

Jack Clark

A Philadelphia organization is leading the movement for jobs

Before the great upsurge of the CIO, the great accomplishment of the 1930s left—both Socialist and Communist—was the organizing of the unemployed. Whether they called them unemployed councils or workers' alliances, the organizers of these movements faced momentous obstacles. Even in the catastrophe of the Great Depression, the myth hung on that people were out of work and poor and hungry because the poor themselves were less than virtuous, not because the social system was chaotic and anti-social.

Then as now, the unemployed were dispersed and demoralized. Our socialist predecessors overcame all that, however, and created large movements in many cities. They forced condescending welfare officials to treat recipients with a modicum of respect; their mobilizations forced cities and states to liberalize requirements for receiving home relief and other income supports. The organizations of unemployed provided a training ground for radicals who went on to become CIO militants, and in some places the organized unemployed provided direct support to the industrial union organizing committees. Militant direct action in working class neighborhoods saved thousands of the unemployed from evictions. (In the film *Union Maids*, Kate reminisces about facing down gun-wielding police on the door step of an unemployed Chicago family; she was at the time an organizer for the Communist unemployed council.)

The success of the unemployed organizations in the first half of the '30s helped set the political tone of the decade. In our own time, the relative quiescence of the unemployed and virtually everyone else on the issue of unemployment has helped to set the conservative tone of the 1970s. On this as on all issues, politicians,

pundits and most ordinary people seem to think that the momentum and the protest comes from the right. It is more important to most politicians, even those who regard themselves as liberal and socially concerned, to hold down taxes, avoid new programs and keep the business community happy than it is to reduce the toll of unemployment. After all, if taxes are raised or limits are set on the freedom of business (to bully its employees, to move a plant, to pollute the air), protests will be heard. As it is, who's complaining about unemployment and what it does to the jobless and to the society as a whole?

The Philadelphia solution.

In Philadelphia, the unemployed themselves are increasingly heard from. Organized into the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, the unemployed in Philadelphia have protested and lobbied on everything from foodstamps to federal job creation. And unlike projects launched in some other cities by would-be vanguards, PUP has sought and won the broad support of the Philadelphia area unions, churches and community groups. It functions effectively in settling the immediate grievances of unemployed individuals dealing with state, city and federal bureaucracies at the same time that it organizes the jobless politically to demand that the society create enough useful, well-paying work for all.

Mass jobs lobby in D.C. April 26.

In line with that broad, political effort, PUP has formed a Philadelphia Coalition for Jobs and issued a call for a mass jobs lobby in Washington on April 26. According to PUP organizer John Dodds, the Philadelphia group has tried similar mobilizations before. On two occasions

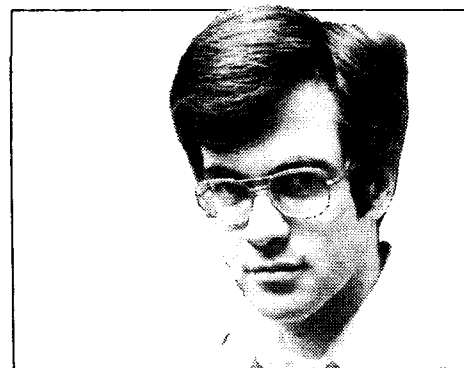
last year, more than 300 people from Philadelphia converged on Washington to meet with members of the House and with Pennsylvania Sen. John Heinz. While they did not succeed in stopping the cutbacks of unemployment benefits from 52 to 39 weeks, the mobilizations did move the Pennsylvania delegation to lead the opposition to the cuts. Perhaps just as important, the experience of traveling to Washington and working together to convince political leaders to respond to them built a sense of confidence and *esprit* among those who went.

Now PUP wants to send a strong delegation to convince Congress that it must use its budget power to create more jobs. Specifically the mobilization is putting forth three demands:

1) Support the AFL-CIO's call for a \$13 billion program to create four million new jobs this year and continue creating four million jobs a year for the next four years. This is an excellent, politically realizable economic program to begin putting people to work immediately meeting urgent needs rebuilding the cities, repairing the railroads, employing jobless young people and meeting other needs. Anyone interested in a copy of the program can get it by writing me, in care of *IN THESE TIMES*.

2) A major increase in public service (CETA) jobs. PUP wants the number of CETA slots doubled so that 1.4 million would be employed under this program. To avoid the use of the program to divide the public employee work force, PUP and the jobs coalition demands that CETA workers be paid prevailing wages (rather than minimum wages, as proposed in Carter's welfare plan) and that CETA workers be granted full collective bargaining rights.

3) Passage of Humphrey-Hawkins to



guarantee Federal planning for full employment.

The program advanced by the Philadelphia Coalition for Jobs is far in advance of anything currently being pushed by the administration or the congressional leadership. If it were to pass, all the progressive constituencies from the black movement to the unions to the women's movement to the environmentalist and community organizers would be strengthened in day-to-day political work.

What's more important in this case than the program itself, which is excellent in any case, is the movement being created. A constituency, the unemployed, that is widely perceived to be apathetic is in motion.

The chief problem Dodds and the other Philadelphia organizers face is lack of support from other cities. Bus loads of the unemployed pouring in from Ohio, New York, Illinois and other areas with severe unemployment could make a crucial difference. "The experience of unemployed people traveling together and working together through this day of activity might be just the spark needed to get an organization of the unemployed started," Dodds says.

And such a mobilization could begin to refute the myth that political momentum rests only with the right.

People interested in working on the mass jobs lobby April 26 can get in touch directly with John Dodds at PUP, 1321 Arch St., Philadelphia 19107. (215) 564-3770. In the New York area, people interested in working on this can call me or Dan Goodwin at the DSOC office (212) 260-3270.

Jack Clark is National Secretary of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

Fellow Readers of In These Times:

If you feel that Nuclear Weapons endanger us all why not take a moment now to add your name to those of Daniel Ellsberg, Bella Abzug, and Ralph Abernathy who are among the Supporters of Individuals against the Crime of Silence which publishes a declaration which reads as follows:

A declaration to our fellow citizens, to the peoples of the world, and to future generations.

1. We can no longer be silent about the threat of NUCLEAR destruction to the human race.
2. We have seen the horrors of nuclear war at Hiroshima and Nagasaki—hundreds of thousands killed, others atrociously maimed, and unknown numbers genetically damaged.
3. We have watched with increased apprehension for the last 30 years as more and more nations engage in deadly nuclear arms competition, ever increasing the number and types of nuclear weapons.
4. We believe that national security is not served by a nuclear arms race that can only end in the destruction of the world.
5. We consider the manufacture, possession and use of nuclear weapons a crime against humanity and a crime under international law.
6. We have acquiesced to a policy that threatens all of us.

As citizens, we must now face the responsibility for our silence. We must speak out.

Therefore, we hereby place our names on record, in unity with individuals of all nations, against the use and possession of nuclear weapons.

We demand that our government, every government, and the United Nations outlaw the manufacture and possession of all nuclear weapons.

To place your name on record with the thousands who have already signed the declaration you need only write to **Individuals Against the Crime of Silence**, P.O. Box 35385, Los Angeles, CA 90035. Include your signature (printed name as well) and your address. We will send you copies of the declaration in letter form to send to your elected officials as well as the Secretary General of the U.N. we are asking for \$2.00 or more donation if you can spare it. Imagine the U.N. receiving thousands of letters during the Special Session on Disarmament!!

DIALOG

New York gays unite against "careerists"

Josh Martin's article on the New York City gay rights bill (*ITT*, Mar. 15) is correct to point out that all "leaders of this city's gay community have decided to push for prompt introduction of a gay rights bill in the City Council," but is strangely misleading in two other respects.

First, it gives the impression that the National Gay Task Force (which is not a New York group) is playing the leading role in this struggle. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The NGTF and two other conservative gay groups (the New York Political Action Council and the Study Group) have been working behind the scenes on the bill, but the real job of organizing the gay community and nongay support is being done by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (CLGR), put together last June following the defeat of gay rights in Miami, and representing some 35 groups (*ITT*, Jan. 18).

Second, the CLGR's position all along has been for immediate introduction and passage of the bill. We have often reaffirmed this position at community meetings. The movement has not "reversed" its position, contrary to Martin's report, but a small layer of pro-establishment gay groups, including the NGTF, have been forced to reverse

their position in favor of stalling.

Many city gay activists believe that these groups were more interested in taking the heat off Democratic party candidates in the election next fall in the event of a referendum than they were in pushing for immediate passage when the rest of the movement was in no mood to wait or compromise.

The NGTF and its associates in NY-PAC and the Study Group even went so far in mid-February as to try to destroy the CLGR by setting up a rival coalition, easier for them and their friends in government to control. This effort blew up in their faces when every single member group of the CLGR decided to stick with the coalition, despite the fact that gay politicians all the way up into the Mayor's office and the office of at least one borough president (Robert Adams of the Bronx) were busy digging up McCarthyite tactics by publicly denouncing the independent lesbian and gay movement in this city as "agents provocateurs" and "nothing but a bunch of Trotskyites" who had been "abandoned by all decent gay groups."

IN THESE TIMES does a disservice by printing misleading stories like Martin's without first checking the facts. The facts are that the movement is united on pressing for immediate passage, but only because we did not allow our movement to be stampeded into postponing our struggle as the Koch administration and its gay mouthpieces tried to get us to do. We are determined to fight for our rights, and we will not let the Democratic party, the Koch administration, or Gov. Carey decide for us when and how to do it. Nor will we let our own gay careerists rebait our movement out of existence.

CLGR Spokespeople:
David Thorstad, Cheryl Adams,
Betty Santoro, Father Leo M.
Joseph, Eleanor Cooper
New York

William Graebner

Attack on mandatory retirement part of quest for New Efficiency

On Feb. 18, 1917, the *Washington Post* carried a story about Elizabeth Hyde, an 86-year-old Treasury department clerk. Although she had not been especially well treated by the government (a recent pay raise was the first in 28 years), Hyde wanted nothing more than to continue her job. Work, she told the reporter, "has always absorbed my entire attention."

Three years later, when the new Civil Service Retirement Act took effect, Hyde may well have been one of many federal employees bitter at forced separation. Perhaps she was one of those fortunate enough to receive a two-year "continuance," for in 1920, debts, mortgages, health, and dependency relationships were all considered relevant in determining whether an employee would be immediately retired or temporarily retained. The future, however, belonged to men like Gaylord Saltzgaber, commissioner of pensions in the Interior department, who refused to grant continuance to any of the 88 persons who applied in his jurisdiction. "I do not believe there is one [older person in the pension bureau]," he wrote, "whose work may not be better done by a younger person and generally at a lower initial salary...."

Saltzgaber's enthusiasm for efficiency was not far from the spirit of the age. The 1920 legislation was in large measure designed to remove the Elizabeth Hydes and other workers defined as superannuated by a society increasingly interested in the productivity of its workforce.

President Carter has now signed a measure closely identified with 77-year-old Florida Representative Claude Pepper

and his Select Committee on Aging, that raises the permissible mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70 in public and private employment and uncaps the age 70 mandatory provision for federal employees. Now that the bill has become law, the modern counterparts of Elizabeth Hyde may continue working. Indeed, they may have to. According to Commerce Secretary Juanita Kreps, administration officials are considering withholding full social security benefits until recipients reach age 68. Kreps finds herself in the company of Russell Long, chairman of the Senate Finance committee; William Simon, Secretary of the Treasury under Nixon and Ford; the *Wall Street Journal*; John Palmer, a senior fellow at Brookings; sociologist Harold Sheppard; and House Republican leaders.

The hearings on retirement give us other tracks to follow. Three are of central importance:

1) *The Social Question.* During the 1930s, the retirement of those over 60 had appeal as a way of spreading available work to potentially radical and dangerous youth and to their 45-year-old parents, thought by the Roosevelt administration to be the key to social stability. The current reassessment of mandatory retirement and social security eligibility reflects a tendency to discount such factors. In spite of continued high rates of unemployment, we are a decade from the urban riots of the 1960s and there is some question whether ghetto violence is capable of invoking the extreme anxiety it once did. Our politicians are thus less concerned about the social impact of keeping older workers on the job than

they have been in the past. The report of Pepper's Select Committee questions the assumption, central to historical analyses of social stability, that a young person has more right to a job than an older person, and it offers youth only the evanescent prospect of full employment.

2) *Social Security Funding.* The restructuring of retirement promises aid to the ailing social security trust fund and private pension systems. In 1975, Social Security commissioner Robert Ball claimed that a reversal in the trend toward early retirement and "greater labor force participation among older people in the next century" could produce "a significant saving for social security...." The Labor department and the Congressional Budget Office have recently attempted to estimate potential savings in retirement benefits. No single aspect of retirement has interested Senators, Representatives and bureaucrats (including Kreps and Pepper) more than this one.

3) *The New Efficiency.* Enthusiasm for efficiency, and for the development of rational standards by which to judge it, has been a dominant theme among opponents of mandatory retirement. On this issue, the American business system is criticized not as callous and unconcerned with its workers, but as excessively solicitous toward the inefficient and unwilling to make hard, rational decisions. A spokesman for the National Retired Teachers Association seemed not only resigned but pleased that the elimination of mandatory retirement would result in the firing of incompetent teachers. The representative of a consulting firm supported the need to "zero base"



age in the labor force." The Department of Labor," emphasized the Carter administration's Donald Elisburg, "is very much concerned about conditions in employment which result in the denial to individuals of the right to be considered on the basis of their ability to do the job. To stifle individual ability and productivity is to establish nonproductive economic and employment policies." The attack on mandatory retirement is, in short, one facet of a larger effort, which might be called the New Efficiency, and which is intended to encourage productivity in a bloated national economy facing critical challenges from abroad.

The 60 years since 1917 have brought us full circle. Convinced of the destructive potential of an aging bureaucracy, the pension bureau's Saltzgaber was typical of an age that perceived retirement as an inexpensive instrument of social and economic efficiency. It no longer seems inexpensive; we are not, for the moment, much concerned with social disorder; our needs for efficiency push us away from classifications that may be easy to administer but have little relationship to productivity. Once again, our older workers are being asked to serve the economic and social needs of other age groups and of the general economy. ■ William Graebner teaches history at State University of New York, College at Fredonia; he recently completed a book on the history of retirement in the United States, and is author of *Coal-Mining Safety in the Progressive Period: The Political Economy of Reform*.

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Nancy Lieber

Ah, Spring is here again... when young minds turn to Marx

Spring quarter has arrived, and I turn once again to the teaching of Political Science 117, "Marxism." If it is anything like the last two times around, it will go something like this...

Week I. Studying the pre-registration list before class, I note that the 90-odd students come from 20 different majors and three college divisions. They obviously are attracted to a course that promises to give them a basic introduction to Marxism in only ten short weeks; I wish I had at least a semester. I begin with the usual explanation of course mechanics, then swing into a broad overview of what Marx and Marxism dealt and deals with. A bright young economics major asks in a defensive voice that if capitalism was as bad as Marx said, how come the workers hadn't overthrown it yet? I assure him that if he could wait, we would be answering that question over the next ten weeks. I go on to indicate the two major interpretations of Marx that dominate the current century—Marxist-Leninist communism and neo-Marxist democratic socialism. An Animal Science major wants to know what "neo" means.

After some background lectures on early capitalist theory, the utopian socialist response to its practice, and then some always intriguing biographical material on Marx and Engels, we plunge into Week II, the Hegelian setting. The combination of Hegel's World Spirit and the 85 degree classroom heat begins to wear down the students' spirit.

Things pick up noticeably with Week III and the discussion of Marx's notion of religion as a manifestation of man's

alienated condition. I read aloud (from an anarchist newspaper given to me by a former student) Madalyn O'Hair's Atheist Creed—the philosophical parallels with what we have just read of Marx's materialist conception of history are striking. Yet, I end the lecture by noting the existence of a Christian socialist movement, even a Catholic Marxist one, in Europe, Latin America.... A hand shoots up in row three, "And we are active here in Davis, too," he exclaims. I give him a few minutes to do a pitch for his group (American Christians for Socialism?).

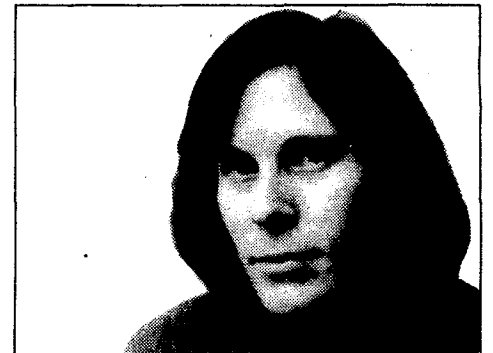
By Week IV we are well into the crux—economic alienation and the nature of work itself. Many of the students have held summer jobs, in particular picking and canning produce grown by California agribusiness. No, they wouldn't want to do that job all their lives; yes, they find a beautiful dream in the Fourier/Marx notion that work should consist of "hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, shepherding in the evening, and criticizing after dinner." They also know that in the meantime they will continue to size up new acquaintances with a "What's your major?" and later "What do you do for a living?" approach. Turning from the *Paris Manuscripts* to *Capital*, I painstakingly go through Marx's explanation of the extraction of surplus value. The students get right to the point, suggesting the word "rip-off." Then the bright young economics majors have their day as we scrutinize Marx's predictions about the future development and eventual self-destruction of the capitalist system.

With Week V we get to the revolution itself, its various means, its elusive ends. The students search in vain for the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the *Communist Manifesto*; they are further confused by Marx's statement, "I am not a Marxist." During office hours, a Leninist-leaning student confides to me that while he finds the pluralist, libertarian side of neo-Marxism seductive, he nevertheless has chosen to resist it; the point is to crush the bourgeois dictatorship, and substitute a dictatorship of American "third-worlders." If they've held us at gunpoint, we'll get our chance to hold them at gunpoint. I suggest he struggle to end all dictatorships.

Week VI or VII, and a young woman comes in during office hours to say that while she had come into the course a liberal, she thought she was now either a social democrat or a democratic socialist, but since she had first heard those two terms only weeks ago, could I please explain the difference once again. Such is the kind of office hour conversation I'm delighted to have.

Week VIII. One of my "readers" announces at the beginning of class that a demonstration is in process on the front steps of the Administration building and that would anyone like to join him and many of their classmates in protesting University of California investments in South Africa? A few leave, sirens are heard in the background, several hours later 18 students (including several from PS 117, but not the reader) are arrested for trespassing.

Week IX. We are discussing the Marx-



ist explanation of why the U.S. went to war in Vietnam. A retired lieutenant colonel in the course explains that the "real" reason had to do with inter-service rivalry—that is, whichever (Army, Navy, Air Force) fought better would get a larger slice of the military budget from Congress. He knew, he'd been there. The class discussion ends in chaos.

Week X. A young man quite in earnest observes that he had certainly learned a lot, found much of it very persuasive, but as a chemistry major he figured he would be landing a job in a large corporation. Could I therefore please recommend some readings that would re-instill his faith in the capitalist system? My last lecture is serious, bidding them to think about their own political assumptions and actions. I paraphrase a favored political writer: "The question is not *whether* the future will be collectivist, for the present already is. The question is whether that collectivist society will be planned privately, bureaucratically, and in an authoritarian manner, or whether it will be done in an open, democratic, libertarian, and emancipatory way." Then the final exam, the turning in of grades, and finally the chance to read the students' evaluations. Some continuing skepticism, some welcome enthusiasts, but also near-unanimous amazement at the richness, complexity and pertinence of Marx and socialism, and unanimous "Why didn't they teach us this in high school?" Is it any wonder I look forward to this year's class? ■

Nancy Lieber teaches political science at University of California, Davis. Her column will appear regularly.