



By Jan Rosenberg & Fred Siegel

BREAD AND ROSES," LONG A rallying cry for feminist and union activists dedicated to the cultural as well as material needs of people's lives, was coined as a strike slogan by young women textile workers in Lawrence, Mass., in 1912. It is fitting that this should be the name of the massive cultural program recently launched by New York's District 1199 of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, 80 percent of whose members are women. From the earliest beginnings of feminism and the labor movement, women have repeatedly focused on both bread and roses.

The New Left in the '60s focused on questions of "culture" while shunning unions, the bread-winning institutions of the Old Left. For their part, most unions either ignored or were openly contemptuous of the cultural thrust of the '60s. But in recent years, the lines between generations have softened; faced with the danger of being run over by the onrushing corporate express, the bread and roses have gradually been reunited.

Bread and Roses, the most visible symbol to date of that reunion, is the brainchild of Moe Foner, executive director of District 1199. It began in January 1979 with an international children's painting exhibit and is now in full swing. Over its two-year span it will feature performances by Harry Belafonte, Judy Collins, Odetta, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Sam Levinson, and other superstars, as well as musical, theatrical, and poetry reviews during lunch hours in Union hospitals. Also scheduled are major painting and photography exhibits at the permanent 1199 Gallery, "dialogs" on the contributions of Martin Luther King Jr., a Labor Day street fair, and an original musical review based on oral histories of 1199 members (now being taped in weekly oral history workshops at union headquarters).

One of the many highlights of *Bread and Roses* will be "The Working American," a major painting show by American artists depicting American workers from colonial times to the present. "The Working American" is being assembled by Patricia Hills, adjunct curator at the Whitney Museum; Hills and David Montgomery, the eminent labor historian, will write introductions to a 96-page illustrated catalog of the exhibit. After its two-month stay at the 1199 Gallery in New

York, it will tour the U.S., greatly extending the reach of "Bread and Roses."

The task force reads like a "who's who" in New York's political culture and includes Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Herbert Gutman, Michael Harrington, Irving Howe, Eve Meriam, Walter Rosenblum, Piri Thomas, and Brendon Sexton.

Most performances and exhibits, like the conferences, seminars, and especially the series of articles by artists and scholars that will appear in *1199 News* over the next two years (and then be reprinted as a pamphlet for other unions) are meant to engage rank and file members in broad discussions about the meaning of the arts in relationship to labor and everyday life. The current exhibit of Earl Dotter's photographs of textile workers, for example, includes two major panel representations—one featuring first-hand reports by Southern textile workers and one featuring Earl Dotter on the politics and esthetics of his work.

Cultural groundswell.

The incentive and support for *Bread and Roses* are part of a much broader swell of interest in working-class culture and labor education among unions, radicals and, more recently, among the educational establishment. Faced with the growing force of the right and especially with the increasingly aggressive anti-union campaign of the last two years, the labor movement has been forced to build bridges to other left social movements and organizations while popularizing union activity, if not activism, among the public at large.

Through the photo exhibit of textile workers and related programs, including promotion of Mimi Conway's powerful new book, *Rise Gonna Rise: A Portrait of Southern Textile Workers* (see review on page 22), District 1199 calls public attention to the struggles of textile workers and particularly the Amalgamated's campaign against J.P. Stevens. Special efforts are being made to involve students from New York's labor colleges in Bread and Roses events. Sympathetic faculty from the City University of New York are trying to integrate *Bread and Roses* programs into their curricula, and finally, public school teachers urged on by the United Federation of Teachers will be bringing classes to the exhibits, where gallery instructors will provide a guided tour and lead discussions.

Parallel programs emphasizing working-class life and culture are now being supported in some measure by govern-

ment arts and humanities bureaucracies. Major historical photo exhibits on working women have won state humanities council backing in Illinois and in New York; documentary filmmakers Julia Reichert and Jim Klein recently received over \$100,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to make a documentary film on Communist Party members in the 1930s; the Labor Theater in New York continues to win the support of the New York State Council on the Humanities; and "Threads," the educational/humanities program of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, received \$150,000 for their one-year program on work, family and community. Since Joseph Duffy was appointed head of the NEH, labor has received a much more sympathetic hearing in those quarters.

Labor education.

During the last six or seven years there has been a tremendous growth in labor education—both in programs tied in to existing universities and non-accredited programs initiated and controlled by the unions. In addition to the forces mentioned above, demographic shifts have sent many educational institutions scurrying to identify and recruit "traditionally bypassed populations," e.g. older students, minorities, and especially union members whose unions will foot all or part of their tuition costs.

Thq State University of New York/Empire State College Center for Labor Studies, Hofstra 65 Institute for Applied Social Science, and AFSCME's labor col-

leges represent current attempts to develop college programs that speak directly to the needs and interests of union members. Even the United University Professions/AFT is attempting to organize a labor college.

"Threads," the ACTWU program in the humanities, offers union members eight-week long seminars in "work," "family," and "community." In all of these programs there is a conscious effort to build on the knowledge and perspectives that the members bring to their studies. Since "Threads" began last year, discussion leaders have found that participants want even more active involvement in their studies; discussion groups are more likely to include localized resources and original poetry and photography workshops. Like *Bread and Roses*, "Threads" is supported primarily by the NEH.

Within this welter of new programs, *Bread and Roses* is the largest, most ambitious, and well organized. As George Weissman, the vice chairman of Phillip Morris and a corporate arts leader, wrote to Moe Foner, "I've always felt that labor was way behind the corporations in recognizing the important role the arts and humanities can play in our nation.... Now at last your union is taking a much needed step forward in this direction."

Bread and Roses is a limited challenge to the world as brought to you by Mobil, Exxon, and friends. Unions across the country will be watching it and if it succeeds they too may think of moving forward from the back of the cultural bus. ■



This poster advertises the cultural program of New York's District 1199