

Complex society must not blur gospel message

by David Malcolm

"The wages of the Labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." James 5:4

When James wrote those words, perhaps it was easy to determine who were the labourers and who were the employers, but that is no longer so. In today's complex societies of multinational corporations, horizontally and vertically integrated companies, Crown corporations, Crown-owned land, income tax, unemployment insurance and social assistance, it's more difficult to blame any one person who has kept back the wages of the labourers.

For example, let's take an imaginary employee in New Brunswick. He drives a truck for a large company, but isn't satisfied with his wages and working conditions. He asks for improvements, but is told that none can be made because the company is not making enough money to pay the workers more.

In fact the company's accountant can prove that the company is not making money, and may actually be losing money. The accountant will not likely tell the employee that one of the reasons the company is not making any money, is that the company is itself owned by another company which provides much of the cargo for the trucking company. Also, many of the supplies needed by the trucking firm are supplied by other companies owned partly by the same parent company.

And so, by clever manipulation—nearly always legal—these companies are able to charge each other for their exchanged services in such a way that none of them ever is able to show a profit. It is small wonder that the worker finds it difficult to understand how all these non-profitable companies are able to expand and to establish new branches and companies elsewhere in the province, the nation and in other countries. And the accountant is not willing to explain because he is working only for the trucking company and "does not understand" what is happening.

The truck driver talks with some of his co-workers. They decide to form an association or a union so they can negotiate better working conditions. But coincidentally the company decides at this time that it does not need as many truck drivers as it did the previous week so now there is no work and no wage.

Getting other work in the community is difficult, because "no one wants a troublemaker", and many other companies in the community are owned by, or do business with, the same company which owned the trucking firm.

Of course, now he can qualify for unemployment insurance—part of his wages have been paid into the fund for many years. However, the amount he receives is not enough to maintain his standard of living. And eventually those payments stop, and the next step is social assistance. His taxes have been supporting that program for years.

And both the federal and provincial governments tell him they cannot pay any more support, because their funds are in short supply and they must cut back on expenditures. And that seems

strange to the truck driver, because for all these years the incomes of the governments have been increasing rapidly, and the gross provincial and national products have been getting larger each year.

He knows that his work and taxes have contributed to those conditions, just the same as his work helped the trucking firm to grow. And he can't understand why the government cannot help him adequately, when it has money to build fancy office buildings, to raise the pay of legislators, to pay exorbitant prices for land purchased from political friends, to make multi-million dollar gifts to companies (like the one that owned his trucking firm), or to pay consultants to study things which are in need of action, not study.

This truck driver is in the same position as the woodworker, the farmer under contract to a food processor, the fish plant worker, or any worker or self-employed person who is dependent on a large company for employment. He is never able to really discover what employer is to blame for his low wage or unsafe working conditions. The blame is always passed off to some other person, company, government or mystical agency.

The power to control wages is also the power to control jobs and to determine who works, and therefore who lives. Even though our society claims to allow each person the freedom and opportunity to choose between working for someone else, for a company or to be self-employed, the choice is

usually more limited for the majority of people.

The very organization of society forces many people to depend on large companies and government for employment and assistance. That situation in itself may not be evil, but if most of the benefits go to the corporations or government, and all the hardships and penalties go to the worker, then the situation requires change.

If each individual has the right to live, then society has the obligation to guarantee employment with a wage sufficient for a reasonable standard of living, with a measure of social programs to supplement those wages or to replace them. There cannot be exploitation for ever.

If you want to know more...

by Gary Webster

We are presenting here a bibliography of the various books and films that may be helpful in learning more about industrial North America. Some of these materials highlight problems experienced in our region: regional dependency, high unemployment and a workforce concentrated in rural and service-sector occupations.

Obviously, this list is not exhaustive: people interested in more works should look at the New Hogtown Press' publication called "**A Guide to Working Class History, Second Edition**". This pamphlet covers both Canadian and American labour history and proved useful in compiling this bibliography. As well, one of the authors of the pamphlet, Professor Greg Kealey of Dalhousie University in Halifax, provided assistance in choosing some of the recent works mentioned here.

Readers interested in gaining the

most information in the shortest possible time should refer to the works marked with an (*). Most of these books are short, all are written in popular style, and, in **almost** every case, their perspective on the subject matter is exceptionally insightful.

Those who hope to understand the theme more profoundly, and those who are looking to **escape the numerous myths** that surround the questions of work and trade unions, will find sources marked with an (!) indispensable. They are longer and often more difficult, but they will repay the effort expended many times over.

Most readers will probably look to local libraries for access to books and pamphlets. A few books are very recent, and might be on order or awaiting order. But in many cases, your librarian may be unaware of the book or the publisher, or may even be

disinclined to order books about "ordinary people" and trade unionists, or on a "radical" theme. Don't hesitate to urge that the book be stocked. (U.P.E.I., for example, has most of them.)

If you want to buy your readings, some difficulty might be encountered in finding New Hogtown Press material. You can order direct from: 12 Hart House Circle, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario; or through Red Herring Co-op Books, 1652 Barrington St., Halifax, N.S.

Magazines, of course, offer numerous insights into the subject matter of this bibliography. Back issues of **Our Generation**, **This Magazine**, and **Canadian Dimension** will well repay the reader interested in workplace issues and trade-union activities in Canada, and appropriate subject headings in the **Canadian Periodical Index** and the **Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature** will guide you further.

I. The Nature of Work and its Effect on the Worker—Description and Analysis.

A. Canada

*Walter Johnson, ed., **Working in Canada**, (Black Rose, 1975).
Jim Lorimer, **Working People, Life in a Downtown City Neighborhood**, (James Lewis and Samuel, 1971).
James W. Rinehart, **The Tyranny of Work**, (Longman Canada, 1975).

B. U.S. and General

!Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century**, (Monthly Review Press, 1978).
!Richard Edwards, **Contested Terrain**, (Basic Books, 1979).
!*Barbara Garson, **All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work**, (Penguin, 1975).
Louise Kapp Howe, **Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work**, (G.P. Putnam's, 1971).
Richard Pfeffer, **Working for Capitalism**, (Columbia University Press, 1979).
!Studs Terkel, **Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do**, (Avon, 1974).

II. Unemployment and Regional Problems of the Workforce

!Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, **Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada**, New Hogtown Press, 1979).
***Canadian Dimension Magazine**, Vol. 13, No. 2 (February 1978). Special Issue on Atlantic Canada.
!Daniel Glenday, Hubert Guindon, Allan Turowetz, **Modernization and the Canadian State**, (Macmillan of Canada, 1978), Part II.
!*Cy Gonick, **Out of Work: Why There's So Much Unemployment and Why It's Getting Worse**, (Lorimer, 1978).
*Paul Phillips, **Regional Disparities**, (Lorimer, 1978).
Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, **Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare**, (Vintage, 1971).

III. Worker's Consciousness of the Need for Change: Possibilities of Change

!Stanley Aronowitz, **False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness**, (Mc-Graw Hill, 1973).
!*Martin Glaberman, **The Working Class and Social Change**, (New Hogtown Press, 1975).

IV. The Trade Union Movement and Labour Unrest

A. Canada

*Irving M. Abelle, **The Canadian Labour Movement, 1902-1960**, (Canadian Historical Association, 1975).
*Eugene A. Forsey, **The Canadian Labour Movement, 1812-1902**, (Canadian Historical Association, 1974).
!*Stuart Jamieson, **Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1920-1966**, (New Hogtown Press, 1968).
Steven Langdon, **The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement, 1845-1875**, New Hogtown Press, 1975).
Robert Laxer, **Canada's Unions**, (Lorimer, 1976).
Charles Lipton, **The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959**, (New Canada Press, 1973).
***The People's History of Cape Breton**, (1971, available from New Hogtown Press).

B. U.S.

!Thomas R. Brooks, **Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor, 2nd Edition**, (Delacorte Press, 1971).
!Ronald Radosh, **American Labor and United States Foreign Policy**, (Random House, 1969).