

MOVING THE MAIL:

From a Manual Case to Outer Space

By
Peter Rachleff
and
The Work Environment Project



PREFACE

This pamphlet began as a series of lectures prepared by Peter Rachleff and presented in July, 1980 to a group of postal clerks attending an educational program in Morgantown, West Virginia. Since there was intense interest in the material Rachleff presented on changes in the U.S. Postal Service during the 1970's, someone suggested that the lectures be published and made available to all postal employees and the general public. To that end the Work Environment Project edited the Rachleff lectures, added several sections including Chapter V on health and safety, rounded up graphics and prepared the manuscript for publication. Members of the Project who worked on this pamphlet are Paul Becker, Keith Dix and Betty Justice. The Project wishes to thank others who read early drafts and provided invaluable comments and criticisms, namely, Jeremy Brecher, John Hilsman, Eugene Johnson, Tim Romine, Owen Tapper, Peter Walsh, and Bill Wyckoff.

Comments by postal workers were recorded on tape at the time the lectures were first presented. These comments were later combined with numerous taped interviews of men and women who shared with the authors experiences they have had working for the postal service. Since these experiences and impressions are an important part of this publication, these workers too, are authors deserving credit for their contribution: Ernest Anthony, Charles Baker, Melvin Benjamin, Casper Betson, Gene Blake, Phyllis Bready, Jim Burke, Carol Burton, Ralph Byrnside, Robert Carey, Charles Crawford, Beverly Cook, Irving Dominique, Glen Dunwoody, John Feazelle, Beverly Fink, Colandus Francis, Harry Gill, John Godbey, Tommy Harper, Eugene Johnson, John Katzmire, Richard Lange, Dorothy Meadows, Morris Meadows, Jim Murphy, Steve Parise, Dan Patton, Eugene Polanski, Roberta Ramey, Michael Reid, Cecil Romine, Timothy Romine, Candace Sexton, Peter Walsh, Joann Witten, and Harry Woodson, Jr.

MOVING THE MAIL:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I	
The Postal Service Becomes A Business	2
CHAPTER II	
The Postal Service Moves To The Suburbs	19
CHAPTER III	
When Machines Replace People	25
CHAPTER IV	
Health And Safety In The Postal Service	37
CHAPTER V	
In Generations To Come	49
CHAPTER VI	
What Hope Is There?	57
POSTSCRIPT	67
APPENDIX	69

INTRODUCTION

In late fall, 1980, a rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral headed for an orbit 22,300 miles above the earth's surface. The rocket's payload was a two ton communications satellite which, according to *Newsweek*, "marks the start of a revolution in the way corporations do business." This communications venture is a joint undertaking of IBM, Comsat and the Aetna Life Insurance Company with the goal of making a profit from the modern business need to transmit vast quantities of data quickly and efficiently. Serving some of the major U.S. corporations such as GM, Boeing and Westinghouse, this privately owned communications system will also be able to transmit voice messages, thus offering a complete communications package: long-distance telephone calls and teleconferences, the sending of financial and other data, and the transmitting of documents.

Utilizing the latest microelectronic technology the Satellite Business System, as it's called, will not only compete with Ma Bell but will, with its batch-document transmittal service, be in direct competition with the U.S. Postal Service. A machine scans a page with a laser, translates the information into digital code and then stores it. When the storage system has collected 5,000 pages of copy "it goes banging over the satellite" explained Roy Fretriss, SBS vice president. At the receiving end another machine decodes the digital signals and prints out high quality copy at the rate of 70 pages per minute. This machine will enable a business office, for example, to send a complete instructional manual to eight or ten branch offices overnight.

The U.S. Postal Service is not standing idly by as private industry moves ahead with new electronic communications systems. It, too, is testing the feasibility of various types of electronic message systems which promise to eliminate much traditional mail processing. The chapters which follow will focus on some of the space age technology now being considered by postal management. Before doing that we will also take a look at some of the less sophisticated technology which has been installed in the recent past to convert mail processing from a manual to a mechanical operation. Along with mechanization of mail handling has gone reorganization of management, centralization of operations and new processing systems such as the nine digit zip codes. The impact of all these changes on postal workers and on the mail service is the primary concern of this investigation. Many of the changes in mail handling have affected letter carriers as well as the clerk crafts but the following chapters will focus primarily on the problems of the men and women who work inside the nation's post offices.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRESS

While the electronic revolution has provided us with some truly amazing developments in space technologies, missiles and weapon systems, calculators and computers, digital watches, word processors and industrial control equipment in the post WW II period, it is important to remember that science and technology have for many years played key roles in American industry. New processes and products resulting from science and technology have improved our material standard of living, have made life at home and on the job easier and have facilitated economic growth by providing the profits for business investment. Technology, it seems, has become the lifeblood of the American economic system. Yet we all know that offsetting these advantages of technological change are many disadvantages, some of which are so severe they can no longer be ignored: loss of jobs, disruption of the work place, degradation of work and alienation on the job, serious dislocations within communities and adverse environmental impacts.

Even though the advantages of any particular technological change should be realistically contrasted with the overall disadvantages—there is a tendency for us to equate technology with “progress.” In fact, the two words are usually tied together in our thinking, that is, “technological progress.” There is also an inclination to condemn as obstructionist those who oppose new technologies. “You can’t stand in the way of progress,” is a familiar phrase. Finally, we generally think of technological change as an inevitable force, one that moves ahead with its own momentum, beyond our control. Technology in industry is as far out of reach, we tend to feel, as the new SBS satellite is above our heads. This study of technology in the postal service may dispel a few of these myths concerning technological progress. And in doing so it may turn a few heads, raise a few eyebrows and ruffle a few feathers—at least the author hopes it will.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

Technology, of course, is not the only force affecting the work place, the community and the environment. In the past 60 or 70 years there has been a virtual revolution in the way businesses are managed. And while it took different forms in different industries this managerial revolution had a central goal of increasing control over the work process and the discipline of the work force. Surprisingly, until the late 19th century, employers in most industries did not control the work process. In general, it was controlled by skilled or craft workers. Only they possessed the skills and knowledge necessary for production. The transmission of these skills passed from one generation of workers to the next through an apprenticeship system. Job control was perpetuated and made effective by their refusal to let work be subdivided into smaller components that did not re-

quire “all-around craftsmen.” By barring helpers and laborers they were able to limit the labor market, maintain skill requirements, and keep up pay scales. The skilled workers set “stints” which determined the amount of work to be done, and established their own rules about the methods and equipment with which it was to be done. The employer could not tell them how to do a job; indeed, the craftsmen generally supervised the unskilled majority of the workforce themselves.

Since the turn of the century, however, in one industry after another management has initiated changes designed to break the skilled workers’ control of the work place. To do this a wide range of strategies and craft techniques was used. The particular system employed depended on the industry and on local conditions but the basic philosophy underlying the whole management movement was found in the books of Frederick W. Taylor. Long considered the father of “scientific management,” Taylor argued in 1911 that the first principle to follow was that managers must assume “the burden of gathering together all of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulas. . . .” The second principle of scientific management espoused by Taylor was that “all possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centered in the planning or lay-out department.”

Taylor was quite emphatic on this second point because he felt it was necessary to remove workers from any participation in the planning process. It was absolutely essential to shift decision making relating to processes and products away from the control of workers on the shop floor to the front office. The so-called “management rights” provisions so common in modern labor agreements attest to the fact that this point has been well established in principle and practice. Yet in Taylor’s day the notion was vigorously debated and not at all taken for granted—management rights were rarely included in union-negotiated contracts.

Once management had garnered the knowledge of the production process from skilled workers and had removed them from participation in decision making, Taylor argued that one final step was needed to completely reorganize the production process. Scientific management required that management control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution. He wrote:

Perhaps the most prominent single element in modern scientific management is the task idea. The work of every workman is fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance, and each man receives in most cases complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work. . . . This task specifies not only what is to be done, but how it is to be done and the exact time allowed for doing it

WORKERS RESPOND TO TECHNOLOGY

From the very beginning of the scientific management movement workers found ways to resist the changes which had so heavy an impact on their lives. In the long run they lost their struggle for control over the labor process but their experiences are important to understand for those facing similar problems in the 1980's. Many of the great strikes in the period before and during World War I were in direct response to management reorganization of work. The wave of textile workers' strikes which spread through New England and New Jersey in 1912 and 1913 usually involved resistance to new stretch-out and premium pay plans as well as efforts for shorter hours and higher pay. The Illinois Central-Harriman strike of 1911-16 started in opposition to the introduction of time study and incentive plans in railroad shops. Craft unionists of many grades joined together to demand the abolition of premium pay plans, time study, personnel records and dilution of skills, leading to an extremely bitter four year strike. In 1910, 5,000 of the 7,000 workers at Bethlehem Works struck against the bonus system. When departments and groups of workers drew up separate strike demands, everyone turned out to demand uniform rates of pay, some specifying an end to piece-work and a return to day-work.

Employers in the metal working industry introduced incentive pay and time and motion studies as a way to eliminate forms of control exercised by the craftsmen. Open resistance usually resulted from the first appearance of time study in a shop. In some cases, when the time study men appeared, everyone refused to work. In others, the time study men were physically attacked and beaten up. In some cases, workers walked out when time study was tried. In at least one case, machinists threw away their bonus pay envelopes unopened to show their contempt for the incentive system.

Union recognition became an important goal for workers, not just to provide higher wages and economic security, but as a means to counter the changes in worklife imposed by technology and scientific management. Grievance procedures, hiring halls, job classifications, apprenticeship rules, seniority on promotion and transfer, and other provisions of union contracts tied management's hands in the pursuit of its goals and thus union recognition itself became a life or death matter. Industrial violence characterized the American scene for years as the owners of the steel, auto, coal, electrical machinery and other industries used every tactic imaginable to prevent union organization by their employees. In the end as we know, these industries were organized and now function under negotiated labor-management agreements.

Unions have, therefore, served as a means by which workers have tried to establish some degree of control over life at work. Yet it is a con-

stant, day-to-day struggle to maintain the integrity of labor agreements and an even greater struggle to negotiate new language that would dilute management's control over technology and methods. Frequently, the struggle takes the form of direct action on the shop floor without official union sanction or knowledge of the event. Output restriction by individuals and informal work groups, pressuring foremen to "shape up," working to the rules, "sickouts," wildcat strikes, bomb threats and even sabotage are common ways workers resist management control. But it has been a losing battle. As we face the last two decades of the twentieth century there is much cause for alarm. The pace of technological change seems to be increasing at a head-spinning rate, new operating methods come down from above almost daily and discipline for those who don't follow the rules seems more severe than ever. We sometimes wonder, "What hope is there?"

TECHNOLOGY IN THE POST OFFICE

The patterns of change which took place in private industry over the last sixty or seventy years (and are still going on) have repeated themselves in the Post Office, but here the changes have been telescoped into the short span of only ten years. The impact on jobs and working conditions has been no less severe, and we might say more severe because it has happened in such a short time span. In 1970, the nation's postal service employed 741,216 people. Ten years later that number had dropped to 666,823 as machines replaced manual methods of mail handling and as management centralized postal operations. Further reductions in manpower needs are anticipated with the introduction of the nine-digit zip code system and with the electronic transmission of messages. A General Accounting Office report to Congress recently indicated that U.S. Postal Service employment will fall by an estimated 200,000 by the year 2,000 if the use of electronic mail increases as expected.

In the chapters to follow, we hope to show how the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has been reorganized from the top down and how postal management has employed the fundamentals of scientific management to shift power from the work room floor to management itself. To do so, we trace the major technological and managerial changes in the USPS since early 1970's. Understanding this history would seem to be a logical first step for postal workers—and the public—in developing programs and strategies to protect jobs and job rights and to keep alive and healthy an essential public service.

The purpose of this book, then, is to go beyond a mere description of the factors which have changed life on the workroom floor in the nation's post offices. The author hopes to raise some questions about who makes the decisions concerning the new machinery and develops the



management practices and procedures, examine why are these decisions made, and determine who benefits and who suffers from them. Our focus and our concern is that of the postal workers, principally the clerks, who have been at the center of management's drive to reduce costs and increase productivity. The author also hopes that by understanding the changes in their jobs and their work life, postal employees may find new ways to protect themselves, to regain some of the control over their jobs they once had and to win back some of the pride they once had in providing a service to their communities.

CHAPTER I

The Postal Service Becomes a Business

For nearly 200 years the U.S. Post Office Department functioned as a public service agency and as such was largely immune to the pressures for higher profits and capital accumulation facing business enterprises. And, through the 1960's, the Department had not experienced the technological changes and the reorganization movement that had so profoundly affected major industries in the private sector of the economy. The delivery of the nation's mail relied almost exclusively on manual labor, with management in the hands of politically appointed individuals. Congress determined policies governing the Post Office Department, established appropriations for running it, and evaluated its performance. In July, 1971, with the passage of the Postal Reorganization Act, all of this changed. Once seemingly immune to the goals of business and distant from the havoc created by new technology, the postal service in the decade of the 1970's entered a new era as it moved to the centers of the economic mainstream.

As the volume of all mail more than doubled between 1940 and 1970, and first-class mail tripled in volume during the same period, the postal service compensated by adding to its workforce, becoming the second largest employer in the entire country. Postal facilities became increasingly crowded with both mail and workers. As a result, both the quality of mail service and the quality of working conditions steadily deteriorated. In 1969, Lonnie R. Johnson, National President of the National Association of Post Office Mail Handlers, Watchmen, Messengers and Group Leaders Division of the Laborers' International Union, AFL-CIO, told a House of Representatives Committee:

The average mail handler working in one of these poorly lit, dirty, cluttered, depressing and inefficient operations, usually bears the brunt of the Post Office's backwardness. He finds himself lugging around an 85 to 100 pound sack that could be transported far more efficiently and easily by machines operated by mail handlers. Many of our major post offices are so inadequate for today's needs that mail handlers and other postal employees are literally falling all over one another trying to get their job done.

Angered over unsafe working conditions, low wages, and their employer's apparent lack of concern, postal workers took matters into their own hands in 1970 when they launched a nationwide strike. Drawing strength and confidence from a surge of public employee unionism in the 1960's, rank and file postal workers, from mail handlers to letter carriers,

Federal officials had become convinced—some before, some during the strike—that full-scale “postal reorganization” was their only hope of avoiding another confrontation with postal employees.

appeared in solid support of the strike, even though their union leaders were compelled by law to disavow it. For one week, the nation's mail was disrupted, as postal workers held firm and in some cities threatened to expand their strike to other dissatisfied local public employees. The combination of a promise of a substantial wage increase and the deployment of federal troops to break the strike brought postal employees back to work. However, the federal government knew that its strategy yielded no more than a temporary solution.

Federal officials had become convinced—some before, some during the strike—that full-scale “postal reorganization” was their only hope of avoiding another confrontation with postal employees. An elaborate plan took shape, a plan whose implementation would change the postal service from top to bottom. A new, semi-independent United States Postal Service was born, with a new, “non-political” management structure and new, corporate goals. The new USPS was given “broad borrowing authority”, that is, the right to float bonds to fund capital improvements. Efficiency, cost-cutting, attrition, mechanization, productivity, and self-sufficiency became the watch-words of the new management. Here, then, was the ultimate answer to the threat which had been posed in the 1970 strike.

ESTABLISHING MANAGEMENT CONTROL OF POSTAL WORK

The new managers quickly demonstrated their business orientation, leaving the public service concerns of the past little more than window dressing. One of their first measures was the awarding of a \$3,400,000 contract to the Westinghouse Corporation for a comprehensive job evaluation study of all phases of postal work. Significantly, the USPS management as a whole was seeking to reorganize postal work along the lines of private industry, and it was attracted to the model of a major firm which had been continually innovative from a technological point of view, and had shown that it meant business in its relationships with the union representing its employees.

Other concerns manifested by the new postal management were consistent with their new business orientation. Postal service officials sought ways to recapture the mail and parcel post volume the service had been losing to private firms such as United Parcel Service (UPS).

Making the USPS more competitive implied reorganization, mechanization, and a greater concern with productivity. Lip service was paid to research and development. The needs and demands of corporate users of the mails—who accounted for more than three-quarters of first-class mail volume—were accorded top priority. In short, the new USPS was to be modeled after modern private business, and was to serve the needs of business users above all others.

One of the major changes provided in the Postal Reorganization Act was in the area of labor relations, where the USPS was authorized to enter into binding collective bargaining agreements with a limited number of nationwide unions that would bargain along industrial, rather than craft lines. While permitting official and exclusive recognition to the unions concerned, the law contained several provisions creating substantial limitations on the unions' ability to protect their members. Now subject to the restrictive features of the Taft-Hartley Act, postal employees were also specifically denied the right to strike. Patterned after labor agreements in the private sector, the contract between the USPS and the union contained a highly formalized grievance procedure with arbitration as the final step. Also patterned after private industry, the postal agreement contained a “Management Prerogatives” clause which reads in part:

Management Prerogatives

The Employer shall have the exclusive right, subject to the provisions of this Agreement and consistent with applicable laws and regulations:

- A. To direct employees of the Employer in the performance of official duties;
- B. To hire, promote, transfer, assign, and retain employees in positions within the Postal Service and to suspend, demote, discharge, or take other disciplinary actions against such employees;
- C. To maintain the efficiency of the operations entrusted to it.
- D. To determine the methods, means, and personnel by which such operations are to be conducted.

In short, the new USPS was given a free hand to “reorganize” postal work as it saw fit. Mechanization and the development and implementation

... technological change will continue to be at the center of postal management's drive for efficiency and control of the workplace.

tion of new technology was to be an important part of the “new” postal service and did in fact significantly shape operations in the decade of the 1970's. And if predictions for the near future hold true, technological

change will continue to be at the center of postal management's drive for efficiency and control of the workplace.

FOCUS ON NEW TECHNOLOGY

Mechanization was seen as the way to reduce the total labor costs of the USPS, which management feared would outstrip its ability to pay, especially in light of the monetary concessions that had been necessary to end the 1970 wildcat. There were those who saw mechanization as a way to provide the postal service management with a degree of immunity from the disruption of strikes. Frederick R. Kappel, then Chairman of the USPS Board of Governors, was asked by a Congressional committee in early 1973:

Q. What would we do if we had an occurrence of the strike of a couple years ago. Do we have any machinery now that would work any better than we had before?

Mr. Kappel responded:

A. No, we do not. I do not know what you could do about it. I think we have some mechanization, but it only feeds into a place where there isn't any, and I think we are still in a very serious condition should a strike occur.

Mechanization was thus seen as the ultimate answer to a wide range of the new postal management's concerns: to increase productivity, to compete with private firms, to cut labor costs, to obviate the danger of strikes, to control employees, and to become economically self-sufficient.

However, the introduction of expensive machines could only be economically justified where there was an adequate, and regular, volume of machine-processable mail. The zip-code system, originally intended primarily for use by large volume mailers, was promoted for adoption by all users of the postal service. Postal management also began a long—and ongoing—campaign for relative uniformity in envelope and post card dimensions by imposing a surcharge on oversized pieces and labeling as “non-mailable” smaller than a specified size.

Most importantly, postal management strategy centered on accumulating at a limited number of locations volumes of mail large enough to justify the capital investment in costly new machines. Exchanges between these mechanized postal facilities could then make use of advanced transportation methods such as containerization. Peter Dorsey, then the regional postmaster for New York and later the USPS's primary strategist in its mechanization campaign, told a Congressional committee in 1973: “I suppose the ideal thing would be to have a long conglomeration of equipment hooked up sequentially where you could dump raw mail in one end and have it come out sorted to the carrier at the other end.”



In the early 1970's, piecemeal introduction of mechanization brought chaotic and catastrophic results. New machines were installed in antiquated and overcrowded postal facilities in major cities. Moe Biller, then president of the New York Metro Local Postal Workers Union, told a Congressional committee in 1973:

The mechanization program, which runs into billions, will yet prove the biggest bust of all. You can't quarrel with the idea of mechanization in 1973, just as we're all for motherhood and against sin. Let's look at the New York experience in this regard. The introduction of letter-sorting machines into the general post office, a building built in 1910. That is a crying shame. The noise is unbearable. The machines are not cleaned enough; frequently there are paper lice . . . The workers on these machines have mostly nightwork and most of them work weekends even though, initially, management advertised these job as mostly

weekends off. Management's comment? The people must be where the mail is.

At the same time, during the early seventies, the new postal management also adopted the strategy of reducing total labor costs through attrition actively encouraging early retirement and even imposing a hiring freeze in 1972. It sought quick results and got them—55,000 postal employees opted for early retirement. Between 1970 and 1973 in New York for example, total postal personnel fell by 13%. Such across the board reductions failed to mesh with the mechanization program and created even more chaos in the postal service. Letter carriers certainly didn't have their loads lightened. With their ranks reduced, they found their routes lengthened, their traditional work patterns disrupted by directives to cross lawns rather than walk on sidewalks, and their actual work observed by time study specialists and monitored by devices in their vehicles. Local officials of The National Association of Letter Carriers reported an increase in heart attacks among their members. Inside postal facilities, the reduced work forces were called upon to put in long overtime hours, actually increasing the labor costs of many facilities. New

"We may have gone too far, we were hell bent on saving money as opposed to service."

York Regional Postmaster Peter Dorsey admitted to Congress in 1973: "We may have gone too far, we were hell bent on saving money as opposed to service." James H. Rademacher, then president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, summed it all up in his testimony before the same committee:

We can state without the fear of contradiction by the general public that the level of mail service is at the worst stage in history and the quality of the nation's mail service is the poorest it has ever been.

Indeed, no one contradicted him.

All observers inside and outside the Postal Service agreed: the immediate results had been disastrous. The USPS was no closer to self-sufficiency than it had been at its establishment in 1970. The quality of mail service had become a national scandal. And working conditions inside postal facilities had deteriorated even further. Postal facilities, especially where new machines were introduced, became publicly known as unsafe workplaces. Despite the "no-strike" clause in the contract, management feared another major disruption of the nation's mails upon the contract's expiration in 1973. Apparently, the business-oriented management strategies had backfired all around.

THE RELOCATION STRATEGY

In this context, postal management moved to drastically reorganize the postal system, seeking to extend direct control over as much of mail processing as possible. Rather than working within the actual distribution of mail volumes, Area Mail Processing and Managed Mail Systems were developed and introduced, in order to *create* large accumulations of mail in specific locations. Under Area Mail Processing, a single centralized facility would process all the originating mail for a given geographic region.

Postal management linked the implementation of these plans to the construction of new facilities. Within these new buildings, constructed according to new "modular" specifications, the entire range of new mail handling and processing machines would be installed. Similar plans were laid for the construction of 21 new bulk mail facilities, systematically interconnected across the country, which were to reorganize the processing of parcels and other non-first class items. Peter Dorsey, now promoted to Senior Assistant Postmaster General for Operations despite his problems as regional postmaster for New York, told a Congressional committee in 1974:

Inside the Bulk Mail Center or Auxiliary Service Facility we will replace today's manual single sorting operations with high-speed machine processing designed to maintain a continuous flow of mail through the facility. Our aim is to reverse the present 80% manual, 20% mechanical ratio in processing bulk mail. . .

Put very simply, the basic idea behind the national Bulk Mail Service is to centralize mail processing so that it is more efficient to utilize mechanization.

Thus relocation and mechanization became inseparable strategies as postal management moved to put the service on a more businesslike basis. Without relocation to concentrate the mails, mechanization would not be profitable and without mechanization, relocation would not have made any sense at all.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT METHODS IN THE USPS

Having reorganized the work place and the whole mail handling system, management moved another step toward its goal of business efficiency. It established job standards, that is, the output expected from employees in various jobs within the post office. In addition, it established what management believed to be the most efficient methods for performing the various tasks related to doing a particular job. In order to enforce these standards and methods, it resorts to discipline or discharge for those failing to meet the standards or refusing to follow established methods.

A recent newspaper account highlighted the attitude of postal management towards those employees who do not follow "correct" procedures:

Worker gets wrong angle on job

By ANDREW A. YEMMA

DES MOINES, Iowa (UPI) — Robert McLaughlin says he's been sorting letters for the U.S. Postal Service for 11 years and thought he had the right angle.

Wrong, said his supervisor, who suspended the partially deaf, bifocaled mail clerk for seven days under an obscure regulation that suggests one hold a letter at a 45-degree angle to the line of vision.

"You refused to hold your mail at a 45 degree angle as I had instructed you to do," Supervisor Durol Mathews said in his letter citing McLaughlin for insubordination. "You insisted that your method of holding the mail was superior to the method that I had instructed you to employ."

McLaughlin refused Wednesday to take his punishment sitting down.

He charged Mathews and other postal authorities acted illegally by suspending him without a hearing. He said he is determined to have his record expunged, collect his back pay and "get rid of this ridiculous harassment."

It all started during a training session under the Postal Service's Manual Operations Methods Improvement Program — MOMIP. In bureaucratic parlance — last summer, McLaughlin said the program is designed to give tips to employees on how to sit on their stools and sort their letters.

A line drawing in the program's manual shows the right way — and wrong way. The right way is to hold the letter at a 45-degree angle — "one foot on floor at all times."

The wrong way, according to Mathews, was the way McLaughlin did it.

"I wear bifocals and I've got a hearing aid," said McLaughlin, who holds his letters at a 90-degree angle to his vision. "I'm not trying to be difficult."

McLaughlin ascribed Mathews' motives in suspending him to a "personal vendetta." He admitted wisecracking around Mathews prior to the incident, but claimed the supervisor runs his area "like a town constable."

"These rules were set up to give them grounds for harassment," McLaughlin said. "They haven't ever enforced this before, and by god if they did it would really mess things up."

He said the postal service in Des Moines is involved in about 400 worker grievances a year and employs three supervisors fulltime to handle the caseload.

Once methods were established by management, it was just a matter of time before postal management would follow good "scientific management" practices and adopt some form of work measurement to determine the "appropriate" time it takes to perform different tasks in a job. The work measurement form chosen by postal management from literally dozens of different possibilities is a *predetermined motion time system* called Methods Time Measurement, popularly known as MTM. The extent to which management expects to apply this new system is indicated by the fact that each year in excess of 200 postal service analysts are being trained in the application of the MTM system. Once the system is implemented, postal clerks will join millions of industrial workers whose workday is ruled by a stop watch.

INTENSIFYING SUPERVISION

As technology increasingly has an impact on jobs and on the control workers once enjoyed on the workroom floor, management will also sharpen its strategies of bureaucratic control. It will constantly be on the look out for weak places in the system where discipline is lax and where labor costs seem out of line. Having located these areas, management will move aggressively to tighten its reins on postal workers. Discipline for insubordination, for absenteeism, and for other infractions of rules and regulations will become a preoccupation for local management, if it hasn't already become so, and will necessitate a larger share of the union's financial resources to protect members through grievance arbitration from unjust disciplinary actions.

In a recent Postal Inspection Service "operational survey" or audit of a medium sized facility in West Virginia an interesting report was made to upper levels of management.

Supervision was very poor in both Customer Service and Mail Processing. All supervisors need extensive training in their respective areas. Employees were seldom directed to perform a particular job, rather they *were permitted* to do their own thing for an entire tour. Aggressive supervision is the key to improved productivity.

In the same report, Postal Inspectors recommended reorganization of tours (shifts) for efficiency reasons.

Tour compression would offer an opportunity to reduce energy usage, reduce hours used in supervision, and offer an opportunity to intensify supervision resulting in greatly increased productivity. For these reasons we strongly urge tour compression. We have worked out a proposed schedule (attached) which will accomplish each of the above.

The object is clear: to lower costs and increase productivity by intensify-

ing supervision, notably "aggressive" supervision.

During the past several months we have had the opportunity to talk with numerous union officials whose job it is to deal with management in handling grievances. One such officer with twenty years in the postal service and six years as a union representative expressed bitterness at the

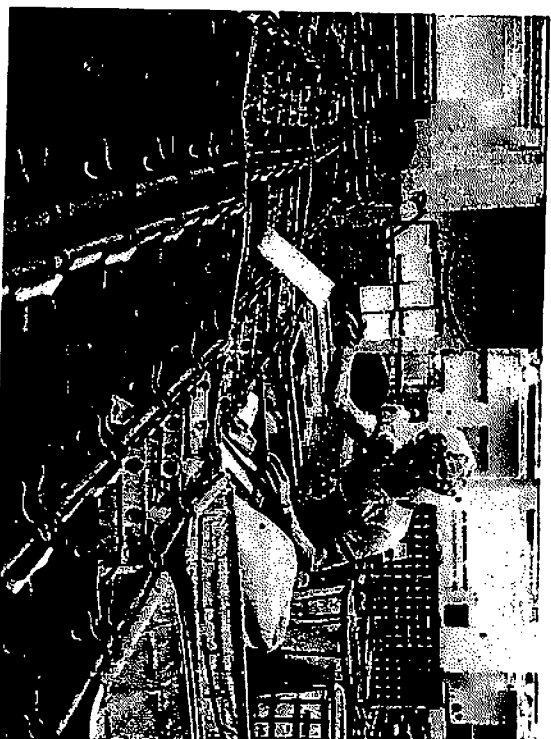
"I would say we are the only big corporation in the United States ruled by a police force because the (postal inspectors) have the ultimate say."

changes that have taken place in management's attitude toward the union and toward postal workers. He said that when he first started out he treated management as an "adversary" but now he treats them as an "enemy the same way that they treat me." In expressing how he new felt about things, he told us that "I have become thoroughly cynical, disillusioned and frustrated with the whole system." We asked why he felt this way and why he thought management had changed so much in the recent past, and he gave his opinions:

Pressure: The line foremen are under severe pressure to increase productivity and their theory of the way to do it is to make examples out of certain individuals by saying, "if you don't do as we say we'll get rid of you" and they do. They'll pick somebody out and get rid of them, for example, a militant steward.

It has become a paramilitary organization. We're under a double gun; we have management and we have the Inspection Service to deal with. I would say we're the only big corporation in the United States ruled by a police force, because they (postal inspectors) have the ultimate say. They come in, they audit, they go out on the street and follow people, take pictures, set up dummy corporations and trap people. You know, we have this supervisory force that we have to deal with but they aren't actually making the decisions. It's the police force, and it comes from the top man down—Bolger. He's an ex-postal inspector and his whole mentality is the Inspection Service—discipline, productivity by any means and things like that.

To carry out a more intensive and aggressive management policy it has been necessary for USPS to expand its managerial personnel. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of those people employed by the Postal Service as part of management increased from 78,749 to 79,716. While this is not a substantial increase, one has to keep in mind that the number of non-supervisory employees decreased during this period of time from 682,467 to 587,115. This means, of course, that the ratio of the number of bosses to workers has increased over the last ten years and now stands at one boss for every seven workers.



An elite core of management executives is being trained under the Postal Career Executive Service Act of 1979. An expensive new training school is being constructed in Potomac, Maryland which will, according to the Annual Report of the Postmaster General, for the first time "provide lodging and classroom space for the postmasters, managers and supervisors, Inspection Service candidates, and Postal Career Executive Service executives who participate in the Management Academy programs each year."

As one of the oldest Federal law enforcement agencies, the Postal Inspection Service has traditionally been charged with the responsibility of preventing post office burglaries, monitoring of mail suspected of containing bombs and the prevention of other types of post office crime. Since 1950, however, the Service has also been charged with the responsibility for "the internal audit of all Postal Service financial and nonfinancial operations." William J. Cotter, former Chief Postal Inspector, told Congress in 1975 these audits "are designed to analyze and assess the effectiveness of systems and programs and to develop alternatives or improvements where deficiencies are identified." Audits also "review the effectiveness of mail processing operations, report on the level of service provided customers and assist field management in identifying major service improvements and cost reductions."

Under its auditing responsibilities, Postal Inspection activities range

from the review of a complete postal facility by a team of Inspectors to the undercover surveillance of an employee suspected of falsifying accident claims. The power and influence of the Inspectors is far reaching, extending into nearly every aspect of the day-to-day operations of the nation's post offices. Using one-way mirrors and listening holes positioned in covered cat walks above the workroom floor, Postal Inspectors can monitor every movement and every word spoken by those who handle the mail. "You never know when they are watching you," one postal clerk complained. "They carry guns in shoulder harnesses and act like a secret police or Gestapo when questioning workers, or they set up elaborate 'sting' operations to entrap window clerks suspected of credit shortages. People feel intimidated by them." And well they might feel this way since the number of Postal Inspectors has increased from 2,112 in 1970 to 5,242 in 1980, a 148 percent increase!

Thus in the short span of one decade the U.S. Post Office Department, a Federal agency which provided an essential service, was reorganized, and in the process of that reorganization acquired new goals. Using the latest tools of scientific management, productivity and business competition have become the standards by which the U.S. Postal Service now judges itself.



CHAPTER II

The Postal Service Moves to the Suburbs

Part of postal management's overall strategy was to locate many of the new facilities for accumulating mail outside of central cities. Publicly postal officials offered a range of explanations for this major decision. One explanation offered was that traffic was too congested in central cities and would slow the transportation of mail to and from the new facilities. In fact many of the locations which they selected outside cities were on busy streets. Another reason offered for locating outside cities was that land was too expensive in the cities. But in fact suburban acreage was also costly. Of course, under the new United States Postal Service structure, management really didn't have to convince anyone of the validity of its arguments. Explaining its actions was mostly a matter of public relations. What were the real reasons behind the strategic relocation of major postal facilities?

HIDDEN REASONS FOR RELOCATION

The center of the 1970 wildcat had been in the major postal facilities in large cities. In Detroit, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York, some 50-75% of the workers—and strikers—had been black. Moving to the suburbs had the effect of altering the composition of the workforces at the major postal facilities. Forest Park, Illinois, for example, was selected as the site for a new facility to replace the major Chicago center. In the old post office, a majority of the employees were black. In Forest Park, a lengthy commute from South Chicago, there were no black families. It was unlikely that many black postal workers would make the transfer. Similar moves were made in city after city.

The suburban location of the new facilities would alter the composition of the workforce in other ways as well. Many workers would choose not to make the transfer, either seeking jobs elsewhere in the postal system or retiring altogether. Management would thus have considerable latitude in hiring new workers or reassigning veteran workers, and, with their strengthened hand, could shape the workforce more in accordance with its own preferences and needs. An added advantage for management in this selection process was that workers transferring in had to be able to master the operation of new machinery. The location of new facilities at some distance from the currently operating centers therefore gave management a tremendous opportunity to reorganize the workforces inside the centers of the postal system.

But the implications of this relocation extended even further, for it

... the informal work groups which had developed over years of steady employment were suddenly torn apart.

simultaneously undermined two major sources of postal workers' strength. With the reorganization of work and the workforce which accompanies relocation, the informal work groups that had developed over years of steady employment were suddenly torn apart. Men and women who had worked closely together for years and had come to trust and understand each other, would never work together again. Moving to a new facility was an individual decision, and many choose not to go. Even accepting the reassignment, however, offered little promise of keeping work groups together, for the new machines in the new facilities demanded a reorganization of the work itself, and the performance of traditional tasks in new ways. Management in the new mechanized facilities could thus operate, at least initially, with little concern for the workplace power developed by experienced work groups.



THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

The impact of relocation was even more wide-ranging. Traditionally, the network of bars, taverns, and restaurants surrounding a large workplace has served as centers for socializing and discussion by the workers employed there. These establishments, and the neighborhood within which they are located, have provided a critical element of the social or-

ganization that contributed to whatever strengths their patrons and residents exercised at work. The old major postal facilities located within central cities were situated within such a framework, and the postal workers employed there extended their immediate work group relationships through them. But the new facilities were constructed "in the middle of nowhere," surrounded by miles of concrete in every direction.

The new postal facilities were not located in the heart of any neighborhood, surrounded by various social institutions. Nor have such institutions developed. Most postal workers live too far from the new facilities to be willing to add to their time away from home by hanging around after work. The prospect of an hour's drive in heavy traffic is enough to sour any man or woman on relaxed socializing.

One postal worker gave the following account of a postal relocation in Pennsylvania:

On July 28, 1979, a new General Mail Facility (GMF) was opened in Lancaster, PA. The new facility was designed to further consolidate the handling of dispatch mail within a three-county area. It also serves the purpose of breaking community ties around the former facility and changing the relationship between employees.

Before occupation of the GMF facility, mail was collected from the county offices and processed for dispatch in each of the three counties within the Sectional Center. When the GMF became operational, all the collected mail from the three counties including local mail began being trucked to Lancaster for processing and dispatch. This means that mail going to a post office five miles down the road may be trucked forty miles to Lancaster and forty miles back to the destination. The reason given for consolidation was to improve efficiency through increased use of mechanization in Lancaster.

By coincidence, I'm sure, management was also able to eliminate the dispatch crews at the York and Gettysburg post offices. Employees were excessed to Harrisburg, Lancaster and other offices within the Region. If an excessed employee refused the offered job in the Baltimore Bulk Mail Center, the employee was out of the Postal Service.

The GMF is on the outskirts of town. While the facility is only 2.5 miles from the old building, the setting is totally different. The old building is three blocks from the center of Lancaster. A convenience store and sandwich shops are literally across the street or around the corner. Banks and stores in the downtown area can be walked to during lunch break or after work. Numerous bars and taverns are within walking distance.

In contrast, the GMF is surrounded by acres of grass and farmland. There is no store or sandwich shop within walking distance. Employees are thus subtly encouraged to stay in the building. Except for the administrative offices, there are no

windows in the building. The building consists of a one story, 156,000 square foot concrete slab. The warehouse atmosphere is cold and sterile.

A number of the manual clerks who were eligible for retirement didn't make the move or retired after working a short time in the GMF. This is exactly what management wanted to happen since 1) all clerks who are now hired must pass LSM training and 2) until they have six years of service, any postal employee hired after September 15, 1978 can be laid off.

While the GMF is close to major roadways, the customer traffic and the installation of a traffic light in front of the facility caused and is continuing to cause traffic tie-ups on one of the commuter roadways in Lancaster. Using mass transit to get to work has also been made more difficult by the move. The old building is two blocks from the hub of the county bus system. While a bus route does run past the GMF, service is only provided during the day. Further, unless the person lives along the Park City route, it is necessary to make connections and transfer buses in town.

Postal management officials have designed these bleak facilities in such a way as to maximize their control over workers. The results are strikingly similar to a prison yard. (Postal workers noted that even the

Postal management officials have designed these bleak facilities in such a way as to maximize their control over workers. The results are strikingly similar to a prison yard.

newly remodeled facilities in central cities look very much like fortresses and prisons. The Bulk Mail Center Manager for the USPS unveiled plans for the Washington, D.C., BMC before Congress in 1974, describing it vividly:

There is controlled access to these facilities. You can see the representation here of the entrance gates and the fences in order to achieve controlled access so we know who is coming up to this plant and what their business is. This will significantly impact our depredation problem, and we have worked very closely with the inspection service in developing what we believe to be an effective control for each plantsite.

These, then, have been the effects of the relocation of major postal facilities—a decline in the percentage of minority workers, the reorganization of the overall workforce, and the disruption of long-established social organization inside and outside the workplace. Postal management, committed to full-scale mechanization and eager to avoid labor conflict, had its hand immensely strengthened by this aspect of postal reorganization alone.

NEITHER EFFICIENCY NOR SERVICE

On the basis of efficiency and financial return on the dollars invested, however, the relocation strategy has not made a particularly good showing. The October, 1979, relocation of mail processing from York, Pennsylvania to a newly constructed facility in Lancaster, Pennsylvania turned out to be embarrassing to postal management because it grossly overestimated the annual savings attributable to the move. When the U.S. Government Accounting Office was called on to investigate this particular postal relocation it reported that, in addition to overestimates of savings, the USPS had used cost and other statistical data of dubious credibility, issued misleading or inaccurate information to the public and generally handled personnel actions poorly.

The GAO found that:

- at the time of the transfer, workers were confused and not fully informed about their rights and options.
- the number of trained personnel at both locations was not sufficient to perform necessary postal operations. . .
- The Postal Service increased overtime work hours and used the services of personnel from associate offices to accomplish the mail processing functions.
- The USPS economic feasibility study which projected annual savings of almost \$1 million was overestimated by at least \$337,000.
- the transfer of mail processing functions from York to Lancaster did not significantly affect the service to most postal patrons.

The bulk mail centers soon became the subject of much public criticism. In February, 1979, the nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson sent a member of his staff into one of the twenty-one bulk mail centers as a postal employee and then published the following impressions:

The bulk mail center is a machine-powered world modeled after Charlie Chaplin's movie, "Modern Times." Automated carts filled with mail run along trolley tracks, heedless of parcels that fall off and people who get in the way. Overhead trays carry mail through the building, tipping their contents into chutes on command from the control room.

Operators in the control room can tell how the mail is moving by watching the flow on video screens. Unfortunately the screens don't show the plight of a worker frantically trying to load a truck as fast as the conveyor belt spews the mail out. It also doesn't show the assemblyline workers who can't keep pace with the relentless machines and can't shut off or slow down the conveyor belt. The parcels often spill off the belt onto the floor, where they may remain for days.

Employees at the Washington center have their own wry slogan: "You mail 'em, we mail 'em." It's not the humans who are doing the mauling, though; it's the machines. Like the sack

"You mail 'em, we mail 'em."

shake-out rig that empties parcels—including those marked "Fragile-Glass"—from mail sacks and lets them fall four feet onto a belt.

Packages that get jammed in the automatic conveyors are ripped apart. Attempts are made to patch them up, but the many Humpty Dumpty irreparables end up in a parcel graveyard—a room designated "loose in the mail" and off-limits to all but a few employees. Our reporter got inside for a look around, and found thousands of items from books to homemade Christmas presents. There were so many books that they had been arranged by topic on metal shelves.

When the "loose in the mail" room is full, the items are moved to a depository in Washington, where they're eventually auctioned off to the public.

Parcels considered too fragile or too oddly shaped for the regular mailing are sent to a special machine of their own. They are put on a conveyor belt and when they reach the right-sized chute, a metal beam rams them down it. Cartons of fruit are regularly consigned to this special machine, and the effects of the supposedly tender treatment are such that the machine might well be known as the "automatic juicer."

Columnist Anderson noted that the billion-dollar bulk mail system was supposed to save the Postal Service \$300 million a year but the savings have amounted to only \$40 million a year, a return of 4 percent on the money invested.

CHAPTER III

When Machines Replace People

In tracing the emergence of the U.S. Postal Service and the evolution of its business-oriented management strategy, we have already called attention to the importance of the 1970 national wildcat strike and management's fear of a recurrence. To counter this power of workers to disrupt postal operations, management introduced a number of piecemeal mechanical innovations in the early seventies. These efforts were followed by a wholesale reorganization geared towards the maximization of management's control over its workforce. They first focused on mechanization and the critical innovation in this movement was the multi-position lettersorting machine—the "MPLSM" or simply the "LSM".

The manual sorting of mail had required each employee to memorize complex sorting "schemes" and was a job that gave clerks pride in their work and the opportunity to socialize with each other. Under the manual system, the sorting of mail had been accomplished with virtually 100 percent accuracy due to the experience, intelligence and manual dexterity of the nation's postal distribution clerks. The old system was dramatically changed with the introduction of letter sorting machines (LSM's).

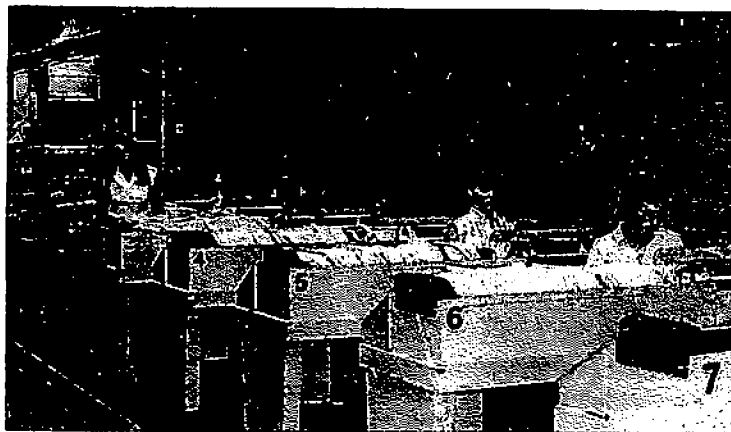
LETTER SORTING MACHINES

The new LSM's rely on electronic memory banks, which allow operators to sort mail into an immediate 277 separations, far in excess of the 77 which had been standard under the manual-sorting system. The machines require clerks to sit before keyboards and screens. Letters—already faced, cancelled, and placed in position—appear on the screen at the rate of one per second. Reading the zip code, the clerk then types the appropriate code on his or her keyboard. Each clerk sits, fixated before the

Each clerk sits, fixated before the automatically paced screen, in a separate cubbyhole.

automatically paced screen, in a separate cubbyhole. Communication with workmates is virtually impossible. Some sorters made the transition but many experienced sorters chose not to try to learn to operate these new LSM's. The tedium and dehumanization were more than they could submit themselves to. But many workers in other jobs with the postal service sought the new, better paid jobs. A new category of postal workers, the LSM operators, grew rapidly.

The LSM's are very noisy—so noisy they present a major obstacle to normal conversation. Though conversation is practically an impossibility, management in many facilities has further reduced the possibility of social interchange among workers by explicitly prohibiting conversation between LSM operators. One Norfolk Area postal clerk reports that postal management has an ongoing program to hire deaf-mute individuals as LSM operators. This practice, the union member points out, not only "solves" the noise problem but creates for management a favorable image in that it is hiring the handicapped.



A Montgomery, Alabama postal clerk, interviewed in May, 1981, was asked how he had felt about the machine as an LSM operator.

I felt like an extension of the machine and I felt like I was being treated less than the machine. If the machine has a little rubber finger wrong with it, it gets immediate attention. If you've got problems, you know, that's tough. "Keep sticking the mail and we'll check you later." . . . That machine gets overhauled every so many years. They'll shut it down and overhaul it, replace all the worn parts, but hang the employee.

"I felt like an extension of the machine and I felt like I was being treated less than the machine."

The same postal clerk expressed some strong feelings about the job itself.

I felt that working on an LSM was very demeaning to me as an

individual. It's not the kind of job anyone would want to take unless the dollar was his major concern. . . . There is no pride in the work, none whatsoever, for anybody. And you tell the supervisors and managers this and they'll say you're getting paid highly for what you do, so if nothing else, you can be interested in your paycheck because we're paying you enough not to even complain about the boredom.

Admitting that money was important to him in supporting his family at a decent level, this former LSM operator also emphasized that "its important to have pride in your work, to feel some element of accomplishment, to feel like you're dedicating your life's work to something worthwhile, to something that is fruitful." But working on an LSM provides none of these for the postal clerk. Furthermore, the opportunity no longer exists for the LSM operator to use a little initiative when a customer has put the wrong zip code on a letter. The operator is now instructed to key only the zip appearing on the letter even if he or she knows it is wrong and could easily send it to its correct destination.

When you're sitting there and you key a letter to Timbuktu because someone put the wrong zip code on it, you can't walk away from that and say to yourself that you did a service to the public. . . . Actually the only thing the postal service has to sell is service, and we're not selling that. We're selling stamps.

After four years on an LSM this clerk bid off the machine to a job as manual distribution clerk. His comments on his new job by contrast, tell us even more about the letter sorting machine and the work relations which follow from its use.

Now I manually stick letters or flats and work the pouch rack. . . . I can talk with my co-workers, I can be familiar with the postal service and what's really going on in mail distribution and how the mail is actually distributed, packaged for transportation, loaded into vehicles, dispatched, etc. . . . You know what's really going on at the post office other than this letter jumping in front of you every second.

I became familiar with the employees who worked there, especially those who work around me, to the point we do things outside the post office together. The people working the LSM know very little about each other and have very little interaction or social life with each other. . . . Now, (in my manual sorting job) there is a whole realm of discussions we can have. We can carry on a conversation during the entire eight hours.

In several dozen discussions with LSM operators, the author found essentially the same feelings about the machines and the way workers feel about the way they are now treated by management. In this connection it is interesting to read what Warren Brown, a *Washington Post*

staff writer, had to say about LSM operators in a recent newspaper article. He talked with employees and management at the large Morgan facility in New York which handles 9 to 12 million pieces of letter-sized mail and 3 to 4 million parcels every 24 hours. He wrote that keying a LSM is "not the type of job that lends itself to creativity. It's a monotonous, piecework job that lends itself to boredom."



Management admitted to Brown that the work is much like working on an assembly line in an auto plant but it feels that there is nothing that can be done to relieve the boredom. Some jobs are just very routine and that's all there is to it, they claim. But the reporter interviewed one postal worker who said that was not so. "They could start by saying, 'Hey, Miss So-and-So; hey, Mr. So-and-So, you did a nice job today. We're all here for the same purpose, to get the mail out, and you all really helped us to do that today.' But that very seldom happens. Instead, we get: 'Hey, you SOB, this machine has a 2 percent error factor and you're screwing up 3 percent. You're messing up production.'" Brown found, as did the author, that most postal workers are sincerely interested in helping move as much mail as possible, but their initiative on the job is stymied and any worker suggestions that could increase mail flow are ignored.

The productivity of the LSM's is impressive. The new machines have reduced the number of sorts necessary overall, and, intermeshed

The productivity of the LSMs is impressive. . . . Nowhere in management's productivity claims did it count the human toll, however.

with the accumulation of mail volumes in a limited number of locations, they made possible a significant reduction in the workforce employed in mail processing. With the introduction of LSM's, the productivity of the San Francisco area postal service jumped 8.5% in 1973. Similar increases were reported elsewhere. In the performance of outgoing and incoming primary sorts, and outgoing secondary sorts, the LSM alone, according to postal management, is at least 57% more productive than the manual sorting system.

Nowhere in management's productivity claims did it count the human toll, however. A Pennsylvania union member explains how being an LSM operator affected his life:

Although I am no longer an LSM Operator, I spent the better (or worse) part of six years as a 'Trained Monkey' so most of my comments will deal with problems in and around the LSM. I started in the Postal Service in 1973, being hired under the LSM training program, whereby I had to qualify on the LSM or lose my job. I did qualify, and worked on the LSM for about 6 years, in which time I went physically and emotionally downhill.

I was fortunate enough to become a 'Regular' about 5 months after being hired. Upon becoming a regular, I did a job on the LSM on Tour I (which I guess you know is the 3rd shift or graveyard shift in the Postal Service) mainly to have weekends off. Weekends off was the main reason I stayed on the LSM as long as I did, until I figured out that weekends off was not worth much at the expense of my health or my marriage!

Prior to working on the LSM, I had never needed glasses, but finally got my first pair in 1976—and should have had them before that. Anyone can look down a row of people sitting on the LSM and see how few don't have glasses—the few that *don't* being relatively new to the LSM, it being only a matter of time until they need their first pair.

I haven't had my ears professionally tested to determine what degree of hearing loss I have actually suffered, but there has been a definite hearing loss—not only have I noticed it myself, but those close to me have pointed it out repeatedly.

The main physical problem I experienced, and one of the major factors in my decision to bid off of the LSM was my hands. My hands cramped up constantly and gave me an arthritic-like pain the entire time I coded. I got to the point where I coded with only one finger on each hand, as this helped to ease the pain compared to coding normally with all my fin-

gers. I went to our medical unit, but neither the nurse nor the doctor were any help in determining what was causing the problem or what to do to alleviate the problem.

The other major factor in my decision to bid off the LSM was not physical, but emotional. I had become so fed up with the LSM and all the B.S. involved with the LSM that I finally bid off—saving both my sanity and my marriage. The constant petty bickering among employees, compounded with the petty, childish harassment by management, and the feeling of being one of Pavlov's dogs (being 'tied' to that damn machine and do-

"I had become so fed up with the LSM and all the B.S. involved with the LSM that I finally bid off—saving both my sanity and my marriage."

ing everything by that stupid bell) resulted in such tension and deep-seated dread of going to work, that as it became more unbearable, I also became more unbearable to live with. I hated the job and everything about it so much, that I took it out (unwittingly) on those around me. When I finally had bid off that dehumanizing LSM, my wife told me how completely different I was and how thankful she was I had gotten off—and then told me she didn't know how much more she could have taken had I stayed on the machine: only then did I learn how close I had come to ruining my marriage.

I realize that everything affects each individual differently and there are literally thousands of jobs that where some people enjoy them, others would hate and would not be able to handle, but the LSM has to be in a class of its own. Here is a job that I thoroughly enjoyed initially, but later came to hate as it became more and more boring and tedious and dehumanizing as I became used to it and it became 'automatic' whereby I became more aware of the 'Pavlov Dog' treatment. I worked 'outgoing' mail initially, and then moved on to 'incoming primary' mail and finally to 'incoming secondary' mail, each time enjoying the change because it was a bit of a challenge at first, but as I learned it, it became automatic and boredom set in again.

The human impact of letter sorting machines is further explained by another clerk:

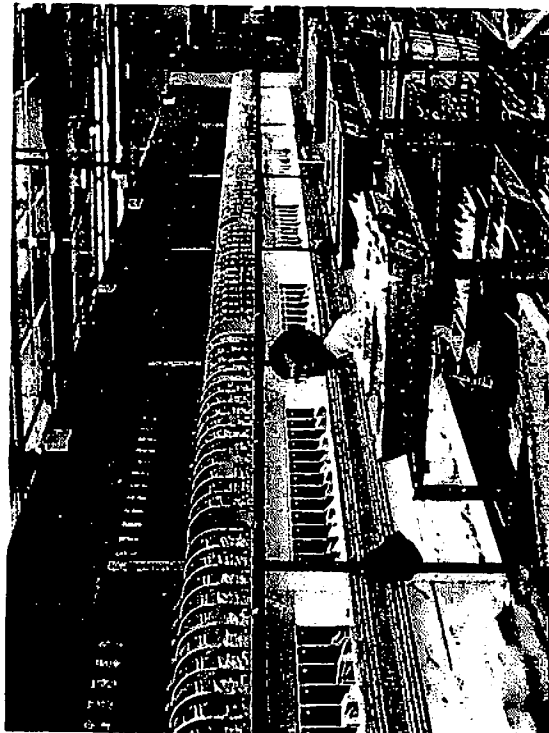
When letter sorting machines were put into service in the larger postal facilities it caused an excess of employees because it took less personnel to process mail. To resolve this the USPS started to excess employees to other postal facilities.

Employees can be moved to other postal Offices within 100 miles at no expense to the postal service. In many cases families had to move to a new location to hold their jobs leaving family and friends behind. If an employee is excessed more than 100

miles the Postal Service is responsible for moving the employees, so you see that the USPS will almost always keep the move less than 100 miles if possible.

The excessed employee has a retreat right that he can exercise but only once. If a job opening occurs in the office he left, he has the right to return to this position, but if he refuses this position he gives up his right to bid on any other job openings in the future, and then loses his retreat right.

There are other problems that excessing causes with the excessed employee, they are job qualifications in the new office with a limited amount of time, the learning of new schemes in a new location of which he knows little of. Making new friends, finding a home to live in, some times costing much more than the home they left. Children of school age being moved to a new school, and making of a new social life.



The letter sorting machine was not introduced alone. Rather it was interfaced with a host of other innovations, which brought mail processing close to a continuous flow operation. Mechanical cutters, facer-cancellers, and edgers fed mail into the LSM's. Operators processed letters at the rate of 60 per minute, and trays were automatically swept, the letters bagged for transportation to their post office of destination. A computerized forwarding system has been installed in larger mail centers throughout the country to reduce the labor time needed for forwarding of mail or returning undeliverable-as-addressed mail. The labor

needed for first-class mail handling has dropped sharply.

Postal management is also very interested in yet another innovation which could be interfaced with the LSM, further boosting productivity and displacing labor. This technological wonder—the Optical Character Reader—has long held a particular fascination for postal management. Jim P. Lee, the San Francisco sectional center manager, pulled no punches when he told a Congressional committee in 1973:

The only piece of machinery that we have no problem with is the OCR. But as long as you put a human being at one of those LSM's we do have a problem because it is getting this human being adjusted to the machinery.

While there are technical problems to be overcome before the OCR can be introduced on a system-wide basis, the OCR will when introduced eliminate the LSM operator's job.

BULK MAIL CENTERS

The second key area of postal reorganization and mechanization has been the Bulk Mail system. Its development and operation have proven even more disastrous for postal workers and postal service. In the early 1970's, the new management of the USPS ear-marked more than \$1 billion for the construction of a complete, integrated, mechanized bulk mail service. Twenty-one Bulk Mail Centers and 11 auxiliary Service Facilities were to be constructed by the mid-1970's. The whole system was to become operational at one time. Here, as with the relocation of major postal facilities, postal management's public justification was questionable. The expressed concern was with winning back the parcel business which had been lost to UPS and other private carriers. However, a study commissioned by the USPS itself in 1973 had concluded that, even if it worked perfectly, the new Bulk Mail System, with its complicated rerouting of packages over thousands of miles between facilities, would never be competitive with UPS within a 60 mile range of delivery—precisely the area in which UPS had taken away most of USPS business. Thus even before the Bulk Mail System became operational, it was clear to postal management that it could not magically recapture lost parcel post business.

But this did not deter postal management. The new system with its centralized control, relocation of centers to suburban areas, recomposition of the workforce, and reorganization of work remained attractive. Despite a series of construction delays and equipment failure, the Bulk Mail System was put into operation in the late 1970's. George R. Cavell, the first Program Director of the Bulk Mail Processing Department, explained to Congress what was supposed to happen in each facility:

The equipment in question consists of highspeed sorting machines into which parcels are introduced from a series of automatic induction units. When the machinery is running, unsorted parcels are brought on conveyors to employees who by operating simple keyboards, feed the zip code of each package into a computer. Once a package has been through this key code operation, it is automatically transferred to one of a number of shallow trays mounted on chair-driven carriages. These trays move by at a rate of 160 per minute, and, following an oval path, carry the packages past a series of slides each of which leads to a different collection point. The computer "remembers" which individual collection point each package is destined for, and as the tray comes up to the particular slide into which its package should be deposited, the computer activates a tripping device that tilts the tray and let the parcels slide out.

Sounds pretty smooth, doesn't it? Reality proved to be anything but smooth, however. In 1976, chairman Charles Wilson opened his Congressional sub-committee hearings on the national bulk mail system by remarking on "What might be characterized as a dream gone sour, or more appropriately, a management blunder of the first magnitude, which will cost the American public millions of dollars." Wilson and some of his colleagues, after hearing complaints about monumental "lost in mails" problems, had dropped in unexpectedly on the Detroit regional Bulk Mail Center.

They had been appalled by what they found—among other things, piles of packages that had become separated from their addresses. In questioning Senior Assistant Postmaster General for Operations, Dorsey, the following exchange took place:

Dorsey: The mail we did find was either in the trash—we generate a lot of trash in these places, wrappers and stuff fall off.

(LAUGHTER)

Dorsey: But I don't mean addresses, wrappers enclosing magazines. We generate a lot of paper; paper falls onto the floor. Let me finish. I'm into it so far, I might as well go all the way.

(LAUGHTER)

Congressman Hinshaw: That depends on how big your foot is.

(LAUGHTER)

Witnesses told Wilson's sub-committee of packages caught between conveyor rollers, parcels being run over by tow conveyor system containers, small parcels being damaged in induction unit slides by heavier parcels, and packages being smashed upon dropping from sack shake-out machines. William Anderson, Deputy Director of the General Govern-

ment Division of the GAO, which had just released its study of the bulk mail system, testified:

We believe much of the damage is caused by the equipment in the centers. Unlike the other problems the Postal Service may have, the personnel have very little to do with this one. It's just a case of the machinery.

Missent and misdirected parcels remained a much larger percentage of total volume than was expected as well. Instead of the targeted maximum 5%, the Washington, D.C. facility, for example, was rarely below 10% in 1975 and 1976, and occasionally above 20%.

The BMCs have also proved unsafe for the men and women who work in them. Before the Bulk Mail System became operational, Senior Assistant Postmaster General Dorsey asserted to a Congressional subcommittee: "From the drawing board up, we have spared no effort to insure employee safety in our new Bulk Mail Centers." In the light of the record of the past five years, one can only wonder if he was kidding. Accident rates were high from the day the bulk mail centers opened, and they have remained high to the present day, continually exceeding the average accident rates in private industry. In 1978, for example, USPS figures ranged between 12 and 14 injuries per million manhours, triple the rate in private industries. In 1979, the USPS paid out more than \$12,000,000 in workman's compensation. Between March 1978 and February 1979, the Washington, D.C. BMC had the highest accident rate in the system—a phenomenal 26.21 accidents per 100 employees—one person in every four. (Further discussion of critical health and safety problems is found in Chapter IV.)

ASSESSING THE USPS'S FIRST DECADE

All these changes have not substantially improved the overall condition of the USPS. Service quality has continued to decline. In 1976, James LaPenta told a Senate committee:

What has \$3 billion in plant and mechanization accomplished? The Bulk Mail System cost \$1 billion and high speed letter sorting machines, and other mechanization cost nearly \$2 billion. Let's look at the Postal Service when it was labor intensive. During that time, missent, misdirected and damaged mail amounted historically to about ½ of 1% of the volume during the decade preceding the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. Today the Bulk Mail System damage rate is 1% and the missent is approximately 5%. This error rate is machine error, not human error. In the letter sorting machine operation the error rate (machine) is 4%...

United Parcel Service and other private carriers have continued to

draw parcel business away from the USPS. Electronic funds transfers and facsimile transmission systems will draw an estimated 60% of first-class mail volume. Who now thinks of self-sufficiency as a feasible goal for the USPS? Postal rates increase, subsidies increase, and postal service remain a public laughingstock. It is now important to ask why these have been the result of the new strategies of postal management.

One is tempted to answer the question glibly by dismissing the USPS's condition as merely another typical example of government bureaucracy in action. To be sure, instances of mismanagement, ignorance, stupidity, and perfidy can be cited *ad infinitum*. But was there not a method to this madness? Are there not some long-run advantages to management which will outweigh the short-run costs and confusion which we have noted? It seems so.

Following the national wildcat strike of 1970, the new business-oriented management of the USPS adopted a series of strategies which did have one critical shared feature—an attack on postal workers' sources of power: on the importance of their skill and knowledge to the postal service's daily operation, on their informal work groups, on social institu-

The workers' strengths, manifested in the 1970 national wildcat, had been undermined.

tions outside the facilities which contributed to organization and discussion, on friendly neighborhoods around the plants and on postal workers' unions. Work was simplified, mechanized, routinized, and subjected to the automatic pace of machines and the centralized control of management. By the late 1970's the USPS's reorganization, construction, and mechanization programs had drastically altered the work situations of most postal workers. The workers' strengths, manifested in the 1970 national wildcat, had been undermined. The quality of their work experience itself had been downgraded. Husain Mustaja, in his study *Postal Technology and Management*, said of the new sorting work which lay at the center of the new regional general mail centers: "(the clerk) is completely absolved from the burden of decision making. He needs digital dexterity, but only average intelligence. LSM operators become appendages of the machines."

The routing and control of work in these new facilities was similarly centralized. Automatic feedback devices on each machine allow management to check on each operator's work. Mustaja goes on to describe how the postal installation is supervised and centrally controlled.

In the control room a panel shows the working of the plant

to the responsible employee by means of signal lamps. A switchboard fitted with a number of switches and control buttons enables the control employee to place the installation in operation or turn it off. A battery of television circuits installed in the control room allows visual control of various parts of the plant and contributes to reduction of faults. The controllers, through a public address system, can speak to specific areas, and maintenance and service areas. The address system can be used to make various announcements or to broadcast much to the employees.

This then is the modern general mail facility where most first-class mail is processed. Yet with all its calculated measures to put the system on a more efficient and competitive basis, the USPS's problems are far from solved. More mail than ever is sent through private carriers. Postal rates have continued to climb, while the goal of self-sufficiency remains as elusive as ever. Missent mail floats throughout the system. But it cannot be denied that this reorganization has strengthened postal management's hand relative to its employees.

It is unfortunate that the public has frequently placed the responsibility for inefficient postal service on the postal employees rather than on poor management and ineffective machinery. Employees who have traditionally prided themselves on both speed and accuracy in handling the nation's mails have thereby been hit hard from both sides. The new technology has eliminated jobs and degraded those that remain. And

And when the new technology fails, workers get blamed.

when the new technology fails, workers get blamed. Management's concern with gaining control dictated the strategies which have resulted in the continuing deterioration of the quality of postal service, but these same strategies now place management in the driver's seat for determining, without challenge or interruption, the future of the postal service.

CHAPTER IV

Health and Safety in the Postal Service

The drive for increased productivity in the Postal Service through large scale mechanization has created safety and health problems for postal workers. When proper maintenance, adequate guarding, and safe work practices take a back seat to productivity, accidents occur. The increasing amount of machine paced work has also created working conditions that cause job stress resulting in serious health problems. Manage-

When proper maintenance, adequate guarding, and safe work practices take a back seat to productivity, accidents occur.

ment tactics of investigation, and taking control over work practices from the workers have also contributed to increased levels of stress on postal service workers. All of these conditions, particularly the accidents causing the deaths of Mike McDermott in December, 1979 at the N.Y. Bulk mail Center, Reymundo Lara at the Los Angeles USPS Terminal Annex in November, 1980, and Joseph Hache at the Portland, Oregon Main Post Office, in November, 1980, have led to increased concern among postal workers about job health and safety issues.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, covering most private workers in the U.S., created the right to a safe and healthful workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was given the task of implementing and enforcing this right. Section 19 of the OSHA Act mandated that each federal agency (including the Postal Service) establish a safety and health program that observed standards consistent with those developed by OSHA. However, Section 19 did not give OSHA power to compel a federal agency to observe OSHA standards. Nor did the law create any way in which federal workers and unions could participate in efforts to secure a safe and healthful workplace.

Though Postal Service officials have, for the past decade, asserted that safety and health practices in their facilities meet or surpass OSHA standards, postal workers have continued to experience a high accident rate. In 1979, the Bulk Mail Centers had an accident rate comparable to that in coal mining. In that year postal workers lost more than 541,000,000 man hours due to job injuries. In 1979, fifteen postal workers died

In 1979, the Bulk Mail Centers had an accident rate comparable to that in coal mining.

due to accidents at work; twelve died from job injuries in 1980. Although the number of accidents and injuries in 1980 per 100 employees dropped from the 1979 level, the rate of lost-workday injuries per 200,000 hours worked is, according to the Postmaster General's Annual Report, about double the rate of industry as a whole.

Of the 876 complaints OSHA has received since 1971 from employees of federal agencies, 358 were from the United States Postal Service. This was significantly more than the number of complaints from any other agency. The high rate of job injuries seems to result from two factors—the new machinery that has recently been introduced into postal operations and management's drive for increased productivity.

The new conveyors and mail handling machinery are poorly designed and maintained. Unprotected conveyors, rollers, and other moving parts operate within inches of workers' hands and feet. Poor facility design offers little head room in many work stations, and the folding out of pieces of equipment closes off escape routes in cases of emergency. The new building with new machinery are proving as unsafe as the antiquated facilities they replaced. Investigator William Anderson of the General Accounting Office told a Congressional sub-committee in 1976:

The walkways are really tough to stick to and then these towveyors are moving downward. There are a lot of instances, and I know we had to dodge them all over the place walking through the plant here. The work floor is just so crowded, and these things are coming sporadically and if you don't keep your eye, if you're not intent all the time on trying to spot a coming towveyor, I can understand how people can be getting hurt.

Three years later, conditions had not noticeably improved.

JACK ANDERSON INVESTIGATES THE USPS

In his investigation of the USPS, Jack Anderson reported on the deplorable working conditions at some of the nation's largest mail handling centers:

The loading docks at the Postal Service's New York bulk mail center are referred to by the employees as "the six doors of death."

Allowing for a certain poetic license by the postal workers—no one has actually been killed at the loading docks—the grim phrase reflects the most serious flaw in the Postal Service's multimillion-dollar, superautomated regional facilities for handling parcels and other non-first class mail. The places simply are not safe to work in.

We have already reported the havoc wreaked on mail by the futuristic assembly-line machines that were supposed to be cheaper and more efficient than human mail handlers. Damage and destruction caused by the remorseless electronic mar-

vels have led many bulk mailers to use private delivery services. The resulting shrinkage in traffic is killing the whole point of the bulk mail centers, which must handle enormous volume to achieve the cost savings projected for them.

But workers' safety is far more important than damage to inanimate objects. The Rube Goldberg machines are ripping human flesh as well as parcel wrappings, crushing human limbs as well as Christmas packages and spilling workers' blood as well as junk mail.

Employees at the regional bulk mail centers are scared and angry. It's dehumanizing enough to work while surrounded by machines instead of men and women; when the machines have the upper hand, it is shattering to employee morale.

We sent our associate Vicki Warren to work undercover at the Washington regional bulk mail center, and when she saw the appalling conditions the facility's employees must work in, she asked them why they didn't quit. The universal response was that the pay is too good to pass up. The postal workers are, in effect, being paid to risk life and limb.

Management's response to the astronomical cost of patching up its injured workers—currently more than \$800 million a year—has been to treat it as a mere bureaucratic problem. Instead of trying to figure out ways to make the environment safer, the Postal Service has chosen to cut its compensation claims by culling them with a fine-tooth comb. The machines aren't to blame for accidents, in management's view; the employees are.

The manager of the San Francisco center expressed this attitude in a memo that warned bluntly: "We cannot continue to permit people to harm themselves at this installation. It is in their best interest to remove them from Postal Service rather than allow them to maim or kill themselves."

The Washington bulk mail center, where our reporter worked, had the highest accident record in the East last year. There were over 300 accidents in 1978—almost one a day. There were 41.4 accidents for every 100 employees, compared to 9.5 per 100 employees at the city post office in downtown Washington.

Yet management and the workers can't even agree on the best way to avoid one of the more common machine-caused accidents at the Washington center: a malfunctioning signal system causes the truck driver to drive off while the loader and the boom-like end of the conveyor are still inside the truck, when this happens, the conveyor belt flails back and forth wildly.

The worker trapped in this nightmare situation has two choices. He can stay in the truck or try to run out. The center's manager, Julie McCarthy, says "workers should run out of course." Employees say this is the worst possible thing to do.

Would a loader who stays in the truck and is hurt anyway be given compensation for his injuries? Or would it be ruled his

fault because he didn't follow management's preferred emergency procedure? This presumably is the kind of question the Postal Service's crackdown on compensation claims will decide. The idea of improving the signal system apparently hasn't occurred to the machine-happy management.

While the Postal Service carefully skirts the heart of the problem, the statistics keep building. Last year, the rate of injuries at bulk mail centers was three times as great as at other postal facilities.

DEATH IN A BMC

While Anderson's comment in March, 1979 that "no one has actually been killed at the loading docks" was ironically belied in December, 1979, his indictment of postal service management for the hazardous conditions in USPS facilities hits the mark. Studies by Dupont Safety Management Services and evaluations of the USPS by OSHA verify Anderson's criticisms.

The investigation by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration into the death of Mike McDermott in the New York Bulk Mail Center in December, 1979 placed the blame for the accident on improper maintenance and guarding of the conveyor on which he was killed. Furthermore the investigation stated that jam relays that could have saved his life had been removed and bypassed in the conveyor's control system. The OSHA study notes further that, "There appears to be an attitude permeating all levels of employees that the mail must be moved and that few reasons justify stopping mail processing." A 1980 OSHA evaluation of five bulk mail centers places the responsibility for this attitude more clearly on management. "There appears to be a lack of understanding by some of the postal service managers concerning the importance of worker safety and health as an integral part of their overall responsibility. . . ."

The Dupont study, commissioned by the USPS itself in response to pressure following Michael McDermott's death, is severely critical of USPS management.

Safety in the United States Postal Service is not managed now. Management reacts to correct a specific problem rather than establishing a systematic approach to involve all members of management in an effort to develop programs with lasting benefits. . . .

Safety in the United States Postal Service is not equal to productivity, quality, cost and other aspects of managing a business. . . . Good intentions have been thwarted by the demands of productivity, energy, employee relations, cost, and security, and management's initiative in safety has thus weakened.

Management talks about its interest in improving safety but has not taken the necessary steps to demonstrate its commit-

"Management talks about its interest in improving safety but has not taken the necessary steps to demonstrate its commitment."

ment. Safety has not been made equal to other business considerations.

Supervisors are not sensitive or responsive to the needs of their employees. . . .

The few safety rules that are posted are not enforced. . . .

The Postal Service does not comply fully with the Safety and Health Section of the collective bargaining agreements.

The death of Michael McDermott is just one example of the callous indifference of USPS management to worker safety.

The overall record of USPS in promoting job safety between 1975 and 1979 is dismal. OSHA's 1979 evaluation of performance cites the following deterioration in USPS safety programs:

- *The size of the safety and health staff has decreased significantly. This decrease is proportionately greater than the overall decrease in USPS employment.

- *The position of professional safety inspector in the district offices has been eliminated.

- *The size of the headquarters safety staff has been reduced from 14 to three, two of whom are professionals.

- *As a result of these manpower cuts, industrial-type installations have not been inspected annually by qualified safety personnel.

- *Instead, inordinate time seems to have been taken up for field safety staff in paperwork connected with workers compensation claims, rather than making facility inspections.

- *There is no industrial hygienist anywhere in the agency, and no discernable agency-wide recognition of existing occupational health problems.

OSHA's 1979 Evaluation of USPS states that "Nonsupervisory employee involvement seems confined to actions specified in the Union Agreement. . . ." USPS management has taken the position that it must follow the union agreement exclusively, because it might be chastised by the union if it followed OSHA requirements that are not part of the contract. This seems to be a smokescreen since USPS unions have consistently demanded employee participation in health and safety matters. Thus far, the USPS has denied them the opportunity.

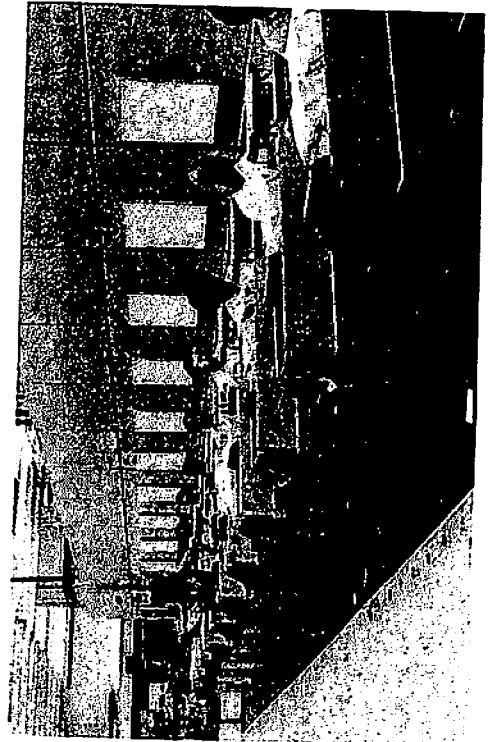
JOB STRESS IN THE USPS

Working with machines that control the pace of work, under speed-up conditions, around dangerous equipment, and under direct and constant supervision can cause serious job stress. Job stress is now considered

a serious threat to workers' health. It is linked to heart disease, kidney disease, ulcers, colitis, migraine headaches, mental illness, chronic fatigue, drug and alcohol use, and a general decrease in the body's defenses against disease. Some experts estimate that occupational stress is five times more important than any other factor in heart disease. Another study has shown that work satisfaction is the strongest predictor of long life, more important even than overall happiness.

Postal workers have concentrated their complaints regarding job stress on the machine-paced letter sorting machines. One worker states, "When they started the machine program they had to open the job for bidding. Many of the people that we had doing other jobs went into the program. Some of them had, you know, six, seven, eight years on the job and they never had any disciplinary problems. Yet when they had been on a machine for a few years, they just started getting a whole track record—wouldn't come in to work, insubordination—there's got to be some type of effect on your nervous system."

In response to employee concern, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health carried out a study on stress in different job categories in the postal service. This study, completed in 1981, compared levels of stress and its health effects between LSM operators and distribution clerks. The LSM operators reported less job satisfaction, greater mental demands, more task dissatisfaction, more work pressure, less co-worker support, and less satisfaction with equity of pay than the distribution clerks. The only area in which they reported greater satisfaction than the distribution clerks was in organizational satisfaction. LSM oper-



ators reported higher levels of physical strain in the areas of general fatigue, vision disturbances, and muscular problems. They also reported significantly more health complaints for 29 health conditions, including visual, muscular, digestive, and psychosomatic problems. A follow-up study attempted to determine if the major source of stress for LSM workers lay in the physical demands of the work such as keying and rigid inspection, or whether the problems were related to the pace and the repetitive nature of the work. This study concluded that task satisfaction

Work on the LSM creates serious job stress that directly endangers the health of USPS workers.

rather than the physical demands of the job has the greatest impact on LSM operators. More precisely, the fact that most workers find the task boring and lacking in challenge and interest has a strong effect on overall job satisfaction and is directly linked to both physical complaints such as gastritis, gastro-intestinal and muscular skeletal complaints, and emotional complaints such as depression and anxiety. The studies confirm what many USPS workers have long known. Work on the LSM creates serious job stress that directly endangers the health of USPS workers.

Several other health complaints have recently caused concern among USPS workers. Many USPS workers report breathing problems and allergies when they have to work around paper dust. A union official from one of the nation's largest postal installations said, "A lot of them are starting to complain about their eyes, nose and throat from the dust of the letters—when you put that many thousands of letters through the machine, the dust starts to accumulate, and just keeps coming into their system. They're breathing all this in and their eyes get irritated, their nose, throat, . . . it's starting to build up."

Another complaint that has recently become serious is a disease called carpal tunnel syndrome. This is a painful condition of the hand that is caused by pressure on a nerve in the hand. It appears to be related to repetitive hand work such as keying on the LSM. Little research has been done on either the paper dust or carpal tunnel syndrome problems. In the future, they may be validated as major health problems for USPS workers.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

A recurring theme in the USPS response to safety problems has been its resistance to employee participation in resolving them. Safety complaints concerning the lack of bumpers around the conveyors where Mike McDermott was killed were filed in February, 1979, ten months before his death. Clyde Dinkins, a supervisor at the New York Bulk Center,

was demoted in the fall of 1979 to a clerical position after he shut down operations that he considered unsafe—operations identical to those performed in the section where McDermott was later killed.

To force the USPS to improve its health and safety programs, postal service unions have in recent years sought legislation that would give OSHA direct enforcement powers over the USPS. Under the proposed legislation, OSHA would treat the USPS like any private business covered by OSHA regulations. This legislation has not yet passed.

While legislative efforts to extend full health and safety coverage to federal workers have stalled, Presidential Executive Order 12196 effective October 1, 1980, moves federal workers a step closer to an enforceable right in this area. Though the order (implementing section 19 of the OSHA Act) leaves primary enforcement responsibility, including inspection, to the various federal agencies, it authorizes the creation of a committee (composed of an equal number of management and employee representatives) to monitor each agency's health and safety program. If an agency fails to establish such a committee, it is vulnerable to unannounced safety inspections by OSHA.

The safety and health committees may be formed at both the national and the installation level. If workers are represented by a collective bargaining agent, the agency must appoint the employee members from those recommended by the union. The primary duty of such a committee is to monitor the agency's implementation of its health and safety program. At each post office or other installation the committee may participate in inspections and when half of a committee's members are not satisfied with the agency's response to a report of hazardous working conditions, it may request an inspection by OSHA.

The Executive Order also provides that an employee representative may accompany any inspection at agency expense, establishes time limits for responding to reports of working conditions in violation of applicable standards, guarantees anonymity of persons making reports, and requires procedures to protect employees from any reprisal for reporting violations or participating in health and safety activities.

While the Executive Order does provide for employee and union participation in an agency's health and safety program, it has several deficiencies. OSHA has no authority to cite violations it finds and there is no system for penalizing agencies that violate the order. Nor does the Executive Order provide for the mandatory abatement or correction of hazards. Finally, any disputes between OSHA and any agency will go to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for resolution (an office where cost is frequently the major factor in a decision).

The full value of the Executive Order to workers in the U.S. Postal

Service is not yet known. Furthermore, it can be changed at any time by any President, as can the regulations which describe the way it is to be enforced. Since agency heads retain primary control over enforcement, the extent to which they respect the order depends on their perception of its importance to those in higher levels of government, particularly the President and his political appointees.

Though fully subject to all other provisions of Executive Order 12196, the postal service has elected not to establish health and safety committees at any level of its operation. The postal service states that in view of its collective bargaining obligations and pending legislation that would create statutory rights for postal workers in the area of health and safety, it cannot revise its present program. Though these are not compelling arguments, the apparent willingness of the postal service to bargain on health and safety issues is a significant opportunity for postal worker unions and the employees they represent. Because postal workers, unlike other federal employees, enjoy bargaining rights under the Taft-Hartley Act, their right to bargain on health and safety issues is well established in the law.

UNION SAFETY COMMITTEES

It is possible through bargaining for workers to win greater protections than those offered in the Executive Order. For example, instead of seeking the joint labor-management committee permitted under the order, unions could institute their own committees with far broader powers. These powers could include participation in fundamental policy decisions ranging from a right to participate in the design and implementation of the agency's health and safety program to a right to remove workers from a job which the safety committee deems unsafe. This right to bargain applies not only to the creation, role, and functioning of committees but allows the union to seek standards stricter than those in the Executive Order. For postal workers, it is collective bargaining that offers the greater opportunity to have an impact on issues like job design and work pace, which are in essence health and safety issues.

In the future, the postal service may make use of some kind of worker/management health and safety committee. This may come about either through collective bargaining or through a decision by the postal service that joint committees are preferable to the risk of unannounced inspections from OSHA. A joint health and safety committee may be a useful means of bringing health and safety issues to the attention of management. However, worker and union participation in such committees can easily become a talking exercise.

To supplement joint committees, unions should consider creating their own health and safety committees. The basic approach of a

union health and safety committee should be the prevention of accidents and exposure to hazardous materials and conditions. Prevention requires the committee to examine the workplace in a way that turns up problems before they cause harm to workers. Unlike the grievance procedure where the grievance committee primarily responds to complaints, the health and safety committee needs to foresee conditions that may be hazardous.

The committee should prepare itself for this task by gathering information on past accidents, compensation claims, and safety grievances. The committee should establish a modest library containing OSHA standards and pamphlets and reference books on safety and health. The committee should develop its own recordkeeping system to track down trends or problem areas and keep track of problems that it has raised with management. It may also make use of health and safety training that may be available through the national union or other sources.

A union health and safety committee can function in four major areas. Its primary function is to respond to the needs of the local union membership. This means that the committee needs to have good communication with the membership. It should solicit the ideas and complaints of members. It should also invite members to suggest solutions to health and safety problems. In addition the committee needs to make the membership aware of its activities—its victories, defeats, and especially information about problems that are slow and difficult to resolve. The local union health and safety committee should also keep the na-

Discussion of health and safety is part of management's obligation to bargain over working conditions.

tional union informed of its activities. The national may be able to lend assistance in solving some problems.

Even if a health and safety committee is not a joint committee, it must find some way of conferring with management. This may be through procedures negotiated in the contract or on an *ad hoc* basis as problems arise. Discussion of health and safety is part of management's obligation to bargain over working conditions. Conferring with management can extend beyond bringing complaints and waiting for answers. Committees can ask management to jointly review all accident and illness reports to look for trends. The committee can seek to regularly inspect the worksite for current or potential safety and health hazards.

A local union health and safety committee needs to develop skills in recognizing hazards. This means tracing the flow of work through the facility, noting all potentially dangerous machinery, constructing a list of all toxic substances and chemicals used in the facility, and preparing a

checklist of potential hazards in the facility that should be regularly inspected by the committee. The committee should also be alert for health complaints that may be linked to a job exposure. If several workers in an area share a health problem there is a strong possibility that the problem is related in some way to their work. This kind of information should be taken very seriously. Most health hazards are first discovered by alert workers, not by research scientists.

In the long run, health and safety committees may seek important rights either through Executive Order 12196 or through collective bargaining. These rights may include rights for the health and safety committee such as the right to inspect the workplace and shutdown hazardous jobs, and individual rights such as the right for workers who are transferred from a job because of work-related injury or illness to retain their rate of pay, and as individuals to refuse work they regard as hazardous.

The union health and safety committee needs to consider a whole range of solutions when it approaches a problem. If normal channels do not provide a solution, the committee may consider less common union tactics—using the press, informational picketing, or embarrassing management in other ways. In all cases the health and safety committee must have gained the support of the rank and file by educating them to the seriousness of the problems.

When postal service unions make demands for improved conditions that affect workers' health, they are challenging management's right to total control of the workplace. When management perceives a demand as a threat to its control, it may resist concessions more vigorously than the small financial costs required to meet the demand would otherwise justify. This drive for total control of the worker and workplace has created the stressful conditions that are probably the most serious and widespread job health problem of today's postal workers. As the postal service continues to change, health and safety issues are likely to become increasingly important to USPS workers. Issues of technology and control cannot be separated from health and safety. But health and safety demands may be one of the most effective ways for USPS workers to gain some control over the changes they are facing in the postal service.

CHAPTER V

In Generations To Come

Historically, management's quest for the rationalization of production has generated chaos for its employees, whatever the industry, whatever management's expertise. The workplace chaos and disorganization that has accompanied the rationalization of the postal workplace seems extreme and certainly has had profound impacts on the lives of postal workers. Although postal management blundered into, and through, its reorganization, construction, and mechanization programs of the 1970's, it did successfully disrupt the growing power of postal employees. Had postal management really "had its act together" in its reorganization and mechanization programs, the consequences for postal workers might well have been even more extreme. Centralized control could have been more ruthlessly implemented, machines better interfaced, more workers displaced, and work paces more rapidly speeded up. Had concessions on job security and reassignment not been made, thousands of postal workers might have found themselves out of work altogether in ever tightening labor markets.

USPS ENTERS THE ELECTRONIC AGE

However, for today's postal worker, there is little solace in the small favors resulting from management's past ineptitude. Contemporary postal management is moving towards the implementation of electronic message systems (EMS) with little of its previous uncertainty and confusion. To assist in this task, it has hired experts from NASA and contracted for the services of the nation's most advanced computer and electronic firms. Unlike the situation in the 1970's, postal management now knows precisely what it is doing in the area of electronic message systems and has carefully worked out implementation plans which will, in the next 20

... postal management . . . has carefully worked out implementation plans which will, in the next 20 years, fundamentally restructure mail service and eliminate most clerk craft jobs.

years, fundamentally restructure mail service and eliminate most clerk craft jobs. John J. Wise, Assistant Postmaster General for Research and Development, told a Congressional subcommittee in 1978, in no uncertain terms: "We are looking toward an initial operating capacity by 1985 and a mature system by 1990." Postal workers can expect to face two major technological innovations in the 1980's: (1) the introduction on a

widescale basis of Advanced Optical Character Readers (OCR), with both "read" and "code" capacities, interfaced with a battery of multiposition letter sorting machines; and (2) a full-fledged electronic message system (EMS) which will do away with most mail handling and sorting. If postal workers are to cope with these innovations, it is necessary to understand them.

Neither of these technological innovations are genuinely new. Postal management has expressed an interest in their development since the mid-1960's and the actual technological capacity to implement such systems has been within the grasp of postal management for several years. In 1977, Dr. Louis T. Rader, Chairman of the USPS Support Panel, Committee on Telecommunications, of the National Research Council, told a Congressional subcommittee:

Technological feasibility does not limit the evolutionary development of electronic message systems. . . . Technologies that are likely to be used in providing an electronic message service within the next 10 to 15 years are already available or in development.

But only recently has postal management committed itself to the development and implementation of these technologies. Millions of dollars have been devoted to research, and careful testing systems have been established. Pilot projects have been launched and monitored and systemwide implementation is around the corner.

The developments of the 1970's, discussed in previous chapters, provided the necessary foundation for the introduction of OCR's and electronic message systems. The reorganization and mechanization programs were linked in two critical ways to mail volume. First, it was necessary to reorganize the collection and processing of mail in order to accumulate enough mail in centralized places to cost-justify mechanization. Expensive facer-cancellers, edger-stackers, LSM's, bulk mail towveyors and the like, demanded a huge and steady volume of mail to make their operation economical. The new programs were also linked to mail volume in another way. USPS management stressed that innovation was necessary to reverse the growing trend toward the use of private carriers for both parcel post and business mail. Reorganization and mechanization was thus seen as a way to recapture lost potential volume.

In the 1970's reality belied these visions. The new Bulk Mail System failed to make the USPS more competitive with Unitel Parcel Service and other private carriers. In fact, the chaos, increased parcel damage, high error rates, and negative publicity that accompanied the changes in postal operations chased even more business away. Moreover, the emergence of privately operated electronic message and facsimile transmis-

sion systems cut significantly into the USPS's volume of first-class mail. The 1977 Congressional hearings on the "Impact of Electronic Communications Systems on Postal Operations" highlighted the problem. Roger K. Salaman, the Chief of the Policy Research Division of the Office of Telecommunications of the U.S. Department of Commerce, gave particularly disturbing testimony. Speaking of the development and expansion of "electronic funds transfers," he noted that some 60% of current first-class mail volume consisted of financial transactions that could be completed through this new, privately-operated system. He predicted conservatively that within the next decade, up to 40% of first-class mail might disappear. In response to Salaman's testimony, Congressman Hanley remarked: "Because of the development of this technology of electronic transfer of funds, I think it is fair to say that we kiss (this mail) right off, say good-bye to (it). . . ."

Other witnesses urged against such a fatalistic concession. They suggested that the USPS enter the electronic message system field with all deliberate speed. Not to do so, warned Dr. Rader of the National Research Council, would mean: ". . . mounting costs, decreasing volumes, and continually rising deficits, a no-win situation leading inevitably to a deterioration of services and a growing dependency on subsidies." In short, then, one of the causes of the current management interest in computer and electronic innovations stems from the *failure* of the 1970's reorganization and mechanization programs to assure a mail volume sufficient to justify the mechanization itself.

The second major development of the 1970's which has put OCR's and electronics on the agenda was the centralized control that reorganization and mechanization placed in postal management's hands. The other side of the coin in centralized control, as we have seen, involved the routinization and regimentation of most postal work. By the end of the 1970's, the accumulated impact of these changes had given postal management a much broader scope of power. Having reshaped the work and workforce, and having established powerful measures of centralized control, postal management now hopes to introduce new technologies with little collective opposition from its workforce. Thus the reorganization and mechanization of the 1970's may have provided the necessary foundation for the forthcoming innovations of the 1980's, and later.

OPTICAL CHARACTER READERS

Most postal workers are familiar with Optical Character Readers (OCR). This computer-controlled device is capable of reading specific lines of the address on an envelope, and then routing the envelope to the proper bin of the LSM's with which it is interfaced. Linked to the introduction of the nine-digit zip code, OCR's will automatically sort much

The introduction of OCRs will, quite simply, replace LSM operators.

of the nation's mail. Prototypes have been developed which are reportedly capable of sorting upwards of 80,000 pieces of mail in an hour. The introduction of OCR's will, quite simply, replace LSM operators who visually read addresses and key in the code. In short, the very occupation will disappear.

The development of the OCR has been plagued with problems, mostly stemming from the machine's inability to "read" all mail. The inability, or unwillingness, of the American people to uniformly address their letters has created the greatest problems. Illegible handwriting, unusual address styles, and the failure to use zip codes have created problems for the OCR. However, between 70 and 80% of first-class mail volume is generated by businesses that have already shown a willingness to dovetail their mailing operations with the technological requirements of postal machinery. Most commercial mailers are already addressing their envelopes in such a way as to make them "machine-readable." Meanwhile, "bar-code" OCR's have been developed to cope with problem mail. Using this method, addresses are visually read once, and then mechanically imprinted with an electronically-sensitive code that can be "machine-read" for all further sorts.

A greater challenge to postal workers' jobs is posed by the interfacing of OCR's with electronic message equipment such as facsimile transmission. At the USPS's pilot "Intelpost" project in Washington, D.C., a "letter" to New York can be sent in 3 seconds. A reply takes another 3 seconds. Here's how it works. A note is handwritten on a plain piece of paper. It is then fed into an OCR, which "reads" the letter and transfers it into electronic impulses. These impulses are beamed up to a satellite and then down to the New York station. There, a printer retranslates the electronic impulses into written words and makes a copy of the letter. The letter is handled only by the machine operators at each end of the operation.

This interfacing of OCR's with electronic message systems is certain to be the wave of the future. Postal management thinks so, as Dr. Henry Geller of the National Research Council explained to Congress in 1977:

With a microwave relay, a facsimile page could be transmitted for 3.3¢, and satellite transmission could be as low as 3/10 of a cent per page. While this appears attractive now, once all-digital systems are in use, facsimile will not be able to maintain itself as viable competition. It takes at least 250 times the number of electronic signals required for a one-page digitally coded

message to carry a similar facsimile message. As long as transmission rates are based upon numbers of signals transmitted, facsimile will always remain the bridesmaid.

ELECTRONIC MAIL

Postal management has divided its research into electronic message systems into three stages—the so-called Generation I, Generation II, and Generation III technologies.

Generation I substitutes electronic transmission of information for a portion of the mail stream. Functionally, this is similar to the World War II "V-mail" service, in which a letter was photographed and reduced to microfilm and transported to an overseas location for reproduction. Today's technology enables letters or messages to be converted to electronic signals for transmission and reconversion to hard copy. The USPS has

Today's technology enables letters or messages to be converted to electronic signals for transmission and reconversion to hard copy.

initiated development projects in this area, involving techniques of conversion by facsimile transmission and paper handling.

In a Generation II system, information enters the mail stream at a postal installation close to the recipient. Prior to the production of a hard copy for delivery, the information exists in electronic form only. All transmission and sorting is electronic. An example of Generation II technology is the Mailgram, developed jointly by Western Union and the USPS. Mailgrams may originate at a terminal (Telex, TRW or Info-Com), at a computer (direct or via a Western Union Office), by a toll telephone call, or acoustically-coupled terminals (facsimile, word-processors, or teletypewriters), or across-the-counter at a public telegraph office. Once entered into the system, the information is switched and transmitted electronically to a post office near the addressee where a hard copy is produced. The hard copy is put into an envelope by USPS personnel and dropped into the conventional mail stream for delivery.

The conceptual model of Generation II suggests telecommunication services similar to Mailgram, with electronic inputs entered directly at a postal installation near the originator. It is estimated that 80 percent of all letter mail originated by government and 40 percent of that originated by business (about one-third of all letter mail) would yield to input in electronic form. Since approximately 88 percent of the business revenues in the U.S. are generated by only 10 percent of the corporations, there is an assumption that the volume of business mail bears some cor-

relation to the size of the business. Therefore mail volume is probably sufficiently concentrated to make electronic inputs practical and economical. Those most likely to use electronic mail services first include banks, utilities, department stores, oil companies, insurance companies, and credit card companies. According to Jacques Harlow in a presentation to the USPS Support Panel, there are indications that transmission costs in the Generation II system will probably be an insignificant portion of the total eventual cost. As Generation II service grows, addressees will receive an increasing proportion of their mail in the form of messages that have been transmitted electronically and converted to hard copy for delivery.

Generation III technology substitutes electronic means for conventional delivery. Information will be delivered directly to the recipient's place of business or residence, where a hard copy may or may not be produced. Two main elements are required for Generation III to operate widely:

- 1) The development of an economical, reliable, and reasonably compact terminal for the individual user.
- 2) The utilization of existing distribution networks or the development of a new distribution network.

A local distribution network would extend from the local postal installation or electronic concentration point to the office or residence of the recipient.

There are several viable possibilities for the distribution of electronic mail. About 94 percent of U.S. households have at least one telephone and each of these local lines is used only a very small portion of the time. Practically 100 percent of U.S. businesses have telephone service. The existing telephone system is thus an operating network already in place, capable of addressing nearly the entire population of the U.S. Clearly, the addition of interfaces and conversion devices to accommodate an entirely new class of service is an engineering problem of some magnitude. While technically feasible, there is the problem of accomplishing it economically and without disruption of the business and social life of the communities.

An alternative distribution network would be one similar to the narrow-band telephone system, but consisting of wide-band transmission links. The wide-band links could be co-axial cables similar to those used by cable TV systems. In 1981, cable TV systems served about 26 percent of U.S. households and at present the cables pass near another 10 or so percent of households. This figure increases substantially every year as more homes are hooked up to the cable. The expansion of such systems to cover every household, plus their integration into a common system,

would obviously be very expensive and could raise major policy questions for governmental regulators. If glass-fiber optical transmission develops as predicted, the cost may be less, but still considerable.

While a complete electronic message system would have elements of all three "generations" operating at any specified time, the specific service is most likely to depend upon the circumstances and needs of the business or residential user. Circumstances and needs change. So does technology. All three elements are bound to make any electronic message system extremely dynamic. This alone is an impressive argument for the USPS physical delivery system that is already in place. Postal management appears willing to accept the task. In 1979, some \$5.5 million was expended on electronic research by the USPS. In 1977, Congress asked William J. Miller, Director of Advanced Mail Systems Development,

Q. How soon do you foresee the opportunity of having what some refer to as "the black box" in the home, an inexpensive means by which every individual household could receive its message?

A. 1990

To be sure, much controversy has followed these plans. Private firms have challenged the USPS's expansion into this area, especially its quest for a legally-sanctioned monopoly. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) and Congress, traditionally responsive to business demands, have thus far failed to grant the USPS the free hand it has sought. Other critics have expressed concerns about the potential violation of privacy such systems pose. In Generation I and II systems, what will happen to the originating copies of letters? Will they be returned to the sender, destroyed, or stored? Who might gain access to them? Public knowledge of historical cooperation between USPS management and the FBI and other agents of domestic surveillance gives little confidence in glib assertions that electronic mail poses no threat to individual privacy. Similarly, the government's growing disregard for individual civil liberties is hardly reassuring. Unless there is a strong outpouring of public sentiment on this issue, the USPS management will do as they see fit.

While former President Carter went on record as supporting the USPS's expansion into the field of electronic message systems, there are signs that President Reagan will oppose such expansion. If Reagan follows the advice of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative "think tank", he will "order an immediate review of Administration policy on the Postal Service's participation, if any in telecommunications." The Heritage Foundation recommends that the USPS not jump into an industry which has been "traditionally left to private firms in the U.S."

Given what we now know about the available technology, there is

Given what we now know about the available technology, there is no denying that the future is exceedingly grim for postal workers.

no denying that the future is exceedingly grim for postal workers. Postmaster General Bolger told a Congressional subcommittee in 1978 that the adoption of electronic message systems would displace 3/4 of the processing workforce, even without eliminating the use of "hard copy" at both ends of the operation. If Reagan is successful in slowing down the entry of the USPS into electronics, it may provide some temporary relief to the threat of massive lay-off of postal workers. In the long run however, there will still be work force reductions as private firms already in the telecommunications field competitively fight for and win more and more of the business of transmitting information.

If there is one lesson to be learned from this review of the new electronic technology, it is that the public postal system will increasingly find itself in direct competition with private telephone, telegraph and other communications companies. As it does so, workers in the whole communications industry will then share common problems. They will find it to their advantage at that point to work together toward common goals.

CHAPTER VI

What Hope Is There?

We have tried to show that, in the workplace, the introduction of new technologies has consistently provided management with a powerful weapon to disrupt workplace organization, reorganize production, routinize work, and increase control over employees. William Anderson of the U.S. General Accounting Office bluntly told a Congressional subcommittee holding hearings on "Postal Research and Development" three years ago: "Anything that will make the Postal Service less labor intensive has to be to the nation's good." On the basis of the record of the past 11 years of postal service, can any user of the mails believe that? Yet that is the policy that has shaped the strategy of postal management for the past decade.

It was in response to the growing demands and militancy of postal workers in the late 1960's, reflected in their 1970 national wildcat strike, that postal management moved forcefully in the direction of wholesale "reorganization." The replacement of human labor by machines and "scientific" management of the work place became the order of the day. But this isn't all that happened. The new technologies disrupted work groups and the social networks of support, regimented the work of all postal employees, and centralized management's immediate control within each postal facility. This strategy, we have seen, was disastrous for both postal workers and the quality of the nation's mail service. But these new technologies did serve management's purpose, for they significantly shifted the balance of power in its direction.

In the last chapter we looked into postal management's plan for the future, that is, the wholesale displacement of human labor by the introduction of electronic messages in the place of traditional mail. While the new system may service the needs of business well, such a technological

... postal workers and private citizens. . . will be subjected to new forms of centralized power that seem right out of the pages of George Orwell's book, 1984.

development will have largely negative consequences for both postal workers and private citizens who use the mails. Both will be subjected to new forms of centralized power that seem right out of the pages of George Orwell's book, 1984. And someone will be exercising that control. Someone is making the decisions about the deployment and operation of these machines. There will be a few new faces in the crowd but

most will be very familiar to us—USPS management, the federal government itself, and large electrical, computer, and utility corporations, like Westinghouse, AT&T, IBM, and RCA.

This scenario, at least in its purest sense, takes place without any checks and balances, any conflict, or any opposition from postal workers or private mail users. The question that must be answered is, "Are there ways and means that both postal workers and the public can regain the control which has been lost during the technological and managerial revolution of the recent past?"

ROLE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Part of the answer lies, of course, in the role that collective bargaining can play in protecting job rights. In addition to winning higher wages and other economic benefits, workers down through the years have used their collective bargaining strength to protect themselves against the impact of technological change and to resist the loss of job control inherent in scientific management. Seniority on layoff, recall and transfer; job posting and job bidding rights; negotiated work rules which, for example, limit crew sizes or place limits on the amount of weight an employee may lift; and grievance and arbitration procedures all indicate that there are a number of ways to cope with management's introduction of new technology or work practices. Still we must soberly admit that most of these efforts, while perhaps able to soften the initial impact of changes, have been unsuccessful in the long run. Today, the American labor movement appears little closer to coping with new technology than it ever has.

One new approach is of more than passing interest. Some unions have recently raised the issue of technological change or—at least its import as a bargaining issue. While this implicitly challenges the deep-seated "management rights" clauses of most contracts, it has not yet become an explicit challenge in the United States as it has in other countries. In Australia, for example, some 70 trade unions recently announced a collective stance with no ambivalence—they stated that they intended to enforce a five-year moratorium on the introduction of new technologies in their industries!

European labor unions, through powerful labor parties and tough bargaining, have won some protection against the impact of technology. According to a report by the American Labor Education Center, unions in Norway and Sweden have won the legal right to complete information about proposed technology. In those countries union representatives can attend meetings of company boards of directors, obtain all information available to those boards, and present the union point of view. It is interesting to note that in these Scandinavian countries, labor has such a

strong political voice that "working environment" laws have been passed which give unions veto power over new technologies which would adversely affect job safety and health.

Faced with the introduction of computer-controlled machine tool operations, the Metal Workers Union in Norway negotiated a provision in its contract for a full-time "data shop steward." This steward is elected by the workers but works on company time. He has "complete access to the plant, receives special training in computer technology, collects detailed information about management's plans, and helps develop the union's response." Management must provide the union with information on all proposed systems, and if it fails to do so, the union has the right to block new technology and reorganization plans.

Unlike American unions which have generally not demanded a voice in the planning and design of new technology, "European unions realize that you have no chance, after the first few steps in the process of developing new technology, to stop what you don't like." Trade union education is taken very seriously in the European countries, so much so that classes for workers are often held on company time. In these local classes union officers and rank and file members become knowledgeable about engineering and other technical matters in their industry so they can participate in the decisionmaking which affects their jobs.

CONTRACT LANGUAGE

No American unions have gone this far. But the last decade was full of sobering lessons, enough so that the formerly sacrosanct status of "management rights" clauses is now being questioned by most unions. The International Association of Machinists, for example, has suggested contract clauses calling for at least six months advance notice on all technological changes; the establishment of a joint union-management Committee for Technological Changes; a guarantee of the rights of employees with seniority to bid for other jobs; the upgrading of wages on the new position; the use of attrition and reassignment, rather than outright layoffs, to reduce the workforce; the provision by management of retraining opportunities for displaced workers; retention of pay rates for those displaced and reassigned downward; prohibitions on moving jobs from bargaining unit status to non-bargaining unit status through technological changes; and the protection of seniority rights and moving expenses for displaced workers wishing to transfer to other plants in the same company.

Much of this will sound familiar to postal workers. After all, many of these IAM proposals are already included in the current APWU contract. Article I, Section 5 provides that newly created positions must be assigned to a bargaining unit within 30 days. Article IV, Section 1, calls

for management to inform unions "as far in advance of implementation as practicable" of technological or mechanization changes which affect jobs, including new or changed jobs, in the area of wages, hours, or working conditions. When major new mechanization is introduced or equipment is to be purchased and installed, the unions at the national level are to be informed "as far in advance as practicable, but no less than 90 days in advance." Section 2 of the same article establishes at the national level a Joint Labor-Management Technological or Mechanization Change Committee. Article VI provides life-time job security to all workers hired before September 15, 1978. Article XII provides a long list of conditions for reassignment with the express purpose "that dislocation and inconvenience to employees in the regular work force shall be kept to a minimum, consistent with the needs of the Service." Even moving costs are subsidized.

However, let's be realistic. Such contract provisions have not given postal workers and their unions any real voice in the course of technological changes. The "management rights" clause has remained unchallenged. Postal management apparently does not even take seriously its obligation under the contract to give the union advance notice of technological change. For example, the decision to install a computerized forwarding system (CFS) was made by the Capital Investment Committee of the Postal Service Board of Governors in 1977. Later, in a management document describing the labor and other savings to be effective upon implementation of the program, the "major milestones" in the implementation process were listed:

1. Procure computer equipment.
2. Train site management people.
3. Conduct 'pre' cost studies.
4. Notice to labor organizations.
5. Prepare site for computer equipment.
6. Convert from present manual system to CFS.
7. Declare CFS operations ongoing.
8. Conduct 'after' cost studies.

From this management source, it is clear that the decision was made, the equipment purchased, management people trained, and tests run before the unions were notified. The contractual obligation to give the unions advance notice was in this particular situation simply ignored. We suspect that it is ignored in virtually all decisions.

Seniority and other negotiated rights have provided some protection against the most severe sort of displacement. But it is doubtful that the negotiated rights currently included in the contract will protect postal workers from the ravages of displacement that will follow the implementation of electronic message systems. Nor has the national agreement

protected postal clerks and others in the postal service against the job degradation that follows from the establishment of new operating methods and job standards.

To an outsider looking in on the postal workers' unions and collective bargaining in the postal service, two considerations come to mind. The first is that the divisions which exist among the various crafts and letter carriers must surely weaken the overall strength of the union movement. We realize that there are historical explanations for these divisions but it seems that if there was ever a time to put aside inherited structures and conflicting organizational goals the time is now.

Second, while it is probably true that individual postal employees are without power to protect themselves against the changes that are affecting their lives so profoundly, as a group postal workers may well be the most powerful group in the nation. Even though the public may not depend as heavily on traditional mail service as it did in 1970, the U.S. Postal Service is still a vital service which business, government and the public require in order to function. The collective voice of postal workers is one that the nation cannot ignore.

And, finally, as we move so rapidly into the new technological age in which a large number of workers are engaged in the processing of

... it seems imperative that unions of telephone workers, postal workers, office employees, ... and others find ways to exchange ideas and to collaborate ...

information, it seems imperative that unions of telephone workers, postal workers, office employees, computer programmers, and others find ways to exchange ideas and to collaborate in developing strategies for the future. The "information society," as some now call it, is upon us and the computerized workplace is a fact of life in many industries. Unions must adapt to this reality.

LOCAL INITIATIVES

The negotiation of national agreements with desirable contract language is only the first step toward providing safeguards against technological change and new management control systems. There is next the question of enforcing the labor agreements once they are signed. Contract administration and enforcement on a day-to-day basis are largely the responsibility of the local union which may or may not be up to the task. Many local unions today have problems enforcing the contract and retaining a vestige of control on the shop floor because their members are inactive, the stewards are not trained in effective grievance handling, and the general image of the union is poor. When this state of affairs

exists, it is quite difficult to rebuild the union into a force with which management must reckon—but it can be done. According to General Vice President Julian Ostro of the Machinists (IAM), a union with weak support should try "the techniques used to organize the plant originally, when you had to rally people around you in the cafeteria or at the workbench and talk about their problems." Making the union relevant to the interests of its members rests on the shoulders of the local union officers who must take the initiative in "reorganizing the organized."

It is sad but true that one of the principal obstacles to rebuilding a local union is the attitude of local union leaders. Many hard working local officers, in their frustration over lack of attendance at meetings and general lack of support, develop very negative attitudes toward the membership and blame the union's problems on "apathy." While it is true that union members have interests and commitments off the job that force them to make choices between the union and their families and friends, it is also true that if local officers start with a negative attitude it becomes a self-fulfilling proposition. Through a more positive attitude, at least an understanding of why people do not attend union meetings, coupled with a lot of hard work and new definitions and methods of participation, local unions can begin to experience a rebirth of the union movement. And with that new beginning comes greater respect from management in dealing with local issues.

There are both traditional and non-traditional ways to rebuild local unions. Counted among the traditional programs would be a local union education program which might include films and outside speakers at local union meetings as well as classes on effective grievance handling for stewards and local officers. Communication within the local is important. Many unions have newsletters to inform the membership about union business, about how grievances are solved (or not solved) and about policies and programs of the national union. Using modern and inexpensive copying machines, these newsletters need only to be a page or two in length and can even be handwritten. There is a wealth of talent among workers and a growing need for communication, as witnessed by the increasing number of "underground" newsletters appearing at workplaces across the country. Some of these unofficial newsletters simply poke fun at management mistakes while others deal seriously with common grievances and complaints. In one plant, a one-page, handwritten underground paper is copied on the company's copier by a sympathetic (and brave) secretary. Finding and using the talent that is already there is one of the jobs of local union leadership.

One creative, yet non-traditional tactic used to build membership support worked well for a local union at a large aircraft plant in Connecticut. Hundreds of unofficial "union stewards" were appointed to sup-

plement the shop stewards officially recognized by the company under the contract. This improved the ratio from 1 steward for every 225 workers to 1 for every 50. The new stewards were trained in grievance handling, were identified by badges, and performed all the normal functions of a union representative except meeting with management (which only the steward recognized under the contract could do.) Representation improved dramatically, and so did support for the union.

At a glass plant in West Virginia, workers became fed up with the management practice of sending letters to individual employees whom it considered to have engaged in unsatisfactory work practices. With approval of the union membership the officers started sending out, on union stationery, letters to supervisors who had harassed members or treated workers unfairly. One such letter looked like this:

MEMO

TO: Larry Green

SUBJECT: *Behavior Not Becoming That of an Assistant Supervisor*

On April 13, 1979, Mr. Larry Green approached Mr. Wm. Shoemaker about handling the cartoons in a rough manner; his approach was anything but polite.

Upon investigation we have determined that this was not the first time you have approached persons on this matter, in this manner.

We find you in violation of plant rule #21 and sincerely hope in the future that you can handle yourself in a more gentlemanly fashion.

Recognizing that most people in management are "on the make" and want desperately to look good in the eyes of their supervisors, the local union sent this memo not only to the supervisor involved but to all levels of management within the plant. At first management just laughed at letters like this; then employees began to notice a much improved attitude on management's part, especially line supervisors. There was less harassment, less discrimination on job assignments, and more willingness to settle grievances at the first step. And as more grievances got resolved at an early stage, membership support for the union grew.

A common complaint in private industry is that the company does not handle grievances in good faith and forces everything to arbitration. This gives local officers a sense of frustration and helplessness. It also weakens membership support for the union—exactly what management hopes for. Faced with this problem in a large chemical plant in West Virginia, union workers decided that if the public knew what was going on in the plant, the company, always concerned with its public image,

would change its recalcitrant attitude toward the grievance committee. Handbills were written up explaining the workers' problems in getting management to deal fairly with them. Offduty employees handed these out at the plant gate and in the community. When the local newspaper found out what was going on and sought an interview with management to get its side of the story, the reporter was told that the problem had been solved and was no longer newsworthy. And solved it was. The company, fearful of losing its good public image, changed its foot-dragging policy and began to handle grievances in a timely fashion. As a side result, faith in the union was restored.

A favorite tactic employed years ago by railroad workers, who were prohibited by law from striking, was called "working to rule." When faced with problems that the union couldn't handle through normal channels, railroad employees made life difficult for management by strictly enforcing every single contract right and all laws and regulations pertaining to the operation of the trains. When speed limits between cities were followed and when all safety laws were adhered to down to the smallest detail, trains got behind schedule and general confusion resulted. By working to the rules, pressure can be put on management without losing an hour's work. Such concerted action can strengthen the union and prevent a deterioration of workers' control of their jobs.

The strategies available for rebuilding the bargaining strength of the local union are limited only by one's imagination. And their effectiveness is determined by how hard people are willing to work for this goal. If the conditions described in this pamphlet are reasonably accurate, employers in the U.S. Postal Service may have no choice but to make that commitment, that is if they wish to improve the quality of their lives on the job.

CONCLUSION

It should be pointed out in conclusion that postal workers enjoy a special opportunity that private sector workers do not have. Congress is still supposed to oversee the operations of the USPS, even under its 1970 reorganized structure. At the very least, Congressional hearings provide a public forum for the airing of postal workers' concerns and can result in mandated changes in the way the USPS operates. Thus political mobilization and pressure hold more immediate hope for postal workers than for many workers in the private sector.

All Americans stand to lose vital privacy rights should electronic message systems replace traditional mail. This is not just a question of the "quality" of mail service, but of the incursion of "Big Brothers" into our homes in frightening and potentially oppressive ways. Who will speak for the American people? We can probably expect the traditional pro-

It should be pointed out in conclusion that postal workers enjoy a special opportunity that private sector workers do not have.

tectors of civil liberties such as ACLU, to step forward. But why not the APWU, the NALC, and other postal unions? They - You - could take the responsibility to organize a public campaign against this planned ultimate changeover. The time is ripe for such a movement. Without postal worker union involvement, if not leadership, there is little hope-for either postal workers or some of the most important civil liberties of all American people. This form of technological change threatens to increase centralized control not only over postal workers, but over all the American people. There is a great deal at stake.

A POSTSCRIPT

As a final word we offer the following editorial from the newsletter of the Prince Georges, Md local of the APWU, *The Union Dispatch*, for your consideration and discussion. Editor Danny Betman calls for some new solutions to the problems we have outlined in the chapters above.

It seems that every time that the Union is getting ready to negotiate a new contract, asks for higher wages, or threaten a strike. PMG Bolger (wild Bill) threatens to suspend the Postal monopoly on the handling and delivery of mail. Bolger and a handful of reactionary politicians are always saying that the only way to make the Post Office more efficient would be to turn over the USPS to private business—lock, stock, and barrel.

Now I would never be one to defend the current way that the Postal Service is run. A bunch of fat-cat bureaucrats at the top all the way down to power-mad supervisors on the work-room floor have almost destroyed the efficiency of the Postal Service. Any worker with his/her eyes open can see the outrageous waste day in and day out, right here in our own facility. Multiply this thousands and thousands of times over throughout the entire country and you see why the PO is in trouble.

But the alternative that they offer—giving the P.O. to big business—is certainly no answer either. "Free enterprise" for the Postal Service simply would mean exchanging the current monopoly that USPS enjoys for a "monopoly" by some great big impersonal conglomerate to operate for its own profit. So instead of USPS, we get AT&T, IBM, EXXON, etc. Would the public be any better off? Of course not. Rates wouldn't go down any, the service would get worse, especially for these services that aren't profitable (rural free delivery, etc.). Would any tax dollars be saved? I doubt it. One only has to look at the gigantic subsidies (bailouts) given to Lockheed and Chrysler to see that we would end up footing the bill anyway. And where monopolies have control of the markets, like oil, utilities, auto production, etc., the public is not being better served, but in fact gouged by profit-hungry corporations who only serve themselves, not the public. Clearly this alternative would be a disaster and is no solution.

So there seems no way out of our dilemma. A system that doesn't seem to work well at all versus one that would be an incredible disservice to the people of the U.S.

Given all this, I would like to propose a third alternative that no "respectable" source has raised yet, because it is considered too radical. I am sure that anyone reading this newsletter for the past several years knows that the Editor is not afraid to put forward ideas simply because they might be considered "radical". So was practically every great advance in the world, from the idea that the earth was round to the Bill of Rights.

My very modest proposal is really very simple. Get rid of

the current make-up of the Postal Service, the PMG, the Board of Governors, the whole mess. In its place, turn over the operation and running of the Postal Service to the only people who know how to run it correctly—the people who do the work day in and day out. This could be done by working through the Union structure. Let the Congress stake us to just three years Postal Subsidy to cover the period of reorganization, and we would be breaking even at the end of those 3 years. How would we organize it differently in order to do this? Easy!

The problem with the PO isn't the hopeless situation of trying to provide a cheap, efficient service to the people and it is not with the workers themselves. The real problem is with top management who sit down in L'Enfant Plaza in air conditioned and carpeted offices and play around with computers, adding machines, pushing a lot of paper and juggling a lot of figures. The problem is that they don't know the first thing of what it is like on the workroom floor, of what it is like actually trying to move the mail. The average worker on the floor knows more about his/her job than any so-called "expert" and there is nothing that cannot be learned by the workers about the rest of the operations.

We would run the PO democratically. The first step would be the elimination of all craft distinctions, and the equalization of salaries for all Postal workers. All supervisory and managerial positions would be filled by democratic vote, all would be subject to recall, and would receive salaries no higher than the rest of the workers. This would insure that only people with an interest in the welfare of the service and of all would want these positions.

Any grievance concerning working conditions, safety, etc. would be heard by a committee of elected co-workers who would solve these problems. All rules and regulations concerning work, salary, etc. would be decided democratically. The workers would elect representatives to make policy for the running of the business. The postal service would remain as the property of the people of the U.S., run and operated by the workers as a non-profit service to the public.

The problem with the PO is not the workers. The problem is the system under which the PO is run. Even the politicians who are hell-bent upon destroying the Postal Service say this. Their solution is give it away to business and the public and workers be damned. We see the same problem but offer a different solution, one that can provide a cheap, reliable service to the public and safeguard our welfare, our safety and our livelihood. So, Mr. PGM, give away the postal service, not to those who only want to use it for their own profit, but to those who are the only ones capable enough and caring enough to do the job.

APPENDIX

Where To Turn For Help And Information

The following list of sources to which you might turn for additional information on technology was compiled by the American Labor Education Center, 1835 Kilbourne Place, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20010. (These people publish an excellent newsletter, *American Labor*, with topics of special interest to union leaders and rank and file union members).

Union Reports and Publications

- *Silicon, Satellites and Robots* summarizes union viewpoints expressed at the 1979 conference held by the AFL-CIO Department of Professional Employees (DPE).

The DPE newsletter, *Interface*, has also had articles on new technology.

Copies are available from DPE Assistant Director Dennis Chamot, AFL-CIO, 815 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

- The concerns of Communications Workers about automation at the phone company are discussed in a 70-page report on a CWA conference, *Technology—Its Impact on CWA Today and Tomorrow*. For a copy, contact Stephen Confer, CWA, 1925 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

- The United Auto Workers Skilled Trades and Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) Departments have both held new technology conferences for local union officers and members.

A quarterly publication for UAW skilled trades workers called *New Technology* reports on these meetings, UAW bargaining, and industry developments.

A yearly subscription for members costs 60 cents; for non-members, \$5. Write to UAW Skilled Trades Dept. 8000 E. Jefferson, Detroit, Mich. 48214.

- The International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) adopted a strong resolution at its 1980 convention on "robotization" in the electrical equipment manufacturing industry. An interesting report on industrial robots prepared for the convention can be obtained from Steve Beckman, IUE Research Department, 1126 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Frank Emspak, a machinist and IUE Local 201 executive board member, has written three informative papers, containing proposals for union bargaining about robots, computerized factory management and monitoring systems, and automatically controlled machine tool equipment.

For copies, contact Emspak, c/o Local 201, 100 Bennett St., Lynn, Mass. 01905.

- The United Electrical Workers (UE) distributes a pamphlet, *A U.E. Guide to Automation and the New Technology*, which outlines un-

ion strategies for dealing with the introduction of numerical-controlled (N/C) machine tools. Copies are available from the UE Publications Department, 11 East 51st St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

- In Great Britain, more than ten different unions have published materials that may be of interest to American unionists.

A complete list of these documents—including research reports, negotiating guides, and health and safety manuals—is contained in a publication of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) entitled *New Technology: Case Studies*.

This is available, along with an instructor's guide and the TUC's 1979 Congress report, *Employment and Technology*, from Doug Gowan, TUC Education Service, Congress House, Great Russell St., London WC1B 3LS.

Research Centers and Consultants

- In the U.S., two labor-oriented researchers currently associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have written extensively on new manufacturing technology and conducted courses on the subject for union members.

Harley Shaiken a former machinist, Wayne State University labor educator, and consultant to the UAW on new technology issues, is the author of *Computer Technology and Relations of Power in the Workplace*. It's available for \$4 per copy (along with reprints of other articles) from Shaiken at MIT, Room 20B-224, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Shaiken also can provide course outlines and copies of bargaining proposals—developed by skilled trades workers in UAW Local 600 for their negotiations with Ford Motor Co. in 1979—that were based on the Norwegian “data shop steward” system.

- MIT Prof. David Noble has written *America By Design* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) on the historical background of modern workplace technology such as industrial robots and automatically controlled machine tools.

In a study entitled *Social Choice in Machine Tool Design* (reprinted in *Case Studies on The Labor Process*, edited by Andrew Zimbalist, Monthly Review Press, 1979), Noble shows how new machine tool equipment has been used to “de-skill” workers in the U.S., strengthen management control over their work, and weaken union organization.

For more information about Noble's work, contact him at 206 Watts, Durham, N.C. 27701.

- Judith Gregory, staff member of Working Women, a national association of office workers, has written *Race Against Time*, an excellent 30-page study of office automation.

Working women can be reached at 1224 Huron Rd., Cleveland, Ohio 44115. Phone: 216-568-9308.

Their office automation report is \$3 for members, \$4 for other individuals, and \$7 for institutions (plus 70 cents for postage).

- The Center for Alternate Industrial and Technological Systems (CAITS) is located at North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge, Rd., Dagenham, Essex R M8 2AS, England.

It has worked with shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace and other British companies who are trying to avoid plant shutdowns and layoffs by developing detailed plans for productions of new, socially useful products. CAITS can provide a complete list of its publications.

- In Scandinavia, technical experts from the Swedish Center for Working Life and the Norwegian Computing Center have aided new technology bargaining by public employees, newspaper workers, retail clerks, chemical workers and machinists.

Results of their research and consulting work are summarized in *Computers Dividing Man and Work*, edited by Ake Sandberg. It's available from Birger Vikund, Arbetscliventrum (Center for Working Life), Box 5605, Fiskartorpsvagen 15, S-11486 Stockholm, Sweden.

- Reports written by Norwegian Computer Center staff members also have been translated and can be obtained from Jostein Fjalestad, Forskningsvn. 1B, Blindern, Oslo 3, Norway.

Labor Education Materials

- Wayne State University's Adult Education Program (Weekend College) was one of the first labor education groups to offer extensive classes on new technology.

In addition to attending the university's ten-week course on the subject, several hundred Detroit-area union members participated in a 1979 Wayne State “Conference on Technological Change.”

The course outline, a list of audio-visual materials used, and the conference transcript (now being edited) are available from program coordinator Vickie Manz, 995 Massachusetts Ave. (305), Arlington, Mass. 02172.

- California Newsreel has compiled a 70-page guide to written materials and films dealing with plant shutdowns, new technology, and the development of “alternative plans” for production and work organization.

The guide, *Planning Work*, was designed for union members and labor educators using the film, *We've Always Done It This Way*.

The film is about a campaign by shop stewards at a British aerospace company to avert layoffs by designing new products the company could produce instead of military aircraft. It is introduced by IAM President William Winpisinger.

This film and others, including a recent documentary on new technology in the auto industry. *The Detroit Model*, can be rented from California Newsreel, 630 Natoma St., San Francisco, Ca. 94103. Phone: 415-621-6196. Copies of *Planning Work* are available free from the same address.

- A short slide show and booklet on health protection for operators of VDTs/CRTs are available from NY-COSH, 32 Union Square, Rm. 404, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Books and Articles

● Monthly Review Press (62 West 14th St., New York, N.Y. 10011) has published several books with important historical background on the impact of new technology and new forms of work organization.

Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974) is available in paperback for \$5.95.

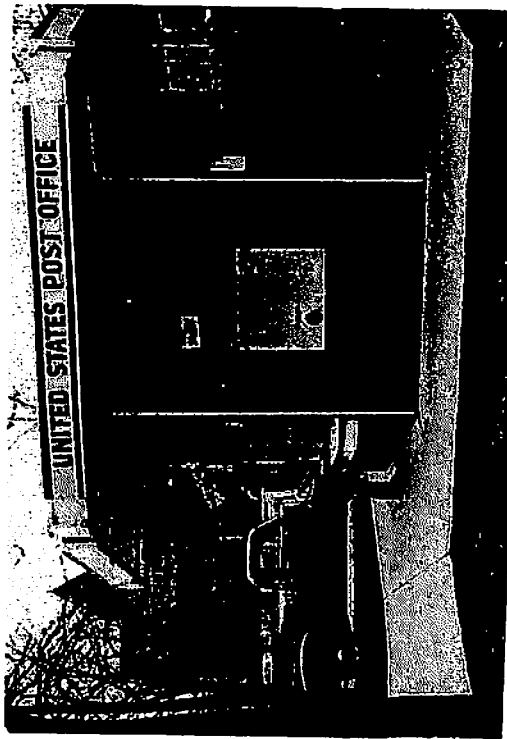
Case Studies on the Labor Process (1979), edited by Andrew Zimbalist, is unfortunately available only in hardcover for \$13.95. It contains a valuable collection of labor-oriented studies of automation and new technology in clerical work, construction, the printing trades, longshoring, coal mining, auto manufacturing, and other occupations.

One "case study" of particular interest in this collection examines the changing nature of computer programming. The problems of workers in this field are also described in more detail in a book by Joan Greenbaum. *In the Name of Efficiency: Management Theory and Shopfloor Practice in Data-Processing Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979, \$15).

● Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman of the 500,000-member British Association of Scientific Technical, and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) have coauthored three books that propose coordinated collective bargaining and political strategies by labor to deal with technological change.

Copies of *White Collar Unionism: The Rebellious Salaried, Computers and the Unions, The Collapse of Work*, and other publications of ASTMS are available from Clive Jenkins, ASTMS, 10-28 Jamestown Rd., London NW1 7DT.

● Shorter accounts of the impact of new technology on workers in the UAW and CWA are contained in *The Computer Factory and The Robot Worker*, by David Moberg, *In These Times*, 1509 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60622 (75 cents per copy) and *Brave New Workers* by Bob Howard, *Working Papers*, Nov.-Dec. 1980 (186 Hampshire Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, \$3 per copy).



Actually, the only thing the postal service has to sell is service, and we're not selling that. We're selling stamps.