

BOOKS

Workplace conflict reshapes work and class

By Michael Reich

CONTESTED TERRAIN: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century

By Richard Edwards

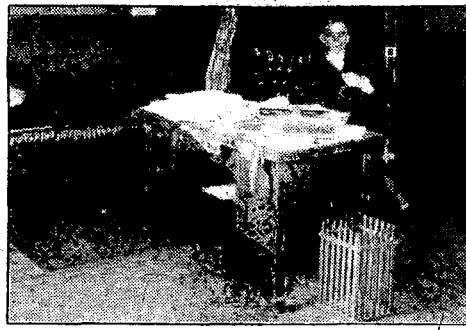
Basic Books, New York, \$12.95

TO NOTE THE GROWING DIVERSITY of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries has become something of a commonplace, but as yet

there is no commonly accepted explanation of the sources of this diversity. With the exception of limited talk of "labor aristocracies," traditional Marxist thought offers little on this vital subject. Orthodox Marxism has tended to follow the guidelines laid down long ago by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto: the working class, based primarily in industrial production, was becoming more homogenous and more unified, particularly as periodic economic crises swelled and impoverished the proletariat.

In *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Harry Braverman pointed out many of the inadequacies of the traditional view. Capitalist oppression, Braverman emphasized, consisted not only in the appropriation of the products of human labor, but also in the organization of work. Pointing to Frederick W. Taylor's attempts at "scientific" management of labor, Braverman argued that tasks have been subdivided in all occupations, clerical and service as well as industrial, and that work in capitalist firms consequently was becoming deskilled. Braverman thus directed needed attention to the analysis of the labor process.

Nevertheless, Braverman's work left untouched a central orthodox tenet: that homogenization of the working class accompanies its proletarianization. This conclusion proved unrealistic, together



Henry Ford watching the store.

with the implicit assumption that the organization of work could be analyzed solely according to the dictates of capital accumulation, separated from the responses and struggles of the workers.

In his path-breaking work, Richard Edwards analyzes the transformation of the capitalist workplace in the 20th century in terms that challenge and transcend Braverman's analysis.

Edwards insists on seeing the workplace as a contested terrain, in which the efforts of capitalists to transform purchased labor-power into performed work can be understood only in the context of worker-capitalist conflict. To Edwards, Taylorism comprises only the tip, and a misleading one at that, of the iceberg of contemporary capitalist structures organized to elicit work. Taylorism showed employers the potential benefits of systematic management of labor tasks, but in the end it failed because it provoked widespread worker resistance.

Edwards investigates the evolution of the labor process from the small 19th-century entrepreneurial firms of competitive capitalism where capitalists supervised workers personally, to the modern corporation of monopoly capitalism. He analyzes at each stage the way work tasks

are specified, workers' performance evaluated, and workers' compliance obtained through a discipline and reward apparatus. As firms expanded, a hierarchy of supervisors with complete discretion over their subordinate workers developed. This "simple control" system still predominates in the competitive small-business periphery of the economy.

In an original analysis of the widespread upsurge of labor struggles from 1894 to 1919, Edwards emphasizes the revolt of workers against arbitrary and tyrannical forms of labor supervision. Corporations responded to this challenge with new forms of control mechanisms, first affecting the physical structure of the labor process ("technical control"), as in the classic assembly-line model, and later affecting the social structure of work ("bureaucratic control").

Firms that institute technical control to organize industrial production found a unified workforce striking back by the late 1930s, the era of the CIO's organizing drives. Industrial union struggles led to the next stage of the labor process, bureaucratic control. For Edwards, the shift from technical to bureaucratic control methods constitutes the most important change in the labor process in the 20th century.

Bureaucratic control involves rules built into job categories and descriptions, wage scales, and systematized procedures for evaluating, promoting and disciplining workers. Where technical methods of controlling workers produced greater homogeneity and unity among workers, bureaucratic methods institutionalized stratification and disunity among them. They encouraged workers to compete with one another, and to identify with the corporation in order to gain promotions. But bureaucratic control methods also contain their own contradictions, as they create greater aspirations for enlarged democracy at the workplace itself.

Edwards' categories of simple, technical and bureaucratic control refer to the

historical stages of capitalist development and class struggle. They also refer to the three main methods of organizing work today. The evolution of the labor process has expanded the working class while creating three major and distinct fractions within it, each operating within one of the control systems. Drawing on recent research on the segmentation of labor markets, Edwards portrays the laboring poor as subject to simple control, the "traditional working class" (including clerical workers) as subject to technical control, and the middle layers (supervisors, technicians, craftworkers and professionals) as subject to bureaucratic control.

Despite this fracturing of the working class at the point of production, conflict with capitalists has continued, as each fraction has pursued its interests through political pressure on the state. In response, capitalists have attempted to restructure government to restrict its democratic content. Edwards sees the struggle to preserve political democracy as a potent force that, together with emerging aspirations for workplace democracy, can unify the fractions of the working class and usher in an era of renewed struggle for socialism.

The final sections of the book speculate on future trends and are the least satisfying. Edwards cannot demonstrate convincingly why the capitalist class might not be able to set the various fractions of the working class against each other in the political arena. Yet these problems do not detract from Edwards' substantial achievement in reconceptualizing the history and structure of the working class in advanced capitalism.

This brief review cannot indicate the richness of insight found throughout the book. It will appeal to a wide audience. Edwards writes clearly and vividly, provides detailed, lively examples for his arguments and avoids the specialized jargon that plagues so many academic works.

Michael Reich is a professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley.

Ambiguous legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution

By Paul Wolman

THE BOLSHEVIKS COME TO POWER:

The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd

By Alexander Rabinowitch

Norton, New York, 1976; paperback ed. 1978, \$5.95

THE PAPERBACK PUBLICATION of Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* makes more accessible a work deserving a wide audience among socialists.

Rabinowitch examines Bolshevik party activities in Petrograd from Lenin's return in April 1917 after the overthrow of the

Tsar, through the October revolution. These were the tempestuous months of war and political ferment during which the Soviet communists transformed themselves from a minor sect of journalists, exiles, and furtive organizers into the ruling political force in Russia.

From the time of John Reed's dramatic contemporary accounts, the world's first successful socialist revolution has held a particular, if somewhat obscure, attraction for Americans. Yet the Bolshevik phenomenon has also seemed frighteningly alien to our own experience and especially to our sense of democratic political process. While this gulf is in some respects the natural and inevitable product of our differing times and cultures, in part it has been the legacy of more than 60 years of polemicizing.

Some critics have persisted in viewing the Bolsheviks' success as a combination of luck and low cunning, the work of a



Red Army soldiers, 1917.

small coterie of fanatics who took advantage of a temporary political "vacuum" to gull an ignorant and excited urban mob into support of their coup d'etat. "Leninists" have also emphasized authoritarian themes, defending the Bolsheviks' rise as the miraculous fruit of a fixed, "correct" doctrine interpreted and transmitted by an infallible elite to an obedient, even adoring party and people.

While his is not the first book to challenge conventional notions, Rabinowitch's study, part of a growing "revisionist" literature, constitutes the most thorough and provocative study of the revolution yet to issue from the American academic community.

Rabinowitch approaches the Bolsheviks of 1917 neither as Mephistophelian conspirators nor as socialist demi-gods, but as one of several political parties responding to a social crisis of vast magnitude. He brings to the study of the revolution

a social historian's interest in hitherto neglected activities of party cadre and supporters in the factories and working class suburbs, discovering and illuminating a surprising degree of organizational flexibility, openness, and initiative at the local level. Yet he does not slight study of the political development of the party's central institutions.

His research reveals the influence exerted by local party branches, and suggests that the rapid maturation of the Bolshevik leadership was not the result of lock-step obedience to any leader or fixed doctrine, but the product of an active internal debate over policy.

Rabinowitch combines a cinematic eye for descriptive detail and drama with a scholar's passion for precision. He evokes the texture and substance of the revolutionary months: machine-gun regiments careening through the cobbled streets during the "July Days"; the Byzantine intrigues of the Kornilov affair; Lenin quizzing the conductress of a streetcar on the "mood of the people." Finally, his account of the October rising skillfully jump-cuts from the feverish party meetings, to the barricades, to the government palaces, as the revolt swept the old order into the "dustbin of history."

An account of the revolution invariably returns to the central figure of the revolution, Lenin. It is a great strength of Rabinowitch's treatment that he is able to establish that Lenin was at once the driving force behind the Bolsheviks' recognition of the need for a definitive break with the dangerously unstable Provisional Government, and yet, no party dictator.

In Rabinowitch's narrative, Lenin emerges as a politician who had to win adherents to his cause in open party de-

bate, and to watch sometimes in frustration as his proposals were voted down by more cautious or tactically conscious comrades. But Rabinowitch remains skeptical of Lenin's own democratic credentials. This is most apparent in his treatment of Lenin's differences with the parliamentary-minded moderate socialists and Right Bolsheviks. Where they are rehabilitated as pluralistic "good communists," Lenin, it is hinted, nurtured the ambition to place the Bolsheviks into a dictatorial control of the state.

Rabinowitch, for all his attraction to the events of 1917, and all his desire to do them justice, still cannot quite avoid seeing revolution and democracy as exclusive categories. The tendency to see revolution itself as somehow inevitably a product of perversity may reflect the measure to which we Americans have distanced ourselves from our own revolutionary democratic heritage.

Yet, in the end, Rabinowitch does view the revolution as a high point of liberty in Russia; and, as he acknowledges, it was probably not the events of the revolution itself which proved most damaging to the prospects of socialist democracy in Russia. This is a theme he may explore further in a proposed volume continuing his account of events in Petrograd into the '20s.

Rabinowitch's book offers eloquent testimony to the creative and participatory capacities of the Russian people, and to the commitment of leaders who risked their personal and political futures in response to the demands of their times. This was the face of neither demagoguery nor divinity, but of a politics which a Washington or a Lincoln might recognize.

Paul Wolman is a graduate student in history at Northern Illinois University.

PERSPECTIVES

Government-business stats catch labor in productivity-crap-trap

By Thomas Brom

WAREHOUSEMAN RON SHEPHERD USED TO DRIVE A FORK-lift at J.C. Penney's big distribution center at Hayward, Cal. Now he rides on one, a huge computer-guided machine that receives orders in a small electronic terminal on the dashboard. The terminal sends back such routine responses as "out of stock," "truck full," or "job done," maintains a complete inventory of the warehouse, and makes out delivery tickets for outgoing merchandize. Logisticon, the company

that installed the system, is now working on improvements that will eventually allow the forklift to perform even more tasks—without Ron Shepherd being there at all. His job will be eliminated, ironically sacrificed to improve the overall productivity of the American worker.

Productivity—once an obscure term seen only in business journals—is now at the center of a national controversy over the troubled U.S. economy.

The Carter administration, reacting to a report that productivity in the U.S. increased by only 0.4 percent in 1978, seized on declining productivity growth rates as a major issue in its campaign to fight inflation.

But in the process, it has stirred up a hornet's nest about what productivity, or output per hour of labor, really means.

Charles Schultze, chairman of President Carter's Council of Economic Advisors, contends that "the biggest single factor in last year's 9 percent inflation rate was the reduced rate of productivity increase."

"When I hear the word productivity," steelworker Joe Samargis told a New York reporter, "I reach for my picket sign, because it's just another word for speed-up."

Labor's dilemma.

"The downturn in productivity growth rates may be a problem of measurement and not reality," insists Andy Oswald, AFL-CIO research director. "I don't know what the data Carter uses mean. Blaming an alleged decline in productivity for inflation is a phony argument anyway."

Productivity ratios are especially sensitive economic indicators because they reflect the day-to-day conflict between business and labor in the workplace. Although output per worker hour can be changed by factors ranging from the skill of the labor force to the work environment itself, the most widespread meth-

ods for increasing productivity involve automation, the pace of production, and capacity utilization.

For employers, productivity increases mean more profits per hour of labor. The increase in profits provides capital for new investment, and the chance for employees to bargain for a larger slice of the pie.

But for labor, the demands for increased productivity present a real dilemma. If workers accept faster production schedules and automation, their job conditions often deteriorate and they may be replaced by machines. If they fight programs to increase productivity, workers may hurt their employer's business, and they might be laid off.

As Oswald says, "Productivity increases are a mixed blessing." The workers can't win, but they can't get out of the game.

No one denies that productivity increases in the U.S. have lagged in recent years behind those in Japan, Canada and Western Europe. The question is who's to blame, with business, labor and government now pointing the finger at each other.

Business claims that government regulations, restrictive union contracts, and the increase of teenagers and women in the work force hold back productivity.

Government blames management for lack of capital spending, and labor for strikes and resisting automation.

Labor blames business for poor management skills and poor working conditions.

The ensuing battle over productivity statistics may seem like a tempest in a teapot. None of the parties has another job ready for Ron Shepherd, or a sense of where the drive for productivity increases will lead. But the winners of the argument will make the losers pay dearly, either in profits or wages or both.

With so much at stake, and with the re-

liability of the figures in doubt, it's worth examining just how the measurements are made and who makes them.

To begin with, the measuring of industrial output per hour of labor is traditionally the exclusive domain of management.

"All the data is generated by the industries themselves," says Barry Silverman, research director of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in San Francisco. "We have to rely on their figures, and so does the government."

"We don't keep productivity figures in any systematic way," adds John Bowers, assistant research director of Service Employees International Union Bay District Joint Council. "We're not in a position to get those figures."

Output statistics for the manufacturing sector are pretty straightforward—so many tons of steel, so many bags of cement, so many boxes of detergent. But measurement is very difficult in the non-goods producing sector of the economy, a broad category now comprising 65 percent of the hours worked in the U.S.

"How do you measure output in the services or government?" asks Jim Savorese, director of public policy for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in Washington, D.C. "They're not just cans of cherries—you can't simply count them up. There's no standardized product at the end."

In fact, there are some areas of the economy reporting figures "so unreliable that we won't publish them," says economist Lawrence Fulco of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Areas of the economy noted for "bad productivity measures" include construction, finance, insurance, real estate, and business and personal services. Together these comprise 29 percent of the total hours worked in 1978.

"It's often difficult to tell if productivity in the construction industry is up, down, or sideways," admits Fulco.

The productivity of government workers—federal, state and local—is disregarded in the statistics because of even worse measurement problems. But public

the work force. By combining the unemployed now comprise 20 percent of counted government workers with the BLS "unreliable" categories, it's evident that nearly 50 percent of the U.S. work force is virtually excluded from national productivity calculations.

"What's being done is so haphazard," concludes AFL-CIO's Oswald, "that we disregard figures in the non-manufacturing sectors."

Measuring surplus value.

The labor movement is especially indignant about the statistical sleight-of-hand that turns impressive production levels into miniscule productivity ratios. Only when business leaders talk to themselves are the all-important profit levels discussed.

For instance, the Texas Industrial Commission calculated the exact amount of money that was made from workers for every state in the union. For every dollar workers were paid in wages in 1972, they produced an average of \$3.35 for the company. On an annual basis, the average amount that a worker made for the company over and above his or her wages in 1972 was \$25,554.

The Texas Industrial Commission figures were compiled especially for a brochure attracting corporations to the state, and are an indication of the highly partisan nature of calculating the output of a worker's labor.

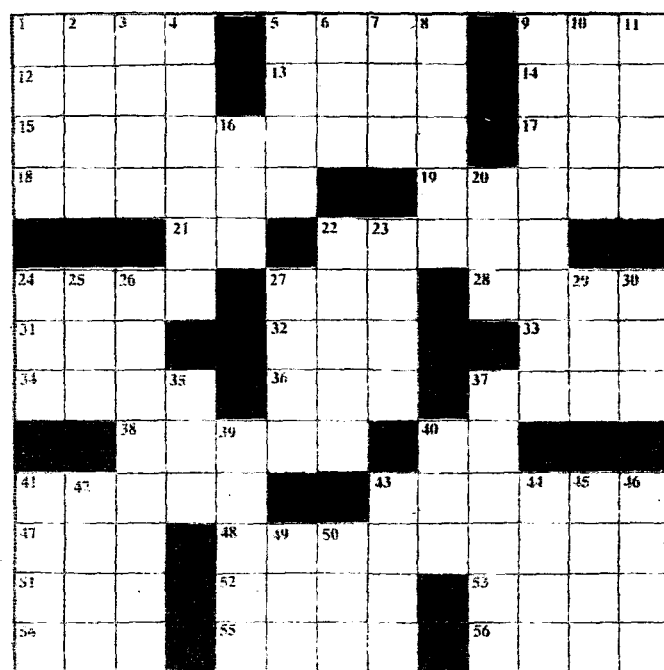
"We still have the highest productivity level of any nation in the world," admits C. Jackson Grayson, director of the privately-funded American Productivity Center in Houston.

Nonetheless, both industry and government are pointing to figures that show low productivity increases to encourage automation, scientific management, wage controls and deregulation of business.

Thus the current productivity figures, whatever their actual meaning, have become a battlefield in the struggle over jobs and profits.

(©1979 Pacific News Service)

Thomas Brom is labor editor of Pacific News Service.



- 6 Household god
- 7 Heavyweight boxing champ
- 8 Author of *From Immigrant to Inventor*: Michael
- 9 Islamic revolutionary leader
- 10 Assistant
- 11 Noun suffix, often derogatory
- 16 Undermine
- 20 *All the King's* ...
- 22 Regenerate
- 23 Bay of the Black Sea
- 24 Actor Holbrook
- 25 Caucho tree
- 26 First name of a Middle East V.I.P.
- 27 Conflagration
- 29 Neighbor of Mo.
- 30 incite
- 33 Judah
- 37 Calif. coastal resort area
- 39 Holy book of 9 Down
- 40 Chemical suffix
- 41 "Come into the garden, _____" (Tennyson)
- 42 City in Piedmont, Italy
- 43 Month of the Jewish calendar
- 44 River into the Seine
- 45 Rediged
- 46 Looped vase handle
- 49 Go in haste
- 50 Room in a harem

The Middle East et al.

By Jay Shepherd

ACROSS

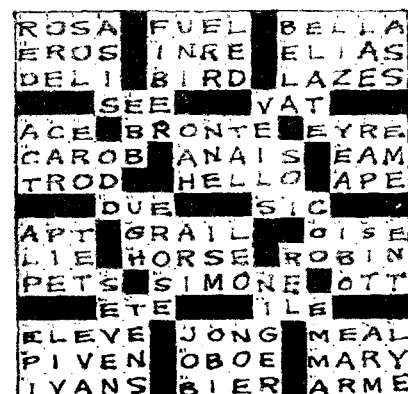
- 1 Sandy sediment
- 5 Applaud
- 9 18th century Dutch cabinet
- 12 Sandarac tree
- 13 Egyptian heaven
- 14 Theatrical success
- 15 Middle East area relating to the Egypt-Israel peace treaty
- 17 Pindaric form
- 18 In any case
- 19 Always: Ger.
- 21 Type of recording
- 22 Wife of a rajah
- 24 Makes a droning sound
- 27 City in N. Morocco
- 28 Antiaircraft missile
- 31 Popular pub drink
- 32 Daughter of Cadmus
- 33 Pester

- 34 Soviet river into the Arctic Ocean
- 36 Accelerate sharply an engine
- 37 The great Crooner
- 38 Awry
- 40 Roman 2
- 41 Portuguese colony near Hong Kong
- 43 War torn African country
- 47 Sodium carbonate (soda ...)
- 48 Ian Smith, for one
- 51 Shoshonean Indian
- 52 Lover of Radames
- 53 U.S. propaganda agency
- 54 Indistinct
- 55 _____ East
- 56 Girl's given name

- 2 Where Tabriz and Isfahan are
- 3 Indolent
- 4 Strong fishing nets for dragging
- 5 Saigon's new name: Ho Chi Minh

DOWN

- 1 *The Forsyte* (Galsworthy)



Conference on ECONOMIC PLANNING: LEFT ALTERNATIVES

May 4-6, New York University

Keynotes include: Rep. John Conyers, Derek Shearer, David Gordon 8:10-9:30 p.m., Fri., Sat.

Panels:

Economic Democracy, Legislation, Media, Community and Labor Organizing, Transition to Socialism, and others Fri., Sat. 9:30-5:30, Sun. 10:30-6:00

Workshops

Health, Housing, Energy, Military Conversion

Morning Registration

Main Bldg., Rm. 908, Corner of Waverly Pl. & Washington Square East

Evening Registration

Schiffman Hall, Tisch Hall 40 W. 4th St.

Unemployed \$2, Employed \$5

Sponsors: Caucus for a New Political Science, Center for Marxist Studies, NYU