

*“I am not writing in order to gain the approval or sympathy of... intellectuals for the workers’ actions. I want instead to illustrate to the workers themselves that sometimes when their conditions seem everlasting and hopeless, they are in actuality revealing by their every-day reactions and expressions that they are the road to a far-reaching change.”*

### **The American Worker (Part 1: Life in the Factory)**

by Paul Romano

“The American Worker” was originally published in 1947 by the Johnson-Forest tendency. It was divided into two parts. The first part “Life in the Factory”, was written by Paul Romano, a young worker in one of General Motors’ car plants. It describes the everyday lives of the workers, their (often contradictory) attitudes towards the work, the company, unions, politics, and each other. Part 2 “The Reconstruction of Society” was written by Grace Lee Boggs (pen name Ria Stone). It is not included here but can be found online at: [www.prole.info/texts/americanworker2.html](http://www.prole.info/texts/americanworker2.html)

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## **THE AMERICAN WORKER**



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# **The American Worker**

## **Part 1: Life in the Factory**

### **Introduction**

I am a young worker in my late twenties. The past several years have found me in the productive apparatus of the most highly industrialized country in the world. Most of my working years have been spent in mass production industries among hundreds and thousands of other workers. Their feelings, anxieties, exhilaration, boredom, exhaustion, anger, have all been mine to one extent or another. By “their feelings” I mean those which are the direct reactions to modern high-speed production. The present finds me still in a factory-one of the giant corporations in the country.

This pamphlet is directed to the rank and file worker and its intention is to express those innermost thoughts which the worker rarely talks about even to his fellow-workers. In keeping a diary, so to speak, of the day-to-day reactions to factory life, I hoped to uncover the reasons for the worker’s deep dissatisfaction which has reached its peak in recent years and has expressed itself in the latest strikes and spontaneous walkouts.

The rough draft of this pamphlet was given to workers across the country. Their reaction was as one. They were surprised and gratified to see in print the experiences and thoughts which they have rarely put into words. Workers arrive home from the factory too exhausted to read more than the daily comics. Yet most of the workers who read the pamphlet stayed up well into the night to finish the reading once they had started.

In direct contrast was the attitude of the intellectuals who are detached from the working class. To them it was a repetition of an oft-written story. They felt cheated. There was too much dirt and noise. They could not see the content for the words. The best expression of what they had to say was: “So what?” It was to be expected, for how could those so removed from the daily experiences of the laboring masses of the country expect to understand the life of the worker as only the worker can understand it.

I am not writing in order to gain the approval or sympathy of these intellectuals for the workers’ actions. I want instead to illustrate to the workers themselves that sometimes when their conditions seem everlasting and hopeless, they are in actuality revealing by their every-day reactions and expressions that they are the road to a far-reaching change.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The Effects of Production**

#### **You've Got to Live**

The worker has to work. There is no alternative but to produce in order to provide even the bare necessities of life. The greater part of his waking hours are spent in the factory. It is here that he, as a worker, must think and act. No matter what the conditions of life are in the factory, he has got to make a living. That is one of the strongest motivations governing the attitude of the worker in the modern productive system. He may not think of ever being anything but a worker, but that does not prevent the thousand and one pressures of factory life from leaving deep impressions upon him.

The worker is compelled on the job to perform a task which can only make him rebel: the monotony; the getting up every morning, the day by day drudgery which takes its toll. He labors under forced conditions. Not only that, but there is the fact that he compels himself to accept these conditions. Home, family, economics make him a slave to this routine. Theoretically, he is a free wage earner. Realistically, he cannot maintain such a policy and exist. In other words, he thinks he has the right not to accept his condition, but clearly realizes he must. These two pressures tend to foment a subterranean frustration within him.

#### **The Shop's Hard on the Body**

The factory worker lives and breathes dirt and oil. As machines are speeded up, the noise becomes greater, the strain greater, the labor greater, even though the process is simplified. Most steel cutting and grinding machines of today require a lubricant to facilitate machining the material. It is commonplace to put on a clean set of clothes in the morning and by noon to be soaked, literally, with oil. Most workers in my department have oil pimples, rashes and sores on their arms and legs. The shoes become soaked and the result is a steady case of athlete's foot. Blackheads fill the pores. It is an extremely aggravating set of effects. We speak often of sitting and soaking in a hot tub of water to loosen the dirt and ease the infectious blackheads.

In most factories the worker freezes in the winter, sweats in the summer and often does not have hot water to wash the day's grime from his body. How many thousands of workers have ridden the bus home with sweat and grime from the shop still covering their bodies. Even if the facilities are there, the desire to get home and away from the shop is so strong that workers often will not even bother to change out of their work clothes. On the other hand, some workers deliberately scrub themselves and take showers before leaving the factory. They attempt to leave every last taint of the day's work

expression of his over-all individuality, is what he would attempt to put into reality.

It is because I feel all this and see it around me in the factory that I am a revolutionary socialist. Socialism is not merely an ideal to be wished for. It must grow out of the daily lives and strivings of the workers, and it must bring a new life to them in that which is closest to them and to society - their work.

It is not for today's leaders of society to solve this problem. They have shown inside the factory as outside it how helpless they are. It is from the workers that will come the men and women who will lead and guide the tremendous upheavals to come. Today they are being processed and prepared in the factory for a new reorganization based on the freed capacities of men in the labor process.

A powerful force is today preparing the socialist reality of tomorrow. I am a part of that, as a worker and as a revolutionary socialist. It is because of this that I have learned to see clarity in confusion. I see that in socialism the workers will gain the dignity which capitalism cannot give, and as a revolutionary socialist I have been able to clarify for myself and for other workers the coming revolution by which the workers will create a new world for themselves and for the rest of humanity.

productive system which will enable the worker to give fullest expression to his senses.

In modern production, the worker is isolated on an island in the midst of men and machines. So divorced has the worker become from himself that he is divorced from his fellow worker. He cannot stand the chattering of men in the cafeteria, and can find ease better, alone at his machine. The anxiety of the worker is due to the fact that he is forever caught between the contradiction of wanting to let his instinct, to do a good job and be close to his fellow workers, have its way, and then having to reverse himself.

The deep undercurrent of protest which exists in the factory is slowly but surely beginning to concretize itself. The deepest hostility exists everywhere. It can be seen in the slumped shoulders of a worker trudging down the length of the factory; in the way in which a worker walks up to a drinking fountain and wearily bends over to meet the rising stream of water; and in the set lips and drawn features of the worker towards midnight on the second shift. What more profound expression of all this can be given than the words of worker X who, in speaking to his foreman, says, "thought Lincoln freed the slaves." Later in the company of several shopmates, he mentioned something to the effect that it was time that someone came and freed us from the machines.

## **What the Worker Wants**

Life, as he lives it in the factory and as it corrodes his home life, builds up this tremendous hatred in the workers. He struggles blindly to throw off the weight of a distorted factory system. His exasperation at the lack of efficiency is always apparent and is deeply rooted in him. It impedes him and tears at him internally. Day by day he attempts to circumvent the bureaucratic methods and orders from above. He takes note of all defects in the utilization of labor-power that result from the improper utilization of technical resources or from unsatisfactory administration. He attempts in vain to carry on a struggle against red tape, laxity and bureaucracy.

He wants every participant in production to understand the need for and expediency of the production tasks he is carrying out, and for every participant in production to take an intelligent part in remedying all technical and organizational defects in the sphere of production.

The worker expresses his hatred of the incentive system by saying he should write the union contract. This is no less than saying that the existing production relations must be overthrown. It is also much more. It means that he wants to arrange his life in the factory in such a way that it satisfies his instincts for doing a good job, knowing that it is worthwhile, and living in harmony with his fellow men. It is deeply rooted in the worker that work is the foundation of his life. To make his work a meaningful part of life, an

on the inside of the plant gate. A new set of clothes and they are on the way home feeling a little relaxed from the day's grind.

X is a laborer. He pulls chips from the machines; fills the machines with cutting oil and helps stock up. Since a number of laborers were laid off, his job has increased in intensity. He has more machines to tend. As a result, he, like the others, begins sweating profusely. The bad part is this. Upon filling the cart with chips, he pushes the cart outside of the plant. The constant change of temperature combined with the sweating gives many of these laborers colds and bone troubles (arthritis, etc.).

However, they have discovered that if they wear a heavy sweatshirt, the perspiration will be absorbed. Of course, they are continually uncomfortable.

Factory lighting as I have known it has never approached daylight in being able to ease the strain on the eyes. Most often in the shops it is of a yellow hue. To illustrate the results of this, it is best to repeat what other workers have said on this score. A worker coming off the shift steps out into the sunlight. He blinks his eyes and says: "I feel as if I have just come up out of the coal mines."

Sometimes workers who do not even know each other, greet each other in passing. One day a worker whom I did not at all know, walked by me and in a brief statement and a gesture of his hand towards the earth announced: "Down into the salt mines again."

Lunch time on the cafeteria veranda, an ex-GI says: "These goddamn factories are prisons. You are cooped up without a chance to get a decent breath of fresh air."

The plant is generally filled with a heavy smoke from the carburizing- and heat treating departments. It fills the nose and throat. Some one wrote the following on the locker room bulletin board: "Why don't some one do something about this smoke hell-hole?" It remained there for a few days and then the following was written: "The union is no good, the smoke is still here,"

In the various shops in which I worked, I used to notice that most old-timers chewed tobacco. Now there is a definite reason for this. To be exact:

1. It was one way to substitute for smoking on the job.
2. It seemed to absorb the fumes, dust and steel fragments that floated around.

I have noticed several young workers doing it now. I asked one why, He said that every night when he got home, his throat is coated and also his nostrils with the dust of the shop. He said it is a lung protection. Many of the workers have discolored teeth as a result. Snuff is also used.

I have made these observations of other jobs. Foundry workers have the soles of their feet cooked on the job. It is a hot, filthy, smoky job and the feet ache from toasting. There is the ever-present

danger of being burned by molten metal.

Crane operators inhale all fumes, dust, gas, heat, etc., which rise to the ceiling. In one shop, the crane men used to complain bitterly that they had to urinate in buckets because they were not allowed to leave the crane. Production welding is also bad. The mask is over the head for long hours. It is a stifling job. The flash of a welding torch can blind a worker. Many such accidents happened during the war.

The factory routine often causes the worker physical discomfort and irritation of a very intimate kind. In the morning he faces the question: should he relieve himself by moving his bowels before he leaves the house, which will mean rushing in order to get to work on time; or should he be uncomfortable until he can relieve himself in the plant? On the other hand, in the plant he may not be able to leave his machine at the time he has the impulse to go to the men's room because of the production demands made on him. Sometimes in such a situation, he shuts down his machine in anger and says: "To hell with this. When you gotta go, you gotta go." No matter what course he follows, the result is that what should be a simple, personal routine, becomes a matter of pain, irritation and conflict.

There are times when a worker will cut himself badly. Although the company continually states that the hospital facilities are there for the use of the men, and that even the most minor cut or bruise should be reported to the hospital, the men do not report for treatment often. The reason for this is that they are afraid that they will receive a black mark on their record which might classify them as careless workers in this or any other factory where they might be working.

One day workers in one end of the shop are freezing from the cold. They get up a delegation and go into the front office. They say: "Either we get heat or we go home."

Monday morning on a dreary, cold, winter day: Workers are dressing and changing clothes. A worker comes in and in one word expresses the philosophical outlook and feelings of each worker present. In a frustrated, definitive, angry tone, he says, "Horse S" Everyone understands and says to himself, "You can say that again for me, brother."

### **And Harder on the Mind**

There are times when a worker suffers a nervous and mental breakdown as a result of attending machines for long hours over a period of months and years. It takes a period of sustained exposure to result in such a climax. In one shop where I was steward, I happened one day to look over at a machine where one of the workers was sitting. He had his head in his hands. It was immediately discernible that something was wrong. I went over to him. He told me if he didn't walk out that instant, he would break. I hurried him into

it nothing will be done." He says, "Come on." I mentioned it to a few workers and they agree. Two of us went up to the bathroom window which was suspended from the ceiling and looked over the situation. It was impossible to fix it from there. We went back down and had to return to our machines. What had become crystal clear to me was the fact that a half-dozen workers would instantaneously have responded to a call to get a ladder ourselves and go up and fix the window.

The workers are ready to act together to better their life in the factory.

## **CONCLUSION**

The basic machine in production is the lathe. It was on the basis of the first crude lathe that the advanced machinery of modern production has developed. Almost all machinery is a modification of the lathe e.g. the huge boring mills, or of the drill press, e.g. the thread-cutting machine, or of the lathe and the drill press. Most every worker who understands machinery knows this. The point which I wish to make is this: The mastery of any of these machines automatically prepares the worker to gain mastery easily over the others. I have seen this hundreds of times in the last 7 years. I as well as other workers have at some time or other, been put on machines which we had never run. Most often it took about a half hour to be able to run them satisfactorily. This is a frequent occurrence in most factories. When work runs out on one machine, the worker is often put on another. I see it every day in the factory. In my present plant, during the first two months, I ran a drill press, air-chuck lathe, automatic-screw, foot press, etc. Two of these machines I had never run before.

I recall that during the war this was much more so. Another fact shown by the war was the ease with which newcomers to machinery could learn in a comparatively short space of time. This was proved to me by the fact that in the first three years of the war, I alone trained some twenty-odd workers, white and Negro, ranging in age from 17 to 50, in running engine and turret lathes.

It is clear, then, that the present-day organization of production itself develops certain strata of workers in a multiplicity of abilities. But this multiplicity of abilities the worker can never develop to its fullest in the factory as it is today.

The worker uses his five senses in the day-to-day labor in the factory. Every one of them is distorted and mutilated. The terrible frustration which is the product of years of exposure to an inhuman production apparatus drives relentlessly toward the overthrow of that apparatus and its replacement by a

respects more satisfactory than before. But the worker, not understanding himself or his reason, is angry because he becoming further divorced from, and automatized in, his work. He attempts to protect his individuality and resents the regimentation of his labor into a sterile path. So he protests not the fact that he is required to lift the work onto the conveyor, but the further divorce of himself, from the end result and the receivers of his efforts.

## **Teamwork**

Production as it exists today in the shop seeks to divide the white from black, Jew from Gentile, worker from worker. But the shattering of the division can take place right at the point of production. As I have stated previously, workers have a basic respect of other good workers. The community of labor establishes a pride in this type of activity which is deeply rooted in the worker. No matter how much modern production distorts the worker, this instinct remains always there. This becomes a universal trait and cuts through barriers of race, creed, and religion. But there is no way for the worker to express this trait today in any productive manner. The result is that it appears in other ways.

At times, a wonderful camaraderie develops in the shop amongst the workers. Usually this is discernible in some sort of horseplay. Many times workers will sing songs together to lighten the day's work. Or many will talk everlastingly of the baseball teams, their standings and who is playing. Specific detail is given to individual players and many know very exact information on some of the players and their health. Workers will use any subject as a means of maintaining a bond of interest between them, e.g. baseball, betting, women.

A good worker always likes to keep his place of work clean. The conflict of classifications often prevents him from doing so.

One day the floor along the row of machines has become soaked with oil. Sawdust has been thrown down to absorb it. The result is a thick, heavy mess on the floor. Although this condition almost always exists, this one day the operators find a broom and clean about their machines. Then systematically the broom is passed on down the line. The company always exhorts the men to do this, but very rare are the times when they do, although they want very much to keep their places of work clean.

One day the temperature soared to the top of the thermometer. The plant is stifling. The top row of windows in the plant is closed. The chain has broken and has not been fixed. Workers up and down the shop complain continuously to the foremen. They are helpless for some reason and are not able to get the windows opened. No one puts in a grievance. I look for the committee-man, but he has not come in. I approach one worker and say, "Let's open the goddam windows ourselves. If we wait for the company to do

the locker room and he left the building. A couple of days later he told me that was the closest he ever came to a physical and mental breakdown. In the same department I knew one worker who suffered a nervous break-down after parts of his machine had showered him when the power was on and something went wrong. Home difficulties, combined with the machine often produce terribly nervous individuals.

On the job, as a result of constantly handling steel chips, the fingernails are torn away. Sometimes it is painful, but always irritating and annoying. Many accidents happen because of simple forgetfulness. The most usual is that of getting a cut by grabbing a chip coming off the machine. Many machines require a constant repetition of routine actions on the part of the worker. With the foot he steps on a lever while his hands are engaged in putting a piece of work in the machine and pushing other levers. The week in and week out repetition of these movements at certain times produces a sort of dullness or dizziness. The result is that one day the worker will put his hand in the machine instead of the piece of work. After such an accident, the operator asks himself, "Why did I do that?"

The militancy of the American worker is something of a sporadic nature. Now fierce, now subtle, now quiet. He may go for months without a violent outward expression. Even years. This does not belie the fact that continually within him is an ever-pressing force which drives towards eruption. Such an explosion at a particular time seizes any reason at hand as the basis for its manifestation.

A worker walks in and sits down in my aisle of lockers at the beginning of work. He is a veteran, was wounded overseas. He suddenly exclaims in a loud voice, "Let's go out on strike." I look at him and ask, "What brings this on?" He replies, "I can't stand it." "Stand what?" I ask. He answers: "The incessant pounding in my head. The goddamn bang-bang-bang of the machine is driving me nuts. It is driving me crazy. Back and forth, back and forth."

The machine he operates is a cold header. It chops off half-inch pieces of steel about one-half inch in diameter from a large roll of steel. It takes great pressure and is done without heat so that the result is a steady pounding noise, with the feeding arm going back and forth. I myself worked next to these machines for several weeks. When you leave work, there still remains the continued booming in your head.

I asked one worker how old he was. His reply was "30." I then said, "Well, you are as old as you feel in body and spirit." He replied, "Then here am I, an old man."

One young worker I know spoke of the fact that he was always under a strain because the boss was constantly yelling at him. As a result, when-ever he sees the boss approach, he hides. In arguments with the boss, on the other hand, he suddenly becomes angry and threatens to quit.

There is the worker who arrives every morning in the locker room with, "Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die."

The worker's attitude is: "All that the company is interested in is production and more production." This is his way of protesting against the complete disregard of the individual human element. This is also evidenced by such statements as: "What do they think we are, pieces of steel?"

## CHAPTER 2

### A Life-time Transformed into Working-time

#### I Work All Week for Friday Night

The life of a worker is transformed into working-time. He does not know how to play. After working hours, in the company of other workers, the conversation invariably returns to the shop. It is like a drug that will not release his mind. The worker thinks of pay day and the end of the week. His off-hours are always conditioned by, "I can't stay up late as I have to go to work tomorrow." When Sunday night arrives, he thinks dejectedly of returning to work on Monday morning. The incessant process continually repeats itself. He looks longingly for week-ends and they disappear before he has a real chance to absorb them. He says, "I work all week for Friday night."

There are times when the worker has several days off in a row. The knowledge of this almost immediately begins to loosen the psychological strain. After a few days, he begins to acquire rest and peace of mind. The work takes on a lighter aspect. He has the opportunity to look out of his limited sphere. The pressure of work temporarily leaves him. Oddly enough however, during fleeting moments of this period, a sense of unexplainable guilt for not being at work suddenly will come over him. The return to work is difficult. The first few hours back in the shop still finds the worker imbued with the spirit of his sojourn. Then comes the end of the day. The appearance and feeling of the worker are exactly what they were before the break occurred.

Effects of production are of a very insidious nature. Some of the cumulative effects reach heights of bursting power. There are days when some workers will go home early or not come in to work at all.

The worker often has to fool himself in order to keep working the whole week. On Tuesday he will promise himself a day off the following day. When Wednesday rolls around, he will say to himself: "I'll work today and take off on Thursday instead." He does this until Friday comes along and then he says: "I might as well finish the week. Another eight hours won't kill me."

One of the workers won \$50 on a bet. When he learned of it in the plant, he worked 4 hours and then took off.

Now and then, the plant has a fire drill. The workers march out of the

When tragedy befalls a worker, death in the family, illness, or some such personal sorrow, the workers express deep sympathy. Often it is difficult to console such a worker in words, so in order to show his sympathy, the average worker will attempt some way in the day's work to aid the bereaved worker. When tragedy strikes a worker, he finds some relief back in the factory away from the sorrow at home.

#### As Though They Were Somebody

At lunch, one day, workers were discussing and lamenting the fact that there is so little real friendship amongst people. One was speaking in terms of what really amounted to comradeship. He remarked that it was tragic that relations between men were not harmonious.

All employees are numbered. Badge numbers are systematically replacing names of individual workers. Pay envelopes, work charts, etc., are all figured on the basis of number. Even workers begin to refer to each other as numbers. "No. 402 worked on my machine last night."

There are many workers in the shop who search for some expression of their importance as individuals. The company, knowing this, institutes a certain type of uniform. It is in the form of a smock or light work coat with the company insignia on it, usually worn by set-up men, inspectors, etc. I took care to notice the effects of this rose on a few workers. For the first few days, they seemed to adopt a self-important air as though now they were somebody. After a few days, the coat was dirty, and added to this, from the very beginning the other workers ignored the new distinction which those who wore the coats seemed to think they had. The novelty soon wore off as no change was brought to their status and work continued in the same monotonous manner as before.

Workers now and then wear their names on their shirts. Many workers become identified by the distinct type and color of the clothing they wear.

I described above the conveyor system and the hostility of the workers to it. There are some other aspects to this situation. Previously, the checkers came to the workers' machines and in a relationship exchanged receipts for the work which the operator created. Now the worker places his work on a conveyor from whence it travels to a central pay point. At various intervals during the week he receives his receipts. The old relationship no longer exists of contact between worker and checker. (This is very satisfactory to the checker.) The old system gave the worker a feeling of individual contact with the recipients of his work. The worker is angry at the new system and demands that the old relation be established. He insists that he be paid for his work at his machine. His reason is that otherwise he is cheated of some of his day's work. But this is no more the case than usual. The company goes to extremes to see no one is cheated. The new system as stated proves in many

rein to these instincts.

Many workers seek relief from tension of the shop on their off hours by working on their cars. Cleaning and polishing them. Tinkering with the motor and other parts. Workers continually paint and fix up their own homes.

But here too they feel that something is missing. They may interrupt such a project for weeks because they have lost interest and, unless they force themselves to finish, it remains undone. Many workers say to their friends in the shop: "When I finish a day's work here I have to go home and do the same thing there."

When a worker sees a new piece of machinery he eyes it with professional skill. "What a piece of machinery that is," he says. His appreciation is not based on a monetary calculation of the machine, but on its performance under his own command.

## **The Community of Labor**

The miserable life in the factory is universal, so when some workers whine and continually complain to their fellow workers, it antagonizes them. Grippers are not liked and wherever possible avoided. The workers say to a gripper: "Don't complain to me. Go tell it to the boss."

The average capable worker respects another good worker. It is his way of building up respect among his fellow workers in recognition of his capabilities. The community of labor brings this forth as part of an unstated code.

Workers have ways of testing each other. Sometimes a whole day will be spent plaguing a worker; for example, putting bluing on his machine, stopping his machine continually, upsetting his tool box, hiding his tools, etc... This is to determine if the worker will squeal to the boss and also to determine if he has a sense of humor and is a good guy.

Often a worker takes satisfaction out of coming to work on a very hazardous day. The initiative is his and he chooses to come as this is one day he is not expected to come to work. Those workers who do come that day find a certain enjoyment out of having arrived, especially if there are workers absent. There is then a certain camaraderie or light-heartedness apparent.

Workers in each department visit the toilet for a smoke and rest at certain periods during the day. No one has set the time, but in my department, we have set a custom of our own. The day is divided into sections. First smoke is at 10:00 A.M., second is at 2:00 P.M. At these specific times, some of the other workers will be there and there is company to talk with.

When a worker moves from one factory to another, a temporary feeling of being lost seizes him, and unsureness of whether he will be able to make good on the next job. One day in the new plant among the workers again and his confidence in himself and his ability immediately returns.

plant for five minutes. Everyone seizes the opportunity to smoke. Remarks of this kind can be heard: "I'd like to go right home," or "I wish we would stay out till quitting time."

Ten workers from my department are settled around the table at lunch time. As the half hour period ends, one worker states adamantly: "Let's stay here (cafeteria) and not go down to work. We work hard. What can they do to us if we stay?"

There is an old popular phrase used on payday, "Another day, another dollar".

When payday comes, the locker-room buzzes as though a faucet was turned on. This one day of the week, there is whistling, chattering, and lively activity. The thing for which the workers have struggled all week has arrived, so it is natural that they should justify their suffering by the "good old pay check."

On the other hand, there is at certain times in the worker a psychological drive to remain in the plant. As we know, a worker spends most of his waking hours in the plant or at his labor. His life, therefore, revolves around this activity. His subconscious becomes overwhelmed with facts and thoughts concerning machine, workers, bosses, regularity of work hours, and incessant repetition. When out of the shop, he breathes a little more like a man. His home is more like the expression of his life. When the break occurs in the work and he has his weekend, for a fleeting moment he has loosened himself from the effects of the shop. Then crash! He must reorient himself back on Monday to the same old routine. The mental strain at many times is immense. This was much more so during the war when in many instances the work day was 12 hours, 6 and 7 days a week. As a result, having become acclimated to the shop, there were times he would rather remain than leave. The longer hours a worker puts in, the easier it is to drag him still further in the work day. There is a converse to this. As the work day shortens, and the work week correspondingly, the worker then begins to want a still shorter working period.

Once we were going back to a 40 hour week. I have heard many comments on this. The greater part of them are statements to the effect that these workers are very happy about it. They hate to lose the overtime pay (as they need it badly) but since the initiative was not theirs, they feel that they are not cutting their own throats. As I have heard it: "I won't ask for overtime. If the company gives it to me, I will work, but I hope there is no overtime." Speaking of overtime, workers sometimes resent other workers refusing overtime, because they are afraid that it will jeopardize their own overtime. They do not want overtime but are forced to take it by economic necessity.

Then I have heard rambling conversations. One worker says, "Let's work 6 hours a day, 5 days." Another says: "While you are wanting, how about 2 hours a day, 4 days a week?"

## **There Must Be a Better Way of Making a Living Than This**

There exists today in the factory an attitude which was not apparent before the war. As stated by the workers, it goes, "There must be a better way of making a living than this." It is a distinct change. Several business suggestions have been bandied back and forth. Opening a tavern, ice cream parlor, launderette, etc. No one of the workers could finance it alone, so for a while they spoke about partnerships, but then gave that up. They feel the closeness of their economic position.

I have noticed the trend amongst the workers to speak more and more in terms of security. How it can be gotten, etc. There is a strong attitude prevalent to the effect that the worker gets pushed around too much on the job. They think in terms of a year or two at the present job. "When production really gets under way it will be a short time before the ware-houses are flooded." In short, they expect bust. Every time a four day work week is scheduled, the workers speak as if the depression is already here. On the other hand, when they are sure of a full week's work, some workers will take a day off.

The married worker with a family feels that the single worker who supports himself only, cannot be too responsible. He arrives at this conclusion this way. Factory life is drudgery. Anyone who is not forced by necessity to endure it, is one who will at any moment up and leave or be irresponsible on the job. It is not uncommon to hear one worker say to another, "Why do you stay in the factory? If I was single, I would be out of here long ago."

One of the inspectors told me he is going into business. Day after day he gets up at the same time, goes through the same routine, and comes home. He says he refuses to take it any longer. This monotonous procedure is getting him down. He does not want to spend his life this way. He had best make a break before he gets old. He does not care if he loses all his savings, at least he will be free for a while. He was in the marines and did picket duty during the strike. I told him he was doomed to the factory and he became very upset. He took a month's leave of absence, failed, and then came back.

Workers often change jobs in the hope of finding conditions better in another situation. Often they will even take less pay if a certain job appears to offer peace of mind. It is apparent now though that conditions of work everywhere are the same. A change of jobs may bring a novelty, but it wears off in a week or so.

## **The Wife and Kids**

The worker cannot express even to himself the real meaning of his suffering. When he arrives home, he finds that his wife, after a hard day's work in the home, often does not show any interest in his problems. His realization of this makes him at times resent the fact that he cannot even unburden himself to his wife. He often talks to his kids about his work though. Not so they will

routine and once again he feels the same dissatisfaction. Many workers express the hope to get into the tool room, but even in the tool room the work has been broken down into routine operations. One of the highest skilled men in my department is a set-up man. He does a variety of jobs in the course of the day, changing set-ups, devising fixtures, etc. Yet he is bored with his work. He says: "If you think this is such a good job you can have it. I'm fed up with it."

During the war, there arose a type of worker creativity known as a "Government Job." I don't think there is a worker who at some time or another has not made a "Government Job." It was always natural to observe a worker making something for himself during working hours. Hundreds of thousands have made rings, lockets, tools, and knick-knacks. If the foreman or boss would come over and ask "what are you doing?", the reply was "a Government Job." Many beautiful things were made and the workers used to show them to each other. This has carried over and it appears that it will remain. The term applies to anything the worker makes for himself on company time. But it also appears that the workers today don't have as much patience for this type of work and something more is needed.

The worker doesn't want to know how to do many things just for the sake of doing them. One worker will refer to another as a good all-round man. He would also like to be one but even that is not enough.

At lunch time, workers will often discuss how a job could be done more efficiently from beginning to end. They will talk about what stock to use, how to machine it, how to do certain operations on various machines with various set-ups. But they never get a chance to decide how and why things should be one. However, if they can't use all they know, they try to use some of it.

In order to make production, many workers devise ingenious adaptations. Some change gears when the foreman is not about. Some make special tools and fixtures for their machines to make it easier for themselves. They keep these improvements secret so the company doesn't benefit. At times they help each other and at other times they do not.

The other day the worker on the next machine devised something of skilled nature to better his machine performance. He insisted on showing it to me and explaining to me what he had done. He was pleased with his accomplishment but was frustrated that there were no others he could show it to.

Operators on steel-cutting machines have desires to speed up R.P.M.'s on them and then increase the feed to the maximum cut to see how far they can go. This is characteristic on lathes, boring mills, etc. I've done the same myself many times. Although destruction may result, the workers seek in this way, completely to master the machine.

Since the workers are unable, in the shop, to express fully their creative instincts, outside the factory and in the home, they seek to give free

surface, but a desire for recognition and a chance for exploitation of one's own capabilities.

In factories where different classifications of work are set up, workers confine themselves to their own classifications. For example, a machine operator runs the machine, the laborer sweeps and cleans, lifts, etc. This is usually the case. I have noticed, however, the distinct tendency on the part of workers to break these classifications by doing work not in their jurisdiction, so to speak. An operator does some laboring work, etc. This infraction of the rules is done on the workers' own initiative. That is, they take on the added tasks as long as they do it of their own accord. If the company orders them to do these things, immediately the men rebel and refuse. It is almost impossible to stop them when they decide of themselves.

Seniority regulations of the union very often prevent workers with real qualifications from getting ahead. For instance there are workers with a few years of experience who have outdistanced old time workers in ability and imagination. This is traced fundamentally to the type of technical and academic training they have received in the modern school system. I have heard even workers with seniority talk about how the seniority system is a brake on production. At the same time they would fight against the company's trying to override seniority. They are in a contradiction because they realize that workers need seniority as a defense and yet feel that such defensive measures do not allow the best productive talents of the workers to emerge. The workers say that if they had the opportunity in the ranks to decide who should be upgraded, they would be able to make better choices.

The last several months have shown signs of a swift development in the workers. They are stirred and moved by a deep unrest. They want a better life in the factory. Their desire to solve the frustrating contradictions of production can be seen everywhere. For example the worker who, sick to his stomach from the stench of his machine, shuts it down and shouts "To hell with my classification. I can 't stand it. I am going to clean out this goddamn machine."

## **The Creativity of the Workers**

When a worker has the opportunity to sneak away, he investigates the other sections of the plant. Rarely does this happen. The longing to vision the whole of which he is a part is never satisfied. He does not get to know the routine and full mechanics of the next departments. When he can, the worker will stop at a machine which intrigues him, pick up a piece of work and comment on it. He will question the operator about it. An exceptional yearning can be seen in the watchful eyes of those whose job it is to perform some sort of laboring or unskilled manual task. It is not uncommon to hear one worker say to another, "Boy, that job's a good one to have."

However, when a worker is upgraded, the new job soon becomes

understand, but as a release for himself.

At other times, his wife is the only one to whom the worker can unburden himself. Many workers' wives know as much about the factory their husband is employed in as do workers in the shop. Over the supper table the many pressures which fell on the worker that day come out. Perhaps a fight with the foreman, some spoiled work, or trouble with the machine. If during the day the worker has made some creative work or found himself able to deal with some troublesome problem on the machine, he will report it to his wife in glowing terms.

Many times the worker awakens on a non-work day with the impression that it is a working day. Saturday or Sunday for instance. He wakes up with a start, not having set the alarm and frantically realizes he is late. The shop is ever in his subconscious.

About getting up in the morning, there is a technique which most workers use against being late. The dock is set and placed about 5 or 10 feet away. To shut it off, it is necessary to get out of bed and walk, stumble, and what have you, to the dock. This process insures the workers waking enough to realize it is time to get up. When the dock is placed next to the bedside, it is a common occurrence to reach out, stop the alarm, rest a few minutes and then wake up late for work. This provokes haste and nervous stomach, upset in the family, etc.

Often the wife must do the waking up at five or six in the morning. This adds to the trials of her day as she has to wake up a short time later for the kids. Many times home life is disrupted by this series of events. It results in early morning quarrels and arguments with the husband leaving for work without his lunch pail. Also a cause of this disruption in family life is the shift work. The third shift from 12 :00 to 7 :00 A.M. is the worst. Some call it the nightmare shift. The family can rarely get together and looks longingly for weekends. The worker gets home at the beginning of day and tries to sleep with the kids running around. He gets irritated at the kids and yells at his wife for not keeping them quiet. He works hard all night to come home to this.

Both second and third shifts prevent the husband and wife from sharing in a rational and human manner the normal intimacies of life.

Many young workers think of a new baby in the family in terms of support, or will they make enough to take care of it. If a slip occurs, the chain grows tighter. Many workers resort to having abortions for their wives. I know one such case in the shop where the woman became critically ill as a result and still suffers from the effects. This family already has two children. They like infants. The only apparent reason for the abortion was economic insecurity.

After supper, sitting in the living room, it is a matter of minutes before falling off in an exhausted sleep on the parlor chair. Here is the way it is told. "I put the radio on. I heard the announcer state the 'Lux radio for the evening,' and that is all. I woke up a few hours later. Stiff neck and backache

and flopped into bed.”

Here are some other aspects of home life. Many workers say, “I’ve already got my ice-box filled with beer. I generally drink a half a dozen bottles before going to bed.” Or, “Relaxing with a bottle of beer.”

Taking a ride on non-work days, a worker many times will deliberately avoid those streets which lead him to work. He comes to dislike all those buildings and landmarks which line the route to the factory. Or he will many times deliberately ride this circuit up to the plant and past, precisely because he is free to do so on this one day.

On the other hand, workers have often made it a point to bring their whole family down to the plant site on a Sunday. There they explain to the family what section of the plant is their working area.

The worker tries to bring a bit of his home into the factory, so he often shows to other workers the pictures which he carries in his wallet of his children. Sometimes it is the home in which he lives. It is not unusual for snapshots of all kinds to be on the inside cover of a worker’s toolbox. One fellow had a snapshot of a filling station which he once owned, and another of his automobile.

In spite of the fact that workers continually go on strike, during periods when such is not the case, the attitude prevailing is one which would seemingly prevent a strike. Workers continually refer to the fact that they have a wife and kids and have responsibilities. They say, “I can’t afford to be out of work or go on strike. If you were married, you would know and understand.”

It is very difficult to reach workers at certain periods. To picture this point clearly we can say that the workers have drawn back into themselves to think things out. Events as they unfold are the lever which periodically brings forth these thoughts into actions. The average worker has too much responsibility to be persuaded by words alone.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Since the War Ended**

#### **The Speed-Up**

At the time of the telephone strike, in the spring of 1947, we got an eleven and a half cents raise. Machines have been speeded up again to get it back. Most workers said when we got the raise that the company would take it out of our hide.

The worker used to be able to smoke more often. Now he has to spend all day watching, changing and cleaning tools. The interludes are briefer. The end of the day produces a more exhausted worker, mentally and physically. The moments of relaxation are continually diminishing.

plant. This job often consists of several workers pushing about large skids of steel. It is plain to see that the foreman over that groups feels that these workers are holding back. He constantly, in moments of impatience, lends his own strength to pushing the skids. The workers distinctly resent this. They do not mind when I, another worker, help them. When I add my weight, the skid of steel rolls smoothly. This may mean that only another worker is needed. But from the look on the faces of the steel gang, it might also seem that they had adjusted their strength to keeping the skid moving at a slow pace.

A laborer one day confided in me the following: “You know, kid, being a laborer is really an art. The idea is not to be around when you are needed. There is a way to time all this, and the clever laborer need not exhaust himself.”

I will add that this may have been much more true during the war. It appears that since some have been laid off, the laborers must work harder. But when the opportunity presents itself, the laborer will still seize it to lighten his load.

As the tempo of work increases and the oppression of the worker becomes greater, at a certain point in the process a change comes over the worker. At the moment the machine is inflicting its greatest damage on him, and when he is reaching the bottom depths of his despair, a sudden sense of defiance and then freedom envelopes him. This happens at rare moments but leads inevitably to lowering the productivity of labor as it exists under the present factory setup.

On the other hand, I have seen workers almost wear themselves into the ground trying to put out an extra number of pieces purely from the desire to see how much they could do. In these instances, there was no extra money involved. In contradiction to this, workers will deliberately burn out tools in the machine at quitting time, by turning off the lubricant. Sometimes this is done to chastize the incoming worker for something ill-natured he has done.

#### **The Division of Labor**

The worker labors under contradictions. He may often wish to help another worker in some task, but because of the classifications and the fear of risking the resentment of his fellow workers, he refrains from doing so.

At the same time there is the ever present threat of the company using the worker’s action against him in attempts to further the amount of work a man must do.

The wage scales and classifications in the shop are extremely numerous. It is a continual battle to reach a higher classification and more money, with one worker competing against another. Much anger is generated between workers and against the company over upgrading or promotions to new jobs. Every time a new job is open, a bitter wrangle takes place. It is not predominantly a question of the nickel raise involved, as it may seem on the

At the time of the telephone strike, the workers were amazed at the militancy of the girls in that strike. Accounts of the picket line struggles were widely read by the workers. Their comments were: "Those girls sure have plenty of guts. Why they are fighting every one from the company to the State and local governments. It sure is a surprise to me."

## CHAPTER 7

### The Contradiction in the Factory

#### Lowered Productivity of Labor

I had discussions with several workers on the lowered productivity of labor. Worker "R" agrees. Especially concerning the assembly lines. Says workers do not want to exist as slaves. Says production could be upped 20% or 30% if workers were given a free hand. Complains of the insuperable number of obstacles which a worker encounters during the day. Says if all red tape and annoying supervisory help were eliminated, and if workers ingenuity were allowed full play, production could be considerably upped. He says it is very difficult to know what the individual worker thinks as he isolates himself mentally in many respects from his fellow worker. He does not often say what he thinks. He says workers hold back on their production and never give their fullest.

#### Just Putting in Time

I spoke with two other workers on the same subject. One worker says production could be doubled. The other is in doubt. Seems to think it means more work for the workers. I approached the subject on the basis of a 4 hour day, 5 day week and asked if that goal was possible. I tried to impress them with a plant-wide conception of cooperation. I explained what was in reality workers' control. One said that during the war in his section of the plant, the fellows used to knock out work fast deliberately and then spend a few hours in horse-play. They enjoyed themselves and at the same time got the work out. He claims the mental attitude was entirely different then. Now the monotony is extremely evident. It is just a question of putting in time. He resents the pressure of the foreman when the production norm is completed and he is kidding around. The foreman, it seems, cannot stand workers being idle even though the norm has been filled. (The other worker in reference to this noted that the miners had not been paid for a full days work in their walk-out, although the production quota for the day had been filled.) He spoke of the many skilful tricks applied by workers during the war.

The steel gang distributes steel wherever it is needed throughout the

On the other hand, the more the machine is speeded up, the more times the worker seeks to leave his machine even though this increases the chances of the machine's cracking up.

Workers in many departments now run 3 and 4 machines where previously a worker ran one. This keeps a worker jumping and on his toes. Invariably during every day someone will speak of his exhaustion.

A worker on a high speed automatic machine said: "I am geared up at a high speed pitch to run a fast machine. Kept busy piling up the work, loading and putting new tools in. If I was to be put on a slower machine, I couldn't stand the change of pace. At the same time it would be a vacation compared to the fast one I run."

#### I Dropped Dead

The shop has the incentive system. The company appears to cheat workers here and there out of parts of their bonus. Many ask "Why do they do this?" The computations of the bonus become complicated especially when time cards are given to workers. The company is often accused of ripping up time cards that were given to workers.

One worker went into a long, heated talk against the incentive system. Spoke of how a man has to exhaust himself to reach or go over the established norm. Also a normal day's work would relieve tension and is enough to expect from a worker. He stated vehemently that he would like to throttle the inventor of the bonus or incentive system.

When the operators fail to make bonus by the end of the day, they climax it with the expression, "I dropped dead." The essence is that the worker exhausted himself to no avail.

#### To Produce or Not to Produce

The machines are speeded up about 40%. The workers are caught in a contradiction. To continue to produce at that rate might soon put them out of work. The workers are divided on the subject. Some think that it matters little, and that when the big bust comes, it will hit them anyway. Others quietly begin to lower their production per day. The work, intensifying in pressure, also drives more workers to reduce their daily quota. To produce or not to produce under these conditions is the question. The cost of living soars upward, compelling the worker to produce in order to make extra money on incentive with which to meet his daily needs.

When time-study men are about, the worker will find a multitude of reasons for shutting the machine down. A resentment of large proportions grows as he sees the man from the office with the dock in his hand. It is then that he uses all the tricks he knows to slow down the machine and also his own action. The time-study man is unwanted in the shop. Every- where he

goes, resentment-filled eyes follow him. He is aware of this, and many times is almost apologetic, at other times surly.

### **The Company Checks Up**

Relations between checker and worker have always been a strained affair. The worker always attempting to cheat, the checker always feels sure the worker is putting something over on him. Of course, the checker's personality becomes molded to his job and he becomes more or less of a "bastard" to the workers. He counts their work to see that they are not cheating, which they resent. However, the workers cheat at every opportunity by stealing work after collection or by deliberate miscount to the checker. Stealing pans of work from the company is an art which many practice. The worker in the morning will steal a pan of work. If in the afternoon, the checker accidentally should give him a miscount on a few pieces, he gets angry and demands the few pieces, even though they mean little.

On some machines, counters were placed to determine whether the worker was stealing work, and to determine the amount of cycles the machine made. A cycle is equivalent to one finished piece of work. It is clear that every means will be used to get the utmost out of the men.

The company is now checking the usage of electric power the last 15 minutes before quitting time. Many workers having reached their quota by then, shut down. It appears as though the company wants to determine the amount of labor they are not receiving.

### **The Worker Double Checks**

The worker becomes a bookkeeper and carefully calculates his day's percentage, checking it against company receipts to see that he is not cheated. He does the same with his paycheck every week. He is consumed with anger if the company has shorted him.

The plant took inventory this week. Many workers including laborers, machinists, heat-treat, grinders, etc., participated. For the past several months workers have been stealing pans of work to fill their bonus needs. Obviously, there will be a shortage of tens of thousands of pieces in inventory. The workers found the situation quite humorous.

We are on production in our department. One hundred percent is the norm you are told to achieve. It takes all day to reach that. It is generally in the last three quarters of an hour that you make your bonus. What has happened is this. The checker comes around to close the worker out just about then. Many lose their bonus because the checker comes too early. There have been some violent flare-ups on this score. Once a worker came around and told the others not to turn in their work until quitting time. However, there is a contradiction involved. The workers are told to shut down early but yet hate

having left deep impressions on them. Navy veterans attempt to strike up acquaintances with other Navy veterans. The same for the army G.I.. The bulk of them still wear their service clothes in the shop. The reason they give is: "They are good work uniforms." It appears that there is more than that to it. It seems to serve as a link by which they continue the bond between them. Often G.I. terms are used in describing the factory. The regimentation of the armed forces is compared with that of the factory. Battle fatigue is called machine fatigue or "Acme" fatigue (the Acme is a type of automatic machine). Sounds of the shop are compared with those they have heard in service. When the plant siren goes off, it becomes an air raid. Dinner time and pay time become the moment to whistle bugle calls for mess and pay-time as it is done in the service.

The antagonisms towards the officer caste are transmitted back into the factory towards the boss and supervision.

The factory is called a steel jungle to be compared some way or other to the islands of the Pacific.

### **The Women in the Shop**

The outbreak of the war brought many women into the factory. I have seen many women operate machines which I have run. In one factory, they were employed as crane operators. The job required a great degree of sensitivity in the lifting of huge sections of steel throughout the factory. Women proved to be particularly able in this. I have seen them swing a heavy load of steel down the length of the factory and skillfully place it exactly where it was wanted. There were many women on grinding machines in this factory during the war. Today I know of but one or two.

The factory seems to have given a sort of assuredness to many of the women workers. The shop counteracts to some degree the unequal status between men and women in society generally. Although very few women attend union meetings, those who do show a surging desire to express themselves. Some think the union is the affair of the men and are afraid to interfere. Others think that the women don't stick together like the men. I had a talk with a woman worker in the shop one day. She was extremely scornful of the men in the factories of the Eastern states. She claimed: "they are all puny, no doubt from factory life, and do not compare with the healthy men of the Southwestern states and the wide open country. What's more, I'll equal and double anything any of you men do. I have held down three jobs at one time already." She was belligerent in trying to establish an equal status with the men.

The relations between the sexes are completely distorted by capitalism. Certain women in the shop are labeled as women who can be slept with. Whenever a woman goes down the aisle, whistles, cat-calls and phrases fly down after her.

there is no chance for individuality in such a set-up. And, besides, how can a fellow make a million bucks if he wants to. The worker also thinks that the communist wants half of whatever you've got. Half of your cigarette, and half of any and all your possessions.

In spite of this, the worker immediately recognizes the fullest control by the workers as communism.

One day in speaking to the steward, I proposed that departmental meetings be held throughout the plant. I explained that this would give the fullest opportunity to all the sections of the plant to discuss the problems closest to them. This would also make it possible for all conditions and decisions affecting the workers to be subject to the closest control by them. He became furious and said that it was communistic. "You can't let the ranks decide everything like that."

Joe Worker today is an educated individual in that he has usually gone through at least twelve years of grammar and high schools. He has a wide sphere of knowledge and can talk about machinery, autos, politics, government, movies, etc. Enough so as to offer an opinion on any subject which may arise for discussion.

I sat with a group of workers. The discussion went as follows: An ex-G.I. said, "America needs socialized medicine. The army provided medical care for millions. Why not in peacetime? The health of the nation is all-important. All doctors should be conscripted for the health of the nation. They should be paid on the merit system. That is, the most skilled get the most money."

One worker says, "That is communism," The speaker says, "But there is good and bad in all systems and forms of politics, There is much good in communism."

A comparison was made as follows, "If the government can supply police protection, it should also give health protection." The discussion was fully participated in by all the workers at the table. They came to the conclusion that what the young G.I. was talking about was pretty true.

## **The Veteran in the Shop**

Veterans in the shop are now beginning to rehash their wartime experiences. For almost a year they have spoken little about their experiences. Now the past is once more coming to the fore and re-evaluations are made. Men kid each other as war heroes as they tell of incidents. Many tragic happenings are also unfolded. The regimentation of the army was greatly hated by the men. The first acts on the part of the company which are of a regimental nature are immediately compared to the army. The phrase, "I thought I was out of the army," is used.

The veterans have come back into the factory with their experiences

to lose their bonus. Here is how the workers get around this: After the checker has gone, they let the machines run for the next guy, so that when he comes in, lying in the pan will be the work he would normally lose at the end of day. The next man does the same for him.

Some workers spend the last half hour making work for the next fellow. However, there are many workers who don't do so. Caught in the contradictions of company inefficiency, high piece-work rates and the desire to make bonus, the end of the day finds them too exhausted to change tools or to make extra work for the incoming worker. The desire to shut down the machine as soon as possible and to get away from it is always present.

## **Violations**

In our shop there is a set of company rules. If any are broken, it means a violation. Three violations give the company the right to fire you. This can readily be used by the company when seeking to fire someone. One worker once told me, "They can fire you anytime. All they have to do is say your work is scrapped three times or catch you smoking, or coming in I late." (However, this is dependent on the strength of the union.)

The company every once in a while sends a superintendent into the washrooms to catch workers smoking or sitting down. Badge numbers are taken down and a black mark put against your record. The worker resents these sneaky tactics.

Workers have been restricted to machines till the bell rings. Formerly, they were able to go up five minutes or so earlier to the lunch room or at quitting time to the locker room. There is also to be no more eating of lunch at the machines. However, the men are already breaking it down. Violations are given out by the company. The plant superintendent complains that no sooner is the restriction announced than he catches a worker eating a sandwich. He says the worker has the gall to offer him a bite too. One worker was hauled in and threatened with a violation. His reply was, "I will eat three sandwiches and you can give me the three violations and try to fire me."

One worker I know has two violations. He is bitter over such treatment of workers. That is no way to treat your fellow men, he says. I asked him why he signed the violation when he should have fought it with the union. He says that while he was in the office, he was raging inwardly, but it could not be noticed outwardly. He signed it to show the company he was not afraid of them.

The company tries not to antagonize workers who are trouble-makers. Their attitude seems to be that if such a worker is irritated by the company, he will prove to be a greater source of aggravation for the company. Therefore, they attempt wherever possible to placate such workers.

The company has the right to fire workers who have been given

violations. That is, for stealing work, making scrap, being caught smoking etc. Although that is the law, so to speak, the company rarely invokes it. They could not in actuality enforce it. Instead they attempt to irritate the worker into obeying the law.

A worker once was caught stealing a pan of work to make up his bonus needs for the day. Upon being called into the office, he demanded that they should give him his final pay, and if they did not like his work, he would go elsewhere. The company declined to do this, but in order to penalize him, gave him a few days off.

Plant supervision has attempted several times to prevent men from using their half hour lunch to doze off in the locker room stretched out on benches. I used to do this in other plants. The idea is to eat your lunch surreptitiously before the bell and then escape into sleep for one-half hour. The awakening is only that much worse though.

The men often say: "If they were to fire us for all the violations that are committed, there would be no one working in the plant."

### **No Use Giving the Company Something for Nothing**

The worker does not give freely of his fullest abilities. When he deems it necessary, he will cut his production. If he can't make out on the job, he will make sure he goes well under for the week. "No use giving the company something for nothing, as that is what they are looking for," he says. "You're here to work for yourself, not for the company."

There are days when a worker has become particularly irritated at the Company. He vents his anger by putting out less work than usual. Other times, when the company speeds up the machine and increases the norm, a section of workers will tacitly agree to begin a slow down. Such a situation is occurring now in one department. In order to compel the company to reduce the rate, the workers are at present engaged in a daily reduction of their percentage. Since the company has refused by arbitration to reduce the rate, the men are relying on their own actions to compel a change.

The workers feel that strikes merely for wages do not get them anywhere. There is a direct, distinct and often openly voiced sentiment against another strike. However, it is easy to see from day to day, that as a result of the speed-up in the machinery and the increased exploitation, no excuse of wages will be needed for strike justification when the saturation point is reached.

did production increase, but absenteeism fell off almost entirely, and waste almost disappeared. I gave the magazine to one of the shop workers to read. He has been a worker for over fifteen years.

He was particularly struck by the manner in which the workers increased production when they were given a free hand. I present in the following an approximate account of his comments on this article.

"This guy has a lot of common sense. One shop I worked in I was set-up man. I used to stand at the machine and constantly try to devise new adaptations. I had hundreds of ideas. I have lots of them now, but what's the use of trying them out. The next guy would come in and change what I had done. I know ways of grinding tools now which I am positive would make the job easier and more efficient, but if I tried them out as things are everything would get more confused. What those workers have done is pretty good but I don't think we could do the same in our plant. Those engineers don't hold a candle to the guy on the machine. How can they know what we know when we spend hours right on the machine? There are things which it is impossible to learn unless you work at it every day over a period of years." He ended up with an indication that the writer of the article might be a communist.

On January 1, 1947, immediately following the big post-war strike wave, "Collier's Weekly" appeared with an article by Peter Drucker entitled, "What to do About Strikes." I brought the issue into the shop and asked a worker who had been with the company over the past ten years to read it. He had been in the preceding strike and was in a position to understand what Drucker had to say.

He agreed that strikes were "essentially revolts." That the workers were psychologically unemployed in the midst of employment. He had gone through the depression years and remembered well.

"Sure. All that stuff is true," he told me. The deep penetrating unrest that upsets all workers he knew about.

### **The Attitude Toward Radical Workers**

Workers view radical parties this way: Members of a radical organization through various means acquire positions of union leadership. There they agitate, etc. The conception is that it all comes from above. As a result, a gulf arises between the professional radical workers and the rank and file.

During the election, accusations went around that one side was using "Red" tactics in consolidating the Negro vote. Red-baiting has risen to new heights in the past year.

I have often heard workers speak of communists this way. "Communists are guys who don't want to work."

The average worker thinks communism means regimentation. Everybody lives in the same house and wears the same clothes. He says

## 2. "Fellows like me know plenty"

I would like to illustrate concretely the development of some of these long time seniority workers as I have seen and heard it. "Z" is a worker employed 20 years by the company. In the past few months he has come out with some revealing statements. It is clear that through the years he has given many worthwhile suggestions for production to the company, but has not been rewarded satisfactorily for them. One evening during the lunch period he tells a dozen or so workers from the department the following, "I have an idea now that would stop those machines from cracking up. But those sons of -- ain't going to get it for a measly fifty bucks. Either they give me a thousand bucks or they can go f- themselves."

At another time, the same worker angrily says, "While we are sweating our heads off, those bastard bosses are in Florida sunning themselves." He goes on to say, "The plant Super went out at seven and comes back at eleven all tanked up. Now if that son of a bitch said anything to me while I was taking a shower upstairs at eleven-thirty, I would let him have it."

One day a copy of a daily newspaper was lying on one of the work benches. One of the columns concerned itself with the Marshall Plan which is being furthered by the U.S.. A worker with several years seniority was reading it. On the basis of that we got into a discussion of the European problem. These are his approximate words: "It is easy to see that Europe must be united on some sort of plan. These countries fighting with each other for so many years has only brought wars and destruction. They were crazy for trying to destroy German industry. The German workers are some of the most skilled and mechanically minded people in the world. Europe will never recuperate if they don't put the German workers back into the factories."

From there we got into a discussion of our factory. I asked him about the efficiency in our factory and what he and the others with long years of experience about machinery could do if they had the opportunity to put their ideas into practice freely. He replied, "Fellows like me and workers "X", "Y", and "Z" know plenty. What do they, (the company), know about production. They get more in our way than anything. Those engineers, who sit in the office, try to plan out things complicated so that they can keep their jobs. They've got to eat too, you know."

## 3. "Sure, all that stuff is true"

The "Saturday Evening Post" of July 19, 1947, carried an article entitled: "The Union That Dared To Be Different." The article deals with a factory which was on the verge of bankruptcy. In order to forestall the lay-off of hundreds of workers, the union and the company came to an agreement whereby the workers would have the full run of the shop to develop production to a point where the company would be able to remain in business. Not only

## CHAPTER 4 The Inefficiency of the Company

The plant I work in is part of a giant corporation. The network is country-wide. It is a high degree of capitalist organization in industry. However, the bureaucratic supervision of work results in inefficiency on a tremendous scale in view of the effort involved. It appears that the company is sacrificing all for production. It is not so. More production could be gotten in a different manner. The intent is more at the subjugation and control of the laborer.

### Wanton Use of Machinery

The machinery is speeded up to a high degree. As a result there are continuous breakdowns and a large crew of maintenance men is needed. The wanton use of the machinery is everywhere apparent.

A cam will be put in the machine to reduce cutting time. The tools as a result hit at high speed and both burn and break up. As a result of excessive speeds, bearings in the machines bum out, and some machines are always in repair. Such machine speeds induce the worker to say: "Some day these damn machines will take off and fly away."

The machines are geared to certain types of metal. Often the steel put at the machine is of a temper harder than that required. This once again causes burned up and broken tools.

For weeks on end, necessary repairs will not be made. A new hole needs to be tapped in a fixture to keep it secure. A slipping clutch or brake threatens the cracking up of the machine at any time with the added danger to the operator. Nothing is done.

The company is not interested in how many tools are burned up, or how often the men must change them. They are primarily interested in getting the machines to run at maximum speed and then it will be up to the operators to keep up with them.

### "If I Had the Money Spent on This..."

The company continually attempts to cut down on the expense departments, that is, the non-productive departments. The production departments suffer by this and are constantly irritated by having to do incidental errands.

The grinding department has blueprints from which they calculate how to grind up the tools. The worker in his daily experience finds that the blue-print is no good and he asks the grinder to do it his way. The grinder says "okay," and for a while he cooperates with the machine operator. Management hears of this. A big argument takes place. The grinder is told that he is to take orders only from management and to follow the blueprint. He then says:

“You’re the boss,” and does as instructed. What follows would be somewhat funny if it did not add to the troubles of the worker in the shop. The worker is then compelled to go to the crib, get the tool, find the foreman, tell him a change must be made in the tool, get a requisition from the foreman, go to the grinding room, and request the grinder to stop whatever he is doing to grind up the tool he needs. It should be remembered that from the moment the worker goes to the crib for the tool, it has already been ground up once.

A huge conveyor belt has recently been installed throughout the plant. It goes from department to department. Hundreds of steel girders and steel baskets comprise its make-up. The cost ran into thousands of dollars. As far as the workers are concerned it is at this date a failure. The workers are constantly hurting themselves on it. It is in the middle of the machinery and serves as a hazard. The workers are becoming increasingly angry about it.

Whereas before the machine operator stacked up his work in pans and placed them on the floor for a laborer to pick up later, now the men are ordered to place the work on the conveyor. The laborer is now eliminated in this respect. The company had tried to institute this once before, but failed. Many of the workers rebelled at the new system, claiming it was out of their classification, etc. For some days there was a disturbance. Although the new system has proved in some ways more satisfactory, the fact that the men were not consulted and the company arbitrarily instituted it, brought on the revolt.

At this time, a layoff numbering into hundreds has been taking place. The workers contrast the cost of the conveyor and its waste of money and space to this layoff and say that the expense involved could easily have kept all these workers on the job. Many say, “If I had the money spent on this, I could retire for life.” The layoffs have brought on increased labor on the part of those still remaining. The workers all understand and state openly and consistently that the company is trying to cut overhead and expense. These layoffs have affected all but the production departments, i.e., laborers, inspectors, tool room, maintenance, and other non-production.

An incident happened in the shop one day. There was a shortage of laborers due to the layoff. Consequently when the checker came around, he asked the machine operators to load the work onto the conveyor. There was a rebellion expressed thus; “Give them an inch and they want a mile.” As a result, a number of the operators refused to load. The laborers were put back on the job. It is obvious that the company is trying to get the machine operators to do the work of the chip-pullers and laborers as well.

A worker put in a suggestion, asking that the recently installed conveyor be used to carry tools to the machines. The company turned it down. The workers thought it was a good idea, but would fail because there never are enough tools anyway and most of them would be gone before half of the machines had been reached.

into debt. It was tough enough getting out of debt from the pre-war years. I would not be against a strike now as the Company needs production and is no longer getting tax refunds. No one broke the picket lines because the company itself after a while shut down the plants. Had they remained open, there would have been violence and workers would have attempted to bust the picket lines. As it was, very few workers from the plant manned the picket lines.”

It should be stated here, that from the accounts of the strike ballots taken during the 1946 strike wave, the majority of workers overwhelmingly voted strike.

## **1. “If I worked here as long as you have...”**

Throughout the years the process of production has steadily been working on these old workers and has produced an explosive latent force in them. More than all the other sections of the workers, they have been subjected to a steady and uninterrupted education and development by capitalist production. All the contradictions are there.

Their years of service in one factory have created in them a feeling or attitude of having a vested interest in the plant. This is expressed by other workers thus, “If I worked here as long as you have, I would want to own the factory.” The manner in which these workers move about the factory indicates an attitude of ownership. The assuredness with which they move from department to department can be seen even in the way in which they walk.

The apparent inability of the union to solve their problems, the seemingly tremendous power of the boss, have contributed to making these workers cynical and conservative. Many sections of them become out and out company men. The company is forced to be lenient in one respect or another towards these workers because they know the ins and outs of the plant thoroughly. However, this does not prevent periodic explosions.

One worker with the company 25 years collided head on with an overhead guard. In a blaze of fury he got a hack-saw and began to saw it down. In his anger he was shouting, “Let them fire me.” Then followed a string of invective and abuse at the company. It is odd because he is a company man.

On one particularly hot evening, another worker with ten years seniority says to a group of fellows, “Let’s f- them all and not go back into the plant.” He then says decisively, “What the hell can they do to us?” Immediately following his statement an extremely funny scene occurred. The assembled workers began to imitate the foreman pleading with them to get back to work. One of them, assuming the identity of the foreman says, “Please, fellows. Please go back to work, Please,” The other workers immediately burst out into loud laughter.

continually broke this down and attempted to discuss the general social problems in relation to them and the new ideas and experiences they have gained as a result of the war.

From my observations of the shop in respect to the Negro workers, it is clear that some dynamic leaders from their ranks are needed. They have little respect for the white trade unionists and feel they are being used. Leaders must come from their ranks with a far-reaching program.

There is a tremendous ferment among the Negro workers. White workers know this. There is an intimation of fear among some white workers as to what the Negro may do. At the same time many white workers respect and understand the position of the Negro in the factory as well as the Negro himself. The Negro worker feels the impending depression. He burns fiercely within. He knows he will be the first to be put on the chopping block. He feels that now is the only opportunity he has to strike back somehow, some way, in the organized labor movement. The threat of impending strikes is welcomed by him. He less than others can afford the loss of pay, but he first of all will vote strike.

### **The Attitude of the Conservative Worker**

There is in the factory today a stratum of workers which over a period of years has accumulated a high seniority. That is, these workers have spent several years in the same industrial plants. During this time they have observed and experienced various union regimes. More so than transitory workers, they have seen union leaderships develop into various patterns and effects. They are aware of the class collaborationist activities of the union bureaucrats. Bureaucratism has left a mark on them. This group of workers which represents a large section of the American labor movement, is acutely aware of the rottenness of present day society. They harbor a deep and abiding hatred of the industrial ruling class. They are wise to its maneuvers, tricks and abuses of the workers. At the same time, not having a fundamental grasp of the economic laws governing society, many believe that the capitalist class is all-powerful. They lean more to this conclusion as they see the trade union bureaucracies continually capitulate.

One old seniority worker said that the old workers were against the strike. Many claimed that the union leadership in the International had juggled the votes and called out the men when they should not have. One such worker claimed that, "those who were for the strike were the new War workers who had never been in industry before. They did not know what our conditions of work were before the war. I was not against a strike as a strike, but against it being called when it was called. The company was being reconverted and was getting back tax refunds from the government. We were licked before we started. We used up all our savings in the strike and many of us had to go back

### **Management Complains**

Management complains continually that the workers do not cooperate. They don't clean the machines or sweep the floor. There are seventy accidents in one month in one department. Safety meetings are held once a month for one half hour following lunch. At the meetings, management attempts to superimpose the company's safety staff as a counter to the union apparatus. The workers are exhorted to bring their complaints to this safety committee. To stimulate worker's participation they appoint three shop workers as the first rung of the safety committee. Thereafter the committee consists of the company engineers and personnel.

The safety meetings are conducted by the company. A speech is generally given by the foreman for most of the allotted half hour. The last few minutes are left open for discussion by the ranks. If a worker or two speaks about something unimportant, they are patiently listened to. If, however, the men are in an uproar and begin jumping up to complain about this, that, or the other thing and the meeting runs away, it is immediately adjourned, and the company says: "Back to the machines, men, we have work to do."

These are some of the reactions of the workers to the safety committee meetings.

1. "Oh boy, another half hour to rest."
2. "What kind of safety meeting is this? All they did was yell at the porters."
3. Some doze off during meetings.
4. The foreman and superintendent always say: "The men are negligent and don't cooperate with the safety committee."
5. You are told to get enough sleep, not to drink, and to eat the right foods.
6. The men snicker sometimes.
7. The company maintains they are doing everything to help the men.

At one meeting the company stated: "We now have enough laborers to keep the plant clean, now do your part." Not long after, half the laborers were laid off. It seems to the workers that the company doesn't know its plans from one week to the next.

### **Why Such Inefficiency?**

One grievance condition in the plant has existed for over a year. Heavy smoke from the heat-treating furnaces periodically covers the plant. This has been brought up in almost every committee meeting. The condition still exists. One worker says: "Someday, we are going to do something about this."

One day a worker is hauled into the office for making a pile of scrap work. They want to know why. His reply is this: "The lighting is poor. Those bulbs on the machine become coated with oil and I can't see. My eyes become strained looking into the machine and it was impossible to see what

I was doing.”

Inefficiency and red tape on the part of the company often drive the worker to the point of a combination of tears and anger. A shortage of tools at a critical moment, an improperly ground tool, a faulty machine left unrepaired and endangering the worker, help not around when needed, stock for the machines left not at the machine for which it is needed but ten machines down where it is not needed; passing the buck down the line when something goes wrong all contribute to the aggravating situation.

Workers often say:

“Why such inefficiency?”

“The company lost a day’s work because of a lack of a piece of chain costing about 75 cents.”

“Why are there no washers? Can’t the company afford it?”

“It is getting so that supervision don’t give a damn about anything.”

Many workers become angry because of the fact that suggestions which they put in are ignored. These suggestions would add to efficiency and also increase production as well as save money.

There is a general tendency in all strata of the working class to work in as efficient a manner as possible. Also, workers feel pride when a plant is operated efficiently. The more complex and efficient the plant, the greater pride the worker experiences. The more conservative workers, i.e., the ones on higher paying and better jobs, those who have a perspective of going out on their own, or those who feel there is a chance for advancement, constantly seek and strive to make for more efficient operation. On the other hand, the majority of the workers face a frustrating contradiction. They feel their oppressed status and consciously and unconsciously struggle against it. They realize that any increase in efficiency is a further exploitation and oppression. As a result, they constantly have to struggle to maintain a balance between good and efficient workmanship and their class interests.

The company tries to increase production by every mechanical means. Management talks much about the human factor in production but it cannot conceive that the human factor lies in the collective capacities of the workers themselves.

### **The Violent Reaction of the Worker**

The conditions of life in the factory often drive the worker into a fury. If windows supplying vital ventilation are closed, he will like as not pick up a piece of steel and break the window. That is the way I have seen it time and again.

In the toilets, water will deliberately be left running at full force when no one is using the sink. Fixtures are dismantled and doors broken.

I have seen workers methodically tear apart sections of machinery lying about and throw them away.

it’s all or nobody. They demand that the issue be fought out at the dance hall with everyone in attendance. One Negro seems to have an Uncle Tom attitude. He does not wish to battle it out, but requests that the dance be held elsewhere with the union taking a loss. He is willing to pay assessment of 5 dollars to other members’ 2 dollars, to make up the deposit loss. An F.E.P.C. is proposed to prevent such occurrences. Other Negroes speak up against discrimination on the job. The one Negro with the Uncle Tom attitude has a favored position in the plant. He is one of the handful of Negroes who is doing a skilled machine job, and he fought his way up during the war.

Only one Negro girl attends the dance but leaves soon after, being completely isolated. The Negro workers deliberately shunned this dance. It was their way of keeping their self-respect.

The white unionist feels that every man in the shop has his job to do. He is hired for a certain job, and that is what he should do. He thinks that the Negro worker should carry on in the same way. He does not however realize that it is precisely the fact that the Negro has his job to do and no other, which angers the Negro.

### **4. Negro Leadership**

In spite of the overwhelming Jim-Crow attitude in the plant, a Negro ran for vice-president. This worker was to some degree set off from the other Negro workers because of the fact that he was one of the few who during the war was upgraded. His being on a job of a somewhat skilled nature developed in him what some of the other Negroes called a superiority complex which they resented. In spite of this, their desire for representation was so strong that he received the bulk of the Negro vote. This I learned from a number of Negro workers themselves.

A young Negro worker in the shop told me he used to be a leader in the Young Communist league but resigned. He resented the Communist Party putting up puppet leaders. He is against a third party and for a distinct labor party. He says that all the capitalist Negro organizations are no good. The Negro will never gain his freedom under capitalism. He belongs to the N.A.A.C.P. He says that the capitalists absorb militant Negroes when they break through the surface. He has utter contempt for those Negroes who have been selling out their people. He claims that the Negro aristocracy thrives on segregation and directly continues to promote it for themselves. He says it is up to the Negroes to lead themselves. The distrust of the whites has left no alternative.

The Negro attendance at union meetings is small. It seems that the Negro worker feels that the union is incapable of solving his larger problems of equality and universal freedom. This was graphically illustrated one day in a discussion between me, a friend and several Negro workers. My friend tried to keep the discussion on the trade union level, but the Negro workers

Negro workers have the amazing ability to be able to determine on sight the model, make, and year of most any car. In the shop, the laborers who handle the chips from the machine know more about the quality of steel being used on various machines, and the piece numbers being run on different machines than most of the operators. They are able to distinguish on sight the part number of a score or more types of work. I have been told that in Detroit the best auto drivers, recognized as such by the workers as a whole, are the Negroes.

The day the Negro has the opportunity to unfold all his talents will be the day when the community as a whole will benefit.

### **3. The Negro and the White Worker**

The workers have many confused and contradictory reactions. In relation to the Negro, it manifests itself in many ways. The Negro as a result is under a terrible pressure in the shop. He does not know when or where he will suddenly hear some degrading remark. Some examples of those Jim Crow expressions are given here with the notation that the same worker could make the same statements in one day. E.g.: "The Niggers buy the best of everything when they buy. The best cars and furnishings and clothes." Then the opposite: "The Niggers never have brakes or windows on their cars." Also: "The Niggers bring down rents and they are dirty."

In the plant, the white and Negro workers eat in the same cafeteria. Outside the factory, when some of these same white workers go into a restaurant where the same Negro workers are eating, they walk out.

When something is lost or stolen, the first people thought of are the colored porters and laborers. When things are missing, you can be sure it either dropped into the oil, or another machine operator appropriated it. However, the white worker instantly thinks the Negro took it. Vicious anti-Negro elements capitalize on these instances for the company and try to drive a deeper wedge between the workers.

Racial tension reaches a climax at various times. Once it exploded in a battle between a Negro and a white worker. The white taunted the Negro. The two went outside and the Negro was beat up. Back in the plant the white worker continued taunting and chasing the Negro. Suddenly the Negro stopped, picked a bar of iron up, and floored the white worker. Later, in an inquiry, the white worker took full blame and absolved the Negro. Company stooges used the incident to bring out every backward prejudice of white workers.

The following is an example of how these contradictions manifest themselves in the union. A union dance was organized. The dance committee chairman deliberately tried to arrange a Jim Crow dance by distortedly citing a local law, (which was unconstitutional anyway) to the effect that there could be no mixed dancing. It was made clear to the Negro workers that they were not wanted. Several workers take the floor and condemn the dance stating

The conveyor has large steel baskets which hang from the chain belt. Periodically a dozen or so must be repaired. It seems that the workers twist the baskets as they go by, swing them back and forth, and in general mutilate them.

I have heard workers say that they wish that their machine would break up mechanically so that they would not have to run it.

There is the destructive fury manifested by the worker throwing a piece of work at the machine when it does not function properly. He bitterly curses the "God dam machine."

Another worker slipped with his wrench and cut himself. He hurled the wrench on the floor in anger. This same worker during the same day had machine trouble. His anger reached new heights. He cursed the machine, the company, the foreman and kept shouting he was going to quit.

Going off the shift, a worker spits at his machine and curses the company and anybody in earshot.

A "Hammer Merchant" is a worker who uses a sledge hammer to adjust the fixtures on his machine. Instead of loosening the bolts keeping the fixture tight, he resorts to such activity as using the hammer in order to save him time on production. Over a period of time the machinery becomes mutilated. Many workers resent such a destruction of the machine and it causes arguments among them.

I once had trouble with a machine and said to the worker next to me, "If I owned this machine, I'd break it up." I was very irritated at the time. He replied, "Don't break your own machine but break this one, it belongs to the company."

### **The Dilemma of the Foreman**

The position of the foreman is an extremely tenuous one. He is caught between two fires. He has to force the worker to produce as his job hinges on it. The pressure upon him from above is very heavy. An important slip on his part would mean his being broken. Those who are above him deliberately divorce themselves as much as possible from daily contact with the workers. This task they place upon the foreman and the first rank of supervisory help. Any difficulty the foreman has with workers is taken out on him. At the same time, there is the immense amount of red-tape and buck passing of responsibility which finally puts the whole burden of something not done upon the worker himself. In the words of the worker, "Before you get something done around here you could drop dead."

All this, having its effect upon the foreman, produces a tense and strained individual. If he is at all sensitive, he is a mental wreck, always transmitting his unstable position to the worker.

I am acquainted at first hand with the situation concerning one foreman who had to take several weeks off as he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

Many foremen, in order to ease the pressure on themselves, will cultivate a shell of indifference. They vow to themselves that no matter what happens, it will not get the best of them. Then when trouble arises in the shop, the foreman will shrug his shoulders, and intimating there is nothing he can do about it, walk away, leaving those involved to figure it out for themselves.

Such situations sometimes develop into “hot potatoes.” No one in the supervision will take responsibility. So from top management on down, the “buck” is passed. So confused does the issue get, that even the various layers of supervision wind up contradicting each other. No one will take the authority to give a decisive statement on the matter.

I once spent several months as a foreman over a few workers. I learned through this and experience as a worker in production that the supervisory help, i.e. the foremen, become irritated by the fact that they feel the workers are deliberately holding back on the job. The men are not producing as they could. They express it: “The men don’t want to work, they are lazy.” This feeling presses on the foreman and drives him to driving the worker.

On the other hand, many foremen are close to the workers. Some workers will even stop other workers from irritating a particular foreman. The men feel that these foremen are in a tough spot and are subject to discipline and firing as are other workers.

From a Detroit worker I learned that during the foremen’s strike the workers felt a mixture of guilt at going back to work and not sticking with the foremen, and of satisfaction because of the chance to show how well they could work without supervision.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Management’s Organization and the Workers’ Organization**

The company for which I work is a gigantic industrial concern which employs hundreds of thousands of workers. From all accounts its assembly lines everywhere are vicious in their exploitation of the individual. Its technique is high speed production. On the other side we have the U.A.W., the most advanced union in the country. The class struggle has tripled in intensity and the workers speak in new terms and thoughts.

#### **Management’s Organization**

It is clear to me that the reactions of the individual to production are of such a nature that they cannot be checked by the present-day utilization of the means of production. There is only one course open to the ruling class. It

## **2. The Negro Worker and the Machine**

The Negro worker looks longingly at the machine. If he is on a job he does not like, he will skillfully try to give the company as little of his labor as possible. In the factory, the Negro is confined primarily to the dirty, unskilled laboring jobs. He is never hired outright as a machine operator. He must get in the plant and then fight his way up. One Negro worker told me he ran automatic screw machines during the war. The company which hired him now would only give him a laborer’s job.

If the Negro does succeed by his efforts in finally getting on a machine, the company and many white workers will make it extremely difficult for him. He will often be driven to quit the plant rather than suffer the indignities.

Only a few Negroes are on machines. The others resent new workers being hired and given jobs that they feel they have a right to. There is much discrimination in this respect. Often now at union meetings, these young workers take the floor and denounce the discrimination and demand equal opportunity in upgrading.

I have heard Negro workers threaten to quit the union if it does not do something for them.

If two machinists, one white and one Negro, apply at the personnel office for an opening, the white will get the job.

A Negro worker has to do a better job than the white worker in order to keep his position. The competition is fierce in such instances, and the Negro is sure to be let go if he does not out-do the white.

And then there are white workers who resent a Negro getting good pay for a job, and would like to take the job for themselves.

There are many Negroes in the plant who have pride in their work. They are serious in their desires to give their best and to help their fellow workers. But the same pressures which drive workers as a whole apart, react doubly so on them. They deeply resent the humiliation which they suffer in production, and the failure on the part of society to give them an even break produces a negation of the qualities which workers as a whole admire. It confuses, distorts, and upsets them. They yearn for integration into the social process. They desire to be one with their fellow men. I have seen Negro workers deliberately turn their backs on a white worker. At another moment they have given of their best. The Negro’s slacking on the job is directly traceable to his resentment at the restricted role he plays in production. Between these two tendencies the Negro is torn apart.

The Negro worker today watches keenly when one of his race hits the professional headlines. He desires so much to have the abilities and the talents of his people given a chance that when Jackie Robinson hits a home run, he applauds with a vigor and excitement which bursts out all over.

## CHAPTER 6

### Strata Among the Workers

The last few years have been eventful ones. Many of the workers of whom I now write, entered the factory just prior to the entry of this country into the war. Some came from small businesses which they owned. They often refer to the fact that they were their own boss then. Others entered the factory then but after a few years were drawn into the armed forces. There are large sections of Italian, German, and Polish workers. In spite of the fact that most of them are native-born, events which take place in their parents' countries are followed with the greatest of interest.

Today in the factory, there are workers from all walks of life. E.g.: ex-school teachers, former coal miners, workers who had small businesses such as a garage, grocery store, candy store, trucking business, fur raising farm (mink), land farming, odd jobs business, salesmen, ex-insurance salesmen, house-painters, and lawyers. There were many more. Each of those I have mentioned was the former vocation of one or more workers whom I now know in the shop.

#### The Negro in the Shop

The Negro question in the plant is of a vital nature. In the main, Negro workers have been quiet, reserved, but deeply moved by their position in the plant.

The average Negro worker sizes up the workers in his shop. He knows who is okay and who is not. He has a keen ability to detect falseness. Towards bosses and stooges, he puts on an act of extreme stupidity. When the boss tries to pull something over on him, he assumes an air of ignorance and incomprehension.

#### 1. The New Negro

There is in the factory today a generation of new, young Negroes. youth who have gone through the war but have spent comparatively no time in a factory. They chafe under the indignities which they receive. They are not a depression product, but youth who have returned recently from service and who have matured in the last six years.

The past several years they have been filled with war propaganda: equality, democracy, and freedom from fear. They want it and are ready for a fight if they don't get it. They have gone through grammar and high school and show a high degree of intelligence. They are anti-Uncle Tom.

Most of the Negro workers in the plant are veterans. Many have seen active fighting and have toured the U.S. and foreign countries. What they have seen has left a deep impression on them. Their readiness to fight at the drop of a hat is evident.

is to channelize, to corrupt, to disrupt, to coerce, to prevent any extreme expression from taking root or form with a view to change.

With this in mind, I shall proceed to discuss the manner in which this is done in the shop, the means used, and the divisions created.

#### 1. The Probation System

The rebelliousness of the worker takes many forms. It is the conscious organization of this rebelliousness which the factory owners attempt to prevent. For example, the company in which I work insists on a six month probation period for a new worker. Exactly why? First let us get clear the fact that it takes but a month or two, more often a few weeks, to determine the ability and worth of the worker. Why then six months of probation? This six months period is the longest I have ever heard of in any union contract. Usually it is one month or two.

The six months period is a time in which new workers are provoked into revealing what their attitudes are. If such workers are stamped dangerous, out they go.

In certain departments, the company hires and fires en masse. Out of say, 40 laid off, a select few will be called back. By this means, during a trial period, the company can select more reliable elements. Then a mass lay-off to avoid charges of discrimination. Then quietly, individuals are called back to work. The company is not bound to these temporary employees as there exists the six month probation period.

#### 2. The Rumor System

The company tries to keep the workers in a constant state of agitation and uncertainty by spreading rumors. Whenever a change is about to take place, a dozen rumors flood the shop. This is skillfully done. The workers never know what is coming next. First it is: we will work seven days a week, 12 hours a day. Then, three shifts at 8 hours. Then, two shifts at 9 hours. Then, no Saturday work or there will be Saturday work. There will be a big lay-off in everybody's department, etc. The workers have a rapid grape-vine over which flows information with an amazing speed. These rumors are spread by the company which then hits with a 5 day week, 8 hour day. That is the general idea. The conditions of employment are continually in flux. Finally the worker gets disgusted and says: "The hell with it, let them do what they want," or when angry, "What the hell are they up to now?"

#### 3. The Kind Master

The company tries to make the workers believe that it is looking out for their best interests. It sponsors all sorts of clubs. 25 year club, bowling clubs, gun clubs, and fishing clubs. It goes in for paternalism, family circles. It likes to

have members of the same family working in the shop. The company tries to imitate the workers' own tendency to organization.

Many times the company will deliberately issue sales of stock to employees in order to simulate part ownership. This however cannot counteract the miserable life of the worker in production.

The workers are not fooled any more by this sort of thing.

The company sponsors a nation wide contest among all its employees. It is called "MJC," the "My Job Contest." The workers are exhorted to write letters as to why they like their jobs and especially why they like to work for this company. Over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars are being spent on the pushing of this contest. The factory walls are covered with signs advertising it. To induce the workers further, the prizes to be given away are brought to the plant. There are autos, refrigerators, washing machines, ovens, and the like. To date, 30% of my plant have made entries and on a nation-wide basis, about 100,000 have entered. The workers joke and laugh about the contest. Their remarks vary from: "The biggest liar will win," to "The winners are already picked out." Others say: "I like my job because I can feed my family", "I like my job because I want to win a new Cadillac," "I like my job because I want to keep my job," etc. Some workers at a loss for what to say ask their children. One worker's child said "because you buy me pretty clothes, Dad." When he asked his wife, she said: "Why don't they give you a steady day job?" The company is pressuring the workers to enter the contest. The foreman and plant superintendents have been going around trying to coerce workers into entering. One long employed worker was in the office about it. He noticed that the boss had a mark next to his name. He became furious and had an argument with him. He said that he would write a letter only if he himself decided. So far he had decided not to and no one was going to compel him.

The contest seems more to have stimulated workers to thinking about what they do not like about their jobs. Many are entering in spite of their hatred of the job. They feel that there are things which a worker likes. The company will accept letters in any language and will translate. They want the letters above all to be in the language of the worker and they stress this very much.

#### **4. Company Men**

There is a general feeling of insecurity throughout the plant. It is clear to me that the company is aggressively preparing for the next strike wave, or labor trouble, by building up a stratum of company men, or as it were, a labor aristocracy of a sort. These workers make it a practice to go out drinking and visiting other workers with a view to building up personal relations, and then to draw them into their circle.

shooting off your mouth."

The worker looks for the first mistake of the leadership. He seizes upon this one error so that he can justify his antagonism towards the leader concept. Many good militants have lost faith in unions as a result of being the center of such a situation. Those whom they daily tried to defend suddenly turned on them at the first, faint sign of a betrayal.

In the U.A.W. handbook entitled, "How to Win for the Union," a warning is given to the stewards, committee-men, etc. as to what to expect on this score.

It is interesting to note that many workers lose money each week on lotteries and pools or horses. However, when a raise in union dues is put forth, a howl immediately goes up. The union is castigated, the conception of the union being the bureaucrats. Some of the ranks feel that some phony somewhere will cash in on the deal. Nevertheless the assessment is received.

In spite of the worker's dislike of the bureaucracy, they would positively defend their union against an attempt to bust it. As one worker put it; "Any union is better than no union."

The worker has many apparently contradictory reactions to a labor Party. He looks at Great Britain and says: "It is doing no good there. How could it help us to have one?" One worker says: "It's Communist." Others say: "Some cliques, groups, or bureaucrats will get a hold of it and use it to their own interest." The workers are afraid that a labor Party will be run the way the union is run today.

One worker seemed to think the labor Party was a good idea but he couldn't understand why the labor leaders didn't make one right away. He stated that the workers should have more immediate control over the leaders of such a party, and agreed that if representation was direct from the factory and right of recall by the rank and file was a first principle, the leaders would have to toe the line. He remarked: "Why any one of us could be sent to represent the men in such a situation." Another worker said to me: "The capitalists aren't going to allow a labor Party. What do you want? A revolution?"

One day, I spoke to a worker about a labor Party abstractly. The reaction was this; "What good would it do? Somebody would slip the leaders 10,000 dollars and the workers would be left in the dust."

prejudices. Most viciously used was the Negro issue. Inasmuch as the sentiment in the shop tends toward Jim-Crow, the various groups attempted to accuse the others of close association with the Negro workers and then smear them as a result. There were rumors and mouth-to-mouth slanders of all sorts on this score circulating throughout the plant.

One Sunday in the union office, before the elections started, I listened to a discussion between the union leaders. They were discussing why they run for office. There seemed to be some confusion as to exactly why. One spoke this way: "We sit down pre-election and plot and plan how to win. When we win it, we say, 'Why are we saddling ourselves with this all over again?'"

#### **4. The Hostility of the Rank and File**

The failure of the ranks to control the union in all periods leaves the road open to bureaucracy and unprincipled factionalism, both of which weaken the union. The section of workers which always attends union meetings is made up of a various assortment of workers. Among them are militants, professional radicals, bureaucrats, union-apparatus men, career seekers, company stooges, and a number of serious non-partisan rank and filers. If any group wishes to pass a motion at any meeting, it is not unusual to understand that it was all planned beforehand. In the union audience, proponents of a certain motion will be strategically dispersed, to speak up at any moment.

The American worker has become thoroughly aware of, and is disgusted with, bureaucracy, both union and governmental. Civil life gives him this outlook even before entering the factory. Upon finding it first hand in the union where it affects him directly, it produces a positive resentment within him. The American way of life has instilled in him the picture of cross and doublecross. He trusts no leaders. That is why a good and sincere committee-man must sooner or later run into trouble with the ranks. It is known in a union that the first defeat or mistake of a union representative brings down the wrath of the ranks upon him. The rank and filer almost automatically searches for examples of betrayal.

During the fourth of July week, the plant was shut down. It was a paid holiday for the workers. Theoretically no one was supposed to be working that day. Some weeks later, a report of the union committee meeting with the management is distributed to the workers at the gate. One of the grievances mentioned is that of our shop committee man, who, it appears, worked on the holiday. He claims that he was not paid on the basis of an operator's pay, but rather on a laborer's rate for that day. It comes as a surprise to the men that he worked that day and they are disgusted with him for having done so when the others didn't. They think it pretty stupid to have bothered to put in a complaint and thereby bring it to the attention of the men. Worker Z says to me very sarcastically: "And that is the union about which you have been

#### **a. Stool Pigeons Are Made, Not Born**

When the bosses find a worker they want to corral, a certain type of treatment is employed. This treatment is of a most ingratiating nature. The worker is treated with kid gloves. In many instances the foreman will go out of his way for you. It places some workers under a tremendous mental strain to combat it.

In the past several months of my employment in this factory, I have been approached more than a dozen times by various workers who have attempted to bring me under the ideology of the company.

I have had discussions with various of these company men. It is necessary to lead these workers on in order to draw out the information. The point at which I was considered safe was the point at which a bolder approach could be used. So one quite bluntly tells me where the bosses drink on off days and then casually invites me to come down to the tavern and meet them over a few drinks.

Other workers use a different approach. There has been an undercurrent of propaganda for an independent union. The aim being to throw out the existing CIO, busting all seniority as it exists and giving preference to company men. This was broached to me quite frankly by one worker. He intimated in these very words, "Suppose the company has a network of stooges through-out the plant powerful enough to break this union, would you come along?" He received an appropriate answer from me as a result of which he determined it safer not to broach the subject to me again.

Still another such worker recently quite frankly explained to me I was "busting my head against a stone wall. Why not play smart? Look out for yourself. A smart guy can go places if he looks out for himself." He went on to explain how the union is no good and is made up of bureaucrats approaching gangsters. This worker is a set-up man in the shop and the other workers know he is trying to get ahead.

The company stooge tries to draw out other workers by anti-company talk such as, "The damn company tries to get the best of you," etc. The unwise or unsuspecting worker finds himself out of a job in no time at all. The last shop I was in, I saw fifteen workers go by the board in four months because of one stool whom I immediately recognized after my experience in several other shops.

One day in the ear with another worker, we had a conversation with a stooge. After dropping the latter off, the worker says, "I can't understand it. This guy never says anything about the union and yet he talks against the company the way he does."

#### **b. The Dilemma of the Company Stooge**

The untenable economic situation pressing upon the working class brings certain sections to the point where they turn informer and betrayer of their

fellow workmen. Combined with this is the drudgery and monotony of factory work as a whole from which these elements hope to escape by advancing themselves through their activity. As a result of their efforts in behalf of the company, many of these workers become foremen, set-up men, and in instances rise to even higher positions. At any rate, it is much easier for them to secure more financial benefits in their pay envelopes.

Another reason why such workers turn to such activity is the fact that they find the union incapable of satisfying their needs. At the same time the role of the union bureaucrat fills them with disgust. The anger at these fakery gives them some of their moral support.

There are many drives in back of a worker turned stooge. Home, wife, children provide his first impulse. At any rate that is his first conscious expression of what he is doing. In defense of these, he justifies all his actions and develops the attitude of: "The hell with everyone else. Everyman for himself. Nobody does anything for you but yourself."

Some of these workers become fawning and servile, lose all self-respect. Others are decent men who are well-liked and who labor under a terrific mental strain as a result of the gulf which must be created between them and other workers. In general any self-respecting worker has a disdain and disgust, bordering at times on hatred, for the company stooges.

Self-seeking workers, e.g. company stooges etc. will denounce each other to get ahead. They will inform on each other to higher-ups on being inefficient, etc.

The stooge in production today is more clever than most of his counter-parts in years gone by. At all times he skillfully will try to cover his own tracks. He attempts to understand all the backward prejudices that workers have and use them against the worker. I have seen stooges brazenly condemn the existence of such workers as themselves to other workers.

These worker stooges are caught like other workers in the maelstrom of capitalist production. In seeking a way out, they choose to perform as they do, no other means appearing to them.

### **c. Infiltration into the Union**

The company's network of stool-pigeons and plants operates into the very heart of the union. Many times these agents employ a militant union exterior for their purpose, the betrayal of the workers for the sake of their own promotion.

In order to create anti-union sentiment, company stooges will infiltrate into union positions and then deliberately betray the workers. This infuriates the workers against the union inasmuch as they are unaware of what has happened.

At a recent union meeting, something of interest came to light.

They are somewhat boisterous at times. The atmosphere is not one of workers' comradeship. There appears to be a high degree of formality pervading the dance as a whole. A worker easily felt more at ease in the shop than he did at the dance.

The most disgusting sight is that of the company superintendent sitting at their table. They are all very friendly. There appears to be more friendliness than between the ranks and the union leaders.

What is the company superintendent doing at the workers dance? He circulates around amongst those present, acting very friendly and trying to develop new friends in the ranks. Those workers who ignore him make it felt.

There are some 800 workers in the union but only about 150 attend the dance.

### **3. The Union Election**

An election is about to take place. In the 8 months I have been in the plant, this is the first time things are beginning to move intra-union. Factions and groupings are everywhere. Suspicion, mistrust, conniving, deals, etc. are the rule. Each group tries to gather to itself any rank and file support it sees. Cliques are continually working under cover preparing for the elections. The ranks barely participate in the elections. One hundred out of 800 members show up for the nominations. Everything is fluid as groups and individuals vie for positions. The rank and file voice is noticeably absent. What takes place is obviously the work of a handful of maneuverers. At the meeting is mentioned the fact that some of the company's foremen were formerly the best union militants. I have never seen a union election as completely confused as this. There are no programs open to the rank and file. Nothing is solid. During the nominating, it is obvious that blocs are forming right on the floor. One worker tells me he feels that all international officers should be elected by a popular vote.

Company stooges are everywhere. They will wind up in every group. They can't lose that way. A certain number of company men have already been elected to office.

Unless the average militant is careful, he must inevitably be drawn into the mess of scheming. The ranks are basically hostile to what takes place and view it all with disgust.

In the shop, printed campaign tickets appear. Each candidate claims more experience than his opponent. Much effort and talking is put out by those seeking office.

The Negro vote was fairly decisive in the election. Among the Negroes, one campaign was carried out, while the opposite was carried out with the whites.

The elections brought to the surface many bitter battles and

meeting be immediately held in view of the situation. He refuses point--blank and says: "The usual monthly meeting will be held in two weeks." I talk to several workers. They say that they have heard rumors that the plant will walk out at twelve o'clock. The chairman of the shop committee then comes up to me. I demand an emergency meeting where the ranks can express themselves. He tells me; "You are going off half-cocked. Next week the C.I.O. is holding a National meeting in Washington on the subject and we must wait."

Several weeks after the initial crisis has passed, the leadership finally calls an after-work meeting on the anti-labor bill. A handful of workers shows up and the leadership rages on this point: "Such vicious attacks are being made on labor and when we call a meeting on this vital subject, the ranks don't show up."

The union leadership has a great deal of ridicule for the ranks. They constantly make fun of the fact that the ranks don't give a damn, and don't attend meetings. Their attitude is one of: "Here we are trying to do everything for them and they don't give a damn."

The union leadership is very much afraid of rank and file action. Recently a grievance of a serious nature came up. It was clear that to stop the company would require clear-cut action on the part of the workers. Just the presentation of a grievance on the matter was viewed with alarm by the bureaucracy. Their advice was: "Don't do anything rash." "Keep cool, and think it over." etc. The leadership is constantly on the defensive with the ranks.

Many times the leadership will agree to certain new proposals of the company which will have an effect on the rank and file. They do not notify the ranks of their agreement as they do not want trouble. This happened recently. It is apparent that "company security clauses" are also frightening some union leaders. It would take rank and file action of a decisive nature to reverse the trend. At a recent meeting one worker arose and asked why the men in the shop were not consulted by the company when a change affecting them was being made.

One day several workers are discussing the union contract with a union representative. The subject is the speed-up. The union official maintains that the workers must abide by the contract. He says, "Any change in the machinery which the company maintains is a change in method, gives them the right to raise the number of pieces per hour." At another time he reiterates that the union contract is binding. A rank and filer states: "It is binding just so long as we let it be."

The president walks about the plant with an aloofness almost comparable to that of the plant superintendent.

Even at a union dance there is this kind of separation. The union leaders have a central table at which they all sit with their friends. They have full bottles of liquor and other drinks. They engage in a cloistered bit of revelry. Some wear "Tuxs" and most all wear white flowers in their lapels.

The chairman of the shop committee spoke of what transpired at union-management conferences. He stated that the company had no faith or trust in workers who would never join the union. In fact, their greatest satisfaction was to break away a fighting militant from the union and reward him with a good supervisory job. This type of worker the company felt it could trust. This same chairman had mentioned on several instances that the company had continually tried and still was trying to reach him.

In many instances, the company will attempt to demoralize a new committee-man or steward by ignoring him and not recognizing him. This was standard practice in other factories in which I have worked. This straightens out over a period of time depending in the main on the shop and the ability of the man involved.

In my plant it is well known that stewards and former militant union men get special treatment if they are amenable. Better jobs, more money, etc. At union meetings, it is not a rare thing for a rank and filer to take the floor and point-blank accuse various union representatives of being out and out company men. Such a rank and filer is immediately marked down as one to be approached by stooges. Recently one such rank and filer immediately got transferred from an unskilled job to one on a machine with an increase in pay.

It is interesting to note that this type of worker, in many instances, bands together with others in the shop in attempts to influence and maintain control of the union. This they do because they never fully trust the company and wish to have at hand the union as a counterweight should the company double--cross them. Of course, in achieving some sort of influence, they resort to bureaucratic tricks and scheming of all kinds to get their men in.

At a recent union meeting the local's president spoke of the company stooges and how they were trying to bust the union. He said that the plant was infiltrated with them and that the company was on the offensive. The union is invoking an old statute and will expel or exclude from membership any one who they discover is a company man. At the same time, it was announced that proceedings had been started against such an individual in one of the departments. The union chairman always warns that fifteen minutes after the meeting is over, the company will know exactly what took place during the meeting.

The company men constitute the minority of the workers in the shop, but during a period of quiet, they can give the impression that the company is strong and its eyes and ears are everywhere. Any worker who has had a few factory jobs throughout several years knows of the existence of these company men. In a new plant he learns to keep his mouth shut for a safe period of time. Many months pass before the gap is bridged between the new worker and his fellow workman. He takes no sides. In answer to involving questions, he will answer with a nod or a knowing wink. What goes on about him does not escape him although to all appearances he has the

aspect of disinterest. First impressions are almost always voided. Real trust is usually placed only in individuals with whom he has become more intimately acquainted through social intercourse outside the pressures of the factory.

This situation becomes completely altered during a critical period when the workers are in action. Then a new cohesion is established among the workers, and the company men seem to run for cover, while the workers speak their minds freely.

## **The Workers' Organization**

I arrived in the plant two weeks after the "Big Strike" had ended. Things were tense for several weeks. Newcomers were eyed with suspicion by both workers and company so soon after the strike. My first day in the plant found me waiting in one of the departments for the foreman. A worker sauntered over to me. In a very brief discussion, he tried to determine my attitude towards unions. I shook him off and he walked away. His speech made it clear that he was anti-union. Union men made themselves conspicuous by their avoidance of newcomers.

### **1. The Average Union Man**

The average union man in my shop rarely talks about the union except to complain that it doesn't do enough for the workers. Nevertheless, he definitely feels he must have the union. The company would ride all over the workers without the union. In spite of his antagonism at the way the union is run, he still holds to this belief. He attributes the small attendance at meetings to several factors. One, the meeting hall is too far away from his home and the workers live all over. He says: "Why must they always hold it on a Sunday? A man likes to take his family and go for a ride or picnic on that day. A fellow works all week and should be with his family sometime." However, even when the meetings are called after work, the attendance is small. The workers reluctantly show up at a meeting. Most of the workers recognize this, but say: "Look how everyone turns out on a strike ballot, contract negotiation or election," They do not leave it to the leadership to decide crucial issues as they do not trust their decisions. The rest of the year, the ranks abstain almost completely from union activity, and angrily criticize the manner in which the leadership operates. They believe more could be done.

In spite of all this, the workers carefully watch developments in other unions throughout the country. When, in Pittsburgh, a union president was put in jail by the government, the ranks were in sympathy with the call of a general strike in that city to free him.

When shop meetings are held in the plant locker room, the ranks will come. They straggle, but they come. Only a few talk. The rest watch carefully what developments take place. If the union representative is under attack,

they watch him squirm, and when a rank and filer speaks up, he generally voices the sentiments of the rest of the ranks. Although most of the workers appear uninterested, they are not. They absorb everything.

They may nod in agreement or disagreement at something which is said, and carry away their opinions with themselves.

Most of these workers feel that the union activist is in there for some reason. Union activity is out of the run of the average workers preoccupation. He believes, therefore, that anyone who engages in it more than the rest has a reason. He is distrustful, and would like to know what that reason is.

The ranks feel that new elections liven up the union and keep union representatives on their toes.

Recently an election was held for delegates to a convention. Various programs were put forth. One nominee had in his program, the slogan for a Labor Party. The union executive board distributed a leaflet at the gate stating that the local had voted against the Labor Party. If the ranks had to be informed that the local had voted such a way, it was clear that only a handful had been present at the passing of such a resolution. And that is the way it is most of the time, with twenty to thirty union members deciding on issues affecting the whole body of the membership of 800.

At the first union meeting I attended in this factory many subjects came up. There was a motion condemning the Army Courts-Martial System. Much information also about the economic system, happenings in the country, and blasts at the industrialists.

### **2. The Union Leadership**

Many union representatives are sincere in their desires to lead, and to fight for, the workers, but most of the union leaders that I have seen, although they work on the machine or on the bench, do not react to most situations as the rank and file does. It is not rare for a committee man to attempt to persuade a worker not to put in a grievance.

The rank and file do not hesitate to demand departmental meetings when issues arise that directly affect them on the job. They do not trust these to the union leadership. They want to be there and to decide what action is to be taken. The workers go up and down the aisles saying: "We want a departmental meeting. If the committee man doesn't call one, we'll hold it ourselves."

The Taft-Hartley bill hung over the nation for some months. One day Congress made it into law. The next day I listened carefully for comment. One fellow says: "Those guys are really out to put chains on us." Another says: "Labor all over the country should walk out." A third says: "This will fix those union leaders."

As a member of the rank and file, I approach an official of the union, an executive-committee member. I demand that a plant-wide emergency