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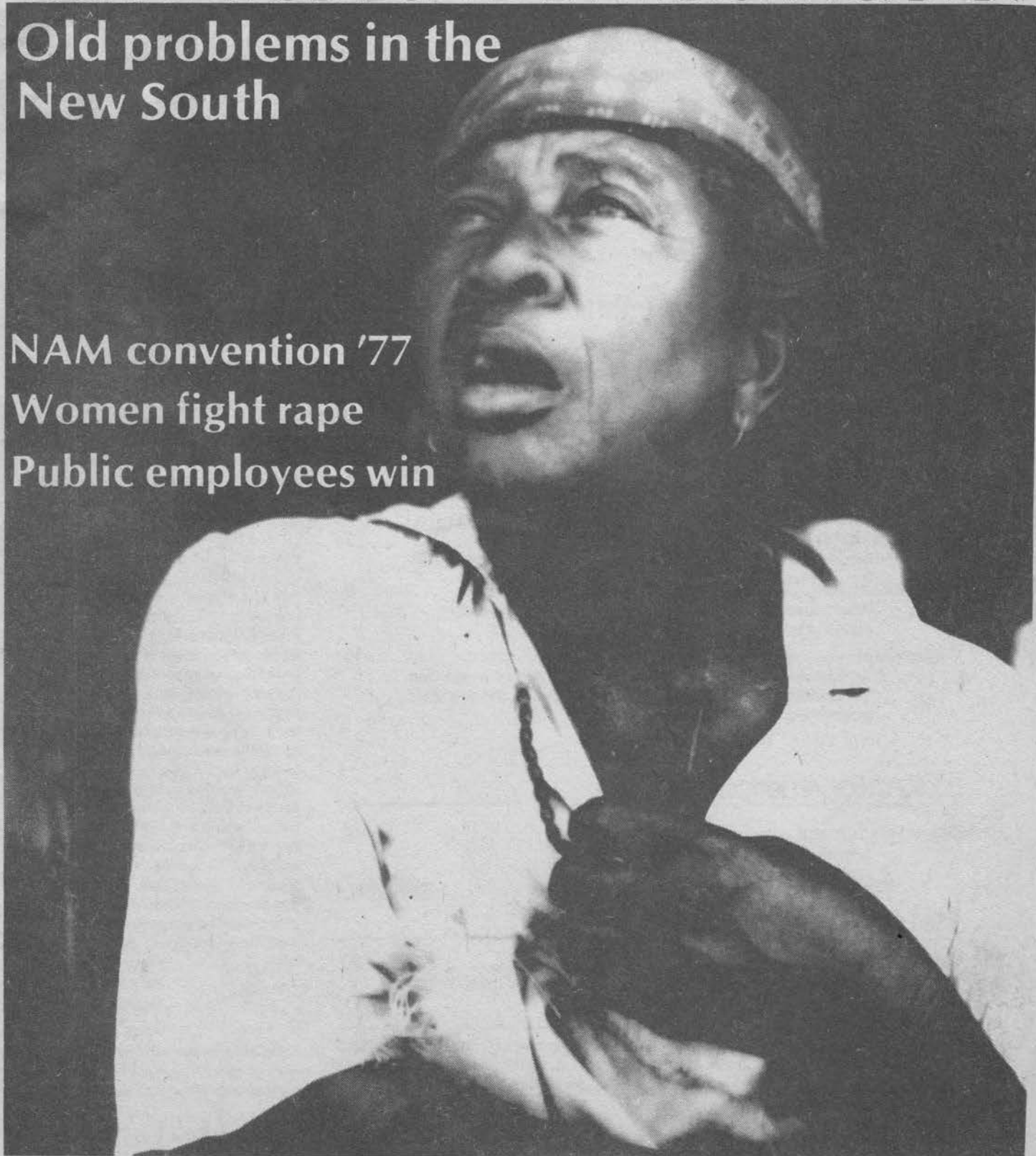
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Moving On

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT

Old problems in the New South

NAM convention '77
Women fight rape
Public employees win



Moving On

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE NEW AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Letters

Dear MO,

First, I think MOVING ON is far and away the best popular socialist magazine in the U.S.. Second I have two minor complaints about the Sept. issue: One, a large number of the graphics and photos are not captioned. Their meaning and identity may be somewhat obscure to those not steeped in a lot of heavy reading. Two, the NAM News section on the Socialist Caucus of the American Public Health Association quoted Steve Tarzynski somewhat out of context. The MO text reads "... this [denying care to the poor] makes the struggle for a national health service all the more urgent."

There seems to be some confusion around the difference between urgency for a national health service and the best means to struggle for it. Saying there is an urgent need for a national health service is like saying there is a need for a socialist revolution—certainly a true statement, but hardly one which suggests how you go about beginning it—which was the point of the original quote, which says:

"The fight for and achievement of a national health service is an important reform which has the potential to benefit millions of people. However, the process of that fight, the nature and means of that struggle, are as important as the reform itself. If the battle is fought primarily and essentially only as a legislative lobbying exercise by politically astute and sophisticated leaders, no real activist base will be built for all the issues which both impact on and go beyond health. If we can't begin to build a broad based, grass roots series of local infrastructures of committed cadre and activists, a national health service will remain a legislative victory with only limited future political implications for struggle. If, however, from this struggle organizations can be built with thousands of activists at their base, it will be an important victory for the left."

Rick Kunnnes
Detroit, MI

more letters, p. 8

Front cover by Dorothea Lange. Sharecropper woman wearing black beads to remedy heart trouble; Hinds County, Miss., 1937.

Comment

Jostling for jobs — there's not even room at the bottom

by Richard Healey
and Roberta Lynch

Full Employment Week, September 4-11, passed almost unnoticed into history. Its sponsoring organization, the Full Employment Action Council (FEAC), has been equally unheralded, even though its co-chairs are Coretta Scott King and Murray Finley (President of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union) and it is supported by the AFL-CIO.

Although the official slogan of Full Employment Week was "jobs not promises," its informal slogan seemed to be "speeches not action." Yet despite the lethargic organization and limited impact, it was an event of some significance. It was the first public indication of the increased priority that the labor movement is placing on full employment and of the new course it feels compelled to pursue to achieve that goal.

This emphasis grows out of both internal and external pressures. When their own members lose jobs and labor unions are unable to aid or defend them, the credibility of the labor movement as a whole is undermined. Most recent statistics show that for the first time in two decades, membership in the labor movement is declining.

Even more threatening is the potential impact on the union wage structure of the ever-expanding pool of unemployed workers. This threat has become more direct with the arrival of Carter's welfare plan. It is essentially a "Workfare" program that would force welfare recipients to accept any available job in the private or public sector at minimum wage. Because it does not create any new jobs, this program

would not really help the unemployed. And because it provides a large number of workers who are forced to work at less than the prevailing wage, it would undermine the labor movement and the jobs of unions members.

Despite organized labor's growing concern with full employment, the chances for passage of any meaningful jobs legislation don't look any brighter than they did the day that Carter was elected. (In fact, they probably seem darker.) The labor movement is already embroiled in a series of Congressional battles over bills that are designed to raise the minimum wage and aid in organizing the unorganized. Winning them is not proving any easy task, and they are absorbing much of labor's resources.

Difficult Issue

Full employment is even more difficult to tackle than these other issues since there is no legislation that has the administration stamp of approval. And hard as they are fighting the labor reform passage, the corporate powers-that-be are even more opposed to any meaningful jobs program. If ever an issue gives lie to the vicious myth that America is governed by the relatively equivalent influence of big business and big labor, it is the jobs question. For despite the complete support of organized labor, even as weak and toothless a bill as Humphrey-Hawkins has not been able to make it through Congress.

With the growing realization of the weakness of its position, the AFL-CIO hierarchy has begun—slowly and tentatively—to seek a new course. After years of going it alone—and being particularly insensitive to the needs of those outside its own ranks—organized

labor is beginning to look for allies. Full Employment Week and the FEAC are indicators of this new approach. They are based on an initial attempt to forge a new alliance of labor, minority, women's, community, and religious groups to bring the issue of jobs into the center of the political arena.

Such a new coalition is to be welcomed. But it should not be cause for undue optimism. Some difficult obstacles remain. For one, there is the problem of legislation. A movement for jobs needs a focus. Right now the Humphrey-Hawkins bill is the only jobs legislation on the Congressional agenda. But it is a notoriously weak bill. It is difficult to inspire people to fight for an act that does little more than formalize promises.

Another open question is the role that black people will play in this effort. It's clear that the participation of black leadership and organizations is key. Yet the black movement itself is currently in disarray—without leaders that have a real base among the people and without a momentum that can



drawing by Emory



drawing by Emory

make it a potent political force. The revitalization of a black political movement and the development of a serious multi-racial movement for full employment may at this time be inextricably intertwined.

Finally, there is the issue of popular mobilization. No coalition—no matter how broad—will be able to enact a program as economically charged as full employment without a movement from the base. A few years ago as the unemployment rate began to soar, NAM and other groups began to work to aid and organize the unemployed. We counselled thousands of unemployed workers—many of them destitute and desperate—but we couldn't organize them. We found that people felt so alone (despite the length of the unemployment lines) and so powerless that they could not imagine effecting the kind of changes that they knew needed to be made. Overcoming this attitude of despair will be one of the most difficult and vital tasks that confronts any purportedly serious jobs effort.

Despite these obstacles, there is no doubt of the importance of building such a movement. The unemployment statistics are well known. As of August the official rate was over 6% for white workers; over 14% for blacks. For black youth, it was over 40%. And there are now more female heads of households on the unemployment roles than there are male.

Human Cost

What we still don't know—and can only surmise—are the human costs.

The rising crime rate. The increased drug usage, alcoholism and prostitution. The undermining of self respect and human relationships. For the black community it has been particularly devastating: an entire generation of young people without a future, left to drift in an indifferent world.

But unemployment doesn't just hurt the unemployed. As long as the threat of unemployment hangs over the heads of those who work, it serves to undercut other movements and to divide

Although the official slogan of Full Employment Week was "jobs not promises," its informal slogan seemed to be "speeches not action." Yet despite the lethargic organization and limited impact, it was an event of some significance.

working people. Competition is the capitalist way. And as long as people see no alternative, they will continue to see preservation of their own jobs in the most narrow terms: a choice between affirmative action and a job; between health and safety provisions and a job; between environmental standards and a job; between defense spending and a job. The future of all of us requires that we change the terms of these debates.

Finally, full employment is a crucial issue because it shows so clearly the systemic weaknesses of capitalism. When leading spokespeople for the current economic order state that it cannot survive without five percent unemployment, that is a pretty good advertisement for an alternative economic order.

Because of the potential importance of a campaign for jobs, the upcoming Democratic Agenda conference on full employment could play a valuable role. The conference is being organized by the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and is sponsored by a number of leading trade unionists and political activists. It is not likely to spark a new mass movement on this issue, but it could help to generate larger interest in it and to develop a climate that would aid in organizing.

Events like this conference, the formation of the FEAC, or Full Employment Week are contributing to the growth of a new alliance at the top. Now there needs to be serious organizing at the grass roots as well. Perhaps it needs to begin from related but more accessible issues, such as organizing the unorganized, labor law reform, energy, housing and neighborhood deterioration. But wherever we begin, in all our work we should continue to build towards a movement that can take on this central issue—jobs for all at a decent wage.

The Democratic Agenda conference will be held Nov. 12-13 in Washington, D.C. For further information: 853 Broadway, Suite 617, New York, NY 10003.

Richard Healey is the National Secretary of NAM. Roberta Lynch is a member of NAM's National Interim Committee.

The back alley revisited

Ever since the 1973 Supreme Court decision making abortion a matter of choice for women, right-wing business interests and the Catholic church have tried to erode that right.

They fought for mandatory parent or husband consent, for a limit on abortions after a certain number of months of pregnancy, for allowing hospitals to refuse to perform abortion. These skirmishes are part of a larger battle to eliminate the right to abortion altogether through constitutional amendment.

Recently, their efforts have paid off. Under the Hyde amendment, the nominal right to abortion remains intact. But the federal government will no longer bear the cost for women whose other medical expenses it pays under Medicaid. States, which pay half the tab on Medicaid abortions, are following suit in passing laws denying funds. Poor women are thrown back on their "private resources. The Catch-22 is that to be eligible for Medicaid in the first place, women have to be without private resources.

Poor women have never really had free access to abortion. Even after '73, in rural areas and much of the south, the right has existed only on paper, due to lack of facilities and information. Now, poor women, a disproportionate number of whom are minority women, will be forced to beg, borrow or steal money for a legal abortion. They might end up at a cut-rate butcher. Or, they'll be coerced into bearing an unwanted child.

A society that really wants to reduce abortions could do so, without forcing women to choose between bearing unwanted children, getting money through whatever means desperation produces, or going to a butcher. Making information available to all women about contraception would be a start, as would research into safer and more effective birth control methods. Programs that meant women didn't have to forget everything else in their lives to raise children and that provided a real right to life—enough to eat, a decent education, good health care and daycare—could turn some unwanted children into wanted ones.

But the fact remains that as long as birth control is neither widely available nor completely effective, women will require access to abortion.

The Hyde amendment and its corollaries could be the first

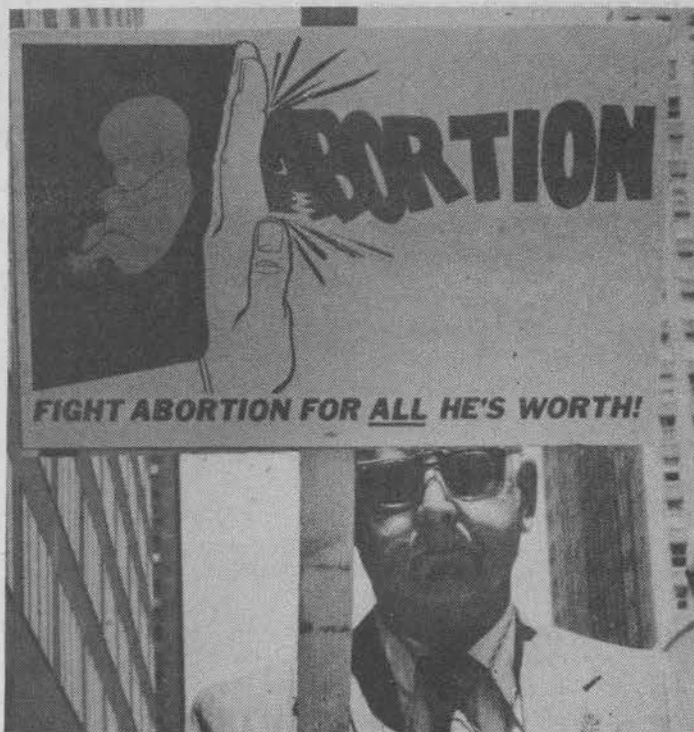


photo by Jane Melnick

mile on a tortuous road back to the back alleys for all women. And for poor women—particularly young and minority women—it is another price enacted for poverty—a public recognition of and acquiescence to the most blatant inequality.

We urge a strong response to these moves—a revitalization and extension of the movement that won the right to choose. A new movement that places equality at the forefront and a genuine concern for life at its foundation.

J.M.

Bakke decision denies equal rights

In 1973, Alan Bakke, a 34-year-old white engineer, was one of 3600 applicants turned down by University of California at Davis Medical School. When Bakke complained he was rejected because UC Davis reserves 16 out of 100 places in the class for minority students, he might have been dismissed as a sore loser. After all, thirteen other medical schools also turned him down.

But UC admissions officials were apparently less than enthusiastic about enforcing their own affirmative action program. They encouraged Bakke to sue, and to argue he was rejected on the basis of race, because some of the minority students' grades and Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores were lower than his.

The case reached the California Supreme Court, which agreed that Bakke was a victim of "reverse discrimination."

turn to p. 14

Getting Together

Can public pressure stop rapists?

by Glenn Scott

The legendary mouse that roared could learn some lessons from a small group of Dallas women and their efforts to make a mighty sound about the crime of rape—a sound that has been heard around the country.

On March 8, International Women's Day, the Kitty Genovese Women's Project jumped into local and national headlines with the publication of the names of 2,100 men indicted for sex-related offenses in Dallas County from 1960-76. Thirty women distributed over 20,000 copies of the newspapers in which the names were listed in neighborhoods and shopping centers all over the city.

Jenny (not her real name) was one of the organizers of the project.

MO: How did the Kitty Genovese Women's Project begin?

Jenny: We started with five women who had progressively been moving from pacifist backgrounds to growing anger and hostility about rape. We'd all either been raped or molested and we were trying to look at ways of dealing with rape ourselves.

MO: How did you decide to fight rape in this particular way?

Jenny: Well it just came to one of us that being able to list publicly men indicted for rape and other sex offenses would be a way to show how the criminal justice system does not consider rape a crime. Also it would be a way for women in their communities to find out who these men are and make them publicly accountable for their actions. In other words, a way to show that community pressure can be

a way for women to gain a sense of control and for men to have to change their behavior and their consciousness.

MO: How did women work together on the project?

Jenny: We started out with women from working class backgrounds, but as word began to spread about what we were doing, women from many different racial and economic backgrounds became involved. Lesbians played a very strong part in the project. All the labor was volun-

People are ready to do something about rape. Women are mad...they're ready to fight. And it's long overdue.

tary. On International Women's Day when the newspaper hit the streets, thirty women leafletted 100 block areas of Dallas on both sides of the street. We distributed 20,000 copies that day to washeterias, bars, office buildings, beauty shops, and homes.

MO: What were you hoping to accomplish through the newspaper?

Jenny: Originally the purpose was to confront rapists publicly and force them to take responsibility for their actions because we found over and over in the research that cases were dismissed. Some may have had to pay their way out of it, but they got out. And there was all the information filed

away in county records, so that no one would even realize that these men were living in the community. Our second objective was to educate people about rape. That's why we put in the personal accounts and educational articles.

MO: What about men on the list who might be innocent of any crime?

Jenny: We recognize that there are men on this list who, through mistaken identity and racist attitudes, are not guilty. We are sorry that those men were arrested. But our main concern is with the women who have been and who are going to be raped. Any time you try to make a strong hard-hitting statement, it can't be one hundred per cent politically sound looking at it from all areas. We recognize that.

MO: How did women react when you were out distributing the paper?

Jenny: One time we walked into a Salvation Army Clothing Store and gave one to a black woman working at the cash register. She was on the phone not two minutes after she looked at it, saying: "You know that paper you said you wanted last night? Well, I just got one for me and one for you too. You know that J. Henry Osborne—well, he's in here. (Silence) Well, let me look. No, he's not in here."

Women are finding the names of men they know and I've heard women make statements: "You know I thought he was weird. I'm not going to have anything else to do with him." or "Hey, my little sister's gone out with that guy!"

A friend's sister called him last week and said that one man (which makes ten men I know personally on the list) had tried to rape her when she was 13. He would always manipulate situations where they would be by themselves. He never succeeded, but when she saw his name on the list, it gave her support. The next time that happens, she'll be ready.

MO: Have you gotten many letters from people?

Jenny: We've received over 100 letters—

drawing by Mary Clark



MLL

"They marched their paper right into laundries, beauty parlors, high schools and living rooms to give information and support to thousands of Dallas women."

all but three supportive. We got one letter from a woman that said: "I've never been raped, but I've come pretty close a number of times. I would like to help. Please send me some bilingual copies for my neighborhood."

Another: "I have two daughters and three granddaughters. Please send me copies for them" (from a nursing home resident).

Another: "I am a woman who feels very strongly on the crime of rape. After reading your paper I feel rage, helplessness, strength and expanded awareness. Unlike other members of the Dallas police force, I feel like this project will have an impact on the Dallas community. It certainly had an impact on me."

MO: Why this response?

Jenny: Because people are ready to do something about rape. Women are mad. They're furious and they're not inner-directing their fear and terror any more. They're not spending their nights shaking in their apartment houses alone anymore. They're talking about it and they're ready to fight. And it's long overdue.

MO: Where are you going with this project from here?

Jenny: Similar projects have been started in at least four other cities that we know of. We want to encourage women to do something like this in smaller towns where community pressure can be even more effective.

We want to help women find ways to change the situation with rape clear around. We want to stop the police and the media and the courts and the lawyers going after a woman who reports a rape and giving her so much shit. To begin to change this, we think it's important to open up information about rape to women in their communities, with more direct community control of police. With information and with getting together, women can force men to be accountable for their actions. This won't stop rape, but it can be a beginning.

Viewpoint: Aiming for the solar plexus

by Glenn Scott

Jenny says it herself: "Anytime you try to make a strong, hard-hitting statement, it can't be one hundred percent sound looking at it from all areas." The project has its strengths and weaknesses, but the weaknesses, it seems to me, can be worked through. The strengths are particularly important now. The project is a breath of fresh air in an atmosphere heavy with a growing anti-feminism, media emissions about the death of the women's movement, and a decline in the militancy of the movement.

Despite this positive impact, the project has not met with universal enthusiasm. Some women have criticized its potentially racist implications.

They feel that the Kitty Genovese list has uncritically reflected the prejudices of a criminal justice system that has consistently charged and convicted minority (especially black) males for the rape of (in the vast majority of cases) white women.

The women who worked on the project respond by arguing that their concern is for the women who have been or are going to be raped—especially the minority and low-income women who suffer much higher chances of rape, much less of assistance, and much more of harassment from the police and the courts. By distributing the paper in working class and minority neighborhoods, they feel that they gave vital information and support to these doubly victimized women.

"The Kitty Genovese project did provide women — both minority and white — with information they never had — information that could save their lives."

An example of how they acted on this conviction: The first neighborhood that they targeted to leaflet on March 8 was a black community where two black women had been raped and then tortured with lighted cigarette butts and broom handles to force them to say, "Yes, master, I loved it." (The man who did it confessed, but was later acquitted.)

I am convinced that the project has dealt with the complicated problem of the relationship of class, race, and sex at least as well as any other aspect of the anti-rape movement. It did not provide the judicial system or the police with any information that they don't already have. But it did provide women—both minority and white—with information that they have never had—information that could save their lives.

On Balance

In my view, the main weakness—and it's surely one that every project must face sooner or later—is the question of where-do-we-go-from-here. The group does not seem to have thought much beyond completion of this one action, other than to plan to initiate similar efforts in other cities. While more such projects will be valuable, the question of what to do once the material has been circulated, or better yet, once women express an interest in doing something about rape, needs more attention.

Also crucial is the need for more thought about the relation of projects such as Kitty G. to the rest of the anti-rape movement. How can "hard-

hitting" actions raise criticisms of more narrow work around rape and yet maintain support for such work in ways that will build a stronger movement?

In a period like this, though, Kitty G.'s strengths far outshine its drawbacks. Vital to our movement is the project's emphasis on women gaining power in their communities and workplaces in the fight against rape—and its special emphasis on working class and Third World women. The project aimed right for the solar plexus. No asking permission; no charting channels; no trusting of the media to reach women for them. They marched their paper right into laundries, beauty parlors, high schools and living rooms to give information and support to thousands of Dallas women.

In addition, the project presents an optimistic message about the possibilities of reaching women not previously touched by feminism. The successful response to the Kitty G. effort indicates that many women are not only open, but actually downright hungry to find ways to combat their fears and passivity.

At a time when women's insecurities, both material and perceived, are feeding movements against everything from abortion to sex education, the Kitty Genovese project has stocked a few nourishing items in our somewhat lean larder.

Glenn Scott is a member of NAM in Austin. She is a writer and researcher on women's labor history and is a member of NAM's Commission on Racism.

Letters

Dear MO,

I have long seen the failures of capitalism, but have shied away from socialism, because of obvious faults in present socialistic countries, mainly the lack of worker's freedoms.

Your September issue was most interesting, particularly the articles by Ehrenreich and Healey. They both admit that weaknesses exist while indicating desire to address this problem. This gives credibility to your movement and hope for the future.

Look forward to your next issue. Good luck.

Elliot Pogue
San Diego, CA

Dear MO,

In the September issue of MO, under "new chapters" it says "And NAM's first chapter in Colorado is now getting off the ground: Boulder NAM recently applied for chapter status."

In the interest of history, this is not exactly accurate. In 1972, there were three chapters in Colorado: Boulder, Greeley, and Pueblo. For a variety of reasons, none of these original groups stayed together. The present Boulder chapter represents an effort to start anew, with some old faces and a lot of new ones, on a solid footing in the community rather than the campus.

This time around, we hope and feel very confident that Boulder NAM will be the first to stick around for a while here in Colorado.

Jay D. Jurie
Boulder, CO



**Support gay and lesbian rights!
Boycott Florida orange juice!
Don't buy Tropicana
and other Florida brands!**

NAM Convention '77 — a sense of possibilities

by Judy MacLean

The sixth annual Convention of the New American Movement, held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on August 11-14, was a hectic and stimulating gathering. It was a composite of the issues, concerns, ideas, and visions that have grown out of NAM's experiences over the last few years—and out of the socialist tradition of which it is a part. Although these disparate pieces did not add up to the kind of clear and overriding priorities desired by some, in a way the Convention was much more than the sum of its parts.

This meeting represented a new confidence and maturity based on an increased awareness of NAM's political role within the left and of the growth and value of its local organizing efforts. It was an affirmative—if still tentative—answer to the question that has been asked of NAM since its inception: Is it possible to be a multi-tendency organization and yet project a definite political approach?

In its early days NAM was home for a host of viewpoints—but most of them were not clearly articulated or widely understood. Hence its multi-tendency character was maintained more by default than by intent. More problematically, the bulk of the membership was new to socialist politics and possessed only a cursory grasp of the meaning of some of the vital aspects of NAM's perspective.

The last six years have seen a gradual—though sometimes intense—process of change within the organization. Through a stronger and more developed national leadership, elements of NAM's politics have begun to be more clearly defined and expressed. In the wake of such clarification, NAM has lost members who saw themselves as outside of the parameters of the organization. But it has also gained a firmer political anchor. And through wide usage of some basic political education materials and internal schools these politics are in-

creasingly becoming the province not just of local or national leadership, but of the entire membership.

Political debate has expanded to include not only abstract polemic, but also exchanges that grow more out of concrete problems and experiences. In the process there has developed an increased tolerance and respect for opposing views—not a desire to sweep them under some magic carpet of unity, but rather a willingness to test ideas against reality as part of any debate. In this sense NAM has become a much more conscious multi-tendency organization—aware of where it is willing to live with disagreements and where it needs to press for common perspective.

Local Organizing

The Convention also illustrated how this greater sense of political purpose has been meaningful at the local level. Two years ago NAM adopted a strategic approach for its work. It criticized previous activity for relying on the search for an issue embo-

died all aspects of its politics without regard for its current organizing potential. And it broke with many on the left who refused to work for short-term reforms or within the existing institutions of our society. It stressed the importance of participation in those struggles that spoke to working people's needs and angers, and of actively working to counter racial and sexual discrimination.

The changes involved in this approach did not occur overnight; the process is still going on. But they have been instituted by many chapters, and this year political discussions were more solidly rooted in concrete organizing experience than ever before as a result.

About a third of the 350 people in attendance were union members, mostly in public sector unions, with a smattering in industrial fields. Others were in the process of forming unions. There was a new sense of the long hours of hard work it takes to build and form a union (or challenge entrenched union leadership). Stewards,

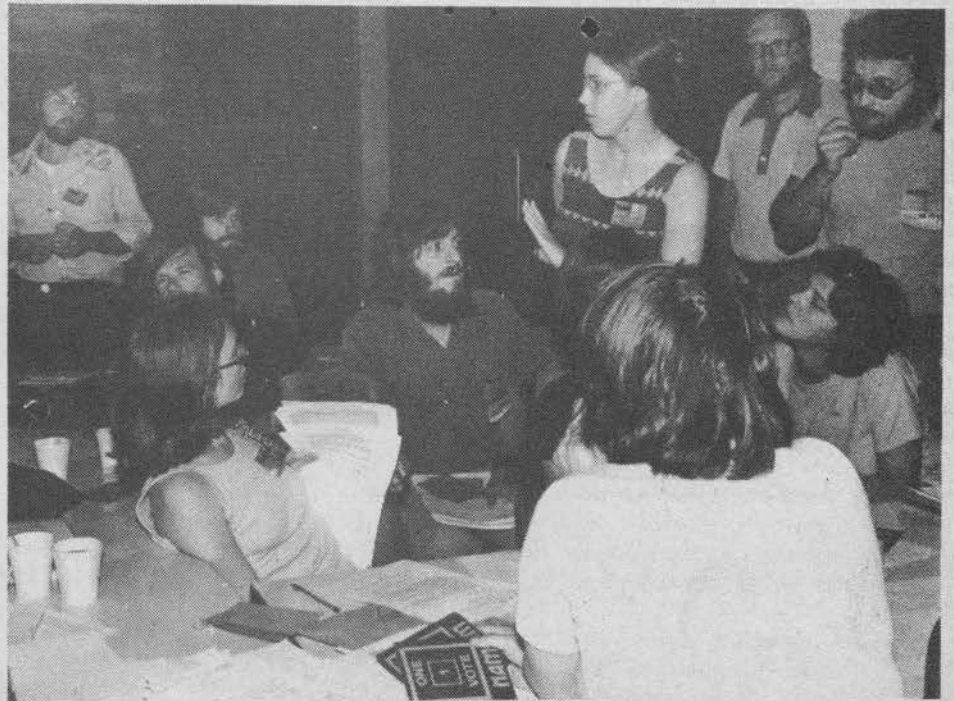


photo by Jane Melnick

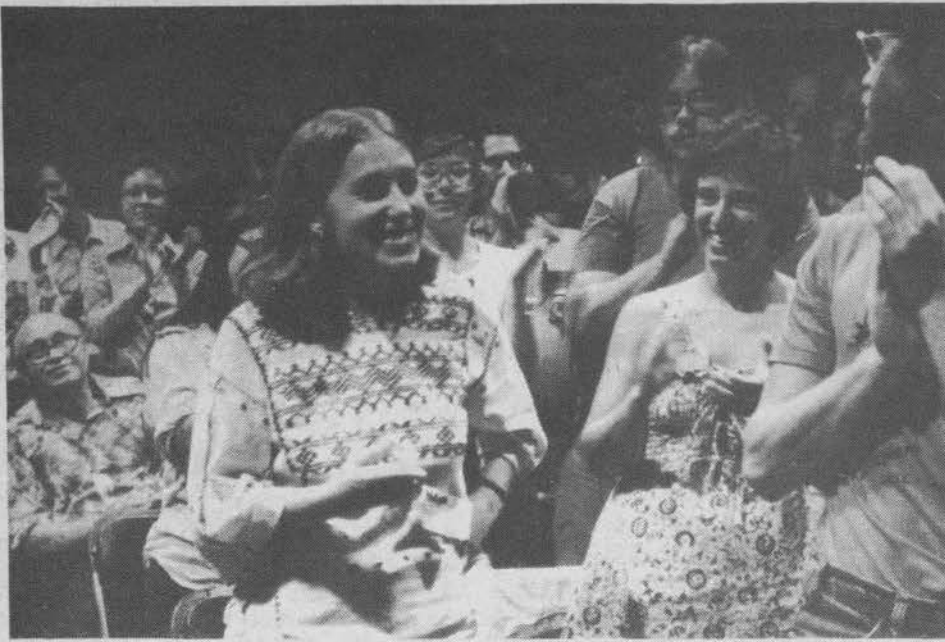


photo by Jane Melnick

organizers, local presidents and rank and file members compared notes—and a sense of the labor movement's complexity permeated discussions.

Sessions dealing with experiences in on-the-job organizing included teachers, health workers, clerical workers, industrial workers and social service workers. Activists from citywide clerical organizations and women trying to form unions spoke of their common problems in breaking through the wall of "professionalism" that still surrounds even the most low-paying and tedious office work. Frank Krasnowsky, a Seattle NAM member who worked with Ed Sadlowski's insurgent campaign in the United Steelworkers, spoke of positive results even though the election was lost. The activity of going out and organizing Steelworkers Fightback energized many of the workers in his area, he said, and the repercussions are still being felt throughout the union.

Energy, especially utilities organizing, has been a NAM priority for several years. In the energy workshop, delegates from Dayton and Buffalo talked about the beginning steps they'd taken in building an alliance between the community groups they've organized and the utility company workers—steps that brought new problems as well as some success.

Sessions on other issues NAM has worked on in the past year included fighting Carter's new immigration

plan, organizing against violence against women, supporting South African liberation, gay rights, the urban crisis and the J.P. Stevens boycott.

New Problems

With the new confidence based on organizing experience came increased respect for the difficulty anyone who organizes for progressive social change faces today. It came up in small and large ways. "Working in a union—in order to go beyond being 'just a good trade unionist' you have to get that far" was the title of one workshop.

A panel on socialist strategy and mass organizing included Harry Boyte and Frank Ackerman, who have taken opposing views on the significance of citizen-action style organizations. Boyte has argued that they are the beginning of a new, democratic mass movement that will affect the U.S. much as the Civil Rights or anti-war movements did. Ackerman, on the other hand, has characterized them as undemocratic, often hostile to the left, and surviving mostly due to church funding. It became clear during the debate and discussion that the two positions were no longer as far apart as they had seemed. Boyte acknowledged that the organizations have many built-in limitations and cannot be seen as substitutes for socialist organization. Ackerman indicated that he based his judgments on only a few organizations and that he saw the need for further experimentation and information before drawing any final conclusions.

Differences on the issues involved of course remain.

Several delegates commented that the question of participation in such mass organizations was not a matter of "yes" or "no" but "how." Max Gordon and Roberta Lynch, on the same panel, raised that issue as decisive. Gordon provided historical insight into the classic tension between socialist goals and reform activity. Lynch stressed that the left faces questions it hasn't begun to answer. For example, she said, no one has built effective opposition to the new manifestations of racism that include the Klan, Nazis, fights over school busing, and the Bakke Supreme Court decision.

Part of the convention's energy came from the pooling of so many different streams of social action. Songwriter and singer Holly Near gave a personal and moving presentation on lesbian feminism.

"Where in this land or in any socialist country could we have seen a convention that had such an open platform that it included contributions from the gay world?" commented Stella Nowicki, another guest at the convention. Nowicki, one of the stars of the film *Union Maids*, talked about her experiences as a rank and file union activist in the 30's after the film was shown.

Ken Cockrel, black socialist candidate for city council in Detroit, explained the background and perspective of his campaign. Spanish leftists presented their view of Eurocommunism and the growth of the Spanish women's movement. A striker from the Coors brewery described the connections between his fight and other causes. Coors money, he said, finances anti-ERA and anti-gay campaigns. The variety of sessions created by NAM members was impressive, too, running the gamut from a Marxian class analysis workshop to a continuing caucus on "Raising Socialist Children."

In his opening convention address, incoming National Secretary Richard

Healey said, "In a broad context, culture means the entire way people organize their lives and see the world. In that sense, some of the most basic patterns capitalism creates are destructive to working people, because they always set people against each other, competing for jobs, housing, health care, etc.. So everyone tends to look out for number one. We have to build on the part of working class culture that goes beyond that, that understands something about solidarity."

Politics and culture came up at the convention in several ways. A session with Holly Near and Julia Reichert, maker of the film *Union Maids*, focused on the need to build an alternative women's and left culture. Reichert said culture should be seen as much more than films and songs; it should include ways of doing all political work. The left culture, if well done, will eventually influence mass culture, she predicted. Stanley Aronowitz argued in a workshop he chaired that art must be innovative in form if it is to inspire revolution. A cultural evening featured a NAM anthem written by Chicago Southside NAM member Bill Fussfield and a sparkling concert by singer/songwriter Kristen Lems with Tim Vear. Lorna Rassmussen, a Canadian filmmaker, was there with her film *Great Grandmothers*, a poignant slice of Canadian women's history, one of a half a dozen fine political films shown.

Old Lessons

To those of us who became socialists during the civil rights, anti-war, or women's movement, it has sometimes felt as though we're starting everything anew in the U.S.. McCarthyism in the 50's didn't always literally destroy our political parents, but it kept us from knowing about their victories, their mistakes.

NAM's "old-timers," veterans of the '20's, '30's and '40's, are giving back this stolen heritage to the young in NAM who are newly aware of its

photo by Jane Melnick



value. Saul Wellman's overview of the history of the relationship between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party drew praise from many delegates, even those who disagreed with his conclusions. Wellman, a union organizer in the '30's and the '40's, argued that despite the animosity between the Communists and the Socialists, they had in fact had many things in common during those years. He urged that NAM not overemphasize its differences with one of the Socialist Party's modern successors, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

At the "old-timer's caucus," one ex-national leader of the Communist Party, USA, cautioned that "We must be here to learn, too."

"Yes, they seem politically immature in some ways. In others, they are way ahead of the times and us," said Stella Nowicki.

As Nowicki points out, there are many weaknesses remaining in NAM. Political maturity has not been accompanied by substantial growth in numbers. The organization remains limited in its racial and class composition. Some chapters still lack a defined structure or clear focus. There has not been a sufficiently systematic evaluation of work—both as a means to aid chapters and to further clarify theoretical perspectives. The very practical strength of the Convention led to criticisms of neglect in other



photo by Jane Melnick

areas—that it did not adequately address NAM's organizational problems or foster theoretical debate and development. All of these issues are high on the agenda of NAM's new national leadership, according to incoming Political Secretary, Marilyn Katz.

"NAM has to be a place where we do more than talk politics or have business meetings," said Richard Healey in his opening speech. "It has to be a place where we start to build a new world view and culture, where we think about ourselves and each other in a new way." Important beginnings have been made in this area.

A delegate named Sandy McGuire spoke for more than just herself when she took the mike at the long evaluation session that ended the convention. A mother of two from Dayton, Ohio, two years ago she was a stranger to the movement. She surprised herself that weekend by rising to speak in front of more than 300 people on political points. She felt she'd grown so much, learned so much, in the process of being in NAM, she said.

"They never seemed to lose that quality of humanness and warmth" observed Stella Nowicki. "They are working. They are building. They are searching."

Judy MacLean is the Organizational Secretary of the New American Movement.

A Convention sampler

In the last decade, there have been great changes in the cultural stereotypes of women ... It has gone from the Freudian view of women as masochists to "looking out for number one." Today what's being pushed is not commitment or families—just a big sexual marketplace where there is no higher goal than our own personal gratification. It creates a tremendous amount of anxiety. The old supports are not there, but there are no new ones. We had self-sacrifice, now we have "fuck everyone else." We've gone from masochism to massive egotism, from suffocation to freefall. Do we have a line or even a glimmering of how people can live, not as victims or as atoms, but as members of a human community?

Barbara Ehrenreich
Long Island NAM

Iwish I could say this to all energy organizers, not just those in NAM. It's been a hard year. The corporations have used millions of dollars and very sophisticated techniques to defeat us. But we shouldn't be discouraged. It shows we're hitting them in a vulnerable spot. Sometimes in the hard work of stopping a rate increase or fighting shutoffs, it seems we're only scratching the skin of the monster. But let's remember, it's the skin over the jugular vein.

Judy MacLean
NAM Organizational
Secretary

When you are talking about race, sex, class or age, the question is not whose

oppression is greater than whose.

The question is, in whose interest is it to end oppression.

Holly Near
Singer & Writer

Sometimes it is hard to tell if the government wants to force black women to have more children or to be sterilized. One thing is clear: the government does not want black women themselves making those decisions.

Holly Graff
NAM National
Interim Committee

One reason women are hard to organize into unions is that they get pressure from their husbands. It's dangerous to go out at night. She should be home with the kids. A group of women whose jobs were cut from Detroit's city budget mobilized their whole families. They took husbands and children to meetings and picketlines.

Bobby Lilly
NAM National
Interim Committee

That's what a convention is about! It's not just highfalutin' abstract political discussion, it's the day to day, nitty-gritty of our practice.

Dorothy Healey
Los Angeles NAM

We all feel pressures. Someone will say, "Wouldn't you be more effective if you were a little less radical?" Anyone completely free of these pressures is probably not doing



useful mass work. A delicate balance must be struck. Some compromises must be made. But too many compromises can lead to a long march backward.

Frank Ackerman
Middlesex NAM

Most environmentalists, I've found, are politically naive. But it's the complement of people on the left who've been environmentally naive. The left has not been interested in occupational safety, environmental safety and public health. I think NAM is a good vehicle to help bring this together and also to go to labor and heal some of those wounds. Because the long term interests of labor and environmentalists are really very similar.

Richard Grossman
Environmentalists for
Full Employment

In terms of program, the Spanish Communist Party is for all kinds of women's rights, for divorce, contraception, abortion. The party program, adopted two years ago, has a famous phrase, that a party that is not feminist



photo by Jane Melnick

cannot be revolutionary, which is very advanced for a communist party. But the problem is how to implement this. You have to change more than the line, you have to change the mind of many male militants who are reactionary on these issues. And at the mass level, among people, there is no real discussion of these questions yet.

Manuel Castells
Activist in Spanish Left

The essence of a socialist organization is not so much in its priorities as in its scope. We are not claiming to build an alternative institution or an alternative program, we are claiming to build an alternative society. Our goal must constantly be to address and unite a wide range of concerns, and to speak to as many of the issues of this society as possible, to link things like the labor movement and the community, and to bring together a holistic vision of the future. That's what we should be about.

Roberta Lynch
NAM National
Interim Committee

New officers

The NAM Convention in Cedar Rapids also elected the political leadership of the organization—a three-person full-time Political Committee to be based in Chicago and eight members from around the country who make up the National Interim Committee. Together they bring a wide range of views and experiences to this job.

Richard Healey (National Secretary). Healey is the former Political Secretary of NAM. He has a history of political activism in the left that goes back over 15 years, and a strong background in Marxist theory. As co-author of the NAM political education program and co-leader of NAM training schools, he has been a primary force in strengthening the organization's collective political development. He is firmly convinced that theory should—and can—be the province of every member if it is presented popularly and consistently.

Marilyn Katz (Political Secretary). Katz has been a filmmaker and member of NAM in Los Angeles for the past several years. She has previously served on the National Interim Committee and has been involved in various aspects of community organizing. She is particularly concerned with developing an effective left response to the current increase in overt racism.

Judy MacLean (Organizational Secretary). MacLean has been active in NAM since its founding and has been involved in developing socialist feminist politics and activities in NAM. She is former National Interim Committee member and has chaired NAM's Energy Commission. Most recently she worked as a staff writer for *In These Times*, a socialist newsweekly.

Ben Dobbs is a long time activist. He was active in the labor movement in the 1930's and has most recently been working to strengthen Los Angeles NAM's labor activity.

Paul Garver is a business agent for a public employees union and a member of NAM in Pittsburgh. He has been very active in local and national work around energy issues.

Holly Graff is the chairperson of NAM's Socialist Feminist Commission. She is a member of Pittsburgh NAM and teaches philosophy at a local university.

Rick Kunnes is the chairperson of NAM's Health Commission. He is a member of Detroit NAM and of AFSCME.

Bobby Lilly is a clerical worker who serves as vice-president of her union local. She is also an officer of the Detroit Coalition of Labor Union Women and a member of Detroit NAM.

Roberta Lynch is the former National Secretary of NAM. She left that post to become involved in local work and the labor movement.

Carolyn Magid is member of Middlesex NAM in the Boston area. She teaches philosophy at a local college.

Eric Nee is active in an SEIU local and is a member of Santa Cruz NAM. He is NAM's representative on the National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision.

NAM Convention '77 — on the agenda

On the final day of the convention, NAM members adopted resolutions that will guide the coming year's work. Some highlights:

** NAM will join in a campaign to overturn the Bakke Supreme Court decision.

** NAM endorses a boycott of Florida citrus products in support of gay and lesbian rights.

** Work in the labor movement will continue to be central. The primary emphasis will be on rank and file activity, but NAM members will seek local union leadership when it can play a role in catalyzing such activity. NAM will take part in a November Full Employment Conference sponsored by Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. In support of striking workers at Coors Brewery, NAM joins in boycotting Coors beer.

** Feminist activities will include projects to stop violence against women and on-the-job organizing among clerical

workers. NAM will work against legislation that restricts public funds for abortion. A socialist-feminist network that also involves non-NAM members will be strengthened.

** A resolution was passed on the rights of "young humans." It calls for more organizational attention to the needs of children.

** Energy organizing remains a priority and chapters will explore possibilities for work with "citizen action" community groups.

** Several measures on human rights passed that were aimed at exposing Carter's hypocritical stand on this issue. NAM will work to show that human rights violations take place around the world in U.S.-supported countries such as Iran, as well as at home, where the unemployment rate continues to deny many the basic human right of a living. Demonstrations and educational work will be done in support of liberation forces in South Africa.

Bakke decision

from p. 5

UC Davis, the defendant, prepared a lackluster case that made no mention of past discrimination against minority applicants. Later, the UC Regents appealed, and now the case is before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Bakke, of course, is the beneficiary of an old-fashioned "affirmative action program" hundreds of years old. This largely invisible program guarantees males, whites and those from relatively affluent backgrounds a lion's share of educational and cultural advantages that lead to higher paying jobs. Sometimes this program has been enforced blatantly, with a sign saying "No Blacks Allowed." More often it is enforced with poorer schools in minority neighborhoods, lack of child-care and nutritional programs, and, later in life, culturally biased tests like the MCAT.

Modern affirmative action programs, like the one at UC Davis, were designed to correct some of this past bias. Those who cry "reverse discrimination" say affirmative action has gone too far. But has it? The class Bakke wanted to enter was still 84% white in a state whose population is only 75% white—and that's *with* the special admissions program.

If the Supreme Court upholds *Bakke*, every affirmative action program in the U.S.—for both minorities and women—will be in question. The Justice Department is supporting Bakke's case, claiming to be looking for a middle ground between quotas and the centuries-old affirmative action plan for white males.

There is no middle ground. Either we try to correct past discrimination or we continue to reinforce it. The Supreme Court is hearing arguments on Bakke this month. A climate of opinion in support of racial justice can affect Supreme Court decisions, just as it did during the Civil Rights Movement when the "separate but equal" clause was struck down. NAM joins with the National Committee to Overturn the *Bakke* Decision in working to create that climate.

In a broader sense, however, we do not accept the present small part of the pie that must be divided among the Bakkes and minorities of this country. While there is a desperate need for doctors in this country and scores of qualified candidates, medical schools deliberately limit the number of admissions each year in order to maintain the elite character of the profession. Why is there no outcry against these socially damaging "quotas?"

In addition, the whites who support Bakke are not all medical school rejects. For many of them, affirmative action means greater integration of the unemployment line and of low-paying jobs; they and their children are prime targets for this downward mobility.

We can't simply integrate the "disadvantaged." We need to eliminate such a category through full employment, quality education, better health care, and more. The resources to do this exist today. Only the profit motive that dominates our society stands in the way. J.M.

The union is us — a rank and file campaign that worked

by Judy MacLean

Across the United States public workers have been taking a beating. The fiscal crisis of cities and states has meant layoffs, static wages, and service cutbacks. This year in Pennsylvania, some public workers won for a change. Bill Perkins, a NAM member, is a shop steward in the Pennsylvania Social Service Union in Allegheny County, a center of rank and file activity during the contract and budget crisis.

MO: Aren't there two unions for Pennsylvania state workers?

Perkins: Yes. AFSCME is a statewide local that represents 70,000 to 80,000 workers, mostly blue collar, clerical and aides in institutions. The Pennsylvania Social Services Union represents about 11,000 workers statewide. Most are social workers, rehabilitation counselors, etc.. At least 80% are welfare caseworkers.

MO: Why two unions?

Perkins: The details are unclear. They've both been in existence for about five years. During the late 1960's there were a lot of illegal strikes by public workers and teachers. Pennsylvania was forced into passing Act 195 which established public employee unions and gave them a limited right to strike. But the details of the act encourage weak unions. Both unions formed very shortly after that, without any struggle or central organizing committee. From the beginning, both were staff dominated, with little rank and file activity.

MO: Has there ever been a move to unify them?

Perkins: No. PSSU is a local of Service Employees International Union. Nationally, SEIU and AFSCME go after the same bargaining units. There's a lot of animosity nationally and at the statewide level. Over the years there have been attempts to cooperate, but it never worked. AFSCME has taken the position that they can go it alone because of their size.

MO: What happened this year around the state budget and your contract?

Perkins: Our contract and the budget both expired July 1. I'd like to deal with the contract first. AFSCME's contract also expired July 2, but about nine months prior they settled for a really poor contract with a lot of rollbacks. The state was offering PSSU the same deal. The successor's clause was the most important; it allowed the state to contract work out to non-union employers. They wanted to take away medical and military benefits, too.

We felt we needed to draw on support from the community... we can't stand alone against the fiscal crisis.

In 1975, we had gone out on strike for three weeks and gotten smashed. AFSCME had gone out with us and gone back after four days, settling for a 3.5% wage increase and practically nothing else. We ended up settling for almost the same thing. The membership of PSSU was disillusioned. It was our first real struggle and we got beaten. Nobody wanted to go out on strike this time.

So, to organize people to oppose the contract, we focussed on the final vote on the contract. Shop stewards understood the importance and did organizing in the shops. We did mailings, posters, and held meetings. It was successful; the contract was rejected 2-1 statewide. This was a shock to our statewide leadership, because they expected us to roll over and play dead. It was also a real shock to the Commonwealth.

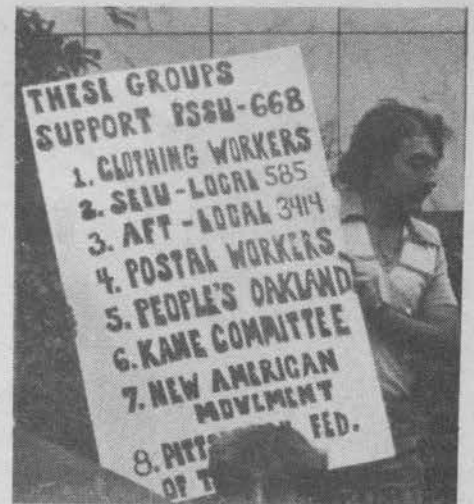


photo by Maureen Pedzwater

After that, we had to indicate that people were really ready to go on strike. So we held two demonstrations on June 28, one in Philadelphia, and one in Pittsburgh.

In Pittsburgh, we felt we needed to draw on support from the community. People in public employee unions are beginning to understand that we can't stand alone against the fiscal crisis. We'd been working with a number of labor unions and community groups over the past year, trying to build a little solidarity. We asked them to participate. The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, which has a long history of militant action, agreed. The Postal Workers Union, SEIU 585 (which represents the county workers), the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, and the American Federation of Teachers at the University of Pittsburgh also took part. People's Oakland, a community group we've worked with around helping out ex-mental patients in their community, the Committee to Improve Kane Hospital and New American Movement all joined with us.

We had three demands. Stop contracting out our work; stop the layoffs that were coming up as a result of the budget crisis; and stop the attacks on public employees that were coming from the media, politicians and the business community.

The demonstration came off in the rain; there were 300 people and it was very spirited. We got local and statewide press. That demonstration, the one in Philadelphia, the vote we took, plus some pressure from our international union settled the contract. We successfully fought the rollbacks,

whereas AFSCME hadn't been able to do that.

MO: How did all this tie in with the budget and what was happening in the state legislature?

Perkins: Way back in February, a fight began developing over the budget with the Democrats and Governor Milton Shapp opposing the Republicans and certain conservative Democrats. The Governor and the Democrats were in favor of a tax increase. In July, Shapp issued layoff notices to 7,000 state workers, closing down community programs and certain state services. He was creating an air of crisis. Either it was his budget, or he'd go through with the cutbacks.

At first, people thought he was just being manipulative. But then layoffs started happening. Services were cancelled. PSSU, locally in Allegheny County, got very upset. About an eighth of our workforce, mostly welfare workers, were threatened. People wanted to do something. The stewards were excited by the demonstration June 28. It was the first time they had organized something on that scale. We'd learned a lot about how to do such things. We'd also learned an important lesson—that the members should rely on themselves and not wait for the leadership to make decisions on their behalf.

So, the stewards in Allegheny County called the president and said, look, we want to meet to decide what to do about these layoffs. We had a meeting and decided on a one-day wildcat county-wide strike. The purpose was not to close the county down, but to raise our point of view about what was happening. The media wasn't raising it at all. The cutbacks and layoffs weren't even a public issue. The media was taking the lead as a reactionary force, especially the *Pittsburgh Press*. They really organized opposition to the tax hike effectively. They had coupons on the front page to send in to your legislator to stop the tax hike, and articles on it every day.

The stewards did all the planning, coordination and media work. On July 19, we had about 85% of the people out. It got banner headlines. It was the lead story on every TV station for two days. The issues were raised. For instance, the *Press* ran four editorials on them.

After that, other groups, like Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens, Welfare Rights Organization and some small AFSCME shops followed our lead and did some militant actions raising the issue of the

The strike accomplished its purpose beautifully...members were extremely proud of their union and themselves.

effects of these cutbacks in the community.

The strike accomplished its purpose beautifully. Allegheny County PSSU members were extremely proud of their union and themselves.

MO: How did the union leadership react?

Perkins: We tried to encourage this kind of thing in Philadelphia and a couple of other places. For a variety of reasons, it didn't happen, one being that the statewide leadership put pressure on them not to do it.

MO: How about the state of Pennsylvania?

Perkins: It was too early in their gameplan for us to have militant actions. They suspended all the officers for one day, the president for two, and all the workers got written discipline

letters placed in their files, which is a pretty heavy action for a one day wildcat. But people were still not sorry we did it.

MO: What was happening with the budget?

Perkins: The budget crisis dragged on into August. Other forces began to mobilize. We did several press conferences, mostly with Allegheny County Welfare Rights Association. They decided to take a trip to Harrisburg to pressure the legislators, along with us and South Oakland Citizen's Council. We announced it at a press conference, got money from the community, and took five busloads of people to Harrisburg. Philadelphia County PSSU and a local welfare group did the same thing. We had close to 1,000 people roaming the corridors that day.

Then, we decided to have one more demonstration in Pittsburgh. We had the opportunity to work with a local AFSCME shop. I had worked with the woman who was president at the shop on the J.P. Stevens boycott. The shop is mostly women, and they were angry about the lack of public response by the AFSCME leadership. We wrote a joint statement with Welfare Rights Organization, and lots of AFSCME members attended the demonstration. It was the first time in the short history of both unions that we'd done something jointly.

MO: How many people came?

Perkins: About 250. It was just as spirited as the first one; there was a lot of media coverage. We met with the AFSCME local's leadership about trying to do other things and they were very open to it.

MO: AFSCME finally called a sickout, didn't they?

Perkins: Here's the way it happened. A budget finally passed the state Senate. In the House, the Democrats forced a vote six times. The sixth, they lacked two votes to pass it. Wednesday of that week the head of AFSCME went on TV and announced a statewide sickout for



Friday. From what I can tell, it was a surprise to local elected officials. They had laid no groundwork. It was a decision by the leadership.

Only about 30% of AFSCME, if that, went off the job. With proper organization, that could have been doubled easily. But in terms of publicity, they accomplished their purpose. The press was whipped into a frenzy. It brought enough pressure to bear on the holdout Democrats and they passed the budget that night at 1:30 AM.

MO: Does the budget include a tax increase?

Perkins: That's not clear. They took \$300 million from the allocation for universities, so there's no tax increase now. But when they come back in session in December, they have to decide whether to pass a tax increase to fund \$300 million back to the universities.

MO: What about the layoffs?

Perkins: They're all rescinded, officially. Everybody's back at work. However, there's a little paragraph at the end saying, beware, it may be necessary in the future.

MO: Did the union have a position on the tax increase?

Perkins: It was extremely weak. None of the unions or Welfare Rights had an analysis of the budget, of the process of creating the budget, or of whether new taxes were really needed. Mostly, the groups argued that their areas couldn't afford to be cut back. That was effective in this instance; I don't think it will be enough in the future.

MO: Let's talk about the future. What are your plans?

Perkins: We need to develop a position on the budget and taxes, and we have to find out a lot more about how state government works. We have to become experts on this issue. So far only the right has addressed the tax question. There's a real vacuum that labor and community groups can fill.

We need to develop our relationships

with the community groups and labor unions who were effective during this process and others who depend either directly or indirectly on money from the state.

Another problem is our relationship with AFSCME. They're seven times as large as we are, and there's hostility at the statewide leadership level. There's hostility too at the rank and file level, mostly because Act 195 prohibits sympathy strikes. When we go out, by law they have to cross out picketlines, and vice versa. We work at the same places, so it's a constant source of irritation.

MO: Do you see any prospects for improving things with AFSCME?

Perkins: PSSU can develop relationships with specific shops and break through the animosity. But it's going to be up to the AFSCME membership to clean up their union. I don't see how we can be much help with that.

MO: What other plans do you have?

Perkins: We have to develop something to complement the strike, some other way to bring pressure on the state. Under Act 195, you can't strike during the life of the contract. When you do go out, the state can pick out the most reactionary judge in the state, say, "this strike is a danger to the health and safety of the residents of the commonwealth," the injunction is issued and the strike is smashed.

In Allegheny County, we're going to conduct classes in how to do a work slowdown. That's a kind of job action that takes a high degree of discipline.

The final thing we have to do is political education for members of the union. A lot of the people in our union

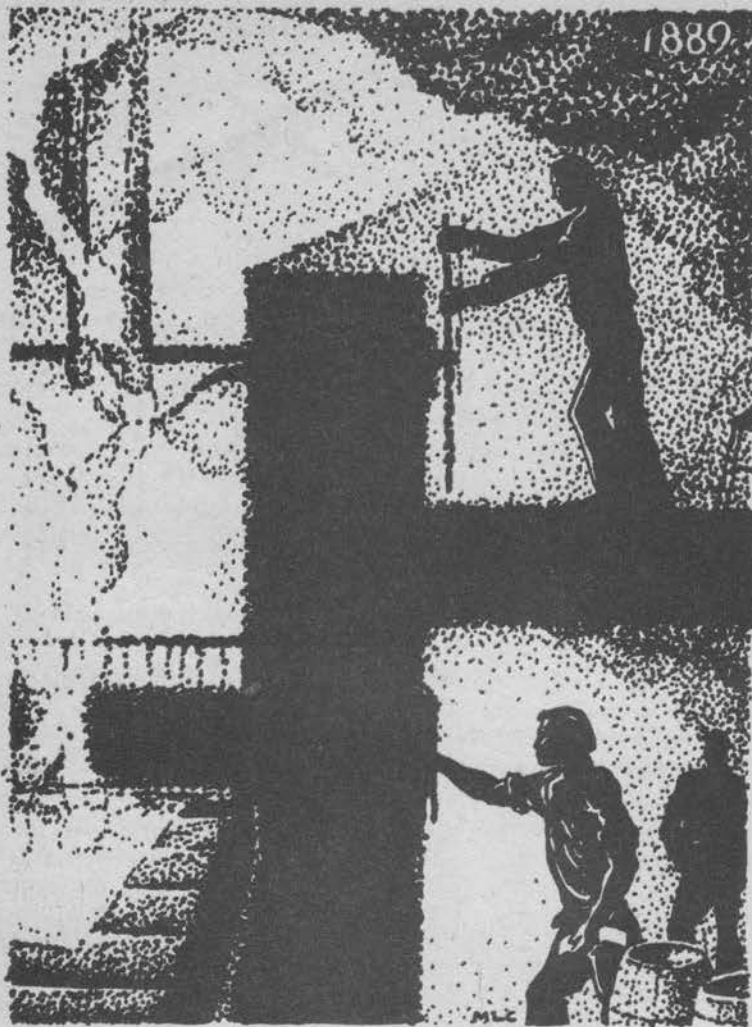
are young, have never been in unions. One important aspect will be exciting labor history courses that all members can attend. Then, we could involve the membership in studying the tax question with a trained economist. The third thing would be to learn about the other labor unions in our area that have problems similar to ours, like the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. And we're going to continue steward training classes that we started last winter, to make our stewards as effective on the shop floor as they can possibly be.

MO: What do you think PSSU members learned through this process?

Perkins: During this whole process, we've worked with other unions and community groups. At executive board meetings, that seemed pretty abstract to people. Now, everyone realizes the fiscal crisis is here to stay, and the only way to fight back is in coalition with labor and community groups. We did it and got results.

And the most important thing is that PSSU members engaged in struggle and made decisions about the course of that struggle. Now they no longer see the union as something that's out there, that makes decisions and we listen. People have a very clear sense that the union is us, and that we're very influential when we act collectively. People believe in themselves.

Judy MacLean is the Organizational Secretary of the New American Movement.



Looking For America

Steel workers at the "119 inch Plate Mill," Homestead, PA.

The novel as history-immigrant labor and life

by Ronaele Novotny

Out of This Furnace

By Thomas Bell

University of Pittsburgh Press

424 pp., \$4.95 paper

Just as capitalism shapes our economic world, so also does it determine our access to records of the past. As a result we have all learned that the exploits of statesmen, generals, and industrialists—the accumulation of power, territory, and wealth—are the subject matter of history. And we have

simultaneously learned that the lives of working people are not.

Luckily this stranglehold which capitalism has on our culture is not a fatal one. From time to time books somehow get published which offer an alternative view of the past.

Thomas Bell's *Out of This Furnace* is an impressive example of this kind of working class literature. First written in 1941, Bell's autobiographical novel was reprinted last fall by the University of Pittsburgh Press. It has since become enormously popular in the western Pennsylvania area. Because of its subject matter and its overall excellence as a literary piece, the novel merits national attention.

Out of This Furnace presents us with a new historical perspective for the years 1881-1937. It relates the experiences of three generations of a Slovak family who immigrated to Braddock, Pennsylvania, a small steel town just south of Pittsburgh. Bell divides his novel into three sections. The first tells of George Kracha's unsuccessful attempts to escape from the hell of working at Andrew Carnegie's steel mill, and the terrible effects of the immigration experience on his wife Elena. The next section describes the courtship and

marriage between Kracha's daughter Mary and Mike Dobrejcek, and their struggles around work and child-bearing during the pre-World War I period. The final part of the novel chronicles the experiences of Mary and Mike's son Dobie, as he is able to win some control over his life during the campaign of the Steelworkers' Organizing Committee in the 1930's.

Yet it would have been easy for Thomas Bell to write from a different perspective. The period 1881-1937 was full of what we've learned to call "real history." These years saw the rapid growth of industrialization, the formation of the U.S. Steel Corporation, the fighting of several wars, and the election of Roosevelt. Bell might also have been seduced into allowing the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892, or the formation of the CIO in the '30's to dominate his novel. But he always resists the possibility of organizing the entire experience of his characters around such major events.

For Thomas Bell working class experience cannot simply be reduced to the drama of a Homestead strike. While Bell does show how important such events are in shaping the experiences of Kracha, Mary, Mike, and Dobie, he does not allow us to evaluate this history as somehow more true than the history which is the daily lives of his characters. The past unfolds in scenes like Bell's brilliant depiction of a steelworker's experience on the biweekly twenty-four hour shift—when "a man could die without knowing it. And go right on working til the whistle blew."

Collective History

Because Thomas Bell does not equate working class history with what happens at the workplace, women's experiences comprise an important part of *Out of This Furnace*. We see Slovak women in this novel not as passive supports for their working husbands, but as economically active people. Scenes like that of Mary, knee-deep in suds, doing the laundry for her six boarders, should squelch forever the myth that married women are only productive when they earn wages outside the home. Bell shows us that women's work in the home is as difficult as their husbands' in the mill, and that it is often the major source of family income.

These historical experiences of Slovak immigrants are not simply incidental to Bell's story. He considered *Out of This Furnace* to be history as well as novel. In a 1946 interview he outlined the purpose of this autobiographical work: "I made up my mind to write a history of the Braddock Slovaks in order to tell the world that the Slovaks with their blood and lives helped to build America, that the steel they

produced changed the United States into the most industrialized nation in the world." He continued: "I wanted to make sure that the hardships my grandfather, my mother, and my brother, sisters, and other relatives lived through would never be forgotten."

Other reviewers of *Out of This Furnace* have ignored Bell's statement of dual purpose. They have chosen to emphasize the individual autobiographical nature of the novel, seeking to find similarities between people, places and events in Thomas Bell's own life and those in his novel. Contrary to what these reviewers have implied, *Out of This Furnace* is not the unique story of Bell's family. The novel is autobiographical in the collective sense: the experiences of its characters are representative of the experiences of a whole group of Eastern European immigrants.

Realizing this is the only way to explain the high sales record of this book outside academic and left circles. Working people in Braddock and the surrounding areas are buying it like mad. Braddock banks give a copy of *Out of This Furnace* free with every new account opened. The Braddock Chamber of Commerce sells it. Older people are giving copies of Bell's novel as presents to their children and grandchildren. All these actions testify to the fact that Thomas Bell has written a rich history of immigrant labor in America, and—more importantly—that he has written it in a way that working class people can recognize it as their own.

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Greene County, Georgia, 1937

The new South has some old problems — Thermidor means reaction

by Manning Marable

The decade of the nineteen seventies has been a period of reaction, retreat and disillusionment. In the New South, this reaction has assumed many forms: racial, social, cultural, political and economic. The demise of the Civil Rights Movement, the decline of militant activism among Southern Black political leaders and the swift emergence of an industrial economy in the region can be characterized best by the historical concept of "Thermidor." The original Thermidor was a political reaction to the triumph of the radical French middle class. A review of the economic, political and cultural events surrounding the decline of revolutionary political struggle within France in the late eighteenth century provides some explanations for a similarly profound Thermidor within the American South.

Beginning as a gradual reformist revolt against the excesses of the

monarchy, the French Revolution of 1789 increasingly moved to the left. By 1792 the monarchists were purged from the popular government and were replaced by a coalition of reformist commercial and petit bourgeois interests. By the summer, 1793, the reformists collapsed in favor of a rival, more radical group of anti-monarchists, the Jacobins. Despite important differences within this group, these radical republicans were able to draft the most progressive legislation of the eighteenth century: slavery was abolished; the great estates were divided and property was given to the French peasantry; joint stock companies were forbidden; free compulsory secular schools were established; religion was abolished. One writer observes that the radicals "had gone beyond political democracy; they had started on the road to social revolution."

The urban bourgeoisie, the initiators of the revolution, were angered by the

new state-controlled economy, the liberation of black slaves and other radical initiatives. On 9 Thermidor, Year II (July 27, 1794) the conservatives, aided by some disaffected radicals, overthrew and executed the leadership of the legitimate government. The bourgeoisie then created a more conservative ruling bureaucracy, reversing the fundamental direction of the revolution in favor of its own class interests.

The French Revolution was the final, successful assault of the emerging economic class, the French bourgeoisie, over the feudal aristocrats and the monarchy. The urban shopkeepers, lawyers, businessmen and bankers united to overthrow the Bourbon monarchy and establish a political order more suitable to their own interests. But the radicals who came to power in 1793 threatened private enterprise itself. The Thermidor established for the bourgeoisie final control over the state and the destruction of its opponents on the left and right.

Within French civil society, the Thermidor created a reactionary and sterile cultural atmosphere. Historian Georges Lefebvre observes that the leading Thermidorians were men "without talent or prestige," cultural and political "nonentities." The end of popular mass struggle in the streets led to the premature death of a young republican culture and the reintroduction of an artificial, bourgeois culture. "Within a few months a complete revolution took place in dress, manners, and even speech," writes Albert Mathiez. The wealthy bourgeoisie held balls and reopened pleasure salons. Radical journals were suppressed, replaced with conservative, pro-bourgeois journals. In the universities, the rationalist tradition of the revolution was opposed increasingly by vulgar romanticism. Melodramas replaced the public plays which were based on anticlerical or anti-aristocratic themes. The remaining radicals were imprisoned, executed at the guillotine, or were exiled.

A historical analogy between two periods as distinctly different as the French Thermidor and the post-Civil Rights/Black Power era in the American South obviously has a limited value: Stokely Carmichael and the radical blacks of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee cannot be equated with the Jacobins. Nevertheless, historical periods of reaction can establish historical patterns of social transformation, no matter where they have occurred. Within the black movement and especially in the South, another Thermidor is happening in this decade, a political and cultural reaction to the advances made by black people in the nineteen sixties. This superstructural reaction is generated by a deep and profound shift in the Southern mode of production. The black South has been transformed in the past twenty years from a mixed agricultural and industrial economy to an overwhelmingly industrial economy.

In political affairs, the Thermidor creates the illusion of racial integration and a substantial increase in black political power within the state without substantial change from the segregation period. Although four million black Southerners are registered compared with about two million in 1964, only two Congressional representatives in the Black House Caucus are from Southern states—and both represent cities rather than rural or black belt areas. Blacks comprise about 20.5 per cent of the South's total population, yet only 2.3 per cent of all elected officials are black, and blacks effectively control the local court house, mayor and school board elections in only twelve counties. The Thermidor in the South, as in France, shut the door to a permanent revolution.

The basic reason for the Southern Thermidor is economic. Since the late nineteen sixties, conservative economists and corporate leaders alike have commented upon the "booster" character of the South's economy. During the economic recession of the

Nixon-Ford administrations Southern business was the leader in stock market revival. Consumer confidence in the South immediately after the recession remained at seventy per cent, the highest level in the nation. Large numbers of foreign countries have relocated in the South to take advantage of the low corporate tax levels. Since 1960, gross income in the South has risen from 133.6 billion dollars to 263.9 billion. Personal per capita income has increased from \$1707 to \$5198, while the industrial output of

Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers have experienced a violent economic purge as the Civil Rights Movement gradually lost momentum.

Southern factories has leaped from 25.8 billion to 54.0 billion dollars.

Agricultural Decline

Coinciding with the rapid expansion of commerce and industry into the New South has occurred the process of "proletarianization"—a decline in agricultural employment, the destruction of small farmers, the loss of Black land tenure, and a significant increase in non-farm employment. From 1964 to 1974 twenty nine per cent of all Southern farms ceased operations, a total of 454,000 fewer farms. The general economic tendency since 1960 has been in favor of agribusiness corporations. Without exception, in every section of the South the family farmer is being replaced by impersonal, profit-oriented corporations.

In Florida, Tropicana, Coca-Cola and twelve other agribusiness operations account for sixty per cent of all citrus products grown in the state and employ a vast majority of farm laborers. Holly Farms, Inc., of North Carolina has, in less than a single decade, absorbed the market of the majority of the nation's independent poultry farmers. The federal government's farm policies under Johnson, Nixon and Ford encouraged the destruction of the independent black and white farmer's market in the South, resulting in a real decline in agricultural output in the region, from 8.3 billion dollars worth in 1960 to 7.4 billion dollars in 1975. Profits for Southern agribusiness, however, have never been higher in the history of American farming.

Black farmers have almost disappeared from the South: in 1950 there were 3,158,000 black farmers; in 1970 only 938,000 remained. Federal government and private foundation support for black farmers has been at best insufficient to halt this movement. Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers have experienced a violent economic purge as the Civil Rights Movement gradually lost momentum. Northern and foreign capitalists, experiencing a period of low inflation and high market prices between 1964 and 1969, pushed many thousands of black farmers off their lands. Many of these farmers and their families were forced to obtain jobs in the many new factories arriving in the South; thousands of others now subsist on federal and state welfare.

As in the French Revolution, the corrupt segregationist states did not succumb to the political pressures of the left, but came to be dominated by moderately conservative Democrats, politicians who were critical of both the Civil Rights activists as well as the older white racists. The "New Southern politicians" have greatly expanded the institutional forms of the state to encourage business expansion and to reinforce their newly established rule over Southern civil



*A moment off from chopping cotton,
Greene County, Georgia, 1941*

society. One unlikely advocate of big, state bureaucracies is George Wallace, the Governor of Alabama. During his administrations he supervised the construction of fourteen new junior colleges, fifteen trade schools and introduced the largest highway construction program in the state's history. The state bureaucracy tripled in size under his administration; the proportion of Alabama residents employed in public programs, about thirty four per cent, is the second highest percentage in the country. Wallace and other older segregationists who have survived have renounced their racist rhetoric and state's rights principles. Now Southern politicians openly court the growing black petit bourgeoisie.

New Politicians

A new generation of opportunistic black politicians have been elevated into leading political positions within the black community, largely due to their relationships with regional bourgeois interests. Like the bourgeois reformers of the French Revolution, they sympathized with the narrow struggle to overthrow racial segregation, the rough equivalent of aristocratic privilege within France's old regime. The black petit bourgeoisie provided critical financial support to

black reformers—Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; James Farmer, Floyd McKissick and many participants in C.O.R.E.; Jesse Jackson and John Lewis.

But as the political struggle gained major successes, black radicals like Malcolm X, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and theoreticians like James Boggs pointed the way toward social revolution—a frightening specter of permanent struggle and cultural transformation which neither the black petit bourgeoisie nor the white economic and political establishment could accept. The popular, massive struggles in the streets died down gradually as the political system granted certain concessions to the black petit bourgeoisie—and after many important black radicals were imprisoned, bought-out or assassinated.

Black Thermidorians, many of whom had rhetorically championed desegregation, political confrontations and heightened racial consciousness during the sixties, called for political compromises and reconciliation in the seventies. The black elite accepted bureaucratic posts within the state and local governments of the South. And

some Thermidorians, like Andrew Young, repudiated their own past legacy of moral activism in order to achieve acceptance at the highest levels of national government. Desegregation within major Southern cities occurred, but a culture of white racism and bitter prejudice remains in every small town and every county.

The impact of Thermidor within black civil society has been equally reactionary. Despite the continued rhetorical use of the word 'black,' most black social and intellectual leaders in the South have quietly accommodated themselves to the new capitalist realities and "New South" political leadership. On college campuses, radical black professors and administrators are being fired; black studies programs are abandoned; fraternity and sorority life has replaced an interest in political discussions. As in the original Thermidor, clothing styles, mannerisms of speech and habits changed overnight. Afro-hair styles and dashikis are being rapidly abandoned for bleached hair, surreal clothing and high heels. The blues and jazz, once an integral part of the political struggle of the sixties, is replaced by blatantly sexist disco. Numerous black activist journals and newspapers have been forced to close for economic reasons.

Cultural Change

Perhaps the strongest single cultural change of the Thermidor has occurred in the relations between men and women. The Civil Rights era in the South was a period of expanded sexual freedom. Women like Rosa Parks of Montgomery and Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi assumed leadership roles in desegregation struggles; black women of all ages led nonviolent street demonstrations, ran for office, organized voter registration campaigns, gave political speeches and raised funds for civil rights activities. During recent years, however, an overwhelmingly black male caste

seized the newly available state and county political offices.

These men have shown themselves to be less than eager campaigners for the needs of women. Yet the social conditions of Southern black women have reverted to pre-1960 conditions. Despite federal programs in health care, many black belt counties have infant mortality rates in excess of 50 per 1,000 births each year. Less than one-sixth of all women needing abortion and birth control services in 1976 could obtain treatment in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Sixty-five per cent or more blacks in black belt regions live below the poverty level in states where legislation seldom provides funds for day care for working mothers and grant minimal aid to dependent children. And black legislators have downplayed passage of the ERA which has not been ratified in any Deep South state.

The Thermidor has created a new level of violence and cultural backwardness throughout the South. More people are murdered per thousand in Savannah and Montgomery per year, for example, than in New York or Watts. The incidence of rape increased over 41 per cent in North Carolina between 1969 and 1973, and increased by significant amounts in almost every Southern state.

The mind of the South increasingly represents the dregs of American academic and cultural achievement. In 1970 the South had only five per cent of the nation's leading graduate schools, according to a national survey. In spite of Wallace's expansion of state-supported educational institutions, Alabama ranks at the very bottom of every national scale for education. The traditional black Southern college, the backbone of black education in the South, suffers from declining enrollments and severe financial difficulties, largely because of the desegregation of the region's major white state-supported institutions. Many white and black

radicals and intellectuals have fled to the North and the West Coast in search of better working conditions, a freer academic climate and higher salaries.

All historical analogies have, at best, a limited value, since history in essence is constantly dialectical. Each successive human struggle is fought on a shifting material base, on a different cultural terrain, for different political ideals. Any comparative study of reaction and revolution can only assist con-

photo by Arthur Rothstein



Resident on plantation near Leland, Mississippi, 1937

temporary socialists in unearthing the contours of the past, as well as in understanding the limitations and possibilities for the history of the future. The Thermidor constitutes a drastic shift in the economic order toward greater industrialization without a concomitant cultural restructuring. But all Thermidors tell us that temporary reaction must, through its own contradictions, succumb to the direction of humanity and history itself, toward the future revolutions of human beings.

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Photos illustrating this article were reproduced from In This Proud Land, edited by R.E. Stryker and Nancy Wood, Galahad Books, New York, 1973.

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