

V o l u m e I
N u m b e r 1
J u n e 2 0 1 2

 workersoftheworld

International Journal
on Strikes and
Social Conflicts

Table of contents

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR	5
DOSSIER: STRIKES AND REVOLUTION.....	6
THE PARTY AS VANGUARD: THE ROLE OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN STRIKES IN ST. PETERSBURG, 1912–14 <i>Alice K. Pate</i>	6
THE PREREVOLUTIONARY STRIKE MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA, 1912-1916 <i>Kevin Murphy</i>	19
WORKERS' STRIKES IN THE PARIS REGION IN 1968: CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES. <i>Michael Seidman</i>	39
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MASS STRIKE DURING THE GERMAN REVOLUTION OF 1918-1919 <i>William A. Pelz</i>	56
WHEN THE CACTUS BLOOMS: A CENTURY OF STRIKES IN MEXICO <i>Richard Roman and Edur Velasco</i>	66
PRE-EMPTING NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, PIONEERING SOCIAL- MOVEMENT UNIONISM: AUSTRALIAN BUILDERS LABOURERS IN THE 1970S <i>Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann</i>	93
THE GREEK TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN CONTROVERSY: AGAINST A STATE-CENTRED APPROACH TO LABOUR MOVEMENT THEORY <i>Anna Koumandaraki</i>	117
ABSTRACTS	133
OUR AUTHORS.....	137

Editorial Board

Alvaro Bianchi
Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth,
UNICAMP
(Campinas, Brazil)

Andréia Galvão
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas,
UNICAMP
(Campinas, Brazil)

Marcel van der Linden
International Institute of Social History
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Raquel Varela
Instituto de História Contemporânea,
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
(Portugal)

Serge Wolikow
Maison des Sciences de l'Homme,
Université de Bourgogne
(Dijon, France)

Sjaak van der Velden
Independent researcher
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Xavier Domènech Sampere
Centre d'Estudis sobre les Èpoques
Franquista i Democràtica,
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
(Spain)

Executive Editor

António Simões do Paço
Instituto de História Contemporânea
Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal)

Contact

workersoftheworld2012@yahoo.co.uk

Website

<http://workeroftheworldjournal.net/>

Workers of the World is the journal of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts, born of the International Conference Strikes and Social Conflicts, held in Lisbon, UNL, on 16-20 March 2011. The Association now has the participation of more than two dozen academic institutions from Europe, Africa, North and South America. Website: <http://iassc-mshdijon.in2p3.fr/>

Advisory Board

Andrea Komlosy	Universität Wien (Austria)
Angelo D'Orsi	Università degli Studi di Torino (Italy)
Anita Chan	University of Technology, Sydney (Australia)
Antony Todorov	New Bulgarian University, Sofia (Bulgaria)
Armando Boito	UNICAMP (Campinas, Brazil)
Asef Bayat	University Urbana-Champaign (Illinois, USA)
Asli Odman	Independent researcher (Turkey)
Babacar Fall	University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar (Senegal)
Beverly Silver	Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, Maryland, USA)
Bryan Palmer	Trent University (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada)
Christian DeVito	Honorary Fellow, IISH, Amsterdam
Claire Cerruti	University of Johannesburg (South Africa)
Cristina Borderias	Universitat de Barcelona (Spain)
Deborah Bernstein	Haifa University (Israel)
Elizabeth Faue	Wayne State University (Detroit, Michigan, USA)
Fernando Rosas	Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal)
François Jarrige	Université de Bourgogne (France)
Jean Vigreux	Université de Besançon (France)
Javier Tébar	Universidad Rovira i Virgili (Spain)
John Kelly	Birkbeck College, University of London (UK)
Kevin Murphy	University of Massachusetts (Boston, USA)
Manuel Peréz Ledesma	Universidad Autonoma Madrid (Spain)
Marcelo Badaró Matos	Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brazil)
Martí Marin	Universidad Autonoma Barcelona (Spain)
Michael Hall	UNICAMP (Campinas, Brazil)
Michael Seidman	University of North Carolina Wilmington (USA)
Mirta Lobato	Universidad Buenos Aires (Argentina)
Nitin Varma	Humboldt Universität, Berlin (Germany)
Nicole Mayer-Ahuja	Universität Göttingen (Germany)
Nicolás Iñigo Carrera	PIMSA (Argentina)
Paula Godinho	Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal)
Peter Birke	Koordinierender Redakteur von sozial.geschichte online
Procopis Papastratis	Pantheion University (Athens, Greece)
Ratna Saptari	Leiden University, (Netherlands)
Ricardo Antunes	UNICAMP (Campinas, Brazil)
Ruben Vega	Universidad Oviedo (Spain)
Ruy Braga	Universidade São Paulo (Brazil)
Silke Neunsinger	Arbark (Sweden)
Verity Burgmann	University of Melbourne (Australia)
Wendy Goldman	Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA, USA)
Xavier Vigna	Université de Bourgogne, France

Letter from the editor

This is the first issue of *Workers of the World - International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts*.

Workers of the World is the journal of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts, born of the International Conference Strikes and Social Conflicts, held in Lisbon, UNL, on 16-20 March 2011. The Association has already the participation of more than two dozen academic institutions from Europe, Africa, North and South America.

Workers of the World is an academic journal with peer review published in English, for which original manuscripts may be submitted in Spanish, French, English, Italian and Portuguese. It publishes original articles, interviews and book reviews in the field of labour history and social conflicts in an interdisciplinary, global, long term historical and non Eurocentric perspective.

In this first issue we have a *dossier* on Strikes and Revolution, with articles by Alice K. Pate, Kevin Murphy, Michael Seidman and William A. Pelz. We also have articles by Richard Roman and Edur Velasco on a century of strikes in Mexico, Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann on the Australian builders labourers in the 1970s and Anna Koumandaraki on the controversy in the Greek trade union movement over a state-centred approach to labour movement theory.

Workers of the World welcomes articles about crisis, working classes, internationalism, unions, organization, peasants, women, memory, propaganda and media, methodology, theory, protest, strikes, slavery, comparative studies, statistics, revolutions, cultures of resistance, race, among other subjects.

Articles should be sent, according to the Editorial and publishing rules that you may find in our site (<http://workeroftheworldjournal.net/>), to the executive editor at workersoftheworld2012@yahoo.co.uk.

We also invite you to visit the site of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts at <http://iassc-mshdijon.in2p3.fr/>.

Welcome to *Workers of the World*!

António Simões do Paço
Executive Editor

DOSSIER: STRIKES AND REVOLUTION

The Party as Vanguard: The Role of the Russian Social Democratic Party in Strikes in St. Petersburg, 1912–1914

Alice K. Pate

Russian revolutionaries reading Marx looked in vain for a comprehensive organizational and tactical framework for political parties. The theoretician Plekhanov, who adapted Marx to Russian socialism, relied upon the definition of the Party found in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties [...] (they are) the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others [...] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.¹

Marx offered both a broad and narrow definition of the term party. Marx and Engels also required the party to "support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things." Marx

¹ Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. *Collected Works*, vol. 6 Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 497.

warned workers they should prepare for revolution by "taking up their position as an independent party [...] and by not allowing themselves to be misled for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeoisie."² From Marx, the party member acquires a dual identity as a conscious guiding party leader and an observer who follows objective reality. In addition to problems of revolutionary identity, if the Communists are to be the most politically conscious and most organized part of the mass workers' party, parties such as those envisioned by Marx had to exist. But, what would be the nature of such parties in Russia? Furthermore, what, according to Marx, is the role of the conscious revolutionary in developing political consciousness?

Russian Social Democrats (SDs) carried out a prolonged theoretical debate on these issues in exile outside of Russia that had little to do with Russian realities. This changed after the 1905 Revolution. Legal societies became possible in 1906 and party activists embraced the new opportunities available to organize clubs, unions, libraries and educational societies with workers, especially in St. Petersburg. The Russian labor movement refused to align itself with either the Menshevik or Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party.³ In place of a party identity, worker activists sought a united campaign against capital and the tsarist state.

Studies of the revolutionary movement from 1906-14, shaped first by the memoir literature and debates among émigrés, focus on the decline of underground activity during these years. By 1908, a theoretical debate about the role of legal work in the movement, the "Liquidationist Controversy"

² Ibid., vol.10, p.287.

³ Soviet and western historians have examined these years within the context of factional debate between Bolshevism and Menshevism. See Leopold Haimson's two part article: The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917. *Slavic Review* (part 1) 23, no. 4, December 1964, pp. 619-42, and (part 2) 24, no. 1, March 1965, p.1-22. Haimson argued that Bolshevik hegemony was achieved in 1912-14 because of increased radicalization of the working class and the similarity between more radical worker demands and Bolshevik slogans. Haimson also credits a generational struggle in the union for Bolshevik hegemony, an argument refuted in Bonnell, Victoria. *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 395-6; See also Swain, Geoffrey. *Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement, 1906-14*. London: Macmillan, 1983; Hogan, Heather. *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890-1914*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v period novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema, 1910-1914 gg.* Moscow: Nauka, 1975; Kruze, E.E. *Polozhenie rabochego klassa Rossii v 1900-1914 gg.*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1976.



dominated Social Democratic journals. Lenin, in an attempt to marginalize legal activity, accused Menshevik party workers of attempting to “liquidate” the underground. While debates continued in the party press, party and non-party activists inside Russia combined legal and illegal work in clubs, libraries, enlightenment societies, cooperatives and unions that strengthened the movement as a whole. Submerging party within the movement, these activists collaborated to organize excursions, libraries, print newspapers and journals and to organize strikes and demonstrations. From 1912-14, many of these collaborators won seats on governing bodies of workers’ associations. Elected on “Marxist” platforms supported by *Pravda* and the Bolsheviks, their victory often was presented in the historiography as a Bolshevik victory over the revisionist “Menshevik Liquidators.” Bolshevik activists were ascribed revolutionary characteristics that best reflected the demands of the radicalized working class movement. According to this interpretation, the expanding strike movement abandoned simple trade unionism and increasingly voiced political demands.

Recent research has indicated that the Bolshevik faction was no more revolutionary than the Menshevik in this period.⁴ Both party factions, especially those in exile, rejected spontaneous strikes and sought a guiding role in the development of working-class consciousness in this period. Fearful of police repression, the Mensheviks hoped to limit strike activity to preserve the movement. Bolsheviks remained distrustful of the masses and often refused to join strikes planned by activists inside Russia.

Labor radicalism challenged party institutions thinned by repression and political infighting. The Leninists had few ties to local groups. In St. Petersburg, Bolshevik conciliators in Kolpino, Neva, Gorodskii and Vasileostrov districts merged with the Vperedists from Petersburg Side and Vasileostrov to form the Central Group of Social Democratic Workers of St. Petersburg. They were not reliable Leninists. Some individual Party

⁴ See for example, Melancon, Michael and Pate, Alice K. eds., *New Labor History: Worker Identity and Experience in Russia, 1840-1918*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002; Pate, Alice. *St. Petersburg Workers and the Implementation of the Social Insurance Law*. In: McCaffrey, Susan and Melancon, Michael eds, *Russia in the European Context, 1789-1914: A Member of the Family*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 189-202; Melancon, Michael. *Lena Goldfields Massacre and the Crisis of the Late Tsarist State*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006; Pate, Alice. *May Day and Late Imperial Russia: Workers’ Voices, 1891-1914*. In: Steinberg, John and Wade, Rex eds., *Making of Russian History: Society, Culture, and the Politics of Modern Russia, Essays in Honor of Allan K. Wildman*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2009, pp.75-90.

Mensheviks, who upheld the authority of the illegal party, joined the Central Group. Other nonfactional SD circles included the "Group of Social Democratic Workers of St. Petersburg" in Vyborg district and the "Group of Social Democratic Workers" in Narva district which by 1912 was tied to the Menshevik Initiative Group.⁵ Finally the Mezhrainoka or the Interdistrict Group became one of the most active SD groups in the capital. Close to Trotsky, its members included Bolshevik conciliators in the Petersburg Metalworkers' Union, A.M. Novoselov, P.I. Nikolaev and A.S. Kiselev, and SD deputies A.F. Burianov and N.M. Egorov. The Mezhrainoka denied the legitimacy of decisions taken at Prague and urged unity of all "revolutionary Social Democrats."⁶ In May 1914, the Mezhrainoka collaborated to distribute Plekhanov's newspaper, *Edinstvo*.⁷

The strongest Menshevik organization was the Central Initiative Group formed after a secret conference in January 1911. The Initiative Group hoped to unite both legal and illegal groups throughout Russia and included workers as well as Menshevik *praktiki* such as I.A. Isov, V. Ezhov, I.S. Astrov, P.A. Garvi, K.A. Gvozdev, K.M. Ermolaev, Eva Broido, secretary of the Organizational Committee and the trade union leaders, A.N. Smirnov and V.M. Abrosimov.⁸ In all, seven district initiative groups were established at Moscow, Narva, Neva, Gorodskii, Vyborg, Petersburg Side and Vasileostrov encompassing a membership of around 100.⁹ By 1913, the predominance of intellectuals over workers in the Initiative Group was drastically altered. Although the Group's existence was sporadic, a total of sixteen workers, four of these members of the Metallists' Union, participated throughout the year. The active intellectuals were the veteran Mensheviks, Feodor Dan, Isov and S.M. Shvarts, a former Bolshevik. By the end of the year and into 1914, Dan and Iulii Martov began to encourage an expansion

⁵ I. Iurenev, "Mezhrainoka, 1911–1917," *Proletarskaia revolutsiia*, 24, 1924, p.114; Iakovlev, I, *Aprel'sko–maiskie dni 1912 goda v Peterburge. Krasnaia letopis.* 3, 1925, p.228; *Rabochaia gazeta* 4/5, 28/15 April 1911, p.4.

⁶ Iurenev, I. "Mezhrainoka," 24, 1924, pp:115–16; Bulkin "Departament politsii i soiuz metallistov," *Krasnaia letopis'*, 9, 1923, p.137.

⁷ Iurenev, I, "Mezhrainoka," pp.116–125; Liubimov, A.I."Neobkhodimaia raziasneniia" *Edinstvo*, 1, 18 May 1914.

⁸ *Listok golosa sotsialdemokrata*, 1, 25 June 1911, p.3 ; See Larin, Iu. Puti sozdaniia. *Delo zhizni*, 7, 1911, pp.:13–20. Many of these had signed the Open Letter in *Golos Sotsial–demokrata* in 1910. See Chapter V above.

⁹ *Izveshchenie o konferentsii organizatsii RSDRP* New York: Krauss International Publications, 1982, p. 10; Dan to Akselrod, 11 May 1912. In: Saper, Boris, ed. *Theodore Dan Letters,(1899–1946)*. Amsterdam: IISG, 1985, p.261.

of illegal activity through the district initiative groups. The Central Initiative Group failed to recover from arrests in 1914.¹⁰

The Menshevik central apparatus elected at the Vienna conference in August 1912 had a varied existence. The Menshevik Organization Committee (OK) included the trade unionist A.N. Smirnov, Petr Garvi, an active party worker, Eva Broido, secretary until her arrest in January 1913 and the lawyer, Baturskii.¹¹ In late 1912, the OK set up district committees which were decimated by arrests in February 1913. Throughout 1913, the only successful meetings of the OK occurred in April.¹² By early 1914, the OK renewed legislative work, calling for freedom of coalition, democratization of city governments and abolition of the Pale, but simultaneously promoted the formation of illegal cells. Menshevik cells existed in educational societies and trade unions throughout the capital before the war and Duma deputies met with Garvi, Dan, Martov and Baturskii to discuss political activity in clubs and the organization of insurance centers. The OK, *Vperedists* and Party Mensheviks formed the 3 July Bloc at the Unity Congress sponsored by the International and held in Brussels from 3–5 July 1914.¹³ The Menshevik network, though broad, was disconnected due to continual arrests.

The only formal Bolshevik organization, the Petersburg Committee (PK), was not consistently loyal to Prague. Reincarnated repeatedly from 1912–14, the PK leadership fluctuated between conciliators, *Vperedists* and Leninists. In February 1912, all its members were workers, six from Putilov. Party activist I. Iurenev complained that the PK was not united and had no central leadership and E.P. Onufriev reported to Krupskaiia the PK was affiliated with the Central Group, which had denounced the Prague resolutions. While the PK actually sanctioned the Prague resolutions, they contended "true unity is only possible by means of joint work in the

¹⁰ Dan to Akselrod, 24 January 1912, 14 September 1912, *Ibid.*, pp.245–6, 254; Dan to Garvi, April 1912, 13 August 1912, *Pis'ma P.B. Akselroda i Iu. O. Martova*, pp. 223, 252–3; McKean, *Robert B. St Petersburg Between The Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June 1907-February 1917. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990*, p.108 citing GARF, f.102, DPOO 1913g, d.5 ch.57, 11.190, 201,311–12; pp. 107–8, citing GARF f.102, DPOO 1913g, d.5 ch.57, 11.2, 166,190,274–5,310–31.

¹¹ Listok organizatsionnogo komiteta po sozyvu obshchepartiinoi konferentsii. 3, 1912, p.1

¹² McKean.*Op.Cit.*, p. 108–9 citing f.102, DPOO 1913g, d.307, prod.III, 1.116.

¹³ *Nasha zaria*. 4, 1914, pp: 60–63; Elwood, R. Carter. Lenin and the Brussels 'Unity' Conference of July 1914. *Russian Review*, 39, January 1980, pp.32–49.

localities."¹⁴ Arrests suppressed the PK in 1913 and 1914, which obliged the board of the Metallists' Union to take over its activities. In 1913, ten skilled metalworkers sat on the PK including the conciliator Kiselev, Mitrevich, assistant secretary of the union, and board members P.A. Mel'nikov and Ignatev. In February 1914, five of the eight members were metallists and either officers or activists from the two Vperedists strongholds, Vasileostrov or Vyborg districts.¹⁵ Party workers in the metallists' union noted in 1913, the "lack in St. Petersburg of strong party organizations capable of leading a general strike."¹⁶

Local activists cooperated in a number of demonstrations during the prewar years. For May Day 1912, the nonfactionalist group "Unity," the Central Group and local Socialist Revolutionaries formed the "Group of Worker Social Democrats." This organization summoned a "meeting of all Petersburg workers' organizations" to compose a May Day proclamation calling for the establishment of a democratic republic. When the Third Duma used its powers of interpellation to investigate the framing of the SD Second Duma fraction, all activists cooperated in demonstrations at Narva and Vasileostrov.¹⁷

In 1913, the PK, Central Initiative Group, local SRs and unions attempted to reestablish the Central Bureau of Trade Unions. *Metallist* was published until 1914, and accepted contributions from activists regardless of factional identity. The Okhrana credited the press with raising the consciousness of workers and, in effect, acting as the illegal underground party organization by spreading party ideas.¹⁸ Even the police noted, "There is marked increase in the new conciliatory movement among workers in the rank and file of Social Democracy who are extremely dissatisfied with the

¹⁴ *Iz epokhi 'Zvezdy' i 'Pravdy,' 1911–14*, vol.3, Moscow 1921, pp.184, 230, 234–5; Iurenev, "Mezhrainoka," p.111; "V.I. Lenin v 1912–14 gg." *Krasnyi arkhiv*, vol.2, no.62, 1934, p.229.

¹⁵ *Sotsial demokrat*, 31, 28 June 1913; *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov. 1902–1917. Tom vtoroi, 1904–1917*. Leningrad: Ogiz, 1939. p. 77–78; McKean. Op.Cit., p.112, citing GARF f.102 DPOO 1914g. d.5, ch.57, 84–5; d.5 ch.57, t.2, 1.24.

¹⁶ McKean. Op.Citi. pp. 104–5 citing GARF f.102, DPOO, 1913g.d.5 ch.57, 11.308–9; d.341 prod.II, 11.218–20; prod.III, 1.266.

¹⁷ Iakovlev, "Aprel'sko–maiskie dni," pp.230–4.

¹⁸ Bonnell.Op.Cit. p.412 citing GARF DPOO f.102, d.341, 1913, pp.8–10.

political fervor and factional infighting between the pravdisit and the liquidators.”¹⁹

The reaction of Party activists to the upsurge in strikes after the massacre of protesters in Lena was similar. While the Menshevik press criticized "strike fever" as a "dangerous illness," Bolshevik activists in the capital also feared the spontaneity of the masses would cause repression of the St. Petersburg Metalworkers' Union and suppression of legal activities.²⁰ After winning a majority of seats on the metallists' board, Bolsheviks actively began to implement the directives of Prague, moving into the legal arena and overtaking former Menshevik territory. However, their policies differed little from the former Menshevik administration of the union. Since 63% of the strikes in St. Petersburg from 1912 to 1914 involved metallists, both SD factions had to respond to the escalating strike movement.²¹ An examination of this response, the nature of Bolshevik victory, the individuals who governed the union and the governing board's actions after the Bolsheviks won a majority reveals little significance in Bolshevik hegemony.²²

From 1912 to 1914, protests initiated by the metallists and Social Democratic activists were either political in their initial conceptualization, or locally initiated in response to a particular economic or political policy of the factory administration or government.²³ These protests and work stoppages were not coordinated or controlled.²⁴ The police repeatedly hindered attempts at citywide collaboration and workers' actions were equivocal. The workers' demands and motivations suggest they collectively

¹⁹ Bonnell. Op.Cit. p. 425.

²⁰ *Luch* no. 53, 17 November 1912, p.:1.

²¹ Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 258.

²² The scholarly discussions of strikes and the Bolshevik victory exaggerate and distort the reality in the movement. See for example Haimson, L.H. and Tilly, Charles Tilly, eds. *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Haimson interprets the election of Bolsheviks as an indication of a younger cohort of Bolshevik workers who rejected Menshevism and pushed Russia to the brink of revolution before the war. Bonnell cites the election of Bolsheviks as a rejection of the reformist trade union. See Bonnell, *Roots*, pp.434–8 .

²³ On the characterization of strikes see Haimson and Tilly. Op.Cit.

²⁴ Elwood blames the lack of coordination and spontaneous nature of the strikes on the lack of a viable underground organization. See Elwood, R.C. *Russian Social Democracy in the Underground: A Study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914*. Amsterdam: International Institute for Social History, 1974, pp. 236–38.

opposed authority in all its forms and sought a united movement against those who attempted to wield political, economic or ideological power. Among the Social Democrats, both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks attempted to assert Party control of the movement.

The first types of protests, political demonstrations, were regularly summoned on May Day and the anniversaries of 9 January and 4 April. After the news of the massacre of miners at the Lena Goldfields on 4 April 1912 reached the capital, the Menshevik deputy, G. S. Kuznetsov, local SDs and students called for a demonstration on Nevskii Prospect on Sunday, 15 April. However, activists in Narva and Moscow districts, more inclined toward political strikes than demonstrations, did little to inform workers of the planned protest. Meetings at Baltic Shipyards and the engineering plant at United Cables approved a five day stoppage beginning two weeks later, on May Day. Therefore students, rather than workers, dominated the protests on 15 April, while workers participated in a wave of spontaneous strikes from 14–22 April involving around 140,000 workers.²⁵

As May Day approached, students active in a study circle at Putilov piloted the establishment of 1 May Committees at Moscow, Narva, Petersburg and Vasileostrov districts. These committees with joint participation of all SD and SR groups except the Initiative Group formed the Central Bureau of 1 May Committees, which distributed leaflets calling for a strike, a democratic republic, Constituent Assembly, eight-hour day and land confiscation.²⁶ In response to such widespread agitation, 150,000 laborers joined May Day strikes. The police, prepared for the protest, prevented convergence of strikers in the center and dispersed the demonstration.²⁷ Although activists made efforts to coordinate strike action after May Day, inviting formation of strike committees at district meetings, arrests curbed their success until August.²⁸

Local activists also resisted Party leadership in political protests occurring in 1913. The PK, a long celebrated bastion of Bolshevism, did not

²⁵ RTsNDI, f.6860, o.1,d.173,14; *Zvezda* 31/67, 17 April 1912; *Pravda*(Vienna), 25, 6 May/23 April 1912, p.3.

²⁶ Iakovlev. Op.Cit. pp. 230–7, McKean.Op.Cit. p.90 citing GARF f.1405,op.530, d.824,11.82,88; f.102, DPOO 1912d.341,1.108.

²⁷ *Pravda* 8, 1 May 1912; 9, 3 May 1912; *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov*, 2:64–5; Iakovlev. Op.Cit. pp.232, 234–5.

²⁸ McKean.Op.cit. p.91, citing f. 102, DPOO 1912g, d.341, 11.136–7,161,181;d.101, 11.81, 225–6.

agitate for strikes on 9 January 1913: they advocated only factory meetings. Despite the lack of Bolshevik agitation, 71,000 walked off the job on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday.²⁹ For May Day 1913, the OK, PK and TsK printed leaflets and the PK formed a strike committee with local SRs.³⁰ Collaboration between party activists continued throughout 1914, when the Central Initiative Group, Bolsheviks, *Mezhrainoka* and SRs coordinated strike plans for 9 January. Petersburg socialist groups also supported work stoppages when the Menshevik deputy, N.S. Chkheidze was arraigned for a speech given in the Duma and the left was expelled for fifteen sessions. On 23 March, metalworkers and party activists reorganized the PK and called for demonstrations on Good Friday. Both Mensheviks and SRs agreed with the plans and the educational societies "Sampsonievskii" and "Science and Life" promoted the strike.³¹ Coordination continued on 4 April, May Day and in other protests even though party institutions were weak and decentralized.

In contrast to political demonstrations, party activists and the union administration of both factions often denounced strikes emerging from the shop floor or joined them only after they had begun. An economic upswing produced a labor shortage in 1912, which prevented concerted action by employers. The Petersburg Society of Manufacturers and Factory Owners (PSMFO) could not agree on a response to the massive strikes that began after Lena. Even though their 1912 Convention voted against union mediation in disputes, standardized black listing, rejected a minimum wage and pay for strikers, most PSMFO members did not confirm to this agreement until March 1913.³² This time lag allowed for the expansion of worker unrest.

The Mensheviks held a majority on the Union's governing board when a strike at Siemens-Halske against a May Day fine became a 91-day protest against factory reforms. Workers opposed recently decreased rates, time clocks and demanded a polite form of address, a council of elders, hot water, and extra pay for Saturday and preholiday work. In 1913, metallists walked off the job for 102 days at Lessner in Vyborg district after the

²⁹ Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov, 2:74–5, "Lenin i Pravda," *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1, 1924, p.71; Kruze, E.E. *Istoriia rabochikh Leningrada*. Tom pervyi. 1703–fevral'1917. Leningrad: Nauka, 1972, p.431.

³⁰ *Listovki*, pp. 82–84; *Pravda*. 10/304, 3 May 1913, p.3; *Luch*. 100/86, 3 May 1913, p.2.

³¹ *Listovki*, pp. 88–90, 102–3; *Novaia rabochaia gazeta*. 8/26, 11 January 1914.

³² For a study of the PSMFO see Hogan. *Op.Cit.* pp.212–13.

suicide of Iakov Strongin who had been accused by the foreman of stealing brass screws. The strike committee consulted the union only after 82 days. The owners refused to bargain with the union, brought in strike breakers, blacklisted strikers and eventually defeated the strike.³³

A change in the Metalworkers' Union Board did not produce a corresponding change in strike policy. In the summer 1913, a specialist in time work, Balik, was carted out of the factory in a wheelbarrow at New Aivaz industrial plant.³⁴ Even though the majority of the newly elected interim board was Bolshevik, the union's response was cautious. On 28 July, the union passed a resolution condemning the use of wheelbarrows and refused to grant strike assistance until 17 August. The factory administration responded more promptly, closing the factory for six weeks while reforms were completed and then hiring many replacements especially from the new pool of women and unskilled workers.³⁵ The strike failed.

Local activists participated in strikes and protests despite pronouncements of condemnation by emigres, party institutions, and theoretical leaders of both factions. The Menshevik August Conference at Vienna had delegated full responsibility for strike action to the union administration and urged members to appraise possibilities for victory before walking out.³⁶ The Central Initiative Group opposed walkouts in June 1913 to protest charges against 52 sailors of conspiracy to commit armed uprising. The PK had been arrested and did not initiate the strike. When 36,000 participated, *Luch* denounced the protest as "chaotic, prematurely weakening the forces of the working class."³⁷

Menshevik *literatory* responded to the strikes with some degree of alarm, as they were convinced government repression of unions was sure to follow continued work stoppages. Garvi condemned the "elemental nature" of strikes "preceding for the most part apart from the existing trade unions"

³³ Zhivaia zhizn'. 3, 13 July 1913, p.3; Balabanov, M. Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody pod'ema 1912–14 gg. Leningrad, 1927, p.54.

³⁴ Kruze, E.E. *Peterburgskie rabochie v 1912–14 godakh*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1961, pp. 156–7; *Pravda*. 116/320, 22 May 1913, p.5.

³⁵ By 1 September, six weeks into the strike 726 rubles was collected, and on 14 September a total of 1378. *Metallist* 5/29, 19 July 1913, p.6 ; 6\|30, 10 August 1913, p.16; 7\|31, 24 August 1913, pp.11–12; Hogan. Op.Cit. claims the strike failed because of factional struggle in union, but the Bolsheviks already had taken control of the union board.

³⁶ *Izveshenie*, pp.33–4.

³⁷ *Luch*. 149/235, 2 July 1913, p.4.

a sentiment echoed confidentially by Dan and Martov.³⁸ Dan and Martov also published articles predicting poor results from the strike movement. In the thick journal, *Nasha zaria*, Dan warned "in the political struggle the strike is not always the sole expedient means."³⁹ On the March walkouts that led to the closing of the union in 1914, Martov theorized "the elemental development of the recent wave of political stoppages has led the workers into a dead end."⁴⁰ Émigré Mensheviks were alarmed by the "spontaneity" of striking workers, "hotheads intoxicated by their own mood and the excitement reigning in St. Petersburg." The *praktiki* defended union organization against their critics who labeled unions a "harmful undertaking" which corrupted working-class struggles.

Leninists at Prague approved the formation of cells in legal organizations, but the Bolshevik hierarchy moved slowly in this regard. Only after an increase in strike activity was noted did Lenin observe:

the proletariat is drawing the masses into a revolutionary strike, which indissolubly links politics with economics, a strike which wins the support of the most backward sections by the success for an immediate improvement in the life of the workers, and at the same time rouses the people *against the tsarist monarchy*.

While requiring a revolutionary stance of the strike movement, the Bolsheviks moved more fully into the legal organizations. The TsK resolved in 1913:

Social Democrats must attract into all workers' societies the broadest possible circles of workers, inviting into membership all workers without distinction according to party views. But the Social Democrats within these societies must organize party groups [cells] and through long, systematic work within all these societies establish the very closest relations between them and the Social Democratic Party.⁴¹

Even the Leninist TsK tactics moved toward a combination of legal and illegal work.

³⁸ Dan to Martov, 22 January 1913, *Dan Letters*. Op.Cit., p.290; Garvi, "Nachalo lokautnoi epidemii," *Nasha zaria*. 2, 1913, pp.19–23.

³⁹ "Burnyi di," *Nasha zaria*., 4, 1914, pp.93–10.

⁴⁰ *Severnaia rabochaia gazeta*. 41, 28 March 1914, p.1.

⁴¹ Taylor Hammond, Thomas. *Lenin on Trade Unions and Revolution 1893–1917*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, p. 72.

After the Bolsheviks gained control of the Metallists' Union, the board continued to register complaints about the spontaneous nature of strikes. From 25 August 1913 to 18 January 1914, 29 of 41 strikes began before the union was consulted. On 3 November 1913, Kiselev admitted "a majority of stoppages and conflicts proceed without any organizational influence on the part of the union." At the general meeting on 19 January 1914, strike assistance was restricted to those who had been members for at least one year.⁴² Both the PK and the union denounced the spontaneous strike activity which followed the closing of the labor press from 6–12 March 1914.⁴³ In response to the walkouts, 16 engineering and electrical firms joined a lockout from 20 – 24 March. The Bolsheviks and the union met on 21 March to determine an appropriate response to the employers' attack. Before any compromise could be reached the union was closed 1 April 1914 under articles 33–35, for the disturbance of public order.⁴⁴

Party activists and workers inside Russia rejected party factionalism and infighting. They collaborated in trade union activities, strikes and worker associations voting for "Marxist" slates. In elections to insurance institutions following passage of the "Law on Social Insurance," the labor movement reaffirmed the desire for unity. Activists from both party factions utilized the slogan, but defined it differently. Leninists called for unity of all anti-liquidationist elements in hopes of claiming center stage as the true Social Democrats. Mensheviks and pro-Menshevik trade unionists still retained the hope that party workers in legal and illegal arenas could work together. Menshevik insurance activists asserted, "divisiveness and fratricidal struggle among leading workers in the campaign is far worse, more senseless, than in political organizations embracing only the vanguard."⁴⁵

From 1912–1914, Petersburg workers acted independently of both the union and party leaders. They staged strikes and walkouts without approval. Both Social Democratic factions, acting through union and other governing boards, condemned spontaneous strikes asserting the authority of

⁴² *Metallist*. 7/31, 24 August 1913, p.11; 8/32, 18 September 1913, p.11; 11/35, 16 November 1913, pp.13,14 ; 12/36, 5 December 1913, p.8 ; 2/39, 4 February 1914, p.11.

⁴³ Shidlovskii, G. Petersburgskii komitet bol'shevikov v kontse 1913g i v nachale 1914g., *Krasnaia letopis'*. 17, 1926, p.129.

⁴⁴ *Put' pravdy*. 42, 21 March 1914, p.1; 52, 2 April 1914, p.3; 53, 3 April 1914, p.3.

⁴⁵ *Strakhovanie rabochikh*. 7, 1914, p.3.



Workers of the World

the Party over the movement. Fearing repression by tsarist authorities, they sought to limit workers' demands for economic and social justice. This attempt to establish the Party as the vanguard of the movement led to the complete rejection of party identity by Russian worker activists. Radicalized workers made politically conscious by prolonged socialist agitation and their daily experiences demanded a united workers' movement rather than Party leadership. By 1914, the discourse of unity placed the workers, not the Social Democratic Party, at the political center.

The Prerevolutionary Strike Movement in Russia, 1912-1916

Kevin Murphy

The strike movement during the Russian revolutionary era has long been of interest to both socialists and scholars. Rosa Luxemburg famously sought to revise the ambivalent Social Democratic attitude toward the "Mass Strike" based on the experience of the 1905 revolt, "the first historical experience on a very large scale with the means of struggle."¹ The mass strike of February 1917 quickly escalated into a general revolt that overthrew the Tsar Nicholas II and throughout 1917, as in 1905, over two million workers went on strike.²

While historians understandably have focused attention on the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the strike wave during the pre-revolutionary period from 1912 to 1916 was no less spectacular. Two and half million workers participated in more than thirty political strikes from April 1912 to the end of 1916, while another 1.8 million workers engaged in economic strikes.³ The epicenter of this movement was St. Petersburg (later named Petrograd), where 23 large strikes involving 50,000 workers or more

¹ Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. 1906. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>.

² Burdzahalov, E.N. *Russia's Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987; Koenker, Diane and Rosenberg, William. *Strikes and Revolution in Russia 1917*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

³ Haimson, L.H. and Brian, Eric. Labor Unrest in Imperial Russia. In: *Strikes, Social Conflict and the First World War: An International Perspective*. Haimson, Leopold and Sapelli, Giulio, eds. Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1992, p. 445.

occurred for various political causes.⁴ The disproportionate number of strike participants in the capital can be explained by its politically-charged atmosphere and the unusual size and strength of the revolutionary left that focused much of their efforts at building workplace cells in the factories of the capital, particularly in the metal industry. Workers in St. Petersburg responded almost immediately to political events, whereas their numerically weaker Moscow counterparts invariably responded slower, often days later, and in much lower numbers.

Much of the rich historiography of the pre-revolutionary strike movement has focused on quantitative analysis of the strike movement, particularly in St. Petersburg. These works have demonstrated convincingly that political and economic strikes cannot be treated as separate phenomena, that the escalating workers' movement often meant that economic strikes directly impacting workers' confidence to strike over political causes and vice versa. The demographic studies of strike activity have also shown that more literate and urbanized metal workers with weaker ties to the countryside, particularly in St. Petersburg, were proportionally much more likely to engage in strike activity. Such evidence has led to more general, but also more speculative arguments, about the role of literacy and urbanization in the radicalization of the Russian working class.

Several authors of these quantitative studies have frankly admitted the limitations of such an approach, particularly the difficulty of incorporating and assessing the role that ideological influences had on the strike movement.⁵ Leopold Haimson's seminal study of Russian urban unrest noted that the Bolsheviks provided a "significant catalytic role" to the movement.⁶ In the conclusion of his quantitative analysis, Haimson offers a more nuanced appraisal of this Bolshevik influence, suggesting that it was "the participation of Bolshevik militants in ad hoc, amorphous, cellular "committees" at the factory or shop level that provided whatever elements of leadership the Bolshevik underground actively maintained at the

⁴ McKean, Robert. *St. Petersburg Between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June*

1907-February 1917. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, pp. 495-498.

⁵ Haimson, L. H. *Labor Unrest in Imperial Russia*, p. 507, and Bovykin, Borodkin, and Kiryanov. *Strikes in Imperial Russia*, p. 189, In: *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective*. eds. Leopold Haimson and Charles Tilly. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ Haimson, L.H. "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917. (part 1) *Slavic Review*. 23, December 1964, pp.619-42; (part 2), 24, March 1965, pp.1-22.

grassroots level.”⁷ Similarly, in his superlative study of Petrograd, S.A. Smith argues that “factories were more likely to go on strike, firstly, if there was an organized Bolshevik cell in the enterprise and secondly, if there was a core of proletarian men or women with some experience of strikes, sufficiently numerous and cohesive to organize new workers.”⁸

Several historians have taken issue with the emphasis on Bolshevism as the dominant socialist influence in the movement by examining the role of Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), Mensheviks and other smaller socialist groups.⁹ Robert McKean’s study of St. Petersburg argues that there was often cooperation between socialist groups. What was surely the most sustained strike movement in world history, however, is inexplicably described by McKean as a failure because “the Bolsheviks failed to spark a national general political strike movement” or create “a Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.” According to McKean, the only sphere in which the Bolsheviks enjoyed some measure of success was in the legal labor movement of 1912-1914.¹⁰

This assessment is at odds with the archival record and says much more about the mindset of anti-Bolshevik historians than about the strike movement. The Director of the Police Department noted in late 1913 that “The faction of Leninists is always better organized than the others, stronger in singleness of purpose...When during the last two years the labor movement began to grow stronger, Lenin and his followers came closer to the workers than the others.”¹¹ Moreover, while the optimist Lenin argued in January 1913 that “the revolutionary upswing is incomparably higher today than it was before the first revolution”,¹² the Mensheviks were often less than enthusiastic participants in the movement, raising fears of “strike fever.”¹³ Additionally, during the war, the Bolsheviks continued to agitate

⁷ Haimson, L.H.. Op.Cit. 1989 p. 509.

⁸ Smith, S.A. *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 53.

⁹ McKean, Robert. Op.Cit.; Melancon, Michael. *The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Russian Anti-War Movement, 1914-17*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990.

¹⁰ McKean. Op.Cit., p.497.

¹¹ Quoted in Trotsky, Leon. *Stalin*. New York: 1941, p.162.

¹² Lenin, V.I.. *Collected Works*, vol.18. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.471.

¹³ McKean. Op.Cit., p.109.

for political strikes while the defencist (pro-War) Mensheviks and SRs abstained from such actions.¹⁴

This essay focuses on the strike movement in the largest metal factory in Moscow. As both the Bolsheviks and SRs competed for influence in the factory, it provides a useful benchmark to assess the strike movement at the factory and even shop level. Using political police (Okhrana) and management reports, and workers' petitions and retrospective memoirs, the source base for the study is diverse. The methodology is explicitly Marxist, examining the process of class development, of workers growing sense of class solidarity at the factory level and weighing the factors that shaped this process of overcoming divisions within the workforce.

Metal production was at the center of Russia's industrial revolution and the class polarization evident throughout Russia society reverberated powerfully in the massive Moscow Metalworks in the city's eastern Rogozhskii district. By 1900, the factory employed over 2,000 workers in 'hot' shops such as the steel foundry, form casting, and rolled metal shops and also 'cold' shops that produced such products bolts, nails and screws. The owner, Iulii Guzhon, personified both the paternalism and intransigence of Russian corporate liberalism by offering free schooling to his workforce, but also hard-line opposition to the workers' movement. From the Lena massacre in 1912 to the end of 1916, workers in this factory struck nineteen times, with nearly fifteen thousand employees participating. Eight of the strikes were overtly political and included over seven thousand workers.¹⁵

This development of class solidarity is all them more impressive when considering the myriad of divisions within the factory. The partition of the factory grounds into separate production departments fostered shop-loyalty (*tsekhovshchina*) among employees. *Tsekhovshchina* transcended craft divisions because former peasants maintained strong ties between specific shops and particular villages. Ideological, skill, and age differences also divided the workforce. Many workers were sympathetic to the autocracy, embracing an aggressive Russian nationalism, while others were either active revolutionaries or sympathetic to the demands of the left organizations. Twenty-five skill categories ranged from the most skilled

¹⁴ Cliff, Tony. *Lenin, volume 2: All Power to the Soviets*. London: Pluto Press, 1976, pp. 22-43.

¹⁵ Murphy, Kevin. *Revolution and Counter-revolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*. New York and Oxford: Berghan, 2005, pp.9-36.

metalworkers, lathe operators, smelters, and rolling mill operators to apprentices and unskilled laborers. The workforce was young, with about half under the age of thirty, a third between thirty and forty years old, and a smaller group over forty. Unskilled women workers earned low wages in the lowest of ten categories and suffered abuse in the traditionally male-dominated metal industry.¹⁶ One worker later wrote that conditions in the shops were “particularly difficult for teenage girls” as heavy conditions “messed up hair, tore dresses, and forced many to leave the factory.”¹⁷

During the 1905 revolution, the workers’ movement in the factory closely mirrored that in Moscow itself with economic and workplace issues dominating grievances until the autumn of 1905 when the movement became more politicized. On 12 January 1905, workers from the nail shop struck and the stoppage quickly spread to other departments, with workers demanding an eight-hour day, wage increases, better work conditions and the removal of abusive managers. Management partially conceded to some of the demands, including reducing work hours to ten hours, ending the strike. In November, workers again demanded the removal of abusive managers and by this time the movement was much more political. Workers struck on 12 November and stayed out through December, elected representatives to the Moscow Soviet and participated in the December Moscow uprising. A handful of workers died in the revolt; many others were jailed or exiled after the rebellion was crushed.¹⁸

The nadir of Russian labor activism came in years of repression after the 1905 Revolution. In 1910, just over 200 strikes took place involving less than fifty thousand workers.¹⁹ Despite repression, workers’ memoirs indicate that a handful of Bolsheviks and SRs continued underground agitation in the Metalworks throughout this period. Management blacklisted militant workers: “Revolutionary workers in Guzhon were fired,” wrote one worker, “and this was communicated to other factories.”²⁰ Other memoirs stress the sense of political isolation and fear that dominated factory life: “For the first three or four years of my work in Guzhon, from 1908 to 1911, all workers were suppressed,” recalled one worker, “and it seemed that at

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.10-12.

¹⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 45. P.I. Tarasov memoir.

¹⁸ Murphy, K. Op.Cit., pp.16-18.

¹⁹ Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. Op.Cit. p.444.

²⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 17. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

that time no kind of revolutionary work was conducted.”²¹ A Bolshevik later wrote that he was arrested in 1910 for participating in a strike, but the Leninists were so weak that an SR member recalled being unaware of any Bolshevik presence: “At this time the Socialist Revolutionaries were the only party in the factory,” he asserted. “I did not hear or see anything about the Bolsheviks.”²²

The reawakening of political activism was led by students. Students demonstrated in the autumn of 1910 in commemoration of the death of the former liberal Duma president Muromtsev; then in memory of Leo Tolstoy; and later against the treatment of political prisoners. These actions helped inspire the workers’ movement as radical students started to make contact with workers, including workers at the Moscow Metalworks. Wider political events often intervened in factory life. The death of Tolstoy also spurred demonstration strikes in the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP) strongholds of Bromlei, Gustav List, Bari, and other factories. In 1911, a student general strike against state repression spread throughout Russia, and the general ferment created an atmosphere in which newly radicalized students initiated contacts with workers.²³

The Lena Goldfields massacre signaled the rebirth of working-class militancy on a mass scale. Working conditions at the goldfields were particularly harsh, with miners working fifteen hour days for extremely low wages. Workers struck on 29 February when rotten meat was distributed and on 4 March, put forward demands for an eight-hour workday, 30 percent raise in wages, improvement in provisions and the elimination of fines. The tsarist government sent in troops and arrested the entire strike committee. On 4 April, 2,500 workers marched in protest, government troops opened fire upon striking Lena miners, leaving five hundred casualties. Minister of Internal Affairs Makarov’s remarks offered a menacing warning to the workers’ movement: “So it has been, and so it will be in the future,” he declared.²⁴ Across the empire, workers responded with a show of force. During the post-Lena and May Day strikes several weeks later, police estimated that nearly three hundred thousand workers struck in

²¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 271, l. 35. V.N. Arapov memoir.

²² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 12. I.F. Toptov memoir; d, 273, l. 97. Kochergin memoir.

²³ Murphy, Kevin. Op.Cit. pp.18-19.

²⁴ Melancon, Michael. The Ninth Circle: The Lena Goldfield Workers and the Massacre of 4 April 1912. *Slavic Review*. 53, 3, Fall 1994, pp.786-795.

St. Petersburg alone, a figure that exceeded the total number of all strike participants in the entire nation between 1909 and 1911.²⁵

In the Moscow Metalworks, according to the Okhrana, the Bolsheviks participated in “a group that made it their goal to organize a strike at the factory ... against the best interest and wishes of the well-intentioned workers.”²⁶ Participants describe how two hundred mostly young workers struck and met in Vadlinsky Woods, listened to speeches about the massacre, sang the Marseillaise, and raised the red flag.²⁷

The small Moscow Bolshevik organization made the factory a political priority, with almost ten percent of their Moscow membership working in the plant, but Okhrana arrests and firings thwarted these efforts. Okhrana reports and worker's memoirs indicate that almost the entire cell was arrested in repeated raids between April and August. The Moscow Okhrana apprehended socialists throughout 1912; with nineteen RSDWP members arrested on 15 April 1912, another eight in May, fifteen in August, seven in September, and six more in November.²⁸ In October 1912, the Okhrana arrested seventeen SR members for organizing in support of court-martialed sailors.²⁹ A Bolshevik organizer who worked in many cities claimed that Moscow “broke the record for provocateurs,” and that efforts to restore the Moscow Committee “inevitably got entangled with one of these provocateurs.”³⁰ Plans to establish a Bolshevik press in the district collapsed in 1912 because the most active worker turned out to be an Okhrana agent. An attempt to revive the Bolshevik cell in 1913 failed when the secret police arrested five Bolsheviks in the days leading up to May Day.³¹

²⁵ McKean, Robert. Op.Cit. p. 495; Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. Op.Cit., p.444.

²⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1497, l. 22. Okhrana report, 12 June 1912.

²⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 17. Seruev recollection; d. 271, l. 306. S.S. Gerasimov memoir; d. 274, ll. 40, 103. P.L. Lavrent'ev, I. Lidvanskii memoirs; d. 275, ll. 17, 49. P.V. Lazrenov, S. S. Leshkovtsev memoirs; RGASPI f. 70, op. 3, d. 150, l. 88, F.I. Karpukhin recollections of RSDWP in Rogozhskaiia district, 1906-1917.

²⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 934, ll. 1, 7, 8, 13, 16; d. 1019 l. 3, d. 1422, l.1; d. 1573, l.1, 1578, l. 5. Okhrana reports 1912.

²⁹ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1645, ll. 1-8. Okhrana reports, November 1912.

³⁰ Bobrovskaya, Celila. *Twenty Years in Underground Russia: Memoirs of a Rank and File Bolshevik*. Chicago: Proletarian Publishers, 1978, pp.222-223.

³¹ G.A. Arutiunov, *Rabochie dvizhenie v Rossii v periode novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema 1910-1914 godov* (Moscow, 1975), 214.

The Okhrana had also infiltrated the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks but the organization managed to sustain its operations and continued to act as an effective catalyst for the labor movement. Despite three Okhrana agents on the St. Petersburg Central Committee and repeated roundups, the group was able to bounce back, rebuild a center, and agitate for strikes, and by 1916 had expanded to three thousand members.³² In Moscow the Bolsheviks had only two hundred members in the spring of 1913 and about six hundred three years later.³³

Despite the political arrests, a seismic shift in workers' confidence had reinvigorated the movement and the divide between economic and political strikes dissipated as workers' confidence quickly grew. Soon after the Lena strike, employees petitioned Guzhon for an eight-hour workday and organized economic strikes in different shops.³⁴ The strike became increasingly bitter when management brought in strikebreakers from southern Russia.³⁵ New workers started at the factory in July, one of whom told the Okhrana that strikers had followed him from the factory and had threatened that "they would deal with him," while another claimed that strikers threatened to "throw him off the bridge."³⁶ The mayor's office sent an order to the Okhrana chief of the district, asking him to "Find the ones at the factory who are the worst scoundrels and who set the tone for others."³⁷ In response, the Okhrana reported that eight workers had played important roles in the strike and that at least three were Bolshevik members or sympathizers, one of whom, according to an undercover Okhrana agent, had worked in the factory for eighteen years and "enjoyed a degree of popularity among the workers in the factory."³⁸

³² Shliapnikov, Alexander. *Kanun samnadsatogo goda*. Moscow-Petrograd, 1923, vol.1, pp.10-11, 292.

³³ Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochie dvizhenie v Rossii v periode novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema 1910-1914 godov*. Moscow: Nauka, 1975, p. 214.

³⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1142, ll. 1-2, 9. Okhrana telephone dispatches, 12, 17, 21 July 1912.

³⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 255, l. 83. Ermolaev recollection.

³⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, ll. 12, 22. Okhrana telephone dispatch, 26 July 1912; Okhrana report, 1 August 1912. Under questioning, the two accused leaders denied intimidating strikebreakers.

³⁷ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, l. 11. Okhrana report, 21 July 1912.

³⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, ll. 18-19; d. 1206, ll. 11, 19-32. Okhrana reports, August and September 1912.

A distinguishing feature of the post-Lena movement was the lack of involvement by working women and younger workers. Though they earned low wages, one worker wrote that “they remained outside the movement and did not participate in strikes.”³⁹ Okhrana reports on strikes and subsequent arrests suggest organizers themselves apparently made little effort to involve women, focusing their efforts on traditional socialist strongholds in the metal and printing industries. A wave of strikes in early November in support of court marshaled Sevastopol sailors was overwhelming male, yet women workers, including four hundred from the Bonaker Metalworks, did participate.⁴⁰

The relative weakness of revolutionary influence, however, meant that even older more skilled male workers in the factory refrained from strike activity. Sixty thousand St. Petersburg workers struck in support of the Sevastopol sailors involved in a mutiny, an action supported by fourteen thousand workers in eighty-two factories in Moscow, including nine factories in the district.⁴¹ By the spring of 1913, the Okhrana was confident that it had again managed to obliterate the revolutionary underground in Moscow, anticipating a demonstration-free anniversary of the Lena massacre because, “To have any organized event, appropriate agitation is necessary, which assumes the presence of some kind of underground party organization.” However, “thanks to the most recent arrests, everything has been extracted that was considered more or less capable of even creating a semblance of such activity ... the most conscious carriers of Social Democratic ideals, are terrified...”⁴²

The Okhrana belief that the strike movement could be surgically snuffed out by removing key activists underestimated both the resonance of revolutionary demands among wider groups of workers and the socialists’ resolve to continue the battle while replenishing their ranks. On May Day 1913, four weeks after the secret police claimed that the revolutionary underground had been crushed, thirty-three thousand Moscow workers struck.⁴³ The revival of Moscow’s political strikes continued in June with

³⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 13. I. F. Toptov memoir.

⁴⁰ GARF, f. 63, op. 32 (1912), d. 1645, ll. 74-217.

⁴¹ McKean, 495. GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1645, ll. 7, 8, 74-76, 97, 150-152. Okhrana reports, November 1912.

⁴² GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1399, l. 38. Okhrana report, 3 April 1913.

⁴³ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17. l. 31; TsMAM f. 526, op. 1, d. 24, l. 24. Guzhon letter to the Moscow Society of Factory and Mill Owners (MSFMO) 1 May 1914.

forty-eight of fifty-seven stoppages overtly political, but only a small minority of Moscow Metalworks employees participated because of the previous rounds of arrests. The largest strikes were in the Social Democratic strongholds of Sytin Printing, Dinamo and Bari. In contrast, workers in Guzhon's factory did not participate. On 24 June renewed strikes included six factories in the district, but only 198 of 2,759 Moscow Metalworks employees participated three days later.⁴⁴

By July 1913 Guzhon expressed concern to other factory owners that "the strike movement taking place at present in Moscow industrial organizations does not show a clear economic form and the essence of the demands and other characteristics are reminiscent of 1905-1906 with all the qualities of a political demonstration." Again the industrialists' response was to call for harsh measures. Metal factories had called for "listing the names of the most zealous strikers," and requested that members circulate information about the movement's leaders.⁴⁵ Although Guzhon was justifiably concerned about the reemergence of political strikes, the only other political action during 1913 in his Metalworks occurred during September, when a mere seventy-five employees stopped work to protest against the harassment of the labor press in Moscow.⁴⁶

A comparison with the Bromlei factory, a metalworking plant with a strong Bolshevik cell,⁴⁷ illustrates the degree to which workers responded to shop floor agitation. At Bromlei 900 (of 1,100) workers struck on the anniversary of Lena, while Moscow Metalworks employees continued to work. On May Day 1913, 800 Bromlei workers stopped work, but again the Okhrana found reported no stoppage in Guzhon's factory. At the beginning of the strike in defense of Baltic sailors in June, 600 Bromlei employees went out, but less than 200 Moscow Metalworks employees participated and only on the last day of the action. Bromlei's 1,100 workers led the strike wave in November 1913 in support of arrested St. Petersburg workers while employees in Guzhon's enterprise did not participate.⁴⁸ Thus, in a factory with a strong Bolshevik presence on the shop floor, workers repeatedly struck in large numbers.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1399, ll. 113-115, 171, 209. Okhrana reports, June 1913.

⁴⁵ RGIAgM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 15. Guzhon letter, 12 July 1913.

⁴⁶ . GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 191 T2, l. 494. Okhrana report, 2 October 1913.

⁴⁷ Arutiunov, G.A. Op.Cit., p.374.

⁴⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 338, ll. 43-4; d. 1399, l. 141; d. 1400, ll. 210-211. Okhrana reports, 1913.

The arrest and subsequent collapse of the Bolshevik cell in the Moscow Metalworks meant that the SRs set the tone for political strike action in the factory for the duration of the prerevolutionary period. An SR member wrote that they had attracted fifty young workers, had organized a study circle and a drama group, and apparently led a successful economic strike in the steel foundry shop in April 1913.⁴⁹ One of the few Bolsheviks also acknowledged admitted that the SRs had had more influence in organizing political strike action.⁵⁰

By the eve of the war the sectarian bad blood appears to have subsided as socialists cooperated in an attempt to establish the metalworkers' union in the plant as they did in other Moscow factories.⁵¹ One SR member noted a strengthening of ties among different factories, including a general strike fund established through cooperation between the SRs and Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and the metalworkers' union.⁵² Renewed collaboration probably encouraged several economic strikes, the first of their kind since the spring of 1913. *Pravda* reported a work stoppage in the steel foundry shop in March 1914.⁵³ Workers' memoirs also mention two short one-day strikes: one in the cable shop, which was defeated, and a second in the bolt shop, which resulted in a wage increase.⁵⁴

On 15 March 1914, Guzhon reported to the owners "the latest workers' demonstration in St. Petersburg shows an extremely weak reverberation" in Moscow with only seven hundred workers participating. A few days later four thousand employees were on strike in Moscow but by then the movement in St. Petersburg that had earlier included fifty thousand workers had collapsed.⁵⁵ Yet on May Day 1914, Guzhon informed the

⁴⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 79. M.G. Ob"edkov memoir. GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d.] 256, ll. 47-60, d. 273, l. 97. F.I. Karpukhin recollection and memoir.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 23. Klimanov recollection.

⁵¹ Bonnell, Victoria. *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983, p.415.

⁵² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 256, ll. 47-60; d. 273, l. 97. F. I. Karpukhin recollection and memoir.

⁵³ *Pravda.*, 18 March 1914.

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 256, l. 54, d. 275, l. 91, d. 76, l. 59. F. I. Karpukhin recollection; M. G. Ob"edkov, and E. D. Tumanov memoirs.

⁵⁵ RGIAgM, f. 526, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 79, 81. Guzhon reports to MSFMO, 14, 19 March 1914.

Moscow Manufacturer's association that more than twenty thousand workers in seventy-three enterprises had struck in

Moscow.⁵⁶ Over one million workers struck in the first seven months of 1914, a level of strike activity comparable to that of the 1905 revolt. In July of 1914, after government troops fired on Putilov workers, a general strike developed and workers erected barricades on the streets of St. Petersburg.⁵⁷

Two SR-led political strikes in 1914 illustrate the importance of socialist agitation at the shop level. On 26 April management informed the factory inspector that 1,120 Guzhon workers had struck "because of the expulsion of some members from the State Duma from several meetings." The strike included all employees in three smaller shops, but the only large shop with a strong showing was the SR stronghold in the steel foundry.⁵⁸ The stoppage in response to the July 1914 general strike of 120,000 in St. Petersburg was larger and better organized. Management informed the factory inspector that 1,500 (of 3,000) Moscow Metalworks employees had struck on 7 July.⁵⁹ Management letters to the factory inspector indicate that this was a well-organized action: workers left in unison at 8 a.m. on 7 July and the next day all workers returned "at the usual time and started work." Two days later the same workers "after lunch again stopped work in the form of a protest against the imposition of fines for the above-mentioned unauthorized work stoppage." The SR-dominated steel foundry shop was again the only large shop to participate.⁶⁰ Thus, participation depended on agitators in particular shops--not just factories--to carry the argument for strike action.

World War I brought working-class militancy to a virtual halt. The Factory Inspectorate reported 3,493 stoppages in which 1,327,897 workers participated in the first seven months of the 1914 but only 9,562 workers participated in 41 strikes in the last five months of the year.⁶¹ No strikes

⁵⁶ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17. l. 31. Guzhon letter to MSFMO, 1 May 1914.

⁵⁷ McKean, *St. Petersburg Between the Revolutions*, 297-317.

⁵⁸ RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 211, l. 5. Management letter to factory inspector, 26 April 1914.

⁵⁹ RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 211, l. 10. Management letter to factory inspector, 8 July 1915.

⁶⁰ . RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 195, ll. 251-253; d. 211, ll. 10-12. Factory management letters to factory inspector 8, 9, 10 July 1914.

⁶¹ Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. *Op.Cit.* p.444,445.

were recorded in the Moscow Metalworks for the first seven months of the war.⁶² “At the start of the war,” wrote an SR leader, “there was a complete stoppage of strikes and later, although they happened, they were small and short-lived.”⁶³ The decline in strike activity did not correlate with the deterioration in workers’ living standards as management utilized the patriotic mood to cut the average monthly wage from 48.3 to 34.1 rubles by March 1915.⁶⁴ Another memoir recalled that during the first year of the war “it was tense and you could not say a word against the war ... after the capture of Przemysl, workers were taken to Red Square for a prayer service” and if one did not participate “you were considered an opponent of the war.”⁶⁵

Economic actions started to revive in the first seven months of 1915, with 231,794 workers involved in 523 strikes. Political strikes remained weak as only 18,008 workers throughout the empire participated in 42 much smaller stoppages in the first year of the war, the largest in Moscow (3,098 workers total) in March 1915 in support of Bolshevik Duma deputies on trial.⁶⁶ The first wartime strike on 15 April 1915 shows how far solidarity had slipped. The Okhrana reported that eighty workers in the rolled metal shop nightshift had turned down management’s offer of a 10 to 30 percent raise and then struck, demanding a piece-rate increase of 50 to 100 percent.⁶⁷ Guzhon’s strategy for defeating this strike involved a combination of compromise and intimidation. On the same day, management informed the factory director, “because of the rise in prices of goods, all workers in the factory would receive an increase of ten kopecks an hour.”⁶⁸ The average monthly wage jumped from 34.1 to 52.5 rubles—the largest wartime wage increase in the factory.⁶⁹ Management also fired thirty-four strikers.⁷⁰ Additionally, management apparently victimized the remaining

⁶² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. Factory list of wartime strikes.

⁶³ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 271, l. 38. V.N. Arapov memoir.

⁶⁴ RGIAGM, f. 2322, op. 1, d. 3, l. 246. Report of monthly wages, 8 May 1916.

⁶⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 117. E.D. Tumanov memoir.

⁶⁶ . Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. Op.Cit., p.446.

⁶⁷ GARF, f. 63, op. 35, d. 25 T1, l. 88. Okhrana report 15 April 1915.

⁶⁸ 148. RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 229, l. 20. Management letter to factory inspector, 15 April 1915.

⁶⁹ RGIAGM, f. 2322, op. 1, d. 3, l. 246. Monthly wages reported on 8 May 1916.

⁷⁰ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 62. MSFMO vice president letter to MSFMO, 20 April 1915.

rolling mill operators as their real wages fell to half their 1913 level.⁷¹ An activist admitted that “things went badly” during the strike because “other shops would not support it.” Significantly, the sectional divisions between older skilled workers and younger workers were strengthened at the start of the war: “We had many young workers and at that time it was impossible to raise the issue of equality in the shop.”⁷²

Nationalist sentiment at the start of the war helped set the stage for anti-German riots after Russian troops withdrew from Przemysl in May 1915. Tens of thousands of Moscow workers, including employees from the Moscow Metalworks, looted and pillaged German owned businesses and factories. Yet continued war losses, workers’ deteriorating economic position, and their perception that gendarmes had led the riots and then arrested other participants all undermined the patriotic mood.⁷³

Workers’ memoirs indicate that after the riots the political mood began to change. “Soon after the pogroms in May 1915 were over,” one activist recalled, “workers began to express their dissatisfaction with the war.”⁷⁴ A Bolshevik activist wrote that “comrades again renewed work that had been interrupted” after the upheavals.⁷⁵ Another Guzhon worker described the deteriorating living standards and growing political anger against the regime: “Our skilled workers began discussions about political events ... that the Tsar was a fool incapable of governing and that Rasputin ruled Russia.” The revolutionary underground became bolder, putting up political leaflets in the general lavatory near the sheet metal shop calling for “the overthrow of the Tsar, for arming workers. Frequently these included quotes from the speeches from the meetings of the State Duma by the Bolshevik deputies...”⁷⁶

By the summer’s end, the patriotic fervor had dissipated, giving way to a new round of militancy. Six hundred and fifty workers in the rolled metal shop struck for seven days in August 1915 and prevailed in the first substantial wartime economic stoppage, securing a small wage increase.⁷⁷ In

⁷¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. Factory statistics collected after Revolution.

⁷² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 81. Kochergin recollection.

⁷³ Murphy, 29-31.

⁷⁴ 187. GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 19. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 14. I.F. Toptov memoir.

⁷⁶ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 273, l. 39. F.I. Karpukhin memoir.

⁷⁷ RGEA f. 9597 op. 1, d. 16, l. 42; M.I. Gil’berg history of Guzhon factory.

a meeting of the Russian Council of Ministers on 2 September 1915, Minister of Internal Affairs N.B. Shcherbatov warned that, “The testimony of all agents is unanimous ... the labor movement will develop to an extent which will threaten the safety of the state.”⁷⁸ In Moscow the sentiment was “violently anti-government” and “workers and the population as a whole are gripped by some sort of madness and are like gunpowder.” He complained that “authorities in Moscow have virtually no forces,” and that those at their disposal were “far from reliable.” Moreover, Moscow had a “wild band” of thirty thousand convalescent soldiers who clashed with police and freed prisoners. In the event of disorders, Shcherbatov feared, “this whole horde will be on the side of the crowd.”⁷⁹

On the following day, Tsar Nicholas prorogued the Duma and triggered the largest wartime political strike wave in Moscow. Alexander Shliapnikov wrote that in Moscow during the late summer of 1915, rising prices and the dismissing of the State Duma led to “meetings and rallies everywhere.”⁸⁰ Guzhon reported to the Moscow factory owners that on 4 September 31,166 workers in sixty-one enterprises struck.⁸¹ SR agitation again placed the Moscow Metalworks at the head of the movement as the entire factory struck in unison. On 5 September 1915, “workers in all departments appeared at work at the prescribed time, but then did not start work and without permission left the factory without issuing any kind of demands.”⁸² The Okhrana reported that three thousand Guzhon workers had “stopped work for two days in the form of a protest about the incident of interrupting the activity of the State Duma.”⁸³

This brief SR militancy during the war was exceptional, as their members in Moscow tended to be more conservative than in Petrograd. On 19 August 1914, the SRs resolved that, because of “the liberationist character of the war,” no attempt should be made to hinder it. Nevertheless, responding to the growth of antigovernment sentiment following the

⁷⁸ Cherniavsky, Michael ed., *Prologue to Revolution*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967, pp. 234-237.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-237.

⁸⁰ Shliapnikov, Alexander. *On the Eve of 1917, Recollections from the Revolutionary Underground*. London: Allison and Busby, 1982, p.101.

⁸¹ RGIAGM, f. 179, op. 21, d. 3391, l. 153; Guzhon letter to MSFMO, n.d. September 1915.

⁸² RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 241, l. 4. Management letter to factory inspector, 5 September 1915.

⁸³ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 191 T5, l. 263. Okhrana report, 2 October 1915.

dismissal of the Duma, Moscow SRs briefly shifted to the left, playing an important role in the September 1915 strike wave, but retreated again after another round of arrests. Moscow SRs convened to pass resolutions that de-emphasized strikes and demonstrations in favor of building their party organization.⁸⁴

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were so weak in the district that in September 1916 their Moscow Committee decided to combine the Lefortovo and Rogozhskii districts that had a combined membership of only thirty-three: ten in Dinamo and smaller cells in Bari, Guzhon, Tsindel', and Postavshchik. Dinamo was the only cell that survived an Okhrana sweep in October, and went on to spark three political strikes in 1916.⁸⁵ The Bolsheviks had a difficult time going it alone in Moscow with only 23,566 participants in political strikes in 1916 while the stronger Bolshevik organization in Petrograd sparked more than ten times that many (256,067), including 138,076 in support of court-martialed Baltic sailors in October.⁸⁶ During the war, the overwhelming number of political strike participants, 348,118 or 74.2%, were found in the politically-charged atmosphere of the capital, with Moscow a distant second with only 39,279 or 8.4%.⁸⁷ Aside from the brief SR cooperation in September 1915, the Okhrana records during the war shows round after round of sweeps in the factories and arrests of Bolsheviks. These were not fictional activists, exaggerated by the Okhrana, but real men and women who paid dearly for keeping the revolutionary movement alive under dire conditions.⁸⁸

Despite the absence of overtly political stoppages in the Moscow Metalworks after the SR participation in the summer of 1915, seven economic strikes demonstrated renewed labour confidence and improved organization in the face of Okhrana and management threats of reprisals. Two strikes in August 1915 involved 400 and 650 workers, extended beyond a single shop, and lasted nine and seven days respectively. A two-day strike in December 1915 involved nearly 500 workers. Strikes in 1916 were even stronger: 3,000 workers participated in a May stoppage, 760

⁸⁴ Melancon, Michael. *Op.Cit.* 1990, pp.67-81

⁸⁵ Karlova, L.A. *Istoriia zavoda "Dinamo"*. Moscow: Profizdat, 1961, pp.135-137.

⁸⁶ Brian and Haimson. *Op.Cit.*, p. 444. Brian and Haimson do not attribute these strikes to Bolshevik agitation.

⁸⁷ Cliff, T. *Op.Cit.*, p.36.

⁸⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 34-36. Okhrana reports 1914-1916.

struck in June, and more than 1,000 participated in an eight-day strike in September, with another 489 going out for six days in December.⁸⁹

The May 1916 stoppage was the best organized of the wartime strikes. Plant managers, possibly sensing trouble, issued a factory announcement on 30 April that increased insurance benefits for workers and their dependents.⁹⁰ On 2 May three thousand employees stopped work and demanded a raise in the minimum rate from 2.5 to 4 rubles.⁹¹ On the following day, according to management, some departments began work, but under threats from strikers in other shops, the strike soon engulfed the entire factory. At 9:30 a.m., workers from all departments gathered at the main office and handed the factory administration a list of demands. These included: doubling sick pay; minimum wages of fifteen kopecks for apprentices and women, twenty-five kopecks for male workers, and thirty kopecks for skilled workers; ending work at 2:30 on Saturdays and the day before holidays; and issuing wages and bonus pay on Saturday.⁹²

Significantly, the new grievances reflected a demographic shift to a younger and more female workforce that had occurred during the war. Whereas on the eve of the war, teenage workers made up 15.7 percent of the workforce, two years later they constituted 26.6 percent. Similarly, the number of women had steadily increased from 193 in July 1914 to 363 in December 1916, an increase from 5.8 to 13.1 percent of the workforce, with women working in six shops instead of just two as they had earlier.⁹³ Thus, the project of forging unity against management necessitated the drawing up of more inclusive demands that addressed the concerns of an increasingly significant minority. This strengthening of workplace solidarity by taking up the demands and concerns of women and younger workers has previously been largely ignored in the literature of the pre-revolutionary strike movement.

The Okhrana reported on 3 May that after lunch, all workers with the exception of seven hundred workers in the rolled metal and repair shops,

⁸⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. List of factory economic strikes during the war that omits the May stoppage. GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 32, Okhrana report, 2 May 1916.

⁹⁰ RGIAgM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 249, l. 9. Factory announcement, 30 April 1916.

⁹¹ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 32. Okhrana report 2 May 1916.

⁹² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 210, l. 93. RGIAgM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 249, l. 7. Management report to factory inspector, 3 May 1916.

⁹³ TsGAMO, f. 186, op. 3, d. 3, ll. 14-17. Factory employment statistics.

returned to work.⁹⁴ Some workers expressed dissatisfaction with the results, and a subsequent 22-day strike by 760 workers in June was the longest of the prerevolutionary period. One memoir describes the difficulties of maintaining such a long action because in “the third week of the strike, the morale of many workers suffered. Many were forced to sell their things to somehow survive.” By the fifth week, many workers secretly returned to work, and by the sixth week “almost all” workers returned. Management managed to break the strike with “some comrades” not returning to work as they were “subject to repression.”⁹⁵

In the context of the rising working-class movement, such management tactics only encouraged more effective labor organization. The eight-day strike of more than a thousand workers in September and October 1916 shows the increased level of workers’ solidarity, organization, and confidence. The Okhrana reported that this was the only strike in the district for the month.⁹⁶ To avoid victimization, shops elected delegates to meet with Guzhon and workers did not leave the plant.⁹⁷ The strike started in the form casting and steel foundry shops on 26 September and spread to the bolt and cable shops the next day. Employment figures show that the strike included all employees in the four shops, including 123 women in three shops and 33 teenage laborers. This was also a well-timed strike, as management complained it caused delays in “orders for various items needed for state defense.” Management was compelled to ask the inspector to certify that the strike had caused the holdup, reporting that on 5 October the strike had been “liquidated,” but provided no details of the result.⁹⁸

A six-day strike by almost five hundred workers in December was the last action of the prerevolutionary period, and again showed a high level of organization with the solid participation of the entire form-casting shop and elected delegates to avoid victimization.⁹⁹ Workers demanded pay for days when it was impossible to work because the machines were frozen, and despite the threat of sending military reservists to the front, almost all

⁹⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 34. Okhrana report, 3 May 1916.

⁹⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, ll. 19-20. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

⁹⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 12, d. 191 T5, l. 578. Okhrana report for September 1916.

⁹⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, ll. 92-93. M.G. Ob”edkov memoir.

⁹⁸ TsGAMO, f. 186, op. 3, d. 3, l. 16. Monthly employment statistics; RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 272, l. 1. Management report to factory inspector, 11 October 1916.

⁹⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24.

workers in several shops struck.¹⁰⁰ The strike ended in a partial victory for the workers, as management conceded to some of the workers' demands.¹⁰¹

The strike movement in the Moscow Metalworks illustrates several features of the prerevolutionary strike movement. First, the radicalization of workers at the factory level cannot be viewed in separation from wider political events. The student movement of 1910-11, the Lena massacre, the war, the proroguing of the Duma, etc., all impacted workers' consciousness and their willingness (or unwillingness at the start of the war) to strike. Second, there was clearly cooperation between socialist groups in the pre-War years. All contemporary sources indicate that revolutionaries—both Bolshevik and SRs—played a significant role in organizing strikes, particularly political stoppages. Strikes did not organize workers, workers organized strikes and these efforts often depended on the presence or absence of worker agitation at the shop level. When the larger SR cell participated and cooperated with the Bolsheviks, the strike actions were the largest in Moscow, though this SR influence in the factory was exceptional rather than the norm in the city. Rather than mandated by directives from a party center, political strikes were the result of local initiatives by shop militants supporting the larger movement in the capital. Evidence at the shop level suggests that Haimson and Smith were correct, that a wider milieu of experienced activists collaborated in organizing economic strikes. Third, Okhrana repression in Moscow was particularly harsh and, unlike Petrograd, the Bolsheviks had a more difficult time organizing political strikes by themselves when other socialists retreated from strike action. While political strikes continued in a few Bolshevik strong-holds during the war, the movement was much less effective than it was in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks paid a heavy price for their principled tenacity while pro-War socialists temporarily benefited numerically—a factor usually overlooked in explaining the contours of 1917. The Mensheviks and SR strength in early 1917 was based in part on their pro-War anti-strike pledge of the previous years which allowed them to avoid the repeated Okhrana sweeps of the factories. It was hardly coincidental that the cowards of October 1917 were also the cowards of the Great War. Fourth, workers learned through class conflict. Their collective experience refutes the notion that workers were mere victims incapable of challenging a “strong state”, while also confirming the Marxist notion of the working class as a powerful “universal

¹⁰⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 257, ll. 1-2. P.N. Klimanov recollection.

¹⁰¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 274, l. 20. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

class” capable of reshaping society. The long-term tendency was for workers to become better organized and more inclusive in their demands in attempting to combat both the employers and the Okhrana. Significantly, by the eve of 1917, the grievances of women and younger workers were included in strike demands, strengthening intra- and inter-shop solidarity. This protracted radicalization and development of class consciousness would directly impact events in 1917— the culmination of years of bitter class conflict in the factories.

Workers' Strikes in the Paris Region in 1968: Continuities and Discontinuities

Michael Seidman

The specter of revolution dominates much of the historiography on 1968 in France. Henri Lefebvre, Alain Touraine, Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis viewed the May “events” as a welcome “rupture” (*une brèche*) with a hierarchical consumer society.¹ These French sociologists/philosophers found that the 1968 rebellion anticipated a new social order. Likewise, Pierre Bourdieu stated that May 68 was a “critical moment” “when all became possible.”² Michel de Certeau, a pioneer of current cultural interpretations, argued that May represented an innovative “prise de parole” by oppressed social groups.³ Most recently, a handful of French political scientists have mirrored Bourdieu’s perspective by labeling 68 as a crisis of “symbolic order” “without precedent.”⁴

¹ Morin, Edgar; Lefort, Claude; Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Mai 68: La brèche*. Paris: Fayard, 1988), p.185; Touraine, Alain. *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform*, trans. Leonard F. X. Mayhew. New York: Random House, 1979, pp.26-81; Lefebvre, Henri. *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969, p.118.

² Bourdieu, Pierre. *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp.161, 182; Gilcher-Holtey, Ingrid. *Die 68er Bewegung: Deutschland-Westeuropa-USA*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001, pp.72, 80, 83, employs Bourdieu’s concept of the “critical event.”

³ de Certeau, Michel. *La prise de parole: Pour une nouvelle culture*. Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968; Gobbille, Boris. *Mai-Juin 68: crise du consentement et ruptures d’allégeance. Mai-Juin 68*, p.21.

⁴ Gobbille, Boris. *Mai 68*. Paris : 2008, pp.6, 95; Damamme, Dominique; Gobbille, Boris; Matoni, Frédérique; Pudal, Bernard. *Mai-Juin 68 en France, le temps de comprendre*.

These analyses emphasizing discontinuity are based largely on interpretations of the student component of the 1968 events, and they either ignore or distort the history of the workers' movement. The latter began after student protests at Nanterre and La Sorbonne in late April and early May had challenged and weakened the centralized Gaullist government. On Monday, May 13, a large worker-student demonstration initiated a one-day solidarity strike against government "repression" of the student movement. The following Monday, May 20, workers' strikes expanded massively, even as the government assured many essential services, such as gasoline distribution, to priority consumers. Thus, workers in 1968 continued various nineteenth-century traditions when wage earners took advantage of an upward economic cycle and full employment to launch major strike waves, which often began in the spring and on Mondays (Saint Lundi).⁵ On May 25 formal national negotiations among government, employers, and unions opened in Paris. On Monday, May 27, the major partners issued what became known as the Grenelle Accord, but workers in large Parisian metallurgical firms rejected it. The estimates of the total number of strikers at the height of the movement vary. Bernard Pudal declares seven to ten million; Kristin Ross nine million; Antoine Prost seven million, and Xavier Vigna 3.5 million.⁶ Whatever the figure, it far outclassed the 1 million strikers of the previous great strike wave in the spring of 1936 during the Popular Front.

On 29 May a large Confédération générale du travail (CGT, General Confederation of Labor) demonstration in Paris and President Charles de Gaulle's departure from the capital seemed to indicate a deep crisis of the

In : Damamme, Dominique; Gobbille, Boris; Matoni, Frédérique; Pudal, Bernard, eds. *Mai-Juin 68*. Paris: éd. de l'Atelier, 2008, pp.11, 13, 19.

⁵ Perrot, Michelle. *Les ouvriers en grève: France 1871-1890*. Paris: Mouton, 1974, pp.101, 109, 137, 722.

⁶ Pudal, Bernard. Les événements de mai et juin 1968: bref récit chronologique. In : *Mai 68*. Op.Cit., p. 192; Pudal, Bernard Pudal and Retière Jean-Noël., Les grèves ouvrières de 68, un mouvement social sans lendemain mémorial. In *Mai 68*. Op.Cit., p.208; Prost, Antoine. Les grèves de mai-juin 1968. *L'Histoire*, no. 110, April, p.36, 2008 ; Ross, Kristin. *May '68 and its Afterlives*. Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 8, 184; Vigna, Xavier. *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68*. Rennes Ed. Presses universitaires de Rennes: 2007, p.37; Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle. L'épicentre. In : Artières, Phillipe and Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle. eds. *68: Une histoire collective*. Paris: **La Découverte**, 2008, p.226; Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle. *Le moment 68: Une histoire contestée*. Paris Le Seuil, 2008, p.46; Kergoat, Jacques. Sous la page, la grève. In : Artous, Antoine; Epszajn, Didier; Silberstein, Patrick eds., *La France des années 68*. Paris : Syllepse, 2008, p. 66.

regime. The following day, De Gaulle returned to Paris and addressed the nation. His speech was followed by a massive rightist demonstration which contested the leftist dominance of the streets of the capital. The government took the offensive, guaranteed “the right to work,” and threatened recalcitrant strikers with repressive state power. Unlike in 1848 or 1871, authorities were able to fuel and feed the city and thus to prevent their adversaries from gaining the solid support of discontented housewives.⁷ In the first week of June, strikers in smaller firms returned to work, and gradually in the first half of that month, holdouts from the major enterprises negotiated firm-by-firm agreements which ended the work stoppages.

Workers’ actions could only with difficulty be seen as a “rupture” or, in the hyperbolic words of André Malraux and Georges Pompidou, “a crisis of civilization.” Similarly, the influential sociologists mentioned above viewed wage earners as participating in a broader movement that challenged the social order. They posited that salaried personnel desired *autogestion* (workers’ control) which demanded the end of separation between those who commanded and those who obeyed. According to these analysts and some recent historical accounts, workers wanted to democratize their workplaces.⁸ Other progressives sympathetic to the movement yearned so deeply to believe that workers wished to take over their factories that they invented the story that the personnel of the CSF factory at Brest had initiated “democratic control” and were producing walkie-talkies.⁹ The myth-makers—who included historians Alain Delale and Gilles Ragache, theorists Ernest Mandel and Serge Mallet, and the major newspapers *Le Monde* and *Témoignage chrétien*—proved as willing to take their desires for reality as any youthful *gauchiste*.

As in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, strikers’ demands remained traditionally materialist, and workplace democracy was seldom

⁷ On 1848, see Price, Roger. *The French Second Republic: A Social History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972, p.171.

⁸ Horn, Gerd-Rainer. *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.2; Wolin, Richard. *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, pp.98, 139, 192, 214.

⁹ Porhel, Vincent. L’*autogestion* à la CSF de Brest. In: Dreyfus-Armand, Geneviève and Gervereau, Laurent eds. *Mai 68: Les mouvements étudiants en France et dans le monde*. Nanterre La Découverte : 1988, p.395; Porhel, Vincent. *Ouvriers bretons: Conflits d’usines, conflits identitaires en Bretagne dans les années 1968*. Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes: 2008, pp. 76-104. See also Kergoat. Op.Cit. pp.77-78, 83.

invoked by the workers themselves or their representatives.¹⁰ Rather than reflecting worker sentiment, the call for *autogestion* may have served as a facile solution to the genuine and thorny problem of worker dissatisfaction with industrial discipline in particular and wage labor in general. The doctrines of self-management had little appeal to a mass of wage laborers for whom work remained *travail* (from the Latin, *tripalium*, instrument of torture) and who were more enthusiastic about escaping the factory or enjoying the opportunities of consumption provided by the expanding 1960s economy. Despite the rhetoric of various unions and parties, including the leftist *groupuscules*, workers never fully identified themselves as producers who wanted to take control of the means of production.

The notion of workers' control in the 1960s recalled *fin-de-siècle* French revolutionary syndicalism. *Autogestionnaire* militants and intellectuals demanded that the individual adapt to the productivist collectivity. However, workers inevitably questioned whether it was really advantageous for them to run the factories.¹¹ Many concluded that it was

¹⁰ Kergoat, Op.Cit., p.58; Perrot, Op.Cit., pp.55, 83; Cf. the editorial in *Les Temps modernes*, no. 264, May–June, 1968, p.11; Morin, Edgar; Lefort, Claude; Castoriadis, Cornelius. Op.Cit. p.95; Gorz, André. *Limites et potentialités du mouvement de mai*. *Les Temps modernes*, no. 266–267, August–September, 1968, pp.240–241. Statera, Gianni. *Death of a Utopia: The Development of Student Movements in Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, p.137: “On May 25 ... millions of people poured into the squares and streets of every French town to demonstrate against the regime, to ask for ‘revolutionary reforms,’ substantial wage increases, a genuine share in power for the masses.” Katsiaficas, George. *The Imagination of the New Left*. Boston: South End Press, 1987, p.106: “In general, however, workers’ actions against management revealed a fundamental aspiration of the general strike: *autogestion*.” Feenburg, Andrew and Freedman, Jim. *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, p.34: “It was to the Sorbonne, to an alternative to union leadership, to advocates of the anarchistic theory of self-management, that the workers turned.”

¹¹ Zegel, Sylvain. *Les idées de mai*. Paris Gallimard, 1968, p.43. Recent articles have questioned the

importance and extent of *autogestionnaire* desires among workers. See Bonnet, Alexis. *L’Autogestion et les cédétistes lyonnais* and Porhel, Vincent. *L’autogestion*. In : Dreyfus-

Armand, Op.Cit., pp.363–399. Also, Hassenteufel, Patrick. *Citroën-Paris: Une grève d’émancipation*. ; Capitaine, Ronan. *Dassault Saint-Cloud: Les grèves de la continuité*. Naudet, Jean-Francois. *La RATP : Une grève-régie* ; and Ribeill, Georges. *SNCF: Une grève dans la tradition de la corporation du rail*. In : Mouriaux, René; Perceheron, Annick; Prost, Antoine; Tartakowsky, Danielle eds. *1968 Exploration du mai français*, vol.1, Paris: Harmattan, 1992, pp.35-140 ; Pigenet, Michel. *Les mutations des mondes et du syndicalisme portuaires autour de 1968*. In: Margairaz, Michel and Tartakowsky, Danielle eds. *1968 entre libération et libéralisation*. Rennes Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp.289-302.

not, since successful workers' control demanded a degree of professional and social commitment that they could not or would not provide. Instead of autogestion, during the strikes of May-June, the major CGT and even local Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT, French Democratic Confederation of Labor) affiliates recalled their agreement of January 1966, which pledged to struggle for a dramatic 35 percent increase in the minimum wage, higher salaries for skilled workers, job security, and a reduction of the working week.¹² In metallurgy and other branches, the CGT and the CFDT demanded less work time and more pay, particularly for the lowest-paid workers, who were often foreigners, women, or young people.¹³ This signaled the resolve of union activists (generally male and French) to reach out to social groups who composed the majority of industrial workers.

Well before May, the CGT had made efforts to attract different categories of wage earners, including women.¹⁴ The demand for female equality meshed harmoniously with new attitudes toward female freedom and emancipation in the "long sixties."¹⁵ As early as 1965, the CGT had called for a reduction of working hours for women. Aware of "the double and profoundly social role of female workers as both wage earners and mothers," it campaigned in 1967 for equal wages and opportunities for working females. CGT militants insisted upon "the end of any type of discrimination against women."¹⁶ In a special edition of its women's magazine, the confederation argued that females should labor less. Its activists claimed that a work-free Saturday and reduced work time were

¹² Caire, Guy. La situation sociale. *Droit social*. July–August 1968, p. 455; Capitaine. Op.Cit., p.81.

¹³ Situation sociale, période du 13 au 26 mai, Groupement des Industries Métallurgiques, [GIM, Metallurgical Industry Association], Neuilly.

¹⁴ For the CGT's attitude prior to May 1968, see René Mouriaux, "Le mai de la CGT," paper presented to Colloque: Acteurs et terrains du mouvement social de mai 1968, Paris, 24–25 November 1988. On the central and thus "non-marginal" role of women and immigrants, see Baudouin, Thierry; Collin, Michèle and Guillem, Danièle. Women and Immigrants: Marginal Workers? In: Crouch, Colin and Pizzorno, Alessandro eds., *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*. New York: Macmillan, 1978, vol.2, p.63.

¹⁵ Marwick, Arthur. *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. French scholars have increasingly adopted this approach. For example, see Margairaz, Michel and Tartakowsky, Danielle. Introduction. In Margairaz, Michel. Op.Cit., p.21.

¹⁶ CGT, Chemins de fer, 28 mai, Tracts de mai 1968, Bibliothèque Nationale [BN]; CFDT, 23 mai, Tracts de mai 1968, BN.

even more necessary for women because “time-measurement and piecework has pushed them to the brink.”¹⁷ The CFDT too had appealed for equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex.

Women were not the only objects of the unions’ attentions. The confederations also wanted young workers and immigrants to participate as equals in the worlds of labor and leisure. The unions accepted growing 1960s multiculturalism and recognized that “one out of four workers is foreign,” a percentage which was three or four times greater than during the last great strike wave of 1936. The CGT congratulated itself on its “long tradition of internationalism” and supported the demands of *immigrés*.¹⁸ French Communists backed the Italian Communists’ Main d’Oeuvre Immigré (MOI, Immigrant Labor Force), which fought for equal pay and equal rights.¹⁹ The unions urged the end to discrimination against foreigners and youth and demanded the suppression of the practice of paying lower wages to youthful wage earners. Prior to May, the CGT made special efforts to recruit young rebels who resisted factory discipline and the authority of supervisory personnel. It wanted to enlist insurgent youth who might have otherwise gravitated towards *gauchisme*.²⁰ Youthful CGT activists insisted that employers pay for educational courses, sporting activities, housing for young married couples, and a fifth week of paid vacation. Displaying their desire for a key commodity of consumer society, young automobile workers at Citroën pleaded for the right to discount car rentals during their vacations.²¹ As in automobile firms, the formal demands of striking youth in vocational high schools—more money for scholarships and the creation of a technology teaching center—were highly materialist.²²

Although militants occupied many factories—e.g., 31 out of 39 striking firms in the Parisian suburbs of Issy-les-Moulineaux and 20 out of 40 in Boulogne-Billancourt—the occupations revealed that the rank and file

¹⁷ Antoinette, [n.d.].

¹⁸ Mouriaux, “Le mai de la CGT,” Ross, George. *Workers and Communists in France*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982, p.165. For an overview see, van der Linden, Marcel. *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History*. Leiden: 2008, p.10.

¹⁹ March 1968, Archives Nationales (AN, National Archives) 820599/89.

²⁰ Informations Correspondance Ouvrières, April 1968, p.13.

²¹ Citroën, 26 May 1968, Tracts de mai 1968, BN.

²² Lycée d’état Corbeil-Essonnes, 20 May 1968, AN 790793; Michel, C. Témoignages apportés au colloque, Acteurs et terrains du mouvement social de mai-juin 1968. *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps*, no. 20, July-September, 1990, p. 71.

had little desire to become actively involved. Contrary to the assertions of the Union nationale des étudiants de France (UNEF, National Student Union of France) activists and other leftists, who adhered to the productivist legacy of Marxism and council communism, many forms of worker struggle did not imply “a total change of society.”²³ In general, the number of workers actually engaged in the occupations remained a tiny percentage of the work force. At Sud-Aviation, the pioneer plant of the occupation wave, the overwhelming majority of workers did not wish to participate in the sit-in, but rather to spend time alone or with their families and friends. Only 3,195 of 8,000 workers voted, and just 1,699 of them wanted to occupy the factory.²⁴ Merely several hundred out of a work force of 5,000 occupied the Renault factory at Cléon.²⁵ At Flins, approximately 250 of 10,000 were occupiers. A few hundred of the 30,000 workers at Boulogne-Billancourt remained inside the flagship plant. At Citroën, both strike meetings and the occupation revealed the passivity of the rank and file, who remained content to permit those union militants who had initiated the strike to spend time at the workplace.²⁶ In the Citroën branch in the fifteenth *arrondissement*, usually no more than 100 occupiers out of a work force of over 20,000 were present. Leftists charged that the Citroën strike committee was more concerned with organizing ping-pong matches and card games than with educating workers politically. During the long weekend of Pentecost (June 1-3) when gasoline became readily available, only twelve remained in the factory. The occupations were the greatest wave since 1936, but the small number of occupiers suggested that the number of engaged militants was

²³ UNEF militants quoted in Schnapp, Alain and Vidal-Naquet, Pierre. *Journal de la commune étudiante*. Paris : Seuil, 1969, p.302. This *gauchisant* orthodoxy is repeated in many other analyses. See also Zancarini-Fournel. Op.Cit. p.230.

²⁴ Guin, Yannick. *La commune de Nantes*. Paris Maspéro: 1969, p.17; Poperen, Claude. *Renault: Regards de l'intérieur*. Paris: Editions Socialies, 1983, p.167: “Ce n’était pas toujours la bousculade pour ‘occuper’ l’usine.”

²⁵ *Le Monde*, 17 May 1968; Labro, Philippe ed. *Ce n’est qu’un début*. Paris Maspéro, 1968, p.71; Hatzfeld, Nicolas and Lomba, Cédric. *La grève de Rhodiacta en 1967. Mai-Juin 68*. Op.Cit. p. 112. Cf. Ross. Op.Cit., p. 68: “The workers [were] enclosed, for the most part, in occupied factories.”

²⁶ Hassenteufel, Patrick. *Citroën-Paris en mai-juin 1968: Dualités de la grève*. Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Paris I, 1987, pp.49-101. For a different perspective, see Dubois, Pierre. *Les pratiques de mobilisation et d’opposition*. In: Dubois, Pierre ; Dulong, Renaud ; Durand, Claude ; Erbès-Séguin, Sabine and Vidal, Daniel. *Grèves revendicatives ou grèves politiques?* Paris: Anthropos, 1971, p.361. For an emphasis on the subversive nature of the occupations, see Vigna, Xavier. *Insubordination et politisation ouvrières: les occupations d’usines*. In : Artières, Philippe and Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle. Op.Cit., pp. 378-384.

proportionally tiny. In contrast to 1936, when masses of workers remained in the factories to prevent unemployed scabs from entering them, in 1968—when full employment prevailed—the fear of scabbing was relatively weak, and workers felt less compelled to join sit-downs.

Usually it was the same group who initiated the strikes—mature male French workers close to the CGT—that conducted the occupation. Employers continued to attribute “responsibility” for most strikes to union militants, particularly the CGT.²⁷ Of the 77 metallurgical strikes listed, CGT militants were responsible for 68, CFDT for 6, and Force Ouvrière (FO, Workers’ Force) for 3. As a rule, militants were male. Although women in the textile and service industries were unusually active, sectors with a female work force generally struck less than male-dominated branches.²⁸ Wives found themselves saddled with increased social and familial responsibilities during the strike wave.²⁹ When observers discussed the change in June of “public opinion” towards strikes, they often meant the opinion of women. School closings added to their child-care duties.³⁰ Unexpected shutdowns, lack of fuel, unavailability of cash, and runs on supplies complicated shopping. Many workers did not stop working because their “women at home did not look favorably upon the strike.”³¹ Numerous wives opposed the work stoppage because it unbalanced the family budget or, in higher income households, destroyed vacation plans. It is not

²⁷ Enquête, GIM. Cf. *Les événements de mai-juin 1968 vus à travers cent entreprises*, 16, 25. For the union role at Citroën, see Hassenteufel, Patrick. Op.Cit., p.44. For the industries of the Nord, see Dubois, Pierre. *Les pratiques*. In Dubois, Pierre; Dulong, Renaud ; Durand, Claude; Erbès-Séguin, Sabine and Vidal, Daniel. Op.Cit., pp.342-345. Talbo, Jean-Philippe ed., *La grève à Flins*. Paris: Maspero, 1968, p.90, underlines the role of “active minorities” in initiating strikes.

²⁸ Adam, Gérard. *Etude statistique des grèves de mai-juin 1968*. *Revue française de science politique*. No. 1, February, 1970, pp. 109, 117.

²⁹ Schwartz, Olivier. *Zones d’instabilité dans la culture ouvrière*. In: Azémar, Guy-Patrick. ed., *Ouvriers ouvrières: Un continent morcelé et silencieux*. Paris : Autrement Revue, 1992, pp.126-127.

³⁰ Leuwers, Jean-Marie. *Un peuple se dresse: Luttes ouvrières mai 1968*. Paris Éditions ouvrières: 1969, p.319.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 64; *L’Anti-Mythe*, 9-10 June 1968; *Cahiers de mai*, August-September 1968; Lefranc, Georges. *Le Mouvement syndical de la libération aux événements de mai-juin 1968*. Paris:Payot, 1969, p.252, which argues that wives of workers reacted against the strike wave by voting for the right in elections at the end of June. Cf. Bertolino, Jean. *Les Trublions*. Paris Stock, 1969, p.288: “Les travailleurs un instant grisés par la furie des enragés, par les barricades qui rappelaient tant la Commune, luttèrent pour la chute d’un régime, et non de la société qui leur assure le travail et la vie.” Cf. also *Mai 68 par eux-mêmes: Le mouvement de Floréal An 176*. Paris :Editions du Monde Libertaire,1989, p.20.

surprising that militants reported divorces. A Flins worker with radical tendencies explained to a strike sympathizer that his wife did not want to see him involved in the movement. As the stoppages endured, perhaps even more than males, women feared politicization, i.e., the subordination of material demands of the movement to the political goals of left parties and unions. Yet during the strikes they pragmatically welcomed the meals offered by left municipalities. They also appreciated the aid of priests in the working-class suburbs who “every day visited some families [of strikers] in their homes.”³²

Metallurgical industrialists reported that older and more experienced workers provoked the stoppages.³³ Fifty-one out of 88 strikes (58 percent) were started by wage earners between 30 and 40 years old. Twenty-four (27 percent) were begun by 20- to 30-year olds. Only 7 (8 percent) were initiated by those under twenty. Young people under 30 may have become strike leaders in firms where unions were weak, but usually activists had some seniority.³⁴ Workers who had been employed in their firms for more than one year were leaders of 67 percent of the strikes. Wage earners at Renault-Billancourt and at a major electronics firm, Jeumont-Schneider, in La Plaine-Saint Denis, did not remember young wage earners as particularly active in the strike.³⁵

The above information is significant because it modifies the common interpretation of May 1968 as a youth revolt.³⁶ Even in cases such as Renault-Cléon (Seine-Maritime), where young workers were said to be most committed to the movement, the major unions and their more mature trade unionists quickly gained control over the work stoppage.³⁷ Relatively

³² 14 June 1968, AN 820599/41.

³³ Groupement des industriels d'Argenteuil-Bezons et communes avoisinantes, “Enquête concernant les conflits sociaux,” July-November 1968, GIM.

³⁴ Davezies, Robert ed., *Mai 68: La rue dans l'église*. Paris: Epi, 1968, p.84. See Zancarini-Fournel. Op.Cit., L'épicentre, pp.224, 228.

³⁵ Schnapp. Op.Cit. p.777; Henri Simon Oral History Project, interviews with workers (1994), Paris.

³⁶ Cf. Cohn-Bendit in Bertolino. Op.Cit., p.391: “Almost everyone agrees [...] that young workers [...] started the movement.” Georges Pompidou also claimed that “young workers [...] ignoring union orders” began the occupations. See *Débats de l'Assemblée Nationale: Seconde session ordinaire de 1967-1968*, 22 May 1968, Paris, 1969, p.2039. Cf. Zancarini-Fournel. Op.Cit., 231. Cf. also Kergoat. Op.Cit., p.59.

³⁷ Bulletin mensuel, May-July 1968, AN 820599/89; Capitaine. Op.Cit., p.102. See *Notre arme c'est la grève*, pp.14-18.

mature, stable, and unionized French workers were largely responsible for initiating metallurgical strikes in the Paris region. The stoppages in Parisian metallurgy confirm the statistical analysis that has established that age was not a determining factor in the strike wave.³⁸

Maturity, though, did not exclude boldness. Metallurgical industrialists noted that in 35 out of 41 reported strikes, workers used threats to convince their colleagues to stop work. In 16 of 60 strikes, militants resorted to force; yet they did not usually insult their bosses or lock in management. In only two cases was property damaged, but the threat of sabotage certainly existed. For example, several persons entered a factory at night and set a truck on fire. A police investigation was unable to conclude if the incident was provoked by strike tensions or by a desire for “vengeance” on behalf of a worker fired before May. In certain white-collar firms, union militants forcibly excluded non-union workers.³⁹ CGT militants dominated the occupation at Jeumont-Schneider, an important electronics firm in the Parisian suburbs, and locked out anti-CGT and indifferent workers. At Flins, veteran wage earners normally manned picket lines.⁴⁰ Sometimes—especially in one large white-collar company that was occupied—older militants were joined by young *gauchistes*. The presence of leftists did not alter the corporatist concerns of strike committees, which were reluctant to forge links with students or even with other occupied firms. Police explained that the Parti communiste français (PCF, French Communist Party) was sure that the situation was not revolutionary and insisted that strikers fly the tricolor as well as the red flag at the gates of their factory.⁴¹ Foreigners usually played a minimal role, perhaps because French wage laborers in many cases regarded them as strikebreakers or as disinterested trade unionists.⁴² Yet some nationalities were more willing to participate than others. For example, at Citroën-Levallois, Spanish workers

³⁸ Adam. Op.Cit., p.110.

³⁹ Henri Simon Oral History Project.

⁴⁰ Kerbourc'h, Jean-Claude. *Le Piéton de Mai*. Paris Julliard, 1968, p.46.

⁴¹ 27 May 1968, AN 820599/40.

⁴² *Lutte socialiste*, 20 October 1968; Hassenteufel. Op.Cit., p.36; *Ouvriers face aux appareils*, 93; Cf. Confédération Générale du Travail de la R.N.U.R. [Régie Nationale des Usines Renault] *33 jours 34 nuits*, (Paris, n.d.), 181; *La Vie ouvrière*, 29 May 1968; *L'Anti-Mythe*, 21 August 1968; Frémontier, Jacques. *La forteresse ouvrière: Renault*. Paris Fayard, 1971, p.344; Hatzfeld, Nicolas. Les ouvriers de l'automobile: Des vitrines sociales à la condition des OS, le changement des regards. In : Dreyfus-Armand. Op.Cit., pp. 68, 355.

were active during the work stoppage; whereas, North African workers were largely passive.⁴³

As the stoppages endured, mature breadwinners seemed more anxious to end the strikes than younger wage earners.⁴⁴ It was at the end of the strikes—not the beginning, as many have assumed—that a generation gap became relevant in the workplace. Young workers resisted returning to the workplace more than their elder colleagues. Indeed, perhaps the most famous striker, known only by her first name Jocelyne, was captured on film as she defiantly refused to return to work as the strike at her metallurgical factory was being settled.⁴⁵ The continuing popularity of anti-work ideologies quickly transformed Jocelyne into the rebellious heroine of the May revolt. Her refusal to labor (*ne pas perdre sa vie à la gagner* as the slogan went) pithily expressed the specific sixties' synthesis of personal, social, and political concerns. Being both female and a worker further heightened her status as a symbol of an ideology that male intellectuals had articulated. Her complete disappearance from the media spectacle enhanced her mystique. Yet ultimately neither she nor any other individual or group resolved the problem of wage labor. Thus, ideologists of the sixties proposed contradictory solutions that ranged from the abolition of work to its internalization in a democratic workplace.

Initially, women were excluded from certain sit-downs for “moral reasons,” but in others they played important roles.⁴⁶ Occupations disclosed gender divisions. The 400 female workers at the Kréma chewing gum factory outnumbered the 200 males, but male domination of the strike provoked the resentment of women.⁴⁷ At a branch of the Compagnie des compteurs of Montrouge, women did participate in the occupation, yet only in their traditional roles as cleaners and cooks. Men proved reluctant to allow them to spend the night at the factory in order “to avoid that the

⁴³ Leuwers, *Peuple*, 185. Gordon, Daniel A. *Immigrants and the New Left in France, 1968-1971*. Ph.D. Diss., University of Sussex, 2001, p.160, disputes this by accusing Leuwers of anti-Arab and pro-Catholic bias.

⁴⁴ Filiu, Jean-Pierre. *Le gouvernement et la direction face à la crise. Mai 68 à l'ORTF*, Paris: Nouveau Monde, 1987, p.273; *Ouvriers face aux appareils: Une expérience de militantisme chez Hispano-Suiza* Paris : Maspero, 1970, p.198.

⁴⁵ Le Roux, Hervé. *Reprise: Récit*. Paris Calmann-Levy, 1998; Ross. Op.Cit., p. 139.

⁴⁶ *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 May 1968; “CGT aux femmes,” Tracts de mai 1968, BN.

⁴⁷ *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 May 1968.

bosses make an issue of morality.”⁴⁸ Women rejected this argument and by the third night of the occupation were almost as numerous as men. Usually, the overwhelming majority of workers—female or male, foreign or French—preferred to stay away from the plant.⁴⁹

Large numbers—whether male or female—displayed little commitment to the electoral process at the workplace, and participation in strike votes varied widely from 40 to 75 percent.⁵⁰ The low level of attendance contrasts sharply with late nineteenth century when meetings attracted 80 to 100 percent of strikers.⁵¹ Union and non-union strikers of some of the most important Parisian firms—Otis Elevators, Sud Aviation, Nord Aviation, Thomson-Houston, Rhône-Poulenc—reflected on striker passivity in a pamphlet written at the beginning of June. They contended that in order to win, a greater number of workers [must] get involved. While the strike forces everyone to make material sacrifices, many comrades rely on a minority and do not participate actively. This allows the government to divide workers by playing on the weariness of some and on the poor information of others... There is only one response to these tactics of division: massive participation of all workers who have stayed away from the occupied factories.⁵²

To encourage non-committed or apathetic workers to join the movement, the pamphleteers recommended adopting the model of strike organization at Rhône-Poulenc (Vitry), where rank-and-file strikers elected strike committees that were easily revocable. Militants regarded the occupation of this firm as particularly impressive because 1,500 of a work force of 3,500, or 43 percent, were actively involved.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Gobille. Op.Cit. p.51: “Une majorité de travailleurs n’a en effet participé ni à l’occupation ni aux votes relatifs à la reprise, et nul ne sait, pas plus les syndicats que les autorités, ce qu’il en est de leur détermination.”

⁵⁰ Situation sociale, 6 June, GIM. Fifty-five percent of French industrial workers surveyed in 1969 declared that they had never participated in a union meeting. See Adam, Gérard; Bon, Frédéric; Capdevielle, Jacques; and Mouriaux, René. *L’Ouvrier français en 1970*. Paris A. Colin, 1970, p.21.

⁵¹ Perrot. Op.Cit., pp.588-589.

⁵² “Défendons notre grève,” Tracts de mai 1968, BN.

⁵³ *Lutte Socialiste*, December 1968; Martinet, Gilles. *La conquête des pouvoirs*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1968, p.69, which sees Rhône-Poulenc at Vitry as a model of “*tendances gestionnaires*.” Vigna, *L’Insubordination*, 67: “La grève de Rhône-Poulenc Vitry inaugure bien les années 68.” See also “Histoire et leçons d’une grève,” *Esprit*,

Even in this example of relatively high participation approximately 57 percent of personnel avoided activism. Many wished to evade the workplace and stayed at home either to garden or to *bricoler*. Suggestions from an inter-union committee, action committees, and Nanterre students that proposed a more innovative and participatory form of striking failed to interest wage earners. Committees recommended that workers engage in “freebie strikes” to rally opinion to their side and to direct public anger against the government. For example, garbage men should collect accumulated trash, transportation workers should permit free rides, and Postes, Télégraphes, Téléphones (PTT, Communications) employees should allow free postage and telephone calls.⁵⁴ However, sanitation, transport, and postal workers disappointed activists by making only traditional bread-and-butter demands. The belief of the Movement of March 22 that the occupations expressed the “unconscious yearning of the working class to take over the means of production” was wishful thinking.⁵⁵ March 22’s demand for the sabotage of the means of production in case of a police assault usually went unheeded.⁵⁶ Striking workers seldom damaged property, and when they did, their targets—telephone lines, vehicles, etc.—were precise and limited.

Indeed, workers’ strikes displayed a considerable continuity with previous strike waves. As in the nineteenth century, most strikers did not use the stoppage as a political weapon, even though the political climate had a decisive influence on the strikes’ beginning and ending.⁵⁷ The fact that

no. 373, August-September, 1968, p.101, which claims that 1,500 to 1,600 workers occupied the factory. Police report that on 12 June only 300 out of a work force of 3,700 favored a return to work. See 12 June 1968, AN 820599/41. Censier militants wanted to popularize the Rhône-Poulenc example. See Baynac, Jacques. *Mai retrouvé*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1978, p.226. Trotskyites of the *Voix ouvrière* claimed to have greatly influenced the strike committee of this plant. See 18 July 1968, AN 820599/41.

⁵⁴ Groupes inter-syndicaux des salariés, Tracts de mai 1968, BN; Ravignat, Patrick. *L’Odéon est ouvert*. Paris: Stock, 1968, p.217; Schnapp. Op.Cit., p. 311; Baynac. Op.Cit., p. 176; Dansette, Adrien. *Mai 1968*. Paris: 1971, p.275.

⁵⁵ Mouvement du 22 mars, *Ce n’est pas qu’un début, continuons le combat*. Paris: 1968, p.99. Cf. also Lucio Magri, “Réflexions sur les événements de mai,” *Les Temps modernes*, no. 277-78, August-September, 1969, p.32: “Because of its spontaneous origin and the consequent occupation tactic, the workers’ struggle profoundly upset the traditional relations between masses and leaders.” Similar views are found in Geismar, Alain; July, Serge; Morane, Erlyne. *Vers la guerre civile*. Paris: Editions Premieres, 1969, p.258.

⁵⁶ Cohn-Bendit during 1 June press conference in Bertolino. Op.Cit., p. 38.

⁵⁷ Perrot. Op.Cit., pp.196-199.

student radicals looked to workers to make the revolution was less important in sparking strikes than the divisions among political elites. What has been called the “political opportunity structure” encouraged the extension of the unrest to wage earners.⁵⁸ As in 1789, 1848, 1871, and 1936, cleavages within ruling groups promoted popular revolt. Students triggered the enormous wave of work stoppages during the second half of May by challenging the state and, at the same time, provoking its brutality.⁵⁹ Both student and worker actions were parts of “a general cycle of protest,” which traversed the social system from its center to the periphery.⁶⁰

A strong state proved as necessary to limit workers’ insubordination in the late 1960s as it had during the Popular Front strike waves of the late 1930s. In contrast to 1936, when Prime Minister Léon Blum defied management and endorsed the shortening of the work week from 48 to 40 hours, Prime Minister Pompidou rejected workers’ demands for a 40-hour week and negotiated a moderately progressive reduction of the work week—2 hours for wage earners laboring more than 48 hours and 1 hour for those laboring between 45 and 48 hours.⁶¹ The follow-up to the Grenelle Accord, the national agreement between employers and unions of December 13, 1968, decided in principle to return gradually to the forty-hour week without a reduction of buying power.⁶²

⁵⁸ “Political opportunities cannot make the poor conscious of grievances of which they were formerly unaware, but it can help them to detect where and how the system is most vulnerable, enabling them to overcome their habitual disunity and lack of information.” Tarrow, Sidney. *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, p.36.

⁵⁹ The CGT rejected the thesis that students had detonated the strike wave in favor of the more *ouvriériste* argument that the workers and their unions were the spark. See Michel Johan, “La CGT et le mouvement de mai,” *Les Temps modernes*, no. 266-67, August-September, 1968, p.327. For a comparison between the student movement’s weakening of the state in 1968 and 1986, see Duclaud-Williams, Roger. Student Protest: 1968 and 1986 Compared. In: Hanley, D. L. and Kerr, A. P. eds., *May ’68: Coming of Age*. London: Macmillan, 1989, p.52.

⁶⁰ Tarrow, *Struggle*, 4, 34, 46. See also Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁶¹ Réunion tenue les 25-27 mai au Ministère des Affaires Sociales, AN 860561.

⁶² Cohen, Maurice ed., *Le bilan social de l’année 1968*. Paris : Revue pratique de droit social 1969, pp.105-122, 387, 414. See also Accord du 13 décembre 1968, AN 860561. Cf. Howell, Chris. *Regulating Labor: The State and Industrial Relations Reform in Postwar France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p.27: “The strike wave of 1968 was not even translated into sustainable material gains for workers.”

Many workers shared an ambivalent attitude towards salaried labor which they considered both wage slavery, but also a part of their social identity. An important recent work, Xavier Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68*, focuses on resistance to labor discipline in the decade following 1968. Vigna explores absenteeism, slowdowns, lateness, faking illness, turnover, sabotage, and theft during what he and other French historians have called “les années 68.”⁶³ These revolts against work integrated various components of the class. Militants and rank and file, women and men, French and foreign could all participate in the “guerrilla” against wage labor. Vigna renews the rich tradition of French social/labor history by showing the paradox of workers’ identities as both producers and refusers. While avoiding workspace and work-time, wage earners used the same vocabulary that they had employed in the nineteenth century and labeled their enemies—whether scabs or cops—“lazy” (*fainéants*). Vigna also demonstrates the dual role of the state as *état-flic* and *état-providence*. However, his periodization of “insubordination” is not fully convincing.⁶⁴ Since he fails to explore resistance to work before the 1968 strike wave, he cannot argue that the decade following 1968 was especially “insubordinate.” Strike statistics do not indicate any major increase in days lost to work stoppages in the decade before and after 1968, even if the number of strikes and strikers did rise.⁶⁵ We do not know how the micro-conflicts Vigna examines were different either in kind or degree from other mini-struggles prior to 1968. Acts of insubordination were hardly new phenomena and were prevalent from 1936 to 1938.⁶⁶ The Gaullist government was much

⁶³ Vigna. Op.Cit..Sommier, Isabelle. *La violence politique et son deuil: L'après 68 en France et en Italie*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1998, p.13.

⁶⁴ Vigna’s periodization also repeats that of sociologists, such as Alain Touraine and Serge Mallet, who saw ’68 as the beginning of a new era in labor history. See Touraine. Op.Cit. and Mallet, Serge Mallet. *Essays on the New Working Class*, trans. Dick Howard and Dean Savage, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975.

⁶⁵ Forsé, Michel et. al. *Recent Social Trends in France (1960-1990)*. trans. Liam Gavin. Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1993, p.150; Jeff Bridgford, “The events of May: Consequences for Industrial Relations in France,” in *May ’68*. Op.Cit. pp. 106, 115-116; Rose, Michael. *Servants of Post-Industrial Power? Sociologie du Travail in Modern France*, (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1979), pp.140, 148. Boltanski, Luc and Chiapello, Ève. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2005, p.176. For another statistical view, see Sirot, Stéphane. *La grève en France: Une histoire sociale (XIXe-XXe siècle)*. Paris :Odile Jacon, 2002, p.33.

⁶⁶ Hatzfeld, Nicolas and Lomba, Cédric. La grève de Rhodiacta en 1967. *Mai-Juin 68*. Op.Cit., pp.106-107; Seidman, Michael. *Workers against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.

more effective in limiting resistance to work than its Popular Front counterpart in the 1930s or its contemporary Italian foil during the *maggio strisciante*.⁶⁷

Socially, the strike wave of 1968 expressed continuity by repeating the nineteenth and early twentieth pattern of elite division which caused state weakness and consequently promoted worker opportunity. Workers made very few demands for revolutionary workers' control and instead asked for more wages and less work time. Even though women, immigrants and youth participated to varying degrees, French male militants led the work stoppages. The 1968 stoppages did not support a Marcusian interpretation that workers were integrated into capitalist society since resistance to work, whether in form of strikes, absenteeism, sabotage, theft, lateness, etc. had to be curbed by a strong state (*état flic*) which served, in workers' words, as prison wardens (*gardes-chiourme*).⁶⁸ The absence in the 1968 work stoppages of a significant rupture with the past can help to explain the "memory deficit" of the strikes in present-day French consciousness.⁶⁹ In sharp contrast to the continuity in the domain of labor, discontinuity dominated the cultural arena. In the sixties, public questioning of work expanded from avant-garde groups such as the Surrealists to a larger mass of students and workers. Similarly, the sixties also marked a new interest in labor history which for the first time began to chronicle workers' everyday refusals of work.⁷⁰ A focus on resistance to work helps link the French movement to others around the world.⁷¹

List of Abbreviations

⁶⁷ Cf. Zancarini-Fournel. Op.Cit., p.248.

⁶⁸ Seidman, Michael. *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. New York: Berghan Books, 2004; Perrot. Op.Cit., pp., 44, 303.

⁶⁹ Pudal, Bernard and Retière, Jean-Noël. Les grèves ouvrières de 68, un mouvement social sans lendemain mémorial. *Mai 68*. Op.Cit., p. 217.

⁷⁰ Prost, Antoine. *La CGT à l'époque du front populaire: 1934-1939. Essai de description numérique*. Paris :A. Colin, 1964; Trempé, Rolande. *Les mineurs de Carmaux, 1848-1914*. Paris : Ed Ouvrières 1971; Lequin, Yves. *Les ouvriers de la région lyonnaise (1848-1914)*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon , 1977.

⁷¹ van der Linden, Marcel, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations*. Aldershot: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2003.

CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail
CGT	Confédération générale du travail
FO	Force ouvrière
PCF	Parti communiste français
PTT	Postes, Télégraphes, Téléphones
UNEF	Union nationale des étudiants de France

The Significance of the Mass Strike during the German Revolution of 1918-1919

William A. Pelz

By strikes, this article means, in agreement with Marcel van der Linden, “forms of struggle, coercion and power in which a group of workers collectively stops working to enforce economic, social and/or political demands that matter to those directly concerned and/or others.”¹ This may seem obvious to most scholars, but in the popular media strikes are often confused or conflated with demonstrations, riots or other forms of public activity. Of course, all discussions of the working class can be subject to greatly nuanced discussion along with various ideological interpretations.²

Strikes, and most of all the general strike, have long been considered as having potential as an insurrectionary weapon. Georges Sorel, French syndicalist philosopher, went so far as to hold that the myth of the general strike was a major factor in the rise of the workers’ movement.³ Sorel notes that even a general political strike “might be peaceful and of short duration, its aim being to show the Government that it is on the wrong track.”⁴ On the other hand, there is the Syndicalist general strike where the “proletariat organizes itself for battle . . . it longs for the final contest in which it will

¹ van der Linden, Marcel. *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 182-183.

² For an enlightening discussion see van Voss, Lex Heerma and van der Linden, Marcel (eds.). *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2002.

³ Sorel, Georges. *Reflections on Violence*. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1925.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

give proof of the whole measure of its valour.”⁵ As the Industrial Workers of the World,⁶ based mainly in the United States, were fond of saying “One Big Union, One Big Strike”.⁷ With less stress on union organization, anarchists have often seen strikes as weapons against the state.⁸ In addition, various members of the Socialist International also would on occasion talk about the need to consider the general strike as a weapon in the arsenal of Social Democracy.⁹ Karl Kautsky considered that mass strikes “may be used as an effective weapon” in the battle for suffrage.¹⁰

Rosa Luxemburg had a different conception of the nature of the mass strike than those cited above. In her famous work on the Russian Revolution of 1905, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, she criticized both anarchists on the left and Social Democrats on the right as having an essentially mechanical view of strikes. That is, they saw the strike as a weapon that can either be used or not used according to the taste of leaders. Both tendencies based themselves on the “assumption that the mass strike is a mere technical weapon that can be ‘decided’ or ‘banned’ at will A kind of jack knife that is closed and ready, carried in the pocket ‘just in case’ and can be opened and used.”¹¹ As the German Revolution of 1918-1919 was later to prove, neither commanding a strike wave, nor prohibiting it, would prove successful.

The mass strike, according to Luxemburg, was a more complex, historically based and even contradictory phenomena. She argued that if the Russian Revolution of 1905 “teaches us anything at all, then it is especially that the mass strike is not artificially ‘made’, not ‘decided’ haphazardly, not ‘propagated,’ but it is a historical phenomenon that results from social

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶ For a wealth of primary material on this group, see Kornbluh, Joyce L. (ed.). *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011.

⁷ For an excellent discussion on the IWW and other Syndicalist organizations and their relation with communism, consult Darlington, Ralph. *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.

⁸ On Russian anarchism, see the recent biography of one of its most famous advocates, Leir, Mark. *Bakunin*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007.

⁹ Kautsky, Karl. *The Road to Power*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Co, 1909.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹¹ Luxemburg, Rosa. *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: 1906-1911. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974, p. 98.

relations at a certain moment of time with historical necessity.”¹² This means that the strike ceases ultimately to be a tactic and becomes a historically determined phenomenon. This clearly demonstrates Luxemburg’s political differences with V.I. Lenin¹³ especially as concerns both the mass strike and democracy.¹⁴ Less than a decade after Luxemburg had published her critique,¹⁵ Europe was plunged into the largest bloodbath hitherto known on the continent.

The events of the First World War are well known and need not be repeated here. The point does need to be emphasized that the battle field losses Germany suffered were mirrored in death and pain on the home front. As many as three quarters of a million German civilians may have died as a result of the food shortages caused by the British naval blockade. The lack of food combined with falling real wages as the government attempted “to develop substitutes for fat – an abiding deficiency – from rats, mice, hamsters, crows, cockroaches, snails and earthworms, even hair clippings and old leather boots, but none was very successful.”¹⁶ These experiments neither solved the food shortage crisis nor endeared the common people to the Imperial system. In fact, the “class peace” proclaimed by the leadership of the Majority Social Democratic Party (SPD) felt increasingly like a vain boast as workers struck against hunger, sometimes the war itself, and ultimately the entire system.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³ For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Luban, Ottokar. *Rosa Luxemburgs Demokratiekonzept*. Leipzig: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Sachsen, 2008.

¹⁴ Note the brief English language publication, Schütrumpf, Jörn. *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation/Karl Dietz Verlag, 2008.

¹⁵ Luxemburg did not stop rethinking this questions as is shown in Luban, Ottokar. *Rosa Luxemburg zum Massenstreik. Zwei unbekannte Rden vom Sommer 1913*. In: Ito, Narihiko et. al., *Rosa Luxemburg. Ökonomische und historisch-politische Aspekte ihres Werkes*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2010, pp. 80-85.

¹⁶ Williams, John Williams. *The Other Battlefield: The Home Fronts: Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1918*. Chicago: Henry Regency, 1972, p. 158.

Table I
Strikes in Germany during World War One¹⁷

Time Period	Number of Strikes	Workers on Strike
January – July 1914	1199	94,014
August, 1914	0	0
September-December 1914	24	1,126
1915	141	12,866
1916	240	124,865
1917	562	651,461
1918	773	1,304,248

While local radical groups had influenced some, or even many, of these job actions, it seems that the overwhelming bulk were spontaneous reactions. Still, as the war ground on and particularly after the Bolshevik Revolution in autumn 1917, the strikes and the workers became more politicized. A vague, if intense, longing for peace among the workers “was transformed into an ardent sympathy with the Bolsheviks in the course of their negotiations with the German militarists.”¹⁸ In late January 1918, between 250,000 and 400,000 workers, particularly in Berlin, went on strike. Besides economic demands, the strikers asked for an end to the war without annexations or indemnities. By February, the strike was broken with great brutality with long sentences handed out freely by military courts that judged civilians accused of political crimes.¹⁹ The left-wing Revolutionary Shop Stewards²⁰ were unable to turn this into a general strike against the war nor were the SPD officials able to prevent it from happening. Yet, by October 1918, General Ludendorff feared “There is no relying on the troops anymore . . . our western army will lose its last self-control and, in complete chaos, flee back across the Rhine and bring revolution to Germany.”²¹

¹⁷ Kuczynski, Jürgen. *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter in Deutschland von 1800 bis in die Gegenwart*. Berlin: Verlag die Freie Gewerkschaft, 1947, p. 249.

¹⁸ Rosenberg, Arthur. *Imperial Germany: The Birth of the German Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-216.

²⁰ For more on this interesting, if short lived organization, consult the work of Müller, Richard. *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik*, 2 vols. Vienna: Malik Verlag, 1925. And Barth, Emil. *Aus der Werkstatt der deutschen Revolution*. Berlin: A. Hoffman Verlag, 1918.

²¹ Von Thaeer, Albert. *Generalstabsdienst an der Front und in der OHL*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1958, p. 236.

As fate would have it, when the red flags signaling the outbreak of what has gone down in history as the November Revolution first appeared, they emanated from neither factory nor front, but rather from the fleet. By October 1918, the common sailors looked increasingly forward to the end to a war that was less dangerous but as tedious, boring and degrading as army service. The Admirals thought differently. The Lords of the German High Seas Fleet wanted to redeem their honor even at the risk of great losses. They planned a full scale assault against the superior British naval forces that had kept them bottled up near Germany's coast line throughout the war. Whether or not the naval leaders contemplated mass suicide, this was the way most sailors perceived matters.²² When ordered to sea, sailors on two ships mutinied. The mutiny soon spread to other ships and even in face of mass arrests, the movement was too strong to be suppressed.²³ By the first days of November, the Imperial German high seas fleet was effectively out of the war and the sailors were heading for home and in many cases spreading word of the revolution.²⁴

This led to frantic efforts on the part of some leftists to call for a mass strike and insurrection to be held on November 11.²⁵ At the other end of the labor movement, the moderate SPD leaders attempted to hold back the wave of radicalism. On November 4, the SPD issued a manifesto that warned of anonymous flyers and mouth-to-mouth agitation which were urging workers to strike and go out onto the streets. The SPD statement warned "rash acts may bring horrible disaster to the individual and to our party. Action that promises success must have the support of the entire working class. Yet for this action the moment is not ripe."²⁶ The plan for an uprising was upstaged by the masses taking action on November 9 without

²² Horn, Daniel (ed. & trans.). *War, Mutiny and Revolution in the German Navy: The World War I Diaries of Seaman Richard Stumpf*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967, pp. 417-420.

²³ Horn, Daniel. *The German Naval Mutinies of World War I*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969, pp. 225-226.

²⁴ Most soldiers, like the sailors, wanted to get home as quickly as possible. See Stephenson, Scott. *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

²⁵ Broué, Pierre. *The German Revolution, 1917-1923*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005, p. 136.

²⁶ "Aufruf des Vorstands der SPD vom 4. November 1918," Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus (ed.), *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Reihe II (1914-1945), Vol. 2: November 1917-Dezember 1918, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957, pp. 289-290.

awaiting orders from the would-be revolutionaries while, at the same time, the pleas of the SPD moderates fell on largely deaf ears.²⁷

Commenting on the revolutionary process, Rosa Luxemburg noted that: “there was nothing of the sort of a preconceived plan or an organized campaign since the parties’ proclamations were hardly able to keep abreast with the spontaneous upheaval of the masses. The leaders had barely time to formulate the slogans of the forward rushing mass of proletarians.”²⁸ Interestingly, those words were written over a decade earlier about the 1905 Russian Revolution, but they could just as well describe Germany in 1918.

In fact, the way strikes did, or did not, break out would seem to have proved Luxemburg’s point. As one radical historian comments: “The revolution which exploded in Germany during the first days of November 1918 seems at first sight to confirm the expectations and the opinions of Rosa Luxemburg. The working masses were finding their way to revolutionary action despite their leaders, and often against them, almost completely independently of the revolutionary organizations, which were overtaken by the event . . .”²⁹ Rosa Luxemburg knew that the strike wave that could be transformed into socialist revolution would be a product of history and not the creation of a mere decree.³⁰ Her fellow revolutionary Karl Liebknecht was not so sure.

Karl Liebknecht, who with Luxemburg founded the German Communist Party (KPD) at the end of 1918, was one of the most recognized voices of revolt. More moved by the power of the Bolshevik example than many German revolutionaries were, he combined this position with a type of inherent revolutionary optimism that annoyed Luxemburg.³¹ All of these

²⁷ For a different view that stresses the conscious activity of a select number of revolutionaries see Hoffrogge, Ralf. *Richard Müller: Der Mann hinter der Novemberrevolution*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2008. For a more detailed appreciation of this author’s viewpoint, see the current author’s review of Hoffrogge in *Left History*, 16(1), Spring/Summer, pp. 138-139, 2012.

²⁸ Luxemburg, Op.Cit, p.110.

²⁹ Broue, Op.Cit., p. 129.

³⁰ This is the argument made for a consciousness that is neither separate nor distinct from the working class in Guérin, Daniel. *Rosa Luxemburg et la spontanéité révolutionnaire*. Paris: Flammarion, 1971.

³¹ Fischer, Ruth. *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origin of the State Party*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1948, pp. 73-74.

things came together and caused him to be reckless, particularly during the fatal days of January 1919 in Berlin.³²

Provoked by the dismissal of the radical Berlin police chief, anger got the better of prudence for many. It was also alleged that there were police agents urging crowds on to occupy buildings, such as Alfred Roland, leader of the group that occupied the SPD's newspaper.³³

Failing to understand the virtue of patience, Liebknecht rushed into premature action, dragging the KPD into an ill-considered pact with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the left-wing of the Independent Social Democrats. When Luxemburg first heard of what Liebknecht had got them involved in, she exclaimed: "Karl, is that our program?"³⁴ This terrible overreach would give the counter-revolutionaries the opportunity to murder him and Luxemburg on January 15, 1919.³⁵ From there they went on to murder much of the far left leadership in Germany.

Part of the objective situation was that a massive increase in unemployment had made many workers desperate to the point of recklessness while at the same time undercutting the ease of organizing strikes since those remaining employed were more likely older and more moderate and fearful of losing their jobs. The irony is that those who were most willing to engage in strikes were often without jobs that they could withdraw their labor from.

³² For more on Liebknecht and Luxemburg during the revolution, see Laschitzka, Annelies. Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht in den Wochen der Revolution. In: Ito, Narihiko Ito, et. al. *Rosa Luxemburg. Ökonomische und historisch-politische Aspekte ihres Werkes*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2010, pp. 113-129.

³³ Frölich, Paul. *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*. London: Pluto Press, 1972, pp. 288-289.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

³⁵ Hannover-Drück, Elisabeth and Hannover, Heinrich (eds.). *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht: Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967.

Table II
Unemployed Relief Recipients, 1918-1919³⁶

Date	Number
1 December 1918	501,610
1 January 1919	905,137
1 February 1919	1,076,368
1 March 1919	1,053,854
1 April 1919	829,580
1 May 1919	700,000

Thus, it can be argued that the events of the German Revolution of 1918-19 reaffirmed Luxemburg's theory of the role of strikes in the revolutionary process. Yet, she wrote that "for the coming mass conflicts in Germany, the absolutely necessary unity of the unionized and social democratic worker movement actually exists. Unity is embodied in the broad masses that is the basis of both social democracy and of the unions and in the consciousness of both sides that they are merged into one spiritual entity."³⁷ This turned out to be wishful thinking, as the majority of the leaders of German labor dared little and feared the left more than the right.

When, during the heady days of early November 1918, Liebknecht went to give a speech proclaiming the Socialist Republic, SPD leader Scheidemann was warned and in haste gave a speech wherein he proclaimed the formation of a German republic with all socialist parties invited to participate.³⁸ This impromptu declaration undercut the left but Ebert, SPD leader and first President of the Weimar Republic, turned livid with rage as he lectured Scheidemann that he had no right to proclaim a republic.³⁹ Quickly reversing himself, Ebert supported the Kaiser's abdication, and finally even the Republic, but only out of fear of the alternative. Ebert said that if the Kaiser did not go "then social revolution is inevitable. But I will have nothing to do with it, I hate it like sin."⁴⁰ Of more importance, was the

³⁶ Kuczynski, Jürgen. *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus*, Vol. 5. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966, p. 159.

³⁷ Luxemburg, Op.Cit., p. 163.

³⁸ Hanssen, Hans Peter. *Diary of a Dying Empire*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1955, pp. 351-352.

³⁹ Scheidemann, Philipp. *Memorien eines Sozialdemokraten*. Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1930, p. 313.

⁴⁰ Prinz Max von Baden. *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1927, p. 599.

fact that Army Headquarters asked their officers if the troops would fight for Kaiser Wilhelm II. The answer was overwhelmingly: Nein!⁴¹

What tentative conclusions might one draw from this historical episode and what questions might be asked? (1) To be successful, a general or mass strike must have overwhelming support that can only be expected to occur in exceptional circumstances. (2) Mass unemployment undermines class unity by potentially pitting employed versus unemployed. As early as February 1906, Luxemburg recognized that the “Achilles heel” of the workers’ movement “is the colossal unemployment, which is spreading like a terrible plague.”⁴² (3) Urban revolutionaries often take too little notice of the rural proletariat, let alone small landowning peasants. Unless these are drawn into the revolution, even successful strike action in cities is likely to be broken by forces from the countryside.⁴³ (4) The mass strike cannot, contrary to syndicalist, anarchist and Social Democratic theories, be willed into being. Neither can it be prevented. In 1910, Luxemburg belittled the SPD leadership’s attempt “to forbid even a *discussion* about the mass strike! . . . The masses themselves ought to decide.”⁴⁴ (5) Revolutionary organizations must be able to relate to strikes in the context of an unpredictable, complex and contradictory situation. This is, of course, extremely difficult to do in practice. (6) The mass strike always poses the question of power. How can the masses be moved from angry radicalism to conscious desire to re-organize society? (7) The strike weapon is often initiated as a defensive measure against some attack by either the employers or the state. One notable example is the general strike that helped defeat the Kapp Putsch against the Weimar Republic.⁴⁵ When and under what conditions can a defensive strike action transform itself into an offensive weapon? (8) Strikes should be understood less as weapons that can be used by leaders and more of as part of the historically determined class struggle.

Since one of the points of this article is that Rosa Luxemburg had a generally correct understanding of the strike as an insurrectionary

⁴¹ *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 27 July 1919, pp. 1-2.

⁴² Letter to Luise and Karl Kautsky in Adler, Georg, Hudis, Peter and Laschitza, Annelies Laschitza (eds.). *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. London: Verso, 2011, p. 227.

⁴³ This was recognized by the KPD at their founding convention, see: Protokoll des Gründungsparteitages der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschland (30. Dezember 1918 - 1. Januar 1919), Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972.

⁴⁴ Letter to Konrad Haenisch in Georg Adler, Peter Hudis and Annelies Laschitza (eds.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 288-289.

⁴⁵ Broué, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 349-380.

development, it is fitting that she be given the last word. For further human progress, she urged “it is high time that the working masses learn how to express their wisdom and ability to act and demonstrate their ripeness for the time of great struggles and great tasks in which they, the masses, will be the actual chorus and the directing bodies will merely act the ‘speaking parts,’ that is be the interpreter of the will of the masses.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Luxemburg, *Op.Cit.*, p. 170.

When the Cactus Blooms: A Century of Strikes in Mexico.

Richard Roman and Edur Velasco

Mexico: more industrialized, more global, more unstable

It seems paradoxical that the decline in strikes in contemporary Mexico coincides with the country's increasing importance in global manufacturing and the logistical aspects of international capitalism. Mexico is now (2012) the second largest economy within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), with a GDP of U.S. \$ 1,743 billion, greater than that of Canada and the eleventh largest economy in the world, just behind France and Italy.¹

A few statistics will further illustrate the crucial role played by Mexico in the new international economy. Beginning in 1995, automotive production in the factories located in Mexico increased at a dizzying speed, reaching an average volume of 210,000 vehicles per month. This is three times greater than the rate fifteen years earlier. In 2011, one out of every five autos built in North America was produced in Mexico. Companies manufacturing transportation equipment and autoparts directly employ 470,000 people in Mexico (INEGI 2010^a: 2.1.17). With regard to the logistical aspects of the world market, the movement of containers through Mexican ports has multiplied 15 times during the last quarter of a century. Every year Mexico's new maritime terminals move four million containers,

¹ International Monetary Fund, 2012. World GDP Purchasing Power Parities. *World Economic Outlook Database*, April. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/pdf/text.pdf>

which are transported along highway corridors crossing the country between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, or stretching up to the country's northern border, in some cases having passed through one of the thousands of Mexico's *maquiladoras*² Consequently, a strike capable of paralyzing this powerful machinery of international capitalism would have consequences—uneven but appreciable—in world industry, as well as in all the world's ports: from Shanghai to Long Beach, from New York to Rotterdam.

The dramatic expansion and deepening of the transnational character of the Mexican working class has a potential significance as great if not greater than the specific gravity of Mexico in the global economy. There are four million industrial workers in Mexican territory, and a similar amount in the industries of the United States. It is a transnationalized proletariat, some of which settles permanently in the US and many others who enter and leave according to economic cycles, with flows of half a million people per year.³ This long history of the Mexican working class as a transborder working class, with a presence in both the Mexican and US labor markets and labor movements, has been profoundly expanded and deepened with capitalist globalization. The voracious appetite of US capital for cheap and vulnerable labor has combined with the neoliberal destruction of sources of livelihood within Mexico to greatly expand Mexican migration to all parts of the US and many sectors of the economy. This transnational character of the Mexican working class combined with Mexico's multiple crises creates potential for a labor insurgency that could have significant impact on both Mexico and the U.S.⁴

In this essay, we will reconstruct some key aspects of the bleak course of Mexico's labor movement within the history of the subsumption of the ancient Mexican nation into the world economy. The deepening of

² A *maquiladora* is an industrial plant that is part of a cross-border integrated production process between the U.S. and Mexico in which the Mexican plant usually performs the more labor intensive aspects of production. It started out in the 1960s under a Border Industrialization Program signed by the U.S. and Mexican governments. It can be seen as a predecessor to NAFTA which deepens the use of cheaper and less protected Mexican labor as part of production by U.S. and other non-Mexican companies. See SCT. *Informe Estadístico, Movimiento de Carga, Buques y Pasajeros*, Mexico, Coordinación General de Puertos y Marina Mercante, Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, 2011, p.35.

³ Pew Hispanic Center, *Latinos in the U.S., Country of Origin Profile*, 2012.

⁴ Roman, R and Velasco, E. *Continental Crucible: Big Business, Workers and Unions in the Transformation of North America* (forthcoming, 2013).



capitalist globalization has further tightened the heavy chains of control placed over Mexico's working class during the decades following the Mexican Revolution of 1910.⁵ And the liberalization of the electoral system has not led to a growth of labor rights. In fact, the government of "democratic transition" has maintained the old system of labor control and added new elements of repression.

The arrival of globalization gave Mexico's major private corporations the hope of creating a strike-proof economic and social configuration. They, in collaboration with the government, have carried out the worst assault on the living and working conditions of the working class in memory. This assault has led to a decrease of strikes every year, as shown in Appendix 1 and 2.

The number of strikes decreased considerably from 1982 to 2010. There were only 84 legal strikes in the entire country in 2010, with only 8,000 workers participating—in a country with a labor force of 50 million people. Only one out of every 6,250 persons in the labor force went on strike that year.⁶

This data is perhaps surprising if we consider that over the course of the past three decades, the share of wage-earners in the Gross Domestic Product decreased from 40 to 25%, and the effective unemployment rate increased from 6 to 18%. In addition, accidents in the workplace are turning Mexican factories and mines into nothing short of "death chambers" that

⁵ The exploitation of Mexico's working class can be concentrated into a single statistic. The minimum hourly wage in 2011 was 42 cents of a euro. Nearly 25 million workers, or 50% of the country's labor force, receive less than a euro for each hour worked. The differences between the productivity of Mexico's economy and European economies do not explain these differences in wages. Turkey, a country with a per capita GDP similar to that of Mexico, remunerates its workers on the basis of a minimum wage that is six times higher than Mexico's minimum wage (based on purchasing power parities). INEGI. *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Agascalientes, Mexico.

⁶ Official statistics also do not include national work stoppages by miners, due to a bitter conflict between the *Sindicato Minero Metalúrgico de la República Mexicana* (Mexican Mining-Metallurgy Union) and the right-wing governments of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (Party of National Action). The conflict arose following an accident in the Pasta de Conchos Mine that resulted in the deaths of 65 workers. The official version regarding the "compliance of Mexico's working class" also disregards the strong presence of workers in the post-election conflict in 2006, with their combativeness evident in the massive protests in Mexico City between July and October of that year, with over a million people participating.

cause the deaths of 7,000 workers each year.⁷ And tens of thousands of other accidents leave more workers with serious life-long disabilities. The economic and political engineering constructed by the Mexican bourgeoisie with the aim of subduing workers in the workplace has been developed step by step, and we will examine it in the last part of this article.

The decline of formal strikes would seem to indicate quiescence on the part of the working class. But this decline has been accompanied by a silent rebellion, a rebellion difficult to measure statistically but nevertheless real. In recent years, workers in a number of factories in northern Mexico have begun to demonstrate their discontent in an increasingly defiant manner—without revealing their underground network—although these actions are not officially recorded as “legal strikes.” They have included the burning of facilities, wildcat strikes, occupation of highways next to *maquiladora* assembly plants, and open confrontations with federal security forces, as witnessed in Puerto de Lázaro Cárdenas, in the state of Michoacán in 2006⁸ and less intensely but still repeatedly in 2009 and 2010. The “peaceful labor relations” imposed by Mexico’s neoliberal governments since the signing of NAFTA with Canada and the United States in November 1993 are fragile. The alleged solidity of these relations is disappearing.

This article will critically examine some important studies of strike incidence in twentieth century Mexico and will present an alternative way of measuring and interpreting strike data. We will then examine two key periods of strike activity (1930s and 1976-1983) in order to present the Mexican experience more vividly as well as to illustrate the methodological and interpretive problems we see in the studies critiqued. We will then discuss the new period of the capitalist offensive and globalization, a period in which formal strike activity has continuously declined, but in which informal resistance appears to be growing. Finally, in the conclusion, we will discuss the implications for the study of strikes and the future of Mexico.

⁷ Velasco Arregui, E. and Roman, R. El México bárbaro del siglo XXI: A doce años del TLC, la muerte tiene permiso. *Memoria*, no. 207, Mexico, CEMOS, 2006.

⁸ Torres, Carlos. 2006. “Enfrentamiento entre metalúrgicos en huelga y la Policía Federal deja dos muertos,” *La Jornada*, April 21, 2006.

Determining Factors in the Long Wave of Strikes in Mexico

There have been various attempts at constructing time series of strikes in Mexico from the classic 1965 work of Pablo González Casanova, *La democracia en México*⁹, to the recent work coordinated by B.R. Mitchell in the extraordinary 2007 volume, *International Historical Statistics*¹⁰, which covers the period 1930-2004. We find that these works, along with those of Zapata¹¹ and Middlebrook¹², have significant methodological and interpretive problems. This paper will suggest a more complete way of measuring strikes in Mexico as well as an alternative interpretation of them. Our data and analysis will be presented more fully in our forthcoming book on Mexican working-class struggles.

Those strikes that are recorded in Mexico are not recorded in an aggregate manner. And many strikes are not recorded at all. Government employees, whether federal, state or municipal have a severely restricted right to strike. Their strikes, however large and of whatever duration, do not appear in official figures. These government employees, including teachers and health workers, make up a significant part of the union movement and are covered under section “B” of Article 123 (the labor code) of the Mexican Constitution. They do not have the right to strike over wages and working conditions; they have the hypothetical right to strike only if the employer, the government itself, agrees that it has violated their constitutional rights in a broad and systematic manner. Therefore almost all of their actions of collective resistance are not recognized in government statistics as “strikes.” There is no record of them, except in the inaccessible archives of the political police and other state security agencies. This omission is tremendously important since the public sector has expanded massively in the second half of the twentieth century. The collective resistance of hundreds of thousands of public sector workers, which has had

⁹ González Casanova, P. *La Democracia en México*. Mexico: ERA, 1967.

¹⁰ Mitchell, B.R. *International Historical Statistics 1750-2005: Americas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

¹¹ Zapata, Francisco. *Strikes in a state corporatist system: Mexico*. In: Van der Velden, Sjaak. (ed.) *Strikes around the World 1968-2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*. Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2007.

¹² Middlebrook, K. *The Paradox of Revolution: labor, the state and authoritarianism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1995.

great importance in Mexican labor history, is omitted from official strike data.

Workers employed by the private sector or by state-owned decentralized organisms (*paraestatales*) involved in production and/or services, are included in Part A of the labor code of the Constitution and have the right to strike over wages or working conditions. Their strikes, however, are recorded in two different sets of records, depending on whether the union is registered under federal or local jurisdiction. The designation of federal or local is made legislatively by the federal Congress according to the importance of the company and the strategic importance of that sector of production. Those enterprises designated as strategic, important, or of national scope, fall under federal jurisdiction. All other enterprises fall under local jurisdiction. Both individual and collective labor-related issues have to be brought to either the federal or local boards of conciliation and arbitration. The importance of this distinction is that strikes are recorded in two different registries, those in enterprises that are “important, strategic, or national” in the registry of the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board while the others are recorded by local boards.

Many strikes of workers covered under section A are also not counted in strike data. The local and federal Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (*juntas*) have the legal authority to declare a strike *inexistente* or *ilegal* and these strikes will not be included in the data. *Inexistente* refers to procedural violations and *ilegal* refers to violence or threat to public order, according to the judgement of the Boards. A good example would be the 1972 strike at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico -- UNAM). This strike, which was declared illegal, lasted 85 days and involved 20,000 workers. It is not included in strike statistics. Some *ilegal* or *inexistente* strikes may end immediately, some may go on for considerable periods, depending on many factors, including political elements (such as the relation of the union to municipal, state, or local government), the strength of union (strategic location or skills, solidarity, militancy), and the political conjuncture. The omission of these strikes not only underestimates the total number of strikes, but likely also underestimates the variation over time as it is likely that a greater number of strikes declared *ilegal* or *inexistente* would nevertheless continue in periods of rising working militancy as compared to periods of relative quiescence.

One of the problems in the statistical series elaborated by B.R. Mitchell in the section on “North America: Industrial Disputes” in which the Mexican data is presented, is that the data from the federal and local jurisdictions are not added together, but rather different sources are used for different years. Federal jurisdictions are used for some years and local jurisdictions for other years. For example, local jurisdiction data is used for the 1975-1985 period, but, from 1986 on, federal data is used. Thus the data from 1975-1985 only reflects strikes at the local level whereas for 1986-2004, the data reflects federal jurisdiction strikes. This creates a non-comparability of data for the different periods and undermines analysis of long-term trends. We have combined the data of both the federal and local jurisdictions to develop an alternative strike index in an attempt to correct this serious problem in Mitchell’s data (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Perhaps the most specific and detailed works on Mexican strikes are those by Francisco Zapata, who developed a methodology based on the six-year presidential terms in Mexico, using data from the *Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Conciliation and Arbitration Boards). Zapata, as Mitchell, is inconsistent in his use of sources, at times using local, at other times federal.¹³ He reported the number of strikes and strikers through averages that coincide with each of the six-year presidential terms in Mexico from 1934 to the present.¹⁴ The most important actors in his analysis of strikes are neither workers nor capitalists, but the state-union officialdom complex. The most important dynamic is not class struggle but formal politics. From his perspective, labor conflict in Mexico is restricted by and subordinated to rigorous vertical control of unions by their leaders in collaboration with the Federal Executive Branch. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 produced a legal and institutional framework in which, according to Zapata, strikes were part of the political mechanisms needed by the party in power to establish an equilibrium with other forces, such as national businessmen and foreign capital. Strikes in Mexico, in his view, did not express worker discontent over economic conditions or the imposed leadership of their unions.¹⁵ Zapata also argues that the cycle of strikes in

¹³ He uses data from local jurisdictions for the period 1983 to 1991, but data from federal jurisdictions for 1992 to 2003. Zapata. Op.Cit., 2007

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “It’s not therefore that trade unions articulate discontent based on economic deterioration, or that they rebel against the imposition of leaders, and this is where the key lies to explaining the history of labor conflict in Mexico. Instead, the top union leadership determines when it is necessary to engage in mobilization or control, action or social

Mexico since 1934 is not related to the long cycle of the Mexican economy, nor is it associated with the international configuration of the correlation of forces between wage workers and capital.¹⁶ Rather they were part of a dynamic limited to the political plane.¹⁷

Our data, based on aggregating both local and federal figures, is presented in Appendix Two in comparison to Zapata's non-aggregated figures. We also present our data in the form of an index. In addition to showing the differences between our figures and those of Zapata, it supports our argument that there are important interconnections between the pattern of strikes in Mexico, on the one hand, and the economic cycle, the strategies of capital, and international models and events, on the other. Of course, Mexican institutional dynamics play a crucial role, but they do not replace these other fundamental elements that shape class struggle. The Mexican workers' movement has been inspired into action through the influence of international models and events, particularly those in Latin America. As well, there has been an increasing synchrony with the patterns of the rest of North America (Canada and the United States).

Zapata's analysis has led to mistaken perceptions by other authors, who have based their understanding of the Mexican experience on Zapata's six-year-term averages.¹⁸ In contrast to Zapata, we maintain that there was

peace, and this is achieved by mutual consent with the country's political authorities. Therefore, strikes take place within a dynamic limited to the political sphere, and economic fluctuations do not influence their determination. Zapata, F. *El Conflicto Sindical en América Latina*. Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1986, p. 127. [Our translation]

¹⁶ Zapata, Op.Cit. 2007, p.122.

¹⁷ Zapata.Op.Cit. 1986, p.127. Also, in a recent text, Francisco Zapata states that since the end of the official party system of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, the Party of the Institutional Revolution) in 2000, when a different political party came to power, the situation has not changed in any substantial way. Zapata maintains that the State's vertical control over labor unions continued during the early part of the first decade of the 21st century. "... (The official unions) support the government in any critical situation and it ensures that the rank and file do not engage in strikes or mobilization through the implementation of clientelistic measures. Until now the CTM has been successful ...to provide a relatively quiescent labor force...we don't have evidence to suggest that the Mexican Government will really face up to the challenge of corporatist unions...An important indicator of the way state-labor relationship functioned in Mexico is the overall tendency for decrease in the average number of strikes from 1940s to the present". Zapata. Op.Cit. 2007, pp. 118-122.

¹⁸ Dribbusch, H. and Vandaele, K. Comprehending divergence in strike activity: Employers offensive, government interventions and union responses. In: Van der Velden, Op.Cit. 2007, p. 369, 372.

indeed an increase in workers' militancy in Mexico in the 1970s and the first part of the following decade¹⁹ as also observed in Argentina, Brazil and South Africa.²⁰ The retreat by Mexico's working class during the most recent period from 1994 to 2010, with its particular characteristics, was the result of a capitalist offensive carried out by the major corporations in all three North American countries against their respective working classes²¹, and not only a consequence of "national peculiarities" in the relationship between Mexico's working class and the state. Mexico's quasi-corporatist system of labor control²² has been an important element in deterring worker protest.²³ But this system of control has itself become subjected to the powerful processes of capitalist continental integration that have been part of the international capitalist offensive waged against the working class in the three nations increasingly integrated under the cloak of NAFTA.²⁴

Zapata describes an important element – the vertical control over the working class and over the incidence of strikes – but that element alone is inadequate for understanding the incidence of strikes in Mexico's state-heavy dynamic of class struggle. Workers' culture, consciousness and

¹⁹ Van der Velden, Sjaak. Introduction. In: Van der Velden, Sjaak. (ed.) *Strikes around the World 1968-2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*. Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2007, pp.20-22. Zapata's six-year presidential terms conceal a much clearer cycle that is, however, apparent in the data published in the Introduction by Van der Velden cited above. The powerful labor insurgency in the 1970s is reflected in the number of strikes during that period.

²⁰ Van der Velden, S. and Visser, W. Strikes in the Netherlands and South Africa, 1900-1998: A Comparison. *South African Journal of Labor Relations*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2006.

²¹ Of course, U.S. capital plays major roles in both Canada and Mexico while Mexican and Canadian capital, though having an important presence in some niches, plays a lesser role in the U.S.

²² Roman, R. and Velasco, E. The Peculiarities of Mexico's Unions. *Relay*. March-April 2006.

²³ The old system of labour control was based on five key, inter-related pillars: 1) labour law that gave the state control over union recognition and the right to strike; 2) integration of the officially recognized unions into the ruling party and state apparatus; 3) authoritarian control over the unions by the union officialdom on the basis of state laws and links as well as the usual control mechanisms of an organizational oligarchy; 4) repression by the state and by thugs commanded by the union officials; 5) and, for some periods, a social pact that allowed gains for limited sectors of the working class, especially in the realm of the social wage (most notably in the period of import substitution expansion, the so-called "Mexican miracle" from the 1940s to the 1970s). We agree with Zapata that the change from one-party rule to electoral competition has not changed the core dynamics of union officialdom-state control over workers.

²⁴ Part I of our forthcoming book, *Continental Crucible: Big Business, Workers and Unions in the Transformation of North America* (2013), deals with the continental capitalist offensive.

horizontal linkages are always important, albeit not easily accessible to the researcher. They enter into individual and collective responses of acquiescence or resistance. The behavior of workers, whether it is militant protest or relative passivity, is not something that is simply imposed. Workers' action and inaction involves individual and collective processes of interpreting the just and the possible.

The Mexican Revolution and the Working Class

The Constitution, which was written in late 1916 and early 1917 by representatives of the Revolution's triumphant factions, recognized for the first time in the country's history – more as a matter of tactics than conviction – the right to association for wage-earning workers, as well as an eight-hour workday, with a dignified minimum wage, and of course, the right to strike.²⁵ The right to strike – as well as employers' right to lock-out workers – was conditioned by the vague notion of its contribution to an equilibrium between capital and labor. The determination of whether a strike or lock-out contributed to “equilibrium” would be decided by tripartite boards of conciliation and arbitration which would basically have the right to declare strikes or lockouts legal or illegal.²⁶ These boards would become powerful institutions of control by the state as well as areas of class contestation. Consequently, the first official statistics on strike movements in Mexico date back to the creation of the *Departamento de Trabajo* (Department of Labor) and *Juntas Locales de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Local Conciliation and Arbitration Boards) in in each Mexican state during the years immediately following the end of the armed period of the Revolution.²⁷ The creation of the *Juntas Locales de Conciliación y Arbitraje* led to the legal existence of unions and their right to collective bargaining with companies in the various Mexican states. The *Juntas Locales de Conciliación y Arbitraje* immediately became vital spaces of power,

²⁵ Roman, R. and Velasco, E. 1810, 1910 and 2010 and Mexican Labor. *Against the Current*. no. 149, November-December, 2010.

²⁶ Roman, R. 1976, *Ideología y Clase en la Revolución Mexicana*, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Chapter 5.

²⁷ Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 instituted the Conciliation and Arbitration Boards as public institutions to resolve differences and conflicts between labor and capital.

administered by the governor of each territory, in accordance with his particular political strategy.²⁸

The wave of strikes in Mexico during the 20th century

The incidence of strikes in Mexico followed a tendency similar to that experienced in the other North American countries during the international crisis that exploded in the 1930s – a drop in union membership and in strike incidence during the months immediately following the beginning of the great crisis, and then an intense process of reorganization and worker militancy during the rest of the decade up until the start of the Second World War in 1939. The highest point of worker mobilization in the case of the United States was reached in 1937, with 4,740 strikes and 1.8 million workers involved in these strikes.²⁹ Worker insurgency in Mexico reached its peak during the decade of the 1930s in 1935, with 642 strikes and 145,000 strikers. A significant development within this major wave of strikes was the recuperation achieved by classist currents in labor unions. Many unions elected communist and socialist militants to lead their struggles in the 1930s.

The short duration of the first strike wave in the history of contemporary Mexico stands in sharp contrast to the experience in the United States where unions continued to vigorously make demands until well into 1941, with a spectacular increase in strikes and labor organization. Membership in the major industrial unions in the United States increased from 3.7 to 10.7 million between 1935 and 1941. In Mexico, however, the labor offensive came to a halt unexpectedly in 1937, in response to a change in the national political scene.

The independence, militancy and classist orientation of the new labour movement of the 1930s, grouped at that time around its large industrial unions and the recently-created *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (CTM, Mexican Workers' Confederation), was destroyed by its incorporation into the ruling party, an incorporation based on selective coercion and the politics of important sectors of the labor movement. The

²⁸ Bortz, J. *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923*. California: Stanford University Press, 2008.

²⁹ US Census Bureau 1976, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial times to 1970*, US Department of Commerce, pp.178-179.

ruling party transformed itself in 1938 from a loose coalition of political elites to a mass party of four sectors,³⁰ one of which was the unions. The radical and independent labor movement of the early and mid-thirties had, by the end of the thirties, been largely incorporated into the official apparatus.

The incorporation of the labor movement into the regime's project of "revolutionary nationalism" and anti-imperialism was not simply imposed from above. First, the working class itself had strong traditions of anti-imperialist "revolutionary nationalism". Second, the use of union positions and state links by personally ambitious union leaders for personal mobility, power, and enrichment also had roots in the union movement. Finally, the important role of the Communist Party in building mass independent unionism, gave it the leverage to push the independent unions back to subordination to the anti-democratic leadership that had emerged in the CTM (with government blessing). The Communists had been a key component in splitting the main industrial unions from the opportunist and anti-democratic leadership of the CTM. But the Comintern (Communist International) ordered them to go back in on any terms and back in they went, weaker and with a big loss of credibility. The strategy of popular frontism of the Soviet Union and the Comintern was very congruent with the strategy of "revolutionary nationalism" of the Mexican regime. To summarize, the main currents within the leadership of the labour movement chose to give up class independence to ally themselves to a party organization led by national political elites whose project was national capitalist development. The nationalization of the oil industry in 1938, previously in the hands of major foreign energy corporations, helped consolidate this voluntary subordination to the project of national development. The Mexican union movement, including the communist current, identified its priority as the tasks of national liberation and the recuperation of revenue from natural resources, in this case oil revenue, to thus lay the groundwork for the country's own domestic market. Mexico hoped to achieve a higher level of industrialization and higher employment levels on the basis of this domestic market. But when the government of President Lazaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) turned against key sections of the working class, as it increasingly did in the last period of his presidency, the working class lacked the independence in perspective and organization as

³⁰ This was shortly dropped to three sectors – worker, peasant, and popular – with the fourth, the military, dropped.

well as sufficient unity to resist.³¹ The ruling party and labour federation had ideologically and politically disarmed the working class and it was thus in a weak position to resist paying the price for national capitalist development.

The working class would pay a huge price for this subordination to the national project over the next three decades of industrialization. The ruling party and the trade unions then became almost fully – though with more autonomy and exceptions than in Communist countries – an instrument of government policy for controlling the working class. Corruption and gangsterist methods of control of unions and workers became characteristic and were fostered and sustained by the government.³² The “labor truce” agreed upon in the Cárdenas era (1934-1940) was extended for more than 30 years in a harsh and, at times, brutal manner, under the iron hand of the country’s presidents. The state used severe repression when faced with any attempt at labor autonomy. Workers were only able to achieve major strike movements during brief, intense periods of organized labor protest in 1944 and 1958.

The peak of labor insurgency in the 20th century

Employment grew significantly from 1970 to 1983, but it was especially rapid in mining, auto, and construction. This high demand for more workers favored the development of independent organization and contributed to the labor insurgency of the period. The second major wave of labor insurgency in recent history erupted in 1980. On June 9 the first national day of action, or *Primera Jornada Nacional*, was held by teachers organized independently from the corporatist teachers’ union.³³ Though concentrated in Mexico City, the action was led by teachers in Chiapas, with 80,000 teachers participating in a week-long work stoppage.³⁴ Workers in all manufacturing

³¹ Roman, R. Nationalization and the Formation of the Administración Obrera of Mexico's Railroads, 1937-1938. *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, Vol. 35, #3, Winter, 1981, pp.3-22.

³² Campa, Valentín. *Mi testimonio*. Mexico: Editorial Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1978, pp. 167-173.

³³ The CNTE (*Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación*- National Coordinator of Educational Workers), is an organized national alliance of dissident teachers’ groups in the SNTE (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación* – National Union of Educational Workers), an authoritarian union previously connected to the state party, now a key cog in the conservative- neoliberal power bloc. It has close to 1.5 million members.

³⁴ Martínez Verdugo: 478-479..

areas, from automotive to food production, entered into a period of open labor discontent.³⁵

The paralysis of the official union leaders in the face of the combination of inflation and full employment led to growing pressure for action from the rank and file in 1981. As well, the rise of *Solidarnosc* as an independent workers movement in Poland and the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua inspired many of these rank and file movements. A series of strikes and stoppages were unleashed in automotive plants. Miners and metallurgical workers suspended work in copper deposits and steelworks. Teachers carried out the largest mobilizations in the country. Between 1981 and 1982, labor struggles were led by teachers from Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, the state of Mexico, Zacatecas, Michoacán, Queretaro, Morelos, Hidalgo and eleven other states. Throughout the year, tens of thousands of workers participated in struggles for union democracy in the streets of Mexico City and throughout the rest of the nation. The teachers' strikes were not counted in the statistics developed by B.R. Mitchell³⁶, since they correspond to Section B. And here lies our major difference with the analysis presented by Francisco Zapata. In the period from 1978 to 1982, precisely when tens of thousands of teachers initiated an unprecedented cycle of strikes and work stoppages, Francisco Zapata perceives a "decline" in the number of striking workers.³⁷

The problems with the data on the number of strikers in Zapata's presentation are the same as that for the number of strikes: 1) that is, the switching between local and federal data; and 2) the fact that large numbers of strikes do not appear in the data. (As well, reliable data on the number of strikers, does not yet exist.) There is a substantial difference in the number of strikes in Zapata and the number in Roman & Velasco, especially for 1983, since he switches from local data to federal data. This decrease in the number of strikes did not occur. 1983 was a year of considerable labor

³⁵ In the final decades of the 20th century, the labor union movement would receive an impulse from other major torrents of social mobilization in a country with its own pre-capitalist cultural matrix, as powerful as Mexico itself. Due to limited space, it is not possible to review the magnitude of the contribution from the 1968 student movement to the labor insurgency, or the powerful links between the working class and the 1994 insurrection by the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) in Chiapas. See Velasco Arregui, E. *Cuestión Indígena y Nación; Una Perspectiva Andina del Zapatismo*, Chiapas, no. 9, vol. 3, Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, UNAM, 2000.

³⁶ Mitchell. Op.Cit.

³⁷ Zapata, 2007. Op.Cit. p.122.



militancy. And 1982 appears in his data as a year with a paltry number of strikers: only 25,173, compared to 92,774 in 1980 which is highly improbable since 1982 witnessed the highest number of strikes in Mexican history. Widespread strikes by teachers broke out in 1978, but are not included in our data or Zapata's data. Their statistical disappearance in Mexican official data makes them no less real and important for understanding strike patterns. But beyond statistical discrepancies and similarities, there is a fundamental difference of interpretation. Zapata sees solid corporatist control throughout the 1940 -1982 period whereas we give great importance to the labor insurgency of the 1970s and early 1980s, an insurgency that happened almost simultaneously, though with some delay, to that of the USA and Canada.

The second wave of labor insurgency was the result of a combination of factors that particularly helped to facilitate the development of worker autonomy: (1) a notable increase in the industrial labor force, which doubled in a brief period of time, as a result of the oil boom that occurred between 1975 and 1981; (2) a chronic inflationary process threatening the total wage mass for workers. In 1981 the prices of consumer goods purchased by workers increased nearly 30% for the second consecutive year. Inflation and an increase in industrial employment led to the most intense period of autonomous worker mobilization in 1980 to 1983. These mobilizations took a variety of organizational forms ranging from the struggles of individual unions, union sections, rank and file caucuses, and the special case of the nationally organized teachers' dissident movement. The period of 1976 to 1982 can be characterized as an ongoing tug of war around the workers' share of the GDP.³⁸ The regime, of which Mexico's peculiar labor bureaucracy was an integrated part, responded with repression. Starting in early 1981, the use of paramilitary groups hired by official union bureaucrats became more frequent and began to deal serious blows to the labor insurgency.³⁹ The second wave of labor insurgency crested in 1982, as illustrated in Figure 1 in Appendix 1, despite all the attempts by the regime to avoid the synchrony between the failure of its economic project and the rise in protest by workers autonomously organized.

³⁸ Bortz, J. *La estructura de salarios en México*. Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1985, p.17.

³⁹ Cockcroft, J. *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation and the State*. New York, Monthly Review Press, 1983, p.viii.

The Capitalist Offensive, Globalization, and Worker Militancy

This section will explore three of the most important elements in the decline in the number of strikes in Mexico in the last three decades: 1) the globalization of production and industrial relocation; 2) high levels of real unemployment; 3) increased repression (a *State of Exception* and social violence).

Global manufacturing and industrial relocation

Mexican industry was structured around the domestic market and concentrated in industrial cities in the country's central region until 1982 when an extensive process of industrial re-structuring was initiated. Production was relocated to different areas of Mexico, areas without unions and without established working-class communities. It also involved the massive introduction of foreign investment. The new factories carry out only fractions of globalized manufacturing processes, and consequently isolated strikes in individual factories have lost a significant amount of their previous capacity to exert pressure on companies – as compared to previous periods when the nation's industry was integrated into an autarchical domestic market.⁴⁰ In addition, industrial relocation involved the de-industrialization of the traditional industrial regions in the center of the country – regions characterized by a great tradition of labor combativeness – and the relocation to new industrial corridors in the country's northern states, in which capital's despotism has been a constant factor during a major part of the 20th century and the first part of this century. The rate of unionization in the country's central region is 25%, while in the northern states it is less than a third of that percentage, with an average of 7%, and most of these unionized workers are employed by the federal government.

⁴⁰ Roman, R. and Velasco, E. Neoliberalism, Labor Market Transformation and Working Class Responses. *Latin American Perspectives Review*, issue 119, vol. 28, no. 4, pp.54-56, 2001. The exception would be if the plant was the sole supplier of a crucial component for the continental production chain. This is rarely the case. In general, companies can relatively easily shift production from one *maquiladora* to another.

New technologies, reorganization of work and outsourcing

The incorporation of new technologies dislodged many workers from their old knowledge of work processes – knowledge which was transferred and assimilated into the objectified production process, as the force of accumulated labor-capital that devours the new, precarious living labor.⁴¹ It is much more difficult to conduct an effective work stoppage in the new automated factories on the periphery of the central technological nucleus of the new production processes. And the new strategic segment of the working class has been de-unionized through various methods including subcontracting out the work to “other companies” in order to block working-class unity.⁴²

Real unemployment rate at high levels

The Mexican government’s claim that the unemployment rate in Mexico is lower than in the United States is an obvious statistical fiction as the *Instituto de Estadística de México* (Mexican Statistics Institute) considers a person to be employed if he or she works only one hour a week or “has an imminent promise of work.” Individuals in precarious employment conditions, or specifically, those who actually have no work on the basis of which to survive, accounted for a fifth of the country’s labor force in 2010. Such a high real unemployment rate constitutes a permanent element of pressure on workers who are employed, due to the difficulty they will face when seeking employment with another company in the case of individual or mass firing. In the past, all periods of rapid employment growth have led to an increase in the levels of worker defiance and discontent, and therefore, in the number of strikes. While real unemployment levels remain above 20%, unemployment becomes a powerful element in discouraging organized working class resistance.

⁴¹ Marx, K. *El Capital, Libro I, Capítulo VI Inedito*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1971, p.72.

⁴² “The average rate of unionization is only 29% for the 50 most important companies in Mexico, including the large public companies. The most notable case of blocking unionization is that of the 230,000 employees of Walmart, where they are not defined as wage workers but ‘associates.’” Bibian, C. Las Empresas de México. In: *Las Quinientas Empresas más grandes de México, Informe de la Revista Expansión*, June 20, no. 1068, Mexico, Grupo CNN Expansión, 2011, p.201.

The safety valve of Mexican emigration

During the last two decades, the emigration of young workers to the United States, totaling an average of about 400,000 per year, has significantly diminished social and political pressure on Mexican capitalism—which is incapable of resolving social problems in the over 100 cities where Mexico’s proletariat is currently concentrated. Emigration to the North creates a paradox in which there may be more Mexican workers in the US in regular, stable employment in certain key sectors than there are within Mexico.⁴³ Many of those with rebellious discontent decide to leave the country—in the absence of effective organized alternatives for expressing their discontent—and end up participating in labor resistance in the United States.

Preservation of vertical control over national unions

A significant portion of the most important national unions, such as those of oil workers, teachers, railway workers and the power workers (those outside the *Distrito Federal* and some surrounding areas)⁴⁴, are kept

⁴³ There were 2.1 million Latino workers in the US in 2010 in the construction industry, with the great majority from Mexico. The number of construction workers in Mexico who are in the formal economic sector and pay into the social security system is only 1.3 million. In the case of the mining industry, the number of workers is similar, with the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) acknowledging 112,000 Latino workers in mining production in the US, out of a total of 731,000 workers, while in Mexico there are 108,000 mining workers in the formal sector. In the transportation sector, there are 1.6 million Latino workers in the US, while in Mexico there are 600,000 transportation workers in the formal sector. In manufacturing, there are more workers in Mexico’s formal sector, with a total of 3.9 million industrial workers, in comparison to the 2.2 million Latino workers in US factories. In the agricultural sector there are 443,000 permanent wage-earning workers in Mexico—the country’s stable agricultural proletariat—while the number of wage-earning Latino workers in agricultural activities in the US, according to the BLS, is 468,000. The total number of wage-earning Latino workers in the United States in the activities mentioned above is 6.48 million, while in 2010 in Mexico the number of permanent wage-earning workers who are in these same sectors and who pay into social security and are therefore part of the formal sector is approximately 6.35 million. In summary there are more Latino workers in the United States, most of whom are Mexican than there are Mexican workers in the same sectors in Mexico’s formal economy. US Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Employed Hispanics or Latino Workers by sex and occupation. Current Population Survey.* Table 13, 2010 and 2010 and Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, IMSS. *Cubo de Información Estadística 2010*, <http://www.imss.gob.mx>2010.

⁴⁴ There are two major power worker unions, the SUTERM (Sole Union for Electrical Workers of the Mexican Republic) and the *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas* (SME—Mexican Electrical Workers Union). The SME was the union at *Luz y Fuerza del*

under authoritarian control by the union officialdom through undemocratic internal statutes, various types of governmental support, the usual control mechanisms of an organizational oligarchy, and when necessary, violence by union thugs or agents of the state. As in the old days under the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* --Institutional Revolutionary Party), the new right-wing governments have been very effective in re-creating vertical control over the large labor organizations.⁴⁵ The recent major labor conflicts have resulted from employer lockouts against militant, combative labor organizations such as the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (SME). The attack on the SME culminated in the arbitrary, illegal firing of 44,000 workers.⁴⁶ In 2011 the transnational footwear corporation, Sandak, dismantled its factory in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala in order to get rid of the independent union established a few years earlier. Workers were sent to their homes to work within a cottage industry scheme.

Though strikes have been few and far between in recent decades, the discontent of workers has been expressed in other ways, as we have briefly described. The absence of genuine unions and state repression of strikes has pushed workers' discontent into other forms not generally measured in strike statistics. In 2006, Mexican workers' discontent burst forth on a massive scale on both sides of the border. The immigrant rights movement in the U.S. was a working-class movement mainly composed and led by Mexican workers. Their demands were for dignity and social rights for immigrant workers. Their one-day massive general strike was not initially

Centro (LyFC--Central Light and Power Company) which is the public company that distributes power in central Mexico, with only token power production. It buys almost all the power it distributes from the *La Comisión Federal de Electricidad* (CFE—Federal Electricity Commission), the other state owned power company that handles production (for most/all of) and distribution for areas outside the jurisdiction of the LyFC. The union at the CFE is the SUTERM, a compliant, undemocratic and corrupt union that does not challenge the government's plans for privatization and squeezing workers even more. The CFE has quietly contracted out significant amounts of power production to private companies whereas the SME has opposed privatization of power production and attacks on workers' rights. In response to the opposition of the SME, the government liquidated the LyFC with a military assault on October 10, 2009 and fired 44,000 workers. The company was then taken over by the CFE who hired new workers who belong to the SUTERM.

⁴⁵ Roman, R. and Velasco, E. The State, the Bourgeoisie, and the Unions: The Recycling of Mexico System of Labour Control. *Latin American Perspectives Review*. Issue 147, vol. 33, pp.96-99, 2006.

⁴⁶ Roman, R. and Velasco, E. Mexico: The Murder of a Union and the Rebirth of Class Struggle, Part I: The New Assault. www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/279.php and Part II: The Fightback. www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/280/php, 2009.

supported by the top leadership of most unions, but pushed forward by mid-level leaders and rank and file activists of Mexican and other national origins. The Oaxaca insurgency was initiated by a dissident state section of the official teachers' union and supported by much of the laboring poor of the city of Oaxaca and the state. The brutal attack by the state government on the striking teachers led to a general uprising that controlled the city of Oaxaca for five months.⁴⁷ The third, the anti-electoral fraud movement in Mexico of the same year, though led by political elites, was also mainly based on the working class. Despite sharing many underlying grievances and a broad concern for social justice, these movements never converged although there were a myriad of formal and informal linkages. These struggles and linkages are sowing the seeds for a possible continental movement of workers' protest. And more recently, as mentioned earlier, workers' protests in the northern *maquiladora* regions have involved wildcat strikes, highway occupations, and even burning facilities. And in May-June 2012, the dissident school teachers' organization, the CNTE, has been carrying out a strike that has closed schools in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Morelos, Michoacán, and parts of Mexico City.⁴⁸ The Oaxaca teachers have occupied the central square of the city of Oaxaca and are blockading highway toll booths and the local airport. 10% of Oaxaca's teachers, accompanied by many teachers from other states, have occupied the central square of Mexico City. This widespread strike will not be counted in the official government figures, neither federal nor local, as it is considered an illegal strike.

State of Exception and Social Violence

The transition from one-party rule to electoral competition has not brought democratic rights to most of the population. In fact, the levels of institutional and social violence have increased in a formidable manner across Mexico. The feminicides carried out with impunity against female workers in cities with *maquiladoras* along the country's northern border are

⁴⁷ Roman, R. and Velasco, E. The Other Indigenous Rebellion: The Oaxaca Commune. In: *Global Flash Points: Reactions to Imperialism and Neoliberalism, 2008 Socialist Register*, eds. L. Panitch and C. Leys, London: Merlin Press, 2007.

⁴⁸ The teachers' movement is protesting standardized testing which they view as part of the neoliberal offensive to privatize education and redistribute resources away from poor areas of the country.



one of the most brutal examples of state-permitted violence. The criminalization of hundreds of thousands of young people has been taking place in Mexico as well as the U.S. Mexico's prison population has nearly tripled since NAFTA was signed. The "war against drugs" – actually a war over control of the production and distribution of drugs within the state-cartels complex – has led to the presence of the Army and the Marines on the streets of numerous industrial cities, and to the increasingly frequent use of institutional violence to intimidate workers from protesting. Between 2007 and 2011, 55,000 Mexicans have been killed in "confrontations" in which irregular forces or State security forces have been involved.⁴⁹ A state of terror – some state-executed, some state-tolerated⁵⁰ – creates an intimidating environment in which it takes great courage to organize collective action. In short, a working class subjected to a State of Exception faces huge difficulties in organizing strikes in a peaceful way in order to demand respect for their rights.

Conclusion and Prospects

We have sought to present a more methodologically complete picture of strike patterns in Mexico by aggregating data collected by the federal and local Boards of Arbitration and Conciliation. We have also argued that the interpretation of strike patterns in Mexico has to move beyond an exclusive emphasis on political dynamics and also examine changes in the economy, capitalist strategies, and influences of workers' movements and revolutions internationally. We have also pointed out that even this aggregation of data paints a very incomplete picture of strike patterns in Mexico as many strikes, including some that are widespread and of long duration, are simply not recorded in official data for reasons that have been discussed above. We have also sought to show that working-class protests, especially given the paucity of genuine unions, have taken political

⁴⁹ Revista Zeta, 15 July 2011..

⁵⁰ Amnesty International (AI) has pointed out that there is a pattern of violation of human rights carried out by the Mexican Army in their "war on drugs" and that both civil and military authorities deny and ignore these forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions. AI accuses Mexican authorities of failing to exhaustively investigate the complaints of abuses committed by the Army. Amnesty International. *México: Memorandum al gobierno de México y al Congreso de la Unión, AMR 41/070/2010*. London: Amnesty International.

2010.

and community forms as well as, at times, through direct action of various kinds.

We have also discussed the neoliberal strategies that have combined with Mexico's old system of labor control to try to disarticulate worker resistance and organization. This combination of neoliberal strategies and old forms of labor control has had considerable success. But as we have also pointed out, there are significant signs of worker resistance. The seeds of a renewal of a workers' movement have been planted by the very same processes of neoliberal capitalism that have combined with old forms of labor control to disarticulate worker resistance. These collective actions have taken dramatic forms, at times well beyond those of trade unionism. The Oaxaca rebellion was a good example of this – a teachers' strike, state repression, and an uprising of a whole city – led, in considerable part, by the state teachers' union. Traditions of communalism and solidarity survive in many Mexican communities and are transported to cities by internal and cross-border migrants, both in Mexico and in the U.S. These old traditions and invocations⁵¹, deep in collective memory, may yet combine with the intelligence and tools available in the 21st century, in ways not yet known, to shape workers' collective responses to the continuing assaults on their dignity and well-being.

⁵¹ Matamoros, P. *Memoria y Utopía en México: Imaginarios en la Génesis del Neozapatismo*. Buenos Aires: Herramienta, 2007.



Appendix 1

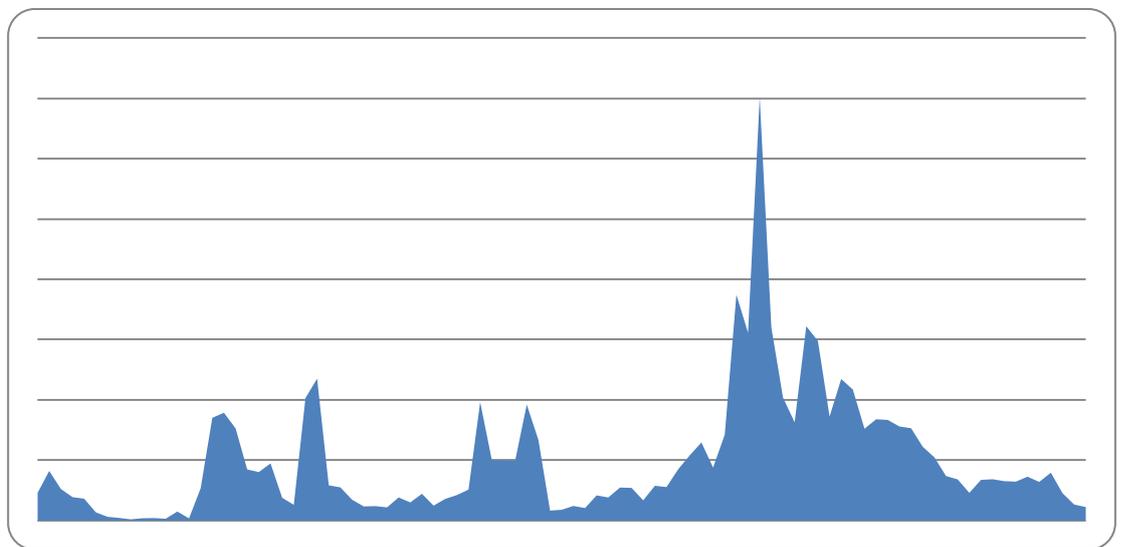
Year	Index of Strikes
1920	45,9
1921	82,2
1922	52,3
1923	38,7
1924	36,1
1925	13,5
1926	6,1
1927	4,2
1928	1,9
1929	3,7
1930	4,0
1931	2,9
1932	14,9
1933	3,4
1934	53,6
1935	170,3
1936	178,8
1937	152,8
1938	84,6
1939	80,4
1940	94,7
1941	37,7
1942	26,0
1943	203,2
1944	235,3
1945	58,4
1946	54,9
1947	34,5
1948	23,3
1949	23,9
1950	21,8
1951	38,2
1952	30,0
1953	44,3
1954	24,7
1955	35,8
1956	42,2

Year	Index of Strikes
1957	51,2
1958	196,3
1959	100,5
1960	100,0
1961	98,9
1962	192,3
1963	133,7
1964	16,4
1965	17,8
1966	24,1
1967	20,7
1968	41,6
1969	38,2
1970	54,6
1971	54,1
1972	33,4
1973	57,6
1974	55,4
1975	84,9
1976	108,2
1977	129,4
1978	87,8
1979	142,4
1980	374,5
1981	311,4
1982	701,9
1983	320,4
1984	204,0
1985	162,9
1986	322,3
1987	297,9
1988	172,4
1989	234,7
1990	217,2
1991	152,3
1992	167,9
1993	166,8
1994	156,0
1995	153,1
1996	122,3

Year	Index of Strikes
1997	104,8
1998	73,7
1999	68,2
2000	45,9
2001	67,4
2002	68,4
2003	65,3
2004	64,5
2005	72,7
2006	63,9
2007	79,3
2008	45,4
2009	26,5
2010	22,3

Source: Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social.
Anuario de Estadísticas del Trabajo (1940-2010)
INEGI. Estadísticas sobre relaciones laborales de
jurisdicción local y federal
JFCA ,Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje,
Informes Anuales del Presidente de la Junta (1928-
2010)

Figure 1. México: Strike Index 1920- 2010 (1960=100)



Source:
Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social. Anuario de Estadísticas del Trabajo (1940-2010)
INEGI. Estadísticas sobre relaciones laborales de jurisdicción local y federal y JFCA Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje, Informes Anuales del Presidente de la Junta (1928-2010)

Appendix 2

Roman and Velasco Index vs Zapata Series							
año	Strikes Councils Local	Strikes Council Federal	Total Federal plus Local	Roman Velasco Index	Number of Strikes Zapata Series		
1960	310	67	377	100,0	nd		
1980	1.339	93	1.432	379,8	1.139		
1981	1.066	108	1.174	311,4	1.066		
1982	1.971	675	2.646	701,9	1.925		
1983	978	230	1.208	320,4	216		
1984	548	221	769	204,0	427		
1985	489	125	614	162,9	159		
1986	903	312	1.215	322,3	312		
1987	949	174	1.123	297,9	174		
1988	518	132	650	172,4	132		
1989	757	118	875	232,1	118		
1990	670	149	819	217,2	150		
1991	438	136	574	152,3	136		
1992	477	156	633	167,9	477		
1993	474	155	629	166,8	474		
1994	472	116	588	156,0	472		
1995	481	96	577	153,1	481		
1996	410	51	461	122,3	410		
1997	356	39	395	104,8	356		
1998	245	33	278	73,7	245		
1999	225	32	257	68,2	225		
2000	147	26	173	45,9	147		
2001	219	35	254	67,4	219		
2002	213	45	258	68,4	213		
2003	202	44	246	65,3	204		
2004	205	38	243	64,5	nd		
2005	224	50	274	72,7	nd		
2006	186	55	241	63,9			
2007	271	28	299	79,3			
2008	150	21	171	45,4			
2009	81	19	100	26,5			
2010	73	11	84	22,3			

Fuente: Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje, Informes Anuales e INEGI, Anuarios Estadísticos de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1980-2011.

Pre-empting New Social Movements, Pioneering Social-Movement Unionism: Australian Builders Labourers in the 1970s

Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann

Social-movement unionism and new social movement theory

The term ‘social-movement unionism’ was coined in 1988 by Peter Waterman¹ but popularized in Kim Moody’s *Workers in a Lean World*.², which studied the rise of social-movement unionism in the 1990s in South America, South Africa, South Korea and the more industrialized parts of the Third World. Moody argues social-movement unionism grew out of the new material circumstances imposed by corporate globalization. It is characterized by militancy, internal democracy, an agenda for radical social and economic change, a determination to embrace the diversity of the working class in order to overcome its fragmentation, and a capacity to appeal beyond its membership by using union power to “lead the fight for everything that affects working people in their communities and the country”³

Robin Kelley’s study of Justice for Janitors in the United States (Kelley 1997: 6-18), Sam Gindin’s research on Canadian automobile

¹ Waterman, P. Social-Movement Unionism: A New Union Model for a New World Order? *Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 245-78, 1993.

² Moody, K. *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*. London and New York: Verso, 1997

³ *Ibid.*, p. 269, 271.

workers (Gindin 1995), Gay Seidman's study of workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa (Seidman 1994), Andrew Vandenberg's study of the 1995 'Toys 'R' Us dispute in Sweden (Vandenberg 2006: 182-84), provide other examples of the extent to which organized labour reasserted itself in militant and broad-ranging ways in social-movement unionism during the last decade of the twentieth century.⁴ These writings investigate the capacity of the labour movement to use its industrial power to effect social change, not only on behalf of workers but also on behalf of much wider constituencies, whose interests have become aligned with labour against the neo-liberal austerities imposed by globalizing capitalism. Social-movement unionism reasserted the efficacy of class struggle at the same time as it emphasized the significance of forms of oppression apart from class: the militant best of labour movement traditions informed by the inclusive values and organizational principles of the new social movements.

The phenomenon of social-movement unionism also attracted scholarly attention to the capacity of the labour movement not only to effect social change because of its power at the point of production, but also to transform itself. In pointing to the latter, the new social movements are deemed a fundamental influence, especially in the USA. For example, Lowell Turner examined the efforts on the part of American unions to change themselves from "inward-looking business unions" to an "outward-looking social movement".⁵ Continuing this project in 2007 in *Labor in the New Urban Battle Grounds*, Turner defines social-movement unionism as "an activist mobilization-based unionism that, in contrast to established insider unionism, pushes for substantial social change". It refers to "union strategies that use social movement-type approaches, such as coalition building, grassroots mobilization, aggressive organizing, demonstrations, and civil disobedience, and which typically operate outside established channels". Alluding to further semantic development, he notes that: "The concept is at once condensed and broadened in the term *social unionism* to

⁴ Kelley, R.D.G. 1997, The New Urban Working Class and Organized Labor. *New Labor Forum*. Vol. 1, no. 1, pp.6-18, 1997. Gindin, S. *The Canadian Auto Workers: The Birth and Transformation of a Union*. Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1997; Seidman, G. *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Vandenberg, A. Social-Movement Unionism in Theory and in Sweden. *Social Movement Studies*. Vol. 5, no. 2 (September), 2006, pp.171-191.

⁵ Turner, L. Building Social Movement Unionism. In: *Rekindling the Movement. Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*, eds. L. Turner, R. Hurd and H. Katz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

encompass both social movement approaches and other coalition-based innovations in areas such as economic development”.⁶

The term “social-movement unionism” suggests the labour movement required the influence of new social movements to develop its desirable characteristics—with the possible exception of militancy. The term thus replicates, perhaps inadvertently, the false binary constructed during the 1980s in new social movement theory. This dichotomy contrasts traditional labour movement concerns, such as wages and conditions, job control and job security, with issues championed by the new social movements, such as saving the environment and representing the interests of those whose identities are based on gender, sexual preference, race or ethnicity. New social movement theory even suggested that labour was incapable of providing social opposition and even shared interests in common with capital: labour and capital were both involved in the production process and committed thereby to maintaining capital growth, which was necessarily destructive of the environment.⁷

New social movement theorists persistently neglected to acknowledge the extent to which labour movements historically had challenged prejudices based on empire, nation, race, gender and so on.⁸ Long before such issues were raised by the new social movements and presented as “new”, these issues were on the agenda for social change provided by the most class-conscious sections of international labour movements, for example, the Industrial Workers of the World. New social

⁶ Turner, L. An Urban Resurgence of Social Unionism. In: *Labor in the New Urban Battle Grounds. Local Solidarity in a Global Economy*, eds. L. Turner and D. B. Cornfield. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 2007, p.15.

⁷ Touraine, A. *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, esp.p.13; Habermas, J. New Social Movements. *Telos*. No. 49, Fall, pp.33-35, 1981; Offe, C. Work: the Key Sociological Category? In: *Disorganised Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, ed. C.Offe. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.133-6, 141, 148. 1985; Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. Post-Marxism without Apologies. *New Left Review* 166, Nov./Dec., pp.103, 106, 1987; Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985.

⁸ Brandt, K. W. New Social Movements as a Metapolitical Challenge: the Social and Political Impact of a New Historical Type of Protest. *Thesis Eleven*, no. 15, pp.60–8, 1986; Inglehart, R. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977; Inglehart, R. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, esp.371-392; Melucci, A. *Nomads of the Present, Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989, pp.11-12.

movement activists too have drawn wildly inaccurate caricatures of trade unions as “economistic” bastions of homophobia, masculinism, racism, ethnocentrism and ecological irresponsibility. In the stereotype constructed by new social movement theorists and articulated on the ground by new social movement activists, labour movements are inhabited by bigoted workers concerned only with their material self-interest, and new social movements are comprised of the educated, enlightened and altruistic, who care about much broader interests and issues.⁹

Introducing the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation

It is interesting therefore to draw attention to an example of a union during the first half of the 1970s that spectacularly refutes new social movement theory and its assumptions embedded in the terminology of “social-movement unionism”: the New South Wales branch of the Australian Builders Labourers’ Federation (NSWBLF).¹⁰ This union confounds the stereotype of unions as incapable of embracing concerns beyond the workplace without the leavening influence of the new social movements. It also precedes social-movement unionism by two decades.

In the early 1970s the Australian Builders Labourers’ Federation had 30,000 members across the country. It covered all unskilled labourers and certain categories of skilled labourers employed on building sites: dog-men, riggers, scaffolders, powder monkeys, hoist drivers and steel fixers. These builders labourers were commonly known as “BLs”. The building industry was booming at this time and so was the union. Between 1969 and 1971, BLF membership rose nationally by 136%. By 1973, the NSWBLF had 11,000 members, more than doubling its membership since the late 1960s and covering a very high proportion of eligible workers in the industry. Its membership was guided by many committed officials, who were strongly influenced by New Left ideology with its emphasis on equality, participatory democracy and direct action. Especially outstanding as leaders of this union were Jack Munday, Joe Owens and Bob Pringle. Munday and Owens, and a significant proportion of organizers and rank-and-file

⁹ Burgmann, V. *Power and Protest. Movements for Change in Australian Society*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993, p.5

¹⁰ There has been inconsistency in the union’s title. Sometimes they were ‘Labourers’, other times ‘Laborers’; sometimes there was an apostrophe after ‘Builders’, but rarely during the 1970s when the union objected to its implication that the labourers were the property of the builders.

activists, were members of the radically anti-Stalinist Communist Party of Australia (CPA); and Pringle was a fellow-traveler.¹¹ The CPA had benefitted politically from the departure of China-line enthusiasts in 1963 who had formed the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). The much larger CPA increasingly pursued a New Left trajectory. It criticized the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, inciting Moscow-line adherents to depart to form the Socialist Party of Australia in 1971. This left the CPA freer than ever of Old Left political baggage. In 1970 the CPA Congress outlined a new policy, the “coalition of the left” concept that had been evolving since the 21st Congress in 1968, which emphasized the need for trade unions to involve themselves in “action on social and political issues going beyond the traditional concern of unionism.”¹²

The NSWBLF became the CPA’s “show-piece”, according to one of its organizers, Viri Pires: “The CPA is very small. It can have ideas but it can’t do much with them. It was the BLF which tested the ideas.”¹³ Taking its cues from the CPA, the NSWBLF developed “a new concept of unionism” committed to “the social responsibility of labour”: it argued that workers had a right to insist that their labour not be used in harmful ways and that the organized labour movement should concern itself with all manner of social and political issues.¹⁴ This principle of “the social responsibility of labour” was not brought to the union from without by the influence of new social movements, which had barely made a mark in Australia by this stage.¹⁵ Rather, it was grounded in pre-existing radical labour movement ideologies and traditions. Older NSWBLF activists still honoured the Industrial Workers of the World (the “Wobblies”), who had been especially prominent in Australia, and the syndicalist legacy more

¹¹ Munday, Jack. Interview with M.Burgmann, 30 March, 1978; Pringle, Bob, Interview with M.Burgmann, 8 March, 1978; Owens, Joe. Interview with M.Burgmann, 29 September, 1977.

¹² CPA. *Modern Unionism and the Workers’ Movement*. Sydney, CPA, 1970; CPA. Statement of Aims, Methods and Organisation: The Party’s Objectives as Adopted by the 22nd Congress, March 1970. In: CPA, *The Left Challenge for the ‘70s: Statement of Aims, Methods and Organisation*, Sydney: Red Pen Publications, May, 1972, p.28.

¹³ Pires, Viri. Interview with M.Burgmann, 30 November, 1976.

¹⁴ NSWBLF, ‘Minutes’, Executive Meeting, 12 May 1970.

¹⁵ Burgmann, V. *Power, Profit and Protest*. Australian Social Movements and Globalisation. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003, pp.16-17.

broadly.¹⁶ Mick Ross, for example, argued that “unions have more chance of changing society than any other group of people.”¹⁷ And the New Left influences on the CPA during the 1960s and thereby on the NSWBLF leadership were crucial. In pursuing this principle of “the social responsibility of labour”, the NSWBLF in the early 1970s was characterized by the same salient features in Moody’s typology of social-movement unionism. These characteristics will be examined in turn, to tell the tale of this union whose pioneering social-movement unionism suggests the capacity of labour to transform itself without guidance from the new social movements.

Militancy

Industrial militancy is defined as much by disposition as by deeds, so it is best measured by degrees of determination, usually pursued in practices such as strike action, but not necessarily so. Interviewed in 1978, Munday assessed the union’s record of militancy: “We were pushing things up to the employers. We as a union had changed”.¹⁸ Heightened militancy on the part of the NSWBLF was apparent in four principal areas: the fight for better wages and conditions; the campaign to improve working conditions; the strategic use of industrial sabotage; and encroachment upon managerial prerogatives.

Continual, successful wage campaigns were conducted by the union from 1970 to 1974, resulting in substantial real wage increases. Munday regularly articulated the union’s commitment to industrial militancy. In 1970 he wrote that: “Most militant workers have been critical for years of the general passivity displayed in strikes, and the failure ... to really force the issues”.¹⁹ Interviewed on national television on 27 September 1971, he argued the need for workers to undertake militant industrial action and develop new tactics: “Without militancy we will not improve the life of the worker.” He suggested offensive strike action in service industries, such as public transport: keeping trains and buses running during strikes but

¹⁶ Munday, Jack. Interview with V. Burgmann, 25 June, 1993; Burgmann, V. *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism. The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia*. Cambridge/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, p.4.

¹⁷ Ross, Mick. Interview with M. Burgmann, 29 July, 1977.

¹⁸ Munday 1978. Op.Cit.

¹⁹ Munday, J. Towards new union militancy. *Australian Left Review*. No. 26, August-September, pp.4-5. 1970.

refusing to collect fares; and factories producing foodstuffs should continue to make them but instead give them to “the needy in our society”.²⁰ When a Labor government was elected in December 1972 after twenty-three years of conservative rule, he stated there was a danger that the union movement would be “too co-operative” with the new government and stressed the continuing need for workers to take direct action to demand “a bigger share of the cake and more social progress for the workers”.²¹

The union was unrelenting in its pressure on employers to provide the best possible working conditions. In 1970 it embarked upon an aggressive campaign to “Civilise the Building Industry”: it did not plead with employers to provide a safe and decent working environment, but rather it insisted that such was the right of those who laboured in the building industry.²² A union circular to organizers advocated that decisions on standards must be made by the workers concerned: “DON’T LET THE BOSS DECIDE FOR YOU”.²³ Workers would refuse to work in extreme heat or in the rain—and the union ensured they received full pay nonetheless. For example, in early February 1973, workers spontaneously walked off building sites when the temperature reached forty degrees Celsius and the union warned employers there would be strike action if the workers were not paid for the day.²⁴ The union also placed bans on building sites that did not employ two dog-men per crane (one at the top and one at the bottom), to prevent dog-men being expected to “ride the hook” of the crane, a dangerous practice that had caused many fatalities prior to the union campaign against it. By the end of 1972 “riding the hook” was virtually eliminated from the industry and two dog-men per crane became the rule rather than the exception.²⁵

²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 1971; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September 1971.

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 December 1972.

²² Burgmann, M. and Burgmann, V. *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1998, pp.103-120, esp. p.103.

²³ NSWBLF., Handy Guide for State and Job Organisers. 7 June 1974, leaflet, 2pp.

²⁴ *Broken Hill Miner*. 6 February 1973; Owens, Joe. 1996, Interview with M.Burgmann, 11 December, 1996.

²⁵ *Tribune*, 4 March 1970, p. 10; NSWBLF, ‘Minutes’, Exec. Meeting, 17 February 1970, 24 November 1970, 15 December 1970; JD Martin, executive director Master Builders’ Association to the Industrial Registrar (NSW), 21 July 1972; NSWBLF, ‘Disputes Book’, 26 July 1972, 4 August 1972; Master Builders’ Association, ‘Report of Proceedings of a Meeting with a Representative of the A.B.L.F. to Discuss the Problem Concerning Dogmen—Held on 15 June, 1972’, p.1; ‘Violence is a bosses’ weapon’,

The union was prepared when necessary to practice industrial sabotage in pursuit of better wages or conditions. During a long strike in 1970, rank-and-file members engaged in spontaneous demolition of work carried out by strike-breakers.²⁶ If an employer did not accede to a demand, the breaking of concrete pours—or threat thereof—was not uncommon. Wrongly set concrete has disastrous consequences on a building site. Union organizer Tony O’Beirne described how quickly the tactic spread, along with the realization of the power this gave the BLs: “breaking concrete pours [...] we said ‘that’s just the most fantastic thing that’s ever happened’”.²⁷ Another tactic was destruction of equipment. For instance, when a company in central Sydney commenced excavation of a site with no washbasins or toilets, the workers on the site hurled a compressor into the very deep hole in the ground that had been excavated. When the workers returned the next day, they found four fully lined sheds, three toilets and a full row of washbasins.²⁸

A well-known NSWBLF adage reminded the officials: “Never eat the boss’s lunch unless you occupy the site and find it on his desk”.²⁹ The NSWBLF developed serious strategies for encroachment upon managerial rights. On a national television discussion with Upper Clyde Shipyards leader Jimmy Reid in May 1975, Munday emphasized that most work-ins were defensive acts which occurred over retrenchments, but that NSWBLF work-ins were often offensive, with labourer’s insisting upon greater control of their workplace³⁰ For example, a campaign at the Opera House for a 35-

Builders Labourer, n.d. [c.mid-1972]; Mr Justice Sheehy to the secretary, ABLF, 11 August 1972.

²⁶ Hogan, Tom. Interview with M.Burgmann, 28 October, 1977. Munday, J. 1970a, ‘Our strike proves they fear workers’ action most’, *Builders Labourer*, July, p. 6; Pringle.Op.Cit. 1978; Ross. Op.Cit. 1977; Curtin, Mick. Interview with M.Burgmann, 29 February, 1976; Baker, Bob. Interview with M.Burgmann, 16 June, 1980; Cook, Bud, Interview with M. Burgmann, 5 March., 1978; Munday 1971: 31; *Passing Show*, 10 October 1978, p 11; ‘Monday Conference’, ABC, September 1971; Barton, Peter, 1978, Interview with M. Burgmann, 5 March, 1978; *Daily Mirror*, 19 May 1970, 20 May 1970, 28 May 1970; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May 1970, 20 May 1970, 28 May 1970, 29 May 1970, 30 May 1970; *Sun*, 27 May 1970; CH Monk (president), report to Annual Meeting of Employers’ Federation,

²⁷ O’Beirne, Tony. Interview with M.Burgmann, 2 March, 1978.

²⁸ Hogan. Op.Cit. 1977.

²⁹ Thomas, P. 1973, *Taming the Concrete Jungle: The Builders Laborers’ Story*, Sydney, Australian Building and Construction Employees’ Union and Builders Labourers’ Federation, 1973, p.133

³⁰ ABC Television, ‘Lateline’, 20 May 1975.

hour week for 48 hours pay escalated and culminated in the workers expelling management from the site and continuing work under workers' control from 8 April until 15 May 1972. Two of the organizers, John Wallace and Joe Owens, wrote an informative account of the experience. They recall that by "Day 2", company foremen were "completely ignored" and were told firmly by the men that "they were not needed and could go and sit in the office, go home or throw themselves in the harbour, but just keep out of the way".³¹ They claim that the manner in which the 35-hour week was won and the form in which the 35-hour week operated, "substantially increased the real control the workers had over production on the job. In the final analysis, almost all of the power of management on the job rested with the workers".³²

The militancy of the NSWBLF was facilitated by the unprecedented boom conditions in the building industry. Developers needed speedy completion of speculative projects, financed by venture capital loans at high interest rates. However, the building industry craftsmen's union, led by SPA officials, was not so militant. SPA abhorrence of New Left ideals influenced the leaders of this craftsmen's union as much as CPA enthusiasm for those same ideas inspired the NSWBLF.³³ NSWBLF militancy was also encouraged by the fact that BLs were more favoured by the technological changes accompanying the boom than were the craftsmen. The new construction methods required larger scale preparatory demolition and excavation, carried out by BLs; greater use of pre-cut components placed on site by BLs; increased use of concrete, which was handled by the BLs; and greater reliance on ticketed BLs, such as dog-men, in skyscraper construction.³⁴ These factors greatly enhanced the BLs' power at the point of production. Union organizer Kevin Cook observed: "the boss wasn't really the boss, we knew it and he knew it".³⁵

³¹ Wallace, J. and Owens, J. *Workers Call the Tune at Opera House*. Sydney: National Workers Control Conference, 1973, p.6.

³² *Ibid.*, p.18.

³³ Building Industry Branch of the SPA, 1975, pp. 5, 22, 24-5, 28; SPA 1972, pp. 2-3.

³⁴ Whitehead, Dick, Interview with M.Burgmann, 8 June, 1980; *Construction*, 11 November 1971; Fiske, Pat. *Rocking the Foundations*, documentary video, 1985; Building Industry Branch of the SPA 1975, pp. 8- 28).

³⁵ Cook, Kevin, Interview with M.Burgmann, 1 December, 1976.

Internal democracy

According to radical journalist Pete Thomas, the basis of the union's militant strength was "democratic control by the rank and file": that is, the way in which the tenure of officials was limited, and the fact that the 11,000 members were regularly exercising their strength and initiative through job-site committees and stop-work meetings.³⁶ The union's organizational principles and practices anticipated the social-movement unionism of the 1990s in its emphasis on internal democracy and rank-and-file participation in opposition to the more hierarchical forms of traditional unionism. The leaders of the NSWBLF were determined to expand internal union democracy and to reduce the distinction between leaders and led, effectively transferring power away from themselves and back to the rank-and-file unionists who had elected them. Munday wrote in the union's journal: "The leadership aims for 'total involvement' in decision making by the membership. We are opposed to 'top' decisions making without reference to the membership".³⁷ As a result, the union improved its density; and the rank and file responded to the emphasis on internal democracy with considerably higher levels of involvement. Interviews with long-serving members who could recall earlier regimes confirm that this was indeed the case.³⁸

Organizers and officials of other building industry unions during this period noticed the unusually high degree of NSWBLF rank-and-file activity and how this was encouraged by the union leadership.³⁹ An international comparison was also drawn at the time. A bricklayer, a member of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians in Britain, was so intrigued by the inclusive style of the NSWBLF he wrote about it in order to publicize its organizational achievements among British trade unionists.

³⁶ Newcastle Morning Herald. 6 September 1973.

³⁷ Munday, J. Our strike proves they fear workers' action most, *Builders Labourer*. July 1970, p. 3.

³⁸ Barton. Op.Cit. 1978; Bishop, Roy, Interview with M. Burgmann, 10 March, 1977; Connell, Harry, Interview with M. Burgmann, 12 February, 1978; Cook. Op.Cit. 1978; Crotty, Don. Interview with M.Burgmann, 13 March, 1978; Hogan. Op.Cit. 1977; Kelly, Ralph. Interview with M.Burgmann, 13 December, 1977; Ross. Op.Cit 1977.

³⁹ Boyle, Mick, Interview with M. Burgmann, 29 January, 1981; Cambourn, Jack, Interview with M. Burgmann, 1 February, 1979; Lane, Peter, Interview with M. Burgmann, 19 May, 1981; Whitehead, Dick, Interview with M.Burgmann, 8 June, 1980; Young, Digby, Interview with M.Burgmann, 1 March, 1979.

Compared with its British counterpart, he considered the NSWBLF was “like a dream”.⁴⁰

In recognition that it was often not formal constraints which most inhibited participation and democracy, the union leadership encouraged members to “drop in” to the union’s office at Room 28 at Sydney’s Trades Hall and to participate in informal discussions on union matters with officials. This increased the leadership’s accessibility, and rank-and-file perceptions of its accessibility: the ordinary member felt able to criticize and advise the leadership in a way unusual in Australian trade unionism. Secretarial staff who had worked in other union offices remarked upon this.⁴¹ Apart from standard provision of interpreters to encourage non-English-speaking members to talk, rank-and-file participation in meetings was improved by a simple change in mass meeting procedure. The difficulty most members, not just those with language problems, had previously experienced speaking in a large meeting was reduced by a new system whereby members queued at microphones and spoke in turn rather than having to depend on catching the chairman’s eye.⁴²

Unlike the officials of most other unions, NSWBLF officials received the same wage as the members on the job, including periods of strike activity. For example, during the long-running 1970 strike to reduce the “margin” in pay between skilled and lesser skilled construction workers, the union resolved “that officials’ wages be stopped whilst the strike is on”. Not one official dissented from this decision.⁴³ The union officials did not change their lifestyles but continued to conform to working-class norms. They remained drinking and eating in the same places, with the same people (Judy Munday 1978; Jack Munday 1978; Owens 1977; Pringle 1978). Interviews with the female office staff reveal that they started work the same time as the workers, at 07.00 or 07.30, unlike the officials of other unions, who rarely started work before 08.30.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Coull, D. The Builders Labourers Federation of Australia. In: *Australian Politics: A Fourth Reader*, eds. H. Mayer & H. Nelson. Sydney, Longman Cheshire, 1976, p.253.

⁴¹ Cockayne, Robyn, Interview with M. Burgmann, 25 January, 1978; Cambourn. Op.Cit. 1979; Healey, Jenny, Interview with M. Burgmann, 25 January, 1978; Kalafates, Carol. Interview with M.Burgmann, 25 January, 1978; Rix, Paula. Interview with M. Burgmann, 25 January, 1978.

⁴² Pires, Op.Cit.

⁴³ NSWBLF. ‘Minutes’. Executive Meeting, 16 June 1970.

⁴⁴ Cockayne, Op.Cit; Healey, Op.Cit, Kalafates, Op.Cit., Rix, Op.Cit.

Most of the officials had worked in the industry for long periods. The union's policy was that all officials, even industrial officers and publications editors, had to come from the shop floor. Only one NSWBLF official, Bill Holley, had more than an elementary education—a situation which distinguished the union leadership from those of other unions. The central core of full-time elected officials was supplemented by temporary organizers brought on to service specific areas for certain periods of time; these temporary appointments had to be endorsed at branch meetings. Between 1973 and 1974, according to a report by Pringle and Owens, thirty-nine organizers “have come on and gone back to the job”.⁴⁵ NSWBLF policy specifically encouraged rank-and-file workers to take the initiative in industrial disputes.⁴⁶ Tom Hogan, a city organizer, recalled that “stoppages would occur and you'd only find out two hours later that they'd stopped. Once I went to seven stop-work meetings in a day. There was a tremendous amount of initiative taken by the men on the job”.⁴⁷

The most startling innovation was limited tenure of office: the insistence that officials, after six years at the most, return to work as a builders labourer. Designed to prevent bureaucracy, inertia and hierarchy, Munday described it as “a Wobbly idea”.⁴⁸ He explained: “The driving force that made me suggest limited tenure was my own experience of seeing modern, contemporary unionism and seeing the need for some inbuilt guarantee for limiting power and having inbuilt renewal”.⁴⁹ Munday suggested on national television late in September 1971 that such a practice would be beneficial for the entire union movement.⁵⁰ He applied the principle to himself, retrospectively, so when his six years was up, he returned to work as a pick-and-shovel labourer at the beginning of 1974.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Pringle, B. and Owens, J. Rank and File Decision-making in the Builders Labourers. leaflet, 1973, 3pp.

⁴⁶ Munday, J. Job Activity the Key, *Builders Labourer*, December 1968, p.7.

⁴⁷ Hogan, Op.Cit. 1977.

⁴⁸ Munday, Jack. Interview with V. Burgmann, 25 June, 1993.

⁴⁹ Munday 1978. Op.Cit.

⁵⁰ Reported in *Tribune*, 6 October 1971.

⁵¹ *Australian*, 2 February 1974; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1974.

An agenda for radical social and economic change

Social-movement unionism, Moody observes, “uses the strongest of society’s oppressed and exploited, generally organized workers, to mobilize those who are less able to sustain self-mobilization”.⁵² Early in 1972 a NSWBLF circular to all job organizers maintained that, “for a union to be meaningful it must speak up on all issues affecting the life of not only the members of a union but all Australian people”⁵³ Pringle expressed the NSWBLF viewpoint: “The strong should support the weak in issues that involve everybody”.⁵⁴ Munday insisted the NSWBLF “feels strongly about unions and the whole workers’ movement involving themselves more deeply in all political, moral and social questions affecting ordinary people”.⁵⁵ Owens believed that trade unionists should contest exploitation “not just in their workplace but everywhere”.⁵⁶ The union’s activism on a wide range of social issues such as the rights of women, indigenous Australians and homosexuals disproved assumptions in new social movement theory that the organized working-class necessarily neglected such matters.

The union was strongly committed to Aboriginal rights and assisted this cause from at least the early 1960s.⁵⁷ As the movement became more militant in the 1970s, Pringle was especially generous in providing bail for arrested Aborigines: “It was evident every time”, he informed the *Sun*

⁵² Moody. Op.Cit. p.276.

⁵³ NSW BLF, *Circular to All Job Organisers*, no.1/73, 24 January 1972.

⁵⁴ Coombs, A. *Sex and Anarchy. The Life and Death of the Sydney Push*, Melbourne: Viking, 1996, p.292.

⁵⁵ *Builders Labourer*, no date [mid-1972], p.1.

⁵⁶ Owens. Op.Cit.

⁵⁷ ‘Aboriginal Builders’ labourer to Represent Our Union’, May 1962, NSWBLF press clippings collection; BLF, 1965 Federal Conference Report, pp.38-9; NSWBLF, Agenda Items, 1965 Federal Conference, p.6; NSWBLF, Report to Federal Conference, 1966, p.22; Federal Council Agenda Items, Submitted from N.S.W. Branch Meeting, 15/8/67, p 537; H Cook, Acting Secretary, NSW BLF, 10/8/67, to Rev WA Clint, Co-operative for Aborigines Limited; WA Clint, Co-operative for Aborigines Limited, 1/8/67, to Secretary, Building Laborers Union; Charles Dixon, Acting Manager, Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, 15/6/67, to Secretary, Builders labourers Union (NSW Branch); Leaflets, ‘Co-operative for Aborigines Ltd’, ‘Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs’, ‘Some Facts Concerning the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs’, ‘Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights (Inc.)’; J Munday, 19/6/68, to the Editor, *Tribune*; J Munday, 20/6/68, to JP Ducker, Assistant Secretary, NSW Labour Council, Trades Hall, Sydney.

newspaper, “that these people had been the subject of excessive zeal”.⁵⁸ When Aboriginal activists wanted help in advertising a major demonstration for Aboriginal rights to be held on 14 July 1972, the union arranged for banners to be hung on the jibs of cranes around the city. Pringle himself was arrested during this demonstration, receiving a black eye, bruising and abrasions, and a four-hour stint in a police cell.⁵⁹ In a subsequent leaflet, “The Black Awakening”, Pringle objected to the way in which this march was not allowed the same freedom of movement as the annual war veterans’ march, that it was forced onto the footpath by the police and when anyone overflowed on to the road they were hassled or arrested by the police.⁶⁰ The union donated frequently to Aboriginal causes. Aboriginal activist Lyn Thompson wrote to the union that “with the moral and financial support given to us such as the Builders’ Labourers give, we will soon start solving a lot of our problems”.⁶¹

Most importantly, in December 1972, the union placed a black ban on the demolition of houses occupied by Aborigines in the inner-city suburb of Redfern. A big developer had bought most of them to renovate as expensive houses and had evicted the Aborigines. This ban greatly aided the black movement’s resistance to the developer, which led ultimately to the federal government buying the disputed dwellings from the developer and granting the area to the black community in March 1973 as an Aboriginal housing scheme under Aboriginal control. At least ten Aboriginal builders labourers were employed on the reconstruction and renovation work. Many of the back fences were pulled down to create a communal recreation area. One of the two factories in the area was converted into a hall-workshop-gym and cultural centre; the other became a pre-school run by Aboriginal mothers and a medical centre linked with the Aboriginal Medical Service. The corner store became a co-operative shop, selling food cheaply. This Redfern Aboriginal Community Housing Scheme of sixty-five houses, managed by an elected co-operative committee, was proudly declared to be the first successful Aboriginal land rights claim in Australia.⁶²

⁵⁸ *Sun*, 13 November 1973, p.7.

⁵⁹ *Tribune*, 20 June 1972.

⁶⁰ Pringle, B. *The Black Awakening*, leaflet, 2pp, 1972.

⁶¹ Lyn Thompson, Letter to Joe Owens, 16 August 1972.

⁶² *Wollongong Mercury*, 30 December 1972; *Grafton Examiner*, 30 December 1972; *Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1973; *Builders Labourer*, 1973, pp.33-35; Hogan, Tom. Hogan, T. 1974, ‘Strengthen that grip’, *Mereki*, vol. 1, no. 1, 15 November, p.13, 1974, p.13.

In June 1973 the union placed what would later be called a “pink ban” on construction at Macquarie University. Jeremy Fisher, treasurer of the campus Gay Liberation Group, had been a resident of a university college until its Master had discovered Fisher’s role as a gay activist. The Master insisted Fisher could not remain at the college unless he undertook to have his “perversion” cured. Fisher refused so he was expelled. The Macquarie University Students’ Council approached the NSWBLF, which recommended a ban that was endorsed unanimously by the BLs on campus. “Universities are places for people to learn—they should not discriminate against individuals”, Munday explained to the press. “The ban will remain until the authorities at the University allow homosexuals to study there the same as anyone else.” The ban stopped construction of a lecture theatre, extensions to the gymnasium, a maintenance depot and a science workshop. The University Council ordered Fisher’s reinstatement, so the ban was lifted.⁶³

The union’s preparedness to jeopardize members’ work prospects by placing a ban over the issue of homosexual rights was applauded by homosexual liberationists, who found the stereotype of the homophobic building worker confounded by the union’s practical support for their cause. Pringle was interviewed about the union’s policy on homosexuality by gay movement reporters, who were clearly exhilarated by the union’s stance, because builders labouring, “probably more than any other industry, has masculinity as its foundation”.⁶⁴ Pringle explained to these reporters: “We as an executive believe that it is a presumption of any sort for society to be the moral judge for an individual’s sexual preference.” He made it clear that, while the homosexual liberation movement had to lead the fight, the union would stand up for homosexual rights wherever appropriate: “We will help, support and do all we can”.⁶⁵ The union sponsored a motion to its Federal Conference in 1973: “Conference calls on all sections of government to alter existing laws to allow homosexuals the same privacy in their personal relations as heterosexuals and be subject to no more control under the law.” Also in 1973, it moved a motion at the Labor Party State Conference calling for legalization of homosexual relationships and an end

⁶³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1973; *Age*, 28 June 1973; *Daily Mirror*, 3 July 1973; Thompson 1985: 50.

⁶⁴ ‘blf on women & gays’, *Gay Liberation Press*, no. 3, September 1974, p.13.

⁶⁵ Batterham, T. and Tubbenhauer, G. Interview with Bob Pringle. *Gay Liberation Press*, no. 3, September, p. 14, 1974.

to discrimination.⁶⁶ The National Homosexual Conference in August 1975 cited the direct material support to NSW Gay Lib. by the then progressive leadership and rank and file BLs' as an example of why homosexual women and men should support unions seeking social change.⁶⁷ The union demonstrated support for women's rights in numerous ways. Both the *Builders' Labourer* and the *Rank and File Rag* featured articles about women's issues and advertisements for women's day marches, the women's unemployment centre, abortion demonstrations and so on. Caroline Graham described how the Women's Electoral Lobby approached the union for help in raising funds for an abortion rights advertisement: "The response was typically generous: not only did we receive a large cash donation, but the union president Bob Pringle, helped our representative to compose and lay out the advertisement." The union officials often marched on International Women's Day.⁶⁸ The 1973 Rank and File Committee's election policy statement favoured "giving maximum assistance to women's struggle for complete political and social liberation in our society"⁶⁹. Its most spectacular support for women's liberation occurred in June 1973. For some time, authorities at the University of Sydney had been resisting attempts by two tutors, Jean Curthoys and Liz Jacka, to launch a women's studies course in the Philosophy Department, despite the fact that the staff concerned and the proposed course had been approved by the relevant undergraduate studies committee. When the Professorial Board vetoed the proposed women's studies course, Munday deemed the decision "sexist" and, following an approach from concerned students, announced a ban on all further construction at the university, including a medical faculty building and a theatre complex. Coming only one week after the Macquarie University ban in defence of homosexual rights, Munday explained the union treated the bans as "top priority", because the union had a social conscience—and considered that universities should reveal theirs: "In these days of social enlightenment and reform, the wiping out of these discriminations should start at the universities. Now we find that discrimination is being promoted at the universities. The ban will stay on all

⁶⁶ NSWBLF, 'Agenda Items for Federal Conference, 1973', Item 33; Batterham and Tubbenhauer. Op.Cit., p.13

⁶⁷ *Tribune*, 26 August 1975.

⁶⁸ Graham, C. Anatomy of a Revolutionary Union: A Post Mortem on the BLF 1968-1975, B.A. Hons thesis, Government Department, University of Sydney, 1975, p.2.

⁶⁹ *Builders Labourer*, August 1973.

further construction until the decisions are reversed”.⁷⁰ Munday affirmed this ban to a 2,500-strong meeting of students striking in support of the proposed course on 29 June. Since the university urgently required the completion of certain buildings, the dispute was resolved internally and the ban lifted.⁷¹ The course commenced in 1974 as one of the first in this field of study that became commonplace at universities around the world.

Determination to embrace working-class diversity

Social-movement unionism, according to Moody, understands the need to counteract the way capitalism fragments workers along lines of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability and utilizes prejudice to increase profits.⁷² In November 1971, the NSWBLF noted in a motion to the BLF Federal Conference that some trade union officials during past periods of unemployment had been “conned into supporting right wing policies of assisting capitalism in its own crisis, by restricting women workers’ right to work, especially married women; sharing the job at reduced wages; and fostering anti-migrant and racial attitudes towards other workers”.⁷³ The union significantly improved the participation of labourers from non-English speaking backgrounds by providing interpreters at meetings, translating union publications into various languages, and encouraging recent immigrants to run for office and act as job delegates.⁷⁴

The NSWBLF also had a significant Aboriginal membership. From at least 1962 it was encouraging its Aboriginal members and supporting them in anti-racist activity.⁷⁵ In the early 1970s one of the union’s organizers, Kevin Cook, was also a prominent and well-respected Aboriginal leader. Cook’s standing facilitated the union’s ability to establish non-racial structures within the union, to encourage anti-racist attitudes at

⁷⁰ *Age*, 28 June 1973.

⁷¹ Crouch, W. Some black among the BLF green, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 November, 1974; Munday, J. . Munday, J. *Green Bans & Beyond*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981.

⁷² Moody. Op.Cit. pp. 269, 271, 290, 309.

⁷³ ‘The Right to Work’ in NSW Branch, ‘Agenda Item for Federal Conference, November 1971’, 2 pp roneod.

⁷⁴ Pires. Op.Cit.

⁷⁵ ‘Aboriginal Builders’ labourer to Represent Our Union’, May 1962, NSWBLF press clippings collection.

membership level, and to maintain meaningful links with Sydney's indigenous community. Cook's many positions within the Aboriginal movement included presidency of the Black Theatre Art and Culture Centre established in Redfern in 1974. In the first issue of its magazine, *Mereki*, NSWBLF organizer Tom Hogan wrote a feature on behalf of the union, congratulating the Black Theatre "for their guts and determination in demanding that the Black voice of Australia be heard", and assuring the theatre "of our continued support in your fight against racism and for the self-determination of your people". Referring to the union movement's emblem of the black and white hands clasping, he noted how important it was to "strengthen that grip", referring to the struggles of black Australians against developers and the union's struggles to prevent workers' homes being demolished. "A common enemy has arisen for Black and White. These types of attacks bring our organisations and our memberships closer together [...]. Separately we have fought tyranny [...] together we shall overcome".⁷⁶

Most unusually, the NSWBLF promoted the right of women to work in the industry as builders labourers on an equal basis with men. The union leadership was ideologically committed to the women's liberation struggle and actively supported the women's cause in significant ways; yet it did so in one of the most traditionally "macho" of all industries. As harbinger of social-movement unionism, it sought from within the all-male bastion of the Australian building industry to overcome the fragmentation of the working class along gendered lines to ensure that women had the opportunity to pursue employment in the building industry on an equal basis with men. By the end of 1971 the BLF had nine female members.⁷⁷ In 1972 several strikes occurred to force bosses to accept female labour. In these confrontations the employers' objections were couched in terms of a threat to management prerogative: a rejection of anything that smacked of "union hire".⁷⁸ The women's rights issue became inextricably linked to that of job-control; and this was to be a recurring motif. Strikes and work-ins in support of the right of women to work as BLs confronted employers' sexist discrimination, and were an indication of the genuinely egalitarian atmosphere generated within the union. Many of the incidents received press coverage, so it became widely known that builders labouring was a new option open to women who

⁷⁶ Hogan. Op.Cit. 1974, p.13.

⁷⁷ Builders' Labourer 1972, p.7.

⁷⁸ *Sun*, 23 May 1972.

did not wish to be “cooped up in an office”, as many female BLs explained it—and one that paid better wages than other women received for manual labour. The women reported good experiences of support from the male labourers, recounting individual acts of kindness and support: men who taught them how to lift things more easily and safely, strip wood, use jackhammers and so on; and men who encouraged them to become job delegates.⁷⁹

In June 1973, 17 women enrolled for a hoist drivers’ course at Sydney Technical College. One of these, Lyn Syme, who later became prominent in the union, entered the industry at the end of 1973. She says the men on her job suspected one of the women who had completed the hoist drivers’ course was going to turn up, because the area organizer, Tony Hadfield, had insisted that the company hire a ticketed hoist driver and that the union would have one on the job by Monday. She describes the men’s reactions as “quite good really”. Hadfield had just succeeded in achieving proper pay rates for the labourers on the job, so the union was in good favour at the time. The men’s reaction protected her from the boss’s displeasure when he first encountered her after she had already been working the hoist for several hours: “he freaked at first, but I was there, I’d met everybody—there was nothing he could do”.⁸⁰

By 1974 the union had eighty female members.⁸¹ It actively encouraged women to take official union positions.⁸² There were countless other examples of leadership support for the right of women to work in the building industry. The 1973 Rank and File Committee’s election policy statement included “the right of women to work as builders labourers”. At the 1973 Federal Conference of the BLF, the NSWBLF called on each state to “take immediate action to establish the rights of women to work in the industry”. By 1974, its agenda items included abortion leave as well as paternity and maternity leave. Also during 1974 the branch sought to achieve a national industrial court ruling “that the right of women to work in

⁷⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 1972; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 6 November 1972, 11 November 1972, 14 November 1972; *Sun-Herald*, 19 December 1971, 23 May 1972; Page, Glenys. Interview with M.Burgmann, 24 January, 1978; Stringer, Wendy. Interview with M.Burgmann, 5 March, 1978; Thomas . Op.Cit. 1973; Williams. Op.Cit. 1978.

⁸⁰ Syme, Lyn. Interview with M.Burgmann, 20 April, 1978.

⁸¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1974.

⁸² *Viewpoint*, January 1972, p.10; Crotty.Op.Cit..

the building industry be recognized without discrimination”. A 1974 issue of *On Site*, published by BLs, noted: “The Builders Labourers Federation has taken a principled stand on the question of women in the building industry. Bitter struggles have been fought by rank and file workers to get women on job sites, and they are an example to all.”⁸³

Capacity to lead community struggles

Moody describes the way social-movement unionism “can make the very concept of class more real” and increase class-consciousness as it extends working-class power. The ability of social-movement unionism to arouse broad constituencies to radical action is facilitated by its “class vision and content”.⁸⁴ The union’s “green bans” from 1971 to 1975 clearly demonstrated the union’s capacity to appeal beyond its membership to lead a community struggle. Based on its commitment to the social responsibility of labour, NSWBLF members refused to work on environmentally or socially undesirable construction. Bans were placed at the request of resident action groups or the National Trust; and a significant social movement developed in support of these bans, which saved Sydney from much of the devastation that would otherwise have been wreaked by developers. It was the first such action in the world and had international ramifications within environmental politics.⁸⁵

Owens argued that unions had the ability to restrain corporations and prompt governments to reconsider foolish decisions, so had to concern themselves with “important social issues” and “become more active in opposing pollution and despoliation of natural resources”.⁸⁶ Munday maintained unions had to become involved with environmental issues, because “too few people question the products we make”; and he stressed that working-class people had a particular interest in environmental protection, because they suffered most from environmental problems.⁸⁷ In February 1973, he coined the term

⁸³ *Tribune*, 1 October 1974; *Age*, 23 May 1974; *Builders Labourer*, August 1973; *On Site*, no date [1974], p.2.

⁸⁴ Moody. Op.Cit., p.309.

⁸⁵ Allaby, M. (ed.) *Macmillan Dictionary of the Environment*, 2nd edition, London: Macmillan, 1983, p.234.

⁸⁶ *Canberra Times*, 2 March 1973..

⁸⁷ Munday, J. Preventing the Plunder. In: *Staining the Wattle*, eds. V. Burgmann and J. Lee, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1988, pp.179-180.

“green bans” to distinguish them from traditional black bans. He claimed the use of “green” expressed the union’s determination to save open space or valued buildings and ensure people in any community had some say in what affected their lives.⁸⁸ Petra Kelly’s naming of the German Greens was motivated by her experience of these bans when she visited Australia in the mid-1970s and became inspired by the way they brought together residents, environmentalists and unionists. In this way, the “green” terminology coined by the NSWBLF green bans movement entered the world’s political vernacular.⁸⁹

In Sydney, the movement got under way in June 1971 when a resident action group from the fashionable harbour-side suburb of Hunters Hill sought the help of the NSWBLF to save Kelly’s Bush on the harbour foreshore, where developer A.V. Jennings wanted to build luxury houses.⁹⁰ These thirteen middle-class women, who called themselves the “Battlers for Kelly’s Bush”, had already lobbied the local council, the mayor, the local State member and the Premier, all without success. The union asked the women to organize a local meeting to gauge the degree of local support for a ban. More than 600 people turned up and formally requested the union to ban the destruction of Kelly’s Bush. When the union agreed to do this, Jennings declared it would use non-union labour. However, building workers on a Jennings project in North Sydney sent this message to Jennings: “If you attempt to build on Kelly’s Bush, even if there is the loss of one tree, this half-completed building will remain so forever, as a monument to Kelly’s Bush.” Jennings abandoned its plans—so Kelly’s Bush remains as an open public reserve.⁹¹ After this first success, resident action groups rushed to ask the NSWBLF to impose similar bans; and the union obliged so long as evidence of widespread local support was provided.

⁸⁸ Munday, Op.Cit. 1981, p.105.

⁸⁹ Brown, B. and Singer, P. *The Greens*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1996, pp.64-65.

⁹⁰ The first green ban was imposed by the Victorian BLF branch in October 1970, when it prevented a developer from destroying a park in Carlton in inner Melbourne. However, Kelly’s Bush is significant as the first ban in Sydney where the green bans movement was strongest.

⁹¹ Kalajzich, P. (ed.) *The Battlers for Kelly’s Bush*. Sydney: Cercus, 1996; Munday, J. Op.Cit.1988, pp.175-177; Roddewig, R. *Green Bans: The Birth of Australian Environmental Politics*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1978, pp.6-10.

The green bans were of three main kinds: to defend open spaces from various types of development; to protect existing housing from demolition to make way for freeways or high-rise development; and to preserve older-style buildings of historic, architectural and cultural significance from replacement by office-blocks or shopping precincts. Environment, heritage and social issues were intertwined, as gentrification of inner-Sydney suburbs threatened low-income residents with displacement by developers keen to exploit more affluent markets. The green bans' defense of working-class residential areas was often linked with the union's opposition to freeway construction and diversion of funding from public transport.⁹²

One working-class residential area saved was The Rocks, site of the first British settlement on Sydney Cove. Despite its historical significance, only a green ban prevented the oldest buildings in the country being replaced by high-rise office blocks and luxury apartments. The NSWBLF halted the redevelopment project, "because the scheme destroys the character of this historic area and ignores the position of the people affected". The Rocks Resident Action Group mobilized enthusiastically in support of the ban and drew up a "people's plan" for acceptable renovation of the area. It announced that, in the face of the usual apathy, inaction and favoritism of the Government, it had been left to unionists "to show leadership in protecting our citizens and their historic buildings". With the green ban prompting the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority to propose a series of improved plans, the union position was stated clearly by Munday in August 1973: "My federation will lift its ban when the residents are satisfied with what is being put forward by the authority." In March 1974, when the latest plan was again sent back to the architect, a reporter observed: "the most powerful town planning agency operating within NSW at the moment is the BLF". When the next set of plans eliminated high-rise buildings in conformity with the "people's plan", the ban was lifted. By the 1990s the Ministry for Planning was admitting that the green ban had resulted in the plans for the area being "an overwhelming success", reflected in the millions of tourists who visit the historic site each year.⁹³

The union also worked with environmental organizations, as well as resident action groups, in defence of nature. Ancient trees in Sydney's

⁹² Burgmann and Burgmann. *Op.Cit.* 1998, pp.169-217.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.195-201.

Botanic Gardens were protected from being sacrificed to a parking lot for the Opera House. A large part of Centennial Park was saved from becoming a concrete sports stadium. The nature reserve of Riley's Island off the coast just north of Sydney was rescued from 300 luxury home sites that would have destroyed much of its fish and bird-life. The beautiful Tomaree Peninsula further north averted high-rise development on its foreshore. And there were others.⁹⁴ Not just concerned residents and environmental organizations, but the National Trust also turned to the NSWBLF to aid its efforts to save sites of architectural and cultural significance from replacement by high-rise office blocks and freeways. The union announced it would refuse to demolish any building designated significant by the National Trust.⁹⁵ Many graceful old banks, churches, theatres, cinemas and other significant heritage buildings throughout Australia owe the fact that they are still standing to the green bans' movement.⁹⁶

By 1975, more than forty green bans had stalled five billion dollars worth of development at mid-1970s prices.⁹⁷ About half of these prevented the destruction of individual buildings or green areas; the other half thwarted development projects affecting much larger areas. Munday maintains that the political significance of the green bans movement was that it forged a "winning alliance" between environmentalists and unionists.⁹⁸ The bans had a significant long-term impact on environmental legislation, town planning and public attitudes. Because of the industrial power wielded by the BLs and the popularity of the green bans, governments were obliged to respond to the union's challenge. At both state and federal levels, governments initiated or improved legislation to ensure more socially responsive and ecologically responsible planning and development.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.178-193.

⁹⁵ Thomas. Op.Cit. 1973, p.57.

⁹⁶ Burgmann and Burgmann. Op.Cit. 1998, pp.228-247..

⁹⁷ Bonyhady, T. 1993, *Places Worth Keeping. Conservationists, Politics and Law*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993, p.39..

⁹⁸ Munday, J. Op.Cit. 1991, p. 148.

⁹⁹ Burgmann and Burgmann. Op.Cit. 1998, pp.278-286.

A social-movement union before new social movements

Nobel Laureate Patrick White wrote a public letter to Sydney's major newspapers in November 1973 to endorse the contentious green bans movement initiated by the NSWBLF:

It is a sad reflection on our so-called civilization that residents of Sydney [...] are forced time and again to turn to the BLF [...] But how much longer can the citizens of Sydney ask these men to endure the responsibility of protecting a citizen's right to live comfortably and without anxiety.¹⁰⁰

The scholarship on social-movement unionism depicts it as an aspect of labour movement renewal and revitalization, bringing social movement attributes to unionism's way of conducting itself. Social-movement unionism in this literature is a turn-of-the-millennium trend, emerging after the heyday of the new social movements and in the circumstances of globalization: a moment as much as a movement. Yet the NSWBLF in the early 1970s meets all Moody's criteria that distinguish social-movement unionism. Two decades ahead of the social-movement unionism phenomenon, its emergence suggests that the characteristics which define social-movement unionism are not necessarily dependent on the influence of the new social movements but can be generated from within the labour movement itself—from its own radical traditions.

¹⁰⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 1973; *Australian*, 5 November 1973.

The Greek trade union movement in controversy: against a state-centred approach to labour movement theory

Anna Koumandaraki

Introduction

The Greek trade union movement is said to have so far exerted a rather limited influence on the status of the Greek workforce. There are two factors which are held responsible for this situation: the slow and inconsistent way that industrialization took place in the country and the authoritarian approaches of the Greek state to trade unions since they emerged.¹ As an influential scholar of Greek trade unionism pointed out, the Greek trade union movement is more a simulacrum of an institution than an actual labour movement.² The reason for this is that, from the very beginning, Greek politicians succeeded in manipulating the trade union cadres by promoting them to leadership positions in political alignment with the government. Most of these cadres had no relation whatsoever with the problems, attitudes and interests of working people, but owed their posts in the high echelons of the trade union hierarchy to their affiliation to the governing party leaders. This paper aims to question these well established arguments by putting emphasis on the circumstances under which the Greek labour movement formed itself and to decipher the reasons why this movement became a state-manipulated bureaucracy.

¹ Mouzelis, N. P. *Politics in the Semi-Periphery*, London: MacMillan, 1986, pp.74-75.

² Koukoules, G. 'Hoi Sylogikes Diapragmateuseis stin Hellada, [Collective Bargaining in Greece]' in *Syndicalistiki Epitheorisi*, March, no.3, p.20, 1985.

Thessaloniki: the emergence of a great industrial centre in the rural Balkans

The first trade unions emerged in the late nineteenth century (1870) but their presence had a significant impact on the Greek government's social policy only in the first decades of the twentieth century. More specifically, it was only in 1914 that the first laws regulating the activities of trade unions were enacted. The Liberal party, which was governing at that time, was the first party in power which showed concern for labour movement organization. In 1918, the same government set up the necessary conditions for the creation of the General Confederation of Greek Labour (GSEE). The Confederation, which until now is the supreme hierarchical institution of the Greek labour movement, very soon after 1918 found itself under the Liberal Party's patronage. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the Greek trade union movement succumbed to governmental orders without frictions. Moreover, Greek trade union history is rather contentious because trade union agitation was combined with conflicts related to issues of national sovereignty and problematic assimilation of ethnic minorities.

The reason why I put forward the issue of national homogeneity is that in the 1900s, when the first militant trade unions emerged, the Greek national territory did not include many areas which were important for the trade union movement. Macedonia and Thrace, for example, only became Greek after two bloody wars between Greece, its Northern neighbour Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. Thessaloniki, the large Macedonian capital and a significant industrial centre in the era, became Greek only in 1912.³ Thessaloniki was a multicultural and multi-ethnic city: Greeks, Jews, Turks Bulgarians, Armenians, Rom and many others had co-existed for centuries. If the city's nationality were to be determined by that ethnic group which constituted the majority of the population, then it should be defined as a Jewish city and not a Greek one, since Jews and not Greeks were the majority. More importantly, Jews were significant for the city's economy not only as capitalists, but also as workers manning the most developed

³ Donald Quataert wrote: "The industrial infrastructure of Thessalonica – including both factories and workshops – was probably the greatest in the Ottoman world....The newly founded establishments included: a distillery, six soap factories, a brick factory, another making nailsa factory making bedsteads, four workshops producing handmade chairs , three macaroni factories and ten flour mills, as well as two cotton spinning mills." Quataert D. The workers of Thessalonica, 1850-1912". In: Quataert D. and Zürcher E. (eds.) *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. 1839-1950*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995, pp.62-63.

industries in the city. The latter abounded to such an extent, that one could very well argue that Thessaloniki had been the biggest industrial centre in the Ottoman World before 1912, and had a technological infrastructure much more robust than Athens in the years that followed the city's acquisition by the Greek army. Under no circumstances, however, does this mean that Greeks did not play an important role in the city's economy as workers. However, there were industries such as tobacco handling and processing in which Jews constituted the overwhelming majority.⁴

It would not be wrong to say that the tobacco workers of Thessaloniki were a privileged group within the Macedonian working class, since their salaries were considerably higher than those earned by their peers in other Macedonian cities. Moreover, tobacco workers had a particularly positive identity of themselves which was exceptional compared to the Greek working class.⁵ This identity was combined with socialist ideology which was particularly influential amongst Jewish workers.

The Jewish Federation

In fact, the most prominent socialist organization both in Macedonia and later on in the entire Greek territory was the *Federacion* which was founded in 1909. It was not only controlled by tobacco workers, but also by the Jewish socialist intelligentsia, that is, a group consisting of distinguished figures committed to the promotion of Jewish workers' solidarity. Greeks or

⁴ "...Thessalonica supplied about one-fifth of the tobacco processed and contained one of the most important cigarette-making factories in the empire. In 1883, at Thessalonica, the factory of the tobacco monopoly was producing 100.000 machine-made cigarettes daily; thereafter, its annual cigarette output grew steadily" (Ibid. p.66)..."Tobacco handling and processing was easily the largest single employer at Thessalonica. Some 4.000-5.000 persons (as compared to at least 15.000 workers in the Kavalla district and another 5.000 in the Xanthi district sorted and packaged tobacco...Mostly men worked at some districts, such as Xanthi while at Kavalla tobacco manipulators were almost evenly divided by gender. In the Thessalonica, sorting shops, however, women were the overwhelming majority. Besides the sorters and packagers, there were the cigarette makers of the tobacco monopoly factory...mostly Jewish. In 1891 there were 15 foremen supervising 300 such workers, two-thirds of them were female and 270 were Jewish....Altogether there were 335 workers, 90 per cent of them Jewish." (Ibid. p .71).

⁵ A. Elefantis wrote for the Greek workers in 1920's: "...with the exception of craft workers, a worker's job is a dishonourable occupation, and the person who follows it is equally dishonourable, an outcast without self-respect, disapproved by petty-bourgeois decency, inept, a manual labourer and wage earner, and therefore brutal and insecure". Elefantis, A. *He Apaggelia tis Adinatis Epanastasis*. (The Promise of Impossible Revolution) in Athens Olkos, 1976, p.321.

other ethnic groups did not participate in its ranks preferring to organize their own national organizations. It should be noted here, that before the Greek incorporation of Thessaloniki, the city's population was divided into conflicting national organizations. Greeks, Bulgarians and Turks were seeking the acquisition of Macedonia by their respective nation states. Only the Jews did not have a nation state to fall back on. However, they thought of Thessaloniki as their own city. Thus, it is not surprising that the day after 26 October 1912 when the Greek army entered the city, many Jews regarded this as an occupation of the city by foreigners.⁶ Although the leaders of the *Federacion* later played an active role in the Greek workers' movement, and their capacity as the leaders of labour organization in the country was eventually acknowledged by the Greeks, in their early brochures, they combined working-class ideals with particular national hints. Abraham Benaroya, the most prominent *Federacion* leader, compared the working class of Thessaloniki to its counterparts in Athens and Piraeus, arguing favourably on behalf of his city peers:

Those who are in charge of the centres and the unions in Athens are characterized by ambitions that are alien to the needs of the growing working masses. The labour centres of Thessaloniki constitute something of an exception. Fewer in number and more centralized, they emerged later and were more influenced by the mass expressions of socialist activities.⁷

In other words, Benaroya presented the *Federacion* as an alternative model to the majority of Greek labour organizations. It was a militant and well-structured organization with a concise programme able to motivate the working masses. In fact the *Federacion* managed to represent Greek labour both in the first Conference of the Greek Labour Confederation and was the main organization in the establishment of the Greek Socialist Labour Party (SEKE) in 1918. They were also proposed by the Greek Prime Minister El. Venizelos to represent Greece in the 1918 European Socialist Conference in London.⁸ The *Federacion* however, was still imbued with distinctively anti-

⁶ Cited in Haupt G. Introduction to the History of La Fédération. In: Benaroya, A. *He Proti stadiodromia tou Hellinikou proletariatou* (The First Steps of the Greek Proletariat). Athens: Stochastis, 1986, p.33.

⁷ Benaroya A. *He Proti stadiodromia tou Hellinikou proletariatou* (The First Steps of the Greek Proletariat). Athens: Stochastis, 1986, p.112.

⁸ Benaroya accepted, on condition that the Prime Minister, in return, agree to stop his persecution of Socialists and allow a labour conference to be held in Greece. See

nationalist views, which could be easily considered by Greeks as anti-Hellenic.⁹ In 1918, with new elections imminent, Venizelos, in an attempt to re-establish some connection with the community, deemed the socialist leader Benaroya a suitable intermediary. Venizelos did not really desire an autonomous organization of the working class, but realized that working-class living standards were so poor, that the labour problem had to be dealt with somehow, especially at a time when socialism was gaining ground and had established considerable influence among working people. Venizelos intended to put an end to this, but, for the moment, he also needed the European socialists' good will to pursue his nationalist and military aspirations. Consequently, the *Federacion* succeeded in prevailing in Greek trade union politics and in taking positions on the Greek Turkish war of 1919-1922 which were against the government irredentist strategy. Under Benaroya's influence, the SEKE decided that the Balkan Socialist Parties should fight all imperialist claims of their national governments and declared that the only way to bring about the union of the Balkan peoples and lasting peace and understanding, was the creation of a Balkan Democratic Federation, "founded on genuine democratic principles, guaranteeing full and true political, ethnic and linguistic freedom, regardless of race and religion".¹⁰ This proposal for a Balkan Democratic Federation, which was close to Benaroya's heart too, however moderately it was put forward by the party, indelibly marked the destiny of SEKE. Whilst the party became the principal pro-peace political organization in those years, during the strike wave of 1919 -1920 many socialists all over the country

Koumandaraki, Anna. *Identity in the Semi-Periphery: The case of the Greek Trade Union Movement*. PhD Thesis University of Essex. 1996, p.89.

⁹ Both the El. Venizelos Government and some socialist comrades of Benaroya did not hesitate to openly express their hostility to him and his organization. According to Nicos Yannios, leader of the Socialist Centre of Athens, Benaroya was not a suitable representative of Greek socialism. He particularly criticised the *Fédération* for promoting the idea of a Balkan Federation which was a concept entirely incompatible with Greek national irredentism and the recent victories of the Greek army in Macedonia and Thrace. This hostile attitude against Jews was no monopoly of the Greek government and Yanios. Giannis Kordatos, for instance, who later became general secretary of the Greek Communist Party, did his utmost to prove that the influence of *Fédération* was limited to Thessalonica. According to him the spread of socialist ideas in Macedonia was due to efforts of mainly Bulgarian and Greek socialists. Whilst Kordatos tried to show that the ethnic cleavages were insignificant in the formation of the Greek trade union movement, his criticism of Benaroya illustrates his own pro-national dispositions. Koumandaraki, *Ibid.*, p.94.

¹⁰ Cited in Leon, G.B. *The Greek Socialist Movement in the First World War*. New York: East European Quarterly, Columbia University Press, 1976, p.115.

were either imprisoned or deported to remote islands. Some of them were forcefully inducted into the army, where they attempted to disseminate socialist principles, and induced their fellow soldiers to take an active anti-war stand. It was in the army that many Greek soldiers first heard about the Russian Revolution and became communists. Meanwhile, the situation at the front deteriorated rapidly for the Greek side. The government's decision to continue the war until the Greeks in Asia Minor had been freed from Turkish sway, led to the defeat of Greece and the influx of 1,200,000 refugees into Greece. This was not without an impact on SEKE too. First of all, the ethnic composition of the country's Northern provinces changed radically: the flood of refugees made Greeks an overwhelming majority, especially since, at the same time, Muslims were forced to leave. The Jews lost much of their economic superiority and were confined to a few districts in Thessaloniki. Moreover, for the established landowners of Macedonia, the refugees' arrival meant the break-up of their estates, which the government distributed as part of a resettlement programme. The Greeks' prevalence in Macedonia militated against the federalist principles SEKE was advocating. Furthermore, the soldiers returning from the war had in the meantime acquired a radicalism that challenged the SEKE leadership. The latter, a few months before the Asia Minor disaster (in the congress of February 1922), had decided in favour of the principle of 'peaceful co-existence' with the bourgeois regime. For this very decision, they were attacked by the returning soldiers as political reformists, and expelled from the party ranks (Benaroya was amongst those expelled).

The Greek Communist party position on Macedonia and its effects on left-wing trade union identity

In 1920 the SEKE changed its name to the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), and in 1924 it officially embraced the principles stipulated by the Communist International. The new party line on the national question was slightly different from that of its predecessor. In 1925, after the COMINTERN (under the insistence of Bulgarian communists) spoke up for an independent Macedonia, the KKE incorporated this goal into its own programme. The Comintern's decision to support the national independence of Macedonia was connected with the favourable prospects of the Bulgarian communists igniting a socialist revolution in the Balkans. It demanded international recognition of the need for an independent Macedonian state, an attitude which implied the existence of a nationally homogeneous Macedonian population seeking autonomy.

The Communists' definition of nation referred to an historically formed community of people who are bound together by a common language, inhabit a common area, share an economic life and have a common national character expressed in a common culture. Every national group thus conceived, should, according to communist theorists, enjoy the right of "self determination". In Lenin's words, this right may be employed "up to the point of separation" of the national group from the state in which it lives. Lenin outlined a theory of nationality for the purpose of combating nationalism itself, aiming to direct the masses' attention against the bourgeoisie.¹¹ He argued that there are no nations more important than others. All nations are equal and may legitimately exercise the right of self-determination. What he meant is that where "historical" nations have occupied the territory of other nations, the communist comrades should back the struggle of oppressed nations for self-determination up to the point of separation. In the context of Greece, the communists' duty would be the fight for the emancipation of the Macedonian people and the subsequent separation of Macedonian land from Greece. On national issues, Lenin observed, workers and capitalists tend to form a united front against an alien national element in the state in which they live, or against a neighbouring nation which oppresses a kin minority. Instead of doing this, the proletariat, according to Lenin, should oppose its own bourgeoisie and sustain the right of national minorities within its own state to national independence.¹²

In 1924 when the Greek Socialist Party was transformed into the Communist Party of Greece, Stalin, who had risen to the leading position in the Soviet Union and the Comintern, followed Lenin's policy on national questions to its extremes. The Soviet government considered Macedonia to be the place where the socialist revolution in the Balkans could be

¹¹ Based on Lenin, V.I. "He Sosialistiki Epanastasi kai to Dikaioma Autodiathesis ton Ethnon [Socialist Revolution and Nations' right for Self Determination]". In: Lenin, V.I. *Kritika Simiomata pano sto Ethniko Zitima. Gia to Dikaioma Autodiathesis ton Ethnon*. [Critical Notes on the National Question. On the Right of Nations for Self-Determination]. Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 2006, pp.106 -122. Detailed descriptions of Lenin's theses on the national question are also cited in Fischer, Ernst/Marek, Franz. *O Lenin me ta dika tou logia* [Lenin in his own words]. Athens: Heridanos, 1973, pp.56 – 66, Lowy, Michael. *To Ethniko Zitima apo to Marx mexri Simera* [The National Question from Marx up to now]. Athens: Stachi, 1993, pp. 70-76, Vasilis, Liosis. *Imperialismos kai Exartisi. He Proseggisi tou Lenin. H Periptosi tis Elladas kai Kritiki*. [Imperialism and Dependence. Lenin's Approach. The Case of Greece]. Athens, pp.50-52, 2012.

¹² Based on Kofos E. *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia*. Thessalonica: Institute of Balkan Studies, 1964, p.67.

successful. Hence, they supported the plans of the Bulgarian nationalist organization EMEO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – VMRO in Bulgarian) for the emancipation from Greece of a separate Macedonian state identified with Bulgarian national interests. According to this line, the Greek communists should also fight for Macedonian national self-determination against the imperialistic Greek bourgeoisie. The Greek Communist leaders did not have the power to defend Greek national interests in the Comintern since the old socialist cadres who could defend them had lost the party leadership and the young cadres who replaced them were not realistic enough to confront the Comintern anti-Greek attitudes. However, later the Greek communist leaders changed their mind and did their best to influence the Comintern against the slogan of a Macedonian nation separate from Greece. Pandelis Pouliopoulos and Nicolaos Zachariadis, who was imposed as the leader of the Greek communist party by the Comintern, tried to persuade the leading international communist organization about the negative consequences of such position on the Greek Left.¹³

This attitude was certainly more radical than the position of the SEKE, which had sought a Balkan Federation recognizing a variety of ethnic minorities living in Macedonia. Yet, as noted above, this more radical stance presumed that the Macedonian people were a separate nation seeking its independence and did not at all consider the ethnic diversity among these people. Thus, paradoxically, the position of the new party was ethnocentric even though it was advocating the rights of a nation fighting against Greek national interests. The new policy calling for an independent Macedonia implied a homogeneous Macedonian and Thracian majority population in these regions, Greek sovereignty notwithstanding. Whilst the SEKE programme had sought the autonomy of ethnic groups and the protection of their rights under the umbrella of a multinational federation, the new programme did not rule out the possibility of setting up a new sovereign nation-state. The KKE's acceptance of such a prospect constituted a

¹³ Alekos Papapanagiotou has shown in detail the alterations in the policy of the Greek Communist Party on the Macedonian question. Papapanagiotou, Alexos. *To Makedoniko Zitima kai to Balkaniko Kommounistiko Kinima 1918 -1939* [The Macedonian Question and the Balkan Communist Movement 1918-1939]. Athens Themelio, 1992, pp.86 -109. Papanagiotou argued that the Comintern's position on the Macedonian question and the subsequent agreement of the Balkan Communist parties with it had detrimental effects on the Balkan Communist Movement not only in Greece and Serbia, but also in Bulgaria where the Communist Party had fully accepted the EMEO nationalist position on Macedonia (Ibid., p.124).

significant change from the ideology that the SEKE had supported, which might in all probability, signify a more general attempt of the party to become institutionally stronger. Another symptom of this was the creation of separate 'red' trade unions in 1927, after the communists had left the United General Confederation of Greek Labour (GSEE) and created their own union confederation.

According to Kofos, the KKE position on Macedonia and Thrace reflects the party leadership's ignorance of the true situation in Northern Greece.¹⁴ Agelos Elefantis argued that not only was that position mistaken and harmful to the party in the long run, but it also was a position that the Greek communists accepted with great reluctance, and only after they had been virtually ordered to do so by the Communist International. In addition, it occurred at a time when the party started dissenting from its socialist origins.¹⁵ With the KKE still under the influence of Benaroya and other socialists, the 'long lawful existence' of the party proclaimed in 1922 in the context of the bourgeois regime was dismissed in 1924 as reformist by the new communist leadership elected in the meantime. Furthermore, according to Elefantis, the elimination of the old socialist leadership deprived the Communist Party of experienced members whose political reformism was counterbalanced by the great appeal which they enjoyed amongst the working people.¹⁶ By contrast, the new leaders were more radical, and whilst committed to socialist principles, lacked the political skills to provide the KKE with substantial popular support. To George Mavrogordatos' mind, the KKE's position on Macedonia deprived the party of the vote of the people who might otherwise have become its popular base.¹⁷ These were the refugees from Asia Minor, many of whom were frightened off by the party's position. Even though they had been the worst-hit victims of the Irredentist War, they held the conviction that it had been fought principally for their liberation. Resettling the majority of them in Macedonia and Thrace had

¹⁴ Kofos has written that the failure of KKE to attract the masses through its slogan for a 'united and independent Macedonia and Thrace' should be mainly attributed to the fact that the people to whom this slogan was directed simply did not exist. According to the statistics of the League of Nations, the ethnic composition of Greek Macedonia in this period was: Greeks 1,341,000 (88%), Muslims 2.000 (0.1%), Bulgarians 77.000 (5.1%), Various 91000 (6.0%), Total Population: 1, 511, 000. Kofos, E. *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia*. Thessalonica: Institute of Balkan Studies, 1964, p.83.

¹⁵ Elefantis, *Ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mavrogordatos, G. *The Stillborn Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

made it possible for the Greek government to claim that Greeks were the dominant ethnic group in the region. The communists' demand for an ethnic Macedonian state, apart from being anti-national, deliberately ignored the actual situation in Macedonia.

The Class Identity of Native Macedonians and Refugees from Asia Minor

As the KKE's inherited political affinities lay with the old inhabitants of Macedonia, the interest they took in the refugees was superficial. This was in keeping with the party's anti-nationalist, anti-war principles. Its stance in relation to the Macedonians can be seen as an attempt to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in the Balkans, which were endangered by efforts to divide the region into different nation states. During World War I and the Greek-Turkish war which followed, the SEKE was the leading campaigner for peace inside Greek borders. As Mavrogordatos quotes:

The satisfactory settlement of the refugees, and in particular their access to real property, whether rural or urban, was thus conceived as the most effective strategy for making them immune to leftist agitation. Full ownership of one's house or agricultural land was supposed to firmly establish a fundamentally 'bourgeois' identity, taken in its broadest sense. Placed in this perspective, the settlement of the refugees and their establishment as property owners have been widely hailed as an achievement which left no ground for the Communist Party.¹⁸

Although the Greek Communists were thought to abide by the orders of the Comintern on the issue of Macedonia, Slavo-Macedonians provided the ground for the Greek Communist party to develop an antinationalist and, to the eyes of the Greek government, anti-Hellenic strategy on the issue. Although since 1922 Macedonia had become ethnically Greek, one should not forget there was still a compact Slavo-Macedonian minority which had considerable linguistic and socioeconomic differences from the overwhelming Greek majority. These people had felt that their rights and interests in the region were seriously threatened due to the Greek government's decision to settle Asia Minor refugees in the most productive arable lands of the Macedonian peninsula. In addition, Greek state, after 1936 when the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas had been imposed, forbid

¹⁸ Ibid., p.215.

Slavophones to speak their own language in public and to organize festivals wherein their own language was cherished. In other words the Greek state treated the Slavophones as an ethnic minority within their own territory which potentially threatened Greek national sovereignty in the Northern provinces. The Slavophones' difficult situation did not leave the Communist Party activists indifferent; they took for granted that the language of the particular minority identified with that of the native Macedonian population. In their line of thought, the refugees from Asia Minor were seen as the enemy who jeopardised the interests of the natives regarding the fertile Macedonian lands.¹⁹

The conflict between the native people of Macedonia and refugees from Asia Minor had a class dimension: whilst the natives belonged to the peasantry and the working class, the refugees, thanks to the government's decision to distribute lands to them, became small landowners who tried their best to avoid proletarianization. The ethnic diversification between the two groups was thus combined with a conflict of their class interests. Moreover, as mentioned above, the avant-garde of the Greek working class were the tobacco workers who played the leading role in all mobilizations of the Greek labour movement in the interwar period. The combination of class agitation with ethnic differences bitterly divided the Greek trade union movement into those trade unions which were attached to the state and an unofficial fraction, which, due to its anti-national ideology, became inadmissible by the Government as an official representative of the Greek working people. Moreover, since the left-wing trade union movement was condemned by Greek law as a Communist party mechanism, it was not only considered to be a threat to national integrity, but was also expunged from official texts and governmental documents. The communist unions' expulsion influenced the bibliography on Greek trade union movement: for

¹⁹ As Iakovos Michailidis has argued, "the main cause of the conflict between Slavophones and Refugees which continued to be even more powerful in the next two decades was connected with solely financial issues and more specifically with the question of distribution of the lands which before their liberation by Greeks were propertyed by Muslim landowners. The conflict between Slavophones and refugees over lands was, according to Michailidis "the superior social conflict in interwar Greek". Michailidis I. "Slavophonoi kai Prosfiges: Politikes Sinistoses Mias Oikonomikis Diamaxis [Slavophones and Refugees: Political Aspects of a Financial Confrontation]" in Veremis, T. *Tautotites sti Makedonia* [Identities in Macedonia].Athens: Papazissis, 1997, p.123.

Anthonis Liakos, Theodoros Katsanevas and George Mavrogordatos,²⁰ the trade unions which were worth mentioning were the unions which were affiliated to the political parties of the government and its parliamentary opposition. According to this line of argument, the trade unions which were affiliated to the Greek Communist Party lacked considerable influence on working people due to the option of the Communist party to support the separation of Macedonia from Greece, losing ground among working people who accused it of committing treason. Therefore, Communist Party influence in the working class was practically eliminated. Having said that however, scholars of the Greek trade union movement failed to see that the Communist Party programme was particularly appealing to those sections of the Greek working class who, for reasons related to the Greek government's strategy against different ethnic groups, could not identify with the anti-communist and pro-national policy that these governments advocated. Mouzelis, for instance, regarded confrontations as an insignificant parameter of the Greek social formation as a whole.²¹ Yet as Serapheim Seferiadis has shown, even in the countries of the semi-periphery like Greece, the labour movement was developed.²² As the author wrote, the uneven and slow pace of industrialization did not restrain Greek working people in regard to the creation of trade unions in the inter-war era. Perhaps these unions did not have the robust organizations that their counterparts had in the countries where industrialization was the focal point of economic growth, but even under the conditions of retarded industrial development, trade unions emerged. This happened, as Seferiadis explained, because working-class organizations are primarily political organizations which reflect the way that working people experience their class identity.²³ The way that this identity is experienced varies amongst the different societies.

²⁰ Liakos, A. *Ergasia ke Politiki stin Ellada tou Mesopolemou*, [Employment and Politics in Inter-War Greece], Athens: Idrima Ergasias ke Pedias tis Emporikis Trapezas, 1993; Katsanevas, T. *Trade unions in Greece*, Athens: National Centre of Social Research, 1984; Mavrogordatos, G. *Metaxi Pitiokampti ke Procrusti: Hoi epaggelmatikes organoseis sti simerini Hellada*, [Between Pitiokamptis and Procrustis: Professional Associations in Contemporary Greece] Athens: Odysseas, 1988.

²¹ Mouzelis, N. P (1986) *Politics in the Semi-Periphery*, London: MacMillan, 1986.

²² Seferiadis, S. *Gia tin sygrotisi tis ergatikis taxis stin Ellada (1870-1936)* [The Constitution of the Greek Working Class (1877 -1936)]. *Elliniki Epitheorisi Politikis Epistimis*, tefxos 6, n.11, pp. 9-78, 1995.

²³ Cited in *Ibid.*, p.13. Seferiadis' argument is informed by E.P. Thompson's famous quotation: "Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and in the end, this is its only definition". Thompson, E.P. *The making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin, 1963, p.10.

Hence, even in the semi-periphery there are particular productive sectors where the labour movement is particularly strong. This was the case of tobacco workers in Northern Greece.

The tobacco workers' role in the Greek labour movement

Tobacco workers have been considered to be an exceptional case within the Greek working class. Authors like R. V. Burks and more recently, Mark Mazower, have emphasized tobacco workers' differences from the rest of the working class. In Burks' words:

The tobacco workers' union is among the oldest and most stoutly organized in Greece; in matters of seniority, the tobacco worker is among the best protected labourers in Greece. Furthermore, his work is counted as highly skilled and is among the best paid. The women, dressed in neatly pressed and brightly coloured cotton prints, are reputed to be the best-dressed among lower class Greek women. On pay day, fruit peddlers and other hawkers can be seen hovering near the doors of the warehouses, doing a brisk trade in oranges and other fruits, much too expensive for the purse of the average Greek worker.

On the other hand, employment among tobacco workers is highly seasonal. Much depends on the state of the world market and its ability to absorb Greek (that is Turkish) tobacco. A tobacco manipulator may be employed only six months in the year. During unemployment he must fall back on a meagre government dole. He alternates between more than average prosperity and hungry impecuniousness.²⁴

And in Mazower's words:

Tobacco workers formed one of the most militant sections of the Greek labour force. Several factors lay behind the tobacco workers' tradition of organized radicalism: the urban refugees' lack of ties to the land, and the working environment itself, where several hundred employees worked alongside one another in one of those cavernous warehouses which still impress the visitor of Kavala or Xanthi. In a country where most of the work-force was slow to develop a sense of collective action, the

²⁴ Burks, R.V. *The dynamics of Communism on Eastern Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, pp.55-56.

achievements of the Tobacco Federation of Greece were startling.²⁵

Arguing about the exceptional class consciousness and political participation of Macedonia's tobacco workers, one should not forget that Macedonia and particularly Thessaloniki was, in the interwar era, a city of high agitation and confrontation on the part of the working class.²⁶ The influence of the Communist Party, and furthermore that of the old socialist cadres, on Thessaloniki's working-class activists was particularly strong.²⁷ Therefore one could argue that the trade union movement in the Northern Greek provinces did not follow the dominant model of a state manipulated trade union bureaucracy but instead, it expressed a militancy that questions the well-established argument of the Greek trade union movement's weakness and docility towards the state. The existence of a strong left-wing trade union movement was also responsible for the anti-communist legislation that was enacted in Greece in 1929 (the *Idionimon* law). The law was enacted by the Venizelos' government and clearly stipulated the imprisonment of those who "attempt to implement ideas obviously aimed at overthrowing the established social regime by the use of violence or by

²⁵ Mazower, M. *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p.126.

²⁶ See Daggas, A. *O Chafies*. [The Informer] Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 1995, pp.69-106. Also Moskoph, Op.Cit. Indeed Moskoph has argued that the sad end (ten deaths and Metaxas' imposition of dictatorship) of the 1936 tobacco workers' strike demonstrations was due to the social-democratic (rather than communist) ideology of the organizers. It seems to me, however, that his criticism of the limited success of the Thessalonica communist organization stems from his disagreement with the social-democratic and Trotskyist ideas of the Thessalonian party leaders. However inept the handling of the May 1936 events, the fact remains that the communist organization in Thessalonica was the largest party organization at that time. According to Moskoph's own figures (derived from oral testimony), when the SEKE was founded in 1918, Thessalonica alone accounted for 60 per cent of the 1000 party members. This included the whole of the *Federacion*. The party organizations of Athens and Piraeus had 150 and 100 members respectively. The SEKE crisis in 1924, caused by the split between its social-democrats and hard liners, reduced the membership to 600. The most serious decline in the strength of the KKE in Thessaloniki was in 1933, when the party lost 30 per cent of its members in the city but, according to Moskoph, increased its membership by 500 per cent in the province of Macedonia! (See Moskoph, *Ibid.*, p.459) cited also in Koumandaraki, A. *Identity in the Semi-Periphery: The case of the Greek Trade Union Movement*. PhD thesis. University of Essex, 1996, pp. 16-17.

²⁷ Popular support for the KKE remained steady in Thessalonica and much above the national level during all of the inter-war period. Whilst the party polled only 4.3 per cent in the national elections in 1932 and 1933, the Thessaloniki vote remained a steady 20 per cent throughout. Of the Jewish vote, with a quarter of the city's total, 15 per cent, went to the KKE. Moskoph, K. Op.Cit. pp. 456-457.

detaching the [national] territory”, It is not surprising that *Idionimon* also prohibited ideas aimed at the overthrow of the social system and the prosecution of suggestions favourable to local autonomy, which obviously referred to left wing party positions on an independent Macedonia and Thrace. Thus the government under the pretext of vexed national interest by KKE cadres took measures aiming to penalize autonomous trade unions. According to official statistics for the years 1929-1937, more than 60 per cent of the people condemned for crimes against state security or for infringements of *Idionimon*, belonged to the working class. In the same period, 96.4 per cent of the people prosecuted for having threatened national security, were penalized on the grounds of *Idionimon*, and only 3.6 per cent on the grounds of other laws.²⁸ After the imposition of Metaxas’ dictatorship, *Idionimon* was replaced by even harsher legislation, where the penalization of communist ideology was mainly based on its alleged anti-patriotic attitude. The militant trade unions were certainly prosecuted on the grounds of anti-communists’ protection of the national integrity of Greece. More important, the economic policy that was implemented in the inter-war years tried to diminish the number of working people who belonged to the working class and to promote instead the affluence of the small enterprise managers who owned very small and family-run units with very few employees.²⁹ This situation was certainly against the empowerment and the unity of the labour movement. Therefore, the weak trade union movement which was seen as the main characteristic of Greek workers’ movement did not emerge “naturally” through inconsistent and limited industrialization

²⁸ Alivizatos, N. *Hoi Politikoi thesmoi se krisi (1922-1974): Opseis tis hellinikis empirias*, [Political Institutions in crisis (1922-1974): Aspects of the Greek experience], Athens: Themelio, 1986. p.359.

²⁹ The extent to which Greek enterprises managed to avoid their proletarianization by setting up their own family run productive units is questionable though. As Serapheim Seferiadis has shown, many of these entrepreneurs suffered from equal degree of poverty like many working people. In fact, in certain cases their situation was even worse since a great number amongst them were people who were unable to find a permanent job and were wandering around with all their family setting up temporary workshops close to or inside their houses (Seferiadis, Op.Cit, pp.30-32). Moreover, he argued that although in numbers the Greek working class did not include the masses that the British or French working class included, it was still represented by a militant trade union avant-garde which was nevertheless a marginal social phenomenon. However, this marginal political organization proves that the process of constituting the working class has started during the inter-war era whilst in the year 1936 class struggle was an explosive phenomenon all over the country, (Seferiadis, Op.Cit., pp. 9-78).

only; it was also the outcome of a programmed state strategy against trade union agitation.³⁰

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to find out whether a strong labour movement was feasible in Greece. As certain scholars of the Greek labour movement have argued, Greek trade unions from the very beginning of their organization became politically dependent on the Greek state and consequently lost their opportunity to express themselves in a subversive way. The article attempted to figure out the reasons why the trade unions' manipulation by the governing political parties occurred, and to prove that this is to a great extent due to the Greek Communist Party's position for an independent Macedonia and Thrace. In other words, the main argument is that those unions that followed a strategy against the Greek government's policy on labour, soon found themselves involved in a struggle committed to minority rights. Consequently, given the Greek state's pro-nationalist profile, they were persecuted as dangerous to their country's national sovereignty. Last but not least, I would like to argue that the study of the history of the Greek trade union movement needs a more detailed, thorough and systematic approach, in which the detailed research of particular sectors and historical moments is emphasized. In my view, only in this way will we be able to know the extent to which working people were affected and mobilised by left-wing political agitation and were able to overcome their political passivity, which I hope is made clear in this work.

³⁰ Koumandaraki, A. Op. Cit. pp. 138-141.

Abstracts

The Party as Vanguard: The Role of the Russian Social Democratic Party in Strikes in St. Petersburg, 1912–14

Alice K. Pate

From 1912–1914, Russian Social Democrats agreed that the expanding strike movement had to be controlled by the Party. Radicalization of the workers' movement brought on by the stresses of modernization created a more mature movement in these years. After decades of illegal organization, followed by legal organization under a new law permitting the existence of "societies," the trade union movement in Russia began to flower. The violent repression of striking workers at Lena Gold Fields led to an increase in the frequency of strikes and contributed to further radicalization of the workers in the years before 1914. Historians have contended that the more radical Bolshevik faction of the party won support from the radicalized workers while moderate Mensheviks condemned strike activity, favoring trade unionism and revisionism. Research of activities in St. Petersburg does not support this interpretation. This paper will argue that Russian Social Democrats in both the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions who were active in St. Petersburg organizations retained the theoretical position that the Party was the vanguard of the revolution.

The Prerevolutionary Strike Movement in Russia, 1912-1916

Kevin Murphy

The prerevolutionary strike movement in Russia from 1912-1916 was one of the most spectacular in world labour history. Because labour historians have tended to focus their attention on the revolutionary years of 1905 and 1917, the strike wave before 1917 remains largely ignored. In terms of the number of participants and political demands, however, the prolonged movement was unprecedented. Examining strikes at the factory level, this essay argues that revolutionaries, particularly the Bolsheviks, acted as catalysts for the movement. The presence or absence of revolutionary

agitators, even at the shop level, determined whether workers participated in the strike actions.

Workers' Strikes in the Paris Region in 1968: Continuities and Discontinuities

Michael Seidman

Many analysts have regarded the workers' strikes in the Paris region as the apex of the workers' movement in Western Europe during the 1960s. In terms of numbers of strikers and media coverage, the work stoppages were undoubtedly the most spectacular of the decade. However, the 1968 Paris-area strikes did not break with the established patterns of stoppages in twentieth-century France. As during the Popular Front of the late 1930s, the momentary weakness of the state—which the student movement provoked in 1968 (not electoral politics as in 1936)—helped to launch the wave. The overwhelming majority of strikes were not “wildcats” (*grèves sauvages*) since the unions played a major role in both their initiation and termination. The great mass of strikers showed much less interest in *autogestion* than in material demands. The gains from this strike wave especially benefited the lowest-paid workers—youth, women, and immigrants—who received significantly higher pay and fewer working hours. Consumerism played a paradoxical role in both fomenting worker demands and acting as a socially cohesive force which induced them to return to work, but a powerful state—following the counterrevolutionary Republican tradition—supplemented consumerism by defending property and the “right to work.”

The Significance of the Mass Strike during the German Revolution of 1918-1919

William A. Pelz

In the early years of the twentieth century long before World War I, German labor fiercely debated the use of strikes, particularly the mass strike, as a weapon in the class struggle. Most famous is the radical position articulated by Rosa Luxemburg in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906). In the furnace of the First World War, the question of the strike as an anti-war, if not insurrectionary, weapon took on added urgency. Various anti-war and radical groups had different approaches, ranging on

the left from that advocated by the Revolutionary Shop Stewards to the ideas of Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht within the Spartakusbund. The role of the strike within the unfolding German Revolution of 1918-19 will be examined with an eye to evaluating both its potential and limitations as a revolutionary tactic.

When the Cactus Blooms: A Century of Strikes in Mexico

Richard Roman and Edur Velasco

There has been an underestimation of strikes in Mexico in several recent important studies due to serious methodological flaws. As well there has been a tendency to a one-sided view of the role of the state in the determination of strikes. The exclusive emphasis by many scholars on the state's determination of strikes in Mexico neglects the activity of workers themselves and the influence of economic cycles and international events on the development of strikes and strike waves. By measuring workers' protests in a more complete manner, we demonstrate the serious inadequacies in many existing studies. By conceptualizing the roots of workers' protests in a more holistic manner, we seek to provide alternate interpretations. The first part of the paper focuses on these issues of measurement and interpretation. The middle sections look at the historical development of strikes over a long time frame. And, in the last part, we examine the new strategies of capital and the state to prevent strikes in Mexico's new period of continental economic integration. It also raises the prospects for the renewal of workers' struggles given Mexico's popular traditions of solidarity and the relentless character of the neoliberal assault on workers' rights, dignity, and well-being.

Pre-empting New Social Movements, Pioneering Social-Movement Unionism: Australian Builders Labourers in the 1970s

Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann

Kim Moody's *Workers in a Lean World* (1997) identifies five characteristics of social-movement unionism: militancy; ultra-democratic forms of organization; an agenda for radical social and economic change; a determination to embrace the diversity of the working class to overcome fragmentation; and a capacity to lead community struggles. The use of the term 'social-movement unionism' to describe this phenomenon that arose

during the 1990s in response to the challenges posed to labour movements by globalization implies its impressive attributes owed much to the influence of the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the early 1970s, the New South Wales branch of the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation (NSWBLF) pioneered a form of unionism that meets all the criteria in Moody's typology. The NSWBLF created this inspiring form of unionism out of the best of traditional labour movement values and practices, encouraged by the New Left in the late 1960s rather than new social movement influences, and well in advance of the development of 'social-movement unionism' from the 1990s onwards.

The Greek trade union movement in controversy: against a state-centred approach to labour movement theory

Anna Koumandaraki

This article focuses on the most significant arguments regarding the lack of political autonomy among Greek trade unions since their emergence in the early twentieth century. The arguments that are underlined here are those about trade unions' weakness in motivating working people and organizing a massive labour movement. Until now there has been a state centred approach to union studies which underlines the Greek government's admittedly successful strategies to manipulate trade unions. The 'state-centred' analyses have certainly failed to see the movement's fragmentation into two sections: one legal and one illegitimate. More specifically, they have failed to see that labour legislation was combined with laws that restricted political freedom to only those unions which had been subordinate to the state and therefore that it created a group of unions that, once declared illegal, could no longer constitute part of the movement's official representation. In contrast to the state-centred approach, my society-centred approach shifts the focus of analysis from the official and legitimate trade union movement to those organizations that suffered governmental restraints, operating without legal protection. The article argues that the fact that the *avant-garde* of this section was in the hands of non-Greek nationals made the confrontation of these unions with the Greek state a critical event in the movement's history. In other words, the fact that the autonomous trade union movement was not identified with the nationalist ideology embraced by the Greek state led to the imposition of legal measures against it.

Our authors

Alice K. Pate is Chair of the History and Philosophy Department at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, USA where she teaches courses in Russian and world history. She received her Ph.D. from Ohio State University in Columbus, OH. Pate has also taught courses in Russian and world history at Columbus State University in Columbus, GA and Daemen College in Buffalo, NY. Selected publications include “May Day in Imperial Russia; Workers Voices, 1891–1914,” Wade, Steinberg eds. *Making of Russian History Society, Culture and the Politics of Modern Russia Essays in Honor of Allan K. Wildman*. Bloomington: Slavica, 2009; “Bakhtin contra Marx and Lenin: A Polyphonic Approach to Russia’s Labor and Revolutionary Movements.” *Russian History*, vol. 31 no. 4 (Winter 2004), pp. 387–417; Melancon, Michael Melancon and Pate, Alice, eds. *New Labor History: Worker Identity in Late Imperial Russia*. Bloomington: Slavica, 2002; “Obshchestvennost’ and St. Petersburg Workers, 1906–1914” *Revolutionary Russia*, vol.15, no.2, December 2002, pp. 53-71.

Anna Koumandaraki was born in Athens in 1963. She has studied Political Science as well as International Relations and Sociology in Panteion University and the London School of Economics. In 1996 she successfully completed her PhD in Sociology in the University of Essex. Her research interests are sociology in Trade Union Movement, Ethnic subcategories and Gender identities. She has worked as an adjunct lecturer in the Sociology Department of the University of Crete, the University of Aegean, and Panteion University. She now holds a tutoring post in the Greek Open University. She has written articles in Greek and British journals on trade union movement, gender roles and ethnic identity issues.

Edur Velasco Arregui is an elected representative of university workers on the Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (JFCA), former Secretary-General of SITUAM (Sindicato Independiente de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Independent Union of Workers of the Metropolitan Autonomous University], and a Professor of Law and Labor Economics at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City.

Kevin Murphy teaches European history at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His book, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*. New York and Oxford: Berghman, 2005 won the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize for the best Marxist book of 2005.

Meredith Burgmann was a leading activist in the anti-Vietnam and anti-Apartheid movements and subsequently became involved in the feminist movement and the 'green bans' movement in the 1970s. She worked as an academic for twenty years, researching areas such as equal pay and the situation of Aboriginal women. She was the first woman President of the Academics Union of New South Wales. She was elected as a Labor Party member to the New South Wales Parliament in 1991 and was President of the Legislative Council from 1999-2007. Her publications include: *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation* (1998) and *The Ernies Book: 1000 Terrible Things Australian Men have Said About Women* (2007).

Michael Seidman is Professor of History, University of North Carolina, Wilmington. He is the author of *Workers against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts (1936-38)* Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1991. (Japanese translation, 1998; partial Greek translation, 2006; Turkish translation, 2010; French translation, 2010; German translation, 2011); *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002. (Spanish translation, 2003); *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. New York and London: Berghman Books, 2004; *The Victorious Counterrevolution: The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011 (Spanish translation forthcoming, 2012).

Richard Roman is a member of Socialist Project and the Greater Toronto Workers Assembly. He is also a retired professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto and an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, York University, Toronto.

Verity Burgmann is Professor of Political Science at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of numerous publications on labour movement history and politics, protest movements, radical ideologies and environmental politics. Her books include: *'In Our Time': Socialism and the Rise of Labor* (1985); *Power and Protest* (1993); *Revolutionary Industrial*

Unionism (1995); *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation* (1998); *Power, Profit and Protest* (2003); and *Climate Politics and the Climate Movement in Australia* (2012).

William A. Pelz is Professor of History at the Elgin Community College (Elgin, Illinois) and director of the Institute of Working Class History (Chicago). He is the author of *The Spartakusbund and the German Working Class Movement* (1988), *Wilhelm Liebknecht and German Social Democracy* (1994), *Against Capitalism: The European Left on the March* (2007) and *Karl Marx: A World to Win* (2011) as well as articles and book reviews in *American Historical Review*, *International Review of Social History*, *International Labor Yearbook* among others.
