States, while shipping labor-intensive manual work on the same products to off-shore production units in low-wage areas abroad. The result has been described as a "global factory," in which workers in many different countries are involved in the production of the same product. One company now offers New York customers word processing and data entry services performed, via satellite, by women working in Barbados for \$1.50 an hour. The internationalization of the economy is by no means only a result of technological change, however. It was a central aspect of the economic expansion of the 1960s and 1970s, which depended in large part on the growth of trade, made possible by the various rounds of GATT tariff reductions. It is also rooted in the massive development of international finance in that period, which saw the growth of the Eurodollar market, multinational banking investment in the third world, and the consequent availability of capital from international markets for economic investment in all parts of the world.

The effect of this internationalization is to put U.S. workers in competition with workers all over the globe. If business can produce electronic components more cheaply in Taiwan, or shoes more cheaply in Poland, or enter data more cheaply in Barbados, it will do so. At present, when management threatens to run away unless concessions are given, the labor movement has no answer except protectionism, which can save only a small proportion of jobs, and has negative effects for many other workers.

Automation. New technology, based largely on robotics and computers, has greatly undermined union power in production. While technology has long been used to threaten specific groups of workers, these new production techniques potentially can replace virtually *any* kind of production worker, however skilled. Groups like first-class machinists, who have been the backbone of union power in the electrical and machinery industries, have been particularly hard hit by the current round of automation. (Indeed, as David Noble and others have shown, numerically controlled machine tools were developed in present form specifically to weaken machinists' control of production.) The "automation option," even if not exercised, is a gun ready to give any group of workers the capital punishment of permanent layoff.

Studies by Barry Bluestone suggest that automation has had as much or more effect on skill levels in non-union, white-collar occupations, such as insurance and retail trade. Computers and computerized check-out equipment have replaced skilled clerical and sales people with de-skilled, lower paid, and increasingly female data entry and sales clerks.

Deconcentration. Technology, transportation, and communication are greatly accelerating the long-term trend away from concentration of workers in the same industry in the same area. New factories are much smaller than the great steel, auto, and other plants that once formed the core of American production. They are likely to be far from the other plants of the same company, or of the same industry. Production is becoming decentralized. Workers in a community work in many unrelated industries and occupations, without the tie of shared employment. Community solidarity coincides less and less automatically with workplace solidarity.

Conglomeratization. Many if not most large companies now operate in a large number of unrelated industries. They are no longer dependent for their profits on the performance of any particular industry. If one branch or company does poorly, the parent company can simply sell it off. Workers in any one plant or branch possess little economic leverage against companies which operate in this way—as the Greyhound strike recently demonstrated.

Shortened Time Horizons. Companies have become far less interested in long-range productive investments, far more interested in making a quick buck. This is expressed in the "MBA syndrome," which taught sophisticated managers to regard productive properties first of all as assets to be bought and sold, and in the executive career ladders which reward short-term profitability. But these in turn reflect deeper structural changes in the economy. A long-term decline in the profitability of production has meant that speculative uses of money—from the Eurodollar market to land and stock speculation to the purchase of rare pictures—become increasingly attractive. Milking plant and equipment has in fact become more profitable than investing in it.

Because of its short time horizons, management no longer has an interest in long-term labor peace. Walter Chrysler lost no love on unions, but he wanted to build cars in Detroit, and he would make an accommodation with the United Auto Workers if necessary to do it. His successors today would just as soon build cars in South Africa, buy chemical companies, or speculate in Eurodollars. Labor peace in Detroit means little to them.

Decline of Productive Investment. As profit rates on productive investment have declined, economic resources have increasingly flowed into nonproductive forms. This process has included purchase of some companies by others, à la Marietta/Bendix; massive stock, money-market, commodity, land, and other speculation; expanded investment in the national debt of first-, second-, and third-world countries; and an expanding share of world resources devoted to military and other nonproductive purposes. This both results from and exacerbates the stagnation of the world economy as a whole and the particular problems of obsolescence and poor management of the U.S. economy.

In this context, large companies become less and less oriented toward production—global traders and bankers rather than producers. Production units are merely properties to be bought and sold. What they produce can as easily be bought from smaller producers, if that should prove advantageous. In such a situation, the companies lose their stake in good labor relations in any one area or industry.

Business management has aggravated these structural factors through an extended campaign deliberately designed to undermine worker power. One aspect has been direct union-busting, including lockouts, phony bankruptcies, and many illegal tactics. Another has been the attack on government programs and on government's power to enforce some social responsibility on business. "Deregulation" has enfranchised non-union employers in many industries. There has been a massive propaganda campaign to blame economic problems on workers with their supposedly excessive wages and unreasonable demands. And there have been more subtle forms, such as the demand that workers "buy out" failing company facilities and work in them for substandard wages, or imitations of Japanese participation schemes, in which workers are asked to give up all identification as workers and think of themselves solely as "members of the firm."

These trends have been compounded by the effects of an economic decline, which at its most severe saw a real unemployment rate higher than in any of the depression years from 1936 to 1940. Unemployment was worst precisely in those sectors where unions have been strong: in September 1982, when overall unemployment stood at 10.2 percent, it was 18.2 percent in steel and other primary metals, 18.7 percent in auto, and 22.6 percent in construction. Unemployment at this level can make workers willing to accept almost any company demands to maintain their jobs. Large cutbacks in the public sector created further unemployment as well as undermining public sector unionism. Many of the layoffs in both industrial and public sectors appear to be permanent. The much-heralded "economic recovery" of 1983-84 resembles the recovery of 1937, when national production rose above the 1929 level while mass unemployment continued. Unemployment in the 7-12 percent range now seems to be accepted as a permanent feature of the U.S. economy.

Continuing mass unemployment is eroding wage levels even in the period of "recovery." In the first half of 1983, one quarter of new contracts contained pay cuts and one fifth had wage freezes. Major concessions have recently been forced on workers at auto, steel, trucking, airlines, and bus companies. Economic

stagnation is reducing U.S. wage levels relative to other countries (the United States has moved from first to seventh since 1970) and creating a vast labor pool that will work at or even below minimum wages. As a result low-wage, labor-intensive, non-union industries are flooding back into impoverished areas in the United States. There are now an estimated 3,000 sweatshops employing at least 50,000 workers in New York City alone.

The labor surplus is also leading to the dismantling of the labor market structures developed in both union and non-union spheres since the 1930s, which created a degree of job security and employment stability for most American workers. Temporary labor systems, with no job security or benefits, are becoming increasingly prevalent, especially for white-collar work. No longer the monopoly of such agencies as Manpower and Kelly Girl, they are now more and more run by manufacturers, hospitals, and other large employers for themselves. They amount to a return to the shape-up. The number of part-time workers in the workforce has increased rapidly. Many women hold two part-time jobs. While statistics are impossible to come by, there can be no question that there is a massive increase in homework (overwhelmingly by women), involving both traditional garment and light assembly work and all forms of work that can be performed on a computer terminal in the home. And there is a great growth of the underground economy, work at or below the minimum wage done "off the books."

Continued at their present rate for only a few years, these trends will lead to a major shift in the work patterns and class structure of American working people. The majority of workers will work in high-turnover occupations with no security, in which they are easily replaceable, frequently unemployed, or only employed part time. Middle-income workers will become increasingly the exception, as more and more workers come to receive a "common labor" wage rate at or slightly above the minimum wage. (Just since 1978, the proportion of Americans receiving what the Bureau of Labor Statistics defines as an "intermediate" income fell from 55 percent to 42 percent, with nearly 10 percent of the population falling from "intermediate" to "low" income.) Despite mass unemployment, the labor force

will continue to grow due to continuing population growth, immigration, and a rising rate of labor force participation due to the poverty-induced need of women and children to go to work. These results of mass unemployment should come as no surprise; the "casualization of the labor market" was a principal effect of mass unemployment in previous depressions, too.

Impact on the Labor Movement

The wage concessions forced on American workers have been the most highly publicized manifestation of the impact of these developments on the unions. Wage concessions to faltering companies in hard times are nothing new, and do not necessarily indicate any long-term changes in the labor movement. But in present circumstances, unions are losing their ability to perform their most basic functions.

Whatever their limits, unions have performed three key functions within the U.S. capitalist system. First, they took wages out of the realm of unfettered competition and created structured wage rates within companies, patterned bargaining within industries, and general wage standards for the economy as a whole. As many labor economists have noted, a primary union function has been to eliminate wages as a factor of competition. But this is precisely what has been lost in the past three years of collective bargaining. The patterns are fading, and it has become the workers of every industry, every company—even every plant—for themselves.

Second, unions have enforced rigid rules that were designed to provide a degree of security for those holding jobs. It is perhaps in this area that concessions to companies have been greatest. Unions have given up rules preventing the "contracting out" of jobs to people outside the bargaining unit, limiting part-time work, defining job categories, determining job assignment by seniority, preventing the assignment of workers to more than one job, and restricting speed-up. The "flexibility" provided management by these changes is just the other side of workers' loss of job security.

Third, unions have provided a form of "industrial legality" in which employers were forced to follow non-discriminatory procedures laid out in negotiated contracts in dealing with their

workers, with grievance procedures through which workers could appeal company decisions that were unfair or that violated the contract. This function is being undermined by a destruction of union power on the shop floor which is hardly reported in the newspapers and almost impossible to measure, but which is profoundly important.

Many companies are now engaged in pervasive violations of union contracts. These involve firings, disciplinary actions, violations of seniority in job assignments and layoffs, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of unionism as a system of "industrial legality." Contract violations are nothing new, but unions now find themselves increasingly powerless to respond. Companies have provoked so many grievances that many grievance procedures have bogged down if not collapsed. Union officials are tied up defending people for absenteeism and similar minor charges, while massive contract violations go unchallenged. Workers who might normally use direct action on the job to protest blatant contract violations are too afraid of being victimized by arbitrary firing themselves. The companies are left free to violate the contracts.

Unions are losing members directly through unemployment. 120,000 of the 300,000 teamsters covered by the national freight agreement are reported out of work. Some 42,000 out of 160,000 United Mine Workers members are unemployed. Unions are also losing members through direct union-busting, or through the subcontracting of work from union to non-union firms. Even in the coal industry there are now "runaway coal mines" (made possible by a recent UMW contract), where companies that formerly ran their own mines now buy coal from non-union producers. Over 50 percent of rubber production and 60 percent of coal mining is now non-union; altogether a lower proportion of construction workers are unionized now than in the 1930s.

The unions are unable to organize new workers for many reasons, not least of which is that they are increasingly powerless against employers, unable to help or even protect those who might otherwise desire to organize. As a result, membership is decreasing sharply. According to *The Economist*, "between 1950 and 1980, union membership dropped from about one-

third of the labor force to 18 percent. Since then it has tumbled to about 15 percent.”

The impact on the union apparatus is serious, although also difficult to measure. The decreasing dues base is leading to staff cutbacks—the UAW laid off 100 and the machinists 200. Mergers and raiding appear to many unions as possible ways to escape the consequences of shrinking memberships. There appears to be a tendency toward contracting out of service departments. There is less interest in challenging concessions, firings, and grievances. The quality of servicing provided by the national unions is widely reported to be deteriorating sharply.

Union officials are also less and less able to use the apparatus of government to win gains for their members. The number of complaints to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are sharply down, both because it is regarded as even less effective under Reaganite leadership than it was in the past, and because workers are afraid to raise issues that may cost them their jobs. Federal and state agencies charged with defending health and safety are currently flooded with company petitions for waivers of health and safety standards. Government agencies charged with protecting the rights of minorities, the handicapped, and other groups of workers have in many cases become simply non-functional. The backlog of cases at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has quadrupled since 1978.

A Born-Again Labor Movement?

The labor movement is something older and bigger than the institutions of trade unionism or collective bargaining. The labor movement has been through many times of collapse and reorganization since it arose along with the rise of capitalism. Its times of collapse have also made possible its times of regroupment, when it developed new forms corresponding to the changed needs of working people in a changed economy and society. To understand what forms might make possible a rebirth of the movement, we need to acknowledge problems that have so weakened the labor movement in its present form.

The fact that new forms are necessary doesn't mean that struggles to preserve what workers already have in the way of

organizations and rights should be abandoned. On the contrary, management attacks on workers' rights should be fought at every point. But unionists within those struggles need to recognize the need for new forms, just as the best of those within the American Federation of Labor in the 1920s and 1930s recognized the necessity for industrial unionism and provided part of the impetus for organizing the CIO.

As their situations become more precarious, workers' discontent with the status quo is likely to rise. Millions of people are going to want to do something to change things. But the existing forms of industrial unionism are unlikely to be a suitable vehicle. The challenge will be to develop appropriate new forms of organization and action. These will not spring from the brain of any one individual; they will have to be the product of the thought, discussion, and experimentation of millions of people. In the remainder of this article I would like to examine certain experiences from the labor movement's history which might contribute to that process.

It is unlikely that the growing number of workers who are becoming part of a low-paid, semi-casualized workforce can be organized into existing unions and achieve recognition and legal collective bargaining under current conditions. But that is not the only alternative. There is considerable experience to draw on, both recent and older, for how labor organizations can operate in casualized, high-turnover labor markets. One form has been pioneered by working women's groups, such as Nine-To-Five in Boston. Employer abuses are attacked through publicity, picketing, and other forms of direct action that are not dependent on union bargaining rights in a workplace. (Similar tactics have long been used by the civil rights movement to attack racist employment policies.) Campaigns can start by attacking the worst abuses, while proposing standards with which all employers will ultimately be expected to comply. By such means, workers can establish minimum wages and working conditions in an industry or community without legally recognized collective bargaining rights.

Control of the hiring process has often proven crucial in highly casualized labor markets. West Coast longshoremen in the early 1930s, for example, focused their organizing efforts on

controlling the casualized labor market based on the shape-up. By establishing worker control of the hiring process through union-run hiring halls, the longshoremen were able to eliminate the intense competition that had prevailed among workers under the shape-up. Attempts to gain control over hiring might prove to be of renewed importance in today's labor markets dominated by temporary employment agencies.

Another approach was that of the Wobblies, perhaps the greatest experts ever known in utilizing worker power in highly casualized labor markets. Despite shape-ups and high turnover, they were able in many situations to use group norms, conscious withdrawal of efficiency, surprise work stoppages, and similar techniques to win concrete gains for workers who on the face of things appeared powerless. Wobblies retained their membership rights and their identification with the union as they moved from job to unemployment to next job in highly casualized labor markets.

Of course activities of this kind depend on the commitment and initiative of rank-and-file participants. And in the absence of dues check-off and union security clauses, a labor movement can hardly depend primarily on paid, professional organizers and staff. It is hard to see how a labor movement could be effective under the conditions developing today without a major shift in initiative and power toward rank-and-file activists.

As industrial deconcentration makes it necessary to look for organizational forms that might supersede industrial unionism, we may have something to learn from the historical experience of the Knights of Labor. American industry in the late nineteenth century resembled in certain ways the pattern toward which the U.S. economy seems headed today. Large numbers of shops of varying sizes spread through both rural and urban areas. The Knights created an organization which embraced "all workers of hand or brain." All members in a region—whatever their industry, employer, or craft—were organized into the same district. Each district was comprised of local assemblies which might represent those from one workplace, one craft, or mixed locals, including workers from many workplaces and even housewives. In recent times, a rather similar structure was created by the workers of Polish Solidarity.

A related alternative is the kind of movement in which each community's central labor council is the most important labor institution, with many labor organizations of various kinds represented within it. In the First World War era, central labor councils were far more important in many cities than any particular union. In Seattle, for example, the important role of the Central Labor Council made possible the general strike of 1919. Similar patterns have been important historically in Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. Currently, central labor councils in a number of cities, for example Martinsburg (W. Va.), have begun to play somewhat this kind of role. Elsewhere, as in Danville (Ill.), shadow labor councils have been established by insurgent union activists to perform similar functions. The occupational safety and health groups that have formed in many areas also provide possible growing points for this sort of development: they create networks among rank-and-file workers in many different workplaces, mobilize attacks on particular abuses, and combine workplace organizing and political pressure tactics to impose health and safety standards on employers.

These examples suggest the possibility of making a community rather than an industry the basic unit of the labor movement. This could lead to the development of a direct sense of solidarity and mutual support among all workers in a given area—crucial if workers are to develop mass power. Of course such an approach will hardly fit into the carefully worked out boundaries among different groups of workers established by NLRB bargaining-unit rules and union jurisdictional policies. But it is essential if we are to recover some of the weapons that have led to labor victories in the past, such as sympathetic strikes and boycotts and other forms of mutual support. Such an approach to organization can also make it possible to overcome some of the obsolete divisions between white- and blue-collar workers.

With organization on community rather than industrial lines, the labor movement would be more able to regard the relation between workers and their immediate employer as only one focus among several, and not necessarily the most important. It could represent the interests of workers in their communities, perhaps via some kind of integration with the kinds of

community action represented by the neighborhood groups, citizens action groups, ACORN-type organizations, and the like that have developed to represent the interests of low- and middle-income communities in recent years.

Such a labor movement could increase its effectiveness by leveraging power among workplace, political, and community arenas. We are already seeing the development of various alliances between community organizations and local labor movements in the form of citywide community-labor alliances and similar organizations.

Moving from a national to an international labor movement will be one of the most difficult challenges, but also one of the most important. The working class has a long history of internationalism. The First International was formed largely out of a recognition by trade unions of the necessity for mutual support among workers of the various capitalist countries. Subsequent Internationals attempted to integrate the working class politically on an international basis. On the whole, however, nationalism has proved a more powerful force than labor internationalism throughout the twentieth century.

The internationalization of the economy has made an important change in the immediate economic interests of U.S. workers. A large part of the American workforce experienced considerable prosperity through its partnership in America's global economic dominance. As that dominance declined, these groups were hurt, and their first response was to turn to protectionism to "save American jobs." But neither an expanded drive for exports nor protectionism will help any but a tiny proportion of U.S. workers in the future. Increasingly, American wages will be driven toward the lowest rates than can be found abroad. This creates the basis for an alternative attitude and strategy, based on the interest of American workers in supporting the right of working people throughout the world to organize politically and economically to raise their wages and conditions of life. This implies direct antagonism to American corporate interests and U.S. foreign policy. But the interests of American workers now lie in opposing U.S. support for repressive regimes, since it is their suppression of workers that makes possible the low wages and "stability" that lure American jobs

abroad. Economic conditions are creating the basis for labor internationalism, and for a far more progressive attitude on the part of the American labor movement.

Experiments with international rank-and-file links are under way. For example, representatives of longshoremen in many countries—some rank-and-file committees, some union locals, and some national unions—meet regularly to ensure that longshoremen in different countries don't scab on each other. The attempt to establish direct links at a rank-and-file level among workers throughout the world will be difficult, but it is essential to counter corporate efforts to play workers off against each other.

Capital mobility has been made possible by modern unionism's acceptance of "management's right to manage." Virtually every labor contract recognizes the employer's exclusive right to make all basic decisions concerning capital allocation and the direction of production. This removes workers from any voice in the most basic decisions concerning technology, investment, plant closing, or the other factors that are currently transforming workers' lives.

Such acceptance of "management prerogatives" has not always been the practice in the labor movement, however. Indeed, one of the strengths of traditional craft unionism was its exercise of controls over the production process itself. The power of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers at Carnegie Steel's Homestead Works 1892 was described in a famous comment by a hostile contemporary: "The method of apportioning the work, of regulating the turns, of altering the machinery, in short, every detail of working the great plant, was subject to the interference of some busybody representing the Amalgamated Association." Some unions, notably the glass-makers, actually regulated the quantity of production for entire industries.

A renewed challenge to "management rights" can be seen arising from several directions today. One is the push by many unions, notably the UAW and the Machinists, to fight for union controls over the introduction of new technology. This drive has been codified in the "Technology Bill of Rights" developed by the Machinists. Another is the movement for plant closing

legislation, which challenges management's right to unlimited mobility. The latter reflects the common interest of workers and communities in asserting social control over capital.

In times when gains from employers are hard to come by, people have to survive nonetheless. For that reason, various forms of self-help and mutual aid have often been important parts of the labor movement during hard times. They not only aid material survival, but also help people resist the atomization and demoralization that can be such devastating results of unemployment and economic insecurity. Mutual-aid organizations exist today in the form of cooperative day-care programs, food banks, and employment services, through which working people can provide for their own survival and prevent total atomization. The unemployed leagues of the Great Depression seem to be developing a contemporary counterpart in the form of organizations like the Mon Valley Unemployed Committees, which have organized food banks, demanded expanded unemployment relief, and even used political pressure to stop foreclosures of property of unemployed workers. The expansion of such self-help activities may well be a necessary part of the labor movement of the future.

There is also something to be learned from the direction in which the civil-rights movement was evolving at the time of Martin Luther King's assassination. This involved a shift toward economic issues and the organization of workers, especially the working poor. King's approach was to combine organization of poorer working-class groups in community-based unions (Memphis garbage strike) and neighborhoods (Chicago community unions) with a national direct action mobilization around the rights of the poor. Local actions would have interacted with the national movement in somewhat the same way that the great civil-rights struggles in Montgomery and Birmingham did with the national movement and the pressures it brought on the government.

The Poor People's Campaign, with its economic demands and Washington encampment, was intended to trigger a lower class political mobilization for which the time was not ripe. With today's mass unemployment and destruction of economic security for a growing proportion of the population, the conditions for

such an approach may be more favorable. The number who feel economically deprived appears far greater. And much of the better off part of the working class, which felt rather threatened by the movements of poor and minorities in the 1960s, faces a common threat with them today.

There are different ways a born-again labor movement could arise. It could be the product of a split in the old labor movement, as occurred with the CIO. It could be the product of independent radicals (as was the IWW), particularly feminists. It could grow out of a period of popular struggles which suddenly crystallized in a new organization, as Solidarity did in Poland. What will contribute most to such a development is ongoing experimentation to discover forms that can actually work.

**Comment: Making History But Not Under Circumstances
Chosen By Ourselves**

By David Montgomery

Jeremy Brecher and the Work Relations Group have offered an insightful analysis and useful suggestions to guide participants in present and future struggles of American working people. They argue that the type of industrial unions and collective bargaining developed during the 1930s are now as badly out of date as 1900-vintage craft unionism was during the Great Depression. They are right. Moreover, they do a good job, up to a point, of explaining why labor's accomplishments of the 1930s have turned out to be so vulnerable today. Consider the developments they underscore. The international mobility of capital and its agglomeration by holding companies which are engaged in as many different types of enterprises as there were

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crafts in yesterday's factories have minimized the economic leverage of a union in General Motors or Greyhound. Productive investment per se has been crowded off the list of business priorities by the lure of quick returns (thus not only weakening workers' collective ability to influence a company's long-term development, but also eliminating from corporate planning virtually all consideration of an economy's social purpose: the provision of use values). Finally, a protracted, international economic crisis has made deals cut with unions for the sake of predictability and productivity seem far less attractive to business executives than the destructive impact a glutted labor market can exert against union wages and conditions. Greyhound's gestures of lining up unemployed job applicants parallel to the strikers' picket lines and Reagan's dismissal of *all* PATCO strikers dramatize this return to pre-New Deal styles of industrial relations.

Such an analysis remains incomplete, however, unless more attention is paid to the role of the state and to the present and future roles of existing labor unions than Brecher has offered us. The strategies of capital in the 1980s cannot be understood without a recognition of the decisive power of the state in shaping economic and social relations; and conversely, no strategy for labor will suffice that does not include a systematic struggle for control of the machinery of state. Nineteenth-century-style self-organization and self-help will simply not do, no matter how red (or black) the ribbons in which they are wrapped.

The state today ardently supports free movement of capital on a global scale and militarily buttresses market relationships and political regimes that are needed to keep it moving freely and profitably. Americans' collective protests against their government's aggression toward the peoples of Nicaragua and El Salvador and against plant closings in their own communities converge against the same political target. Just as economic regulatory commissions had once provided shelters for exclusive, but well-rewarded, union practices, so "deregulation" has now made the huge gap between the earnings of unionized and non-union workers in the same industries a virtually irresistible invitation to concessions bargaining. Moreover, the state has contributed decisively to the bureaucratization of unions, both

through legislation and court decisions that encouraged contractual activity by workers but prohibited other forms of class solidarity, and by refusing to enact such elementary measures for the benefit of the whole society as national health insurance, adequate and universal retirement benefits, and housing developments suited to popular needs (rather than those of real estate developers). Those welfare measures are commonplace in Europe, but labor's struggles on their behalf were decisively defeated here in the late 1940s. The fringe benefits and commercial schemes that arose instead served not only to maximize corporate influence over everyday life and sharply segregate protected workers from the unprotected, but also inspired union officers to cultivate the talents needed to manage pensions and services for their members, rather than to mobilize them for mass actions.

Second, at no time in American history has any emerging movement among the workers been able to ignore the organizations that had been created by previous waves of struggle. The Knights of Labor grew alongside many existing trade unions and shared members with them; just as the AFL was later formed by major unions partially in opposition to the Knights. At no time during the IWW's headiest days could its militants forget the presence of a 2-million-member AFL, whether it was openly sabotaging the Wobblies' strike in Lawrence or aiding their strike in Akron as a way of attracting new recruits into the Federation. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s the CIO was sharply opposed, always outnumbered nationally, and severely limited in its options by the AFL. It is also worth remembering, however, that some of the most militant actions of that epoch, such as the 1934 strike of Minneapolis teamsters and their subsequent industrial organizing, the rise of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, and the 1946 general strike in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, took place under the banner of the AFL.

The complex legacy of past struggles must be kept in mind when we assess Brecher's advocacy of mobilizations not linked to bargaining rights, of new organizational forms (especially those reflecting geographic solidarities), of internationalism, and of direct attacks on "management's prerogatives." I heartily agree with the notion that the legal forms of collective bargain-

ing have become so tightly circumscribed that many important future actions of working people are bound to assume styles that make no demands for contracts or for recognition of certified bargaining agents. There are plenty of precedents—not only in the IWW but also in the practice of many nineteenth-century craft unions and of the famous American Railway Union (ARU)—large-scale strikes in which unions organized workers, formulated demands, and negotiated with employers, without ever raising the question of contractual recognition. Perhaps the lessons of the ARU would be especially relevant, not only because that union had to deal with huge corporations of continental scope, but also because it had to contend with a deeply entrenched network of previously created contracts, railroad brotherhoods, and Knights of Labor assemblies.

Local attacks on managerial controls are far from futile today, even within components of multinational corporations. In fact the type of specialized plant, computerized coordination, and low inventories that such corporations now favor makes them highly vulnerable to sudden job actions. It is also true that civil rights boycotts and feminist organization in offices have suggested patterns of self-organization quite different from those prescribed by the Wagner Act. Even at this point, however, it is worth remembering that as early as 1938-39 the courts ruled mass picketing and boycotts by the Future Outlook League (the militant voice of Cleveland's black community) illegal, on the ground that they were not related to formal collective bargaining.

Just as some major innovative workers' efforts of the 1930s and 1940s took place within the AFL, so it is worth noting that organization of the clerical and service sectors is expanding within the framework of legal-contract unionism. Even 925, which is mentioned by Brecher, transformed itself (after careful consideration and shopping around for terms) into a district of the Service Employees International Union. Despite the passivity of many public-sector unions, some of them exhibit the most visible dynamism in the labor movement today. They cannot be disregarded. In short, we must anticipate and cultivate new forms of struggle both inside and outside of the collective bargaining framework.

Similarly, when we think of city-wide solidarities, we must deal with the fact that so far they have been most likely to appear where an established union is combatting plant closures (or concessions backed by the threat of closure, as in New Bedford's Morse Twist Drill), or where a public service union has locked horns directly with the government (as in the 1946 general strikes of Newark, Pittsburgh, and Oakland). In such battles the character of the people active in central labor councils is of critical importance. It is also noteworthy that the One Big Union, which was formed by western Canadian unions that had withdrawn from the Canadian Trades Congress in 1919, and which spread to Lawrence and other parts of the United States in the early 1920s, deliberately organized workers into neighborhood rather than industrial branches, because its activists considered industrial unions to be as divisive as craft unions.

If the OBU ideal made sense at all, however, it did so only in the very congested neighborhoods of cities that were dominated by a single industry. Such tight links between residence and workplace are rare today. Nevertheless, where a large bloc of workers does live adjacent to the factory, a community-based form of organization (or even a local union which acts like a community organization) can provide the form of expression for just such solidarities. During the 1979 strike at New Haven's Olin-Winchester works a neighborhood did mobilize very effectively around its strikers. A draconic injunction against picketing at the plant gates was foiled when all streets leading toward the plant were cordoned off by strikers and their allies.

The fact that the neighborhood which produced such solidarity was black raises questions about how the various strands of popular struggle discussed in Brecher's essay may converge. At every stage in the development of the American labor movement, its unions, assemblies, and parties have taken on a special cultural and political flavor imparted by the ethnic group which dominated the workforce at the particular time and place. The power of the black presence in industrial and service unions today encourages an orientation toward political action (and especially toward action aimed at ending the exclusion of blacks from municipal power), a sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the third world, a sense of abuse by the existing social order,

and a lack of enthusiasm for bellicose jingoism, all of which run counter to the political orientation of Lane Kirkland and the AFL-CIO's Executive Council. Witness the number of union banners and hats worn by blacks at recent mass peace and civil rights demonstrations. This orientation is as significant for the unfolding political struggles of American workers as it is for their activity at the point of production.

These issues deserve discussion for the same reason that makes Brecher's analysis important. Ultimately what decisively shapes workers' actions and our future is what is in people's heads. No style of struggle and no militant "fight-back" will lead out of the crisis of capitalism unless it evokes widespread popular debate about the basic nature of our society and what sort of life we as people wish to create. Reagan has done us an unwitting service by reminding us of the importance of ideology—of the terms of discourse that inform public discussion of policy and objectives. What has always been true of labor movements, whatever their form, is that their ultimate strength and significance lies in the ideals, analysis, and common aspirations of their constituents. Action, argument, and analysis must be promoted on all possible fronts.

The Leopard Does Change Its Spots

Civil Rights

We condemn bigots who inject class, racial and religious prejudice into public and political matters. Bigotry is un-American and a danger to the Republic.

Equal Rights

We recommend to Congress the submission of a Constitutional amendment providing equal rights for men and women.

We favor legislation assuring equal pay for equal work regardless of sex.

—1952 Republic Platform (adopted by the
Republican National Convention, July 11, 1952)