

DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 5 OF 16

FOLDER 21

REFERENCE MATERIAL

WORKING CONDITIONS R

SCOTT MS

R6

I'm there w/ this -

Do you want to
save it?

Jim

Rachel Scott
2320 20th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Outline for a book tentatively entitled

THE TORTURED MILLIONS

They are dying that I may live, the tortured millions,
By the Ohio River, the Euphrates, the Rhone.
They wring from the rocks my gold, the tortured millions;
Sleepless all night they mix my daily bread;
With heavy feet they are trampling out my vintage;
They go to a hungry grave that I may be fed....

--from a poem in McClure's, 1930,
by Florence Wilkinson

In 1906, in his classic book "The Jungle," Upton Sinclair wrote of the horrors of the working conditions in a slaughterhouse. "Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms," he wrote, "and like as not he would have a sore that would put him out of the world. All the joints of his fingers would be eaten by the acid, one by one.... The hands of the butchers and floormen had no nails--they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were so swollen that their fingers spread out like fans....

"There were also the wool-pluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, until the acid had eaten their fingers off....

"There were the beef-luggers, who carried 200-pound quarters into the refrigerator cars; this was a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years....

"There were those who worked at the stamping machines, and it

was very seldom that one could work long at these at the pace that was set and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off."

Sinclair said later that when he set out to write "The Jungle," he was not thinking of the issue that made the book famous, the scandal of impure food. "I wished to frighten a country by a picture of what its industrial masters were doing to their victims," he said, "and entirely by chance I stumbled on another discovery--what they were doing to the meat supply of the civilized world.... I failed in my original purpose."

The country, to this day, remains unfrightened. Most Americans believe that the sweat-shop factories with their unhealthy and dangerous conditions disappeared along with the 60-hour week and child labor. On the contrary, conditions in thousands of factories, mines, mills, shops and farms today are an even match for many 1900 conditions or, for that matter, for some that Charles Dickens described. Many working places, in fact, are more dangerous today, because of more sophisticated manufacturing techniques that bring with them thousands of new varieties of toxic fumes, chemicals, gasses and dusts. Manufacturers have been allowed to proceed with the fantastic elaboration of technology with little thought to the resulting new menaces to workmen's health and life.

As for the countless older menaces, only the coal miners' dramatic fight against dangerous working conditions has reached national attention. But the miners and their black-lung disease are not even the most

extreme example. Few people, for instance, are aware of the shocking death statistics for asbestos workers. Of all asbestos workers, one in five dies of lung cancer. One in ten dies of cancer of the body or lung cavity, a rare disease that affects one in ten thousand in the general population. Among workers who stay in the industry at least 20 years, four out of five develop asbestosis--a disease similar to black lung but caused by exposure to asbestos dust.

Asbestos workers, however, consider fiberglass a far more dangerous substance than asbestos. Their union president, Albert Hutchinson, has said that fiberglass dust "will make black lung and the miners look like a picnic.

"I don't want to scare anybody," Hutchinson added, "but I know what it can do. I've had the end of my nose eaten off by fiberglass."

The more subtle cases often are overlooked--the zinc workers who were hospitalized for long periods of time after exposure to high levels of lead oxides, carbon monoxide, cadmium and 124-degree temperatures. Or the cotton worker who, after years of breathing lint, had to "retire" at the age of 40 because he "just got choked up there in the mill," an unknowing victim of byssinosis--brown lung disease.

American industry has successfully hidden its acts of violence against workers while maintaining a favorable safety image through such fronts as the National Safety Council. Just as the safety council has shifted the burden for auto safety away from the manufacturers and into the driver's lap, industrial hygienists and safety experts speak only of the need for workers to be more careful. If only they

would wear their safety shoes and safety glasses!

workers in most trades have traditionally accepted hazardous working conditions as an unchangeable fact of life. Faced with deciding between hazardous work and no work at all, they choose to work. One young worker in a North Carolina furniture factory told me recently that he frequently had difficulty breathing in the plant because of the strong lacquer, kerosene and turpentine fumes. Most of the workers complained, he said, but the supervisors told them, "If you don't like it, stay home." Said the worker, "Sometimes I have to beat the breath into me. But I'd rather work than walk the streets any day."

Workers in larger plants are becoming more concerned now about plant conditions, perhaps because their unions are finally beginning to recognize the problems and educate their membership. But workers and their unions are finding that state and federal health agencies are in most cases either unable or unwilling to provide relief.

A book on occupational health is urgently needed and could not help but be an important social contribution. It could also be a publishing success. Since the middle sixties, when Ralph Nader ate his last hamburger and started working for auto safety, the American people have begun to realize that the so-called safety crusade is not simply a series of separate attacks on a broad range of unrelated targets, but an attack against what Nader calls "corporate crime." The unseen and untold story of the maiming and massacre of

millions of workers by callous, profit-motivated businessmen is potentially the most dramatic example yet of corporate irresponsibility, and a perfect target for a hard-hitting book.

Working conditions is a subject that has never in this era been comprehensively examined in a popular book. Yet it is the perfect subject for our time, a subject that the right book could make into a matter of intense national concern, just as Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" did to the subject of environmental poisoning. The book, in fact, could easily build on the already strong concern with the environment. The environmental crisis has made us responsive to this sort of problem, for dangerous working conditions, like pollution, are hidden human costs of overextending the consumer economy and of putting profits first.

Like "Silent Spring," the book should be a muckraking book in the sense of advocacy, but it must be accurate and low-key, dramatic but not exaggerated or simplistic. For example, it should be made clear that although it is the manufacturers who inflict the actual injuries upon workers, they do so at the behest of all comfortable Americans. We want our fiberglass and cotton and asbestos products, our plastics and magic chemicals, the coal to make the power to run our appliances, and we want these things at a price. Our standard of living must be maintained at all costs--even the cost of disease, dismemberment, death. It is not necessary for us to think of what might be happening to our fellow citizens who labor. We don't live among them, we never meet them. How many middle-class Americans know anyone who has been disabled on the job? Yet, according to

a recent study, each year some 25,000,000 workers are injured, moderately or seriously.

The aim of this book is to make it necessary for the kind of people who buy books to think of this problem, so that something may be done. If this book can add human drama to the statistics, it could have a powerful effect.

And there is a great deal of human drama. I spent three months this spring with a group of mill workers in Mebane, North Carolina. Workers there who catch their hands in the machines--and I've seen the scars--are bound up by their foremen and sent back to work. If they are sick, they must work anyway or lose their jobs. When they are older and begin to slow down, they are thrown out, often without pensions. "Stretch-outs" are common and sometimes used indefinitely as punishment for any who dare to complain. Women workers who are pregnant must work right up until they go into labor, and they are required to return to work too soon, causing "women troubles" that they are embarrassed to tell a stranger about. If their children are sick and need care, they must work anyway or lose their jobs.

I have talked to mill workers, coal miners, atomic energy plant workers, furniture workers and construction workers, street workers, lab technicians, union leaders of oil and chemical workers and auto workers, leather-makers.... The job descriptions are endless and the trail of violence is clearly marked throughout.

Until I get deeper into the preparation of the book, I can't

suggest a chapter outline that will have any permanence. I can, however, cite some categories. What follows are discussions of those categories, not descriptions of chapters, and it should be stressed that the chapters will be quite unlike these discussions; they'll be composed largely of narrative, with people and anecdotes and scenes, and with the exposition blended in painlessly. The book must be exceedingly readable--no jargon, few medical terms and statistics.

I. Why Doesn't The Government Do Something?

Of course blame must fall primarily on industry, but bad working conditions go unchecked in the United States partially because federal and state government have largely ignored them. The United States lags far behind many countries in research, standards and regulation. For example, Great Britain long ago recognized byssinosis as a crippling lung disease among cotton workers; it set strict standards for dust control and provided workmen's compensation coverage. The U.S., however, perhaps operating under the illusion that the American worker is somehow constitutionally hardier than his British counterpart, has yet to set a recommended standard and only recently recognized the disease as a significant danger to American cotton mill workers.

So with most toxic chemicals and dusts. Because research funds are scant, American scientists know very little about even the most common working hazards. The result is a lethal knowledge gap. In a recent study of an Anaconda refinery in Montana, investigators found traces of cadmium, lead, zinc, copper and arsenic in workers' blood samples and high levels in urine and hair samples, but concluded

that "lead is probably the only element which is currently of any significant hazard to the workers." The state health department report explained its amazing conclusions this way: "A clear relationship between levels of elements in blood, urine and hair with possible toxicological effects has not been established."

Imagine the outcry if the same logic were applied to food and drugs. Cadmium, for example, is considered too toxic to be permitted in any food product. Anaconda workers should find little to reassure them in the effect the pollutants from their plant, in more diluted quantities than those they are exposed to, have had on the East Helena community. Ranchers have not been able to raise horses in the area for decades. Commercial rabbit growers report stillborn litters of rabbits. Henry Schroeder, M.D., a professor of physiology at Dartmouth Medical School's trace-element laboratory, wrote to a Montana scientist that he was "not at all surprised that...rabbits have dead litters. This, of course, is typical of lead poisoning. I would suspect that the East Helena mothers will also, in time."

The weak Walsh-Healy Act of 1935 is the only non-specific federal law regulating job safety. It applies, however, only to companies with government contracts. The law provides that plants not meeting health standards on some 400 toxic substances may lose their federal contracts. The catch is, industry sets its own standards. The bureau of labor standards enforces the act with a 20-man force of field inspectors who annually check about three percent of all the plants with government contracts. In plants checked, infractions are frequent, but violators are seldom punished. Results of the

investigations are available only to company management.

The rest of the federal occupational health program--"Program" is actually too generous a term for it--is the responsibility of the timid Bureau of Occupational Safety and Health, aptly nicknamed BOSH. At BOSH, where industry influence is heavy, the by-word is cooperation. The bureau's officials habitually write reports which blithely praise the conditions of the shops they have studied, overlooking dangerously unhealthy pollutions and hazards.

The bureau is full of "nice guys," who cry poverty and lack of manpower pretty convincingly whenever they are attacked. But ask a simple question--and get this kind of answer:

Last February I asked the bureau's public relations officer, Pat Foley, for two reports on an Anaconda plant in Montana. From the beginning she seemed doubtful that the reports were available, so I pressed for an explanation.

"Who made the study?"

"I think we, at the request, assisted the Montana State Health Department. I think there are certain confidentialities that they can insist that we keep, that we are not allowed to release."

"Do you know now if I can have that study?"

"No, this is what we're going to have to find out. And I hope it doesn't take the general counsel to decide."

"Who is the general counsel?"

"Who is the general counsel? Let me look in the HEW directory. You ask simple questions, but they are not that easy to answer.

Have you been in Washington long?"

In a second phone call, I asked Miss Foley what she had found out about the reports.

"You mean the industrial surveys done in the Anaconda plant. Okay, well, I'll have to call over there and find out. We don't have that. If I can get somebody in Montana who knows anything about it, you know, I'll do that. Because I can't spend too much time on this. I'm only one information person and there are information things to be done, okay?"

"Well, this is an information thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, but do you think that everything else should come to a screeching halt?"

"Well, what I've requested is whatever you do have in your files."

"Well, I don't have anything but notes here."

"Whatever correspondence or notes that you can show me that you have on the Metcalf letter or anything concerning that particular problem in Anaconda."

"The letter from the Union, which is the only thing I do have."

"Can you send me the letter from the Union and also call me back on these two reports?"

"The '65?"

"The '65 and the '69 reports."

"And '69. Okay."

That was the last I heard from her. Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana, with more persistence, went directly to Secretary Finch for the information a month later. The bureau still maintained it did not

have access to the reports. When the senator went to the Montana State health Department for the information, state officials claimed that the reports were protected under a state law (which as it reads, is designed to protect the confidentiality of the patient-physician relationship). Only after the state attorney general ruled that the reports were not covered under the law did the senator, five months after his initial request, receive the reports.

The reports, most of them labeled "confidential," were shocking. In addition to the alarming traces of toxic metals found in samples of workers' blood, urine and hair, in repeated surveys state and federal officials measured fatal concentrations of cadmium fumes, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide, sometimes at concentrations higher than their instruments could register.

But since both the state and federal health officials lack enforcement powers of any kind, they simply continue their endless task of measuring and recommending--usually as quietly as possible.

Some Montana health officials show remarkable bravery in their investigations, but their director, Benjamin Wake, is, as a Metcalf aide describes him, "a little timid." Timid indeed. In March of 1969 Wake wrote the manager of the American Smelting and Refinery Company in East Helena that one of his investigators (the brave one) found concentrations of carbon monoxide of 300 parts per million, 1,000 ppm and 500 ppm in various areas of the plant. (The level for safety which industry set for itself at 50 ppm is considered to be harmful by reputable scientists.)

"As you know," wrote Wake, "these concentrations are extremely

high and suggest that a fatal situation could easily develop. An immediate control program is indicated." Wake concluded: "We would appreciate your advising us what steps have been or will be taken to correct this problem."

Two months later, his remarkable faith in Montana industry unshaken, Wake wrote the plant manager again, this time to tell him that state investigators had measured cadmium levels in the plant at thirty times the industry-accepted safe level. "We felt that you would like to know these concentrations," Wake explained, "since fatalities from cadmium poisoning are reported from time to time. We appreciate your interest in this matter."

As of this writing, the possibility of fatalities had failed to stir any response by the company.

In 1907 William Hard, who wrote "Making Steel and Killing Men" and "The Law of the Killed and Wounded," proposed two remedies, simple enough but today, 1970[^] as distant as they were in 1907:

--Complete publicity--report to public authorities on every accident, fatal or non-fatal. Yet a 1966 report to the U.S. Surgeon General says "the only agencies presently partially aware of the incidence of injury and disease arising during the course of and out of employment are some state workmen's compensation bureaus or the labor departments and a few private insurers. ✓"

--Granting of power to the public authorities to supervise all machinery in all industrial establishments and to suggest and enforce such changes, within specified limits, as shall seem fit. Yet in 1970 there is still no federal program--the Bureau of Occupational

Safety and Health of HEW exists without legislative mandate. The majority of state programs are weak; nine states have no programs at all.

II. Safety And The Business Mentality

In the first of the two books mentioned above, William Hard exposed the death and disablement in a United States Steel Corporation plant in South Chicago. Hard reported that in one year--1906--46 workers were killed, 184 temporarily disabled and 368 permanently disabled.

"The operating men who manage the Illinois Steel Company are human beings," he wrote. "They do not wish to commit either murder or suicide. But ~~Steel~~ is Dividends. All the operating men in South Chicago, from William A. Field down to the lowest 'Huniak' who now sculls the ladles that Mr. Field used to scull, are bound, hand and foot, by the desire to produce more steel this month than was ever before produced in South Chicago. The figures that indicate products and profits are the only figures handled and scrutinized by the members of the board of directors of the United States Steel Corporation. Steel is Dividends."

In my reporting for this book, I will visit not only workers, to observe the conditions under which they work, but also their employers, for the same reason. Is the air in the office of a manufacturer of trichlorethylene (a widely used industrial solvent that is now believed to produce "chronic toxicity") filtered through an air

conditioner? To what extent are the respective executives aware that industrial cancers have been linked to uranium, oil products and coal tar, dyes, fluorspar, arsenic, chromium, nickels, iron and zinc and to vapors of some aromatic hydrocarbons? I want to try very hard and soberly to find out the mental mechanism that allows a man to live with the knowledge that he has added to his personal prosperity by refusing to spend money to halt the slow destruction of other men. (And to do this effectively, I know, I must in fairness grant that executive every point he is due, give him credit for any efforts at remedy, and so forth.)

I am interested in how industry controls the standard-setting organizations and how it influences workmen's compensation. I will also give a narrative description of industry's defeat of the current occupational health bill.

III. The Prostitution Of Science And Medicine

Company doctors add a frightening sort of Rosemary's Baby dimension to the industrial health drama. We might expect callous irresponsibility from corporate officials or bureaucrats but certainly not from the trusted medical profession. But the industrial physicians and hygienists purposely mis-diagnose occupational diseases, write biased reports on occupational health studies and misallocate research funds in a prostitution of medicine that allows millions of workers every year to suffer needlessly and thousands more to die.

A similar phenomenon is the Industrial Hygiene Foundation. It

is hardly a household word, but the foundation does its dirty work in the good name of medicine for corporations whose products are household words. The foundation is supported by fees from its 400 corporate members, including nine of the ten largest companies in the United States, all making this small investment to avoid protecting workers adequately at a higher cost. Faithfully, for its sponsors, the foundation produces research report after research report which exonerate the companies from any charge of shoddy or dangerous products, any charge of hazardous working conditions, any guilt for any accident resulting in a workman's compensation suit.

I want to focus upon Dr. Paul Gross, M.D., the main researcher and spokesman for the foundation, and upon the many incredible reports he has written to distort otherwise clear medical findings on occupation hazards. In 1968, for example, Dr. Gross testified before the Senate Labor Committee that only 1,300 to 5,000 active and inactive miners had disabling forms of black lung disease. Gross claimed that the other 50,000 disabled workers who most researchers believe have the disease are disabled by causes not related to coal mining, such as smoking. In another study--this on the effects of asbestos dust on rats--Dr. Gross found that a third of the rats in the experiment developed cancer. Undaunted, Gross concluded that the cause of cancer was exposure to trace elements of metal from the hammer he used to pound up the asbestos. For his money, the only logical conclusion.

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IV. The Right To Be Healthy

Frank Wallick of the United Auto Workers, one of the strongest union advocates of better health and safety legislation, talks of "the rising tumult of dissent in the work environment." I believe it will not be long before the unions and the unorganized workers in this country explode in a rage equal to the violence they have so long mutely accepted. They will demand protection, compensation and retribution.

The sparks to light their rage are being quietly ignited now. The oil and chemical workers recently organized a series of regional conferences for their workers, asking them to talk about their plant hazards and providing experts to answer their please for information. The textile workers union is posting warnings in non-union as well as union mills about the cotton-dust disease byssinosis. The United Auto workers claim they are serious about including health provisions in their bargaining demands. These are all rather timid attacks, but they are the first murmurs of dissention heard since the 1930's.


Students and workers have already begun to find a common bond in protesting industrial violence. In Kansas City, for example, students joined with women workers a few months ago to demonstrate against unsafe working conditions in a plastics factory. That sort of action will increase as unions begin to realize their need for public support.

As I've said, the foregoing discussions are mainly just statistics

and cold political argument. I want this book to be about people. I want to tell the compassionate but unsuspecting Americans who work in quiet offices, with upholstered swivel chairs and carpeted floors, how it is to have to sell your health to stay alive. I want to tell how it is that in 1970, just as in 1906, men's youth and strength and souls are stripped, mauled, mashed, wrenched out of them until they are too sick to compete, too worn and ruined to care, then cast away.

In 1906 Edwin Markham wrote a moving description of conditions in the cotton mills. "To what purpose," he asked in closing, "is our 'age of enlightenment,' if, just to cover our nakedness, we establish among us a barbarism that overshadows the barbarism of the savage cycle? Is this what our orators mean when they jubilate over 'civilization' and 'the progress of the species'?"

I expect this book to run about 80,000 words. I will begin work immediately upon the signing of the contract and will deliver manuscript on September 1st, 1971. I need an advance of \$7,500, which will be my sole income for the time I am working on the book.


Rachel Scott

MY BACKGROUND

Born 1947 in Iowa, grew up in Iowa and Kansas City. Attended Kansas State University--active in student politics and newspaper reporting. Co-founded the midwest's largest free university. Worked in the summer of 1968 as an intern for the Detroit Free Press and during the Detroit newspaper strike worked for the Akron Beacon Journal. After graduation I worked for the Winston-Salem Journal for six months, covering business, labor and government.

After leaving the Journal I worked for Ralph Nader, researching and writing about occupational safety and health. Beginning in March, 1970, I spent three months investigating one-company textile mill towns in North Carolina under a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism. The result was a feature story in the July 25 issue of the New Republic entitled "The Firing and Hiring of Fredy Jones."

I returned to Washington and worked briefly as a Washington correspondent for Pacifica Radio. They decided my voice was too high for radio and I was fired. I met David Obst of Dispatch News Service soon after that and have formed a symbiotic association with Dispatch, but I'm essentially a free-lance reporter.

I have written for the Washington bureau of Knight Newspapers, the Washington Post, the Carolina Financial Times, Dispatch News Service and Off Our Backs (the underground women's liberation newspaper). My single award is a sixth-place William Randolph Hearst award for investigative writing for my investigation in 1969 of campus unrest at Kansas State University.