

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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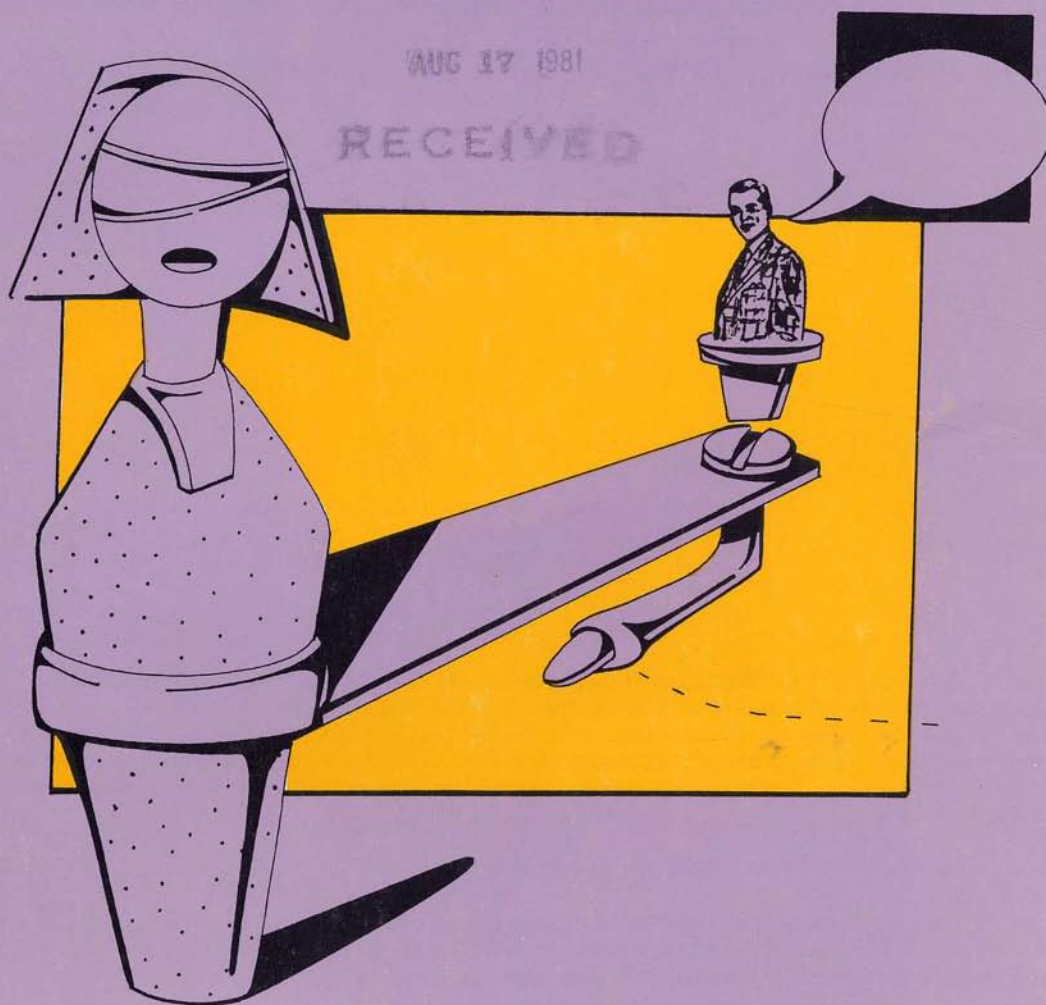
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INTRODUCTION

We are devoting a large section of this issue to sexual harassment because we are increasingly impressed with its importance as an aspect of the oppression of women and as an issue with which to challenge male supremacy. The emergence of sexual harassment as a major focus of feminist organizing at this time is appropriate, too, given the particular contradictions that face women in a contracting economy and a reactionary, antifeminist mood. The "pro-family" and religious Right is reasserting the traditional motherly, domestic role for women at a time when the economic conditions make that role — even if it were desirable — unattainable for most women. The myth of the male breadwinner is quickly dying. Most middle- and working-class people know it takes two incomes (at least) to maintain a family. But women, even mothers and older women, in the wage labor force are in a unique double bind; no, a triple bind. They are expected not only to earn a living and hold down another full-time job of domestic labor, but also to live up to a new cultural image which requires women to be sexy, attractive, and — at least in conversation — available to men's sexual overtures. Even the moralistic, religious New Right to a large extent accepts the new norm of women as sexy and available (see Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman*, for example).

The feminist campaign against sexual harassment illuminates this trap for what it is, a piece of the apparatus that keeps women and particularly women workers subordinate and insecure. It is an important workers-rights campaign that is also challenging unions and employers to give employees more respect and control over their working conditions. It also

represents a major challenge to a deeply embedded aspect of male power — the control over public space and the right to use implicit sexual threats as a way of keeping women either out of public space or timid within it.

Articles in this issue by our editor Linda Gordon and the Boston-area Alliance Against Sexual Coercion (AASC) argue, however, that the workplace is for women a *complex* arena of social interaction. On the one hand, women look to their jobs for increased power and well-being through acquiring more money, friendship, and social contacts, and independent space and time. As the number of women working exclusively within their homes declines, more women's lives will be defined by a variety of factors including employers and co-workers as well as family. This variety is attractive to many women, and even when working conditions are oppressive they may enjoy the camaraderie of other workers in facing those conditions. On the other hand, these sources of increased power for women can be undercut when their working environment reinforces a self-image as sexual object, not only sexualizing every possible encounter between men and women but doing so in a manner in which women are always passive, the acted upon, not the sexual initiator or equal.

Both Gordon and AASC point out that the definition of sexual harassment is difficult because its varieties are so many. All forms take power away from women, making them less willing to stand up to injustice and more likely to seek out "good" men for protection against other men. But different women experience different things as harassing, due to class, cultural, age-based, religious, and personal differences.

Both authors also demonstrate in these articles another aspect of recent feminist thought that seems to us very important:

viewing women's work experience not merely as a class relation between labor and capital, but also as an experience of relations between the sexes with an autonomous set of power struggles; similarly, while wage work can provide experiences of solidarity (and betrayal) among proletarians, it can also provide experiences of solidarity (and betrayal) among women. These many factors should illuminate our overall understanding of the experience of work, moving us beyond abstractions based on a theoretical model of class struggle.

Finally, the variety of factors also shows the need for varied tactics in responding to sexual harassment, as the AASC article demonstrates. Simplistic rhetoric of condemnation does not help many women who cannot simply withdraw from oppressive workplace situations. Women need to build understanding and support among other women workers who still (we suspect women are changing about this fast) experience unwanted sexual advances as an inevitable, even biological, result of their own womanhood rather than as voluntary and aggressive patterns of men.

The other three articles in this issue all touch in one way or another on the decline of manufacturing in America. There is much to be said on this topic, and these articles explore different aspects of its complex character. Staughton Lynd's article uses the experience of the Youngstown, Ohio, steel industry as the starting point for a strategic discussion of how workers and communities can organize to prevent the arbitrary closing of plants. Only the most partial of victories was won in Youngstown, but Lynd's article represents a creative attempt to make the experiences of that struggle useful to activists in other industries and other parts of the country.

In a sense, Karen Nussbaum's speech on the shift of capital represents the other side of the

coin from Lynd's article. She points out that massive investments are going directly from manufacturing into industries that employ mostly low-paid female clerical workers. She points to the need of these workers for union protection against the intense speedup that is part of the corporate plans for them. To this we would add that a fight against their victimization specifically as women is equally necessary.

Finally, Ann Sullivan's review of *Amoskeag* is an insightful personal look at a city that was

once one of America's most important manufacturing centers: Manchester, New Hampshire, whose giant textile mill closed in the 1930s. Her review is also an important criticism of a trend in "oral history" and family history, a trend towards a nostalgic and consensus view of the industrial working class which denies the centrality of class struggle, conflicts between men and women, and political issues, and offers instead a false view of families as homogeneous, harmonic institutions of mutual support.

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Remember that a man could drown,
as easily in honey
as he could in quicksand;

(unless you are the moon
and can reassemble after
carelessly shattering quarter by quarter)

Ann Newman

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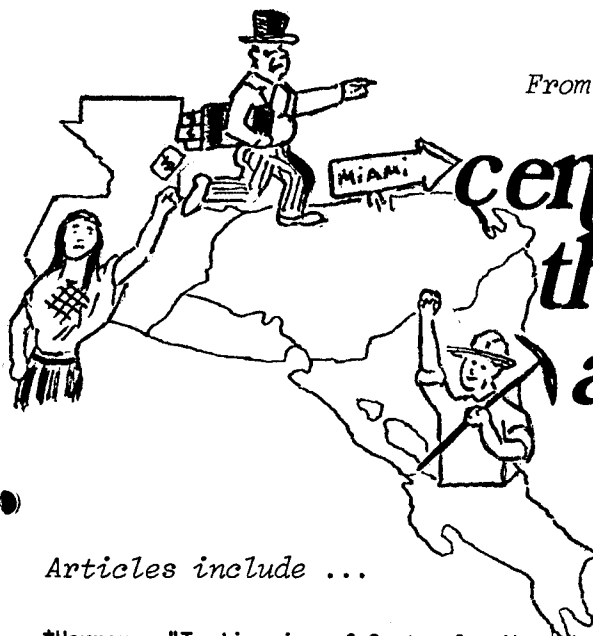
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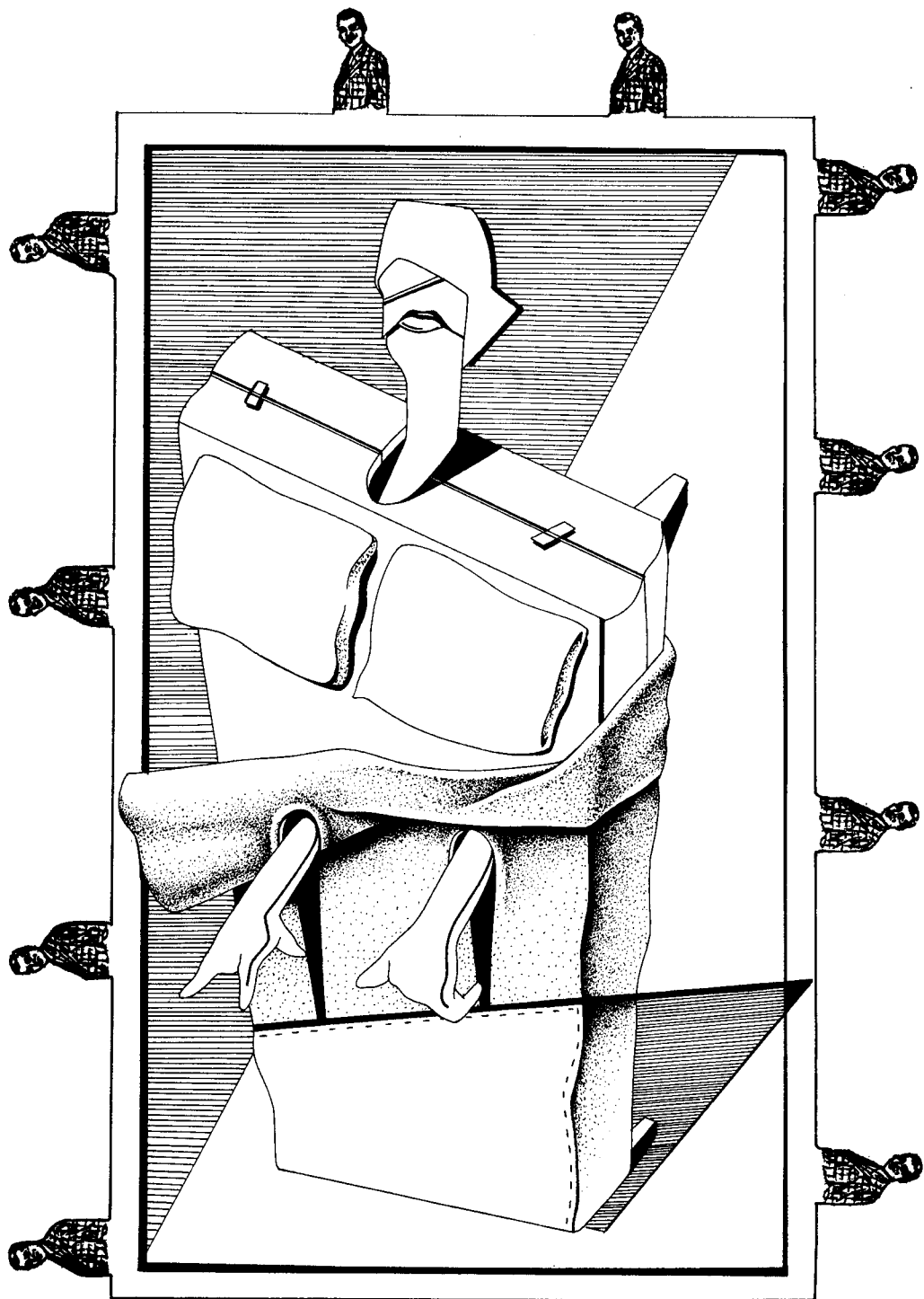
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•THE POLITICS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Linda Gordon

The existence of this public meeting reflects the big victory we have already won. It is a great achievement of the women's liberation movement that sexual harassment has been dragged out of the sanctum of tacit male privilege, with its disguise as harmless badinage and play ripped off, and recognized as a violation of women's rights. Indeed, not only is sexual harassment now a violation of the law, but to many it is becoming apparent that it is even unjust. A decade ago such recognition did not exist. Indeed, a decade ago the phrase "sexual harassment" would have been unrecognized by most people in this country. The creation of a new vocabulary by the feminist movement is not a minor accomplishment. New concepts like sexism and sexual harassment, and new definitions of old concepts like rape, are the symbols of profound changes in consciousness. Such consciousness-changing is absolutely as fundamental a form of progress toward a better society as any material or organizational gains — in fact, probably more fundamental, since consciousness must be the basis of political struggle.

In this talk I want to do two things: first, to summarize what the experience of women has shown about the seriousness of sexual harassment and the importance of making it a high-priority target in all political work; second, to take stock of some of the new problems

This is a slightly revised version of the opening speech given at a public forum on sexual harassment, sponsored by a group of feminist activists in Boston, February 1981.

created by the victories we have gained.

There is no universal definition of sexual harassment; involved in its definition are controversial implications, some of which I will mention later. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, referring to legally actionable harassment in work situations, has a particular definition.* The Alliance Against Sexual Coercion here in Boston offers a much more flexible and realistic definition.

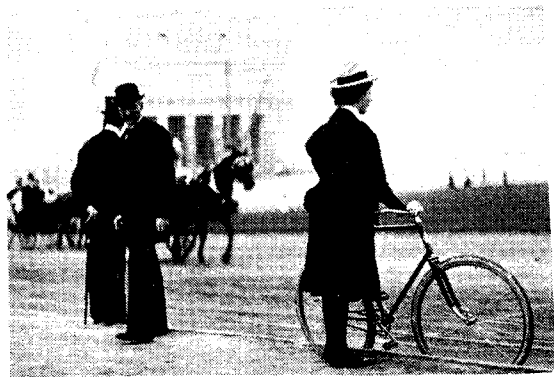
One point worth noting is that the definition of the wrong has itself been evolving historically as women gain power to set higher standards of the way in which they expect to be treated, and as both women and men evolve different standards of acceptable sexual behavior. The earliest records of women's experiences in socialized and heterosexual work situations include complaints of sexual harassment. In the 1820s in the Lowell textile mills women objected to harassment. They included as harassment offensive language used in their presence (language which may be used by women themselves today) as well as indecent propositions by men with power over their jobs. There is both continuity and change in the manner in which men harass women.

A second point is that a definition of sexual harassment cannot ever be complete because of the literally infinite variation in the forms in which men use sex to intimidate and subject

women. Much of sexual harassment is embedded in innuendo, in body language, in rude stares — gestures that will vary by culture, social group, class, and era, as well as by individual. One consequence is that it is often impossible to prove that a certain gesture was harassing; to some extent one has to accept the fact that harassment is what feels harassing to the individual woman. Furthermore, the implied threat may be extremely subtle. Men have power over women in so many ways that they need not be bosses, nor make direct threats, for their sexual overtures to be coercive. What a woman perceives as harassing may not be intended hostilely or even arrogantly. Men frequently make remarks about women's looks that come no doubt from their genuine appreciation of beauty; yet these remarks may deepen the women's sense that they are *only* sex objects and thus further deprive them of the ability to take themselves seriously as workers, friends, and people with ideas about the world.

Despite this variety and historical change in the nature of sexual harassment, there has been remarkable continuity in the results — or perhaps one should say function — of sexual harassment. In the Lowell textile mills 150 years ago, as in insurance offices today, harassment

*Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.



is a major contributor to the consciousness that women have of themselves as workers, that men have of themselves, and that the sexes have toward each other. The notion that women are fundamentally out of place in the wage-labor force is perpetually maintained and reinforced by their treatment as passive sexual beings. By contrast, men are workers (we cannot say men are *treated* as workers since they claim the right to self-definition) who can behave sexually if and when they desire.

In contemplating the many reverberations of the patterns set up by sexual harassment, it is hard to keep in mind all the consequences. That women are forced to accept the image of themselves as fair game in any public space — even if for the least serious of attacks, say, whistling from across the street — maintains and reinforces women's sense of belonging at home in the family, and hence of the most basic sexual division of labor, one of the biggest sources of sexual inequality.

The attitudes which produce sexual harassment also maintain a powerful bonding among men which not only weakens any existing class consciousness, but is one of the major obstacles to its development. I might add that this is the *hopeful* view; the more skeptical one is that the historically developed notion of class consciousness that we have inherited is based so fundamentally on male bonding, on fraternity, that it cannot be transformed into a comradeship including women without changing the image of comradeship itself.

Thus, from a socialist perspective as well as from a feminist one, no general issue is more important than sexual harassment. To challenge it, to make it unacceptable, is to attack one of the major barriers to unity among people who have the possibility of bringing about radical social change. To challenge it is also to challenge one of the aspects of the male

ego and the male-dominated culture that feminists so dislike — the ego and the culture which depend on the subordination of others.

The very difficulty of defining sexual harassment specifically should be an asset, for it cannot be combatted effectively in a mechanical, legalistic, or superficial way. Teaching men to quit harassing women cannot be done by rote. It requires enjoining them to try to see the world from a woman's perspective: it requires developing the faculty of empathy that is so atrophied in many people; it requires challenging all those patterns of bonding which block the possibility of understanding a different point of view.

I do not consider sexual harassment as a gender-neutral phenomenon which women do to men as often as men to women. I would hardly deny that women can use sex in an harassing way; far from it. Sex is one of the few weapons women may have. But it is absurd on the face of it to suggest that the sexual harassment of men by women or of women by women is a social problem, any more than rape by women. For better or worse, women's sexuality in our culture, whether heterosexual or lesbian, is not aggressive. Furthermore, acts of sex or sexual flirtation cannot be abstracted from the overall context of male supremacy which, with few exceptions, deprives women of coercive powers. These basic facts can be obscured when the struggle against sexual harassment becomes disconnected from a women's movement, as has now happened to some extent. Thus we see polls which show men to be harassed as often as women!

This brings us to the second general topic, the changes created by the victory we have won in making sexual harassment illegal. Perhaps the most important characteristic of this victory is its fragility. In this period of strong anti-feminism it does not take much imagination to

figure out how sexual harassment could be licensed again, and the legal and social weapons we now have against it taken from us. Only constant vigilance and militance on this issue can maintain these weapons for us.

Furthermore, as feminists we face a particular problem in how to *use* the weapons we have because of the definitional problems. There is a big area of overlap between sexism and sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is part of sexism; to detach it from that context would be to miss its importance. Yet we have an interest in defining sexual harassment specifically so that we can use the legal and moral weapons we have gained. If we insist on total subjectivity in the definition of the "crime" — that is, that whatever makes a woman feel harassed is harassment — then we will sacrifice all access to legal weapons. Perhaps someday we will be strong enough as a movement to make sexism itself a crime; but we are not that strong yet and "merely" pressuring sexual harassment out of existence would be most welcome.

We have yet another interest in being specific about sexual harassment: because we women are *changing*, are deciding not to accept treatment that we previously regarded as normal, many men are genuinely confused. Indeed, many men are defensive and angry; many conceive of the pressure against sexual harassment as a rejection of their very personalities, and lack confidence in their ability to find other sources of identity. This does give us the responsibility of *examining* what it is that we find harassing, at least enough to be able to *explain* it to others. It is not our fault, of course, if men are thick-skinned about this, and our explanatory attempts may often, perhaps usually, fail, because men benefit from harassing women, and thus have an interest in not understanding. Still, our only hope after all

is that the majority can be forced to change, so that a new norm can be developed, a new pattern of male-female public relations that allows women more space to define and initiate the sexual content of encounters. There is no substitute for patient, as well as impatient but repeated, explanation.

These necessities for specific definition of sexual harassment bring us a new risk: that of separating it from the larger political struggle against male supremacy. Such a separation is, of course, exactly what the government and other institutions forced by our pressure to deal with sexual harassment would like to accomplish. They will want to take control out of our hands, and to transform the issue into a bureaucratized, mechanistic set of procedures for disallowing certain very narrowly defined behavior. That sort of legalism will tell the majority of victims that their experiences do not qualify as sexual harassment and must be tolerated. It is therefore vital for the women's movement to retain a *primary* commitment to nonlegal and nonbureaucratic means of struggle, means that we can control ourselves.

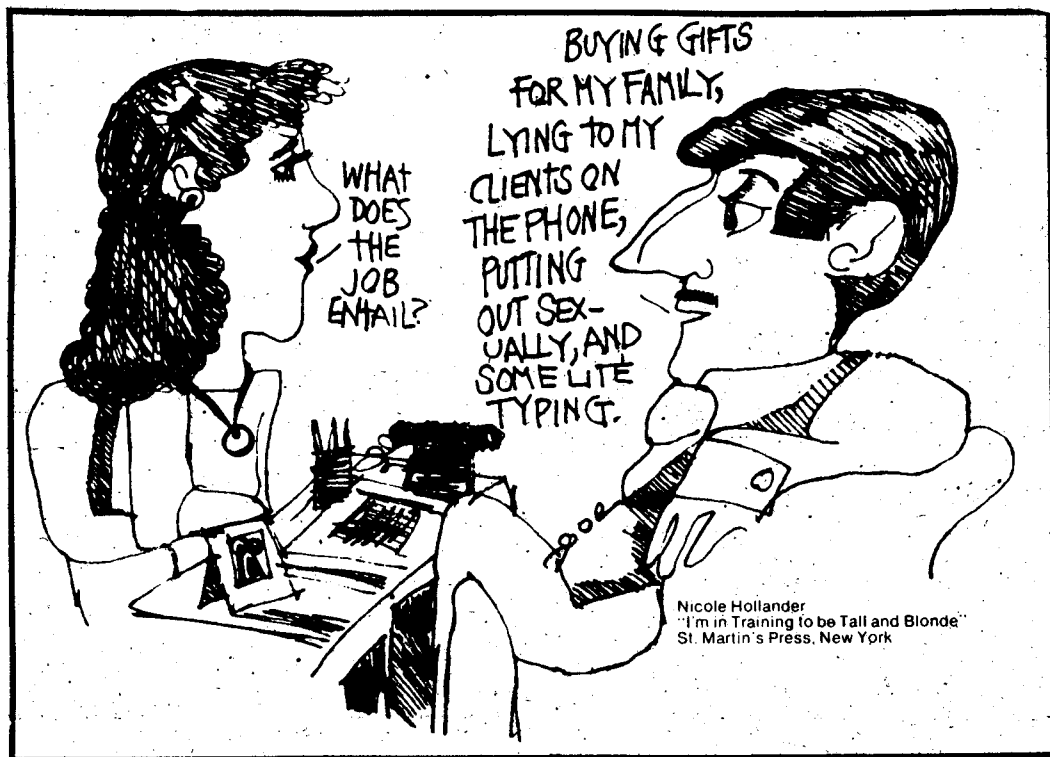
There are important civil-liberties dangers involved in sexual harassment actions in general, and in particular resulting from our commitment to extralegal, movement-based struggles. A person's reputation can be ruined, in certain communities at least, by an accusation of harassment. We do not believe it is ever in women's interest to override civil-liberties concerns automatically, because those kinds of protections are so important to us as a subordinate group. Furthermore, we want to encourage victims to protest, and we think women will do so more easily if they do *not* feel that they bear the responsibility for ruining someone's life because of a mistake. In addition, sexual harassment procedures can easily be used against lesbians and gay people as part of a

homophobic campaign. The record of sexual harassment cases litigated so far suggests that the government and institutions are more likely to act against accused men who are themselves members of vulnerable social groups — racial minorities, or leftists, for example. And judging from the so-called statistics that claim men are often harassed by women, these procedures can easily be used against heterosexual women too, with women of color or other oppressed groups again liable to be more vulnerable.

Civil-liberties considerations lead us to believe that sexual-harassment procedures — whether formal or informal — should whenever possible begin with private conversations. Since women victims cannot be expected to risk such confrontations alone, it is vital to build organi-

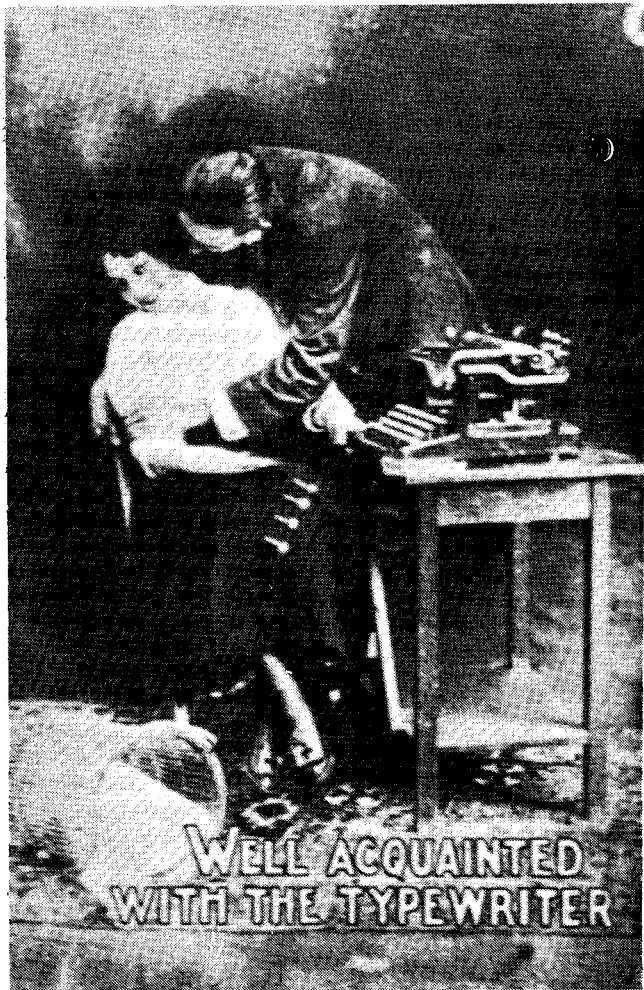
zations and support groups in all situations to take the initiative in behalf of a harassment victim, to confront the accused and give him a chance to apologize and change before beginning public and legal actions which may risk everything. Furthermore, our procedures ought to recognize, without apologizing, that women can be wrong. We get angry like everyone else, and can try to hurt out of anger. We ought also to avoid the trap of assuming that every harassment victim must be an angel in order to qualify as a genuine victim entitled to justice.

There is also a danger that work against sexual harassment can become or be interpreted as antisexual. In the past, feminism has shown distinct tendencies toward sexual prudery, with good reason. Sexual relations are intertwined



with sexism; because of sexism, sexual relations with men have often been exploitative, joyless, and unfree for women. In the nineteenth century women had few options — economically or socially — other than heterosexuality, and it was reasonable for feminists to picture heterosexual sex as something to be minimized and kept within the family. In the early twentieth century the feminist movement began to seek ways of welcoming heterosexuality as potentially fun for women too, and in the past decade a second wave of feminism has helped bring out lesbianism as a practical alternative for women. One purpose of a campaign against sexual harassment is to make it more possible for women to enjoy sexual freedom — as active participants, not as passive recipients. Today, when a right-wing antifeminist backlash is attempting to reinstitute prudish and repressive limits on sexual freedom, it is more important than ever that feminists not project antisexual attitudes.

To fight sexual harassment without being antisexual is complicated, because sex is itself complicated. Enjoyable and mutual sexual flirtations often include teasing; people do say no when they really mean yes. No doubt this happens because in a sexist culture sexuality has been connected to violence, and even romance and play often involve coercion and female submission. One can deplore such a state of affairs, but few can live their whole sexual lives without these cultural forms leaving some personal mark. What is more, different people may experience the same come-ons very differently. Again, there must be somewhat subjective criteria about what constitutes harassment. Such criteria ought to encourage women to take responsibility for our own sexual behavior: identifying what makes us feel harassed — that is, out of control — and reclaiming our own sexual and flirtatious impulses.



Because different women may respond differently to men's overtures, it is extremely important to avoid moralism. Moralism is not the same as morals. Moralism is a kind of right-line-ism in which we impose our own standards on others, disrespecting their own culture and circumstances. Moralism frequently invades discussions of sexual harassment. Some women put down others for wearing sexy clothing, or enjoying treatment by men which they find

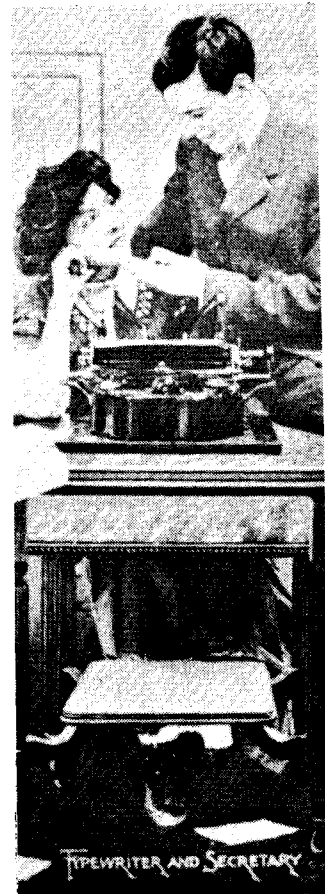
offensive; some women get put down for being up-tight when they can't accept treatment which other women find normal. One long-range goal might be to raise all women's standards for the treatment which they expect, and to increase their confidence to protest when they don't get it. But in the short range one must begin by honoring each woman's own sense of what violates her integrity, at least to the extent that her charges do not violate another person's rights.

The main theme of all this is that an effective struggle against sexual harassment should not be separated from an overall fight against male supremacy. The strictures laid out here no doubt are very demanding: We need to produce a strategy that respects civil liberties, that acknowledges the inevitable subjectivity of judgments without losing the claim to legal objectivity, that criticizes sexual harassment but not sexual flirtation (even when the latter takes forms that may be personally distasteful), and that educates people about the relation between sexual harassment in particular and sexism in general. But all these various goals flow organically out of our basic commitment, which is to make the world a better place for women. And with that as our main commitment, we really cannot afford to lose sight of these complexities.

We are unlikely to be able to keep all these things in mind all the time. And at some times our anger will and should simply explode. But I do think it is important for us at least to acknowledge the complexity of the task we are attempting, and to realize that we are the ones with the most to lose if campaigns against sexual harassment become single-issue reform drives severed from an overall feminist perspective on changing the world.

No matter how radical and ambitious our views of the kind of new society we would like,

the starting point must be that sexual harassment is bad for women. It makes women uncomfortable in their workplaces and therefore encourages them to accept themselves as peripheral in the labor market; it keeps them stratified in the worst jobs, and keeps them subordinate to men in every way. Sexual harassment functions to keep women domestic, to reinforce the tradition that public spaces belong to men. It tightens the double bind we are all — especially heterosexuals — in: that to




be a true woman we must look sexually attractive, but not too sexual. And it encourages blaming ourselves for not being able to meet these double and conflicting expectations. Sexual harassment encourages women's internalized sexualization in a passive mode; it dooms us to reacting and receiving, never inventing and initiating sexual (and also nonsexual) experiences. This passive sexualization discourages women from taking ourselves seriously in other ways. It is hard to function as a serious intellectual in a university when one is being addressed mainly in the form of compliments on our appearance. It is hard to do manual work with strength and skill when one is constantly made conscious of one's body as it is sexually perceived by others. It is hard to be politically active when one is not heard.

Sexual harassment is not a matter of manners, or style. It is a fundamental form of oppression, and one of the most widespread in our society. Tolerating it is absolutely against

the interests of anyone committed to freedom and equality. The understanding of this issue and the struggle against it can only be effectively advanced within the context of an overall feminist analysis. Of course we need to use legal and administrative procedures against sexual harassment wherever they are available to us, but we must resist turning the power completely over to the state or other institutions. We need to hang on to the power to define sexual harassment; to understand that the only reliable protection for women will be the power of the women's movement, not the threat of official punishment. Therefore our primary goal should be to raise the consciousness of other women about the kind of treatment they deserve, and their capacity to defend each other's "individual" rights collectively.

LINDA GORDON *is a longtime feminist and socialist activist and a women's historian.*

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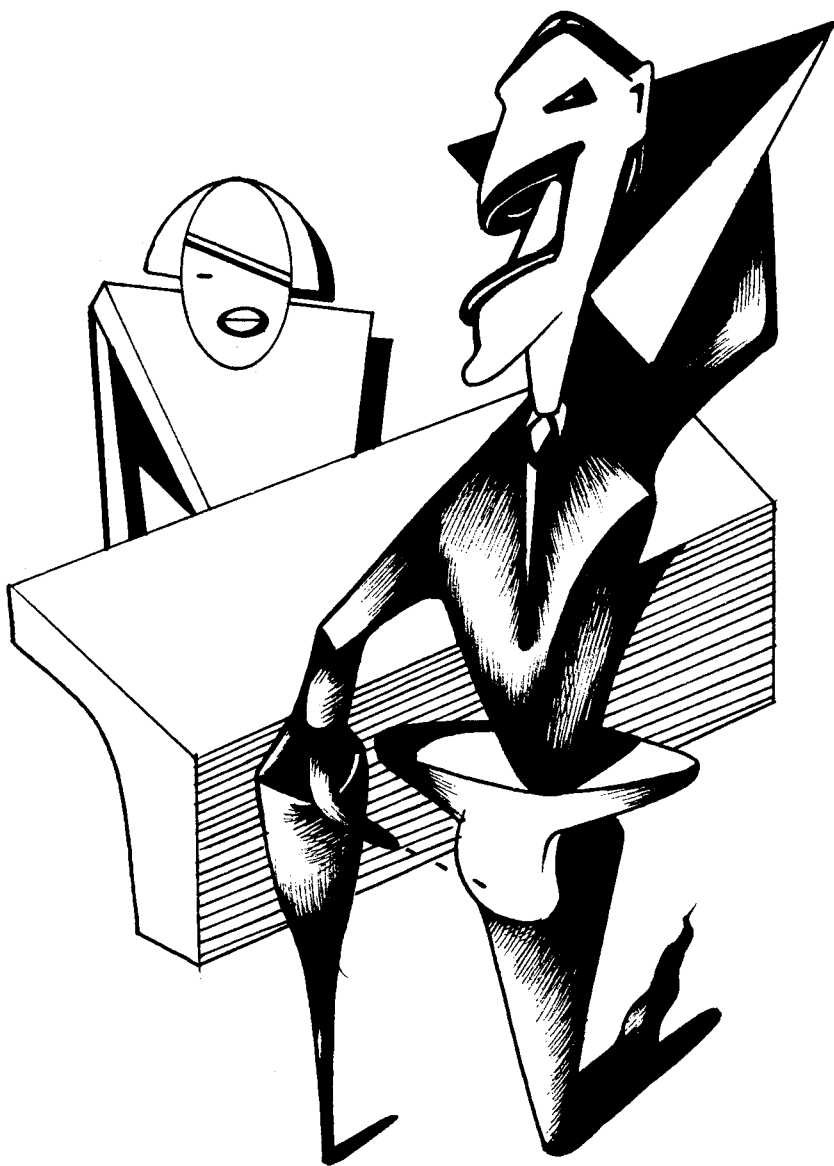
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•ORGANIZING AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

by the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion

In 1976, when the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion was founded, sexual harassment was not a topic of public concern. That same year, *Redbook* magazine included a questionnaire asking women if they received unwanted sexual attention on the job. Of the nine thousand women who responded, a startling 88 percent reported harassment. The response was a complete surprise to almost everyone at that time.

Today, sexual harassment stories are featured in newspapers and magazines; TV specials and movies address the issue explicitly. Sexual harassment has been made illegal under the Title VII sex discrimination law, as well as other statutes. Women who are harassed can (sometimes) collect unemployment if they quit their jobs. Feminists have won some victories.

In the process feminists and leftists have come to understand more of the subtle dynamics of power and sex in workplaces (and in universities, where many cases have been documented). Some of us have come to recognize as harassment, dynamics which formerly we accepted as inevitable aspects of male-female interaction in the workplace. Our definitions of what we will accept as "normal" have changed. Along with these changes, our confidence in ourselves as women and as workers defining what we want and need in our lives has grown.

But work on the issue of sexual harassment is not simple. Legal solutions do not encourage the kind of workplace organizing which would ultimately give women greater

power vis-a-vis management. Historically in the US the women's liberation movement, particularly the violence-against-women movement from which AASC evolved, has been separated from the labor movement. Both labor leaders and leftists have been indifferent, suspicious, or even hostile toward organizing around "women's issues." Yet sexual harassment is an issue which combines insights from both the labor and women's movements.

In the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, we see sexual harassment at the intersection of two perspectives: first, as a working women's issue, since the harassment is affected by the unequal power relationships of the workplace; and second, as an issue of violence against women. We feel that these aspects of sexual harassment are interrelated and interdependent. The economic insecurity of working women is intensified by the threat that sexual harassment might escalate from subtle to much more serious and blatant actions involving physical and sexual assault. The threat of such violence has always kept women "in their place" as defined by men, and in the workplace it serves to keep women isolated and powerless.

AASC was founded by three women who had worked in the movement against rape. The violence-against-women movement identified the inequality of men and women and showed how our society was structured around male power and sexism. But because sexual harassment occurs at work and is only one issue among the many problems women workers face, AASC found that it was necessary not only to create separate services for sexually harassed women but also to expand our analysis and explore strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and sexism on the job. The violence-against-women movement had initiated certain strategies and institutions such as rape crisis centers for women to deal with

emotional aspects of rape, and shelters for battered women. On a small scale, self-defense skills were shared and women became much more aware of their own relationship to the social system. But these strategies were not viable within a job context. These women had to go to work every day and deal with the harassment each day. Dealing with the emotional aspects of violence against women, or being more self-aware or knowing self-defense, helps to give a woman more control, but it does not confront the issue of economic dependence and survival.

Violence is an underpinning to social control in this society, and the use of it to control women is readily accepted. A woman will not complain to another woman or to a man about sexual harassment if she feels that they condone the behavior. But this is not the only reason why a woman might not complain: the strict hierarchies and regimentation of the workplace discourage any complaint from men or women. People are tracked and expected to stay tracked; it is much easier to fire those who balk than to change the hierarchy of the institution. There is no assumed level of worker support, particularly in cases involving sexual harassment. All of these factors are part of our analysis of sexual harassment in the workplace, as both issues of violence against women and as an economic issue facing women workers.

Any woman who strives to be economically independent knows consciously or unconsciously, that she is stepping out of place. The threat of violence is a means of pushing her back to validate herself according to a male definition — to "go back to the home" psychologically or actually. Whether women work out of necessity (as most do) or out of choice, the threat of violence tells them they should understand themselves as marginal to the world of paid work. In 75 percent of our cases, subtle

harassment does escalate to a more blatant form. Whether women are conscious of it or not, this is part of the reason that women remain powerless and fear to do anything.

● Women are conditioned to feel that if they confront the issue directly, it will most likely escalate, for sexual harassment at the workplace is an issue of power and experience shows that pressing the issue will bring on an intensified response. It seems easier to do nothing than to complain, because complaining is stepping out of line, and stepping out of line brings on a display of power and control in our society.

These are some of the reasons why creating strategies to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace is a difficult task. The first step is to challenge women's socialization, to reveal how it disempowers them, and to show how society is structured around their lack of control. The next step is to challenge the workplace structure and to show how women and Third World people are oppressed as workers in a capitalist society. There is no single course of action which will bring about these changes.

The Definition

In some early articulations, violence against women was more or less synonymous with the existence of a sexist, racist, and capitalist system in which women were, as members of our sex, race, and/or class, violated by individuals (men) and institutions. Now violence against women is more often narrowed to acts of physical harm caused by individual men, like rape or battering and violence in the media.

● In the remainder of this article, we use the narrow definition. Work on sexual harassment has gained some focus by narrowing the definition but has lost some insight which came from the broader definition. We have gained a focus on the importance of the ever-present threat of

physical violence as a means of maintaining sexism and preventing women from speaking out against more subtle harassment. Sexual harassment threatens not only a woman's job, but also her safety. Narrowing the definition, however, tends to obscure the way subtle acts which degrade a woman or treat her solely as a sex object are violations of her person; violations have strong emotional impact and generate a sense of powerlessness, regardless of whether the woman feels a greater threat to her safety or her job.

The ultimate message of the violence that is present in all aspects of our lives is that there is no escape from male power. That message remains in the linking of rape, battering, and sexual harassment, along with media violence as the core of violence-against-women organizing. The street, the home, the workplace, and even the world of fantasy and escape are dominated by male power, backed up by the threat of physical harm.

There are difficulties here. Power is also the basis of masculinity in our culture. Many women are attracted to men because they are, or at least appear to be, powerful. This attraction, however, is not to men who appear likely to be violent or cause harm. Rather, power seems to offer protection from violence or actual harm. Passive submissiveness, or at least its pretense, is a part of the definition of femininity. It is likely that powerful men will be attracted to women who play out this definition of femininity. Mutual attraction in the workplace can be the beginning of a fulfilling relationship for both people. It can also be a setup for a woman, a setup for the abuse of power the man has due to his position in the workplace, a position quite likely to be over hers in the hierarchy. It can also be a setup for her due to his ability to wield male social power, regardless of his position in a workplace

hierarchy.

Sexual harassment may often stem from a confusion of issues of sexual attractiveness, power, and violence against women on the part of the harasser. The harasser may fail to recognize the power he does have, denying the importance of the fact that he is above the woman in the workplace hierarchy, claiming that he is just approaching her "as a man" and that she is attracted to him because of who he is, not what he does. A woman may find it hard to sort out confusion as well. We suspect that such a confusion would be particularly difficult for a young woman (i.e. student) to sort out in relation to an older man (i.e. her professor) where other issues such as mentoring may come into play. One test of such a relationship is what happens when one person decides to end it. Can they come to a mutual decision about how to handle the resulting tensions? Or is the

decision made by the more powerful person, resulting in negative effects on the woman's school or work life?

It is clear that what counts as a violation to one woman will not necessarily violate another. And it is important that women begin to define their own needs, to regain a sense of their own power. It is also important that men begin to see *real* women, to see women as individuals. Together, these three points are the basis for the Alliance's insistence that only a subjective definition of sexual harassment, one which incorporates the point of view of the person harassed, is adequate politically.

AASC defines sexual harassment as follows:

Any unwanted sexual attention a woman experiences on the job, ranging from leering, pinching, patting, verbal comments, and subtle pressure for sexual activity, to attempted rape and rape. The sexual harasser may be the woman's employer,



supervisor, co-worker, client, or customer. In addition to the anxiety caused by sexual demands, there is the implicit message from the harasser that non-compliance will lead to reprisals. These reprisals can include escalating the harassment, poor work assignments, sabotaging a woman's work, sarcasm, unsatisfactory job evaluations, threatened demotions, transfers, denial of raises, promotions and benefits, and in the final analysis dismissal and poor job references.

We want to expand briefly on the two reasons we have given for the subjective definition. As advocates, we have relied on this subjective definition because sexual values and beliefs vary greatly between individuals and between culture-groups. Behavior which is frightening, humiliating, or traumatic for one woman may not bother another. When we say that men must take these cultural and individual differences into account in their behavior, we make men responsible for learning to gauge social interactions, for learning how to behave toward whom. Women are too often reluctant to demand that men respect a woman's feelings and beliefs about appropriate social behavior. The reluctance is typified by the frequently heard comment "boys will be boys" — a comment which is often followed by an admonition to girls to be "careful" or "smart," i.e. to assume responsibility themselves for the interaction.

At times, when people ask what sexual harassment is, they are hoping to be provided with a neat categorization. Getting an answer which seems too subjective and perhaps too inclusive such as "unwanted sexual attention" or any sexual behavior which makes a woman uncomfortable, they ask for specifics. But no one could list all the kinds of behavior that constitute "sexual attention," let alone distinguish which could make a woman uncomfortable. A glance or a comment in one context

may be asexual, in another it may be sexual. A joke, a card, a present, a touch of the hand, or shoulder, a dinner invitation — any of these may signify camaraderie, friendship, or support for another worker, or they may be part of a sexual proposition or putdown. Developing a list of "sexual harassment behaviors" would in fact be very constraining of workplace interaction. Many things which are most often merely signs of worker camaraderie would have to be included because they might constitute harassment.

There is concern that women will claim sexual harassment not only falsely, but also when the behavior is either trivial or "just sexist." Actually, this is a rarity rather than the norm. It is more likely that women will not name even clear situations of sexual harassment as harassment. Rather they look at the problem as a man being a jerk who should be ignored. Seldom do they realize that the harassment may escalate or that they are dealing with a social problem that is manifested in all workplaces. More often, it is only after women talk about the behavior and particularly only after it becomes clear that she is afraid of confrontation or of reprisals, or her work is affected, that she names the behavior sexual harassment.

One point to make clear is that in advocating a subjective definition of sexual harassment, we are not advocating the de-sexualization of the workplace. Work is a place where friendships and alliances are formed. Most of a person's waking hours are spent there. What is being demanded is that the friendships formed at work be mutual with all parties consenting. The problem with sexual harassment is that the woman cannot freely choose to say yes or no because of fear of reprisals attached to the demands.

It can be difficult to draw the line between

vulnerable.

Sexual harassment is a complex phenomenon. The two sources of power we are dealing with — male power and class power — overlap and support each other in a variety of ways. It is helpful to look at a concrete example of sexual harassment to clarify and illustrate this point.

Marie is a thirty-two-year-old woman who has worked for the last seven years as an engineer for a large corporation. She is the only woman engineer and was recently promoted to being the only woman supervisor. One person she supervises, Jim, began to flirt with her shortly after he started work, teasing her when she gave him work assignments and making comments about her appearance in front of other crew members. His behavior made Marie uncomfortable, but she was uncertain what to do.

About two months later, about two hours after Marie arrived home, she answered her doorbell, and Jim was at the door. He said he was in the neighborhood and asked to have dinner with her. Marie said no, and that she would see him at work the next day. A couple of times over the next month, Jim stopped by Marie's house after work and requested to have dinner with her or to talk. She explained that she wanted to have only a working relationship with him. At work, Marie felt watched and found herself less and less able to talk to Jim, and spend the time with him that she needed to as his supervisor.

One day Jim approached Marie at work and asked her again why she never invited him in or joined him for dinner. Marie repeated to Jim that she was not interested in seeing him outside of work and that she wanted to maintain professional work boundaries. Jim told Marie that it would be hard for him to complete the project he was working on if she couldn't give

him some time and supervision outside of work.

Six months later, Warren, Marie's supervisor, approached her and told her that Jim had filed a complaint against her. He said that she was unavailable and inaccessible as a supervisor and that she was difficult for him to work with. Jim decided to leave his job. Marie explained the situation to Warren who didn't believe her and thought she was acting irrationally. He felt a good supervisor would have been able to handle the situation. He said that Marie would have to do Jim's work now that he was leaving. Marie felt both punished and, at some level, demoted.

Marie's story is based on a real case and has been chosen because it illustrates many points, both typical and untypical of sexual harassment and its effects on women. The first thing to note here is that Jim's behavior at first made Marie uncomfortable, but there was some confusion for Marie about Jim's behavior and intentions. Due to that confusion, Marie did not set her limits immediately or take clear steps to stop the behavior. It was unclear to Marie whether she as a woman supervisor was being tested for competency, or whether she as a woman was being treated in a degrading manner. In any case the harassment escalated as time went on. This response to sexual harassment is very typical. In the beginning, the behavior feels uncomfortable but not clearly harassing so women are hesitant to set limits. It often reaches a crisis point before the power dynamics of the situation become clear.

Also typical is the fact that Marie blamed herself and saw it as a problem between her and Jim instead of seeing it as a function of Jim's social power as a man. This lack of understanding makes a woman feel only more powerless, guilty, and paralyzed by the situation as it escalates and she is less able to take action.

harmless and mutual flirting and invasive and objectionable behavior in a society that produces men and women who live in separate cultures. Given the power that men hold in our society along with the frequent abuse of power, we feel that it is crucial for women to draw that line and set the standards for acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviors at work. If sexuality, roles, and power are not examined, then any changes in the workplace are only superficial and do not address the real issues. Though there might be channels through which to grieve, this does not solve the problem if women know that the unequal power and violent means to maintain it still exist.

Capitalism and Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is possible because sexism is an integral part of capitalism. Male dominance in the family or at home also means male dominance in the workplace (and vice versa). Sexual harassment expresses and reinforces this power relationship at work. Bosses, supervisors, managers, and owners are almost always men, and such occupational segregation not only perpetuates a close link between sex roles and job functions but also props up the system of depressed wages for women workers.

Recognizing male dominance under capitalism helps us to understand sexual harassment at the workplace because men have not only social control over women, but economic control also. This places women in a situation of double jeopardy. The two spheres of male power mutually reinforce each other, creating a situation in which men are socially and psychologically dominant — sometimes even when women are more highly placed in the workplace hierarchy. In other words, men can and do exert power over women even when they are lower in a job hierarchy or are not “economically fit” in providing for their families.

The leering boss chasing his secretary around the desk is a universal image of sexual harassment. Implicit here is the threat of job-related reprisals for not complying with his demand, a threat which results from the “office-wife” mentality. This view represents the secretary as the girl in the office who takes care of the boss at work while he’s away from his wife at home. The “office-wife” mentality or the creation of the home in the workplace sets up a situation in which a woman is there to meet the needs of her boss. The boundaries concerning what a secretary actually has to do to fulfill her job responsibilities can and often do get fuzzy. The experience of women in these traditional jobs illustrates the fact that male power and dominance forms the basis for male-female relationships in the workforce.

The following are all ways in which capitalism has incorporated sexism, reinforcing male power and reaping increased benefits by the “superexploitation” of women:

- (1) The ideology that views women as a reserve labor force that works only when men are preoccupied with other activities, such as war.
- (2) The ideology that women belong at home, when in fact women must work to support themselves and/or their families.
- (3) The reserving of high-paying jobs for men by tradition and by current practice. This is justified by the myth of men’s natural superiority as well as the definition of women as wife and mother, not worker.
- (4) The idea that women workers are only part-time or transitory help, rather than full-time steady help.

The function of these myths and ideologies is to increase the vulnerability of women workers and to justify the discrimination women face at work. Sexual harassment is only possible because of these myths and it, in turn, makes the position of women workers even more

By not talking to anyone, Marie has eliminated any potential support so that she has no documentation or witnesses to support her explanation of what had been occurring for the past year. Warren believed Jim over Marie — an example of male bonding in action — and she had no evidence to prove otherwise. This situation of internalized guilt is a common one. The myths surrounding sexual harassment, and violence of women generally, make a woman feel that she must have done something to bring it on. Thus she is reluctant to talk to other people about it, maintaining and reinforcing her sense of powerlessness, isolation, and guilt.

It is also typical that the harassment went beyond the workplace and interfered with Marie's home life. Harassers often go to women's homes or follow them home, keeping the woman in a constant state of fear and vulnerability.

The untypical part of this situation is that Marie is a supervisor harassed by a subordinate. Frequently harassment occurs between coworkers, and most often between a boss and a subordinate. Due to the rarity of female supervisors, this case is the exception rather than the rule, but it does illustrate very well the way in which sexism empowers men even when they are economically subordinate to women. Marie is the only woman supervisor and working a nontraditional job. Hence there is a lot of hostility directed toward her and very little support. It is hard to find supportive networks, either among women who are not supervisors or among the male supervisors, who are probably threatened by her very presence and are ready to find her incompetent and irrational.

The bind for Marie is that if she complains or talks to other supervisors, they are likely to decide that she is not a good supervisor because she can't handle this problem with Jim. In this

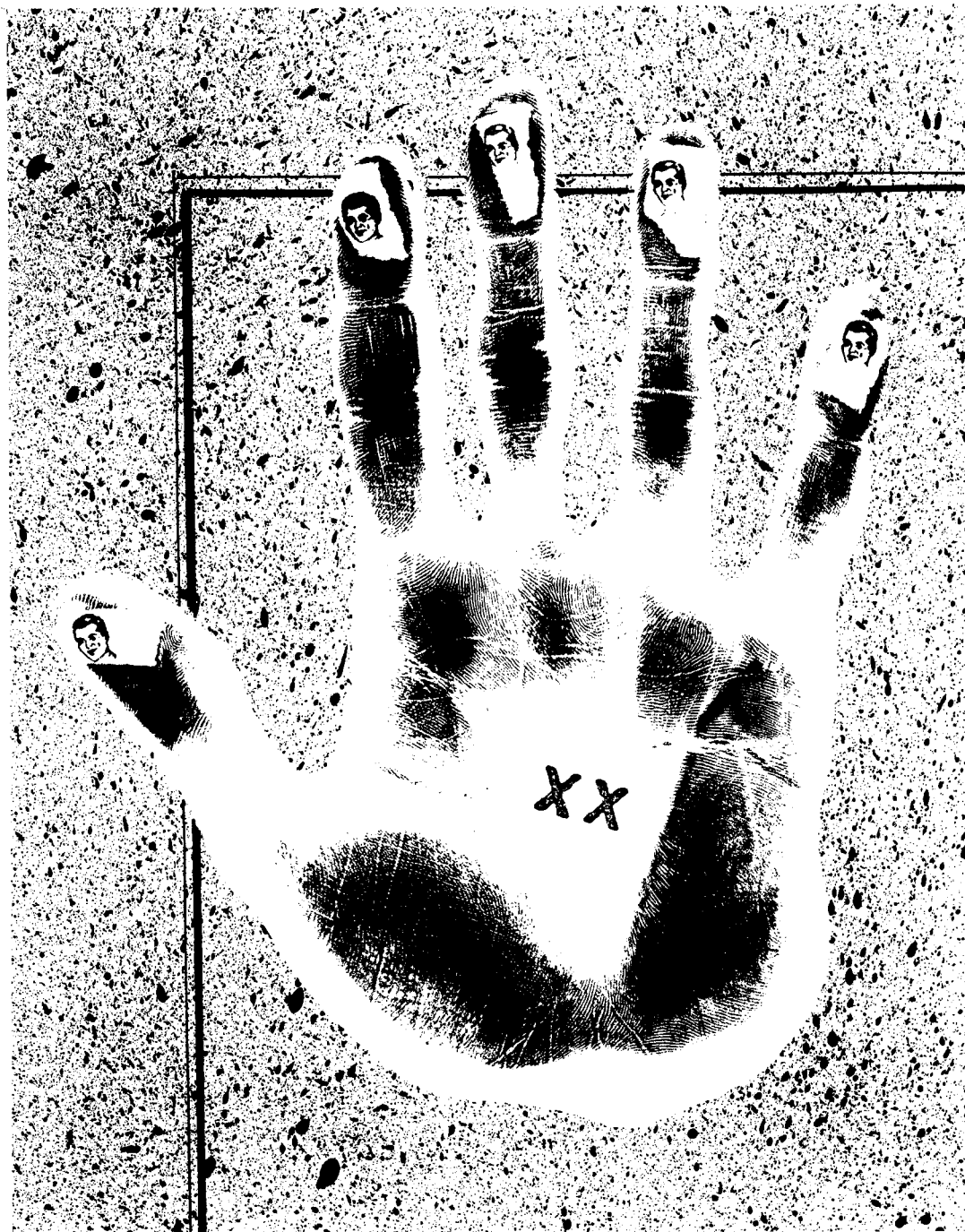
case, Marie's paralysis also has to do with the very real pressures she feels from men testing her and trying to undermine her power. There is a fine line between sexual harassment and workplace rituals. The unclarity and confusion between the two make sexual harassment an effective way to get rid of women in nontraditional jobs or to keep women in certain occupations by showing that they can't handle the pressure.

In conclusion, sexual harassment plays an important function in maintaining sexism and the exploitation of women at work. The effects of sexual harassment on women lead to low productivity, low morale, and high turnover among women workers. This simply reinforces sexist beliefs that women are not good workers, that they should only work certain jobs, and that men should have more power, higher wages, and higher status.

It is clear that sexual harassment is a function of sexism in society and of the sexist organization of work. Sexual harassment, as one expression of male power and sexuality, is a tool to maintain the system of male domination. Our understanding of this problem and of the possible strategies to challenge it must include an analysis of both male power and the structure of the capitalist workplace.

Fighting Sexual Harassment

AASC's work around sexual harassment reflects two goals: (1) assisting women who have been sexually harassed in their workplace or school, and (2) challenging sexual harassment as a built-in condition of work and education for most American women. Challenging the institution of sexual harassment requires a confrontation with the structures of power that perpetuate it: capitalism, sexism, racism, heterosexism, and ageism.



Andy Ewen

AASC has assisted individual women from unorganized and unionized workplaces. We have worked with women who organized themselves to work as a group against particular harassers or for workplace and school grievance procedures. We have worked with women in workplace-based women's groups, both union and nonunion.

Sexual harassment, like all other occupational hazards, is more difficult for unorganized workers to confront than for those in unions. Too often, workplace advocacy groups have failed to seriously address the situation of unorganized workers because the unions have traditionally acted as the primary avenue for providing information and resources about occupational hazards to workers. This has been particularly true in the occupational safety and health movement as most advocacy groups work closely with regional labor councils and do very little outreach to unorganized workers.

Only 11 percent of women workers are unionized. And until recently most unions have not been interested in "women's issues," meaning that it has taken some struggle to place sexual harassment on the union agenda. For both of these reasons, AASC has chosen to make contact with women workers independently through a telephone hotline rather than by working through unions or other workplace organizations.

We have found in our work, whether with unionized or with unorganized workers, that at times our goals conflict. A strategy that most expediently stops the harassment of an individual woman is not necessarily the same tactic that challenges the power structures and ideologies that allow and create harassment. Many women find that the best way to deal with particular situations of harassment is to leave them. This reaction might be the best "solution" for the individual woman, but it

leaves the woman who takes her place vulnerable to the harasser. Many women are fearful, often with good reason, of the risks involved in pursuing strategies which might have a more lasting effect on the workplace.

Although we recognize the conflicts between these goals and try to raise consciousness about the importance of challenging the institution of sexual harassment while fighting a specific harasser, we also remain committed to a woman's right to decide what action she wants to take in a given situation. As an advocacy group, we offer support and information about possible risks and benefits, but women who are harassed must make their own decisions if they are to regain a sense of their own power, a sense which is generally undermined by harassment. Furthermore, they are in the best position to assess the possibilities and risks of various actions. And they must live with the results. This means that we are limited in our ability to challenge an individual's decision, even if we disagree.

There are times, for example, when an individual woman may get more immediate results in her efforts to stop sexual harassment by complaining to a sympathetic person in the hierarchy than by organizing with other women. We've seen a concrete instance in a local hospital. A high-ranking hospital official was dismissed for sexual harassment after a secretary complained to a powerful doctor in the hospital. The doctor was a woman and understood her complaint; the doctor's father had also been a prominent figure in the history of the hospital. Even so, nothing was done by Personnel until the doctor put her complaint on behalf of the secretary in writing and threatened further action if the secretary was not protected. Although the harassment stopped, the secretary felt no greater sense of power in the workplace. Personnel went on to suggest

that she should be transferred, and she had to continue to rely on the good will and understanding of the doctor.

Several other secretaries had been harassed by this hospital official. Their organizing against him might have been less effective in stopping the harassment than the doctor's intervention was, given the harasser's power in the hospital and the expendability of the secretaries. On the other hand, they might have formed the core of a secretaries' organizing group that could eventually force changes with more long-term and truly empowering effects. Taking up sexual harassment as an organizing issue would have been more progressive over the long term. In the meantime, though, a number of secretaries might have lost their jobs or undergone intensified harassment.

Even if the secretaries had filed a joint complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a sex discrimination complaint leading to suit against the hospital, they would have faced a trade-off in their lives. They *might* have forced the hospital to pay for damages and forced it to institute grievance procedures. Thus they might have gained some power vis-a-vis the hospital. But they would have given several years of their lives over to a stressful court battle for whatever they gained in money or in precedents. A lawsuit becomes an act of self-sacrifice to try to establish even a meager legal precedent for other women. And these legal protections may be revoked (as we now see Reagan attempting to do with current guidelines against sexual harassment) by hostile presidential directives or legislation. In the end, the secretaries might wish they had simply found other jobs. Thus the goals of assisting individual women may conflict with the goal of challenging sexual harassment as an institution, along with the power structures which perpetuate it.

This conflict exists both in unorganized and unionized workplaces, but it is more prominent in the unorganized workplace where detailed channels for grieving do not exist. We have also seen cases of union women who face these same dilemmas because they have no real representation of their interests as women by the union. This backdrop is an important one to keep in mind as we look at potential strategies for fighting sexual harassment. We will first look briefly at sexual harassment and unions and then move on to look more closely at the situation of unorganized workers.

Sexual Harassment and Unions

AASC has provided information and programs for various union locals about sexual harassment and has helped women who approached us to raise the issue in their unions. Over the years, we have seen an improvement in the response of unions to this problem, but the basic framework from which unions approach workplace issues — as a simple conflict between management and workers — tends to obscure conflicts based on gender or race. Current controversies over affirmative action and the threat to traditional seniority rights illustrate the bind many unions are in — Which workers' rights are to be protected and which are to be sacrificed? The rights of women workers are not generally seen as a priority.

In fact, sexual harassment and affirmative action often go hand in hand. Complying with affirmative-action guidelines is often a condition of receiving public money. Many companies initially hire women, then systematically subject them to sexual harassment; the women either quit or are fired during their probation period. In many contracts, management is not required to justify the firing, and employees on probation are not entitled to union representation. Either way — quitting or

being fired — the company can claim it met its responsibility in good faith.

Evidence of sexual harassment being used as a union-busting technique also exists. When the Steelworkers were attempting to organize Canadian bank workers several years ago, members of management began harassing those tellers who were most prounion. Again, some women chose to quit, while others agreed to stop their union organizing efforts if the harassment would stop.

Given the widespread attention to sexual harassment as a serious problem, most unions would probably support a union member who was harassed by a member of management. Happily, the cases that have come to AASC's attention in which union officials chose to ignore such complaints are greatly outnumbered by the success stories. The most dramatic of these occurred in October 1979, when fourteen hundred workers walked out at Simpson Plywood in Washington state to protest several instances of women in the International Woodworkers of America being sexually harassed during job interviews. Women were asked to take off their blouses, asked if they wore a bra, and asked if they were willing to have sex with the supervisor. One woman filed sex discrimination charges with the Washington Human Rights Commission and the EEOC. She was fired after filing. The firing triggered the strike, which spread to Simpson plants in California and eventually involved over three thousand workers.

We acknowledge the conflicts for unions in handling sexual harassment between coworkers. As mentioned earlier, most unions are not prepared to step in to resolve sex- or race-based complaints and need to develop methods of intervening in such conflicts between union members. The results of this neglect are seen in increasing friction between

female and Third World workers and the white men who control the unions.

Examples of unions creatively handling cases of coworker harassment are quite rare. Union women around the country report being discouraged from filing a grievance against a union brother. Grieving is often viewed as a divisive act, one that allows management to discipline union members. In contrast, the harassment itself is not often seen as divisive, nor as violating a union's "brotherhood" codes. In cases where grievances are filed, the union is placed in a difficult position; they are obligated both to support the woman's grievance (by EEOC guidelines) and to represent the harasser if he is disciplined by management.

Of course there are strong positive reasons for unions to take sexual harassment seriously, and to deal with it before it takes place. In times where unions need to increase membership and organize workers in new fields, a firm stand against sexual harassment can make a difference. This proved to be a pivotal issue in a recent strike at Boston University by clerical and library workers. District 65 of the UAW won a specific clause in its contract which prohibits harassment, provides a definition, and indicates that grievances will be handled quickly. Fearing similar success during an organizing drive at hospitals in the Harvard Medical Complex, administrators launched a series of training sessions on sexual harassment for all women employees.

Sexual harassment also forms an important bridge between traditional health and safety issues (e.g., noise levels in factories, presence of toxic substances) and other issues relating to the quality of the working environment. After a black woman was raped by a white man in a bathroom at a General Electric plant in Massachusetts last year, the Women's Committee of Local 201 of the International Union of Elec-

trical Workers took action. In addition to responding to the specific event, they distributed a survey to women on all shifts at all of GE's plants. The survey sought to determine the extent of sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced by women, and how safety concerns affected their choice of shifts with pay differentials. By linking sexual harassment and sexual assault with other workplace safety issues, they increased the awareness of all union members. Women from the United Mine Workers and United Steel Workers of America have also included sexual harassment and sexual discrimination with traditional health and safety issues when picketing or taking other job actions.

The legal (EEOC) requirement for workplace training on sexual harassment can be useful for initiating educational programs in locals where they don't already exist. Following the incident at GE described above, the union incorporated workshops into its regularly scheduled business meetings. Films and speakers from community women's organizations were used to encourage internal discussion between men and women on societal images of women, the effects of these images on men and women who work side by side, and sexual harassment. Coworkers can learn to respect each other's definitions of appropriate workplace behavior as they become conscious of sexism and its effects. Unions can distribute literature from sexual-harassment groups, sample contract clauses, and case histories from other locals or unions. Stewards can be trained to assist women and to mediate between coworkers. Women's committees, health and safety committees, or union officials can use general membership meetings to inform members about how to report sexual harassment (a specific person, preferably a woman, should be designated as the recipient of such complaints) and how to meet the required

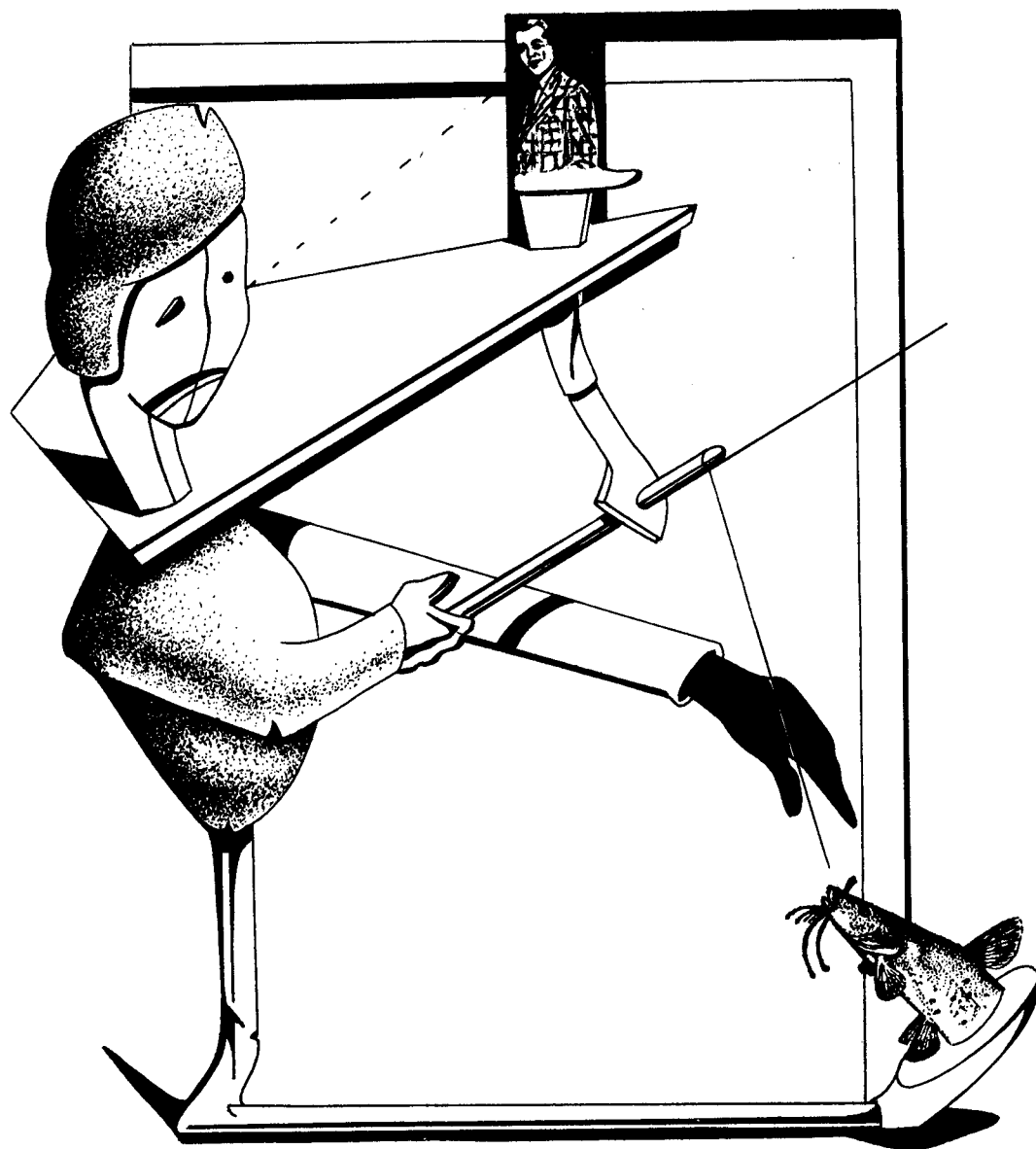
standards of proof.

Sexual Harassment and Unorganized Workers

As mentioned earlier, AASC's work is largely conducted via a telephone hotline. This approach has both positive and negative consequences. We do reach the unorganized woman worker who often has no other resources to help challenge workplace problems. From the vantage point of offering emotional support and basic information about potential strategies and options, our work is both valuable and successful; however, from an organizing perspective, there are many limitations. Our contact is almost always with an individual woman in a workplace who is experiencing sexual harassment in isolation. The one-to-one nature of this contact places us in the service-provider role rather than in a position to catalyze organized action. We can (and do) make suggestions that involve soliciting coworker support and taking action in conjunction with other workers, but collective action in an unorganized workplace is so difficult (and often even harder when sexual harassment is the issue) that many women choose to pursue a strategy that does not involve a lot of publicity and reliance on coworkers.

Whatever theories we hold, it is crucial to understand the ways in which sexual harassment and complaints resulting from it are experienced in the unorganized workplace.

Being sexually harassed often means losing your job no matter what you do. A woman's job is on the line whether she rebuffs the harasser but doesn't tell anyone, acts to stop the harassment, decides under pressure to comply with the demands, or ignores the harassment and hopes it will go away. In each of these cases, we have seen women who were eventually fired on the pretense of poor work



Andy Ewen

performance or insubordination, or who were forced to leave an intolerable situation of constant harassment. We are not saying that it is useless to fight sexual harassment in the workplace or that a woman should leave as soon as the harassment begins. Rather, we are saying that there is no safety in staying quiet and trying to keep the problem between herself and the harasser. In fact, we have found that a woman's greatest protection in keeping her job is to speak out and let everyone know exactly what is happening and how she feels about it.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is to overcome the many myths and fears that cause women to remain silent. Many people still believe that sexual harassment doesn't really occur unless the victim provokes it or tries to "sleep her way to the top." Thus, a woman who complains of sexual harassment is often confronted with a barrage of questions that implicate her and play on any feelings of self-blame she may already be experiencing. Women who complain of sexual harassment are often seen as troublemakers and humorless prudes who "just can't take a joke." The chances of retaliatory action, ranging from increased harassment and work sabotage to firing, are high. Some coworkers will be afraid to associate with the "troublemaker" in the workplace. Harassers are often in a position to fire employees who step out of line, so taking any action at all entails great risks. And finally, for many people sexual harassment is difficult to talk about because it means talking about sex and sexual violations — taboo topics in our culture.

These factors forcefully keep women isolated and silent about their experiences with sexual harassment. Many women feel too embarrassed or afraid to speak out about the harassment and also believe that it is safer to remain silent. Remaining silent ensures that a woman will

remain isolated and unprotected from any action the harasser chooses to take. If the harassment continues and a woman decides to try to grieve at a later point, she will have no witnesses or support, or if it gets to a point that she can no longer tolerate, she has no verification that she has been *forced* out of her job.

These real experiences are a starting point for evaluating the options for confronting sexual harassment. On the one hand, our understanding of the many dangers and complex power struggles does not allow us to paint a hopeful picture for sexual harassment victims, but on the other hand, our experience does suggest that taking collective action in an unorganized workplace may well be worth the risk.

With this in mind, we would like to suggest some specific tactics that can be used to fight sexual harassment. The first option we will discuss involves varying levels of coworker support and does not rely on utilizing formal grievance procedures within the workplace. The first step in pursuing any course of action is to break the isolation of sexual harassment. This can be done in a number of ways. Placing leaflets about sexual harassment in bathrooms or publicizing the name of the harasser can be an effective means of communication. Another option might be to survey your workplace to determine what the incidence of sexual harassment actually is. This information is particularly helpful in validating individuals' experience and in convincing those who might be skeptical that sexual harassment is a "real" workplace problem. This can be done discretely and safely. There is also the option of discussing your situation with as many coworkers as possible, and then perhaps forming a workplace safety committee that would meet regularly to discuss the situation and to decide on group action.

The following is an example from our case-load of a successful strategy that resulted from the women in a workplace talking and acting together. A new man/boss was hired, and he soon began harassing many of the fourteen secretaries in the typing pool on the sly. Their tentative efforts to talk to each other about it made them aware of the problem and revealed that each of them felt threatened and isolated as well as very angry. Together the women decided that each time he called one of them into his office, a coworker would accompany her so no one would ever be alone with him. If he insisted on speaking with only one woman, then the other would leave the door to his office open as she went out. The situation placed the man in an extremely awkward position and made it very difficult for him to continue his harassment. He quit within a month. This story exemplifies one of the wide range of options available to women who truly have the support of their coworkers.

Each of the tactics offers a chance to fight sexual harassment but they all require a willingness to raise the subject within the workplace and then to take responsibility for educating those who don't take it seriously. These strategies certainly help a woman who is actually being harassed by creating a network that can help develop a plan of action as well as offer support. It is also very helpful to pursue one or all of these tactics *before* a situation of harassment actually occurs. If sexual harassment has already been discussed in a workplace, the climate is better for responding to a specific instance of harassment.

We have successfully used two other options for fighting sexual harassment outside of traditional workplace solutions to problems. The first is an educational picket in front of the worksite. For obvious reasons, this strategy is not realistic unless a woman has quit her job or

knows that she will inevitably have to leave anyway. Pickets certainly have the advantage of drawing public attention to the problem of sexual harassment and embarrassing the employer by pointing a finger at a specific workplace.

The second tactic is to send a warning letter to the harasser. At the request of a worker, AASC sends warning letters that let the harasser know that his behavior is illegal, and perhaps more importantly, that someone else knows what he is doing. We have found, however, that warning letters sometimes have the effect of escalating rather than stopping the harassment. This option should be chosen only if a woman is prepared to deal with more blatant and direct forms of harassment. Another type of warning letter is one that is sent to the employer rather than the harasser. The employer is legally liable for providing a harassment-free environment, and this type of warning has been helpful in forcing companies to adopt policy statements and grievance procedures concerning sexual harassment.

Another option is to file a grievance through company policy if such a grievance policy exists. Most women will utilize this type of strategy more readily than they will pursue one of the other options outlined here. Filing a grievance is an individual action that does not involve public outcry such as telling the story of being harassed to other coworkers. It is a legitimate channel for grieving (from the employer's perspective) so that it is *seemingly* safer in terms of keeping your job. The reality is that many women who file grievances for sexual harassment are subjected to harsh recriminations on the part of the employer, the harasser, and even some coworkers. These women are often without support or protection of any kind because they have filed as an individual without soliciting support and aid within the workplace.

Even so, the myth tells us that we should be "good" workers and follow company policy. If a woman chooses to pursue a legal strategy ranging from filing for unemployment to lodging a complaint with the EEOC, she must first use the employer's existing channels for complaints and give him or her an opportunity to rectify the situation.

We recognize that a workplace policy on sexual harassment is something to get excited about only if workers maintain some awareness about its potential misuse. It doesn't necessarily offer much protection for a sexual harassment victim; it implies that individual solutions to the problems of sexual harassment are possible, and that women workers can rely on management to take care of their problems. In many cases, the harasser and the person administering the policy are so close that a woman might not even be able to file a complaint.

The issue of using company policy only becomes more complicated when the harasser is a coworker rather than a supervisor or part of management. We have seen instances in which a worker files a complaint against a male coworker out of desperation and lack of options and then is appalled to find out that she loses complete control over the process and over what might happen to resolve the situation.

In other words, when the harasser is disciplined or fired, it may be for reasons other than the harassment: perhaps he is personally disliked; maybe he is not wanted in the workplace because of union work, his color, or his national background; possibly the management is religiously or moralistically opposed to sex, or the owners fear negative publicity or legal action. Issues of worker harassment, union harassment, and racism then come into play. Any individual "victory" in getting a harasser fired can also be a defeat for those of us who

see sexual harassment as being rooted in broader power relationships. When antisex attitudes prevail then the liberation we seek is undermined by a limited vision of who we are as people and a view of sexuality which is ultimately antiwoman. If only women who can afford a lawyer and are not intimidated by the legal system (or by publicity about the actions taken against them) can be effective in stopping harassment, men will simply choose easier victims. Here the conflict between helping a woman and confronting power structures is deepest.

It is still worthwhile to have a policy against sexual harassment on the books. There are those occasions in which the policy provides just enough legitimacy and safety for a woman to pursue some form of direct or collective action with a minimal amount of protection. A stated policy and grievance procedure also helps clarify before the fact how the employer might respond to sexual harassment and helps to make that response consistent. With no clear policy outlined before, the employer can justify any action he or she chooses to take and simply use sexual harassment as a tool for selective punishment of certain employees. Given that women who are being sexually harassed often feel forced to go to "Personnel" at some point during the experience, it is better to have a policy than not to have one. The key is to be very clear about the limits and potential abuses of such a policy.

Sexual harassment is a complicated issue. Fighting it requires an understanding of how sexism, racism, and class privilege operate in our society and in the workplace. Sexual harassment occurs within the work setting because of strict hierarchies which result from and reinforce capitalist economic organization. These class hierarchies are not always structured along race and gender lines, although we

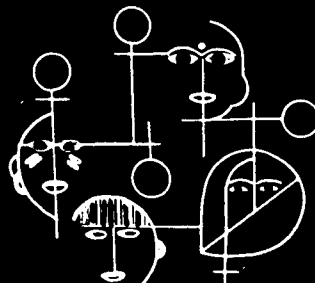
have found that race, class, and gender often coincide. When trying to decide what to do about sexual harassment, we have to take all of these exploitative systems into account.

As leftists and feminists, we can understand why sexual harassment occurs and in many ways it comes as no surprise that it does. What has not been acknowledged to date is the very real bind a woman experiencing harassment is in. We constantly hear about all the problems with the legal system and with using formal or institutional channels to grieve. But along with these very necessary critiques must be a serious understanding of the limited options that do exist. We must be *as concerned* with protecting the woman being harassed and her right to take action as we are with the potential (and probable) misuse of formal complaint channels. This requires not only extensive education about sexual harassment and ways to fight it, but also concerted action by both female and male workers within a workplace before harassment ever occurs.

Greece, April 1967

A pile of bricks lies in the yard
cyclamen pushes the stones apart
the dismayed cry of an ambushed partisan
is still reflected in the window-glass.
The silent hills squat like fortresses,
the rain, exhausted, falls into the sea,
the bathers go home. Comrades, friends,
you resemble the exhumation of a dream.
Your creased, smudged, newspaper faces
are like a mirror framed in darkness.
Your hands merge with the shadows.

Sara Kafatou



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A MAGAZINE OF UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES



North of the 49th parallel we value our aspirations. We have to. In some Canadian cities we have access to more American TV than Americans themselves. We also live in a country that is a convenient dumping ground for mass-market books, magazines and films. Underneath this clutter we do produce an indigenous culture.

Five years ago, in the best tradition of small magazines, a group of artists and writers began working on what has become FUSE — a bi-monthly cultural newsmagazine. We understood that too many ideas of political importance were being buried, lost, or ignored. We wanted access. We wanted to make available the cultural work of women, minorities, labour, artists, community action groups and native peoples. The collective working experience of these often segmented communities is vital in de-federalising and de-homogenising our corporate-dominated culture. As media artists and writers, we also recognized the failure of most progres-

sive magazines to recognize and revalue new exemplary cultural work.

So FUSE is a cross-community magazine. We publish working criticism of feminist, gay, labour, minority and artist productions in film, print, video, music and performance. In our discussion of cultural productions we include issues of economics, class politics, sexism, racism, censorship and minority discrimination.

FUSE has produced supplements on: The Collapse of the Mass Music Industry, Feminist Resources in Art, The Trial of The Body Politic, Canadian Immigration, and Oppositional Television. We have reported on layoffs and shutdowns, Quebec's struggle for self-determination, Inuit control of satellite TV, the history of Black Music in Canada, and much more. If FUSE sounds like a magazine that might interest you, please fill out this box, and we'll send you a sample copy.

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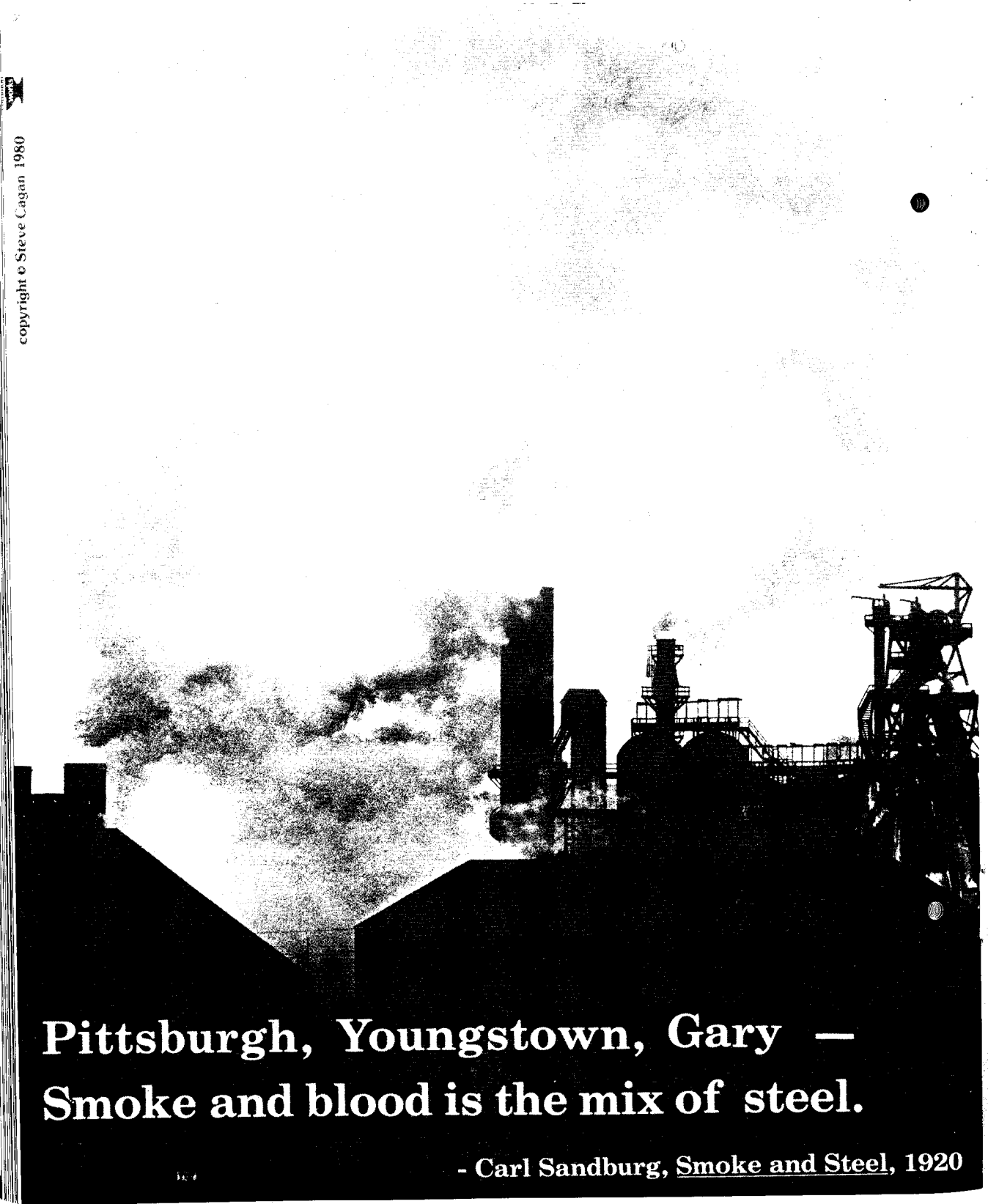
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**Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Gary —
Smoke and blood is the mix of steel.**

- Carl Sandburg, Smoke and Steel, 1920

•WHAT HAPPENED IN YOUNGSTOWN

An Outline*

Staughton Lynd

Economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison state in their recent study *Capital and Communities* that 15 million manufacturing jobs were lost to workers in the United States between 1969 and 1976, an average of 2.5 million jobs per year. In the steel industry, plant closures began to reach epidemic proportions in 1977 when Bethlehem Steel (Lackawanna, New York, and Johnstown, Pennsylvania) and Youngstown Sheet & Tube (Youngstown, Ohio) each closed major facilities and terminated thousands of employees.

On November 27, 1979, United States Steel announced the closing of its Youngstown Works, with the loss of about thirty-five hundred jobs. This was the last in a series of blows to Youngstown area steelworkers; already in the two previous years shutdowns by two other companies had cost about sixty-five hundred jobs. By the time of the US Steel announcement, workers were ready for a fight. Since plant closures are a crucial and unavoidable issue for worker activists all across the country, the story of the Youngstown struggle is worth telling. It is important that we share our experiences with this issue and draw lessons from those experiences.

After futile efforts to induce US Steel to reconsider, the four local unions at the Youngstown Works (Locals 1330, 1307, 3073, and 3072), Local 1462 of the Brier Hill Works (also closed in 1979), Local 1112 of the United Auto Workers (the GM local at Lordstown, Ohio), Republican Congressman Lyle Williams, the TriState Conference on the Impact of Steel,

and seventy-five individual workers filed suit against US Steel on December 21, 1979.

The suit asked that US Steel be restrained from closing the mills, or alternatively, that it be required to make the mills available for acquisition by its workers.*

Federal Judge Thomas Lambros first issued a dramatic injunction forbidding the company to close the mill. Then, after a trial in Youngstown at which the company's chairman of the board and president were subpoenaed to testify, he ruled in favor of the company. On appeal the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals generally affirmed the lower court's decision, though returning the antitrust claim to Judge Lambros for further proceedings.¹

Workers temporarily occupied the administration buildings of United States Steel in both Pittsburgh (on November 30, 1979) and Youngstown (on January 28, 1980). In Pittsburgh what had been planned as an informational picket line spontaneously surged inside the rust-colored company skyscraper. Security guards blocking the escalators to the second floor were brushed aside. In response to pleas from some of their own leaders to go back on the street, people began chanting: "Hell no, we won't go." We had more power than we knew. The company had turned off the elevators leading from the second floor to the executive offices, which also prevented the executives from leaving the building so long as we were there.

On December 20, local union officials were finally permitted to meet with the corporation's

vice-president for industrial relations. They offered to give up \$6 million a year in incentive pay if it would help to keep the Youngstown mills open. They were informed that the corporation did not believe further discussion would be fruitful. The workers then asked if they could buy the mill but elicited no response from the company. This was what prompted the sit-in of January 28.

Close to a thousand protesters gathered at the Local 1330 union hall on January 28, 1980. They listened to Ed Mann, president of Local 1462, quote Frederick Douglass on the necessity of struggle, and then streamed down the hill to occupy United States Steel's Youngstown headquarters for six hours.

The workers were induced to leave the building by a promise of talks with local management the next day. They did talk, and were assured that they would have the same chance as any other potential purchaser. Two days later, on January 31, 1980, David Roderick, chairman of the board of United States Steel, repudiated his local management and declared that the corporation would not sell its Youngstown Works to a government-subsidized competitor.

Hopeful that their antitrust claim in court would somehow overcome the company's refusal to deal with them, the workers formed a corporation, Community Steel, Inc. The board of directors included five local clergy and five steelworkers from the Youngstown Works. The articles of incorporation provided that any decision to lay off more than 10 percent of the workforce must be approved by a majority of the steelworker directors.

A federal grant was made available for a feasibility study. The consultant recommended installing electric furnaces next to the finishing mills in the McDonald Works and reopening the plant. Essentially the same alteration had

*In 1977-78, after Youngstown Sheet & Tube shut down most of the Campbell Works in Youngstown, an Ecumenical Coalition headed by the Catholic bishop of Youngstown had sought federal aid for reopening the shut-down portion under employee-community ownership. Despite a pledge by presidential assistant Jack Watson, the government failed to approve the necessary loan.



Steve Cagan

been recommended before the mills closed by the Youngstown Works superintendent, Bill Kirwan.

But the Carter Administration made no definite commitment before the presidential election of November 4, 1980. Unable to present itself as a potential purchaser with cash in hand, Community Steel lacked "standing," and was obliged to enter into a court-supervised settlement. The gist of the settlement was that steelworkers threw their support to a group of local businessmen to whom United States Steel was willing to lease its mills.

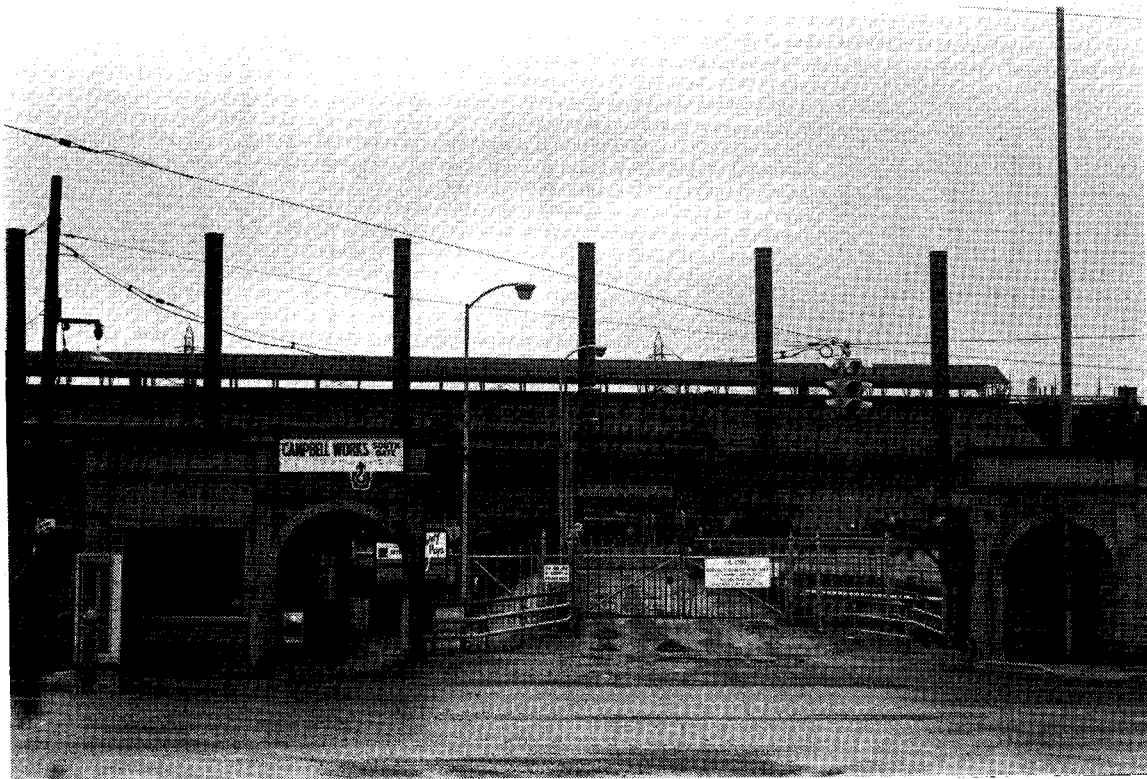
Workers at United States Steel helped to achieve the reopening of part of the McDonald Works. As this is being written, it looks as if

five hundred to a thousand jobs will be restored, thanks to pressure from Community Steel to expand the original plan.

What Is to Be Done?

One day in the summer of 1980 I happened to be at the hall of Local 1330. It was from here that workers had marched to the occupation of the company's administration building, six months before.

Defeat was visibly evident. With the mill down, dues income had ceased. Secretary Terri Cannon had been laid off. The now-empty building with its big glass windows was a natural target for neighborhood kids, and several windows, the glass door, and the



Steve Cagan

window of the secretary's office had been smashed.

When I came in, Bob Vasquez, president of the local, was alone in the building sorting out papers. He looked up and said, "I understand you're a historian," and gave me some typewritten pages.

The papers consisted of several drafts of the first contract of March 1937 between the United States Steel Corporation and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. The drafts reflected divergent management and union approaches to such matters as seniority, adjustment of grievances, and health and safety. One clause, however, was the same in all drafts, by whomever presented, and indeed remains

essentially unchanged in the current Basic Steel Contract. Then the clause stated:

The management of the works and the direction of the working forces, including the right to hire, suspend or discharge for proper cause, or transfer, and the right to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons, is vested exclusively in the Corporation....

Today it reads:

The Company retains the exclusive rights to manage the business and plants and to direct the working forces.... The rights to manage the business and plants and to direct the working forces include the right to hire, suspend or discharge for proper cause, or transfer, and the right

to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons.

This is the heart of the ordering of economic decisionmaking in the United States. Workers may take part in deciding wages, hours, and some working conditions. Management reserves the right unilaterally to make the big decisions about plant location, new investment, and shutdowns. And since this power is, in form, a part of a collective bargaining agreement to which rank and file workers have — in theory — voluntarily consented, filing a grievance or a National Labor Relations Board charge will almost always be unsuccessful. It may be possible to obtain an injunction freezing the status quo until an arbitrator or a regional director of the NLRB or (as in our Youngstown litigation) a federal judge reaches the merits, but when that time comes the decisionmaker will look to the management-rights clause in the contract and affirm, however reluctantly, management's freedom to close a plant if it so chooses.²

Recently, however, there has begun to emerge a consensus that investment decisions are too important to be left to corporate executives alone. Should Chrysler fail, thousands of workers, local governments dependent on tax revenues from plants in their jurisdictions, and an entire society which senses the need to meet its own requirements for oil and steel and automobiles, would all be affected. As we used to say in the sixties, there is a right to participate in decisions which affect one's life. And since not merely the workforce, but the public at large, is critically affected by corporate investment decisions, the public is beginning to demand that it be consulted before such decisions are made.

Existing law gives us very little to work with in implementing this new sense of direction. Just as the management-rights clause freezes

out the worker, the law frees corporations from meaningful obligations to the society which (through state incorporation acts) brings them into being. Corporate executives like David Roderick of US Steel understandably take the position that their legal obligation and fiduciary duty is to their stockholders. When society asserts *its* claims through an Occupational Safety and Health or Environmental Protection statute, this seems to corporate decisionmakers an unnatural interference, rather than the expression of an accountability which was always there. Hence, one speaks of getting government off the entrepreneur's back. But one does not speak of getting the stockholder off the entrepreneur's back: the stockholder is assumed to belong there. Accordingly, making as much money as possible to pay out in dividends is felt to be right and proper. If it is objected, in the case of the steel industry, that this may mean investing in downtown realty rather than in modernizing steel facilities, whereas the nation needs up-to-date steel mills more than another shopping mall, the observation is outside the logic of the existing system.

Lessons: Direct Action by Workers

The main thing to be learned from the Youngstown experience is, of course, that workers *must* seek to take part in investment decisions.

As Bob Vasquez has said:

Don't wait till they shut down. Look at the trade manuals. Watch what the competition is using. The best job security is a competitive factory. When they tell you [what they invest in] is none of your business, say, "What do you mean, none of our business. You've seen what happened in Youngstown."³

But how is the ordinary worker or local union to go about getting a voice in investment

decisions? It's not so easy.

The most obvious strategy would be for national unions to insist on clauses providing job security or directly controlling investments in national collective-bargaining agreements. There are a few examples of this. The United Shoe Workers negotiated, and an arbitrator and federal court enforced, a clause which stated, "It is agreed by the Employer that the shop or factory shall not be moved from the County of Philadelphia during the life of this Agreement."⁴ Clothing workers obtained and enforced the following contract language:

A. During the term of this Agreement the Employer agrees that he shall not, without the consent of the New York Joint Board, remove or cause to be removed his present plant or plants from the city or cities in which such plants are located.

B. During the term of this Agreement the Employer shall not, without the consent of the New York Joint Board, manufacture garments or cause them to be manufactured in a factory other than his present factory or factories.⁵

However, generally speaking national unions refuse to become involved in bargaining about investment decisions on the theory that this is none of labor's business. Another reason for union attitudes may be that even were a union to grasp the nettle, and insist on bargaining to impasse over a voice in investment decisions, there is a further difficulty. Four circuit courts of appeal have recently held that companies have a *presumptive* duty to bargain with unions over decisions to close down part of a business. The duty is not absolute, and can be rebutted by certain kinds of evidence, e.g., as to economic hardship. Accordingly a union which bargained to impasse over a demand for contract language about investments could not, in the present state of the law, be certain that a strike in support of the demand would be

legally protected. If the NLRB or a court were to determine after the event that investment decisionmaking was not a "mandatory subject of bargaining" in the particular circumstances, the union's strike would constitute an unfair labor practice, striking employees could be replaced at will, and the union might be liable for damages.

Nor have national unions in the United States been prepared to use their power to strike. At first glance one might ask, Is a strike any use when management wants to close anyway? The answer is emphatically yes, for two reasons. First, a decision to stop operations in one place can be challenged by strike action at other facilities of the company. This tactic would be ineffective only where the plant to be closed was the company's only operation. A dramatic illustration of the effectiveness of this strategy was the strike of twenty-six thousand Welsh coal miners in February 1981 to protest the planned closing of as many as fifty mines by the government-owned coal board. They were immediately joined by three thousand miners in Kent. When by the second day more than fifty thousand miners were on strike, the government withdrew its plan.⁶

Second, aggressive direct action can be effective even if limited to the locality where management proposes to discontinue production. Where the plant contains valuable machinery or an inventory of bulky products, management has capital invested in the facility it plans to abandon. Moreover, in the typical situation there is intense management concern to transfer orders smoothly to other facilities, and generally, to have an "orderly" shutdown. This is the real reason companies are so reluctant to notify their workers in advance of a shutdown.⁷

Without the support of the national union it is almost impossible to bargain about invest-

ment decisions. If a local union tries to initiate bargaining about the future of its plant, both the company and the national union are likely to refuse to participate. Their argument will be that the national union signs the contract and only the national union is the bargaining agent.* If the local union responds that the future of its particular plant is a "local issue," hence a proper subject for bargaining between the company and the *local* union, the local union will be told that anything this important is, by definition, a national issue.

The national union's bargaining often makes matters worse. For example, strong pressure on the union to do something about shutdowns resulted in a clause in the 1980 Basic Steel Contract which requires a company to give 90-day notice of an intended shutdown, but for the first time states unequivocally: "The final closure decision shall be the exclusive function of the Company."

It is the considered opinion of workers most active in the Youngstown struggle that what little they have accomplished has been by direct action: by demonstration, confrontation, and sit-ins. Speaking as an historian, not an advocate, I have to say that the present attitude of both corporate and union establishments makes this an entirely rational conclusion.

More Lessons: Forms of Community Support

The direct action of rank-and-file workers

and their local unions is unlikely to bear fruit without community understanding and support. When local police were called to the Mahoning Country Club in February 1979, where angry Brier Hill workers confronted Jones & Laughlin superintendent Gordon Allen, or to the US Steel administration building in January 1980, where workers had occupied the building, discovered the executive game room, and appropriated superintendent Bill Kirwan's favorite putter, much depended on whether the police sympathized with their embattled neighbors. (They did.) Similarly, in Flint, Michigan in 1937, Governor Frank Murphy's decision not to order the National Guard to evict the men occupying the General Motors plants made the difference between victory and defeat.⁸

I believe that, as in the civil rights movement where sit-ins and voter registration *both* proved necessary for eventual victory, or as in the anti-war movement where in retrospect draft resistance and the political work of groups like the Indochina Peace Campaign *both* were essential, so in the developing movement for democratic control of investment decisions there is need *both* for direct action by workers and for the most varied and imaginative kinds of activity outside the workplace.

The most obvious form of community activity is the passage of plant closing laws. In the Youngstown law suit, Judge Lambros, even as he ruled against us, spoke memorably of the need for such laws:

This Court has spent many hours searching for a way to cut to the heart of the economic reality, that obsolescence and market forces demand the close of the Mahoning Valley plant, and yet the lives of 3500 workers and their families and the supporting Youngstown community cannot be dismissed as inconsequential. United States Steel should not be permitted to leave the Youngstown

*The USWA constitution states, "The International Union shall be the contracting party in all collective bargaining agreements and all such agreements shall be signed by the International Officer," Article XVII, Section I, but also, "The International Union and the Local Union to which the member belongs shall act exclusively as the member's agent to represent the member in . . . grievances and other matters relating to terms and conditions of employment or arising out of the employer-employee relationship," Article XVII, Section 3 (emphasis added).

area devastated after drawing from the life blood of the community for so many years.

Unfortunately, the mechanism to reach this ideal settlement, to recognize this new property right is not now in existence in the code of laws of our nation.⁹

Legislation is no doubt one ultimate solution to the problem of investment decisionmaking. Yet as a strategy it leaves much to be desired. The laws presently under consideration in the United States typically provide for (1) advance notice of a shutdown, and (2) payment of reparations to the community and, where there is no contractual provision for severance pay, to affected workers. Even if passed, such laws would scarcely affect the right of the corporation unilaterally to make a shutdown decision.* If legislation is proposed it should resemble the European statutes which require a company to justify a shutdown to a public body before it is permitted to proceed.

Another possible strategy is employee or community ownership. As compared to legislation, it may seem even further out ideologically, and so, even less practical politically. Moreover, public ownership of a single firm in a capitalist economy presents many familiar problems. Some of them are as follows: Will the company that now owns the property let you buy the plant in the first place? If you acquire the plant can you sell the product? Will not banks, suppliers, and customers boycott an institution that challenges their basis of existence? Won't a worker-owned company be tempted to take wage cuts in order to survive,

and so survive only by becoming a sweatshop? If employees are encouraged to buy stock, can the company also afford a pension, and if there is no pension are not workers being asked to bet their security in old age on the fortunes of a single firm? If employees own stock, can stock ownership be kept equal, and if not, will not the inequalities that prevented democratic decisions when the firm was privately owned be reproduced? Even if the distribution of stock is equal, will stock ownership lead to worker participation in decisions, or will a conventional trustee manage the stock and vote the workers' shares? In a nutshell, a worker- or community-owned enterprise has historically fallen victim to one of two fates: either it fails, or it reverts to a capitalist enterprise like any other. Witness Oneida silverware and Amana refrigerators, both of which still bear the names of nineteenth-century utopian colonies.

Nevertheless, I favor a community strategy centered on employee-community ownership, for two reasons.

First, it represents a real solution. If we the public are unhappy with Standard Oil's decisions about the nation's energy, the way to change that situation is not to regulate the Standard Oil board of directors. The way to change the situation is to make the decisions ourselves.

Second, it is flexible and can take various, decentralized forms. We must get out of our heads the equation of public ownership with nationalization. Nationalization is required only in the case of very large, capital-intensive enterprises, which require so much money that the only alternative to private capital is the taxing power of the national state. I have reluctantly concluded that steel mills probably fall in this category.

But even nationalization need not be centralized in the manner of the United States post

* It is sometimes contended that such laws will prevent shutdowns by making them prohibitively expensive. This argument overlooks the very substantial ways in which existing law subsidizes and rewards shutdowns. See Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *Capital and Communities* (1980), e.g., at 130-34. An effective law must directly prohibit shutdowns unless specified conditions are met.

office or the British steel corporation. It is possible to take federal tax money and place it in the hands of public corporations that are both locally managed and nationally supervised. One example is the Tennessee Valley Authority. Another is the Legal Services Corporation. The other day, in Pittsburgh, Frank O'Brien, former president of the Jones & Laughlin local union, suggested the formation of a "Monongahela Valley Authority." The idea, I take it, is that if United States Steel and J & L have lost interest in producing steel in Pittsburgh, perhaps the public should step in and do the job. And I say, why not?

An idea which has caught the imagination of steelworkers and community activists in Pitts-

burgh is eminent domain. They talk of running candidates for city councils up and down the Mon Valley and, once a majority has been achieved, using this local legislative power to take property for the public interest. Communities commonly use their eminent domain powers to take land for highways, or to buy a slum area where the housing has been declared blighted and make it available for development. What about an industrial site which a company has termed obsolescent? In Pittsburgh they are saying, why not?*

All of the strategies thus far discussed — changes in contract language, plant closing legislation, public ownership through the eminent domain power — have their particular difficul-



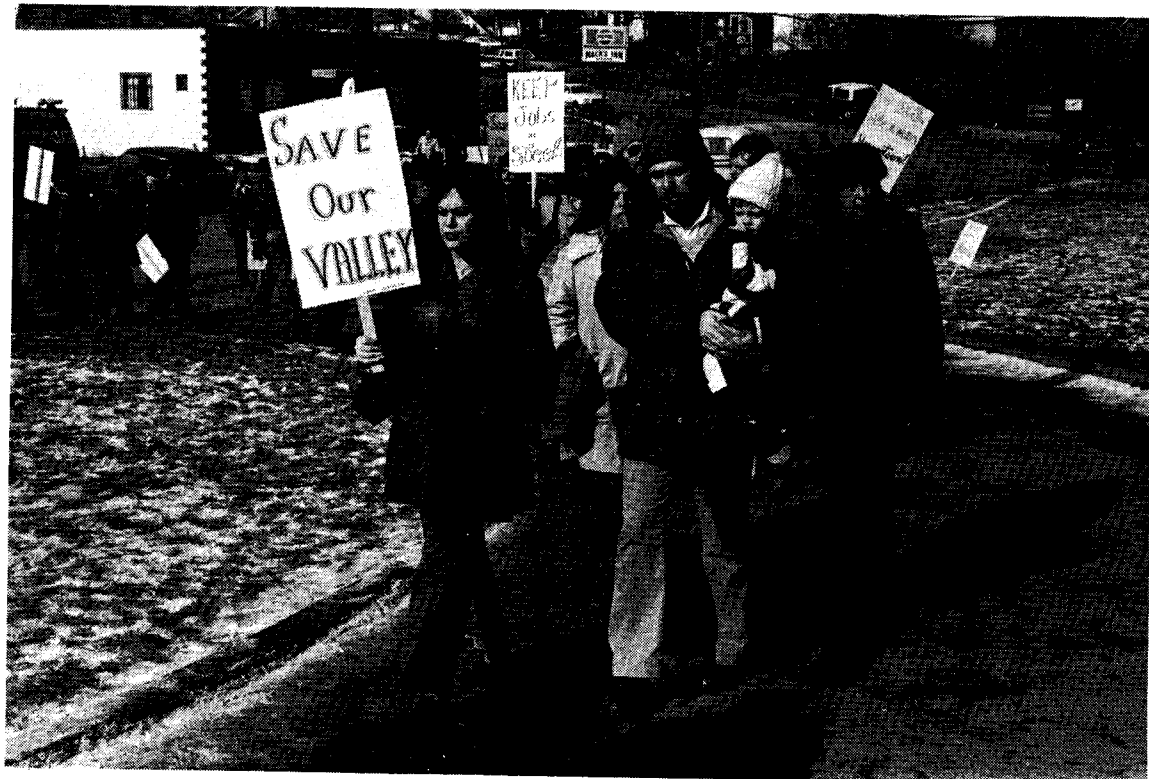
Steve Cagan

ties, as I have sought to show. All are worth pursuing. For the organizer, an additional problem is that all three strategies are essentially long-term in nature. An adequate piece of legislation, contract language that really restricts the power of the company, or public ownership of an enterprise as capital-intensive as a steel mill is not likely to be achieved

*Eminent domain, too, has its particular problems. Broadly speaking, the power of eminent domain is the power of a community to act for its own self-preservation. In exercising this power, a community must show that its action is prompted by a public purpose. Moreover, a study by Meredith Kane of the Harvard Law School of the possibility of using the eminent domain power to acquire and operate steel mills in Youngstown pinpoints two problems: 1. the eminent domain power has historically been exercised

quickly. Yet no organization or movement will grow without victories which can be achieved in six months or a year of struggle. These short-run triumphs are likely to be successes in influencing a corporation's own decision making about particular facilities. Management itself is forever deciding and then undeciding what to do about Plant A or Plant B. Workers

over real property (land) and fixtures attached to the land (such as buildings) whereas the machinery within buildings has been regarded as "personal property" exempt from the eminent domain doctrine; 2. a community seeking to use its eminent domain power will wish to make sure that the property designated for acquisition is not sold or otherwise devalued during the period required for the community to take title, but the law has generally given property owners great freedom to do what they will with property during eminent domain proceedings.



Steve Cagan

and community groups lack the power to do much in the short run about a decision that management is unambivalently determined to make. Often, however, there will be conflicts within the corporation about alternative investment strategies, and when this is so, one senses that vigorous agitation can tip the scales.

Again, that vigorous agitation will ultimately have to take the form of direct action, if the Youngstown experience is any guide. If, for example, United States Steel were to decide to close its historic mill at Homestead, that particular decision about that particular place might well be reversed by workers prepared to occupy the plant in conjunction with community allies ready to lend support by way of research, litigation, introduction of legislation, and picketing. We are not in the position of being free to abandon the struggle because it is difficult. We must throw bricks at tanks in faith that, one day, we will find ways to overcome.

Summing Up

About a year after US Steel's shutdown announcement I took a long drive with Bob Vasquez and had a chance to ask him what he felt he had learned about the world in that time.

Bob said that what he had learned was not to expect fairness. He had always counted on being able to communicate what was fair to other people. As a grievance representative, for instance, he often confronted a person who had a strong grievance but who could hurt only another union member by winning it. Bob's practice was to say, in effect: "It looks like you've got a winner. But I want to be sure you realize that, if you win, Brother So-and-so will be bumped back to Job Class 2" — or whatever the effect on a fellow worker would be. Usually the grievant himself would suggest a compromise fair to both workers involved, for instance that the grievant should be first in line for the

next job opening but that the incumbent should not be displaced.

In dealing with US Steel's local managers, Bob went on, he had generally been able to get them to do the fair thing even when the grievant had no case at all under the letter of the contract.

But the shutdown struggle had been different. US Steel's headquarters people didn't seem to care about fairness. For them it was a question of what would be most profitable. In court, too, everything was either one thing or the other, either black or white. Courts were not for working people, Bob concluded. Workers should do what they had to do outside of court and let the company go to court for an injunction.

I raised a sensitive subject: What did Bob now feel about having called off the sit-in of January 28? Once again, in more detail than ever before, Bob went over the evidence that had persuaded him the sit-in was getting out of control. A grievance representative whom we both considered solid and reliable had reported the presence of guns in the building and talk of burning the place down after dark. Drinking, and the effect of drinking on young members of the local from the 43-inch mill, Bob had seen for himself.

Yet if he had to do it again, feeling as he now did that fairness didn't matter to a company like US Steel, he would have kept the occupation going forever.* I asked about the responsibility I knew Bob had felt about the likelihood that anyone who was arrested would also be fired, and thereby lose unemployment compensation, Supplementary Unemployment Benefits

*Ed Mann concurs. He feels that if energy had been directed to controlling the drinking, rather than to the question of whether to leave, the occupation could have been successfully continued.

(SUB), and the possibility of transfer to another US Steel plant. If Bob were to plan another sit-in, would he try to have only young single men with relatively little to lose exposed to arrest and discharge?

No, Bob Vasquez said at once. He had thought too much in that way the first time. Another time he would ask all thirty-five hundred workers and their families to join in, and see if the company would be prepared to fire them all. Once people began comparing who had most to lose, Bob said with conviction, you were beaten. Instead, there had to be a spirit of one for all, and all for one.

That, I have come to believe, is what the shutdown struggle in Youngstown, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere, is really about. A sit-in can only be successful if participants act in the spirit that "an injury to one is an injury to all." Employee or community ownership, as through the exercise of the eminent domain power, ultimately articulates the concept that all those affected by a decision must have a hand in making it, so that, when the entire public is affected, an injury to one is an injury to all. The vision of "brownfield" modernization, in which technology is made to serve family and

community integrity, and economic development strengthens rather than destroys the social capital created over decades, again is finally grounded in the sense of human connectedness. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Footnotes

1. *Local 1330, et al. v. US Steel Corp.*, 492 F. Supp. (N.D. Ohio 1980), aff'd, 105 LRRM 2312 (6th Cir. 1980).
2. See my "Investment Decisions and the Quid Pro Quo Myth," 29 *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 396 (1979).
3. In *These Times*, November 26–December 9, 1980.
4. *United Shoe Workers v. Brooks Shoe Mfg. Co.*, 183 F. Supp. 568, 569 (E.D. Pa. 1961), aff'd, 298 F. 3d 277 (3rd Cir. 1962).
5. *Jack Meilman*, 34 Lab. Arb. 771, 773 (Gray 1960).
6. *New York Times*, February 17, 18, 19, 1981.
7. The view of management motivation stated here is dramatically illustrated by the interviews with company decisionmakers in Alfred Slote, *Termination: The Closing at Baker Plant* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1969). See especially the reminiscences of the plant manager quoted and paraphrased at pages 15–18, 36–40, and 44–46.
8. See Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–37* (1969), e.g. at pages 271–74.
9. Transcript, at 992–93.

STAUGHTON LYND is a longtime activist and a lawyer who works with labor and community groups in Youngstown.

solidarity

human pain	redoubles itself
mines the tooth	strikes the child
remembers debts	is implacable
flourishes in cellars	forgets bread
bides its time	sharpens its petals
puts on its shirt	gives its wound
speaks slowly	must be answered

Sara Kafatou

●Document:

SHIFTING INVESTMENTS AND THE RISE OF THE SERVICE SECTOR

Karen Nussbaum

A recent cover of *Business Week* provides a good example of what I'd like to talk about today. This particular story was headlined: "Exxon's New Prey: IBM and Xerox." On the front was a picture of a mangy, mean-looking tiger. But it wasn't your usual "tiger in your tank." Instead of fearsome-looking fangs, it had a ferocious video-display screen for a face. The article goes on to say that Exxon is now preying on the high technology that made IBM and Xerox the leaders in their field. Industry analysts predict the office automation business may be bigger than oil by the turn of the century.

In fact, all three have a target much bigger than each other. They're beginning to prey on *us*, especially low-paid clerical workers.

In Youngstown, Ohio, in 1977, the Lykes Corporation announced the closing of Youngstown Sheet & Tube. Five thousand production jobs were lost. Lykes had bought the plant in 1969, attracted by its profitability. In the next eight years, the conglomerate drained Sheet & Tube of its profits to finance *more* profitable acquisitions, which included the Coastal Plains Insurance Company.

Last year, U.S. Steel announced it was closing plants and mills in eight states. The retrenchment was one of the most sweeping in the industry's history, in spite of high demand for steel in the previous two years. Five months later, U.S. Steel announced that it was

building a 54-story office building right here in downtown Pittsburgh.

When you look at trends like this, you see that some of what the business pundits say is right: there *is* a fundamental shift going on in the economy. A shift away from manufacturing and toward the clerical and service sectors. And this shift is systematically lowering the standard of living of the American family.

The destruction of lives and communities in the service of extravagant corporate profits is well-documented and shocking. Strategies which challenge corporate abandonment of manufacturing workers and their communities are a critical part of the progressive movement today. Those of us concerned about economic democracy must address *both* sides of the phenomenon: we must prevent the social irresponsibility of the wave of disinvestment in manufacturing; *and* we must organize the workforce in the expanding industries to win a decent standard of living.

The shift to the service sector affects women in particular because it relies on taking advantage of female labor to keep labor costs low and profits high. But don't make the mistake of pigeon-holing this as a "women's issue." Organizing women workers in the clerical and service industries is as important to the progressive movement of the 1980s as the organization of industrial workers was in the thirties. And though it is of great importance beyond being a "women's issue," this organizing will indeed be led by women, adding to its significance.

Today, I want to talk about three major elements of the business strategy to shift to the service sector and to lower the standard of living for working people. These elements are job segregation, increased use of part-time employment, and automation of the office.

Fifty years ago half of the workforce was employed in manufacturing. Today, service

sector jobs account for *two-thirds* of all employment, and clerical work is the largest job category. What does this shift mean for the economy and the workforce? The expansion of the service sector means the growth of low-paid, low-status, unorganized employment.

Let's look at a typical American family over a generation's time.

In 1955, the mother works at home, caring for two small children. The father has a blue-collar, unionized job which pays well with good benefits.

By 1975, the family picture is completely changed. The father has been laid off and now is working as a maintenance worker in a downtown office building for half his former pay. The mother works in a retail store. Their married daughter works as a bank clerk, and their young son earns minimum wage in a fast-food restaurant.

Today with both husband and wife working, they are barely making ends meet. Their real income plummets as inflation soars. Today, their combined earnings are worth only 75 percent of their value in 1967.

Who gains from this situation?

— Monopolies which raise their *prices* to keep up with inflation while our buying power takes a nosedive.

— And the finance companies use *our* deposits, *our* pensions, and *our* insurance premiums to invest in the low-wage, nonunion growth industries — while they turn us down for loans for a car or a home because we don't earn enough money.

Subsistence-level service jobs aren't the solution to unemployment. They can't stop the collapse in working people's quality of life — because low pay in the expanding jobs is part of the problem.

How do corporate employers make sure that service industry workers are low-paid and

unorganized? Job segregation is the major mechanism for reducing the bargaining power of certain workers. Employers can pay low wages without fear the workers will go elsewhere because they have nowhere else to go.

Clerical work is a prime example. Job segregation for women in clerical industries has actually *increased* in the last decade. There is now a higher proportion of women concentrated in the lowest paying jobs. Pay has stayed unnaturally low. Female clericals earn poverty-level wages. Last year, one in three full-time women clerical workers earned less than \$7,800. In cities across the country, we've found full-time bank clericals who are eligible for food stamps.

Business spokesmen put forth what we call the "Lemming Theory" of low pay for women. They would have it that women willfully fling themselves into the labor pool, flooding the clerical labor market, in essence reducing our own wages and doing ourselves in by the millions while the employers stand by shaking their heads.

Businessmen would have us believe that women workers are so intent on sinking to the bottom of the labor pool that we won't even take advantage of the "secretarial shortage." They suggest that good jobs as secretaries go begging because women don't have the skills and motivation to advance themselves. Of course, despite the shortage of skilled secretaries, *pay* for secretaries has not gone up.

The theory of supply and demand is as irrelevant for secretaries as it is for consumers, and for the same reasons. Employers exercise monopoly control over the labor force through deliberately creating job ghettos, conspiring among themselves to set wages, and through corporate mergers which create literal monopolies in most industries.

Job segregation isn't new to the American

economy. Blacks were exploited as slaves, and immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were exploited to build railroads and the steel and textile industries. These examples stand as monuments to how employers have used new pools of workers to expand and to maximize profits.

Today we are seeing a movement of industrial capital in a different direction. Instead of *importing* a fresh labor supply as before, the employers are *exporting* the manufacturing jobs overseas or to the sunbelt. Meanwhile, they've found another "reserve army" of workers to expand the service industries — women. Needless to say, the modern office doesn't approach the plantation or sweatshop in the suffering of those at the bottom. But the use of forced job segregation to keep wages low is exactly the same.

To enhance further the profile of service industries, employers are increasingly turning to part-time and temporary employment to avoid paying decent benefits and to bypass unions. In manufacturing, 10 percent of workers work part-time. In banks and insurance companies, though, a quarter of the workforce works part-time. And in the health and retail industries, the figure is an astronomical high of 55 percent to 75 percent part-time or part-year. The use of temporary workers, particularly clericals, is also on the rise. Some industry experts predict a permanent 15 percent temporary workforce.

The implications of part-time and temporary work are not hard to divine. These workers are rarely paid benefits and often aren't eligible for regular salary increases. They usually are excluded from collective bargaining units. And they create a permanent condition of instability within the workforce, making organizing more difficult.

The current trends in office automation

make all these problems even worse. New technologies are being applied in ways which deskill and devalue the work and provide means for greater management control. Workers produce more but earn less money. The jobs are restructured to eliminate variety, closing off opportunities to advance. And the computer industry is heralding the potential for shift work, piece work, and even a return to the "cottage industry" as free-lance data entry operators can have machines installed in their homes.

Here's how the industry describes it: "Workers are being offered a much freer lifestyle as portable terminals allow people to work at home, on the road, or even in a mountain cabin," a prominent management consultant explains. "These terminals will be a special aid to homebound workers such as mothers with small children..." concludes *U.S. News & World Report* — and then shows us a commodities broker lying on the beach, with his computer terminal alongside him on the blanket. He can follow the stock market while he works on his tan.

But for most workers it means piece work, and being removed from the worksite and from all other workers.

In addition, automation means a giant leap down in the health and well-being of office workers. The old myth of the beleaguered boss suffering ulcers and risking a heart attack for his \$60,000 job has been shattered. It's *his secretary* who is suffering the highest rate of stress — the risk of heart disease, ulcers, and hypertension. A recent study shows that low pay, a lack of decision making, and unsupportive bosses are the main reasons for the alarming rate of heart disease among women clericals. The office of the future is becoming a stress factory for clerical women.

As service industry employers are bought out

by conglomerates, their ability and will to keep their workforce low-paid and unorganized is strengthened. We may think we've got an easy target when we organize against American Druggist Insurance Company at their headquarters in upstate New York — only to find we're up against Armco Steel. We may think we have a local campaign at Cincinnati Federal Savings & Loan — only to discover we're challenging City Investing Corporation, the nation's tenth ranking conglomerate. And now, when we demand that office technology companies apply safety standards to the manufacture of video-display terminals, some of our chief adversaries will be Volkswagen and Exxon.

As the conglomerates and giant corporations continue to acquire service companies, it will be increasingly clear that those of us fighting *disinvestment* and those of us fighting the negative features of service employment are both taking on big oil, big steel, high finance, and the giant multinationals.

That *Business Week* issue featuring the "tiger in your office" instead of the "tiger in your tank" was remarkable for another reason, too. In honor of National Secretaries Week, they ran a three-page article on my organization, Working Women, National Association of Office Workers. Titled "Rebellion Behind the Typewriter," the article points to the growing movement of women office workers spearheaded by Working Women. *Business Week* writes: "Though the traditional labor movement has long regarded women office workers as unorganizable, it now appears that office workers do want to belong to something — specifically, an organization that reflects their feelings about themselves... [Working Women] may ultimately serve as a bridge to organized labor."

I agree. The historic conditions which have

brought about the shift to the service sector also create the basis for organizing.

I believe the 1980s will be for clerical workers what the 1930s were for industrial workers. In the 1930s industrial workers were low-paid — an immigrant workforce concentrated in the single largest job category, working in the expanding and most profitable sectors of the economy. And they were unorganized. Industrial workers were able to forge an identity as a class exploited by employers — employers who were clearly able to provide fair pay and fair treatment.

These conditions are true today for clerical workers. Women are the low-paid “immigrant” workers of our generation. They are concentrated in the single largest job category, and they work in the most profitable industries. The key element needed to ignite these factors, as *Business Week* was astute enough to point out, is building a common identity among women office workers as a group — taking the problems out of the realm of individual complaints and into the arena of competing interests between employers and employees — building a *movement* of office workers.

Working Women is doing that. Our work is helping to create the opportunity for a new massive wave of organization in the workforce. In doing so, we help to lay the basis to fight the degradation of American workers. And we add new allies to the battle against the corporate attack on the standard of living and the economic rights of working people in this country.

Thank you.

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FORCED CHILDBEARING IS A FORM OF SLAVERY

We believe that women, like men, have an inalienable right to self-determination. This means that we have the right to direct our own destinies *and* to express ourselves as sexual beings. We cannot exercise these rights unless we have full control over our reproductive function. Without the ability to end unwanted pregnancy, women are forced to live under the constant threat of harsh punitive consequences for being sexual. Rape, contraceptive failure, or simple human fallibility carry the potential to massively disrupt our lives.

Abortion is the cornerstone of women's freedom. To say the fetus has a right to live is to say that woman has an obligation to sustain that life with her own body. Forced childbearing is a form of slavery. It is based on the traditional definition of women as childbearers—forces of nature—rather than autonomous human beings with the right to define our sexuality. The outlawing of abortion would be an enormous victory for this view of women. Not only would it seriously restrict our freedom, it would give a powerful impetus to the rest of the right's repressive social program.

HOW GREAT IS THE THREAT?

● **JUNE 1980**—Supreme Court upholds the Hyde Amendment, cutting off Medicaid funds for abortion.

● **NOVEMBER 1980**—Reagan elected on an anti-abortion platform; liberal legislators on "pro-life" hit-list defeated; ultra-conservatives become the dominant force in Congress.

● **JANUARY 1981**—Sixteen bills outlawing abortion are introduced in Congress.

● **MARCH 1981**—Reagan appoints ultra-conservatives who oppose abortion, non-marital sex and contraception as Surgeon General and head of the Federal Office of Adolescent Pregnancy.

● **APRIL 1981**—Congress holds hearings on the Human Life Statute, which declares a fetus a person, and thereby defines abortion as murder.

● **???????? 1981**—The ultimate goal of the Right to Life Movement is a Constitutional amendment declaring the fetus a person and outlawing abortion. We can expect the so-called Human Life Amendment to be introduced in Congress in the near future. An alternative method of passing HLA—calling a Constitutional convention—has been endorsed by 19 state legislatures out of 34 needed.

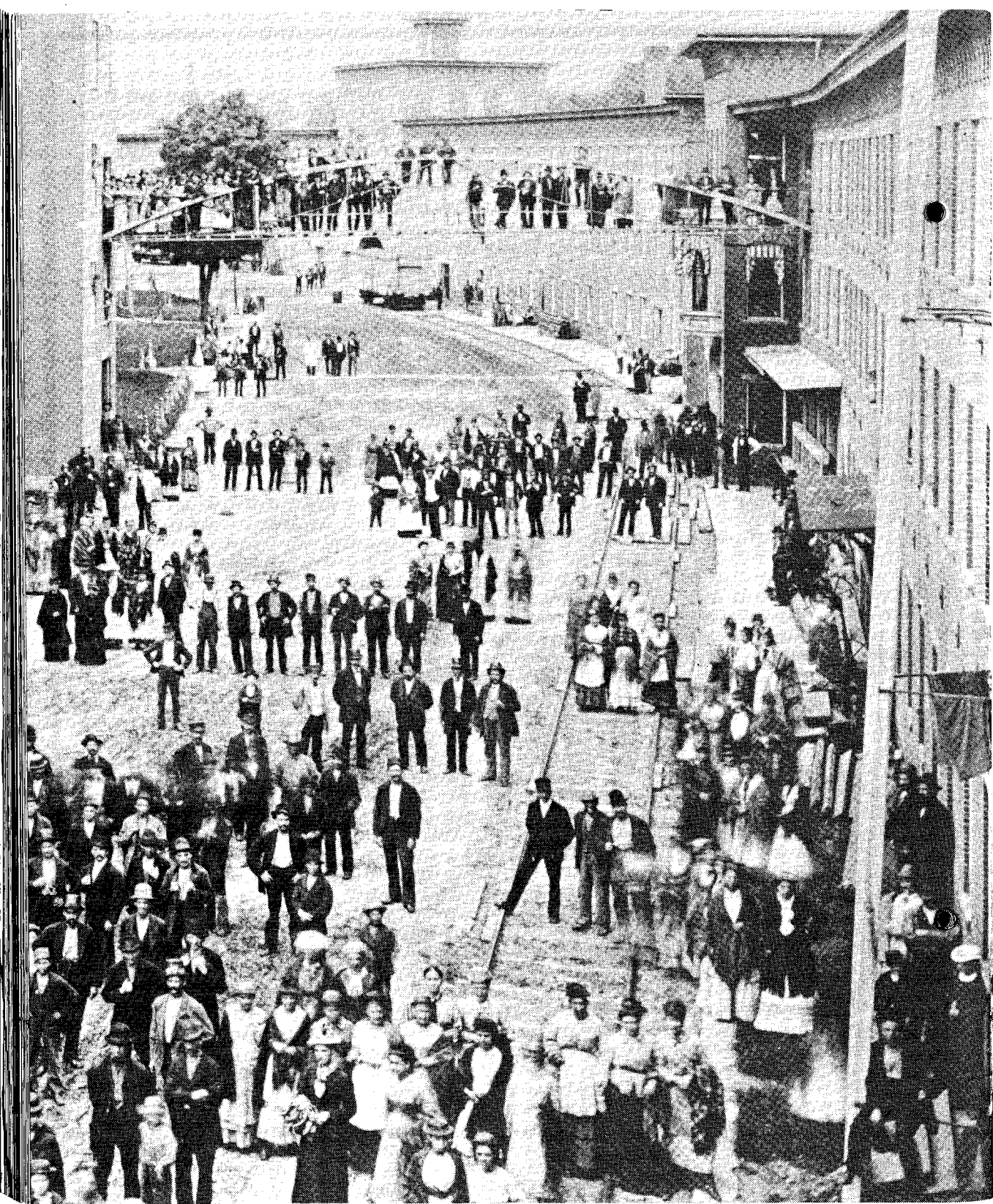
STOP THE WAR ON WOMEN

The Right to Life movement and the Moral Majority are doing their best to make women feel guilty for having abortions, wanting sex, and wanting freedom. They call us selfish, irresponsible, frivolous. They accuse us of killing babies.

We will not be intimidated by this hate campaign. It is time for women and all people who care about freedom to stop apologizing and start fighting.

We must call the right's "morality" by its true name—a sadistic sexual McCarthyism.

**NO
MORE
NICE
GIRLS**



HAPPY TIMES IN MILL CITY

Ann H. Sullivan

Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City by Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Most people who now live in Manchester, New Hampshire, only think about the textile industry when they dine out at a fancy restaurant called the Mill or shop for a cheap sweater at the Pandora Factory Outlet Store. Part of what regional planners like to call the *new* New Hampshire, Manchester now serves as a banking and service center for high-technology companies. The last cotton-weaving mill, the Chicopee, shut down in 1975.

But those of us who grew up in Manchester in the 1950s and 1960s had not yet learned to forget the working-class and heavily ethnic character of the city. Barely one or two generations removed from Ireland or Quebec, we attended parochial schools, heard French spoken along with English on the streets, and spent Sunday afternoons visiting grandparents who had worked as operatives in the giant Amoskeag mills before the final shutdown in 1935.

Using the traditional avenues of the study of law or education (with a healthy boost of support from the GI Bill of Rights after World War II), many children of factory workers had moved into the middle class. Yet my father, who was a lawyer, didn't think it odd that his best friend was a man who worked in a shoe shop and who had grown up with him in a largely Irish East Side neighborhood called the Hollow. Still, no parents wanted their own

children to go back to the mills. Memories of factory life even became an overt means of social control: "Don't study hard," I remember my mother telling me, "You can always quit school and get a job in the mills when you're sixteen."

My parents' fears only became intelligible when I became old enough to understand my home town's curious history. For decades, the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company dominated life in Manchester. It was a gritty factory town where textiles were king and where almost every immigrant family's economic well-being depended, to some degree, on corporate decisions made by the managers and shareholders of the Amoskeag.

Although the first textile mills were established in Manchester as early as 1837, it was a Boston financier named T. Jefferson Coolidge who brought the various Manchester mills into a single unit in the 1880s and 1890s. As treasurer of the Amoskeag, he created the largest textile complex in the world during its halcyon days before World War I. At its peak years of production, fifteen thousand operatives streamed through the mill gates every morning. Many were immigrants, lured to Manchester, as my grandparents John Sullivan and Hannah Sheehan were, by the promise of steady work and a new urban way of life.

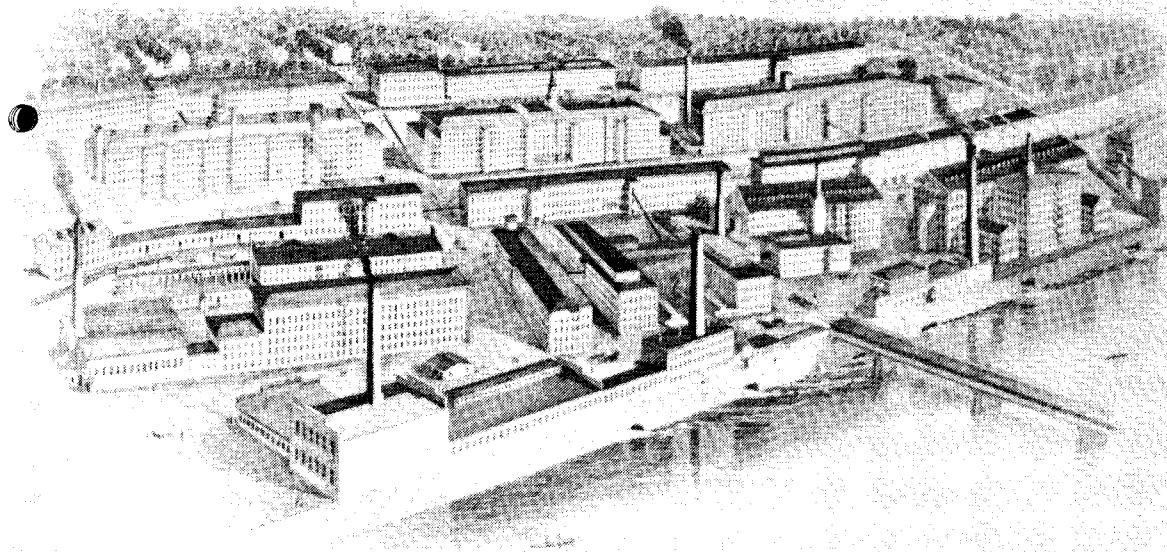
The Amoskeag Company touched upon and controlled almost every aspect of life in Manchester before 1936. Physically, the carefully planned factory complex fanned out from the mill buildings that hugged the Merrimack River and arched gracefully for over a mile and a half on the East Side of town. Socially and economically, company control penetrated every facet of mill-town life. Decades after the final shutdown, stores along Elm Street remained open on Thursday nights, a reminder of the company paydays when flush

operatives strolled Downtown, chatting, flirting, and spending their pay. The city government erected schools and other municipal buildings on land lent (never donated) to Manchester by a company that prided itself on its well-publicized paternalism towards its employees.

Profits remained the driving force behind the Company's efforts to accommodate and placate its workers. It made sense to offer free garden space and self-help courses to workers who had earned millions in dividends for the Amoskeag shareholders, most of whom lived in Boston and only rarely visited the city that was a source of their wealth. But the seeds of Amoskeag's collapse, and a corresponding shift in the Company's "enlightened" paternalistic policies, first became evident in the hard times that hit the New England textile industry just after World War I.

Since the mills continued to function profitably, the basic solvency of the Amoskeag Company was never at issue. But absentee shareholders worried over competition from southern textile mills and a slackening in production caused by obsolete equipment. Most troubling to the habits of corporate boardrooms, however, was an increasingly truculent labor force. The men and women who lived in Manchester never forgot the harsh lessons of the 1922 strike caused by a corporate decision to simultaneously slice wages by 20 percent and increase the work week from forty-eight to fifty-four hours. Preferring a living wage to the blandishments of cheap corporation housing and free garden space on unutilized company land, the workers stayed out for nine months.

The strike failed. But Buck Dumaine, a self-made man who had succeeded Coolidge as treasurer, took quick steps to protect his stockholders' investments. In a 1925 move that he



The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, ca. 1870.

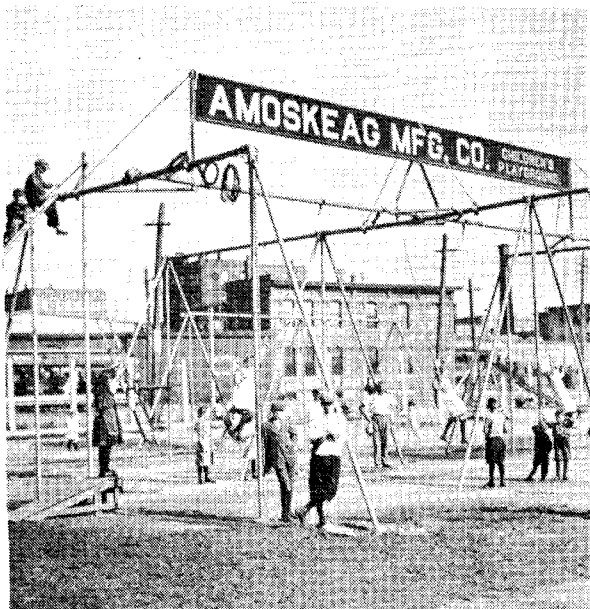
called the Reorganization, Dumaine neatly sliced the Amoskeag Company in half. Gutting the Manchester mills of \$18 million in accumulated profits, Dumaine reinvested the money in a new Amoskeag Company that financed the same southern textile mills that were undermining the Manchester complex. The other half of the old company, now dubbed the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, comprised the increasingly obsolete and undercapitalized Manchester mills.

The Amoskeag Company still exists and its profits support the heirs of Buck Dumaine. The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company officially died in 1936 — a victim of the Depression and a corporate mentality that refused to modernize the mills. After the shutdown, Dumaine sold the buildings to a group of Manchester businessmen. A variety of concerns, including garment manufacturers who moved to Man-

chester from New York City to avoid unionization, set up shop in order to draw on the limitless pool of superbly trained textile hands. For until the Second World War, Manchester remained a broken city where, as old mill workers still recall, “most of us couldn’t buy a job.”

Outside of Manchester, most people quickly forgot the Amoskeag story. It remained, after all, but one chapter in the sorry history of the decline of New England’s textile industry. Then, suddenly in the 1960s, the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company became newsworthy again. The catalyst was an urban renewal project that planned to level many of the old red-brick buildings to make way for parking lots and access roads.

Few if any of the people who then lived in Manchester opposed the renewal plan. The canal was badly polluted, popping up in the



The Children's Playground, ca. 1920.

newspapers each year when someone drowned in its unfenced waters. One mill remained even more of a health hazard since it was contaminated with anthrax spores brought into Manchester with shipments of unprocessed wool. Most telling, however, many mill workers took satisfaction in seeing buildings leveled that served as a reminder of an unhappy time in their past. But some people who lived outside Manchester were not pleased with the project. Red-brick factory buildings were becoming chic. In 1968, as the first buildings fell before the wrecking ball, architectural historians and journalists began informing the people of Manchester that they were cavalierly destroying a priceless example of America's architectural heritage.

In an unsigned article, *Fortune Magazine* wrote mournfully that "nobody in Manchester

seems to care. But around the nation, historians of technology, of business, and of art are outraged."¹ *Time* agreed with *Fortune's* assessment of Manchester: "The biggest obstacles to preservation are the elected town officers, from the mayor on down. They are tough, pragmatic and just don't care about preserving the past."² Only Ada Louise Huxtable, while suggesting that Manchester would make a lovely museum, remained perceptive enough to mention exactly whose past was being debated. "In Manchester," she said, "where the memory of the mills as a poor and oppressive way of life is still alive, nobody really cares. And that is the most tragic indictment of all."³

Time and *Fortune* quickly found more timely topics, but two of the scholars who had rallied to save the mills kept their interest in Manchester. Randolph Langenbach, an architectural historian and photographer, had photographed the mill buildings for years in order to preserve a record of the buildings slated for demolition. At the same time, Tamara K. Hareven, a historian at Clark University, was culling old Amoskeag records for her research in labor and family history. Aided by large grants from, among others, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Textile Workers Union of America, they set out to create a record of life at the Amoskeag Company. They visited Manchester frequently, taking more photographs, interviewing operatives, and speaking with relatives of old agents and managers of the Amoskeag. In 1978, they published *Amoskeag*, a book that centers on life in Manchester in the years before the shutdown in 1936.

Amoskeag received almost unanimous critical acclaim and a popular reception that remains rare for most "scholarly" history books. It was touted on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, was excerpted in the *Boston Globe*, and even inspired a docu-

mentary film. One reviewer described the book's appeal: "the overwhelming result is an intensely human yet scholarly portrait of early 20th-century life and labor in the world's largest textile mill. As a whole, the interviews convey a view of work and a sense of place that is rapidly disappearing."⁴

In many ways, the praise that *Amoskeag* received is well-deserved. Closely adhering to the traditions of oral history, the book allows interviewees to speak for themselves, concentrating on the highly complex nature of factory work, dramatic events like the 1922 strike, and the final bleak days of shutdown. While analytical discussions frame each section, they never intrude on the interviewees' perceptions of an event. The photographs by Lewis Hine and Langenbach offer visual evidence of this lost world.

As a native of Manchester whose grandparents (I suspect out of bitterness) only rarely spoke of their lives in the mills, I found parts of the book especially riveting. The descriptions of work in a large textile mill, the intensely personal accounts of French-Canadians who abandoned dirt farms in Quebec for big-city life, and the halting defense of Buck Dumaine by his son and grandson filled in parts of my own family history for me. Often I was deeply moved as the recollections of an elderly man or woman brought me back to a way of life that no longer exists in Manchester.

But as I read on, leaving behind the descriptions of rollicking mill-room flirtations and of hearty spreads of boardinghouse food, I found myself more and more uncomfortable with the book's depiction of life in the Amoskeag Company. With some exceptions, the interviews have a tone of nostalgic recollection. Cora Pellerin proudly recalls that "I was happy in the Amoskeag. I loved my work; It was my life." Hareven and Langenbach even manage

to squeeze in a good word for modern corporate capitalism as Betty Skrzyszowski praises her life at the Chicopee mill which closed down abruptly in 1975. "At Chicopee," she recalls, "It was just one big, happy family."

The themes that Hareven and Langenbach employ to weave together the disparate interviews accent the sense of nostalgic pathos. They contend that mill life did not cause social fragmentation and that workers created tightly knit families and social organizations that shielded them from the seamier side of life in a giant textile concern. As Hareven and Langenbach write, "Despite [the workers'] hardships and the conflicts they experienced, they shared the feeling they so frequently expressed about their lives in the mills: 'We were all like a family.'"

By the time I finished *Amoskeag*, my sense of unease had become more like anger. How could I reconcile the generally rosy overview of life in the mills that emerges from *Amoskeag* with stories that I heard from my own parents and grandparents? Did my grandmother feel she was part of a family when she spent two years in a tuberculosis sanatorium after years of work in unventilated weaving rooms? Was the black-listing that my grandfather earned for his participation in the 1922 strike just one of the disasters that *Amoskeag* insists "fatalistic workers accepted as a part of life."

Perhaps Hareven and Langenbach didn't intentionally set out to concentrate on the highs rather than the lows of industrial life in Manchester. The people they interview obviously speak honestly and movingly of the years they spent in the mills. Much of the problem of emphasis rests in the operatives who make up something like 90 percent of the interviewees: first-generation French-Canadians, whom Langenbach and Hareven categorize as particularly "docile" and "industrious" members of



First Parade of Strikers, April 10, 1922.

the Manchester work force. The book is thus flawed by the absence of interviews with second- and third-generation French and Irish operatives who might have spoken of life in the mills from a far different perspective.

By 1900, for example, a central fact of life in Manchester was the deeply felt ethnic hatred (rivalry is too light a word to use) that French and Irish felt toward each other. The Irish and French organized in their own social and political clubs, worshipped in district churches and even buried their dead in segregated cemeteries. Yet, while many of the operatives interviewed

in *Amoskeag* mention the ill feeling between the two ethnic groups, they never coherently analyze or discuss it. For if the authors had taken it seriously and tried to root it in tensions that existed in the workplace, they would have been forced to jettison much of the analytical baggage that frames the interviews.

It would be easy to infer from *Amoskeag* that the Company maintained generally favorable relations with its labor force until the 1922 strike finally broke down the old paternalistic bonds. But as early as 1883, an Irish-Catholic priest William MacDonald, complained to a US

Senate committee about unheated, unhealthy corporation housing and the deep bitterness his parishioners felt at being locked out of supervisory positions in the Amoskeag Mills.⁵

● Most striking in *Amoskeag* is the real absence of any mention of the class hatreds that also festered in Manchester. Chief of Police Healey, whose knocking of heads in the 1922 strike is related in detail by Buck Dumaine's son, might seem to embody a blurring of class lines because of his own immigrant background. In reality, Healey was a convert to Protestantism whom the working-class Irish despised as a turncoat. The death of a young daughter of the agent of the Amoskeag Mills, described as being met with tears and flowers on the part of the striking mill workers in the book, was, at the time, widely rumored to be the work of strikers who secretly poisoned her. This was the paranoia that characterized life both in the Amoskeag Company and in Manchester — a paranoia whose roots clearly antedated the 1922 strike.

Before writing this review, I asked my father about his memories of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. The youngest son of an Irish-Catholic family in which parents, aunts, and uncles all worked as operatives, his own history illustrates the most persuasive way in which mill workers registered discontent with their life. Partially supported by the earnings of three older siblings, he was sent to college to guarantee that at least one member of his family would escape the mills. Yet, almost fifty years after the shutdown, he spoke with only bitterness of the corporate bosses who ran Manchester until 1935. "Those bastards," he said. "They used people. We were the mill workers, the maids, the servants. They didn't care about us. Remember, at Amoskeag they locked the gates after the workers went in mornings. That should tell you something."

In ten or twenty years, nobody will be left in Manchester who can tell what life really was like in the days when the "mills were Manchester." This is why *Amoskeag*'s rosy view of mill culture in Manchester most upsets and infuriates me. For many reputable historians and scholars, the story of Amoskeag has been told and told well. They will continue to assign *Amoskeag* in their classes, perhaps reliving the experience of one labor historian who told me his students "were taken aback because life was so happy there." At best, *Amoskeag* tells only half the Manchester story. I do not question the recollections of those people who speak for themselves in *Amoskeag*, but other individuals could have related a far different story. They deserved better.

In the final analysis, *Amoskeag* is like the pretty pictures that Langenbach took to provide illustrations for his book — soft, unreal and slightly out of focus.

NOTES

1. *Fortune*, February, 1969, p. 121.
2. *Time*, September 6, 1968, p. 70.
3. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Manchester, N.H.: Lessons in Urbicide," *New York Times*, December 22, 1969, p. 111.
4. J.A. Neuenschwander, "Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City," *Library Journal*, October 1, 1978, p. 1980.
5. *Report of the Senate upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital*, Vol. 3, pp. 209-16.

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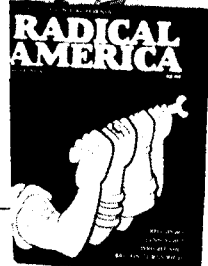


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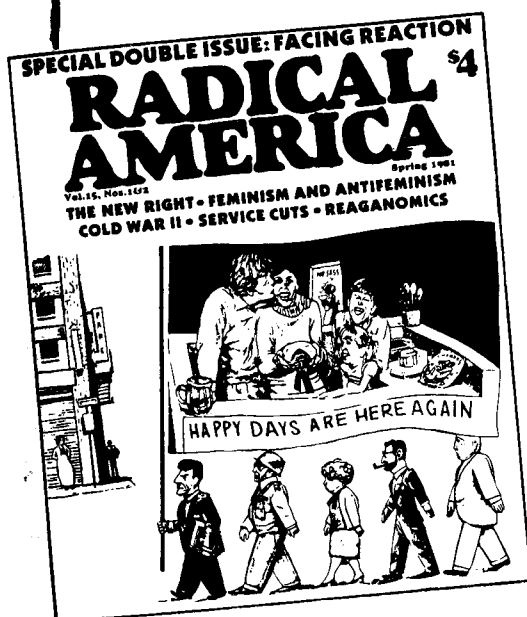
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