

**THE REVOLUTIONARY
JOURNALISM OF**

Felix Martin

(ISAAC WOODS)

WORKER-PHILOSOPHER



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Introductory Note

This book is dedicated to the memory of Isaac Woods, who met Marxist-Humanism early in the 1970s when he was working on the production line at GM's South Gate plant in California. Over the next three decades, writing under the pen name of Felix Martin, he became a columnist for the Marxist-Humanist journal, *News & Letters*, and then served as its Labor Editor through the 1980s and 1990s until his death in April 1999.

The collection of writings by a worker speaking for himself which we have reproduced in this book were selected from his over 200 articles printed in *News & Letters*. We have also included some of his work for the "Blue Sheet" which he and some 70 other workers who had organized themselves as the South Gate Workers Committee distributed right in the shop.

Felix Martin wrote about the struggles at the point of production, literally on the assembly line of General Motors, and about the national as well as international issues confronting workers in the wake of the structural crisis of capitalism that began in 1974. His strong internationalism was expressed in his solidarity with workers from Japan to South Africa. His writings include a wide range of solidarity activities with all other forces of revolution, as well, whether farmworkers, student and working youth, the Women's Liberation Movement, the revolutionary Black dimension, Latinos and immigrants, or prisoner solidarity. He participated in and wrote about environmental issues, the U.S. farm crisis, several waves of anti-war movements, and the health and medical crisis that is rampant in the U.S. today.

Central to all of the writings was his uniqueness in projecting the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism as the lifeblood of the movement for freedom. While his writings reflect the wealth of his experiences as a revolutionary farmer and worker long before he met *News and Letters* Committees (when he was already nearing his 50s) this collection

reveals the enormous self-development his life manifested after that meeting. It could be said to be a historical record of the last quarter of the 20th century, a history that is urgently needed for the freedom movement of the next century.

In writing a history of 25 Years of Marxist-Humanism, its founder, Raya Dunayevskaya, singled out the moment when this white worker from the coal-mining region of Kentucky joined forces in the mid-1970s with our Black worker-editor, Charles Denby. She called it an expression of "a new militancy of workers, white and Black (which) raised again the question that has predominated the struggles ever since Automation: What kind of labor should human beings do?"

Today, when that question has been raised anew by the struggles that erupted in Seattle during the protests against the World Trade Organization on the eve of a new millennium, and by the debates that have followed it, this book introduces the work of an extraordinary worker-philosopher to a new generation who can continue the work that remains to be done.

-- Olga Domanski, for News and Letters Committees

Biographical Note

by
Pauline Woods

Felix Martin was the pen name of Isaac Woods born in 1921 in Leslie County, Kentucky. He was the oldest of nine children, eight of whom lived to adulthood. His father worked in the mines, farmed and had a small store. Isaac worked hard even as a child and often said he did a man's work before age 13. He told stories of his childhood



about hoeing corn, gathering fodder, plowing the hillside with a mule and a hillside turner. He raised hogs, went to a one room school house, walked or ran to town over the hills and did all the things expected from the oldest in a farm family. He loved the mountains of Kentucky and said once, "Its awful, no other generation of children can grow up in such a beautiful environment."

He left the hills to enlist in the U.S. Navy on 22 January 1941. He was at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. For the rest of World War II he served on a troop ship which did amphibious landings. In late 1942 he was in North Africa participating in the landings there. In early 1943 he participated in landings in Alaska. Later that year he was in New Zealand and the Gilbert Islands. 1944 saw the ship in the Marshall Islands and then the Mariana and other major battle areas in the Pacific including Leyte Gulf, Okinawa, and Lingayen Gulf. After World War II he remained in the Navy and was eighteen months in Korea during that conflict. He left the military in March 1952.

After leaving the Navy he went to Indiana where his parents now farmed. While farming there he also did carpentry work including building corn cribs with his brothers all over Indiana. At one point he took a job with a cabinet factory. He spent his time after work visiting the workers at home talking union. The cabinet workers eventually were represented by the carpenters' union.

Isaac's next stop was Arizona in 1961 where he did carpentry and roofing. By March 1962 he had arrived in California and found a job on the assembly line at General Motors in South Gate. He wrote and talked about going into the "belly of the monster" and no wonder -- he was now over 40 years old and beginning work on an assembly line. He stayed at General Motors until the plant closed in the early 1980s and his time there was spent not only working but fighting the company and the leadership of the United Auto Workers (UAW). He and other workers fought to improve conditions in the plant. They supported other union movements including area teacher strikes, the farmworkers and Cesar Chavez; they were against the Vietnam War and other injustices.

He found News and Letters Committees in the early 1970s and discovered a new way to relate to what was going on around him. He began to write regular columns as Felix Martin for *News & Letters*. He also wrote for his local union paper, UAW Local 216's *The Assembler*, where he wrote as Isaac Woods "A Voice from the Woods by Isaac" and "Out of the Woods by Isaac." Another project while at General Motors was the *Blue Sheet* which he wrote with other militant workers' views on problems in the plant. Last but not least he wrote letters to newspapers in Salem, Indiana; Whittier, California; Long Beach, California; and the Los Angeles Times. Isaac continued writing until his death in April 1999.

After his retirement and in his later years when he was not as active, he often said that because he was no longer at the point of production he felt the quality of his writing diminished. He felt very strongly about this and felt a worker needs to be involved at the point of production to be involved in the struggle, to make the greatest impact.

So what was his life about? First and foremost he felt he was a WORKER; that being a worker was his class and he was proud of it.

Biographical note

He felt he never sold his soul to the corporation. He felt that if you were a worker you also became a "mental philosopher." He was always interested in what was going on in the world and how the world (capitalism) was destroying humanity by stopping men and women from developing and growing and reinforcing the division between mental and manual labor.

I hope a new generation of workers will read his columns and take up the work he left undone.

--Pauline Woods

February 1972

Whites hold selves and Blacks down

Denby¹ introduces Felix Martin

Charles Denby's Introduction: This issue I am turning my column over to a white Southern-born worker, because of the profound ideas he expresses, through his own experience, concerning this society, our so called labor leaders, and the blindness of the racism of white workers that has held back the struggle for freedom of working people as a whole. He reveals that it is much more than just a question of Black and white unity against the companies in the factory. What is involved is an understanding of the need for unity in order to make changes in our every-day lives.

Much of the blame for workers' racism belongs to past and present union leadership. When the UAW-CIO was first organized, the leaders could never get beyond a mere slogan: "Black and white, unite to fight." When Black workers demanded that membership meetings should discuss the question of racism, union leaders were constantly objecting on the grounds that it would make white workers more hostile to Black workers and drive them further apart. It was their own racist prejudices that caused them to object.

The white worker who speaks for himself, below, has grasped the total understanding of workers' struggle – and we can be sure that there are others. We would be happy to hear from them.

--Charles Denby

Nixonomics started in 1968 and has worked up to where labor is going to come under control by the government. Our labor leaders have joined in and as far as I'm concerned they've sold labor out. They have

¹ Charles Denby (1907-83) a Black production worker, author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*, was the editor of *News & Letters* from 1955 to 1983.

15 men on the Pay Board. Five are supposed to represent management and five represent the public.

I don't know who the "public" is in this country but it must be someone besides working people, because I haven't seen a working man on the board. All we've got is five labor leaders who are supposed to be representing labor. Labor to me is people who work. The people who are not labor, they own it; and if you don't own it in this country you're working for it. That's what I call labor.

Nixon smoke-screen

Nixon now is going to control inflation by jumping on wages and labor, which don't have a damn thing to do with what has created inflation. You never hear them talking about the real thing. I call that a smoke-screen.

I was in the Navy during World War II, on small ships which would lay a smoke-screen and make torpedo runs on enemy ships to sink them. What I see coming up for 1972 is a smoke screen to put Nixon back in the White House. He has to go back in because the oil magnates can't do without him.

Out of Southwest Texas there was \$150 million from the Hunts and other people that bought Nixon the job in 1968, not counting the \$30 million or so that other millionaires threw in. But the big money is never spent because Hunt can control about every radio and television station across this country.

And now we have the Supreme Court that's Nixon's court. They're going to back up the Wage and Price Board, which has been extended until April of 1973—after the election. With a system like we've got, we're not to change anything.

In the near future—the next three or four years—the working man in this country is going to start looking like the worker in Czechoslovakia, or Russia, or anywhere else where the working man is controlled. We may go out on strike, so long as it is a strike that General Motors wants. But if we ever strike from now on and mean it—where General Motors is not loaning us money to stay out, like they did the last time—then we're going to see the government coming

down on the people, and it is going to come down hard. It will make Russia look like a bunch of play kids, because this country's government is the most powerful, potentially fascist machine the world has ever known.

Blacks most militant

I don't feel I represent the workers in the shops where I come from, because I'm a white man, and I feel that most of the white people in this country now have become the anchor around the Black man's neck. He's dragging us. In my plant—and I think it pretty well represents the other plants—the most militant people who are searching and trying to do something are the Black man and the Chicano or Mexican. The most important man is the white man because he's been holding down everybody in this country including himself.

And that started just after the Civil War in 1868, when they kept the white man holding the Black man down in the South. He's been sitting on the Black man ever since and here one hundred years later they're both sitting at the bottom of the barrel. This is not only in the South, now it's all over the country.

The way they did that was that the Southern Democrats, the conservative Democrats and the Northern Republicans formed a coalition and what they call a "gravy train" where they could have relief stuff coming into the South to keep these fellows from starving to death and use them as cheap labor against labor in the North where they were trying to organize unions.

My white ancestors went into the mountains of Kentucky because they believed in freedom. I'm a hillbilly, and I don't have too much education, but I know one thing. Until they put roads in there, we did have one little spot in this country where we did have freedom.

We had a jailhouse to protect someone who maybe shot a man, before the family could get to him. You didn't need a sheriff to go out and get him, because he ran to the jailhouse and hunted up the jailer to put him in to protect him. Now this is our kind of "law and order."

"Free" economics

My dad drove a truck and I learned to drive a truck.

We did a lot of hauling in the hills of government whiskey. This is how we made our living, and this is how the government finally got hold of us. When the roads came into the mountains, freedom ended.

That may not seem much like economics, but to me this is the most economic thing there is. Because we produced what we wanted, and for how we wanted to live. But now we are producing for someone else, and the government is in there trying to control it all.

The workers—they are going to have to do something. We don't need a Moses. We've had our Moses. We finally got the eight-hour but now we're going back to the ten-hour day. In the last ten years, I haven't worked an eight-hour day—I work a nine or a ten-hour day.

We're in one jar, one barrel; we're on one earth and we're one people. If we've got misery on this earth, we're the ones who created it because we're the majority and we let the minority do it to us.

-- G.M. Worker,
Southgate, California

March 16, 1972

Dear Isaac:

I received your letter of Feb. 24, and was very happy to get your answer. It appears to me that you are very good when it comes to writing letters, but, as you so well analyze the ruling class, it is the only way they have to control our minds to make us think we can't think and write for ourselves. They want us to think the only things we can do are what they teach us, and what they want us to do.



I have never heard anyone define the word racism as you did. We want to put your letter, or part of it, in the next issue of the paper. We hope that is agreeable to you. The philosophy of Marxist-Humanism is so imbedded in your letter-the unity of workers and intellectuals, what workers can teach them, and what they can teach us.

I was so moved by your letter, in fact, that I would like to ask you to consider writing an article regularly for the paper. It might eventually become a regular column. The best way to start would be to make a regular date, every month, to write to me. You can make it in the form of a letter, if that is easier, or in the form of an article, whatever you wish. But make it at least one each month. That means that you should choose a pen-name for your articles, for your own security. You are still working in an auto shop, for the capitalists, and to avoid any trouble with them we always advise our writers to use a pen name. Could you send one right away, or tell it to Eugene so he can send it in time for us to use it with your article for this issue we are getting to press right now?

I was very impressed with how you could relate your own past life with that of Matthew Ward. I am sure that many workers black, and white, all over this country, can relate their past lives to Matthew Ward, too. So get over the hangup in your mind about letter-writing. And let me hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,
Charles Denby

Denby asks Felix Martin to write regularly for News & Letters

April 1972

'Racism is the bosses' whip'

Los Angeles, Calif.—I believe there are two classes of people. One is the privileged or ruling class, the other is the working class. My greatest disagreement among the working class, made up of Black, Brown, Yellow and White is the meaning of the word Racism.

I am not one to judge what is right or what is wrong. I believe there must be a higher power to make that judgment. I am not talking about what the preachers preach about on Sunday, just before the hat is passed. I am talking about the creation of all things by Nature.

What is racism?

I believe racism is the power of the privileged to keep the workers in place at the bottom, or the foundation. Racism is when a White worker blames the Black worker for his misery, and this keeps going around from White to Black to Yellow and then back to White—on and on. This is the history of working people, killing each other in wars or otherwise. The history of the privileged has seen them sitting on top of the workers' backs all the way.

Look how the world has been divided up by the ruling class. Then take any nation and see how the rulers are on top. Next come the top bootlickers, then the bootlickers of the bootlickers, and at the bottom of it all are the workers. Between the workers and the privileged are always the blood-suckers, called "bosses."

I believe Marx put it something like this: "Working people of the world, organize. Throw off this heavy load. You have only your chains to lose." Truer words were never spoken.

The enemy's whip

Our enemy is not racism. That is only the whip which the privileged use to keep us in our place -- at the bottom.

I read the book *Indignant Heart* by Matthew Ward (early pen name of Charles Denby, Ed.). He was raised in Eastern Tennessee. I was raised in Eastern Kentucky. His dad worked in the cotton field for the other fellow. My dad worked in the coal fields for the other fellow. We both were schooled with short days and short terms, controlled by the farming season.

It seems that the same type of a bootlicker was kicking us both around. But it was worse for Matthew Ward. Because he was Black and had the know-nothings to deal with too.

—Felix Martin

October 1972

Nixon 'Work Ethic': No Jobs, Divide and Rule

President Nixon's Labor Day message was an attack on the working man and an attempt to divide us up. First he talked about the "work ethic" vs. the "welfare ethic." Mr. Nixon tried to make it appear that the reason there are so many people on relief is because they are too lazy to work. He never mentioned the real criminals, the corporations, that are doing away with jobs so that people can't work because there is no job to work at.

The people on welfare are just on the other end of the working class. They are the surplus that the employers use. Our government together with the employers make sure that it is the workers who have to support this surplus which in turn is used to keep workers' wages down.

Code words

Nixon also talked about quotas in employment, and busing. In particular there was a report that he was ready to scrap his own plan, the Philadelphia Plan, which is supposed to insure jobs for minorities in the construction industry.

The former Assistant Secretary of Labor, Arthur Fletcher, a Black man and a Republican, understood what Nixon was doing: "Busing is a code word which means whites don't want to have anything to do with Black folks. Opposition to low-cost housing in the suburbs is a code word for the containment of Blacks. And the new code word is quotas, and it means whites don't want to see any systematic way to deal with minorities."

The number one plan Nixon has is to get elected this fall. The way he is trying to do that is to get a chunk of the labor vote. In dropping the quota plan he is making a strong appeal to the hard hat worker.

Mr. Nixon states that workers' values are threatened and they have to understand the challenge. Yes, Mr. Nixon, we in labor know our values are threatened. We know who froze our wages and let the corporations have freedom to raise prices at their will. We know who is taking back from the workers increases in wages it took years to reach.

Mr. Nixon's attempts to divide up the working class aren't just an election tactic. The "work ethic" means he wants us to produce more for the corporations after the election too. To help this along he is going to set up a National Commission for Industrial Peace which will help decide contracts and deal with strikes. He hasn't defined it yet, but when he does, this board may make the wage price board look like only a small tool.

Some white workers are going along with this running against everything Black Americans stand for. Some whites are so sick with racism they cannot think. Don't they see that the more minorities work and support themselves, the less taxes that workers will have to pay to support the ones that don't have jobs? The know-nothing redneck worker who goes along with Nixon's brainwashing is so sick with fear of the Black man that he can't think right.

One class

The working people in this country are made up of all colors and kinds of people. We belong to one class, the working class. When one part of this class is held back the whole class is held back. We end up standing in one spot like a car spinning its wheels. When one part of the class is discriminated against, the whole class suffers. Wake up, white red necks! Your racist ideas are hurting all workers. This includes you.

Mr. President, I believe most white American workers know that Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, Puerto Ricans, students and women --we all belong in this together. We know this one body has to move forward together or not at all. We know what you do to one section of this body affects the whole body. When you attack Black American workers you are attacking all working people. People like you think that people who work are stupid. Mr. Nixon, we are not as stupid as you take us to be. We will not be fooled.

December 1973

GM South Gate—Noise, Air, Foreman Pollution

Los Angeles, Cal.—The noise pollution in the plant begins when the whistle blows. All hell breaks loose. The line starts moving, the door bangers begin knocking the doors in, the welding starts the sparks flying, the metal finishers are banging on the side knocking dings out with their hammers, and soon the whole body shop is a roar.



Aerial photo of the plant circa 1940s

It is all combined, and for the full four hours before lunch it keeps on in your head. It can drive you nuts. By the time you get used to it, if you ever get used to it, it has destroyed your hearing. I think that is where nature comes in to save you from either going crazy or dying.

Air pollution comes from grinding, from the smoke of welding and from soldering operations. The solder plating, repair soldering and grinding of solder outside the grind booth all add up. During the day when the sun shines through you can look down through the plant and really see all the filth in the air. Within 24 hours of clean up, there is a thick layer that settles out.

All this hard work you are doing through line speed-up and the physical effort of the job means that you are breathing more than you would if you were just standing. You can imagine how much of this stuff is going down a person's lungs.

Then there is foreman pollution. You can call him a racist, an SOB anything you can call him will cover him. This is a kind of man that each section has, or aims at having. The training comes down from the superintendent to the general foreman to the foreman. That is how all these people have moved up. These are the only kind of people that can hold that type of job.

Color doesn't matter. We used to think that it would be a good deal when they would have to hire Black foremen. They might be more human. But quick as they get a Black foreman in, they dehumanize him and he becomes a man with Black skin but with what some of the Black workers call a white soul.

You are working on a speeded-up line and you are trying to get your job done, because if you don't, this foreman will come down on you. Here you are breathing in this stuff, you are choking to death, and the foreman comes down on you. This makes you mad and tears you up inside and makes you breathe more.

You get a reprimand, you call your committeeman, and you are shook up for the rest of the shift. If you are really sick, and everybody gets sick in the plant, you miss a day to kind of keep from dying or going crazy. But if don't go to a doctor to get a slip, they won't take your word, even though you always have to take their word. This is part of foreman or management pollution. Coupled with the other pollution, it really makes the working conditions inhuman.

June 1974

'A few notes which I spoke to the students':

Unite mental, manual labor

I was recently invited to speak on a college campus about workers. I look forward to speaking there as the students are always interested. I remember in 1970 when I first went to the campus. We were on strike in auto and had closed the plant down. The students were surprised that the workers were strong enough to close down a corporation as powerful as GM.

The thing that struck me that first time on campus was the working conditions—they were like working conditions should be. There was no smoke, grime, noise, or the foreman standing over you. But since then I have realized that alienation is really there also. It is in having to take the classes they give you and not necessarily the ones you want. It is in not having anything to say about what is being taught. And it is in being trapped in this system just like workers are trapped. I have tried to work out this relationship between the alienation of students and that of workers. Here are a few notes which I spoke to the students about:

"What it is really like"

People ask me to talk about the shop and tell them what it is really like. I will do that, though sometimes I get emotional about it. However each of you will find out soon enough. The most important thing is that none of us workers or students should let this society control us . . .

When I talk about wage slaves I am talking about the most horrible divisions of the capitalist system—the split of mental and manual labor. When I am talking to students I am talking to those who are becoming the mental labor and who the system is training to look down on us workers. The workers are the dropouts of this society. They say the only reason there has to be wage slavery is because the dropouts don't know anything. Just because a worker can't say the

words he could have been taught had he gone to an institution, doesn't mean he can't think. He had to do a lot of things just to live . . .

How many can think?

I spoke to your professor and he told me about the different divisions of study on this campus, like into scientific areas. But all those science minds end up being there for one thing—controlling and extracting from the dropouts, the men not trained for using big words. Almost everyone can be trained, but how many at the university can think . . .?

I see a close relationship between the mental labor here and the physical labor in the plant. The two are being separated from each other.

When I am at GM I see this army of supervisors, which I call mental labor, over me. All of you at college can be part of this division into mental labor, or you can work to end it. We all aren't going to be anything until we change this society.

July 1974

'The actuality of the subject and the non-actuality of the world'

Thoughts on a UAW Convention

As a blue-collar worker observing the delegates to the UAW's 24th Convention, I noticed that in donning their suits and carrying their briefcases, many had been transformed from blue-collar workers to stereotypes of the top officials of the International Union.

I spoke to many of the arriving delegates who had stopped to watch the picketing being done by union members they were supposedly there to represent. There were only 3,000 delegates, so 50 to 100 young workers, Black, white and Chicano, carrying picket signs against the International made a big impression.

Control from top

First-timers found out that the so-called democratic union is totally controlled from the top-down. A few top officials decide everything and the delegates sent to represent the membership decide nothing.

As one delegate put it: "Try to get your local's resolution on the floor, try to oppose a resolution, try to organize a floor debate, try to run for office or to vote the damn rascals out. The Convention rules are against you, the structure of the convention is against you, and the power, the money and the muscle of the top officials and the International and Regional directors are against you. When I go back to the membership that sent me, I will report to them like it is."

At every convention there are different caucuses, with different programs, but I didn't see any of them grounded in freedom. To change the convention from two to three years, is another way for our leaders to get further away from hearing the workers' grievances. It is very plain now that the International has complete say over the accepting or rejecting of our contract.

Actual and non-actual

That old philosopher Hegel knew what he was talking about when he wrote about the "actuality of the subject" (those who are fighting for freedom) and the "non-actuality of the world." The assembly line workers know their problems are the real ones, but the convention bore no relationship to this reality at all.

The actuality that he is an assembly line worker and the complete transformation into the opposite is the non-actuality of the convention. It will always be this way unless changes are brought about by the membership. Only the working people can abolish all of these phony institutions which are ruling us and these parasites which are living off our labor. We have the muscle and the reason for change. These top officials of our International Union need to be replaced with a philosophy—a philosophy grounded in freedom. The UAW doesn't have it.

The convention came alive when Cesar Chavez spoke, but all the UAW gave him was a dead check, not the live manpower to walk the picket line against grapes, lettuce, and Gallo wine. A two-hour picket line would have shown a real human effort—that they could not spare.

The one highlight was honoring Genora Johnson, 38 years later, for the heroic action she took in the sit-down strikes in 1936-37. This is one of the examples to show how women have struggled to help build this union. What Genora Johnson did to help build this union wasn't a check, but a human picket line. Freedom can not be bought with a check. It takes human beings with a philosophy grounded in freedom to free mankind.

December 1974

*Too tired to sleep...We have to take back our
heads*

We have to take back our heads. We have to be able to use our minds as well as our hands. We don't have our minds to decide how we should work to produce what people need. It is management that makes all of the decisions, and those decisions are always to increase production and profits over the previous year.

GM has taken our heads in its drive for more and more production and profits, and they have used automation to replace thousands of workers. Ten years ago we assembled 34 to 36 jobs per hour. Now we assemble 50 to 55 jobs per hour with a thousand less workers.

Too tired to sleep

Those that are left are forced to become more and more a part of the machine. We don't even feel the tiredness and pain of being overworked. By the time we get home, we are too tired and our body aches so we can't go to sleep. If we do get to sleep, it is only a few hours until it is time to go back to work. Our life becomes eat, work and sleep.

How can we keep on existing under these conditions? With prices going up and up, will workers be able to eat? What other than war and depression has the capitalist system given workers?

The only times in all history when real progress has occurred is when working people moved to take back their heads. This happened during the French Revolution of 1789 when the workers organized in Paris. But then capitalism took our heads after we got rid of feudalism. During the Russian Revolution, workers tried to build socialism, but state capitalism took their heads, too.

In the U.S., during the sit-down strikes of 1936–37, workers took GM and helped build the CIO. The first contract with GM was signed on March 12, 1937. There were 170 sit-downs in GM's plants between March and June, 1937. Neither John L. Lewis nor the radical leaders could speak for or control the workers. The workers acted on their own to settle grievances that arose on the line.

Grievances disappear

The labor bureaucrats within the CIO took our heads after we took GM. The union agreed to deal with management through plant committees, and they became the agency that substituted itself for the workers' actions. Now workers write their grievances with their committeemen, argue about them with the foremen, then the first thing they know, in many instances the grievance disappears.

Revolutionary philosophy is based on the activity of working people taking back their heads. That is what Marxism is all about—each person being a whole person, with a mind to think, telling their two hands what to do. Marxism is not established Communism in Russia or China. The workers there have to take back their own heads, just as we must do in the U.S. We have to begin taking back our heads here at GM.

October 1975

*Anti-busing racism aims to divide
workers on shop floor*

I was visiting Louisville, Ky. during the beginning of the school term when the busing demonstrations were taking place. I felt sad when I saw what many members of the white working class were doing. The Ford Motor Co. assembly and truck plants were closed down because many workers went to the demonstrations against busing for integrated schools.

How have so many workers been poisoned so that their class militancy can be used in such a way? One answer I found in a church I visited in Jeffersonville, just outside of Louisville. The first thing I noticed was that the church was filled to "standing room only" with white working class families. The sermon was about the "rights" that the government has supposedly taken from the people—prayers in school, neighborhood schools. In listening and watching the people, you could almost see the white sheets over their heads. It was almost like being at a KKK meeting.

A second answer is Pres. Ford's Administration and local governments which are creating this turmoil to turn white, Black, poor and working people of all races into political enemies. Ford with his anti-busing statements and the school board in Boston are the demagogues that keep exploiting the situation.

Why is it so hard to see that racism is the tool of capitalist society? One white worker in Louisville told me that the busing of Black and white children in the working people's communities is only another way to keep the working people fighting each other.

But it isn't the busing that divides the Blacks and whites. It is how the government, the capitalists, work to divide Black and white workers through racism. They are using busing as the issue to do it.

October 1975

Why is the government spending all this effort to divide the working class? It goes back to the point of production. As long as they can keep white and Black apart, workers will not unite against what is happening in production.

Look at the power of the working class together in West Virginia, going out on wildcat strike for the right to strike. But how can that power ever express itself in Louisville when the white working class is blinded by racism? Don't they see what that will mean for both white and Black on the production line?

December 1975

Machines and 'dead people' merging together
'We're all in different jails'

We're getting ready to put another car on the assembly line. There are still lots of people laid off and I can't understand why they haven't been called back because those of us still working are working overtime.

Before the last layoff lots of workers were taking off on Friday because of the speed-up and overtime. They were just unable to hack it. Now people are working so hard they not only miss Friday, but sometimes can't even make it back on Monday.

But still the company isn't calling workers back. At the work center inside the plant where the local union bureaucrats hang out in air-conditioned offices, laid off workers keep calling, wanting to know when they will be called back. But no answer is given.

On the inside of the plant we are dying from being worked to death and on the outside the brothers are dying trying to make ends meet when they should be inside with us, all sharing the work load. We all seem to be in just different types of jails and I see it not getting better, only worse.

I saw some additional machines, all this automation, piled up near me, getting ready to be used. I visualized these machines and dead people merging together. No, not dead people, really people not being born because of these machines. As each new machine comes in to replace workers, less workers are needed. People feel they should have fewer children now because they can't figure out where the jobs will be to feed their future generations.

What they can't see is that automation (machines replacing people) has caused this problem and that for each new machine less and less people are needed.

December 1975

I think we, especially women, should be able to decide how many children to have. But I cannot see this capitalist system deciding for me or anyone else how many children to have by saying: We don't want you to reproduce yourselves anymore because we don't need you. Our machines and technology will be turning out the work force.

Even the big corporations can't see that by replacing workers with machines, sooner or later with less and less people working, there is going to be no one to buy their products. The machines don't need to consume what they produce. Only humans have uses for it. It's only a matter of time until the machines replace us all, unless we change this system.

March 1976

What is human power?

A group of workers were sitting around while the line was shut down at break time and one worker was looking at a copy of *News & Letters*. He asked, "What does the masthead slogan 'Human Power is its own end' mean?"

One worker said it meant that everything we produce is bringing us closer to the end of time. Another said everything that is produced for defense will be used in the next war and that will be the end of all human beings.

Those six words kept coming back to me and I started thinking about them. Either of those two workers could be right about what the phrase means if this society isn't changed. Because now, our human power is really being used to oppress us. We build machines which end up running us. And our human power builds weapons of war which could end up destroying all of us.

But to me those six words should mean the opposite of that. They come from Karl Marx. What I believe he meant is that the creative power of human beings striving to be free is the greatest power on earth.

It is not science, or industry, or machines, or bombs which should be the goal of society. Not material things, possessions, commodities that are the measure of society, but instead the power of human beings to create, to be whole, to have both mental and muscle power, to both think and act. In other words, to be total.

The capitalist sees working people as commodities when they buy us for a day's work. The system turns us into a pair of shoes, a pair of pants, a car, or something to eat. All of this is produced by workers' labor and when finished belongs to the capitalist who hasn't done anything.

March 1976

The worker who is still working sees his payday like a shower of rain on a very hot day. But for the worker, this rain is really his own sweat. In fact all of society is built by the sweat of the worker. That is why if this system is ever to be done away with, it will have to be the workers who do it.

Many of the groups on the left have the same ideas as the capitalist to do the thinking for the workers, while the workers do the work. Those kinds of ideas don't change anything. To change this system working people have to be the ones to do away with it, with their minds and muscle, and replace it with a system where "Human Power is its Own End."

April 1976

Kentucky coal disasters throw light on deadly working conditions everywhere

Twenty-six men were murdered at the Scotia Coal Co. No. 1 Black Mountain Mine near Oven Fork, Kentucky in two methane gas explosions. Murdered? Yes, that is what I write and feel. The night before the first explosion the company had been cited for not having the required amount of air in the area where the blast occurred. Scotia had previously been cited for methane levels of five to fifteen percent, where a level of more than five percent is considered dangerous. The company "corrected" the problem and led 15 miners to their death the next day and 11 others, including three federal inspectors, two days later.

We are now witness to a barrage of statements by spokesmen from the Kentucky Bureau of Mines and Minerals, from the U.S. Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration, from the Undersecretary of the Interior, from Kentucky Congressmen. They are asking how it happened, are stating theories, are preparing investigations. But there are those who do know, who have witnessed this before, who have experienced the near misses, the mangled hands and crushed legs, the black lung and silicosis -- the working miners. To them the reality of unsafe working conditions is as much a deadly weapon as any shotgun. It is a shotgun in the hands of management.

Death rate three times higher

It is a continuous thing. Each day, week, month, workers are giving their lives. Deaths in Kentucky coal mines doubled in 1975 over 1974. The causes? A gas explosion, the face of a tunnel collapsing, a roof giving way. Yes, but more deeply it comes from the drive for more and more production with less and less caution for working peoples' lives. The miners, whose death rate is the highest in the nation, three times the average for all other industries, know this well. It was for the right

to be able to close an unsafe mine that they went on wildcat strike against company and union last year.

It is not only in the mines and it is not only in the United States where we are dying. I recently read about the nearly 3,000 work-accident deaths in France in 1975. In the shop we know this disregard for human life does not stop at national borders.

In auto where I work we also face these questions of health and safety found in the mines. Speed-up through automation means fewer workers in my plant. But it also creates a situation where the men left often have a number of different jobs to perform at each workstation, using a number of different tools. Each worker has to complete his assignment in a very short period and with all of these different jobs to do, workers don't have time to be careful.

Within production we are becoming more and more a part of the machinery we work with, and are treated as machinery. The result is the hundreds of thousands who become injured on the job each year.

The price of an arm

When an accident does occur, the state industrial welfare board has a book with a price list which pays you so much for a lost hand, or arm, or broken back, or loss of hearing. It is in keeping with looking at a worker as a machine. If the part is beyond repair, you are paid so much for the loss. If life is lost, your insurance pays double.

The workplace, whether in the mines, in auto, or in many other places where we labor, is unhealthy. New reports keep coming out relating different cancers to where people have worked. I believe that there is a link between the callous disregard of the environment in which women and men labor, spend a third and more of their day, and the pollution of everything around us.

A few years ago a report showed that 40 percent of New York-New Jersey asbestos workers died of asbestos-related diseases including cancer. A new study has just showed the presence of asbestos fibers in approximately half of the baby and body powders tested.

In our plant the body shop workers are concerned with breathing the dust raised from grinding the solder. We have had an uphill fight with GM to do anything about it. At the same time GM is leading the fight with the rest of the auto companies to weaken the auto pollution standards for cars.

I read an article by a rubber worker (March, N&L) which stated that rubber workers have a shorter life span than the average industrial worker because they use so many chemicals. When I drive to work everyday, I am constantly breathing the smelly output of various industrial plants along the way.

Recent studies have indicated that a high percentage of cancer may be caused by the ever increasing amount of chemicals we are putting into our environment. Can this disregard of our environment as a whole be unrelated to the fact that occupational injuries and illnesses have been increasing?

Three engineers involved with nuclear power plants at General Electric resigned saying such plants are unsafe, and there is real danger of a devastating nuclear accident. G.E. hotly denied it. But I thought of a story a young G.E. worker told me of a terrible accident in which a worker was badly burned at his plant because G.E. management had allowed barrels recently emptied of a vaporous flammable liquid to be used as supports in a welding area.

The owners of mines, mills and factories often try to get workers not to fight for health and safety by threatening to close the workplace. There was a recent report of a steel mill in Ohio which has been found polluting. Naturally, when the plant is threatened with being closed the workers don't want to lose their jobs, and talk against anti-pollution measures.

The coal miners in Kentucky feel that certain mines should be closed as death traps but they also ask: where are we going to work? The fact that people will risk their lives to make a living shows how desperate the situation is. At my plant I have had foremen tell me to stop writing grievances on health and safety as GM will close the plant if we keep that up.

Plan to occupy GM plant

This past month we were faced with a long lay-off and possible closing of the plant. Workers at our union meeting voted to elect a committee to take over our plant if GM decides to close it. This was done in opposition to the union bureaucrats, whom none of the rank-and-file trust. Workers are saying that to get something done we have to be the ones to do it.

Since the resolution on possible plant occupation passed, there has been a lot of discussion from workers on how to do it and many want to be on the committee which plans for the occupation. There was so much discussion that the company came out and posted its propaganda on the bulletin board.

They first stated that "build out" for this model year would be based on the buying public and gave a tentative start-up date for the 1977 model. Then a second statement "leaked out" saying they would take work from Canada and give it to us and keep us working until June. But how will that help Canadian workers? Is GM greasing the squeaky wheel? Everyone knows that all these statements mean less than the paper they are written on. And why are the union bureaucrats working so closely with management on all this?

Rank-and-file Teamsters

While what is happening right now at our plant occupies a lot of discussion, it is not the only thing we are concerned with. There are many issues nationally and internationally that we talk about. And we are always trying to see what is happening in other industries. Thus some of us have been watching the recent upsurge in the Teamsters Union, with Teamsters for a Decent Contract. It is one sign that working people are determined to take matters into their own hands on health and safety and all other conditions of their labor.

Several workers from auto, including myself, participated in one of the Teamsters for a Decent Contract rallies in Los Angeles. It was part of a 17-city nationwide demonstration of Teamsters against the Fitzsimmons leadership and for rank-and-file control. Their demands include both wages and working conditions, especially the end of

forced overtime and Wednesday through Sunday work week. Their newspaper Convoy has documented such things as the heart attacks drivers have suffered when forced to be on a 70-hours-in-eight-days work schedule.

The fact that such a rank-and-file movement can arise within the Teamsters, where opposition has often been crushed by the fist and the gun, is significant. It is the first time in many years that there has been such a widespread rank-and-file group within the Teamsters. Whether or not they can force Fitzsimmons to take a militant stand in negotiations with the trucking industry, the sign has been given of the workers' opposition to both the company and the union bureaucrats, and for something entirely new.

Each day seems to bring new crises which we have to deal with. Whether we are in coal, steel, auto or Teamsters, we are trying to take matters into our own hands. I don't see any solution in terms of fighting solely to keep one plant open, or in a way which makes workers have to accept dangerous, deadly conditions in order to make a living. But I do see the unity of working people in many plants, in many industries, being the type of force which can change what is going on; which can provide ideas coming from the rank-and-file themselves for taking control of their life and labor.

December 1976

*Post-election realities:
Crises remain unanswered*

The reality of 5,000 unemployed women and men, Black and white, waiting hours for a job application at the Cadillac plant in Detroit the day before the presidential election, tells more about Carter's win and why, at the same time, it will no more fundamentally change conditions than the reams of economic statistical data coming out. Ford's anti-labor economic policies, which had helped to perpetuate unemployment at the highest level since the Depression, compelled a substantial majority of union members to cast their vote for the ex-Governor of a right-to-work state.

Hand-in-hand with Ford's anti-labor stance was the administration's attempt to turn back the clock in the area of civil rights. In his opposition to the creation of public works jobs and to the building of low income housing, in his attempt to cut back social services such as food stamps and most especially in his attempt to return to segregated education, Ford demonstrated the racism which, together with his anti-labor actions, has been the real continuity between his administration and that of Nixon. Black voters in the South as well as the North voted in overwhelming majorities against the racism of Ford, and gave Carter his victory.

Racism is enemy of workers

Unfortunately the racism is not confined to the administration of a Ford or a Nixon, but is in the very fabric of American society. That Ford, despite the economic jungle he has kept the country within, despite his links with the total corruption of the Nixon administration, could have almost won the election, and did in fact take a majority of the white vote, shows how deep runs this Achilles heel of racism, which includes a segment of the white working class.

In the auto plant where I work, I spoke with white and Black workers about this election. While most white workers voted against Ford, I have run into a number who voted for him. Sometimes they used the excuse that they voted for Ford because they were against the union bureaucrats who were selling us out in the latest auto contract negotiations, and who were at the same time pushing Carter.

I want to know who are these workers trying to kid? These white workers are not being truthful to themselves. Do they think that having Ford in would have meant anything for working people?

Workers who would use this type of reasoning better look at what they are doing, because they are selling their souls. To have voted for Ford despite everything he has said and done against the working man could have meant only one thing—racism. It was a racist vote no matter which way you cut it.

The Black workers were quite clear on Ford. They saw the link between his racism and his economic policies and knew exactly what they were throwing out of office. And they recognized the division between themselves and white workers. One Black worker commented, "How can any white worker vote for Ford after Nixon. It has to be racism."

In California, the division between race and class was revealed in the vote for Ford, for Hayakawa to be Senator, and most importantly against Proposition 14, the initiative put on the ballot by the United Farm Workers.

It went down to defeat 3 to 2, which meant that many, many working people voted against a labor initiative. The leaders of agribusiness, which included very large companies such as Southern Pacific Railroad, International Telephone and Telegraph and a number of oil companies, chose to take the ground of access to private property—the fact that union organizers would be given access rights in order to talk to farmworkers before and after work and during the lunch hour.

Right to organize, real issue

There is in fact no other way to really organize a farm which is so spread out. Those who fought for the initiative, especially Chavez and the United Farmworkers Union, accepted these grounds. The fight became one over whether private property was really being invaded. As a result, when workers, especially white workers, went into the voting booth, they could again fool themselves that they were voting on private property, rather than voting on the rights of lower paid workers, who are in the vast majority Brown and Black, to organize themselves.

When my industry, auto, was organized in the 1930s, and there were the sitdown strikes, no workers thought that the auto companies had a private property right over the machines and the factory itself that was above the right of working people to form a union. The workers occupied the factory to show what they thought of that private property! Have the working people today forgotten that lesson?

When we saw the governor and other officials all for Proposition 14, and all the "Yes on 14", bumper stickers, we fooled ourselves that the initiative would win, even though it was being fought on the growers' ground. But we were wrong. If the ground chosen had been the correct one, that of the right of low-paid, unorganized workers in this country, a high percentage of whom are minorities, to organize themselves, then the working people would have had to make a choice on the real issue of class and race. Again it was the Black workers who recognized this best. One said to me, "Look what private property has done to the white man's mind."

The defeat of Proposition 14 no doubt contributed to the election of the extreme right-winger Hayakawa. But it was a shock nonetheless. Not only has he been against youth and minorities with his attacks on the student body at San Francisco State University, whose president he was in the late 1960s, but his proposal for a substantial lowering of wages for youth is viciously anti-labor. And his remarks about how the internment camps for the Japanese during the Second World War helped them to assimilate, were racist to the core.

Carter, no answer

Now that Carter is elected, the problem of unemployment and the economy will not disappear. They are part of our system whether headed by a Ford or now by a Carter.

Carter promised to lower the rate of unemployment, but where is he going to find the jobs? Look at General Motors, where we have just gotten another contract pushed on us. Since the 1973 contract, GM has automated some 60,000 jobs away, out of a total of 450,000. This is happening time and time again so that the army of unemployed has become a permanent feature of this society.

Meanwhile those of us who do have a job, work under conditions out of our control. At my plant we have been working 10 and 11 hours a day since coming back to work on the new model. We don't have any control over when we go home, or under what conditions of speed-up, or health and safety we will be working.

Neither Carter nor the Democrats have anything to say about that. Far from being concerned about our working conditions, they are in fact only concerned with productivity, increasing the U.S.'s gross national product. That in turn comes from more automation, more speed-up, more sweat from us as workers. Neither the employed nor the unemployed will find any fundamental changes in going from Ford to Carter.

More of the same

In foreign affairs, everything Carter has said so far has indicated his willingness to continue the general line that Nixon and Ford have taken. His remarks on the Panama Canal were as offensive to the Latin American people and their right for self-determination as Ford's policy. That attitude will no doubt be present globally.

The question of where we are going in the future does not rest in the hands of a Carter. It rests in our own hands. Leaps to freedom have come when working people—women and men, Black and white, organized and unorganized—have united, as in the birth of the CIO. When divided we will only have the very narrow choice of the ballot box, always the lesser of the evils.

Meanwhile the real issues of how we labor and live continue to go unanswered. Or more precisely, are answered by those who make us labor and not by those of us who labor. Only when we decide what happens at the point of production through our own thought will any real changes occur.

January-February 1978

Ideas for workers to study in times of crisis

Review: Marx's Capital and Today's Global Crisis

I have just had a chance to read a new News and Letters pamphlet, *Marx's Capital and Today's Global Crisis*, which, in the crisis we are now facing, every worker should be reading.

This pamphlet shows what other workers have done in times of crisis the Civil War in the U.S., the Paris Commune, the fight for the eight-hour day. In each case it was working people who moved to solve the questions. Today we are again in crisis, and no one is going to be able to solve this except working people.

The greatest thing that workers today can learn is that workers everywhere in the United States, in Japan, in Germany are one class, and with the multinationals, we are working for the same companies, no matter what part of the world we work in.

The pamphlet points out how workers became international, had an international unity with the First Workingmen's International and the fight in Europe and in America for the eight-hour day. That was how they fought those who were oppressing them.

The chapter on the Civil War in the U.S. explains how Marx understood that Lincoln was not the real hero of the Civil War, that he wanted a white man's constitutional war, and that the Blacks demanding freedom became the cutting edge both of the Civil War and of the fight of white labor for an eight-hour day.

Today we are faced with a huge unemployed army. Marx had long ago spoken of the unemployed army as being the gravediggers of this society. But what was shocking to read in this pamphlet is that there are some revolutionaries who have so misunderstood Marx that they have analyzed the unemployed army as the necessary prop to keep capitalism going!

I was trying to figure out why someone who wants a new society, like Ernest Mandel, would say such a thing. I don't believe he really understands labor at the point of production to the point where we will rebel. Mandel also talks about a new society as a society of "associated producers."

But today we are already "associated producers" in a factory. I am in association with hundreds of fellow workers, an *exploitative* association. The key is that we are not *freely* associated producers. That was Marx's phrase. The question of a new society turns on the question of associated labor vs. freely associated labor.

I have two sons, 19 and 20, who can't find jobs. When I look at them I think about all the young people in this society who need jobs, and whose energy when they can't find any work, is used to break laws and end up in jail. This system has 10 million unemployed.

I want very much for many many working people to read this pamphlet, and not only to read but discuss it with others—to add in their own ideas.

I hope you will look in this issue of *News & Letters* and write to the *News & Letters* local near where you live and plan to attend their discussions. This is one way we can begin to solve the crisis of our society.

November 1978

Medicine for sake of production, not health

A worker was telling me how he called doctor after expensive doctor to see if someone would try to find the cause of his wife's dizzy spells before finally he was able to get her in a hospital for some tests. It made me think that there isn't really a health care system in this country. We have a disease care system because that is what makes great profits.

And this is crucial for working people, because most occupational diseases are not curable, but they could be prevented. When you read about industrial disasters or watch factory explosions on TV, it's easy to pretend that they are isolated incidents. The next time you get into your car, think about the workers who made your car and the disease and injuries they are suffering everyday, and not only in industrial disasters.

Think about the coke-oven workers in steel mills who die horribly from cancer and emphysema; foundry workers get silicosis casting steel into engine blocks and other parts; auto assembly workers who lose their hearing, die from heart attacks, suffer from lead poisoning and lose lives and limbs putting cars together.

Danger is built into big business operations in this country. Safety isn't first, or second, third, or even fourth. It is last in big business. In general, the philosophy is to operate as cheaply as possible and put the burden on the workers to protect themselves.

There are some immediate steps that could improve our chances of living to collect our pensions. One would be a "right to know" law requiring companies to tell workers what chemicals they're exposed to and the dangers from them. But it is not just a question of laws, though it would certainly help to pass a law that would jail all those corporate managers found guilty and responsible for workers' deaths and injuries.

November 1978

But if industry is ever to be made really safe, it will have to be run by the workers themselves. Health and safety are not alone technical problems, they're economic and political.

Why do employers fight even the mild reform of the Occupational Safety and Health agency (OSHA) so fiercely? It's not the fines or the cost it would take to improve these conditions. It's the control of absolute power they fear most giving up—the power to set the standards of production and thus the health and safety conditions of the plant or mine.

Because that power is not in the hands of workers, more than 115,000 will die this year from job related causes. Until workers control their working conditions and health care in this country, workers and their families will continue to be treated by "disease care" and continue to suffer and die.

January-February 1979

Review of Indignant Heart A Black Worker's Journal
Worker's life, in the process of becoming

In the mountains where I grew up, those who couldn't get a job in the mines, and who needed something to eat sharecropped. They were the really poor, and used the corn raised to buy a few other things and for moonshine. The cropping in our area meant you supplied your labor while the man furnished the land, the tools and the seed. Where I was raised it was only white. There weren't any Blacks.

How much rougher it is when your skin is Black. Charles Denby, my friend and editor of *News & Letters*, has just had his *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* published and one chapter deals with sharecropping. In the deep South, where sharecropping was not white and white, but Black and white, the plantation owner gave only the land. The tools and seed and everything else was for the cropper to supply, and you always wound up in a hole to the plantation owner. Certainly the struggle of Appalachian white and Southern Black is similar, but that struggle is deeper and rougher if you are Black.

All through the first part of *Indignant Heart* I felt this kinship with Denby's life, that part of my life resembled his, and at the same time the depth of experience and struggle which was profoundly Black. For the Black, a run-in with the law was devastating whether guilty or not. Where I was raised we didn't pay attention to the law. We created our own.

When you come to the North, on the surface-for Blacks-it looks free. You can sit where you want. But then Denby explains how he often felt more at home entering through the back door in the South where he knew where they stood, than the front door in the North where there was such hypocrisy. I remember my own mountain accent in the North and how people would think of us as stupid mountain people. In Indiana where I first worked after coming North, my revolt against the conditions of work was immediately answered with the call of being just a dumb hillbilly striking out.

Denby in the North found that his slavery was to the boss and machine in place of the plantation owner. In speaking of Auto in the first part of the book he is profound. Twenty-five and more years ago (the first part of the book was written in the early fifties) he was seeing so much on the question of Black and white, of men and women, and of conditions of labor--all in the plant--that he anticipates so many of the struggles of workers in the 60s and 70s, like the Black caucuses, and women in the plant, and most especially the fight of workers against the machines, speed-up and against the labor bureaucracy.

The second part of the book, which deals with the last twenty-five years of Denby's life is one in which you really see where you are going. It begins with Denby returning South, only it is a very different South. It is a South of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It is a South of a people on the move. And the North that Denby continues to write of, not alone as observer, but as participant, is now a very different North.

This movement of the Black struggle, of workers against capital, puts the stamp on the second part of the book. It allows a life in the process of becoming to have a certain direction, to find a way to go, and to, in turn, help give a certain direction to the freedom movement.

But it is not the movement alone which did this. The last twenty-five years of Denby's life has been as editor of this newspaper, *News & Letters*, a workers paper. That experience as writer and thinker together with the development of a body of freedom ideas--Marxist-Humanism--puts its stamp on Denby's self-development as a revolutionary. And it is here where my kinship with him is strongest. I have not had his years in association with News & Letters Committees. But in the time I have been with them, that self-development of Denby as an individual and as part of these body of freedom ideas, all of which is so forcefully presented in *Indignant Heart*, I have felt within myself. Thus my becoming has taken on a certain pathway toward something very, very different, new and human.

To some of my fellow workers, those who have struggled all their lives and are continuing to struggle, I want to take this book and say, Look, read this. Here you are. To those who are beginning to struggle I want to say Here is a book in which you will find some of yourself. Indeed, anyone who has anything human within them will be able to find something of themselves in this book.

March 1979

*A Voice from the Woods**

By Isaac

Letter To A Chinese Worker

I realized what was going to happen to you when I saw Deng Xiaoping, your Vice Premier on tour of the U.S., being escorted through the Ford auto plant in Georgia by Henry Ford II and by Leonard Woodcock, whom we American auto workers know from his days with the UAW.

Deng was interested in all the automated machinery which he saw in the factory. He saw that each worker on the assembly line in America produces something like 83 times more surplus value than each of you in China. And no doubt that is what he wishes for China.

Workers in China, I want to warn you about automation. Your leaders will tell you that you can't stand in the way of progress. Your union leaders will tell you that it will shorten your work day and you will have more leisure time to live. Don't believe it. This was told to us American workers. It is all a damn lie!

Automation was first introduced into the mines, in the form of a huge machine called the continuous miner. It reduced the number of miners that had jobs from 400,000 to 100,000. Yes, the amount of production increased many times over, but it didn't help those workers who did not have jobs and those that were left had to work even harder at the pace of this new machine. It put workers in poverty and created a hell for those who were left to work. And the cost of coal didn't go down for the consumer, it went up.

* Isaac Woods wrote a column for *The Assembler*, published by Local 216 of United Auto Workers called "A voice from the woods." Here we print one of his columns.

The Assembler, March 1979

Then in 1955 automation came into the auto industry. We had a strike against this automation, but we lost. Today automation is in all industries in the U.S., and what do we have? We have millions of working men and women unemployed. We have inflation for working people running in double digit figures. This inflation is capitalism's new weapon to cut worker's wages. It causes some workers to think they are making more money, but their day's wages buy less and less. Worker's standard of living falls. Young workers, even with a working wife, cannot qualify to buy a decent home.

This is what Deng Xiaoping is planning for you in your country. This is the reason the bureaucrats in your country get together with government bureaucrats in my country, together with businessmen like Henry Ford II.

The only thing that these leaders and rulers see is how much more surplus or unpaid labor value they can get out of each worker. Private capitalism as in the U.S., or state capitalism as in China or Russia is really the same no matter what one calls it.

The laboring class is the same class the world over, no matter whether workers are ruled by private or state capitalism. There are only two classes of people in the world-those who labor, the working class, and those who control labor, whether private owners, state bureaucrats and others including high labor officials who live off the labor of workers.

This system world wide cannot change until the workers see themselves as a class of producers and see that the bureaucrats live off them. Then the workers will be able to change this system so that production is not a system which takes life from workers, but that working people will find their labor as a creative act which adds to their life and doesn't serve to support this group of owners-controllers of production.

In this fight, you as Chinese workers and we as American workers have the same kind of people oppressing us, and the same desire to get to a different non-exploitative society where we all will share equally in production and in the fruits of production.

-Your friend, Isaac

December 1981

South Gate workers respond to mass layoffs

West Coast Editor's Note: I would like to devote my column this issue to the excerpts from the latest *Blue Sheet* written by myself and others in the GM South Gate Workers' Committee in response to the lay-off of the second shift at the GM South Gate assembly plant.

■ Felix Martin

The Blue Sheet

Just in time for the holiday season General Motors has announced Nov. 30 as the target date for closing down the second shift at South Gate. And so concerned is the company about what laid-off workers might do between now and then that it has laid off both shifts the week before Thanksgiving.

It has only been one month since the second shift started up, and now the word is that 1,800 workers are to be laid off. What GM is afraid to say, but what everyone knows, is that the plant is on the verge of closing completely. As one new hire who worked 27 years at Ford put it: "Today the line is very thin between a worker having a job and a worker being on relief."

For those of us without seniority, or who are new hires, GM has once again pushed us over into the lines of the unemployed.

Those laid off will certainly be the hardest hit, especially after so many had quit other jobs to come work at GM. But, what about those of us who will be left in this monster? . . . Getting rid of second shift now means the company will force the production of two shifts out of one shift.

Wrecking GM's plans

What the company, and the union leadership for that matter do not want workers in South Gate to hear is how GM workers in an Oklahoma plant refused to work when word came that they were to be laid off. Every worker stayed home and really fouled-up GM's plans, before the company had a chance to lay them off.

Today, workers across this country are feeling the cut-backs from the Reagan Administration and giant corporations like GM, which are governments unto themselves. In a rare moment of honesty, even Reagan's main mouthpiece on the economy, David Stockman, admitted that Reaganomics is just a "Trojan horse" carrying lower taxes for only the rich. Stockman also admitted that the Reagan Administration's "supply-side economics" is only a new name for the traditional Republican trickle-down theory of channeling profits and income to the wealthy. After the unthinkable sum of \$1.5 trillion for the military budget and \$1 trillion projected for the national debt, what can working people expect to "trickle down" but missiles and poverty!

Since the 1974-75 recession the American economy has been going through a fundamental re-structuring. Though oil prices and foreign imports are made the causes for the recession (which looks more like a depression) by government economists, the actual cause is found right at the point of production, in plants like GM South Gate.

Robots and no jobs

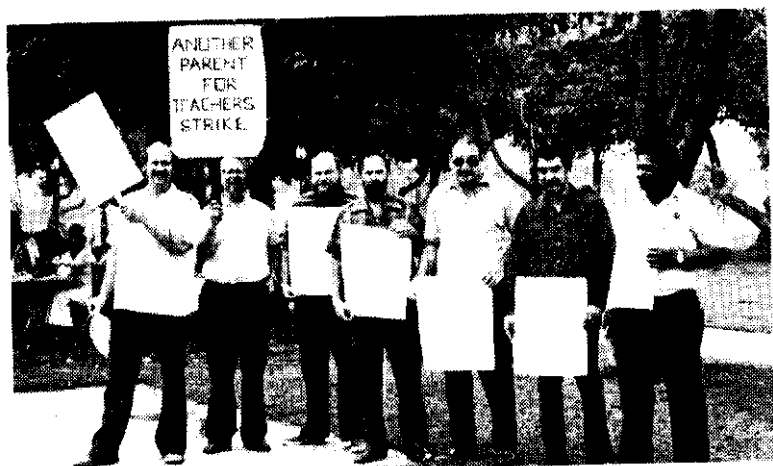
General Motors expects to use about 14,000 industrial robots in its factories by 1990. They see these machines as the salvation for the industry. Together with Reagan, corporations like GM are attempting to restructure the American economy by pushing down the wages and living standards of American workers, at the same time as they transfer the wealth into the hands of big corporations. In turn, GM and other industries will use the money to invest in new machinery, new automation and robots to boost their lagging production.

Reagan's militarization of the economy and GM's replacing of people with robots has given American rulers, in and out of government, the illusion that there will be another economic boom. The truth is that there will be no next boom for the American economy. We are living through a period of permanent recession (if not a depression), inflation and no economic growth. Reagan's answer is missiles, missiles, missiles. Working and poor people are asking, but what about jobs, what about the survival of humanity. For unless Reagan-Haig-Weinberger are stopped the next boom will be World War III, and the end of civilization as we have known it.

The "Polish Lesson" the Solidarity union is teaching its bosses and rulers is a signal to workers everywhere to take their lives back into their own hands.

Thus, the GM South Gate Workers' Committee, in issuing this Blue Sheet #2 for this year, wants to get together with other workers to see if that Solidarity spirit can be created here, before there are more lay-offs and plant closings and before Reagan gets a chance to blow us up.

Note from Felix Martin: The Blue Sheet scared the hell out of the union leadership. Sal Astorga, chairman of the shop committee, read the leaflet in the parking lot, then headed back in the plant saying that the announced meeting on plant closing and lay-offs that evening was only a steering committee meeting. Of course he was on his way to talk over the Blue Sheet with Bill Harden, plant manager. They closed the union hall for the meeting. Everyone was told that they couldn't use the hall, that the Blue Sheet was the cause.



Felix Martin and GM co-workers at a support rally

August-September, 1982

An open letter to Japanese auto workers

*Editor's Note: The Japanese quarterly **Town Meeting** published by workers in the company town of Toyota City, reprinted and translated five articles from the labor page of March, 1982 **News & Letters**. The way that Toyota workers responded to articles by U.S. workers on plant closings, union give-backs and unemployment has inspired this letter to deepen the exchange of ideas.*

Brothers and sisters of Toyota and all auto plants,

Every day we hear more and more reports of workers facing lay-offs, plant closings, and unemployment. In July the government here admitted that one out of every seven Americans is living below the poverty line -- over 30 million people. What we constantly hear from the politicians and union bureaucrats is that the reason for this crisis is competition from Japanese imports in auto, steel, computers and other industries.

As a laid-off GM worker I think it's about time the Japanese workers got a chance to hear the voice of the rank-and-file workers, who aren't buying this big lie about the recession being caused by Japanese workers getting rich off of imports to America. What we are suffering from here is a crisis in production, not Japanese imports. And the crisis we face today the capitalists will be bringing to you Japanese workers tomorrow.

The reason our plant closed was because the cars GM was making would not sell because of their high price. One reason they were so expensive was because all the new automation and unimation GM was investing in to build them. At the same time this unimation reduces the quality of the car produced.

But I challenge anyone to tell me that's the fault of the Japanese workers, It's the fault of the capitalists here, who in their hunger for profit invest more and more in dead labor, machines, and less and less

in living labor, the worker. Now my plant is closed because GM has built new ones that hardly need any workers.

The crisis in production will show the American and Japanese workers they have the same enemy-the capitalists who are working them to death and promising them nothing more than a future of unemployment.

Today more and more workers are not believing the lies that it is the Japanese worker who's to blame for this crisis. Recently the largest meat packing plant in the world went on strike in Nebraska, and when the company hired in scabs, hundreds of workers got involved and tried to stop those scabs from getting in. They know their jobs are not being taken away by you-they are being stolen by the capitalists who are trying to drive down the wages of all workers.

The same is true in heavy industry like auto. Here, instead of bringing in scabs, they bring in robots. They have the full support of the union bureaucracy in doing this. Workers knew a year-and-a-half ago after we came back to work at GM following a year's layoff that the plant wouldn't be open long, since they did not bring in the most up-to-date robots into the plant. Today cars are produced where they hardly need workers at all.

The only way this will be changed is when workers here uproot this system of production where what happens to the human being at the point of production is considered less important than how many cars the capitalists produce to make their profit. But we cannot make that kind of revolution alone. Japanese workers will feel the recession as deep as we, the more the capitalists reap their profits. They will use that wealth to invest in more machinery and automation in Japan.

The road to change for us is the same road to change as for you-a social revolution. I want you to know that there are workers in America waiting for the chance to join hands with you, as well as for you to join hands with us.

--Felix Martin, GM worker

November 1982

*Talking to Farmers in the Midwest:
No escaping capitalist crises*

After talking to many farmers in my recent trip across the Midwest, I can see that the American farmer is in as bad economic shape as the working class as a whole. The life of the farmer today is one of debt, bankruptcy, unemployment and threatening poverty.

The dismal position of the American farmer today has roots in the policies of the Eisenhower Administration over 20 years ago. At that time I was a farmer, a time when the government brought in the Soil Bank-laws that say you can't grow certain crops on so many acres of farmland, so the prices will stay high.

Farmers were told they had to increase their yield per acre, not farm all of their available cropland. The result is that prices of corn or wheat have not changed very much for farmers while cost of equipment, technology, and fertilizer have shot all the way up.

Agribusiness rules

When I was a farmer, a farm of a few hundred acres was considered big. Not today. Today's small farm is between 1,500-2,000 acres, miniscule compared to the giant farms of agribusiness. Even a 1,500-acre farm demands a lot of technology-tractors, planting machines, harvesting machines, etc. Farmers have had to pay out for these new high technologies and the fuel they consume at a time when the price of their crops was not increasing.

It has brought American farmers to their most severe crisis in history. Tens of thousands are selling out-or trying to. Even though thousands of farmers are saddled with huge debts they have no hope of ever making up, the price of farmland has dropped so low they'd lose even more by selling.

The reason for this crisis is the drive for increased yield per acre and the enormous outlay in cost for fertilizer and high technology this requires. Today's crisis in farming is rooted firmly in the crisis at the point of production that workers like myself at GM have seen happening for years. We have seen management come in demanding more and more cars built per man-hour, while they bring in more and more automation to boost production and toss workers out of work. That has brought the American auto industry to its deepest depression ever-just as it has brought the American farmer to its deepest depression.

When I left the farm life for General Motors 20 years ago I thought I was leaving the pre-capitalist method of production to work in the heart of the capitalist monster-the factory. Now I see that farmers experience the same problem workers do-capitalism's hunger for more and more dead labor at the expense of living labor.

Capitalism's method has made a unity out of the farm and the factory-but if workers and farmers get together against the economic crisis they both face, it will be the beginning of a new unity from below which could spell the end of capitalism altogether.

Thrown off the land

All the farmers I talked to were looking for something new. Some are moving into the city, but many know they won't find jobs there anyway. At least on the farm they could grow their own food and not starve. But now the banks are coming in to throw farmers off their land because their debts are so high. Farmers can't get unemployment insurance, so you wonder what happens to them next.

It's the same problem workers like myself laid-off from GM deal with. Once workers and farmers don't let another class or leaders do their thinking for them, they will be sure to find new ways of getting together against the crises of this system.

March 1983

Marx, labor, Marxist-Humanism

Note: In March 1983 the entire issue of News & Letters was devoted to a celebration of the Marx Centenary. It featured excerpts from a conversation between editor, Charles Denby and co-editor, Felix Martin, talking about Marx, Labor and Marxist-Humanism.

"Meeting Marx"

CHARLES DENBY: When I got into seeing what Marx really meant in his writing it was the period shortly after I left the Trotskyist movement. They used to repeat this slogan that white labor could never emancipate itself wherein Black labor was branded. I used to use the slogan a lot, but that is as far as I knew. I didn't know its history, and no one in the movement had told me about it.

Then I saw a film about labor history at my local union, and in it they showed that when they had tried to start unions before the Civil War, it didn't get anywhere. It was only after the Civil War that the union started to take hold, started to take form.

So I was sitting in that union hall that night, and I finally saw what Marx had really meant by that expression about white labor and Black labor. It was only then that I saw that Marxism could mean far more than what the Trotskyists had been saying.

From then on, I went into the shop and started talking to workers, white and Black, on a different level. And they were agreeing with me that this is what Marx meant. He hadn't meant you had to hug a white worker, or be a brother to a worker before you could emancipate yourself. All that was in it. But what he really meant was that the freedom of Black workers was crucial for everything. This way of looking at Black-white labor gave me a feeling about Marxism, about Marx's freedom, about what we call Marxist-Humanism.

FELIX MARTIN: When I first "met Marx" I saw that he was recognizing workers as being something in their moving and doing.

That was the greatest thing to me, because in this society no one ever sees workers as anything. Here was Marx talking about the workers having their own movement, their own self-development, and it was done so that you could see your own thinking and doing. It was not Marx telling me what to do, but recognizing what I was doing.

I had always been involved with labor, beginning with the miners. When your family is involved in something the kids are involved. So my daddy was a miner organizing the mines, and the kids were organizers too.

I never thought of labor as something different from growing and living. Labor really meant something to us when someone threatened us. When my daddy went on strike they could throw all of us out in the street because it was a company house you lived in, a company store.

On my first job I ended up organizing. We were working in a shop in a small farm town that was paying only a dollar and a dime. This company was taking advantage of workers who had a little piece of land to farm on. They treated them like the job was something extra; they were robbing them. It was the actual stealing that bothered me. So I wrote away and got some union cards and organized. Even after we got the union in, the main thing became how they discriminated against the women, paying them 40 cents below a man and laying them off the first no matter what their seniority. The women were the most militant in the plant.

"The division of mental and manual labor"

CHARLES DENBY: When I was talked to about becoming the editor of this workers' newspaper, *News & Letters*, I had no idea, that I could do it. In fact I never even dreamed that I might edit a paper or really write anything. I felt that that was for leaders and intellectuals to do.

But then it was explained to me that I could tell stories, many concrete stories that related to what Marx had said. I thought about it some more and then became editor of *News & Letters*.

When I started editing the newspaper the whole question of mental and manual labor was raised. In the shop we had sometimes thought about it, but not in the way Marx had talked about it. After I started to

understand Marx's concept we had an incident which made it very concrete. We had a contract ratification vote where the union leadership tried to jam the contract through, and I was able to raise questions of mental and manual, of labor power and the laborer, all in relation to the machine on the shop floor and most importantly seeing the worker as thinker.

I took the floor at the meeting and said the company was putting all of its thinking, all of its effort into the machine, and leaving the machine to work the hell out of us, the worker. I was talking about there being such a separation of mental and manual labor.

When I spoke of this both at this meeting and on the shop floor, the workers understood it and many times tried to carry it further. They would say this division between thinking and doing was what was wrong with everything. We were supposed to do nothing but work and those bastards were supposed to be the thinkers.

FELIX MARTIN: I was at GM almost 20 years and ever since I was there I'd been fighting. But the only way I knew how to fight was by myself. You know, you struck out against whatever there was.

It was back around the 1970 strike that I first met leftists. I had had a fight with my foreman and after the battle a worker came up to me and introduced himself and said he wanted to meet with me after the shift. So after work I and a couple of others met with him in a beer joint. He told me about how students were fighting on the campus and how he was an organizer and invited me to some meeting. I was a little suspicious because I didn't need no organizing to get me fighting. In any case at the meetings was the first time I had heard someone talk about Marx.

But when I decided I wanted to write a little article on what was happening in the shop and thought it was something this group might print in their paper, my leftist friend saw it and said they couldn't use it in their paper, but that he did know of a paper which would print what a worker wrote. That is how I got introduced to *News & Letters*.

They asked me to come to a meeting and talk. They wanted to hear about conditions at the plant, about what I thought about everything. And that is exactly what I talked about. It wasn't too much later that

they brought me the next issue of *News & Letters* and what I wrote was right in it.

The first book I ever read which dealt with Marx was *Marxism and Freedom*. When I could understand the words I could begin to understand this question of mental and manual. We who were working at the plant had a head the same as everybody else. Where I had always been looking to the foreman or the union bureaucrats as the thinkers -- that they were the head and I was the body-- and I now saw it very differently.

If there had not been an organization which had both workers and intellectuals like *News and Letters*, I couldn't have belonged to any organization. At first you are suspicious of intellectuals, but then you see that they can be a great help to you. But also you have a great deal to say to the intellectual, because you are in the plant.

May 1984

Las Vegas hotel workers strike in company town

Las Vegas, Nev. -- Recently I walked picket lines with hundreds of workers striking against Las Vegas hotel and gambling casinos. Over 17,000 workers of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union struck 32 hotels and casinos in early April after management tried to force wage and benefit concessions on them.



Felix Martin in Las Vegas, 1984. Photo by Pat

I spoke with many workers on the picket lines, and they all earned from \$4 to \$6 an hour prior to the strike. Yet management is not only demanding that their wages be cut, but that the guaranteed 40-hour work week clause be dropped from the contract, putting these workers making \$4-6 an hour on a part-time basis!

One worker told me, "How can I make concessions when I can't live on what I make now, \$3.80 an hour? I don't know whether we can win this strike, but we've got nothing to lose. It's better to fight than to give in to this."

Picketing despite arrests

Fight is what these workers have done, not only in walking the picket lines, but also in holding several large demonstrations in town and a sit-down in front of the MGM Grand Hotel. Their actions have resulted in the arrests of over 100 strikers. Many were charged with "inciting violence."

The truth is that it is the police and management who have over and over again incited violence, first in demanding concessions, then in hiring scabs, and then again in giving the police free rein to attack strikers. On April 3, Las Vegas police used violence to drive striking workers from hotel entrances, though they were simply walking a picket line.

Lt. James Chaney defended the beatings inflicted by the police on several strikers, saying, "The workers were abusing the right of private property" --as if their "private property" is worth a nickel without workers' labor!

One Black worker told me of a similar incident: "The guards attacked us fully armed, while we carried nothing but our picket signs that were hanging by strings around our necks." I told him that those armed guards remind me of the company-hired gunmen that I remember from my schoolboy days, growing up in the coal-mining region of Harlan County, Ky. Today the hotel owners might call them "guards", but their function remains the same.

But workers weren't only angry at the police. Several also had some harsh words for some of their union officials, who had asked the governor to call in the National Guard. "Since when has the National Guard ever defended the interests of striking workers?" one picketer asked.

New voices of labor

As an auto worker of many years, I had always believed that workers in heavy industry would be in the vanguard of every labor struggle. But now I am seeing instances where it is the unorganized or poorly-paid workers in industries like these that can be the vanguard.

It is no accident that it was Cesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers, that went to Las Vegas to lead a solidarity march of 7,500 people. He represents that lower and deeper layer of American workers who know the reality of life on minimum --and below-minimum-- wage. It was that march, together with the daily pickets and demonstrations, that forced management back to bargaining.

There is a power and militancy brewing in these workers. The contagious excitement of their fight for justice can be seen in a conversation I had with a teenager, who was working a non-union minimum-wage job in a Las Vegas store. She said to me, "Even though I'm not in the union, can I join the picket line when I get off work?"

If there could be more communication and solidarity between workers such as those striking against the hotels, and against Southern California Davis Pleating in Los Angeles, and against hundreds of other small shops and industries around this country, we could see the beginnings of something very new in the labor movement. It's the response of these lower-paid workers that we want to be watching closely in this next period.

January-February 1985

Capitalist "progress" sacrifices miners' lives

The death of 27 miners trapped in the Wilberg Mine in Utah by a fire which started on Dec. 21, 1984, was the nation's worst coal disaster since 1970, when 38 miners died in a coal dust explosion in Hyden, Ky. Both of these disasters were caused by speed-up and ignoring safety rules. What was different about the disaster in the Wilberg Mine, operated by Emery Mining Company, is that a new mining technology-long-wall mining-was being employed.

In the long-wall system a machine cuts right through to the other side of the mountain and then cuts back and forth until it has extracted all the coal. Large metal pins in the roof of the mine hold up the mountain as the machine works through, moving with the machine after each section is cut out. With this huge, automated device fewer miners are needed than even with the continuous miner.

New technology is "man-killer"

A second major advantage of this system for the mine companies is that 100% of the coal in a mountain can be extracted. When using the continuous miner, up to 20% of the coal has to stay in a given mountain in order to hold it up after the rest of the coal has been removed. But in long-wall mining, as the machine cuts through each section of coal, the pins are removed, allowing the mountain to settle. One miner told me that just this extra amount of coal extracted with the long-wall system is enough to pay the cost of production.

When the continuous miner was brought into the mines of Kentucky and West Virginia 35 years ago, the miners right away called it a "man-killer." With this new technology we have an entire mining operation that is a constant man-killer. Not only does it allow company profits to reach record heights, thereby giving the bosses even greater incentive to work the miners to death, but so few miners are needed to

operate the long-wall system that whole mining communities face poverty and starvation.

The constant reduction in the number of miners working thanks to these new technologies means that a higher and higher percentage of miners on the job are suffering death from industrial "accidents." And as the disaster at the Wilberg mine showed, even a small spark can set off enormous destruction. Six of the 27 miners killed in the Wilberg mine were management pushing the miners to break the world record for coal production in one day. Once again it was the drive for "production for the sake of production" that was responsible for this disaster.

First strike against automation

The first strike against Automation was the 1949-50 miners' strike in the U.S. against the continuous miner. In that strike the miners went against John L. Lewis for the first time, because Lewis considered the continuous miner a sign of "progress." No doubt, plenty of union bureaucrats and bootlickers for this system will now try to argue that long-wall mining is "progress" as well.

But in capitalism the introduction of any new technology can only mean one thing: the sacrifice of labor. That is what is happening today, not only in the mines but throughout all industry, and not only in industry but even in the offices. The result is misery and destruction for workers thrown out of work and made victims of disasters like those at Wilberg. The only kind of real progress workers can look forward to is uprooting this whole system of capitalism that has sacrificed workers to its "progress" far too long.

June 1986

*From rally in Soweto to May Day songs in Minnesota:
Specter of workers' power*

This year on May 1, the Black South African workers showed what the real spirit of May Day means. Over a million and a half workers refused to go to work; it was the largest general strike in that country's history. The life of the whole nation, which runs on cheap Black labor, was disrupted.

Thirty thousand Blacks rallied in Soweto and cheered Winnie Mandela when she said, "The wealth of this country belongs to you. It is your hands that made this country rich ... It is the workers' power that is going to liberate this country."

Seeing how the Black workers in South Africa celebrated May Day this year took me back to when I was a boy, growing up in coal mining country in Kentucky. That was in the 1930s, during the great workers' struggle for organizing the CIO.

The workers always made May Day into a holiday, with big labor rallies. I remember huge crowds of people, whole families. Women would bring baskets of food and we'd sit at long tables and listen to great speeches from miners about organizing in the coal fields.

Stolen from rank-and-file

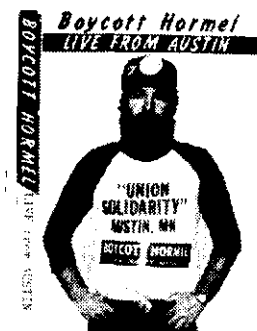
To me, the spirit of May Day disappeared in this country after the war. It is because the spirit of the labor movement was different. There was still a lot of militancy, but the rank-and-file workers themselves weren't in control. The union bureaucrats had taken over. That was inevitable once workers lost control of production after their battle in building the CIO. The division between thinkers and workers that is the principle of capitalist production was bound to lead to the creation of a labor bureaucracy.

Today it is the rank-and-file workers of Local P-9, on strike against Hormel in Austin, Minn., who are rekindling that spirit of workers thinking and organizing for themselves. I heard a tape of some songs written and sung by some of the Hormel workers available from Adopt a P-9 Family Fund, UFCW Local P-9, 312 NE 4th Ave, Austin, MN 55912. Those songs say so many things that mean so much to me. One song says: They say we should be happy to compromise, but the more we concede, the more we get burned, and in these times of concessions, the lines are finally drawn.

Same songs, new words

Some of the songs are old tunes that go back to the 1930s. I remember them from the organizing of the CIO. But the Hormel workers have added new words, not only on the Hormel strike, but also on women's liberation, on Black/white relations, and on South Africa and Latin America.

In one sense the words are new, but in another sense the meaning is returning to what these songs meant in the 1930s. When the Hormel workers sing about sticking with the union, they mean themselves, that they are the union, they are in charge. That is what union meant when Solidarity Forever was sung in the 1930s, but today the big labor bureaucrats sing that song as if union means the actions of the bureaucracy.



But look what is happening to the Hormel strikers. The rank-and-file workers are sticking together and going against the union bureaucrats, who have told them their strike is hopeless. The workers are reaching out to other rank-and-file workers all across the country for support in

June 1986

their strike and in boycotting Hormel; the International bureaucracy is not in control.

And because of this, the International bureaucracy is trying to crush the strike and Local P-9. The International is moving to take over the local union. They are working together with the capitalists because they are afraid of the power of the working class.

As a worker, this is what I think about a lot, the power of the laboring class. It is so clear to me. And this is what got me interested in the writings of Karl Marx, who listened to the workers in his day. If he were alive now, he would be listening to the Hormel workers.

For Marx, freedom meant a society where all people are equally thinkers and doers, full human beings. That is what I have been fighting for as long as I can remember, and what people all over the world are still fighting for today.

February 1987

Farm workers used up and thrown away

On New Year's Eve, after working a full eight-hour day, 300 onion-field workers at Boskovitch Farms in the Santa Clarita Valley in California were suddenly fired, without any warning. These workers were stunned, as many of them had been with the company from 15 to 30 years. New Year's Eve these workers were given their last paycheck, and were told that they would not be rehired or relocated to another Boskovitch property.

The Boskovitch family, which had grown rich from the bent backs of these workers in the Santa Clarita Valley, is moving much of its farming operation to Mexico where, according to them, they can get field workers for a whole day for what they pay a worker here to work for one hour.

30 years and out

These farmworkers worked from sunrise to sunset, sometimes two weeks without a day off, sometimes by the light of their cars, when the company had large orders to fill. One woman, Rosa Delarosa, said she had worked in spite of back pain and arthritis when she was needed to help fill large orders for Boskovitch. And now suddenly: no job.

In the Workshop Talks column in the Feb. 13 N&L, John Marcotte wrote about how the new so-called immigration reform law is really an attack on American labor. He discussed one aspect that shows how the big growers have made sure to guarantee themselves a supply of cheap labor, no matter how else immigration policy in this country changes. But what is never guaranteed is the worker's right to a job.

What kind of system is capitalism, when one person has the power to control the means for another to exist? It's against the law to kill another, but what is the difference in killing a person or taking away his or her means to live?

I went to Newhall in the Santa Clarita Valley to try to meet some of these workers to hear their story. I went to what they call the "outdoor unemployment office" --the lot outside a market on San Fernando Road where workers gather hoping for day labor.

I met one worker who had been working for Boskovitch for five years. He made \$4.65 an hour--more than minimum wage because he was an onion washer, which was "above" a picker. He said that out of the crew of 100 the company kept only 20, and that four crews of 100 each were laid off. He said: "Boskovitch will hire new people and pay them minimum wage. He fired all of us who were making \$4.65."

Farmworker death camps

I read another article in the Los Angeles Times about the working conditions in San Quintin, Mexico, where Mixtec Indians, natives of Southern Mexico, come to work in the fields for \$3 or \$4 a day. They live in crowded labor camps. One woman featured in the story was Maria Parra. Her three-year-old son died from dysentery the day before.

This was not the first child the Parras had lost. The last time they worked in San Quintin they lost a son, two years old; he also died from dysentery. They are worried about their six-year-old daughter; the day they buried their son she had been sick from diarrhea and bleeding. The Times writer reported that the conditions in the camp are typical of the area. The children often get sick and die from dysentery or malnutrition.

Is this what the American capitalists are running south of the border to do? Is this the cheap labor they exploit and brag about? To me these capitalists should be brought to trial and found guilty for crimes against humanity.

Even here in the U.S., it was only this month, Feb. 6, 1987, that a court ordered the Labor Dept. to issue regulations requiring farmers to provide toilets and drinking water to farmworkers in the field! Men, women, and children. This covers over half a million workers. In our great civilization, the richest country in the world.

And the capitalist growers with their lackeys in Washington have opposed these rules and still oppose them. And even if there are regulations, that doesn't mean they will be enforced. It's going to take labor itself, in the fields and the factories and the mills, to make rules for ourselves, to bring a human change.

July 1987

In Memoriam to Raya Dunayevskaya: A true friend of labor

Los Angeles, Cal. -- When I heard the news that Raya Dunayevskaya had died, I thought to myself, The greatest friend of the working class, of working people everywhere, has died. To me, Raya could always understand what a worker was saying. She often commented: Everyone is ready to talk and to lead the workers, no one to listen. Raya knew how to listen, she knew how to hear what workers were saying.



Speaking at the memorial meeting

I think that Raya's first book, *Marxism and Freedom*, is easier for workers to understand than for the intellectuals. It came out of the consciousness of workers and their struggle. The struggle at the point of production is a life-and-death struggle. Everything depends on the factory clock and the assembly line.

Before I met Marxist-Humanism, my attitude was that the everyday struggle I went through working at General Motors was just a normal part of living, working and struggling and living, fighting to exist. But Raya helped me to see the meaning of my struggle, she helped me to understand my own self.

When I read Chapter 1 of *Philosophy and Revolution* on Hegel, I could just feel the scales peeling off my mental seeing. Hegel wrote: "Individualism that lets nothing interfere with its Universalism, that is, Freedom." What a lot of smog she looked through to be able to say that. This is what Marx developed, and then Raya for our age.

I was always called a troublemaker all my life. I was always rebelling against everything I saw, anyone who told me what to do. I was always a fighter since when I was growing up as a Hillbilly in Hell-for-Certain, Kentucky. And I saw that kind of kinship between Raya and myself. That helped give me the patience to stick with my self-development.

To me as a worker, this Marxist-Humanist organization founded by Raya Dunayevskaya and Charles Denby, is what all of history has been struggling toward, an organization where workers and intellectuals can come together and work out these new ideas, where each can become a whole human being, to free ourselves from this butchering, inhuman system.

Now for the first time we are without Raya. It's like we lost our navigator at sea. But all through the 1980s Raya was trying to help our self-development so we would all become navigators, Marxist-Humanist thinkers and activists.

-Felix Martin, Labor Editor

November 1987

I see my life in Matewan

I recently saw the new movie *Matewan*. It is the story of the events leading up to the Matewan mine shoot-out in West Virginia in 1920. Many of the events and characters in the movie are true, including Sheriff Sid Hatfield being on the side of the miners against the owners and their Baldwin-Felts thugs who were trying to prevent the workers from organizing a union.

Labor struggle to be free

Miners who joined the union in those days were fired from their jobs and evicted from their company-owned homes. In the movie you see the miners, living in a tent city they had set up for themselves. The movie shows how Blacks from the South and Italians straight off the boat from Italy were brought to Matewan to act as scabs, and how they became part of the union. It shows you that real American history is the struggle of labor to be free.

The history in the movie was very real to me because I grew up in the coal fields of Kentucky. My dad was a coal miner. I grew up in the mining struggle to organize in the 1930s.

I could relate very well to the 14-year-old boy in the movie, Danny, who is working the mines. By the time I was 12 I was doing the work of any man. But I couldn't relate to the idea that Danny was a preacher. In my growing up in the 1930s, we were so busy learning how to use a gun, that preaching was left for those who were too crippled to work or to fight. In the 1930s a person could starve to death preaching. Danny's widowed mother is also a very real character and stands for all the strong women in the mining communities.

Two kinds of non-violence

The person I am not sure about is Joe, the union organizer, who preaches non-violence. I like how the movie showed that Joe was a Wobbly from the IWW in the early days of American labor With their slogan of one big union. Of course, capitalism labeled Joe a Red, a Communist.

He had been put in jail for, refusing to go off to fight World War I. He was against killing other workers in another country so the capitalists could profit from it. In Kentucky in the 1930s we knew we had to be armed because the capitalist class and their gun thugs, as well as the federal troops were using arms and violence against us.

What happened in Matewan in 1920 was just the beginning of the coal country wars. Federal troops and even airplanes were called out to suppress the workers struggles. This was how I grew up in the 1930s, knowing that the working class had to fight.

This fight has continued on to today. In the movie we see the beginning of the division between the trade union organizer and the rank-and-file workers. It is just this division that reached it, climax in the 1949-50, general strike of the coal miners against Automation when the great union leader, John L. Lewis, told the workers to go back to work: You can't strike against progress, he said. The miners, instead, asked: What kind of labor must a worker do?

Today they kill us many more ways then they did then. They don't need the gun thugs. They kill us through chemicals, workplace, accidents, Automation and plant closings that force workers and their children to live and die in poverty, not even able to afford medical care. The chemicals produced since World War II and used at the point of production have transformed all of America into one big chemical



"An American Classic."
"Easily one of the Best Films of the Year."

November 1987

dump. Thousands of workers are killed on the job each year and thousands more I get sick from every type of poison.

I was born in 1921, the year after the story in the Matewan movie. This whole time of history between writing about is my lifetime. Can life itself stand another 65 years of capitalism? Labor has to uproot capitalism, and transform this system into a society, that is for human beings, what Marx called human power which, is its own end.

October 1988

The real addicts of society

A retired worker at the union hall the other day was telling me about his son who had become an alcohol and drug addict. His son was in the hospital trying to self-develop to overcome this horrible capitalist disease brought on by this system and how we produce to meet our needs to live.

My friend said, "Before my son began to take drugs and drink so heavily, he asked 'Dad, what else does this rotten system offer but to go to work each day—if you have a job? I'm working, but I can't buy what my family needs. I make good money, compared to other workers, but it doesn't give me in life what I feel I should be enjoying'." My friend said to me, "I didn't know how to answer my son."

I started to tell my friend about myself, how—like every worker—my working life was hell right here on earth. But instead of it transforming me into an alcohol and drug addict, it transformed me into a revolutionary to destroy the system that is destroying us.

I remembered the speed-up and overtime in the plant, and following that would come the layoffs: this system either works a worker to death or puts the worker on the street without a job and no way to produce a living for his or her family. I remembered going to the union hall after a layoff and how a large number of workers would be affected by drinking and drugs.

The disease of capitalism

Capitalism is an addict itself. It eats up workers' lives, and always wants more of our unpaid labor power. Like an addict, our news media and government bureaucrats and politicians point to other segments of the society as the "cause" of the drug problem: the ghettos, the gangs, the street dealers.

Like an addict, they point to other countries, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Reagan's CIA friend General Noriega in Panama, and blame them. Then the government passes more laws, like throwing the drug addicts in jail; stop the drugs at the border; head them off at the pass.

Meanwhile, the disease of capitalism keeps on destroying and mutilating all life in sight.

I said to my friend: "I hope with my heart and soul that your son can make it in that treatment program, to overcome what this system drove him to become. But I still ask myself: What will he face when he gets out of the hospital? The same monster, the same disease that put him there in the first place."

The way I see it, capitalism has produced a nation of addicts, alcoholics, workaholics, overeaters, sexaholics, gamblers, because this whole system, starting from the way we produce to meet our needs, fragments the whole human being, separates thinkers and doers, tears us up into small pieces, our hands separated from our minds, our minds separated from our feelings-nothing is the whole human being.

Total uprooting is needed

The opposite of this is what Karl Marx projected in his philosophy which he called "a New Humanism." In 1844, Marx wrote of how all our human senses under capitalism are reduced to the sense of possession, what Marx called a "to have" instead of a "to be":

"Each of [our] human relations to the world --seeing, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, thought, perception, experience, wishing, activity, loving ... in place of all the physical and spiritual senses, there is the sense of possession, which is the simple alienation of all these senses."

But for "the wealth of human needs to take the place of the wealth and poverty of political economy," a total uprooting is needed.

And that has never been more needed than right now. In the pages of *News & Letters* each month you can read workers speaking for themselves about speedup and job injuries, layoffs and robots replacing

human beings. We need to uproot this sick society where workers are killed on and off the job each day, while the government is addicted to hundreds of billions of dollars in spending for armaments and death.

We need to uproot this capitalist system, and create what Marx wrote of, "a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality; where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming."

April 1989

*John Dwyer's Legacy Lives**
Fighting Reaganism and union bureaucrats

When I learned that John Dwyer (Peter Mallory) had died, I started to think back on the many stories I had heard him tell about becoming a union organizer in the 1930s. I also was thinking about the articles he wrote for News & Letters against Reaganism and against today's sell-out union bureaucrats who are transformed into opposite from what the rank-and-file workers fought for in the 1930s.

It was then, during the Depression, that John Dwyer became a revolutionary. He lived in Lynn, Mass., where the big industries were shoe and leather. Listening to John talk about leather-tanning made me think about leather workers I knew when I was growing up in Kentucky. There'd be no work in Kentucky in the early 1930s, so people would go up North to work, and come back.

Rotten jobs, rotten wages

Leather-tanning is one of the dirtiest, stinkiest jobs that the world has ever known. If you worked there, for weeks afterwards the smell was in the pores of your skin. You smelled like something dead. The men would still be smelling when they came back to Kentucky.

That shows how badly people needed to work. And this is what we see so much of still today with these takebacks that workers are accepting. Since Reaganism, many workers think that any job, no matter how bad, is better than nothing at all.

* John Dwyer (1912-1989) was a founding member of News and Letters Committees. For the many writings that he contributed both before and after he became a Marxist-Humanist see *The John Dwyer Collection* at the Wayne State University Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in Detroit.

Now, in the 1980s, all the gains that workers had fought for and won from the 1930s on have been rolled back. Some factories have two—and even three-tier wage systems. Any job above \$5 or \$6 per hour looks good. Many shops are like the sweatshops of 60 years ago.

Here in Los Angeles, there are thousands, if not tens of thousands of workers who don't even earn the minimum wage. Some don't earn a wage at all, but work only for tips, like at a car wash. A government General Accounting Office report showed that last year investigators found 43,000 employees in six Western states who were owed more than \$15 million in unpaid wages or unpaid overtime.

But the number of these investigations cover only a tiny fraction of the violators. When Reagan was getting government off the back of the capitalists, he cut the personnel for the enforcement of the labor laws.

What gets me is that if these thieves are caught, they pay the back wages to the workers that they stole from, get rid of those workers, and keep on stealing from the new workers. They are not fined or punished in any way. That is the labor law.

What is the enemy that stopped the labor movement in this country? We've gotten so far away from the days when the workers were organizing themselves. A class of bureaucrats, the union leadership, has taken over, and destroyed the kind of togetherness where workers recognized that if one hurts, we all hurt. How long has it been since, if the autoworkers are on strike, you saw the Teamsters and all the other unions join in a national strike? It never happens today.

In the 1980s, John Dwyer wrote some great articles against the bureaucrats of my own union, the UAW, as they went along with the so-called "Japanese-style" management system. John showed that it is just another form of speed-up.

In an article for *News & Letters*, October, 1985, on the new GM Saturn plant in Tennessee, he wrote: "For the first time in labor history, the union has signed a contract for workers, who will not be employed until 1990, at 80% of the wages now prevailing in the auto industry. The contract was agreed upon by a 25-member executive board without any consultation or consent of UAW members..." That shows so perfectly the fact that the union has been transformed into its opposite.

Changes in thinking

Until I found News and Letters Committees, I couldn't understand why this happened. In my years in the plant I had seen so many people-including good, militant workers-who, once they were a "leader," or even a union steward, became different. They were dealing with the company, and the first thing you know, the company's thinking and their thinking became the same. They weren't talking about what the workers were saying anymore. They were making deals with management.

With Marxist-Humanism I have learned about the philosophy of Hegel and that dialectics means self-movement and self-development, and if it doesn't come from the self, from the workers themselves, then the movement goes backward, or transforms into its opposite.

I know that John, too, had seen many of these betrayals of the workers by the union bureaucrats and by the radical parties in the 1930s and the 1940s. He became a founding member of News and Letters Committees in 1955.

This is the way I feel inside myself about that: If you have that background of struggle, like John, you know there's something you're fighting for, but you haven't got it yet. You're looking for that Idea of Freedom that won't betray the workers' struggle and why you became a revolutionary in the first place.

March 1991

On the Gulf War: Capitalist Wars and Production

In this war in the Persian Gulf the soldiers, sailors and marines on both sides are victims of George Bush and Saddam Hussein. They are the ones dying, and they are the ones who, if they live, will face the point of production after the war. In Iraq it will mean the labor of rebuilding from the terrible destruction that the bombs are raining down.

Here in the U.S. the soldiers will return to plant closings and unemployment as well as to the assembly line. I survived two wars, World War II and Korea, only to come home and go to work to produce for the next war to be fought by the next generation, my sons and daughters.

I worked for many years as a blue-collar worker at General Motors (GM), and what goes through my mind when I see and read about this war is the assembly line. It seems like war and production are produced in the same way. There are the officers and/or foremen on the one side, and in both places—the war zone and the factory—on the other side are the workers, the “grunts,” doing the suffering and doing the dying.

I read an article where it said that the U.S. soldiers had not yet worked themselves into a “fever of hate.” It said that “enemy is a word used by the officers, not always by the grunts.” When I read about a marine major talking about “hurting the enemy” and trying to make his men feel the same, I see him having a lot in common with the foreman on the line and his drive to always have “production greater today than yesterday.”

When the soldiers come back from this war, it isn't only that they will face the drive for “production greater today than yesterday,” but many will not be able to find any job in production. For Bush's war in the Persian Gulf is happening at the same time we are in continuous recession.

In the 1980s GM closed a lot of its plants, moving overseas in search of cheap labor. Other workers lost their jobs to automation. And GM isn't the only capitalist corporation in trouble.

Sears Roebuck announced it was eliminating an additional 9,000 jobs to cut expenses, which will bring the number of U.S. workers cut to 30,000 by the end of this year. U.S. Air will lay off over 3,500 workers. On the West Coast the biggest department store chain, Carter Hawley-Hale, has just filed for bankruptcy under Chapter 11, which is how this large capitalist corporation can continue to operate without its capitalist creditors seizing its assets.

War and production in a capitalist system. How much longer can we allow this to keep going? The government uses our young to fight wars. The ones that come back are used in the mines, mills and factories to produce wealth to fight the next war, with the next generation of youths being under the orders of that next President acting as commander-in-chief.

August September 1991

A "biological Hiroshima": Southern Pacific cuts workers, pollutes river

Los Angeles, Cal. --On July 14 seven cars and one engine of a Southern Pacific train jumped the tracks near the upper Sacramento River in northern California. One car fell into the river. It contained the pesticide metam-sodium, a fumigant used before crop planting to kill insects, weeds and fungi in the soil--in other words, everything.

Which is what it did in the river; it killed everything --100,000 fish, and no one even tried to number the dead insects, worms, algae. One writer for the *Los Angeles Times* called it a "biological Hiroshima." The spill travelled down the river to Shasta Lake, which furnishes drinking water for 22 million Californians.

Southern Pacific was trying to cut costs and labor by not using a helper engine with two more workers to push the train through the river canyon. The railroad had agreed to do this after their last poisonous derailment in the same river in 1976. Larger work crews were part of the demands of the railroad workers when they went out on strike this spring, a strike that our state-capitalist government ended after one day. The workers have now been forced to accept all the company terms.

I was walking through the park the day after I heard the news of the spill. I counted many pine trees dying from the smog. When I was a boy growing up in Kentucky, air and water were the measure of clean. No one thinks like that today. I can remember when the forests were filled with virgin trees and were alive with animals and birds. The rivers were filled with fish. That nature has been transformed by man, by capitalism, into what nature is today, with a smelly, yellow-green poison on the Sacramento River killing everything.

Metam-sodium is a "cousin" of methyl isocyanate, which killed more than 2,000 people in Bhopal, India in 1984. Those who did not die immediately are still suffering, but most of the world has forgotten this horror. One article in the *Los Angeles Times* said that "available

studies seem to indicate" that we won't get cancer from these chemicals; but Ralph E. Lightstone from the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation said that the studies are incomplete and "If you ask whether it might cause cancer or reproductive effects, the answer is, 'We don't know'."

President Bush is talking about getting ready to use his "smart bombs" on Saddam Hussein again, if Saddam Hussein doesn't tell him about all of the chemical and nuclear weapons he has to kill people with. What Bush needs to do is to find out about all the chemicals that are killing us here and now and threaten the big corporations that disregard safety regulations with some "smart bombs." But of course he won't do that.

I want to know: How much longer can life exist on this earth under capitalism? How many more Hiroshimas can this earth stand until all itself is dead?

December 1991

Remembering Pearl Harbor fifty years later

Fifty years ago I was a sailor in the U.S. Navy on the ship, the USS Vestal, at Pearl Harbor. The American capitalist news media has made such a big deal about the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack that I want to state what it means to me—as a worker and as someone who almost lost his life that December day.

Since Dec. 7, 1941 we've been told to "Remember Pearl Harbor," the same as our grandparents before us remembered the Maine, remembered the Alamo. It is a rallying cry for American workers and the poor to arm themselves to protect American capitalism and to help expand capitalism throughout the world.

When I try to remember my part in Pearl Harbor, it seems a really bad dream. On Saturday, the day before, we had the Admiral's inspection of the entire fleet, and that left all of us sailors pleased and tired. Dec. 7, 1941 began by having an extra 30 minutes to sleep, like we did every Sunday.

"This is not a drill"

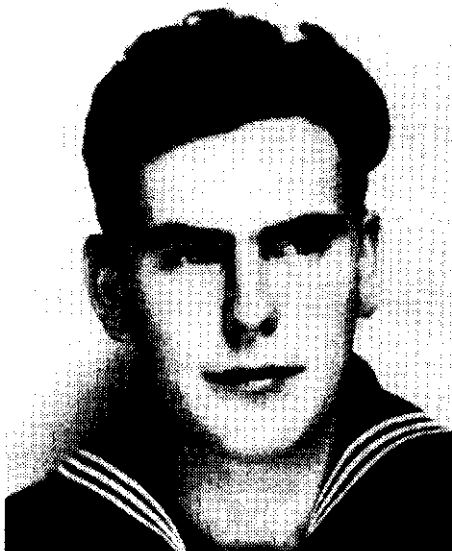
After breakfast I went down to the deck below to the mess hall to read. I had been there just a few minutes when the boatswain's mate sounded General Quarters alarm: "This is not a drill. Man your battle stations." The first bomb hit our ship. It came through the mess hall, killing the chief master-at-arms.

I ran out, and as I crossed the well deck, a plane strafed us. The red tracers hit and jumped back into the air, spinning and dancing before my eyes. Then I entered a long passageway leading to the aft part of the ship and to my gun station. As I came out of the passage-way another bomb hit the ship and exploded in the carpenter's shop below.

The next thing I remember was when the fighting had ended. I remember seeing blood on the shells, and we were trying to find out where the blood was coming from. Our third shell man had lost his fingers. He was only 17 years old. We were issued rifles, and we went in the cane fields, dug fox holes and waited for the invasion that never came.

Forty-four months later the war ended, but the big change in my attitude didn't come until the Korean war. I was sent to a ship moored in Japan. I went there to bring it back into commission, and I was in charge of a crew of Japanese workers.

One young fellow was wearing a jacket which had some Japanese lettering on it. I asked him what the words were, and he told me it said "the Kamikaze." He had worn the jacket as a suicide pilot in World War II, though he never did have to fly. The war ended and that saved him. I told him how stupid I thought that was, to fly a plane into a ship and blow himself up along with it. He asked me, if it was the Japanese navy off the coast of California bombing the cities of the West Coast, what would I do?



I began to think for myself for the first time. I asked him, did he come from a poor family or was his family well off? He said his dad was a worker and poor. For the first time I began to see the war as a capitalist war, and working people and the poor on both sides killing each other and doing the dying while the capitalists and their children were protected and got rich.

Capitalist rallying call

Fifty years later we see the capitalists on the losing side, Japan, winning out economically over the capitalists on the American winning side. It's not just that the American capitalists don't like this, but also that the rulers are looking for all kinds of ways to turn workers' attention away from blaming our own rulers and the capitalist system for the misery right now in our lives—no jobs, no health care, no toys for our kids for Christmas.

I see these big doings over remembering Pearl Harbor as a rallying call by the American capitalists to the American workers to save them from the capitalists of Japan --that is, work harder, don't complain, and when you do complain, make sure you blame the Japanese. And when this country decides to go to war, as it did against Iraq, and bomb cities and bury soldiers alive with bulldozers, shoveling them into the sand—don't even think that there might be something wrong or inhuman about that.

I am not saying that one capitalist is better than the other capitalist, because the capitalists in each country are the enemy of their own people. This whole system is inhuman. We're still living in what Marx called the "pre-history of humanity."

January 28, 1992

'Philosophy is screaming in the souls of all humanity'

Dear Peter,

The more I look at the quote from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) that is in the Introduction to the book of Raya's working out of the theory of Russia as a state-capitalist society, the louder Raya's words ring within me concerning "Why Hegel? Why Now?"¹

To me as a worker, this quote shows why Hegel speaks so much to today. This quote refers to the period following the French Revolution, which stopped at the first negation. Today we are still living in the first negation, as capitalism has developed to its absolute and is now crumbling to pieces. It has no other space from which to grow and develop. We are living in the age of absolutes if there is no new beginning then it will mean the death of civilization.

Karl Marx, a Hegelian himself, 36 years after Hegel made his great discovery [in the *Phenomenology of Mind*] about the dialectical method of self-knowing, was able to see how capitalism effected working people. In 1843 as a young Hegelian fresh out of college he

¹ Editor's note: This is a reference to the following quote from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, which appears in the Introduction to *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism: Selected Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya* (Chicago: News and Letters, 1992): "The Spirit of the time, growing slowly and quietly ripe for the new form it is to assume, disintegrates one fragment after another of the structure of its previous world. That it is tottering to its fall is indicated only by symptoms here and there. Frivolity and again ennui, which are, spreading in the established order of things, the undefined foreboding of something unknown all these betoken that there is something else approaching. This gradual crumbling to pieces, which did not alter the general look and aspect of the whole, is interrupted by the sunrise, which, in a flash and in a single strike, brings to view the form and structure of the new world."

break his vision was of total freedom, for man, woman and child. He saw all society up to capitalism as a slave system, but capitalism, this bourgeois system, is worse of all because it is based on wage slavery.

Karl Marx saw capitalism as what it really was, though even today it is called a free society. He wrote "no one fights freedom, he fights at most the freedom of others." The kind of freedom that exists under state-capitalism is wage slavery, fighting to survive.

Karl Marx saw the contradictions in the capitalist system in 1844 when he wrote his *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, four years before the workers in Europe revolted against the capitalist system [in the 1848 revolutions]. In 1844 Marx asked: "What kind of labor" the same question the coal miners asked in the 1950 wildcat general strike against automation. The question "what kind of labor should man do?" is being battled out all over the world today.

Today state-capitalism in Russia has fallen to its knees, but it is still more dangerous to the world than before. Russia still has 20,000 nuclear warheads on missiles that can destroy the world many times over. And just as dangerous is the gradual crumbling of capitalism in the U.S. This time it cannot climb out of its crisis off the backs of workers, because most of them have been replaced by automation, machines, that cannot produce surplus value which is needed to keep capitalism alive and growing. Capitalism has only produced its grave digger, the unemployed army, which is growing by leaps and bounds throughout the world. Today there is no way to turn this system around again. When monopoly capitalism died in 1929-30, state-capitalism rose from its ashes and was born. In Russia 1928, under the leadership of the counter-revolution led by Joseph Stalin, state-capitalism was born. In 1933 it came to Germany under the leadership of Hitler, and in the United States in 1934 under the leadership of Roosevelt and his New Deal.

Today state-capitalism is in its absolute crisis. This is "Why Hegel, Why Now" sounds so loud and clear. To Raya, to us and the world, the movement to theory and philosophy today is screaming in the souls of all humanity for man to save himself. Humanity is being forced to move to freedom and a new world. A new human society, a new way of producing humanity, must be born.

January 28, 1992

move to freedom and a new world. A new human society, a new way of producing humanity, must be born.

Felix Martin

P.S. The Introduction is great as far as I am concerned: maybe a little improvement here or there, it reflects great (labor, patience?) and suffering.

May 1992

'American Dream': A documentary

I recently saw a movie documentary, called "American Dream," made by Barbara Kopple, about the strike against Hormel in Austin, Minn. in 1986-87. Kopple was filming the workers in Austin even before the strike began and continued on through the strike and as the union, Local P-9, had to separate from the International leadership of the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which wanted P-9 to cave in to the company's demands for cutbacks.

The difference between the thinking of the rank and file and the thinking of the union leadership has perhaps never been shown more clearly in the last decade than during that strike. Yet although Kopple does show the contrast between the International and the Local, I still felt that she had missed the boat.

Most of the movie was based on the contrast between different leaders, the leaders of the International and the leadership of Local P-9. Yet there was so much creative thinking and acting by the Hormel workers during their strike, as they spread out all across the country to gather support from other rank-and-file workers everywhere. The movie shows nothing of that. There is a view of the workers only as force, not as Reason, and the movie leaves nothing for workers to build on from out of the defeat of the Hormel strike.

I thought of what Marx wrote about the greatest revolution in his lifetime, the Paris Commune, when for a brief six weeks the working people of Paris took over the city and ran it themselves. The revolution was defeated by the capitalists, who slaughtered men, women and children in one of the worst massacres in history.

This struggle lives on today, because Marx wrote about how the workers took power, how they abolished the old forms of government, the army, the factory, and ran things themselves, and in each factory at the end of each day the workers met and decided the next day's work. Workers need to know this history. We need to know what we are

May 1992

capable of, at the same time as we work through why we have not yet been able to win.

The workers could bring this government to a standstill if we really meant to do that. Right now I believe we haven't worked out how to begin and what is needed for the 1990s. We need more than slogans like "Organize!" We need to do a lot of deep digging into history and into Marx's philosophy of freedom.

August-September 1992

Rising resistance of Latino workers: Drywall workers organize after the LA rebellion

On June 1, 1992 several thousand drywall workers and tapers walked off their jobs at hundreds of job sites across southern California demanding higher wages, benefits and union representation. One hundred fifty-three workers were arrested in Mission Viejo on July 2 and jailed on charges of trespassing and kidnapping for storming the job site and forcing out scabs.

Another 68 workers were arrested on July 23 in Hollywood, where a demonstration was held at a job site to convince others to leave the site. The police and the highway patrol attacked the demonstration, and it spilled over into the Hollywood Freeway. An eyewitness told the *Los Angeles Times*: "All of a sudden there were men all around me yelling 'we want work not food stamps.'" Television reports showed several strikers bleeding severely, and the paramedics were never called.

Wage cuts, labor abuses

The workers' wages have been cut 60% over the last 12 years. The Orange County Human Relations Commission in a 1989 report entitled "zero Dollars per Hour" reported on numerous labor abuses. The subcontractors of drywallers took the most heat: "Cash pay is rampant in construction. Payment in drugs is common in the cash pay game in the drywall and framing industries."

The real lawbreakers, the developers and the subcontractors, never go to jail. These damned thieving rascals are not bothered by the law. The laws are there to protect them from the workers. When workers work and keep their mouths shut no matter what their bosses do to them, everything is fine. When the workers are forced to do something for themselves, the police are Johnny-on-the-spot to beat the hell out of them and jail them for resisting arrest. The immigration authorities are

on the spot to deport any "illegals" who have become "troublemakers."

The daily protest and organizing activities by thousands of construction workers covers the areas of Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego counties. Weekly demonstrations in front of the Santa Ana Court building by the drywall workers and their families are the most militant labor demonstrations seen in a long time in this part of the country. It is no accident that they come in the aftermath of the Los Angeles rebellion. The organized unions have kept away from these self-organizing drives.

Rising resistance

The rising resistance of Latino workers in southern California is met by rising open racism against Latinos, who are being blamed for the bankruptcy of the state. A participant was quoted in a Los Angeles Times article saying: "There is a double standard. American society loves Mexicans. They love Mexicans as long as they are working for subminimum wages, as long as they don't complain. Once they start asking for things within their rights, Mexicans become the enemy."

Workers in every trade have to become one class. When one worker hurts and the capitalists don't take care of the problem, all workers must go home until the problem is taken care of, without loss of wages. We also have to fight the union bureaucrats who are also the enemies of the workers.

Why do we need capitalists --or union bureaucrats-- to tell us what we need to produce for ourselves, our needs? Our labor produces everything. Their stupid thinking produces nothing. Doesn't it make you see how stupid is this system we produce under? How much longer are we going to put up with this capitalist production that robs us of our labor?

November 1992

Review of the Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism
What kind of labor?

Los Angeles, Cal.—Marx writes of two types of labor: creative labor, which combines one's muscles with one's mind; and alienated labor, which is forced labor, any kind of labor just to live, doing just what you are told to do until you could do it in your sleep, without thinking, just like a machine. Do you know what this kind of labor does to your nervous system and the muscular system?

If you let your mind think only about this kind of work, it would destroy the mind. At General Motors I kept my mind on things other than work. I studied philosophy, Hegel, Marx and Raya Dunayevskaya. I knew that this system of production had to be destroyed or it would destroy the human mind.

Economy falling apart

That is why I think every worker should read *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism*. This book contains a selection of Dunayevskaya's writings, spanning a half century, on how she worked out the stage of state-capitalism, which brought on World War II and today has reached its absolute. We are living through the moment when state-capitalism finds nowhere else to grow and is falling apart, piece by piece.

The economic conditions that we are suffering today grew out of the 1974-75 recession, caused by the great decline in the rate of profit. That is when the capitalists all over the world embarked on a global stage of economic restructuring. Russia couldn't save itself and fell apart. The U.S. is on the same course.

These capitalists think they can save themselves by running to Mexico to get cheap slave labor, but they are fast running out of places

to run to. Cutting wages and salaries will continue, until the masses move and take command to save ourselves.

Stifling workers' revolt

The path that led Dunayevskaya to state-capitalist theory and later to her rediscovery of Marx's Humanism began with the Spanish Revolution of 1936, which confronted revolutionaries with the emergence of counterrevolution from within the revolution. She saw that the road to Franco's victory was paved by the Communist Party stifling the new form of workers' revolt.

I would give anything to have known about the counter-revolution within the revolution as a young worker. I could have seen how a representative or spokesman can get transformed into leadership, like the labor bureaucracy is today: leaders and thinkers for the workers, stifling workers' own thoughts and activities. The organizing of the CIO was when the workers were doing the thinking.

How far we have come since then when we see today Clinton calling for the middle class to vote for him to "save" state-capitalism and completely forgetting about the working class. These damn politicians are trying to blame the workers for their own unemployment, as if all that is needed is for the millions of workers to get up and go to work!! As if these damned thieving capitalists are there waiting for them to start up production. If there were ever a time and reason for revolution, it is now.

May 1993

"If the doctors would go to the point of production"

Workers' health:

The *Los Angeles Times* recently reported on the U.S. auto makers' call for a national health care system because, as one spokesman said, "progress in productivity is ... dissipated by health costs." It makes me mad when I hear someone say how much health care costs the capitalists. The only "cost" comes out of the hide of the workers. Health care is not a cost, but the price we pay for capitalist production.

I recently was asked to speak as a worker on a panel on health care. I talked about the experience in my lifetime at the point of production to explain what medical care means to the working class. Here are some excerpts from that talk.

In the belly of the monster

You need to go into the belly of the monster, General Motors, where I worked. I had fought in two wars for the capitalist system and found when I went to GM that I had fought the wrong enemy. The first thought that hit me when I went in was that the machinery was digesting human beings and transforming them into shiny products to be sold for a profit in the marketplace.

What happens to the human being on the assembly line? I've had two major operations since I retired. I have back, shoulder and hip injuries. I can tell when I look at a retired GM worker which side of the assembly line he worked on by the way he walks or gets out of his car. We knew of carpal tunnel syndrome before they had a name for it.

When I was working in the plant there were many days I could not get my hands open when I got up in the morning. Now that I am

retired I have a hard time using my hands to get my checkbook out of my back pocket to pay for my high-priced groceries. You can see what I mean about the belly of the monster where 94% to 98% of all injuries and illnesses are created.

What an injury is worth

I took GM to court because the noise was destroying my hearing. I had been fighting them for years over the noise pollution in the plant. Again, you can tell which side of the assembly line a person worked on by which ear has the most hearing loss. I took GM to court because I wanted something for my hearing loss, and I wanted GM to do something about noise pollution for all of us workers. It took 20 years until they finally did.

When the judge was going to decide how much my hearing loss was worth, he looked into a book, like the kind you would get at a parts plant. I said, "Hell, I'm not a machine, I'm a human being." The judge said I would get more for my hearing loss if I was a musician. So you see, if you are a worker, you don't need hearing, just a strong back. The judge said all this and I understood that the system says I am not a human being, I am part of the machine and a number on a badge.

I used to raise hell about the solder grinding in the body shop. I wondered what it was doing to our minds. Lead gets into your bones and joints and brain with the solder grinding in open space. Your body can't throw it off.

This environment inside the plant leads to pollution also outside the plant. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the chemicals in our foods that make us sick are caused by the production system of this country. Medical coverage should be a right and a cost to the capitalist thieves.

The struggle to stay alive

It should be part of the constitution that people who produce the goods and services of the country and the world should be cared for when they are sick or injured. At least when we were chattel slaves,

they had to take care of us because we were property. Now we are wage slaves and they get us for nothing.

The struggle to stay alive under capitalism is a hell of a job. If the doctors would go to the point of production and see what speedup has done to workers, they would understand why people are becoming ill. If you are not employed, that will make you sick, too. You have a family to feed and to keep a roof over your heads. I never had a threat like the young workers' have today. If they lose their jobs, there are no jobs to be found. The jobs are in Mexico or overseas.

Under any national health care program—if we get anything, and I think we will get something—most people will be no better off. Those who don't have anything aren't going to get enough to really help as long as we have capitalism. Anything that is produced in this world has to make a profit for capitalism. That is what is wrong with the whole system of medical care.

Making a profit off a sickness of a human being is the most inhuman thing there is. You can see what a monster capitalism is. The only time the people of this country will have real medical care will be after workers take over the power of production and uproot capitalist relations root and branch.

August-September 1994

Every worker is an organizer

The rise in the consciousness of the farmworkers in California in self-organizing has begun. Over the last month these workers have won three elections, and a fourth is contested. The UFW (United Farm Workers) has negotiated two new contracts, one with a Coachella table grape grower, the first grape contract in a decade.

On the eve of the UFW's month-long pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento in April and at stops along the way growers and farm groups dismissed the event. "It's the last gasp of a dying organization," said the Grapeworkers and Farmers Coalition, one of the enemies of anything that workers try to do for themselves.

Since May the state agricultural labor board, which had been silent since governors Deukmejian and Pete Wilson, has all of a sudden filed many complaints against growers who have refused to bargain. It is a clear response to the activity among the farm workers in the California fields.

The biggest aftershock came from the lopsided victory in July at Warmerdam farms in Kings County. Out of the 263 workers who voted, 220 voted for the union. State labor officials who oversaw the election were stunned. Bill Warmerdam said the workers "caught us by surprise." He is a third generation fruit grower who has never had to deal with organized workers before.

UFW President Arturo Rodriguez said the vote was the union's first in Kings County. "The workers at Warmerdam did it all. They formed their own committees and signed up their own co-workers," he said. I hope this message will get to the CIO misleadership, to stop meddling in the workers' affairs and get back to representing the workers. Workers are thinkers; they don't need to be led. Every worker is an organizer.

In the early 1970s the UFW had contracts with 80% of the grape growers in the San Joaquin valley. Two decades later not a single contract remained. The movement got transformed from struggling in the fields to boycotts, to writing to Congressmen. Workers know that the government is owned and controlled by capitalism. They know that together workers can produce the world or destroy it, and the capitalists and their bureaucratic bootlickers are the lice that feed off workers' labor.

Trade unions are part of the capitalist control over the workers. The truth of that lies in how the capitalists along with the union leadership have used automation to replace millions of workers' jobs and have not reduced the hours of work each day to keep every worker employed at a higher standard of living.

I also see the beginning of a new labor movement in the South. The Black women, like those at Somerville Mills, don't want to give up their self-won power to a union leader. As a wage slave, retired, who has spent his life in the labor struggle, I see the thinking of these Black women as a higher level of thinking, a great leap in cognition. I also see the importance of this Marxist-Humanist organization, News and Letters Committees, present to give support to that self-development of workers taking back their power to think for themselves.

December 1994

'Something has gone wrong with nature':

Capitalism's take over of farming

Leaving Chicago, going south through the farming counties of Illinois and Indiana, we saw no one in the fields—just corn and soybeans as far as the eye could see. It's a different way of farming under capitalism today than it was when I was a farmer.

Farming before World War II was still under the system where each farm was a unit, where the farmer took a wife to produce his own hands to work the farm. Horses and mules were the power for the heavy work, like pulling the tools to work the soil. The feed for that power was produced on the farm. This 160-acre unit produced and reproduced its own life. Up to World War II about 70% of the population lived on the farm.

After the war ended, capitalism began taking over the farming. Tractors began replacing the horses. Where it took nine weeks to produce five-pound broilers the natural way, chickens for the market were now being produced in five weeks. In feeding cattle, the natural three-pound gain per day became, in crowded feed lots and with hormones in the feed, nine pounds per day. This is why meat eaten today has no taste. Quantity reduces quality. This is all about time, producing the most in the smallest amount of time.

In my farming days I had a lantern and later there was electricity to power the equipment and lights. The question is: What's after these fossil fuels run out? Even with the best methods of farming, it was not a natural way of life, producing itself, which includes building the soil. I read where in ancient society their method of farming turned the land into deserts.

The method of logging in the Northwest—cutting everything clean—is destroying the natural way of the forest. The building of

houses, factories and super roads since World War II, coupled with the logging and methods of farming—what effect does this have on the environment?

I have seen a lot of changes in my 73 years. I have seen running springs dry up, branches and creeks dry up, no water running in them in summer. I have seen virgin forests disappear, muddy roads become concrete. Waste has become more than we used to live on.

This year, 1994, for the first time in those 73 years, fruit trees were in blossom in the spring and bloomed again in the fall. Something has gone wrong with nature. In October my tomatoes were in full blossom, just like in the spring, with new tomatoes setting on. With all these signs, I believe that time is running out for allowing all of the things that capitalism has done to nature. We are running out of time.



Isaac Woods showing watermelon and tomatoes he grew in Whittier, late-1990s



MAY, 1995

DEAR FRIEND AND COMRADE —
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ONE OF
THE UNSUNG HEROES OF THE AMERICAN
WORKING CLASS

THROUGHOUT YOUR ENTIRE ADULT
LIFE, YOU HAVE BEEN IN THE FORE FRONT
IN THE STRUGGLE TO BRING A MEASURE
OF JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND EQUALITY TO
THE AMERICAN WORKER — BUT MORE
IMPORTANT, YOU HAVE USED YOUR TIME,
TALENT AND ENERGY TO EDUCATE NEW
GENERATIONS OF WORKERS TO THEIR
HISTORICAL TASK THAT LIES BEFORE THEM.

"IT IS THE HISTORICAL TASK OF
THE WORKING CLASS TO ABOLISH CAPITALISM
AND REPLACE IT WITH SOCIALISM"

ONCE THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS HAS
SUCCEEDED IN ESTABLISHING A FREE AND
DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN WHICH ALL WILL
ENJOY PEACE, ABUNDANCE AND SECURITY
— THEY WILL REMEMBER ISAAC WOODS
AND ALL THE OTHER COMRADES THAT GAVE
SO MUCH OF THEMSELVES TO SERVE
HUMANITY.

I AM GLAD THAT YOU PASSED MY
WAY AND WE MET — BUT I AM PROUD THAT
I COULD CALL YOU FRIEND AND COMRADE.

RUDY SULENTA

From friend and comrade Rudy Sulenta (above) on Isaac's 75th birthday

July 25, 1975

Letter from Raya Dunayevskaya¹

Practicing Proletarian Reason

Dear Isaac:

Permit me to say a few historic-philosophic things on the question of seniority precisely at the time we have no definitive position on the question because...not only must all aspects be considered as a totality, but also there is then greater objectivity than at a point when one "must" take a position.

Marx, from the very start of being a revolutionary, declared, "The proletariat is revolutionary, or nothing." He said so not only because he was so set on spontaneity and what he called "the self-organization of the proletariat," but because, again from the very beginning, he considered the proletariat not only as revolutionary force, but as Reason. Thus in the 1844 [Silesian] weavers' strike-as against Lassalle and all other socialists, communists, Left Hegelians, and whatnot that were opposing Prussia, but who called for [themselves], the intellectuals, to be elected to parliament and speak "for" workers and thus both avoid their "anarchy" and rioting and breaking up machines and other "backward" features-Marx insisted that they, those poor, supposedly backward masses, were in advance of the great 1789-1793 French Revolution. He said so because (1) "the reason of these poor Germans were in inverse ratio to poor Germany." In a word, whereas "poor Germany," though they had reached the height of philosophy with Hegel, were only talking of dialectics, change, transcendence, but "poor German masses" were acting, doing it. (2) It may not be good to break up machines-and workers will surely learn otherwise once they see machinery helping them produce instead of throwing them out of work-but in action, that is in fact, machines do "represent" the

¹ Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-1987) was the founder of the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism in the United States and Chairwoman of News and Letters committees.

bourgeoisie and all "truth is concrete." (3) And, moreover, they are nowhere backward as compared to the intellectuals. For...they found the deeds to the machines and made a bonfire of these. So they are not just against machinery but private property, and even the French Revolution had not gone that far in overthrowing feudalism; private property remained, only this time [belonging] not to the lords, but...to the capitalists, whereupon the opposition between haves and have-nots has grown to open contradiction, [that of] capitalists/workers, with this overwhelming advantage: the have-nots are now united by the very method of production [with] hundreds, thousands in a single factory-the revolutionary force, the gravediggers of this society which "produces" them.

[By] the time [Marx] was involved, first in actual revolutions-1848-and in all sorts of daily activities-unions, women's struggles, against child labor, national struggles be it in Poland or [by] slaves for freedom in USA-just as class struggle was [the] first and remaining major contradiction, the concrete now became internationalism. The Workingmen's International Association was established against blacklegging [scabbing], against slavery, against Tsarism in Poland especially, [and] against Bonapartism in France, but the overwhelming majority were English trade unionists. Yet the minute the Paris Commune burst forth-and many British trade unionists said they joined for international labor solidarity, not for proletarian revolution-he hesitated not one moment to discount their membership, and place [ahead of them the] Paris Communards who never had belonged to the IWA.

Not only that-and this is most applicable to our day on the question of seniority vs. affirmative action and visa versa-just as in the 1850s after defeats of proletarian revolutions [of 1848] and "bourgeoisification" of [the] proletariat in Great Britain because it was the empire then and Marx demanded "going lower and deeper," so in 1871, when trade unions said they were the masses and IWA was small, Marx concretized that "going deeper and lower" as the International appealing to the masses, whom the trade unions [didn't] know how to touch[:] unskilled workers, East side of London Jewish ghettos, peasants newly arrived in cities, women. None in the Second International, even when it was still revolutionary and all Marxists belonged to it, grasped that "lower and deeper." The only one who organized the unskilled and women before [there was] the Second International was Marx's daughter [Eleanor], and precisely where Marx pointed to-East London gas

workers, women. It took nothing short of outright betrayal in 1914 before ever Lenin "discovered" "going lower and deeper," though he must have read [Marx] dozens of times before...

When he did "discover" and said, "Never again with the Second International," State and Revolution came next, but when 1917 did succeed, what happened to trade unions?

Because there was no national trade union in Russia before 1917 three different organizations arose spontaneously: trade unions became national, but meanwhile shop committees at point of production, and soviets were organized. Three different focal points [were] too much, but when Lenin started out for "single" rule, it was not at all what anarchists claim, [that it was] either political or trade union monolithism, but [rather] workers must chose one. Yet at once arose both "right"-Trotsky insisting that trade unions be incorporated into state "since it was a workers' state already"-and "left"-not only anarchists, but Bolshevik Shlyapnikov saying there should be no political party, calling for a "workers' congress." That sounded great except if you looked at Kronstadt which broke out at once, not to mention world capitalism and remaining White Guards in Russia. In any case...Lenin insisted the only [way] the workers state can be sure of remaining is if workers have right to criticize, and if they are permitted other forms of organization, and if they are not incorporated in state.

When we get to the American scene in those 1920s we find that we Bolsheviks couldn't for the life of us see that either the damned [American Federation of Labor] would ever organize [the] unorganized, or the Blacks would be permitted in anywhere. So we organized [the American] Negro Labor Congress, [the] Trade Union Educational League, women workers in isolated places but especially garment and textiles. But after many years of struggle and failures, from below did arise [the Congress of Industrial Organizations], and by "from below" I do not mean out of nowhere because we certainly were there too, but from within and outside at one and the same time-in a word, [John L.] Lewis making his motion for organizing the unorganized, [the] Left being in [the] organization of unemployed, and from below, etc., etc.

Presently, both Blacks and women find they have very little chance of getting in, not only because of labor bureaucracy, but, most tragically, the rank and file likewise do not recognize any value in "affirmative action." Believe me, no one in the Movement is unaware of

how long it took to get seniority, nor its absolute indispensability as against the boss who can otherwise fight at will. At the same time we cannot use just the past and old arguments since the opponents this time are not bosses but "lower and deeper layers." We also know the bosses would nevertheless use that against workers, even as they use the Equal Rights Amendment against working women who fought hard to win the rights. But here, too, we always defend the gains and demand proletarian women be consulted for working out any ERA on [the] basis of men too gaining the rights, not on basis of giving up [rights]. With seniority, instead of at once running to a "conclusion" and line, let's keep all avenues open, maintain dialogue with those excluded, or more precisely first hired, first fired.

AND ABOVE ALL, SEE THAT IT IS NOT ONLY LEFT IN [THE] TRADE UNION FIELD BUT [THAT WE] ACTUALLY PRACTICE PROLETARIAT AS REASON AS WELL AS FORCE...

Yours,

Raya

June 20, 1999

Hell for Certain, Kentucky

Remarks at Felix Martin's Gravesite

by Peter Hudis

Shortly before he died, Felix Martin asked that I come here to speak to you about what his work as a writer, activist, and philosopher for News and Letters Committees meant to him --because it represented something very precious which he wanted all to be able to share.

Not everyone here may know that for the last 27 years of his life Felix Martin was a writer columnist and editor of News & Letters newspaper. He wrote on an enormous variety and range of subjects. He wrote on the plant and shop floor conditions at GM South Gate, where he worked for many years, as well as on UAW politics and struggles of workers in other industries, like steel and coal. He wrote on world politics, discussing freedom struggles in Poland, South Africa, Bosnia, and elsewhere. He wrote on the environment, being one the first anywhere to take up issues of pollution and environmental degradation in connection with conditions inside the factories and in urban as well as rural areas. And he wrote on philosophy, on ideas of liberation, ranging from Hegel to Marx to philosophers of our time. He wrote with a simplicity and directness that was every bit the expression of humanism he exhibited in every facet of his personality --and he did it with so natural a voice that many a reader and listener called it a kind of poetry.

What galvanized him to develop as a writer, activist, and public speaker, was the concept of freedom that he found in the philosophy which has guided News and Letters --Marxist-Humanism. Marxist-Humanism is a philosophy first developed in the U.S. by Raya Dunayevskaya. It represented a total critique of both capitalism and what called itself "Communism," and a return to what Marx originally called his own philosophy --a thoroughgoing Naturalism or Humanism. Felix Martin saw in Marxist-Humanism a philosophy that could help change the world --one that could change everyone who pursued to the end the idea of freedom.

Marxist-Humanism helped him see why so much that angered him about this society existed. It showed him that work was limiting and alienating not because that is "natural" but because of the division of mental/ manual labor which defines class society, and which capitalism carries over and develops to an extreme. Far from accepting that division he constantly sought to uproot it. Marxist-Humanism showed him that Black and white are so divided in this society not because it is natural or inevitable, but because the system divides Black and white in order to maintain the rule of capital. Far from accepting that division he constantly opposed racism and chauvinism in all forms, providing us with an anticipation of what the American working class will become when it finally breaks from the manacles of racism which so define this system. Marxist-Humanism showed him that so many pursue money and material acquisition as a false god because they are not at their own selves, since their human capacity of being conscious, purposeful beings has become alienated from them. He understood better than anyone that so long as our capacity of being conscious, purposeful beings is not realized in our work and everyday life, we will reach out for some outside force to guide us --be it "God," religion, "the Party," or what-not.

But Marxist-Humanism didn't only help him see why so much that he hated about this society existed. It also provided him with a philosophy which showed that things do not have to always be this way, that they can change. From Marxist-Humanism he learned of those moments in history when working people embarked on new paths to realize the idea of freedom --like the Paris Commune of 1871, or the IWW, when white and Black workers came together in the early decades of this century against capitalism, or those moments closer to our own, like the struggles for liberation by workers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His gaze extended to events of the entire world, as he embraced things like the student movement; the women's movement; the Black consciousness movement; the movements of workers around the world to improve their conditions and livelihood, etc.

Most of all, what he got from --and in turn gave to-- Marxist-Humanism was a philosophy of liberation which spells out the need to uproot this society and create a new one in which the capacities of the individual can be fully realized.

That this is no mere dream or illusion is seen in how Marxist-Humanism enabled him to realize so many of his own capacities. It wasn't just that he became a political activist. Marxist-Humanism showed him that workers are not powerless or mere objects of someone else's designs, but that workers can become philosophers if they draw from and develop from within themselves the depth of the passion to be free. With that in hand, he dug deeply into thinkers like Hegel, Marx, and Raya Dunayevskaya, whose thought centers on the revolutionary dialectic --the process of developing through contradictions through a constant process of negating and transcending obstacles until freedom itself is achieved.

Raya Dunayevskaya once wrote that when workers master the principles of the dialectic the division between mental and manual will be broken down once and for all, and the *self-development of* humanity's natural and acquired talents will be realized. Felix Martin worked day and night to achieve that in himself. Even when working on the line he'd try to engage workers in discussing and studying dialectical philosophy. He could barely buy a bag of groceries without talking to the cashier about what was wrong with this system and what is needed to replace it. He was irrepressible, not just because of his personality, but because he wanted all others to share the sense of growth and self-development that he obtained by knowing the philosophy of liberation of Marxist-Humanism.

He was someone who could converse with anyone, whether a worker right off the street, or a philosopher in the academy --and quite often the latter had to wonder and shake their head over how he seemed to know more history and philosophy than they. He influenced an entire generation of political activists and thinkers, who looked to him as the kind of worker-sage who presages what working people will be in the future, when all the mind-forged manacles of this society are finally removed.



Peter Hudis and Felix Martin in Los Angeles

As he said at the memorial meeting for Raya Dunayevskaya in 1987, "Before I met Marxist-Humanism, my attitude was that the everyday struggle I went through working at General Motors was just a normal part of living, working and struggling and living, fighting to exist. But Raya helped me to see my own self. When I read chapter one [of her book] *Philosophy and Revolution*, I could just feel the scales peeling off my mental seeing. Hegel wrote, 'Individualism that lets nothing interfere with its Universalism, that is, Freedom.' What a lot of smog she looked through to be able to say that. This is what Marx developed, and then Raya for our age.

"I was always called a troublemaker all my life. I was always rebelling against everything I saw, anyone who told me what to do. I was always a fighter since when I was growing up as a Hillbilly in Hell for Certain, Kentucky. And I saw that kind of kinship between Raya and myself. That helped give me the patience to stick with my self-development.

"To me as a worker, this Marxist-Humanist organization, founded by Raya Dunayevskaya and Charles Denby, is what all of history has been struggling toward, an organization where workers and intellectuals can come together and work out these new ideas, where each can become a whole human being, to free ourselves from this butchering, inhuman system."

Marxist-Humanism opened up a new world for Felix Martin because it provided a pathway to break down the division of mental and manual, theory and practice, objective and subjective, that holds us back from realizing the fullness of our human potential. The fragmentation and alienation of this world does not have to be. We can be different, he saw, by taking responsibility for the passion for freedom which resides within us all.

Because Marxist-Humanism opened that up to him he was determined to have others be able to share it with him-so much so that even in death he wanted me to be able to come here and speak on what these ideas represent for the future of humanity.

Nothing was more important to him, he said again and again in the last weeks of his life, than to see this philosophy, Marxist-Humanism, and this Marxist- Humanist organization and newspaper, *News & Letters*, continue and grow. In its continuance and growth he saw his life continuing long after death, in the new generations to come who will pick up and realize the still-to-be-achieved challenge of fulfilling our human potential through a new unity of philosophy and revolution. He did not talk his ideas; he lived his ideas. And in doing so, he lives in us.

His life is a beacon, not just for those of us who knew him; it is a beacon for all those who seek to realize the idea of freedom in the 21st century. In working to realize that goal, we will make him live in us, as he made our lives so come alive in knowing this remarkable worker, thinker, and human being.