

PERSPECTIVES

FOR A NEW AMERICA

Political solution needed for labor pensions, health

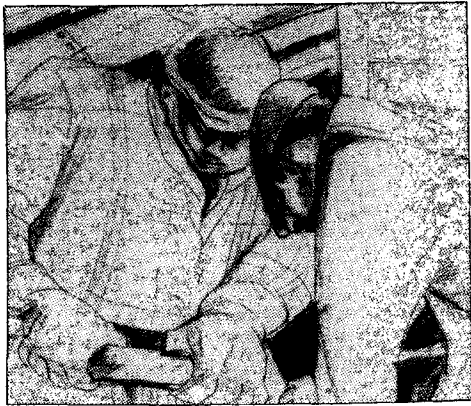
Changing economic conditions, including conglomerates, but especially inflation, force us to go beyond the bounds of industry-wide collective bargaining. Increasingly the whole structure of privately negotiated social benefits, is no longer capable of meeting the needs of the membership. Retirement plans are being eroded by inflation and medical costs are increasing. Since most benefit plans are organized on the basis of seniority, the high level of unemployment in manufacturing industry means that many workers with low seniority do not participate fully in the benefit programs.

The erosion of private benefit plans is significant because such benefit plans form one basis of business unionism. But with the erosion of the private plans, American unionists are being pushed into the political arena to settle problems previously settled privately. Such a development implied many changes for the structure of American trade unionism.

Let me discuss a few of the problem areas that illustrate our situation in the electrical and machine industry.

Automation: The introduction of new tape controlled machines—called numerical controlled machines—means that the trade machinist as we know it today is being downgraded and destroyed. Whatever little humanity emanating from our skill (and thus control over the job) is being taken away.

The interesting part of the work—the setting up of the machine—is removed from the province of the machinist and through design of the machine tool and the employing of a computer the machinist's skill is put on a piece of tape, which runs the machine and makes it produce the job. The most skilled are not the only ones affected; the trade is structured so that there are many thousands of work-



ers who set up and operate their own equipment.

What are some of the implications of the way in which automation is being introduced?

Older workers with seniority can usually hang on to their present jobs long enough to retire or get placed in some other job. But few or no new jobs are being created in spite of expanding production. Automation means that skills are being downgraded instead of providing the opportunity to move up to more interesting jobs. We now have the prospect of either unemployment or a dead-end job. The freezing of the job market, in spite of expanding production and population, has other pernicious effects. Only recently have women entered the machine trades in significant numbers as skilled workers. Likewise, in many plants blacks have been allowed to move up into skilled jobs only in the last few years. Both are again being squeezed out of the industry. And, of course, there are now tremendous numbers of young people who can't even get into the industry.

There are alternatives to the way in which automation is being introduced that unions can explore. We have to establish the position that the fruits of technologi-

cal change must be divided up, with some going to the worker and not all to management, as is the case today. We must demand that machinists rise with the complexity of the machine. Rather than dividing up his job, the machinist should be trained to program and repair his new machine. This is a task well within the grasp of most people in the industry. Demands such as this strike at another prime ingredient of business unionism—the idea of “let the management run the business.” The introduction of automatic equipment makes it imperative that we fight such ideas.

Automation also brings unemployment into focus. Unemployment and increases in productivity bear a direct relationship to each other, given a stagnant or artificial market.

Previously, in most large industrial towns, especially those that have a factory belonging to some huge corporation, there has been continuity of employment. People in Lynn have worked at GE for years. So have their families—grandfathers, uncles, etc. For people my age, this is less and less the case. Job reduction due to increases in productivity, runaway shops, or speed-up, have meant that a large number of people in their mid-thirties, who ordinarily would have 15 years service, don't have it. Since most benefits are based on seniority, it means that the union, as far as the perception of many people is concerned, functions on two levels. Everybody gets to use the grievance procedure, but not everybody is going to get the long-term benefits because they will not have enough time in the plant. (This assumes that people laid off from one place are able to get a job in an organized shop, which is not always the case.) With the closing of the huge steel mills and smaller machine tool manufacturers we are also witnessing the wholesale destruction of the equity people have accrued over the years in benefits.

Because benefits are tied to seniority the potential for increasing the tension between long seniority employees and short seniority employees increases as the plants fall victim to wild fluctuations in employment. A new way to deal with benefits, such as vacations, must be found. We must make the benefits, which are a social obligation, into a political question. Taking such an approach leads to a political settlement—such as four weeks vacation for all those who are employed one year or more. This is the way things are done in France, for example. In France, anybody who works one year gets four weeks off. If I stay at GE 20 years I may get it, too. But the chances are slim.

On the most basic level, unions function to protect the wages and working conditions of employees. Recently this has become ever more difficult. What we have won in wage increases in the shop we have lost through inflation. The management of the economy is a political question. For example, is unemployment a way in which to control wages? Some companies and economists believe that the answer is “yes.”

On the issue of conditions of work we have taken a beating. We are asked to trade a slow death from cancer for jobs. Instead of using technology to slow down the pace of work, the work pace has increased along with its attendant strains.

Instead of moving towards a 30 and out arrangement, the new legislation allowing people to work until age 70 means, for blue collar workers, that they will work more years—work until they drop dead. They will stay in the plant longer because older workers can't afford to retire due to inflation.

Thus we have problems on several levels. Most narrowly our industry is not organized as well as it was 30 years ago, and we have not moved into the newer fields of electronics, computers, etc. Our unions are divided. We need unity based on democratic principles. The UE and IUE must come together on some principled common ground as a beginning step towards unity in our industry.

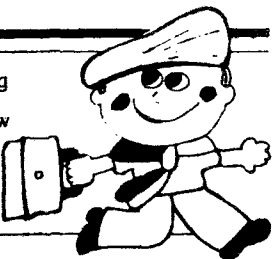
Within the unions we must re-organize to take on the companies. We have to make locals and internationals respond to the needs of all workers—not just some. Part of this re-organization is the need to challenge business union concepts and practices. This means the re-organization of rank and file groups that will deal positively with our problems. (It was through rank and file organization that the CIO first got started). Going a step further, we have to have the re-organization of class politics in the shop. Unions have never moved forward in this country without the uniting of left forces (socialists, communists) and those who have a strong sense of trade unionism.

Beyond the plant new forms of political organization are called for. The marriage of the unions and the Democratic party commenced in the '30s and cemented during the Cold War is not in labor's interest. If we are to make the gains we need to break even—never mind get ahead—we must begin to organize around specific issues and then force those issues upon our elected officials—as a first step towards independent labor candidates. ■ *Frank Emspak is an historian and a machinist at the General Electric plant in Lynn, Mass.*

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Carter/Cities

Continued from page 3.

tional Peoples Action, a neighborhood direct action organization, is concerned that the money may continue to be diverted to "gentrification" projects, where old neighborhoods are rebuilt for professionals and the affluent middle class.

Although new housing programs in the past have often benefited the suburbs rather than the cities, the President's study committee argued that some new housing construction for poor people was necessary to prevent their simply being pushed into existing, stable working class neighborhoods due to the absence of housing.

What do all the piecemeal programs add up to? "Carter lacked any vision of how cities are changing for the worse and how cities could change for the better," John Mollenkopf, director of Stanford's urban studies program, said. "Private sector investment may not help the poor. Carter's plan doesn't represent any political vision of how people can solve their own problems."

Community action.

There is a slight nod in the direction of community action. Carter proposed \$15 million for assistance to neighborhood rehabilitation efforts, \$40 million for a new Urban Volunteer Corps under ACTION, and some additional funds for community credit unions, community development corporations, community health centers, parks and the arts.

Already this approach is embroiled in controversy. Big city mayors, remembering the way Great Society funding of neighborhood groups short-circuited their political control of the poor, are vigorously attacking the proposal, even though any funding of a neighborhood project must be approved by them. Poor and working class neighborhood activists, on the opposite side, envision the program expanding and incorporating projects now under other agencies.

Although there is general agreement among critics somewhere "on the left" that the Carter plan is inadequate, there is little agreement on what should be done. Traditional urban liberal groups emphasize the need for more money. However, a new breed of urban activist often criticizes the plan more for its failure to understand or to encourage working class city dwellers' need to gain more control over the resources of the neighborhoods in order to trigger a process of self-sustaining growth that is not siphoned off

by downtown banks and big corporations.

Lee Webb of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, who also advocates more money for housing, mass transit and soft public works, said that he would build an urban program around the consumer cooperative bank bill that the House approved and the Senate is now considering in committee rather than Carter's bank, which he thinks has little chance of passing. That would emphasize neighborhood cooperative action rather than big business salvation.

Stan Hallett of Northwestern University's Center for Urban Affairs is less concerned about the levels of funding than about possible redirection of money already allocated. For example, he argues, switching Chicago's storm water storage plan from a multibillion project of drilling deep tunnels and reservoirs under the city to creation of neighborhood water retention projects could accomplish the task better and yield \$100 million for the average neighborhood to use in redevelopment. Likewise a comprehensive urban plan would emphasize energy conservation in housing, since in many buildings energy costs have doubled in the past seven years. That could provide local jobs, lower rents, make it possible for landlords to spend more on maintenance (or pay now delinquent taxes) and conserve energy. Carrying such renovation further, Hallett argues that aiding renters to purchase buildings through land trusts would also strengthen neighborhood economies.

Spending more money alone does not necessarily "develop the organization, technology and social capacity for neighborhoods to develop themselves," Hallett says. "My idea is that if you give people half a chance they'll build decent cities. But how do you give people the tools, the capacities to build cities? Carter's plan is about as good as we could expect at this point. The thinking about cities and how to revitalize them is just not very far along."

But the urgency remains, and the Carter program does not take full advantage of even what is understood. As Horace W. Morris, executive director of the New York Urban League says, "We're considerably disappointed. We could use twice the national amount for housing here in New York for ourselves. The approach to our urban problems cannot be piecemeal. It has to be concentrated, committed. We were looking for a war and we got a skirmish."

Zen Hustling

Continued from page 24.

settings illustrated with erotic photography. And that's going to—a lot of people—you can't say the Bible is obscene, they're gonna say the text is okay, but not pictorially? That just goes against the chronology of symbolic communication. Pictures came before words so I see it as a good way to test people's hypocrisy. That's the main thing Flynt and I share in common—a resistance to hypocrisy. What's the editorial content going to be like?

There's going to be more investigative journalism. More articles of social concern. However people's lives are fucked up, whether it's their wallets or their minds. Whatever the authorities do to individuals is a valid concern.

But is Hustler going to be as graphic as it has in the past?

I don't know, maybe even more graphic. After pink, rainbow. There's no blueprint. We're playing it by ear.

You're going to be starting up *The Realist* again. Why? (Krassner had to stop publishing *The Realist* in 1974 because of financial difficulties.)

It's a different stance. I asked Flynt what he thought was the difference between *The Realist* audience and the *Hustler* audience and he understood perfectly. He said, "*The Realist* reaches people of a higher consciousness and a lot of people in the media and people who are in some kind of influential situation." So it's not so much a class difference as a consciousness difference. Some things I can take for granted in *The Realist*, such as certain attitudes on abortion or homosexuality. Things that might have appeared in *The Realist* ten, 15 years ago might go into *Hustler* now.

When will you start publishing *The Realist*?

It will be out in May, as a monthly. We'll start with the 20th anniversary issue. Flynt is publishing and distributing it. I'm editing and I'll have total editorial control. It'll be printed on a bit better paper with a color cover and better distribution. Who knows? Maybe *The Realist* will be in supermarkets.

How do you like living in L.A.?

Well, I've adapted to it. The way Patti Hearst adapted to her kidnapping.

Has it been hard to hang on to your identity?

My identity is always evolving. This is educational for me. I'm learning. It's like another planet, the corporate structure. I was living like a hermit and now I've

gone from one extreme to the other. As I crawl out of my cave I suddenly crawled into an executive position. So I'm kind of studying it anthropologically. But underneath it my identity is still the same. I mean I'm not taking any money for *The Realist* to help me remain pure. As long as it remains fun, my identity will still be constant. If I start making terrible compromises because I don't want to lose my job, then that would be a difference in my identity.

You haven't made any compromises so far?

Well no, I can't see any. The April cover has an Easter bunny nailed to a crucifix and people in the office were afraid that Larry wouldn't like that. And I said, "Well, he's going to have to fire me or defend me." It turned out he loved it. The point is, I took him at his word when he said I was to be given editorial control. You're going to be making \$90,000 a year, right?

Yeah, but I'm \$50,000 in debt, so a lot will go to that. But I'll tell you, it's been like a Roman Polanski film with ants crawling out of the wall, people who want something. But that's part of the game.

Have you indulged yourself in any way materially?

I don't know that I have. I mean, I came to work carrying a paper bag one day and showed it to the receptionist and said, "This is my attache case." I'll probably, in a month or two, buy a vibrating bed or something.

Did you go through any crisis of conscience in deciding to work for Hustler?

No, not really. If there's stuff that I can't get into *Hustler*, I can get it into *The Realist*. But no, I had done all my soul-searching just in terms of writing for *Hustler* before I became publisher. I had gotten an assignment from Flynt to do a Lenny Bruce piece. I had already decided that it would be good to reach that audience. I had always wanted to do something for them 'cause I didn't like people putting down what they thought the *Hustler* audience was. I had no real crisis of conscience.

Have you ever turned down any writing assignment?

Life magazine once asked me to do a column. For a thousand a column, a humor column. But the limitation on that was bad taste. So we didn't get very far with that.

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LIFE IN THE U.S.

HISTORY

Rebels all: the Finns in America

FOR THE COMMON GOOD:

Finnish Immigrants and the Radical Response to Industrial America

Michael G. Karni and Douglas J. Ollila, Jr., editors
The Tyomies Society, 601 Tower Ave., Superior, Wisc. 54880

Perhaps it is their anxiety to counter the charge that socialism is an alien philosophy that has led American socialists and historians of socialism always to undervalue and frequently to ignore the role played by non-English speaking immigrants in American radical movements. Michael M. Passi observes in *Finnish Immigrants and the Radical Response to Industrial America*, that "despite the fact that a large percentage of membership in the Socialist party of America was enrolled in the party through its various foreign language federations, no historian of the party has given more than passing attention to these immigrant socialists." Yet, "it was primarily in and through the language federations that the Socialist party reached whatever constituency it had among industrial workers."

The Tyomies ("Worker") Society, itself active for 70 years in the publication of a Finnish-language radical newspaper, has published this book of essays as its "contribution to the American Bicentennial" and has thereby done much to fill this damaging inadequacy in our understanding of American radical movements.

The Finns, few in number in America and in the world, have been particularly influential in American radical politics, often to the embarrassment of both conservative American Finns and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod), which had close ties to the state Church of Finland. The fact remains that the Finnish Socialist Federation was the largest foreign language federation in the Socialist party and by 1912, with 13,000 members, made up almost 12 percent of the Socialist party membership. When it split with the SP in 1921, it brought more than 7,000 members into the Workers Party of America—then more than 40 percent of the total membership of what would be the Communist party of America. *The Daily Worker* was founded with a \$25,000 contribution from the Finnish Socialist Federation.

Finnish participation in American radicalism was by no means restricted to the SP and CP. The Finns, in whom can be seen "the radical response of peasants to modern industrial society," were major supporters of the IWW, and the Tyovaen Opisto (Work People's College, founded by a liberal wing of Finnish-American Lutheranism and very soon officially Marxist, becoming an official school of the IWW in 1920). The most energetic and influential of the teachers at the college, Leo Laukki, was arrested in 1917 along with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the Chicago 166.

Finnish radicalism was in part



The Finns, few in number in America, have had a profound effect on American radical politics. The Finnish Socialist Federation was the largest foreign language federation in the Socialist party, and when it split with the Socialist party in 1921 it brought more than 7,000 members into the Workers party, 40 percent of its membership. Above, Finnish socialists sing the Internationale.

imported and in part American-grown. Early Finnish radicals like A.F. Tanner, who preached Darwinism and socialism in the eastern U.S., were formally educated people who were in exile from Czarist-controlled Finland. One of the exiles, Matti Kurikka, former editor of a major socialist newspaper in Helsinki, founded a utopian colony on Malcolm Island in British Columbia, based on principles that included socialism, theosophy, and free love.

A few of these early socialists tried to merge Christianity with socialism, with little success. Characteristic was Wainio Paananen, who published a play in 1903 arguing that Jesus should be seen as an advocate of "freedom, fraternity, and equality." A year later Paananen organized a socialist group in Aberdeen, Wash. As A. William Høglund observes, "Because of the defection of religious liberals like Paananen from its ranks to the class-conscious socialists, the social gospel never blossomed into any major movement for Christian socialism."

But neither liberal interpretations of Finnish Christianity nor Helsinki-educated socialist agitators were necessary to make Finns into socialists. The hard conditions in the mines of Minnesota and northern Michigan did that. Michael Karni cites this testimony from one of the Finns who came to work in the Mesabi range:

"I was small when I came along with thousands to the land of the free at the turn of the century, my mother holding me up to see the statue of liberty! We rode the train with others going to the North Country, and I looked out the window and saw

what I would never forget—the red Mesabi! Everything was red—the roads, the water in the ditch, the miners' clothes, the big open pit, the sidewalks, the skin of the people. The red ore seemed to penetrate, to drive into everything. I came to know it stood for U.S. Steel that claimed our lives, our thoughts and our allegiance.

"Father worked in the red mine, my mother would cry when she tried to wash off the red dirt from my father's clothes and body. The neighbors around us spoke a strange language. My mother would wash the clothes and cry for Finland."

The Finns lived in tar-paper shacks, log huts or shabby company housing and went to ill-paid dangerous jobs.

"My first days were a foretaste of hell. After making several trips from the tiggings to the shaft pushing a heavy tramcar, I was wretchedly tired. My thirst was unquenchable; sweat flowed in rivulets from my pores. My legs threatened to give way, and my body became limp... My partner saw that I was exhausted. But instead of slowing his pace, he speeded it; apparently he wanted to show me what America was really like.... When lunch time came...my food did not go down; my eyes saw dizzily; my ears rang; my heart pounded violently. After the shift was over, my partner showed me his gnarled rust-eaten hands. 'When your paws are like these, you'll be able to stand the grind.'"

Advancement was possible only for the American-born. Strikes were suppressed by violence that included the outright murder of numbers of strikers. The Finns faced ethnic prejudice of the crudest sort. In one notorious

case an attempt was made to keep Finns from receiving citizenship papers because District Attorney John C. Sweet of St. Paul argued that "a Finn...is a Mongolian and not a 'white person.'" In the 1920s, only 36 percent of white protestants were willing to live next door to a Finn, only 16 percent "would allow a Finn to marry a close relative."

The Finns certainly suffered for their radicalism. Union activity of any sort risked mutilation or death. Strikers were black-listed by the mine owners, and company representatives warned the U.S. Immigration Commission against Finns:

"All the races employed on the Vermillion Range are good laborers except [the Finns]. Their people are good laborers but trouble breeders. We refuse work to every one who applies wearing the red button of the socialist organizations...and it is my desire to weed out this element and see the movement suppressed. ...The Finns are good workers when they want to work, but are not to be depended on.... The younger set, and especially those who have received a little education, are troublesome and agitators of the worst type."

"Church-Finns" and those who were rapidly assimilated into American commerce and industry had to spend their lives denying Finnish radicalism, or at least, as I can confirm from my own upbringing in a Finnish immigrant community, refusing to talk about it.

Finnish support for women's rights was early and consistent. Hilja J. Karvonen attributes this support to the Finns' having been beneficiaries of the same Scandinavian ferment that produced the

plays of Ibsen. She offers an important study of Selma Jokela McCone, Maija Nurmi, and Helmi Mattson, all active on the *To-veritar* ("Woman Comrade") magazine. Support from male socialists was enlightened, far ahead of the times, and the men questioned only whether women's rights should be approached separately or as part of a total socialist vision of the new America.

I want to praise the authors of the individual articles, Passi (University of Washington), Høglund (University of Connecticut), Karni (University of Minnesota), Ollila (Augsburg College), Puotinen (Suomi College), Hummasti (Texas Tech), Karvonen (Mankato State), and Kestinen (University of Turku) for their painstaking and accurate research, particularly in Finnish-language newspapers which are hard to locate and, for most second- or third-generation Finns, hard to read.

They have written a book that no historian of American radical movements will be able to ignore.

One must end with praise for these Finnish radicals, who—in a new country, cut off by their language—resisted the mine owners, the local "American" businessmen, the American Legion, and the occasional opportunities for easy integration into American life in order to voice their demand for a better America for all. *Kun-iaa kaatuneille sankareille* (a Finnish equivalent of "give flowers to the rebels failed"—literally, "honor to the fallen heroes.')

—Victor N. Paananen

The Tyomies Society is at 601 Tower Ave. Superior, WI 54880. Victor N. Paananen is Associate Professor of English and Assistant Dean of the Graduate School at Michigan State University.