Chapter 1: The Rise and Fall of the Union

In the last twenty years an industrial revolution has been taking place in the United States at a pace faster than that of any country in the world, transforming social layers of this country on a scale never before dreamed of. So fast has this industrial revolution been developing that 60 percent of the jobs held by the working population today did not even exist during the First World War, while 70 percent of the jobs that existed in this country in 1900 don't exist today. Not only have work classifications been fundamentally altered, but the work force has multiplied from 20 million in 1900 to 40 million in 1944 to 68 million today. The change is not only in numbers. Over 20 million of those working today are women, and by 1970 it is expected that women workers will have increased to 30,000,000—a work force of women which will be one-and-a-half times the entire work force of 1900.

The United States has transformed itself so rapidly from an agricultural country to an industrial country, and as an industrial country has undergone such rapid industrial revolutions that the question of who is in what class becomes an ever-wider and more complicated question. Today's member of the middle class is the son or daughter of yesterday's worker.

When I was a child, my mother's chief ambition was to learn how to read and write, because if she had been able to read and write she could have become a first-class cook for some rich white people. That, for her, would have been success and the realization of what was, for her and in her day, a high ambition. Her ambition for me was that I should obtain an education so that I would not have to do the things she had to do. In America, more than in any other country, the revolutions in the mode of production have been accompanied by changes in the composition and status of classes. Today most workers in the plant have been to high school and quite a few have even been to college. All either plan or wish to send their sons and daughters to college—their sons so they won't have to work in the factory on what they call a dull and automated job; their daughters (get this!) so that they won't have to marry some bum but can make their own living and be free to decide whether they want to marry or not marry, unhampered as they have been in years gone by, when the big aim was to raise a girl so that she'd be able to meet and marry a good hard-working man who would provide for her and the children.

America is therefore at the stage where no class is a homogeneous segregated bloc as in the early days in Europe when, fresh out of feudalism, everything was controlled by a few large owners of estates and factories, while the rest of the population were the direct servants of the ruling class, whatever the form in which they worked for it. Nor is it like the United States in the period before the Civil War when, in the South, you had the big landowners with millions of slaves watched over by a few straw bosses, while in the North you had craftsmen in small shops, farmers, and textile millworkers. Nor is it like the 1920's when the farms were being mechanized and the rural population was pouring into the big cities to man the machines and the assembly lines of the mass production industries that had grown up since the First World War.

In the 1930's, with the country in a deep economic crisis, the old craft unions went into a state of decline, and people in panic and disillusionment began to create new forms of organization. They were spurred on by an administration which called itself the New Deal and which, in order to save the country from total collapse, initiated certain reforms, thereby creating an arena in which the people could act. This led to a wave of further social reforms and the birth of the CIO which at that point was the biggest social reform movement that had ever taken place in America. Radical groupings for the first time had a mass force in action within which they could propagate and agitate for their theories and ideas, ideas which were predominantly based on European concepts of organization, and on Marx's, Lenin's, and Trotsky's theory of the class struggle. Thousands of young intellectuals,
most of them the sons and daughters of European immigrants, began to take part in and become part of the labor movement. At that time the validity of their approach was strengthened by the fact that the bulk of the American workers were still "raw workers" and not at all articulate—sharecroppers, auto workers, textile workers, rubber workers.

What has transpired since then? The sons of the factory workers and coal miners have become teachers, engineers, draftsmen, scientists, social workers. In fact today, even the radicals no longer think of their children replacing them on the assembly line, or with the pick and shovel in the coal mine, or behind the tractor. Today the largest bulk of organized workers in this country is made up of truckers, dispatchers, etc., in the transport industries. The other large bulk, mainly unorganized, is composed of teachers. There is a growing army of technicians and engineers who today have the same status in industry as did the plumbers, carpenters, and skilled workers in yesterday's industries. That is all they are, nothing more, nothing less.

Even in the South this transformation is taking place and not only among whites but among Negroes. There are many tens of thousands of Negro youths in the colleges today, and they are the ones leading the freedom struggles in the South. They are the sons of ex-GIs, men who have worked in the steel mills, on railroads, in factories, in the mines, but are determined that their children shall not follow in their footsteps.

Today the working class is so dispersed and transformed by the very nature of the changes in production that it is almost impossible to select out any single bloc of workers as working class in the old sense. Today something like 15 percent of industrial employment is in war industry—in the production of missiles, tanks, guns, rockets—and the men and women in these industries hold all kinds of positions. Some of these positions in years gone by would have classified them as middle class; some make salaries that exceed those of the executives of some corporations. The sons and daughters of yesterday's ditch-diggers are today's engineers, scientists, toolmakers, electronic specialists, nuclear physicists, school teachers, social workers, time-study men, cost-analysis experts, laboratory technicians, hospital nurses, secretaries to big executives, as well as typists, file clerks, dictaphone operators. Only the mothers and fathers are still left in those jobs which were once considered the testing ground of the pure working class. And each year these pure working-class jobs become fewer and fewer as automation moves in and takes over.

However, it is not only diversification of work that has changed the working class. The working class is growing, as Marx predicted, but it is not the old working class which the radicals persist in believing will create the revolution and establish control over production. That old working class is the vanishing herd. There are only 12 million of these production workers left in American industry, out of a total work force of 68 million. Moreover, since the Negroes were the last hired into these bottom jobs, over 30 percent of these 12 million production workers (or about 4 million) are Negroes. So the Negroes, whom the radicals do not ordinarily think of as workers, form a large proportion of this working-class force which is usually considered as the revolutionary force, while the native-born whites who have been able to move up with every change in production are less and less inside the working-class force.

By examining the history of the CIO, the industrial revolution, and unemployment, we can get some idea of the revolutionary changes that have so rapidly developed in America, directly leading to changes in the nature of work, the social composition of various strata of the population, the classes within it, and the culture of the population.

The CIO came in the 1930's. It came when the United States, which had fought in the war of 1917 and built up large-scale industry out of the technological advances of that war, was in a state of economic collapse, with over 12 million unemployed. The workers in the plant began to organize in the underground fashion which such a movement always takes before a great social reform—in the cellars, the bars, the garages; in the same way that the Abolitionists had to organize—a minority against the sentiments of the community. Involved in getting the movement under way were Communists, Socialists, wobblies, radicals of every type, along with preachers and a new layer of militant workers. Sitdown strikes
erupted all over the country. All auto workers, except those of Ford, were involved, and the movement spread to allied industries.

To grasp the social significance of the CIO it must be clearly understood that the workers in taking hold in the plants did not take power. They only took hold of the plants. They did not take over the state government, or the national government, or the city police, or the National Guard, or the army. But in their struggles with the police and often with state troopers, they mobilized that section of the population which was not directly involved but which felt it also had a stake in the struggle. People from all strata of the population began to support these struggles centering around the workers and often to participate in them, both physically and financially.

It should also be clearly understood that all the workers did not act as one, nor did they all sit down as one, nor did they all join the movement as one. When the sitdown movement began in the shops, some workers stayed in while others went home and waited to see how it would all come out. The great Ford plant at River Rouge, where more workers were concentrated than in any other plant in the country, did not erupt at all. It was only four years later, in 1941, that the Ford Motor Company was brought into the union. It is necessary to realize that more workers were organized into the union than themselves spontaneously organized the union. The struggle for the union was also the battle against the scabs. There were workers who had to be forced to join by those who had seen and felt the benefits of this great social organization.

From 1935 to the entry of the United States into the war in 1941, we saw in this country the greatest period of industrial strife and workers' struggle for control of production that the United States has ever known. We saw more people than ever before become involved and interested in the labor movement as a social movement. Those who worked in the plants under a new Magna Carta of labor, the great Wagner Act, not only had a new outlook where their own lives were concerned. They also had the power to intimidate management, from the foremen up to the top echelons, forcing them to yield to workers' demands whenever production standards were in dispute. When management did not yield, the workers pulled the switches and shut down production until it did yield. So extensive was their control of production that they forced management to hire thousands and thousands of workers who would not otherwise have been hired. Yet it should be remembered that even at this point, at the height of its greatest power at the point of production, the CIO never solved the question of unemployment. It took the Second World War to put back to work the millions who had been unemployed throughout the 1930's. At the height of CIO power, we had more unemployed than we do now, both absolutely and proportionately.

The first serious contest of the CIO came in 1938 and it expressed itself in contractual language in 1939. That was when the union agreed with management to outlaw sitdowns inside the plants. The workers, not to be outdone by the union contract, quickly devised a new way which would later prove to be the path of opposition to both union and management. They began to walk out without union authorization. In 1939 and 1940, with the shadows of war hovering over Europe, the contract stated that the union would not cause or instigate sitdowns or walkouts in the plants. The NLRB was set up in Washington and then, following Pearl Harbor, the War Labor Board. The union leaders gave the government the no-strike pledge, and there followed one of the biggest debates that has ever taken place in the union over the question of whether or not the unions should abide by this pledge. Although thousands and thousands of militant workers, realizing that their newly won freedoms were being curbed, put up a protest, the CIO and all the other unions except the miners' succumbed. But throughout the war, the workers continued to wildcat over production, even though many had sons in the armed forces. It was here also that the union leaders began to use other forces from outside the unions, including members of the War Labor Board, to persuade workers to return to work for the sake of the war effort. However, in the flux of the Second World War, the workers created inside the plants a life and a form of sociability higher than has ever been achieved by man in industrial society. For one thing, the war meant the entry into the plants of women workers, Negro workers,
Southern workers, and people from all strata, including professors, artists, and radicals who would never have entered the plant before, either because of their race, sex, social status, or radical background. With the war going on, you had a social melting pot in the plant, a sharing of different social, political, cultural, and regional experiences and backgrounds. Side by side with what was taking place in the shop there was also growing up the union organization and what is today the union bureaucracy. With only one problem at hand—to keep the workers at work—the labor leaders began to sense their power. Yesterday workers at the bench, they now sat at the table with management and with representatives from Washington. If in Washington, on the top level, Roosevelt was clearing things with Sidney and vice versa, on the local level labor leaders with thousands of workers under their control were also feeling their oats. These labor leaders often used the radical intellectuals as advisers in strategy and tactics. They found these radicals useful in presenting a militant face to the workers. On the eve of the war, the union bureaucracy received the union shop contract which required every worker in the plant to become a member of the union. For the first time the political machine of a plant was organized by the union itself, and the company set up private rooms in the plant for union officials. Throughout the war period the workers continued to defy the union on its no-strike pledge to the government. Thousands upon thousands of unauthorized strikes took place. (In 1943 and 1944 alone, there were 8,708 strikes involving 4 million workers.) These strikes took place over such issues as the right to smoke a cigarette (the companies for the first time were forced to allow workers in the big plants to smoke so that tobacco chewing was no longer necessary); the right of management to fire guys who were accused of sleeping on the job, or who laid off too much, or who didn't keep up with production; the right to eat on the job, read on the job, and even to cook on the job. Although workers officially had no right to strike, they achieved by these unauthorized strikes such human rights in the shop as to give them the ability to utilize their talents as never before and the opportunity to develop such an understanding of production as no group of workers in history has ever had the leisure to acquire. With the War Labor Board settling the matter of wages, the union leadership spent most of its time at the bargaining table trying to finagle job classifications which would bring a few cents more, hoping thereby to prove to the workers that they were doing something. It was only the miners' union under John L. Lewis which officially took any position with regard to workers' rights during the war. It did this by calling the only strike of national significance, the strike which brought into the labor movement the "No Contract, No Work" slogan.

It made little difference to management, which was making record profits through the government's cost-plus contracts, how many hours workers worked or even how many workers were on the payroll. So corrupt were both union and management that a government study at Packard Motor Company revealed hundreds of workers sitting around and gambling while others worked. The workers were frozen on the job and had no way to leave unless they could harass management into firing them. So some of the more ingenious workers carried on individual wildcats, refusing to work in order to be fired, whereupon they would go to another plant for a few cents more. In this way many workers moved from job to job and saw the inside workings of many plants. Then as suddenly as had come the war, came V-J Day. An era had ended and a new era inside the union movement began. The control of production and the human relations inside the plant which the workers had achieved were now shunted aside by the union. The struggle was shifted from the plane of relations on the job to the economic plane, where it had never been up to then. For although the coming of the CIO had meant wage increases for most workers, these increases had not been big. The average wage in the plants throughout the war was $1.00-$1.25 an hour. It was the long hours of work which made the paychecks big enough to meet the black market prices and the rising cost of living. The great General Motors strike of 1945-1946 was the opening gun in the new vicious circle in which wage increases and fringe benefits would be won by the union and hailed as great social progress, only to be followed by concession of some part of the control over
production which the workers had won. But flushed with the freedom they had gained inside
the shop during the war, the workers almost unanimously supported the early postwar
strikes for economic benefits. It was not until 1948 when the union gave management the
"security clause," handing over the right to run production as it saw fit, that dissension
began to spread.

Reuther had come to power in 1947 and with him a new kind of labor statesmanship which
was to set a pattern for the whole CIO. Riding the crest of popularity of his "Open the
Books" slogan (which he had raised as director of the 1945-1946 GM strike), Reuther
pushed aside all the militants and radicals who in the sitdowns and during the war had built
the UAW up into a model for the CIO. The historic escalator clause which the Trotskyites
had projected and GM had rejected in 1946 was now accepted by GM. A new pattern of a
sliding scale of wages was adopted which became the foundation of the union's "Sliding
Scale of Socialism" strategy. The year 1948 also saw the further development of the union's
Political Action Committee, whereby the schemers of the Reuther bureaucracy and the CIO
leadership in general hoped to take the militancy away from the shop and focus it on the
halls of Congress—to do through legislation what the workers had not done through the
sitdowns, exercise political power.

In 1950 the UAW launched its historic pension scheme, and the 117-day Chrysler strike
took place. In the contract which emerged from this strike, Reuther (to use one of his
favorite phrases) "nailed down" a scheme for the workers to get pensions and holiday pay.
It was with this contract that the workers began to realize how nailed down they really were
to the company and how they were being made into a part of it. The contract evoked from
the workers, particularly the younger ones who were unable to see any benefits for
themselves in the pension schemes, the first serious opposition from the ranks. The pension
pattern quickly spread to other unions. Again the UAW had established itself as the model
for the labor movement.

But 1950 also brought something else—the 5-year contract. GM hailed it as a guarantee of
five years of industrial peace. From the workers' standpoint it was the beginning of the
stalemate, and a rash of wildcats began which were to continue until the expiration of this
contract and even up to the expiration of the next contract, in 1958. During these eight
years, from 1950 to 1958, the workers used the wildcat as a defensive weapon to fight off
encroachment on their control at the point of production, while the companies gradually
wore them down with the help of the union.

During this period, management's strength began to assert itself in conjunction with the
Republican administration in Washington. The economic pace of the country was beginning
to slow down as Truman's "police action" in Korea was being brought to an end. But the
United States was still moving from a welfare state to a warfare state: the Cold War was on,
the McCarthy era was here, and the radicals and militants were on the run, pushed out by
Reuther's insistence that all opponents were "parlor pinks." The Taft-Hartley Act, enacted
under Truman, the friend of labor, was now being enforced by Eisenhower. Merger of the
AFL-CIO to centralize labor's strength was being talked about everywhere. No one said that
the CIO, which represented the most radical point yet reached by labor in the United States,
was now going back to join those whose only contribution to the labor movement had been
the conservatism of business unionism. All that mattered now was a bigger organization.
Strength was measured by size.

The wildcat movement reached its peak in 1955. In that year the Ford and GM workers, who
up to that time had more or less supported the Reuther machine, believing that thereby
they were supporting unionism, erupted in nation-wide wildcats while Reuther was still
celebrating the "Guaranteed Annual Wage" contract (which was to turn out to be only a
supplementary unemployment benefit). The wildcatters all over the country raised the
slogan of "Specific Local Grievances" and forced the union to give them the right to local
strikes over these grievances. For the first time Reuther and his associates were really
scared. They had been warned by the workers that control of the machine was one thing
and control over the workers quite another, that a contract between the union and the company is not necessarily a contract between the workers and the company. However, a new force had now entered the picture, a force which the union had given up its claim to control when in 1948 it yielded to management the sole right to run production as it saw fit. With the decline again of auto production after the Korean War, and with the signing of the 1955 contract, management began introducing automation at a rapid rate. Automation is a change in the mode of production which is more radical than any since the introduction of the assembly line. But unlike the assembly line, which was to increase the manufacturing work force over what it had been, automation is an advanced form of technology which replaces individual human controls with electronic controls. What had already happened to the coal miners with the mechanization of the mines was now catching up with the CIO in chemicals, rubber, steel, glass, autos, machinery, etc.

As the companies began to step up their pressure for higher job standards from the workers, the union itself began to try to persuade the workers that automation would provide more jobs for them. Caught squarely between the union contract and the company, the workers continued to wildcat against every attempt to reduce the work force, but each time they were forced to return by the union officials. New plants with new automated machinery began to spring up all over the country. The work force in the old plants was broken up, scattered to the new plants. Thus the machine shop work which had been done by 1,800 at the old Chrysler-Jefferson plant was now being done by 596 in the new Trenton, Michigan, plant which supplies not only the old plant with machined parts but all the other plants of the corporation. Layoffs followed by the hundreds as more was being produced not only by the new automated machinery but by forcing workers to tend more of the old machines—man-o-mation. With the building into the automated machines of more controls, thus reducing or eliminating breakdowns, even skilled workers were no longer needed for repair work.

The workers wildcatted, held meetings of their locals, voted not to work overtime, all in an attempt to stem the tide. But the union continued to send them back, and so the layoffs continued, reaching into every section of the plant, and including office workers, time-keepers, and paymasters. As the office workers found their places taken by IBM machines and computers, high-heeled and silk-frocked women began to join the production workers on the picket line.

Finally, after 137 wildcats at U.S. Rubber in one year and 700 wildcats in the Chrysler plants in three years, the union agreed with the company that any worker who wildcats should be first warned and then summarily dismissed. That put an end to wildcatting. Then came what was for all practical purposes the end of the union when, in 1958, under the pressure of the company and for a period of four months, the union insisted that the workers continue on the job without a contract. Meanwhile, the company introduced new work standards when and how it pleased, daring the union to strike. When the 1958 contract was finally signed, there were few workers in the plant who did not realize they had returned to fully company-controlled plants. Time-study men and work layout specialists roamed the plants like sniffing bloodhounds, spying, taking pictures, watching over the workers' shoulders, while the ashamed union representatives hid behind pillars or in the toilets.

The cooling-off period which the union had devised in the 1955 strike over local grievances was now in full contract effect. After a certain number of workers' grievances had been accumulated, a strike vote could be taken. Then a 60-day wait was in order. Then, if the International Board considered the grievances worth a strike, a strike might be held, etc., etc. Meanwhile, the company was free to keep the work standard in effect and get out all its production.

So ridiculous has the union become as a workers' organization that in 1958 when the contract with Chrysler was being ratified on a Sunday, the union authorized the workers to take a strike vote on the next day. Once again the workers devised a method to hit back, but this time not against the company. In December, 1958, the unemployed began to picket both the plant and the union
against overtime. When this happened, the union, in cooperation with the company and the courts, saw to it that a ruling was handed down that any picketing by the unemployed of a plant is in violation of the contract. Not satisfied with this outlawing of actions by its unemployed members, the union at its next convention decided that unemployed workers could only retain their membership and the right to vote if they reported to the local union during the last ten days of each month. Thus the union has itself drawn the line between the employed and the unemployed. Today unemployed workers march around the Chrysler plants protesting overtime, but the union does not allow them to do so during hours when the workers are actually going into the plant. They may only march when the workers are already inside working.

All that is now left to the workers is the picketing of the union itself. From 1955 until today the workers have made it absolutely clear that man does not live by bread alone. They have insisted that the question of wage raises or money benefits in any form is not what concerns them but rather the conditions of work in the shop. In 1961 the union bureaucracy negotiated new contracts with the "Big Three" and American Motors. If you take the word of the workers themselves, you will see that not one of the issues that they consider the major ones was settled by the new contracts. The overtime which they insisted must go and the shorter work week they wanted have been tossed out the window. In fact, before the ink was dry on the new contracts and before the workers had even ratified them, the plants were scheduling six days a week, ten hours a day. Not only was nothing done to improve working conditions. Management now had another three-year contract under which it can legally pursue the merciless speed-up and intimidation which have been developing since 1955. Even the small representation of stewards and committeemen which workers retained at Chrysler has been reduced. At American Motors wash-up time has been cut out. Faced with the question of unemployment and accepting it as permanent, the union has now embarked on an all-out program to ease as many workers out of the plant as possible, through severance pay, pensions, increased unemployment benefits. At the same time, it is pushing a profit-sharing plan to incorporate those still left in the plant into management itself. When American Motors workers made it clear that they didn't want the profit-sharing plan, the union manufactured a new definition of democracy: the holding of one election after another until the workers vote the way the union wants them to vote. Joining hand in hand with management, it conducted an intensive educational program to brainwash the workers into line. At General Motors, where local union after local union, with the Pittsburgh local in the lead, refused to go back to work until their local grievances had been settled, the International simply brought all dissident local officers to Detroit where, together with management, it whipped them into line. In the Chrysler set-up, where the Twinsburg, Ohio, stamping plant is the key to continued production, the International came to a settlement with the company over the unanimous opposition of the entire local bargaining committee.

The UAW is just one union among the major CIO unions. But it has been considered the most advanced, the most progressive, the model of the labor movement that arose in the 1930's. If this is what the UAW has done, it is not difficult to imagine the state of the other CIO unions which failed to reach the heights of militancy and social advancement of the UAW.

Thus, after 25 years, the UAW has given back to management every right over production won in the movement of the 1930's and the war years. Today the workers are doing in eight hours the actual physical work they used to do in twelve. At 6:30, a half hour before the day shift begins, you can see workers setting up their operations so that they will not fall behind during the hours for which they are paid. They are afraid to go to the toilet, to get a drink of water, to take time off to go to the funeral of a relative. If they refuse to work overtime, they are written up and sent home on a regular working day. They are afraid to walk around with a newspaper in their pockets for fear that they will be accused of reading on the job. Whenever the company wishes to work the men more than 40 hours a week, all it has to do is "schedule" overtime. Here is an example of how "scheduling" works: Recently
a worker at one of the Chrysler plants refused to work through lunch when asked to do so by the foreman. The foreman took him to Labor Relations. The Labor Relations man asked the foreman, "Did you tell him the work was scheduled or did you just ask him to work?" The foreman replied that he had only asked the worker to work. Whereupon the Labor Relations man said, "Next time tell him the work is scheduled, and then if he refuses you can fire him because we have the sole right to schedule production as we see fit." Anyone listening and talking to workers in the auto plants today can tell that the workers are through with the union. In the early days of the union, the most common expression in the shop was, "Now that we have a union we don't have to take a lot of the stuff that we used to take." Now the expression is, "When we had a union we didn't have to take this stuff." For over four years now it has been obvious that the workers themselves have drawn the curtain on the era of the union.

When the situation has reached such a stage, all questions of what the union should have done or could have done, or what some other leaders might have done or should have done, or what might have been achieved if some other policy had been followed—all these questions become completely irrelevant and abstract. To continue to think in such terms is to repeat the mistake that the Trotskyites made for thirty years as they tried to formulate an alternative policy and leadership for Stalin, while Stalin himself was going ahead and building not only the Russian bureaucracy but a Russia which no longer bears any resemblance to the Russia of 1917.

The end of the CIO is not necessarily due to the advent of automation, although it is automation which has made clear its helplessness. It is due to the fact that all organizations that spring up in a capitalist society and do not take absolute power, but rather fight only on one tangential or essential aspect of that society are eventually incorporated into capitalist society. The fact, the key to the present situation, is that from the beginning the union did not take absolute control away from the capitalists. There was no revolution, no destruction of the state power. The union itself has therefore become incorporated into all the contradictions of the capitalist system and is today fulfilling the same functions for the American state as the Russian trade unions do for the Russian state.

But what about the experiences that the organized workers have had in the last 25 years and what is going to happen to the workers who were organized into the CIO, now that automation has arrived and the assembly-line system and mass production by mass production workers are coming to an end as the typical mode of production? First of all, these workers have undoubtedly made certain very substantial gains not only for themselves but for society, as all workers have who have carried on the class struggle. The CIO movement gave the American public its first real taste of class consciousness and social thinking, establishing in the American mind for the first time the idea of democracy on the job, in the factories, the offices, and every place where people work. The whole idea of human relations at work, which has since become the subject of innumerable studies by industrial relations experts, is the product of this movement. The CIO, in conjunction with the war and the activities of the Negroes themselves, established a framework within which Negroes could fight for equality inside the plant. It has done the same for women workers. Over the years it has provided a focal point for the energies of tens of thousands of idealistically minded young people who found in the labor movement a cause that they could serve. The theory that America has a class structure, so long disputed, was finally recognized after the CIO was organized. It was the CIO movement, and following it the Second World War, which established the production worker as a citizen of American society rather than just a beast of burden.

But the question is: What is going to happen to the workers who established these values now that automation is cutting so sharply into their ranks? What is going to happen to the steel, auto, rubber, aircraft, coal workers, who are today the vanishing herd? This is a burning question, not only to these workers themselves but to all who for so long have looked to these workers to save American society as a whole.
These workers will not just fade away, although their numbers will be constantly diminishing both relatively to the rest of the working population and absolutely as older workers die or are pensioned off and no replacements are hired. Those who remain have undergone a very rich economic experience. They are not only educated in the meaning and nature of modern production, but through this they have acquired a certain wit which they will use to evolve tactics of self-defense, prolonging their tenure as long as possible. They have also had a very rich political experience—with the union, with management, and with the government—from which they can draw as they join other strata of the workers in the struggles which will inevitably develop as the pressure is transferred to these new workers. But above all, they have learned a great lesson for all future workers: the lesson that those in whom they put their trust to serve them have wound up as their masters. From now on these workers are going to fight these new masters every step of the way, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating, but always antagonistic. Their fights will clarify for the new revolutionary forces what a struggle entails.

But what about all the unemployed? What will society do about them? This would be one question if we were talking about a socialist society. It is another question when we are talking about a capitalist society, which is what the United States is today. The capitalists will take care of them. The capitalists, you say? Aren't they the most inhuman people on earth? Aren't they the ones whom these workers have been fighting tooth and nail all the time?

Here is one of the greatest contradictions of capitalism itself. Today the capitalists have to feed these untouchables instead of being fed by them. Faced with an economic crisis or industrial change, as after a war or when a new mode of production is introduced or when the market is glutted with goods, the first thing that the capitalists say is, "We have a cushion." What is the cushion? It is the very thing that these capitalists refused to give for so long and which the workers forced them to yield only by long and bitter struggles—social security, pensions, severance pay, unemployment benefits, supplementary unemployment benefits, charity, welfare. But the capitalists are not going to pay for these, you say. You are so right. The workers have paid and are still paying for them. Today over 100,000 UAW workers are on pension—the product of the new method of silent firing which the companies have devised to get rid of one set of workers without having to hire new ones. Even more coal miners, steel workers, rubber workers, iron ore workers, railway workers, have been eased out in this way. In fact, the railroads have made the process clearest of all. They will hire no new firemen, they say, but those still working can continue to ride like dummies in the cabs until it is time for them to retire. In the auto shops one of the methods of silent firing involves the use of the physical rating code. Workers are required to take a physical examination each year and are coded accordingly. Any worker over 60 who cannot keep up with production is forced to retire on the basis of physical fitness. Those under 60 are laid off, draw unemployment benefits until they are exhausted, and then go on social security disability.

What about those millions of unemployed who have never been called back to work and have exhausted their compensation? Well, the government can periodically extend compensation a few weeks longer whenever it fears these unemployed may be getting desperate, and then finally there is welfare, where the bulk of them wind up. But won't this cost the state, the country, the city, the manufacturers a lot of money to take care of all these people? But the people pay for that also, through taxes on those still working. It is among these taxpayers that the tempo of revolt is accelerating.

What about the young people to whom the doors of industry are closed because there are no more semi-skilled jobs and because they have not been trained for the new technical jobs? There is always the mass army, the mass peacetime army which, like automation, we didn't have in the United States in earlier periods. This army, the biggest peacetime army in the world, is the modern equivalent of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's. It is the place where a part of the unemployed youth are now regularly dumped and where periodically even some of the employed are transferred in order to make room for others to
take their jobs. Only now it is not civilian, it conserves nothing, and it is paid for out of the
taxes of those still working and excludes the most handicapped and underprivileged—the
illiterate and the physically unfit.
It is clear that this growing army of the permanently unemployed is the ultimate crisis of
the American bourgeoisie. But the American bourgeoisie is a powerful bourgeoisie, and it
will take every step in its power to moderate, cajole, temper the revolution which this
condition will undoubtedly provoke. It is also clear that the most organized workers in this
country, the members of the old unionized strata, the vanishing herd of production workers,
have learned that in the actions they will take or may take from now on, they will have to
be joined by other forces. Today, the problem of control over production and the solution of
their specific local grievances will have to be dealt with by larger sections of the population.
These are now, more than ever before, questions which require the taking on of the union,
the city government, the state government, and the national government. That these
workers can or may revolt is not the question. Even one worker can revolt. But workers are
not fools. They want to win sometimes too, and this is true of American workers more than
of any other workers in the world. When they struggle, they like to know that they can
achieve some immediate success. And understanding the structure of society as they do,
they know they are going to have to join with others in order to win. They will have to move
on a scale of revolt powerful enough to smash the union, the company, and the state which,
under the guise of national security and national defense, denounces every move they make
on their own behalf as irresponsible and irreconcilable with the system itself.
Why don't they take over their own organization, their union? Looking backwards, one will
find that side by side with the fight to control production, has gone the struggle to control
the union, and that the decline has taken place simultaneously on both fronts. As the
company regained control of production through bargaining with the union and through
automation, the workers have been losing control of the union. So that just as the workers
today know that they have to challenge more than the plant management for control over
production, so they know that merely taking over the union today would gain them very
little. Historically, workers move ahead by the new. That is, they bypass existing
organizations and form new ones uncorrupted by past habits and customs. In the 1930's the
workers did not take over the AFL. They formed the CIO, a new organization, adapted to the
new forms of industrial struggle. It is also significant that when the AFL and the CIO finally
joined together in 1955 with the aim of strengthening the American labor movement, they
did not become stronger but rather declined in numerical membership and influence.
Millions of workers in the South have never been organized by the unions and never will be
because the unions no longer have the social power to overcome the resistance of the
Southern industrialists who control the local sheriffs, judges, police, politicians, and agents
of the federal government. Millions of unemployed have been run out of the unions because
they are afraid that these unemployed may explode in some action that would disrupt the
cooperation between union and management. Thus with every day more people who can be
classified as workers are outside the labor organizations than inside them.
Chapter 2: The Challenge of Automation

Since 1955 and the advent of automation, overtime has been detrimental to the workers. Again and again workers have been faced with the decision to work overtime or not to work overtime, and the decision has usually been: "To hell with those out of work. Let's get the dollar while the dollar is gettable." The amazing thing is that this has nothing to do with the backwardness of these workers. Not only can they run production and think for themselves, but they sense and feel the changes in conditions way in advance of those who are supposed to be responsible for their welfare. But with all these abilities there is one big organic weakness. Over and over again workers in various shops and industries, faced with a critical issue, only divide and become disunited, even though they are well aware that they are being unprincipled and weakening their own cause as workers. Since the advent of automation there has not been any serious sentiment for striking, particularly if the strike was going to come at the expense of material things that the workers already had in their possession, like cars, refrigerators, TV sets, etc. They were not ready to make any serious sacrifices of these; they would rather sacrifice the issue. Between the personal things and the issue, they have chosen the personal. Most American workers have geared themselves to a standard of living that is based on a five-day week plus—either in the form of overtime or another job, part or full time. And any time this standard of living is threatened, it is a personal crisis, which means that more and more decisions are being personalized and individualized rather than collectivized and socialized.

What then happens to the class struggle? At this point the class consciousness of the workers tends to shift from what has traditionally been considered its main quality, hostility to the class enemy outside, and to focus on antagonisms, struggles, conflicts among the workers themselves. Fights among the workers begin to sharpen, although they no longer take the form they did in the 30's when the workers were divided by race and nationality prejudices ("Dagoes," "Wops," "Polacks," "Niggers," "Buffaloes," etc.). The division is now between two groupings. On one side are the brown-noses, stooges, and workers who are only looking out for themselves, those who are complacent because of the fringe benefits they assume they have won through the union, particularly those near to retirement, and those who would revolt but are afraid of the union bureaucracy or of being fired and then forgotten or branded as "nuisances" and "troublemakers." On the other side are those who emphasize issues, who raise a cry about rights, who call upon workers to make decisions on principles and issues. Among the latter are the unemployed who picketed the union for agreeing to overtime work and who continue to picket the plants against overtime even at the risk of being considered nuisances and troublemakers by those inside the shop, showing that the only ones who are seriously concerned about unemployment today are the unemployed themselves.

Yet these same workers who call the principled ones "nuisances" know exactly what their own chances are. In the average auto plant today, for example, ex-foremen make up nearly one third of the work force. Although these ex-foremen know they'll never get back on supervision, they still keep hoping and trying to make an impression on the bosses by their work. The same thing is true of a lot of other workers. They know that the speed-up is going to get worse and worse, but they continue to keep up with it rather than sacrifice a few days' pay to show the company how much they resent it. Instead they take the easy way out and blame it on the union. It is true that contract-wise the union has made all this possible. But at a certain point the union simply becomes an excuse, a pretext for not taking a stand on issues. The sell-out that has taken place in the contract between the union and the company does not change the fact of the corruption that has taken place in the workers.

These struggles among the old workers, which are creating such antagonisms among them, are really only delaying tactics on the part of the old herd. They do not touch the real
question. It is automation which is the reality facing them and everybody in American
society today. America today is headed towards an automated society, and it cannot be
stopped by featherbedding, by refusal to work overtime, by sabotage, or by shortening the
work week by a few hours. America today is rapidly reaching the point where, in order to
defend the warfare state and the capitalist system, there will be automation on top of
automation. The dilemma before the workers and the American people is: How can we have
automation and still earn our livings? It is not simply a question of retraining or changing
from one form of work to another. For automation definitely eliminates the need for a vast
number of workers, including skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, and middle-class clerical
workers.

It is quite obvious that the attitudes and relations to their work of the new strata of workers
who are already deeply involved in automation, are different from those of the old workers.
It is these new relations to their work which have already made it impossible for the union
to organize these new workers or for the old herd of workers to establish any relation to the
new workers. The old workers regard the new ones as close to management and as part
and parcel of the process which is eliminating them. The union can only approach these new
workers in terms of economic demands or job classifications. But their salaries are high
enough so that they are not concerned about a few cents more an hour. They start at
salaries much higher than the old skilled workers ever dreamed of attaining. But they do not
think like the old skilled workers in terms of job classifications. Rather they
welcome constant changes in production as a challenge to their ability, knowledge, and
ingenuity. Automation to them is as fascinating as going to school and tackling new
problems every day. This interest in their work also makes them quite unconscious of the
effect that their work is having on the old workers. But there is more than that. These new
workers are not like the old inventor-geniuses who were hired by the company only so that
their brains could be picked (e.g. as Henry Ford hired George Washington Carver at the
peak of his abilities). These new workers are part and parcel of the new process of
production, and at the same time their ideas are so crucial to the direction of the work that
they are inseparable from management and the organization of the work. In their attitude
to work and in the process of their work they have invaded management to the point of
actually controlling the flow of production itself. But at the same time, in much the same
way as the semi-skilled workers of the CIO era failed to seize political control, these new
workers are leaving the political direction of their work, the purposes for which it is
intended, to the old management. And because they lack any experience of struggle, even
in getting their jobs, it is unlikely that any initiative for political struggle will come from
them. Yet they are the new work force coming into a position of strategic power in
production at a time when all the social problems of American society are being posed.

Automation replaces men. This of course is nothing new. What is new is that now, unlike
most earlier periods, the displaced men have nowhere to go. The farmers displaced by
mechanization of the farms in the 20's could go to the cities and man the assembly lines. As
for the work animals like the mule, they could just stop growing them. But automation
replaces people, and you don't just stop growing people even when they have been made
expendable by the system. Under Stalin the kulaks and all those who didn't go along with
the collectivization of agriculture were just killed off. Even then, if they had been ready to
go along, Stalin could have used them. But in the United States, with automation coming in
when industry has already reached the point that it can supply consumer demand, the
question of what to do with the surplus people who are the expendables of automation
becomes more and more critical every day.

Many liberals and Marxists say that they should be used to build schools and hospitals and
be sent to foreign countries to aid in their development. But such a proposal has as its
premise that this is a socialist society when in fact a capitalist society, and what
motivates a capitalist society primarily is the return on its investment.

There is only a limited number of these old workers whom capitalism can continue to
employ in production at a pace killing enough to be profitable. The rest are like the refugees
or displaced persons so familiar in recent world history. There is no way for capitalism to employ them profitably, yet it can't just kill them off. It must feed them rather than be fed by them. Growing in numbers all the time, these displaced persons have to be maintained, becoming a tremendous drain on the whole working population, and creating a growing antagonism between those who have jobs and those who do not. This antagonism in the population between those who have to be supported and those who have to support them is one of the inevitable antagonisms of capitalism. And it is this antagonism, brought to a climax by automation, which will create one of the deepest crises for capitalism in our age. In this crisis one section of the population will be pitted against another, not only the employed against the unemployed but those who propose that the unemployed be allowed to starve to death rather than continue as such a drain on the public against those who cannot stand by and see society degenerate into such barbarism. On both sides there will be members of all strata of the population.

Thus automation not only poses the questions of poverty and employment and related economic questions. It brings into sharp focus that element which the Negroes always bring with them when they struggle for their rights. It makes the question social because it poses the relations of man to man.

As automation spreads, it will intensify the crises of capitalism and sharpen the conflicts among the various sections of the population, particularly between those working and those not working, those paying taxes and those not paying taxes. Out of this conflict will grow a counter-revolutionary movement made up of those from all social layers who resent the continued cost to them of maintaining these expendables but who are determined to maintain the system that creates and multiplies the number of expendables. This in turn will mobilize those who begin by recognizing the right of these displaced persons to live, and from there are forced to struggle for a society in which there are no displaced persons.

Thus automation is that stage of production which carries the contradictions of capitalism to their furthest extreme, creating and sharpening inside capitalist society the conflicts, antagonisms, clashes between people that make for social progress and the inevitable struggle that goes with it.

The fact has to be faced. Automation is the greatest revolution that has taken place in human society since men stopped hunting and fishing and started to grow their own food. It is capable of displacing as many productive workers from the work force as have been brought into the work force since the invention of the automobile at the beginning of this century. (Today an estimated one out of every six American workers depends, directly or indirectly, on the auto industry for employment.) In fact, so devastating would be the immediate effects if automation were introduced at one fell swoop that those who would appear to benefit most from it (the capitalists) are as afraid of its introduction as the workers threatened with displacement.

Up to now the Marxists have more or less gone along with the old herd of semi-skilled and skilled workers who have resisted automation, at the same time reassuring themselves that private capitalists themselves would not have sufficient capital to go all out for automation. What they have failed to recognize is that it is not private capital as such which is introducing automation. The great bulk of the capital invested in automation today comes from the government and is paid for by every member of the American population, whether he is a worker, a member of the middle class, or rich. This is all done in the name of research and defense, but, whatever it is called, the benefits are as great to the capitalists as if they had put out the capital themselves. Thus the capitalists have found a way to get around the high cost of automation as well as the high cost of scrapping still productive machinery.

One of the major aims of the Kennedy administration is to encourage automation, by granting subsidies to companies who go full-speed ahead on it, both directly and in the form of tax write-offs. Therefore, when workers fight the introduction of automation, they are not only taking on private capitalism but the federal government itself. Yet so great is the contradiction generated by automation that the government, while giving it such
encouragement, must at the very same time set up a new committee to study what is going to happen to the millions of displaced workers.

There is continual talk of new training programs. Yet those making these suggestions know that training is not the answer. In the very period when individuals are being trained, new machinery is being introduced which eliminates the need for such training. Take, for example, the draftsman. With the old methods the engineer used to present his ideas to a draftsman who would make a rough sketch of these ideas which would then be given to another draftsman to refine. A third draftsman then drew the final blueprint, incorporating in it the exact size, the appearance, and the correct fittings to the millionth of an inch.

Today all that this same engineer has to do is talk his ideas into a tape recorder which plays into a computer and the ideas are transformed into a design; the design in turn is fed into a developer and, once developed, can be handed over to the work foreman for building. The three draftsmen have been eliminated from the work process, and only the engineer and the toolmaker remain, each having to know more than before about the other's job.

Marxists have continued to think of a mass of workers always remaining as the base of an industrialized society. They have never once faced the fact that capitalist society could develop to the point of not needing a mass of workers. But this is the dilemma of our time in the United States, and as of now only for the United States. The question before Americans is whether to be for the technological revolutions of automation despite all the people who will be displaced, or to be opposed to this advance, sticking with the old workers who are resisting the new machinery, as workers have done traditionally since the invention of the spinning jenny.

When Marx was writing in the middle of the 19th century, he was dealing with the most advanced countries of his day. But even these countries were underdeveloped in the sense that the great bulk of the people were still engaged in farm work. A large part of the labor force was still needed to produce the foodstuffs for people to eat and the raw materials (e.g. cotton) for industry.

Today if you told the average worker in a big American city that he ought to go back to the farm, he would give you all kinds of arguments. The only reason why he might go back is to get away from the Bomb. He wouldn't think of going back in order to make a contribution to society in the way of production. He knows enough about the food that is rotting in the warehouses and the taxes he has to pay to store it. He knows enough about the great change that has taken place in the technology of farm production so that farm work is no longer socially necessary for the great majority of people.

But as yet few people have been ready to face the fact that, with automation and cybernation, we are reaching the stage where work in the factory is also no longer going to be socially necessary for the great majority. It is easy to accept that a man should move from one form of labor to another form, but it is hard to accept that there will no longer be a mass demand for any labor. It is so taken for granted that the production of goods is man's fundamental role in society that, even when technology is making this unnecessary, most people from the politicians and economists down to the man in the street still try to dream up schemes that will require a lot of people to play a material productive role.

Yet, unless the Bomb falls and throws what is left of mankind back to the stage of hunting and fishing, society can't go backward technologically. Once man has gone on from the stage of hunting and fishing to that of agriculture, it makes no sense for him to go back to hunting and fishing as a means of making his livelihood. If man no longer needs to drive a mule in order to live, you just can't make him drive a mule. Why then should people keep looking for work in order to justify their right to live if there is no longer a social and economic need for them to work?

Marx envisaged a long period of industrialization during which the number of workers would be constantly growing. He believed that in the course of the conflict between labor and capital in the productive process, a new force would be created with human values of organization, cooperation, and discipline, in sharp contrast with the individualism,
competition, and greed of the capitalists. This new force he called "socialized labor" and he said that it was the new society growing up within the old. In this country during the 30's Marx's perspectives were realized to an astonishing degree in the organization of the CIO. The work force had grown in numbers to meet the needs of the mass industrial production, and now came its co-operation, organization, discipline, and revolt. True, this work force did not actually take over power from the capitalists, but in the crisis of the Depression the pressures it exerted compelled the capitalists to establish the Welfare State with many of the social benefits that Marx had advocated. That was a generation ago. Today when automation and cybernation are shrinking rather than expanding the work force, many people still think in the same terms. They still assume that the majority of the population will be needed to produce material goods and that the production of such goods will still remain the heart of society. They have not been able to face the fact that even if the workers took over the plants they would also be faced with the problem of what to do with themselves now that work is becoming socially unnecessary. They have not been able to face this fact because they have no clear idea of what people would do with themselves, what would be their human role, or how society would be organized when work is no longer at the heart of society. I don't think Marx would have had any difficulty in facing this fact if he were living today. Marx saw more clearly than anybody that men's ideas are determined by the stage of production. However, Marx is dead and one cannot continue to quote him as an all-time solution for social problems brought on by the development of production. A new theory must be evolved and it is likely to meet as much opposition as Marx's has met.