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FOLK CONSTRUCTIONS OF A PLANT CLOSING

By

Donald L. Tuski

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Anthropology

1998

ABSTRACT

WORKER'S FOLK CONSTRUCTIONS OF A PLANT CLOSING

By

Donald L. Tuski

Deindustrialization is an acute and chronic problem within the United States as well as internationally. Because of this there is a growing body of research on how the constant movement of capital negatively impacts people. However, despite all the detrimental effects of a plant closing, workers in this study do not seem to question the premises of capitalism. Criticism is instead directed at a multitude of other variables, but the economy as a human made system is not focused on as "the problem". This study explores who and what workers blame for the closing in 1995 of the Lansing, Michigan plant of the Motor Wheel Corporation in particular and deindustrialization in general as well as how they blame. Special attention will be given to the possible reasons why workers do not directly blame capitalism in a climate of downsizing and plant closings.

Even with this growing amount of deindustrialization literature, responses by workers are not easily understood. The "folk constructions" of workers tend to be complex, diverse, and dynamic. Included herein is an enormous amount of creativity and ingenuity as well as insecurity and even inconsistency. Many workers suffered in multiple ways while

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they struggled to "rationalize" the closing. Their responses defy theoretical categorization, essentialism, and "false consciousness" explanations. Thus, workers should not be forced into theoretical constructs or reified.

This qualitative study of fifty people is based mostly on interviews with some survey data. Chapter I introduces the topic, need for this type of research, and a literature survey. Chapter II focuses primarily on the history of the Motor Wheel Corporation and utilizes newspaper articles as well as Motor Wheel publications. Chapter III introduces the people in this study with explicit and implicit themes. The complexity of these workers is also introduced. Chapter IV presents who and what workers blamed for the closing as well as how they blamed. These expressions form the "folk constructions" of the plant closing.

Chapter V discusses in some detail the possible reasons why workers may not blame the economic system. It is shown that a "false consciousness" explanation is too simplistic. Also, the concepts of greed, social contract, moral economy, and myth of meritocracy seem to deflect blame away from the economy. It is further argued that a form of "common sense" ideology, which implies that the economy is natural, helps to shield capitalism from open and honest criticism by limiting accepted discourse. Thus, these workers are not only complex but rational-- using a "common sense" view of the economy.

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The long process of completing a dissertation is usually accomplished with the help of many individuals. Such is the case here. I would first like to thank my Guidance Committee of Dr. Rita Gallin, Dr. Loudell Snow, Dr. Scott Whiteford and my Chair, Dr. Joseph Spielberg, for providing much needed comments on organization and content. Without such insights I would not have been able to complete the dissertation. I need to thank Dr. Spielberg for his patience during our discussion sessions on the dissertation. I also truly appreciate the individual efforts of the other committee members as well.

The many people who worked for and gave so much to the Motor Wheel Corporation in Lansing, Michigan need to be thanked. I especially need to thank Bob Ruffin, George Tijerina, Mike Feldpausch, Horace Fletcher, David Spicer, Jerry Welch, Leon Kramer, George Dixon, Darryl Buck, Dean Patterson, Doug Morrill, Bruce Beard, Al Grill, Lloyd Keeler, Jim Cooper, Dan Martin, Paul Neirink, Victor Lewis, Larry Shortz, and Paul Speidel for their open and honest thoughts on such a difficult subject. I truly thank them all.

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I would also like to thank Olivet College for giving me a chance to teach and make a contribution. Furthermore, I am grateful for the love and support from my wife Louise and her assistance in giving time and energy to the effort as well as for being very flexible. I need to thank my great children, Ian and Kenna, for their patience and understanding at such a young age. Flavia Manske should be thanked for all the various ways she supported me. My friend, Dr. David Sly, should be thanked because he helped me believe I could finish. Finally, I wish to thank my Mom, Dad, and my brother Michael for their spiritual support, which was needed and greatly appreciated.

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FOLK CONSTRUCTIONS OF A PLANT CLOSING

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Why a Plant Closing Study?

Deindustrialization and plant closings have been household terms for many Americans throughout the Twentieth Century and even in the Nineteenth Century. However, only recently has it become a term used widely in the popular press. With the rapid increase in plant closings starting in the early 1970's more Americans have been affected. Thus, the popular press has reported on deindustrialization and its ramifications. However, there still is very little analysis, academic or popular, on how individual workers vary in their interpretation of this human tragedy. Moreover, there is very little reporting on long-term closures or "chronic closures".

The importance of such a study is significant in any historical context, but especially today when people around the world are facing both the flight and invasion of the corporation. Because capitalism is a historically specific economic system (Wolf 1982) it is even more important to study plant closings and to study them as human-made events, not "natural" phenomena. In short, plant closings or plant movement overseas are not self-explained or inevitable, but essentially problematic events.

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The nature of capitalism itself and its effects on workers' perspectives is also problematic. For example, there is ample evidence now of the negative effect on the American working class as well as the growing income gap between the rich and the poor (Nasar 1992). Thus, democratic societies are becoming less equal. However, as evidenced by recent elections (1996), most Americans felt that the economy was "ok". Understanding this paradox within the context of an empirical study of a plant closing is a central purpose of the research undertaken here. This study will present "folk constructions" from about fifty people involved with this plant closing in order to demonstrate a diversity and complexity of expression not emphasized in the current literature as well as to try and understand why there were few workers who really questioned the economic system. If deindustrialization in general and this plant closing in particular are so devastating, why do workers not call into question the economic system of capitalism?

At the same time, however, some workers still struggled to understand the process of a plant closing. Their struggle to understand what was happening to them and their community produced a diversity of interpretations. These views could also be understood as rational or "common sense", given the context of the workers themselves. In this study, "rational" refers to how workers in a particular culture (American culture), are constructing reasonable or understandable

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explanations and interpretations that help them to both cope and understand this plant closing in particular and deindustrialization in general. Therefore, rational refers to how workers in this study make sense of what is happening. The issue, however, is whether or not "reasonable" understandings and interpretations call into question the very nature of capitalism and its ideology. As this study will show, most of the folk constructions provided by the workers do not, at least not directly or unequivocally, challenge the economic system. There were, however, what seemed to be partial critiques that questioned certain aspects or participants in the economic system, yet there were no expressions that radically questioned capitalism itself. Challenging the economic system in a radical way would include, first and foremost, the rejection of the logic of accumulation.

Theoretical Approach

Most of the literature on deindustrialization analyzes plant closings from a more macro statistical view focusing on policy and corporate behavior (e.g. Bluestone and Harrison 1982, 1988; Bluestone and Bluestone 1992 and Harrison 1994). They strongly argue, and with prescience, that deindustrialization is a structural change in the economy and not a cycle. Bluestone and Harrison's *The Deindustrialization of America* (1982) was a critical work

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> ...widespread, systemic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity...[where the] problem with the U.S. economy can be traced to the way capital--in the forms of financial resources and of real plant and equipment--has been diverted from productive investment in our basic national industries into unproductive speculation, mergers and acquisitions, and foreign investment (1982:6).

This view contradicted the prevailing liberal and conservative economists during the Reagan years. It was not until the late 1980's, even early 1990's, that other economists started to acknowledge this view. Thus, in 1988 Bluestone and Harrison produced *The Great U-Turn,* which speaks to the fact that the average American worker was losing buying power if not manufacturing jobs and this was resulting in a growing division between the classes in America. They cite the need and greed of corporate America for increased profits. Slashing labor costs was and is the most direct and fastest way to increase profits. This was also in the context of a world economy that was rivaling and surpassing the U.S. in efficiency--including energy use. Harrison's new book, *Lean and Mean* (1994), argues that the big corporation is alive and well and has the resources to be extremely flexible and innovative. Becoming "lean and mean", Harrison argues, is the way corporations increase profits by outsourcing certain activities that are less crucial than other activities. This lessens their production costs because the smaller vendors are not usually unionized

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and do not have the same benefits or pay as does a larger firm such as General Motors. Also, he shows how these large corporations make strategic alliances with other similar corporations that will ensure their survival.

As the main framers of deindustrialization studies, Bluestone and Harrison must be a starting point for any plant closing study. However, deindustrialization theory, while clearly articulating the essentially anti-labor nature of the plant closing, fails to explain the rather timid, almost acquiescent, nature of labor's response to the closings or the lack of a uniform response or reluctance to challenge the closings. Furthermore, deindustrialization theory does not provide a way to understand how macro variables, such as the world economic system or the media, interact with micro variables, such as work and family history, to produce a very heterogenous working class. Hence, there is "...no homogenous consciousness within the working class" (McNally 1995:25). An attempted explanation for this lack of a clear class consciousness and subsequent reaction against the actions of capital is found within an orthodox Marxian perspective.

The traditional Marxian approach for this apparent lack of resistance would be to employ a false consciousness explanation for why workers do not see the economy as the problem. Focusing on production, orthodox Marxian perspectives argue that some workers do not see their own

exploitation where they have to sell their labor power and become commoditized and dehumanized. But over time and as conditions worsen, workers would start to comprehend their exploitation and resist or even revolt. From this perspective, some workers at this plant would see that they were being exploited and commoditized or dehumanized and form a revolutionary perspective that would call into question the system of capitalism that would reject the notion of accumulation. These would be radical workers; all other workers would still have a false consciousness about their situation.

As capitalism developed, empirical research discovered that this traditional Marxian framework did not provide for the growing complexity of workers. This complexity was especially pronounced in managers who did not own the means of production. They had differing class interests which conflicted with owners and workers. Erik Olin Wright (1985) took up the challenge of this complexity and developed his concept of contradictory class relations. He placed managers as well as state bureaucrats in this position because they did not actually own the means of production, but managed them. Hence, their interests were often at odds with workers and sometimes with the owners of the means of production. This clearly complicated their philosophical view towards the economic system.

Although this moves class analysis further, it does not

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help with worker variation in terms of their consciousness. Other researchers argue that the work site is not the exclusive source of class consciousness. Calagione, Francis and Nugent (1992) put forward the idea that work life and home life cannot be easily separated. Views originating from work flow into workers' home life while views from home life flow over into work and thus their interpretations on issues of work can be informed from their private lives. Thus, community studies, which look at workers in a broader context, offer a better way to understand this interaction and even the diversity within the working class.

Because these community studies start to incorporate variables outside of the workplace they may also help to explain why some people do not question the economic system during a plant closing. Some of these studies focus on effects of a plant closing on workers, their families, and communities, and how they adapt (e.g. Perrucci/Targ 1988; Hass 1985; Rothstein 1986), while still others focus on the union, media and local government (i.e. Dandaneau 1996), but few focus on the diversity of worker expressions and the lack of criticism of capitalism. The work of anthropologists such as Nash (1989) and Newman (1985a, 1985b, 1988, 1993, 1995) as well as Ehrenreich (1989) have been beneficial in moving research toward more detailed micro analysis of workers and how they can have different views. One major source for worker variation, according to these authors, has

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to do with how economic trends in historical eras produce different job opportunities. For example, one major trend they refer to is the Golden Age of American capitalism (1945-1973) (Wallerstein 1991) where the rapidly expanding world economy, over which the United States was clearly hegemonic, allowed many working people to have good paying factory jobs. The economic trend today does not provide the same economic opportunities for the working class. This insight is not recognized, these authors argue, by the people who benefitted the most (e.g. retirement-age people). Thus, they have different views of the economy and society in general. For this study, economic trends adds another possible reason that workers would vary in their interpretation of the plant closing and possibly not see the economic system as the problem.

Nash (1989) also utilizes the notion of a "social contract" between labor and management to represent the historical relationship between the two. This theoretical construct further articulates why workers coming of age in different historical eras can vary in their responses to deindustrialization and may not question the economic system. Essentially, Nash sees the "social contract" as being broken by the corporation. This agreement "...between labor and corporations was based on an accord that ensured labor peace and a minimum of political activity in return for well-paid jobs for the primary sector of the work force"

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(Nash 1989:11). However, as global competition eroded America's political and economic hegemony, corporations turned to domestic labor for more profit. Thus, because the corporation wanted more profit in a global economy, it needed to sever any informal or "social" agreements with domestic labor. It was able to accomplish this because of its corporate hegemony developed over the years as well as its ability to move to another site. As Nash (1995) continues the theme of corporate hegemony and the breaking of the "social contract", she, however, sees a generational change in the view of the "social contract" where older workers felt that a "social contract" had been violated and where younger workers had not. It seems that the "social contract" could be viewed as a partial critique of capitalism or at least of the owners of capital. Also, older workers who questioned the breaking of the "social contract" could be pointing to some notion of "moral economy" where unlimited profit is not accepted while the younger workers could be buying into a philosophy that allows unlimited profit; they have to adapt individually to the changing economy. Younger workers may also have more affinity for notions of individual meritocracy where they are individually responsible for their employment as Newman (1988) discusses below.

Even though the "social contract" is a beneficial heuristic tool, one that is used to critique the

corporation, it still tends to homogenize workers because it does not allow for further variation within older or younger workers. This seems to be the case with Nash's study. However, in my study, it allows for a starting point, but needs to be transcended if a better understanding of how worker views are constructed and why they do not criticize the economic system.

Newman's (1988) study documents and tries to explain how once-middle class people deal with job loss and their loss of middle class status. Newman looks at not only blue-collar workers, but managers, the air-traffic controllers fired by President Reagan, and women who have been abandoned by their white-collar husbands. She combines detailed ethnographic material with a feminist and somewhat leftist economic critique, although remaining short of Marxist. Newman finds that many people who lose their jobs first and foremost blame themselves because of the meritocratic myth common among Americans. This could be another reason workers do not question the economic system. It is not part of the popular American mythology. Thus, the use of the meritocratic myth may deflect criticism away from capitalism.

In 1993 Newman continued her study of America's working people, especially the middle class (loosely defined). In this text, Newman places generation at the center of her study. She is able to demonstrate quite convincingly that

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different generations have had and do have very different economic opportunities. She generally concentrates on post-World War II parents and their offspring (the Babyboomers). Newman argues that the GI Bill, low interest rates for mortgages, and the strong, expanding economy of the 1950's allowed post-War parents to obtain large homes and be solidly middle class. This middle class also included a growing number of union factory workers. In today's economy, parents are able to reap the benefits of skyrocketing housing costs while their children, who usually have more education and are working as long or longer hours, are barely able to stay near the middle class much less afford a house.

Newman goes on to debunk the myth that the reason why some babyboomers are not able to do as well as their parents is because "they want it all now." In fact, Newman points out that post-War parents often had more in their twenties and thirties than their young adult offspring. Newman's connection between wealth and generation is thoughtful and helpful in trying to understand the workers' varied responses to plant closings and why workers may not challenge the economic system.

Newman (1995) now argues for a broader view of deindustrialization that includes how varied it is between and within communities as well as between workers.

> The economic effects of deindustrialization add up to an assault on the standard of living and social

> security of most working Americans. Yet their concrete impact on class and occupational groups in the United States varies considerably, for each community confronts economic hardship with different resources in the form of skills, work histories, educational credentials, financial cushions, and cultural supports" (1995:125).

Newman, in this latest work, argues for a closer study of the symbolic dimension of deindustrialization (1995:143) that includes language--similes, analogies, and metaphors. "Understanding this texture, and the variation in experience it produces, is an important part of the anthropologist's task where downward mobility is concerned" (Ibid). "How do workers who have spent their entire working lives in the confines of one factory conceptualize the collapse of the economic infrastructure that defines their lives? What is the relationship between deindustrialization and identity?" (1995:140). These two questions Newman raises are addressed in this study. Furthermore, "...anthropological studies have shown that plant failures can occasion critical reflections on the 'abandonment of tradition,' a reading of economic tragedy as moral collapse" (see Dudley 1994; Newman 1985b, 1988 as cited in Newman 1995:140). Like the concept of a "social contract", the notion of a moral collapse may be closely related to ideas of a "moral economy". Newman concludes by also stating that "[i]t remains the anthropologist's task to understand what this powerful, disorganizing force [i.e. deindustrialization] means in the everyday lives of the communities we study" (1995:145). Such

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The meaning of deindustrialization is also explored by one of Newman's students, Kathryn Marie Dudley, in her book *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America (1994)*. Dudley offers a further step toward linking empirical data on deindustrialization to theory with her discussion of "social Darwinism" and the class debate held outside of academia by working people. The "tradition of opportunity" is being questioned by more people in the United States as Dudley documents from a Chrysler assembly plant in Kinosha, Wisconsin. But at the same time, others in the community, the "self-proclaimed visionaries [teachers, businessmen, and local politicians] have also developed a symbolic language for expressing their understanding and tacit approval of deindustrialization" (1994:xxiv). Hence, Dudley "...explores the cultural factors that give rise to these different ways of experiencing and interpreting economic disorder" (1994:xxii) found in a community. However, this study investigates the diversity within a group of workers from the same plant, not the diversity of the community. Such concentration on the divergent views within the working class is not an area that has been studied in detail. This study is in the process of interpreting the emerging patterns of "understandings" of a plant closing and the extent and manner in which they reflect a critical consciousness of capitalism and how its

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Another way to view workers and how they are different is presented by Lockwood (1982). He defined three types of workers and suggests that the community where workers live also provides a source for workers to develop a class consciousness. This opens the way for variation in worker views to be better understood. Lockwood divided workers into three groups that included deferential traditional workers who defer leadership, prestige, and authority to management. There is a strong hierarchical view of society in which these workers do not strive to reach the status of their leaders (business and political). These workers also believe in "natural" leaders and false or spurious leaders. Finally, deferential traditional workers would not be radical and would not question the economic system. They believe in the system and most of the leaders as natural.

There are also privatized workers according to Lockwood who do not identify with any working class philosophy. In fact, they neither identify with their fellow workers much at all, nor do they identify with management. In this case, community is not a strong influence on their consciousness, but neither is the workplace. These workers see work in a very instrumental way-- to make money to buy what they need and want. They, too, would not question the economy. They would also believe in its naturalness.

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traditional proletarians, who are the most radical and class conscious. These workers live and work in tight working-class communities. By working together and then socializing together, workers can discuss their similar material conditions and develop strong ties with each other. This increases the chances that workers will find common criticisms directed at management and possibly the economic system. Thus, it is very likely that this group would develop a more dichotomous view of society regarding owners and workers. Issues of power and "we" versus "they" become strong aspects of their vernacular. They see their exploitation and become the most radical. Therefore, Lockwood moves the discussion forward by presenting three varieties of workers. But these are definitions and do little to help us understand the different responses workers have regarding a plant closing. They do not represent the complexity or even contradictions workers have about their lives in the context of a plant closing.

In order to understand how workers come to understand a plant closing as well as not question the economic system, several theoretical concepts from the above works have to be used. The "social contract" as Nash (1989) defines it helps in this process because it implies that there is some understanding between labor and management that is not based on a strictly market mentality. But the "social contract" with its emphasis on the relationship between labor and

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management may actually help to displace blame away from the economy. Even though workers may not overtly say they believe in a "social contract" per se, they may describe the relationship in language that suggests it. Responses that supported notions of a "social contract" referred to changes in management and corporate philosophy or treatment of workers. One salient example is: "There was a time when you could give your working years to a corporation and they would take care of you through old age. But not now. They just use you up and throw you away."

The concept of a "social contract" is also related to notions of a "moral economy" (Wilk 1996) where again market mentality does not completely dominate and there is a sense of fairness and what is right. The use of greed by workers may imply how management is breaking the "social contract" or violating a sense of fairness or morality. Because class consciousness is an often utilized theoretical concept that workers do not often use explicitly, it is difficult to identify its presence empirically (Fantasia 1995). However, issues surrounding class may surface in the context of a strike or in this case, a plant closing, that galvanize workers to a certain degree against an opposition (i.e. management). This could be represented through the use of the term "greed" and may then be more of an "emergent value" (Fantasia 1995:280) developing from a plant closing in the context of wide-spread deindustrialization and record

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corporate profits. The use of greed, like the breaking of the "social contract" allows for the blaming of something or somebody (i.e. corporate America), but still deflects criticism away from capitalism. This is also the case with the idea of meritocracy where individual achievement is paramount and "explains" the successes or failures of most Americans. Believing in this philosophy leaves little room for criticizing the system. Thus, the meritocracy myth helps to explain why workers may not question the economic system.

These theoretical constructs (from "social contract" to "class consciousness", "moral economy" and the "meritocracy myth") may or may not reflect criticism of the capitalist economic system and may help to explain why workers are not more radical. But these are theoretical models. Workers may not use these same constructs to express their views on a plant closing or the economy. Thus, how to study and understand the ways in which people talk about their lives becomes a problem. Furthermore, how their expressions are possibly manifested in the theoretical constructs mentioned above also becomes an issue.

Therefore, the nature of the phenomenon (in this case, folk constructions of a plant closing in the context of a capitalist culture) informs the theoretical and methodological approach. This approach needs to be flexible to accommodate the wide spectrum of responses workers may have regarding a plant closing. Because of this, the work of

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cultural Marxists such as Willis (1977), MacLeod (1987, 1995) and especially Foley (1990) provides an important starting point for comprehending the varying responses to a plant closing as well as why many workers only partially critique the economic system, if they critique it at all. This approach uses the discursive interplay between the subject and the author. This discursive interplay leads to "[b]eing dialogic with the subjects of the study...[and] generally suggests a greater intellectual openness and political and emotional vulnerability on the part of the investigator" (Foley 1990:xvii).

All the authors from this perspective focus on how capitalist culture is reproduced or resisted. Capitalist culture is defined as materialistic, competitive, individualistic, and unegalitarian as well as classist, racist, and sexist (Foley 1990). Furthermore, capitalist culture involves treating people as things (Ibid). This view stresses how capitalist culture, both in the workplace and beyond, is not reproduced or resisted in a clear cut way such as the more traditional Marxists suggest. There are too many variables that influence a person's views and that production is not the sole determinant. These authors go to great lengths to show the complexity of responses to capitalist culture without losing their historical materialist base. Thus, this approach enables researchers to analyze not just the relations of production, but their

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cultural practices stemming from this relationship, which may manifest in various expressions outside of the workplace. Just as important, this approach also allows for analysis that considers influences from outside of the production process such as those from popular culture. People may then be seen as complex and dynamic; this is critical for the present study because seeing workers as "just" workers is too simplistic and positivist.

Therefore, this study is in the spirit of the work of Foley: "non-positivist science and rationality grounded in personal experience" (1990:206). Because many workers ended with characteristics that overlapped, positivist interpretations would be futile. Although quantitative as well as qualitative analyses of the data helped in a heuristic way, the writer was not interested in "stuff[ing] people's experiences into...analytical categories (Foley 1990:229), but using categories as "a general empirical marker" thus preventing reification of any of the categories (Cook 1990:26-27).

Foley (1990), like MacLeod (1987, 1995), and Willis (1977) and other cultural reproduction theorists of the cultural Marxist genre use a similar approach and go into great detail in discussing how capitalist culture and ensuing class relations are reproduced or resisted in communities and school settings. They all study everyday practices, especially the "talk" or discourse of youths in

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order to gain an understanding of how they see the world and their situation. This helps them to better understand how capitalist culture is reproduced and resisted. Willis (1977) stresses how working-class kids penetrate the contradictions in society, especially the educational system. By interacting with these kids, Willis argues that their creative penetrations may be viewed as resistance and that this is the beginning of a class consciousness. Foley (1990) studies how youths reproduce and resist capitalist culture through the process of instrumentalism wherein people treat each other as things. Because he places his study in a multiethnic community and is historical, he is also able to show the complexity and diversity of the youths as they resist and, in the end, mostly reproduce capitalist culture. MacLeod (1987, 1995) focuses on reproduction of capitalist culture, where structure and agency are viewed concurrently but with structure being viewed as more dominant. Social structures, according to MacLeod, have a great impact on how people formulate their cosmologies and how they develop their aspirations and to what degree. Again, as with Willis and Foley, there is not a clear-cut process of how capitalist culture is reproduced. It can also vary between groups and individuals. These neo-Marxian approaches or cultural Marxist approaches add intuitive strength and flexibility to the standard materialist approaches. By concentrating on the expressions of their subjects a better

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Thus, the approach of studying everyday expressions of people is utilized here where workers, losing their jobs because of a plant closing, construct their view of this particular crisis. However, because this project is studying workers who have been displaced over two years and do not live in traditional working class communities, there needs to be some modification to this approach to allow for the lack of a concentrated geographical setting. This was accomplished by focusing more on interviews with some added survey work. This was achieved by focusing on explicit questions regarding their life experiences.

Thus, using this dialogic approach, I am trying to better understand the variations in worker expressions regarding a plant closing while at the same time trying to identify radical workers, through their own vernacular, who question the economic system or see contradictions in the system. This understanding of capitalism would include internalizing the contradictions found in the nature of capitalism. Some of the contradictions referred to in this study include, but are not limited to: the increasing concentration of wealth and class division in a democratic yet capitalist society; the constant world-wide search for new markets and cheaper labor in order to increase profits, causing deindustrialization in the United States; the unemployment and underemployment of many people, which is

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needed in capitalism, and where all needs and wants are commoditized in an environment of decreasing social welfare; the continuing exploitation of workers in the U.S. and around the world in terms of the expropriation of surplus value and the continuing and historical removal of wealth and resources from "third world" countries in order to preserve capitalism in western countries; and, finally, the inability of capitalism to reconcile the contradiction between the need for people to constantly consume under capitalism and the environmental principles that call for reduced consumption.

Trying to understand people, their motivations, and actions, as well as their views takes a certain amount of restraint. This study does not attempt to "explain" their actions, motivations or views, but rather constructs a better understanding of how people interpret the crisis of a plant closing and, hence, deindustrialization.

Methodology

The factory studied produced steel wheels and other parts for cars, trucks, tractors, and military vehicles. It was the Lansing, Michigan plant of the Motor Wheel Corporation. Formed in 1920, this corporation no longer exists, but in the early 1980's the factory employed over 3,000 workers, making it one of Lansing's largest employers and a visible member of the business community.

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The research strategy can roughly be broken into two ategories which obviously inform each other. One major ource for data on Motor Wheel was historical documents, ncluding newspapers. The other was ethnographic data iscussed later. A good deal of time and energy was spent in he Lansing Public Library going through documents on Motor heel. It was initially thought that the State of Michigan istorical Library would have information on the industrial istory of Lansing. That was not the case. The Lansing ublic Library has a series of files starting in the late 940's, which contain many Motor Wheel articles from the *ansing State Journal*. Other publications on Motor Wheel ncluded the *Motor Wheel Newsletter* as well as local papers uch as *The North Lansing Gazette*. Other historical data was rovided by the workers themselves and then cross-referenced ith the written texts. The objective of constructing a istorical context was to demonstrate some themes or atterns for the company that may have influenced the way orkers characterize this current plant closing. This would elp in understanding the workers' folk expressions.

The fieldwork section of the research began by ontacting some individual workers who were quoted in the *ansing State Journal*. A few of these people were closely nvolved with the entire closing process. One such example as the president of the union at the time. He provided much eeded background information and helped to frame the key

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issues as well as provide an overall perspective of the closing. A few other workers were interviewed in an informal way as well.[1] This small group of six workers formed a loose focus group that I was able to get to know on a personal basis. A more formal interview schedule was then developed and reviewed by the focus group. The focus group was not only used to refine the interview schedule and survey, but also for important insights.

The subjects in this study included forty five workers and five related people. I was able to obtain a list from the union of the last 500 workers at Motor Wheel, which included addresses and phone numbers. Surveys were sent to most of these workers and thus a random sample of self-selected respondents was developed. These workers could then choose to be interviewed and some did. However, while this provided a wider sample, I continued to use my initial contacts for follow-up interviews. Most workers were at this particular factory for at least fifteen years, some up to thirty-five years. Out of the fifty people, twenty were production workers and twenty were skilled workers. Five workers were placed in a different category: union official. There were three female spouses and one female secretary who were also in the study. Finally, there was one telephone interview. Twenty-six people were interviewed, Thirty workers completed surveys. Of the thirty workers who completed mail surveys, eight were interviewed and comprise

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part of the twenty-six. The three female spouses were present during the husbands' interview and participated. The focus group included six workers from the three main groups, production (1), skilled (3), and union official (2). One worker was interviewed five times, two others were interviewed three times, and the final two were interviewed twice. The researcher also interacted with some workers in an informal manner in order to enhance data from formal interviews as well as to check reliability and to possibly record new, emerging views or reactions not solicited earlier.

Participant observation was still utilized when possible. For example, participant observation was used to collect data at the union hall and the On the Job Training (OJT) office. I was able to observe interactions between union officials regarding the closing as well as how they interacted with displaced workers. All the OJT officials were former Motor Wheel employees. Furthermore, the OJT office was connected to the Union Hall. This close proximity, as well as overlap in personnel, provided a rich source for observations on the plant closing and both the general feelings and specific reactions.

The extensive interviews and surveys were completed over the course of fifteen months from January 1996 to March 1997. I met workers at locations chosen by them; often these included restaurants of their choice or their homes. The

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interview schedule included questions concerning the following: employment history, views on plant closing, union activities, family and friend network, health, financial and other challenges, and life history (Appendix). Through a dialogic process, they were asked how they developed their understanding of the plant closing as well as how they view the company and its actions. In other words, what it meant to them as workers to be there during the closing-- to be directly affected in multiple ways as a human being. As the researcher interacted with them the different terms they used to describe the process were explored. Most interviews were completed after the plant closing. A direct question about whether a "social contract" existed or exists was not asked because I did not want to give the idea to the worker. The data are presented in Chapter III and IV. The workers' constructs were then interpreted by the researcher for their meanings.

Thus, this was an ethnographic study in which data was obtained primarily through interviews and mail surveys, both formal and informal, with some participant observation. Open-ended questions were used because worker expressions can be creative and unique to individuals and cannot fit into predesignated categories. These open-ended questions proved invaluable in terms of discourse analysis and worker empowerment. Therefore, a dialogic process was almost always part of the interview. This means that workers got to voice

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their own ideas in their own words. "Open-ended interviewing of the people provides a personalized form of investigation...." (Pelto and Pelto 1979:127). Such is the case with this study. Therefore, a flexible and interpretive approach that is "dialogic" without falling into either a total relativist or positivist approach (Foley 1990) was used. This also allowed for emic terms to be more carefully matched with etic terms (i.e. social contract).

At the same time, asking open-ended questions may have kept some workers from completing the lengthy survey. I say this because of the low return rate and a few comments from workers who felt their "English was not good enough" and who may have felt self-conscious about writing responses. This low return rate could also suggest a number of others issues. For example, many workers could have moved because the list had not been updated; many workers could have been busy with other employment; and the survey was somewhat lengthy; or some workers probably did not want to reflect back on such a painful event in their life. This last reason was one that several workers used as a reason not to participate in the study. Other workers opted not to complete a survey but chose to be interviewed by me while still others completed the survey and agreed to also be interviewed. Some of the best data was obtained when workers completed the survey and then agreed to do a follow-up interview. These workers, plus the initial workers in the

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focus group turned out to be the most helpful informants. By allowing workers to self select, as well as directly contacting workers via referrals, I was able to both randomize the sample as well as include "the principle players" (Fantasia 1995:274) such as the union president. Furthermore, because many workers self selected themselves to participate I was able to talk with the workers who really wanted to "have their say" about the plant closing. This was especially important because, like many plant closings, there was no one to record or interpret the workers' views on the situation beyond some brief comments a few workers expressed to the media on the day of an official closing.

Format of Dissertation

The Introduction provides the theoretical context for this study. In the Introduction I chose to discuss why a plant closing study is pertinent today as a major example of sociocultural change and the result of capitalism. Thus, plant closings are the result of change as well as causes of change. These comments lead to theoretical discussions of much of the literature on deindustrialization and end with a discussion of the specific theoretical approach of this research which impacts the methodological approach. The methodology of this study was then presented in order to familiarize the reader with the various ways fieldwork was

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Chapter II presents the historical context of Motor Wheel starting at the turn of the century when the company was formed. For organizational purposes and because many of the historical documents did the same, Motor Wheel history was divided into ten-year segments. Important dates such as mergers and strikes are highlighted. As the 1970's moved into the 1980's a more varied historical presentation develops because it was difficult to obtain standard records and I had to rely on individual people. This time frame, however, provides some of the richest social history of Motor Wheel and represents the diversity of views workers have of Motor Wheel.

Chapter III presents a general description of the workers at Motor Wheel using many of their own words and phrases.[2] Different experiences and characteristics provide the initial background of these workers. Included are themes such as the import of family for many workers and the influence of the union for some workers. Other themes in this chapter are based on how the workers reacted initially to the closing. Finally, this chapter begins to demonstrate the complexity of these workers as people.

Chapter IV presents the folk constructions of the workers and further explicates the complexity of the people in this study. This includes who and what they blame for the

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Chapter V briefly mentions some of the theoretical models already described in the Introduction. However, discussion quickly moves on to theories that incorporate reproduction theory and resistance theory. Added to the theoretical discussion here is Stuart Hall and his notion of "common sense". This is utilized to better understand how these workers are "rational". The conclusion and summary end this chapter and dissertation.

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CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MOTOR WHEEL CORPORATION

Origin of Motor Wheel

> Motor Wheel has grown with Lansing. It was founded in 1920 as a consolidation of three Lansing companies and one Memphis company. It has progressed, expanded, and played a key role in Lansing's economy (*Lansing Centennial* 1959).

This key role expressed no longer exists. It started to dwindle in Lansing in the early 1980's like many other corporations and their communities (i.e. General Electric in Pittsfield, Massachusetts; see Nash 1989). Today, the Motor Wheel name does not exist since it was merged/bought out by Hayes Wheel International. However, there is a history to Motor Wheel, one that ends with some similarities to its beginnings; one that starts with mergers or consolidations.

Since the beginning of the automobile industry, Lansing has played an important role. Automobile wheels became one of Lansing's most important products. "Motor Wheel has roots in the industry dating back to 1903 when the Prudden Company was formed to manufacture wooden wheels for the infant automobile industry" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970). Harry F. Harper's Prudden Wheel Plant was producing millions of wheels by 1918 (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978). "In 1909 another Motor Wheel forerunner, the Gier Pressed Steel Company, was organized to manufacture brake drums and hub flanges" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:4). A third company, Auto Wheel, was a

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competitor of the Prudden Company from 1909 to 1920, and like other industrial-capitalist developments, soon merged with Prudden. One can only speculate on the true reasons for the merger. However, the end result was competitors coming together to form a larger, more vertically integrated company. Vertical integration was nearly complete by backward integrating the supply of wood. This was done through the decision to have the Weis and Lesh Manufacturing Company of Memphis, Tennessee become part of the "corporate family" because they controlled thousands of acres of woodland (Ibid.). Wood was crucial for the early wheel industry since wheels for early automobiles were constructed mostly of wood. Steel was used for the metal wheel rims. Thus, Motor Wheel assured itself control of resources for its wheels. By 1924, after acquiring several other smaller wheel manufacturers (which resulted in the steel wheel innovation), Motor Wheel became the world's largest producer of both wood spokes and steel wheels (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978).

Therefore, the expanding economy led by the automobile, set the context for Motor Wheel to emerge. Key individuals such as Harry F. Harper of the Prudden Company, D.C. Porter of Porter's Auto Wheel Company, and B.S. Gier of Gier Pressed Steel Company as well as the Weis and Lesh Manufacturing Company made it possible for the Motor Wheel Corporation to form on January 17, 1920 (*North Lansing*

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Gazette 1978). Corporate mythology has it that Harper "...became President, following a drawing of match sticks" (Ibid.). It does seem clear that Harper was the main force from the historical records. He was characterized as a "driver" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:4).

As time passed into the 1920's and Motor Wheel diversified as stated above, it also continued a vertical integration because of pioneering the shift to the steel wheel that supported rubber tires. These steel wheels were less costly to make, especially since Motor Wheel purchased the Disteel wheel patents and the assets of the Detroit Pressed Steel Company in Detroit (1970:6). Also, in the 1920's, Motor Wheel purchased the Forsyth Brothers Company and the "Forsyth" steel wheel. Motor Wheel then went on to produce the Turac wheel with its demountable rim (Ibid.). A third type of wheel was also introduced in the 1920's-- the wire wheel. These changes cemented Motor Wheel's control over the wheel market.

A clear pattern has emerged that shows how Motor Wheel was constructing a oligopoly, close to a monopoly at times regarding wheels for cars, carriages, and even farm equipment. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 may have kept Motor Wheel from having a true monopoly. The company rhetoric that describes Motor Wheel's ascendancy reads: "Because of its farsightedness and pioneering spirit, Motor Wheel had gained a unique position in the industry by 1924.

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It became the world's largest manufacturer of both wood and steel wheels for use on passenger cars than all other manufacturers combined" (Ibid.). Innovating through buying and merging strategies, Motor Wheel developed into a dominant corporation by the third decade of this century.

Again, like other growing corporations, Motor Wheel diversified into other areas such as Duo-therm oil furnaces in 1929 (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978). This included oil space heaters (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:7). At the close of the 1920's Motor Wheel had firmly established itself as not only the dominant wheel producer in the world, but as a producer of a growing number of other products.

Even though "[t]aken singly, the wheel is about as useless as a side saddle on a sow" (1970:8) Motor Wheel internalized the ability to profit from it and "...teamed up with other component parts to equal the end result of a vehicle..." (Ibid.). But to stay abreast of the rest of the automobile industry it chose not only to innovate its products, but to buy companies that had innovative products. The Cleveland Welding Company, which produced wheels demountable at the rim, was one such company and Motor Wheel sold its assets as they became standard (Ibid.). Also during the early 1930's Motor Wheel entered the brake drum business through a joint development with Campbell, Wyant and Cannon Foundry Company, where the latter company developed a

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process of fusing iron and steel to make a lighter and stronger brake drum (Ibid.). Diversification into other wheel sectors continued with the production of farm and industrial wheels as well as train wheels (*Lansing Centennial* 1959:35). Hence, by World War II, Motor Wheel was in a position to profit immensely. And it did.

Another theme that surfaced in the historical documents and company brochures was the "family" nature of Motor Wheel and the comraderie among the employees. "Employee activities played an important part in the life of Motor Wheelers in the 1920's" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:7). Bowling teams were formed and one such group won a championship and was featured in the document referenced above. This type of activity seemed to be a part of Motor Wheel until about 1980 when workers seemed to socialize less with each other and certainly less with management, for reasons which will become more clear.

Motor Wheel and World War II

We Aid Uncle Sam in the Forties
-Motor Wheel Public Relations Department (1970:10)

"The early 40's were characterized by production of a variety military of materials and continued diversification of the Motor Wheel product line" (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978:6). During World War II Motor Wheel produced tank wheels; 40 mm cartridge cases; rocket bodies and motors for

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Navy ordnance; aluminum propeller domes for the air force; bomb, gun and cannon parts; brake drums and hub assemblies for military vehicles; and a variety of miscellaneous metal parts for the U.S. military totaling $155 million dollars (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1978:10).

A year after the end of World War II (1946) Harry Harper retired as president and was succeeded by John E. Garlant, "who led the growing firm into the fast moving 1950's" (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978:6). Finally, "[i]n 1949 gas space heaters and water heaters were added to the Duo-Therm line" (*Lansing Centennial* 1959:35).

The "Good Years" at Motor Wheel (1950's)

"One of the biggest developments took place in 1953 when Motor Wheel introduced the "Electrofuse Process" which made rims air tight, making the development and use of the tubular tire possible" (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978:6). The new technology led the way for almost all wheels and tires to be constructed in this way. Merwin F. Cates also became president in 1952. Again, Motor Wheel kept its theme of buying other wheel manufacturing firms by purchasing an unnamed but modern and highly automated wheel and brake plant in Newark, Delaware to provide wheels and brake drums for east coast car plants. The *Lansing State Journal* reported in 1996 that Motor Wheel built this Newark plant in 1950 as it was reporting on the latest management cuts (Kyle

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1996a:1A). Motor Wheel also diversified once again by buying the Reo Power Mower line in 1954 (*Lansing Centennial* 1959:35). Motor Wheel then had two separate lawn mower lines, the Duo-Therm Power Mowers and the Reo Power Mowers. Snow blowers were also developed in the 1950's.

During the 1950's Motor Wheel continued military production of items such as shell casings as well as brake drums for cars, trucks, and campers. The Centri-fuse brake drum also became the industry standard in the 1950's.

"Teamwork and togetherness--1954 marked the 15th consecutive season that the Pin Hunters gathered Friday nights to bowl in Lansing city league competition" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:12). As mentioned, bowling was one of several forms of socializing that engaged Motor Wheel workers after work. According to several employees, it was not unusual for management and hourly employees to bowl together and socialize in other ways such as fishing or having regular family picnics. This was especially true up to about 1980 when such activities dramatically tapered off.

"We Soar In The Sixties" or Predator Becomes Prey

Motor Wheel history likes to view the 1960s like other decades and from one perspective this is accurate. "Further corporate acquisitions and innovations continued into the 1960's" (*North Lansing Gazette* 1978:6). "To further its

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policy of expansion, Motor Wheel in 1960 acquired Foreman Manufacturing Company in Chicago" (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:13). Electric brakes and axle assemblies were then produced by Motor Wheel. As companies were bought, Motor Wheel also built many new buildings/factories and this was still true in the 1960's. The early 1960s also saw Motor Wheel making the Centrue light wheel, the lightest and truest wheel yet for light trucks. Furthermore, Motor Wheel developed the Unistyle wheel for passenger cars, which was a styled wheel not needing a hubcap-- combining function and style (Ibid.) This was hailed as the most important development since the steel disc wheel replaced the spoke wheel. This was done in 1963, along with naming Raymond J. Wilcox as the fourth president.

One year later, in 1964, Motor Wheel became a subsidiary of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company (Ibid.) for $21 million (*State Journal* 1964). At the time "E.J. Thomas, chairman of Goodyear, said Motor Wheel will be operated as a Goodyear subsidiary, and no management or personnel changes are contemplated" (*The Wall Street Journal* 1963:8). However, Wilcox did not have a long tenure as president, being replaced by John H. Gerstenmain in 1964 (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:13). Tables seemed to be turned for Motor Wheel in the sense that it was Motor Wheel that was now being bought rather than Motor Wheel buying some other company. It is very difficult to get a clearer

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description of the processes and variables that may have led to Motor Wheel's purchase by Goodyear. What type of layoffs or cutbacks were made when Motor Wheel bought companies or when Goodyear bought Motor Wheel is unclear. However, what seems clear is that Wilcox did not last as president.

In terms of the corporate message, Motor Wheel continued to view itself as Motor Wheel, "[b]oasting the reputation as the world's largest producer of styled wheels..." (Ibid.). Probably with the extra capital Goodyear could supply, Motor Wheel built or acquired many new plants, including ones in Newton, Kansas; Ashburn, Georgia; Sanger, California; and Alamo, Tennessee; as well as in Chatham, Ontario, Canada. Also in the late 1960's Motor Wheel introduced its new sport wheel, the Magnum 500 (Ibid.). This was produced through the deep-draw die process (1970:14). As the 1960s progressed, Motor Wheel and Goodyear combined engineering, production and sales to form the Metal Products Division in Akron, Ohio (Ibid.). This became the world's largest supplier of rims and wheels for trucks and heavy machinery (ibid.). About this time, Motor Wheel also started producing disk brake rotors in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This was one of the few plants to stay open beyond the main Motor Wheel factory in Lansing. Another development in the 1960s for Motor Wheel was increased sophistication in testing. Finally, Robert J. Perleth became the company's sixth president in 1967.

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Like the previous decades of Motor Wheel history, "off-the-job activities" were a part of being a "Motor Wheeler".

> It's a fact of business life that companies are geared to the sales and profits picture. For this picture ultimately affects every single employee.
> But like many companies, Motor Wheel doesn't forget its commitment to the community as a civic leader.
> And we're also a firm believer in our life-blood--the individual employee. We believe in employee activities, employee participation and employee fun (Motor Wheel Public Relations Department 1970:15).

Employee activities now not only included bowling, fishing and picnics, but an annual car rally and employee basketball, softball, and golf teams, all sponsored by Motor Wheel. This was in addition to sponsoring Junior Achievement and Motor Wheel's Girls' Club (Ibid.). "It all adds up to a healthy environment of activity and involvement" (Ibid.). All this construction of positive culture by Motor Wheel and for the most part, the workers themselves, was in the context of America's Golden Age (1945-1973) (Wallerstein 1991), with America dominating the world economic landscape in industrial production, research and development, and technology. Thus, there were ample resources for sponsoring programs in the community as well for the workers themselves. Included in the political-economic hegemony of the United States was the unequal relationship with oil producing countries whereby the U.S. obtained oil for next-

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to-nothing prices. This would soon change in the 1970's and start a process that ultimately affected most of American manufacturing including that of Motor Wheel.

The First Beginning of the End (1970's)

The 1970's started with layoffs continuing from 1969 and "the worst profits since 1962" (Murphy 1971b:1A). Then a strike in 1971 over the lack of pay increases equal to the "Big Three" prompted the then president of Motor Wheel Robert J. Perleth, to say, "We would hate to curtail our operations or pull up stakes...but without a solid workable contract, we have no choice" (1971b:1A). Thus, the 1970s started with threats of plant closure and became part of the rank-and-file vernacular until the final closing in March 1996. Workers wanted 56 cents/hour increase and Motor Wheel offered 20 cents/hour. "Other areas of disagreement", Derleth pointed out, "...are the grievance procedure--on which the company has asked for arbitration--and work standards. The company wants to establish standards which are fair to both the employees and company", Derleth emphasized (1971a:1A). As is the case in many newspaper reports such as this example from the *State Journal*, management gets much more ink than labor; many workers know it and often say they will not even read the "grey tabloid". In terms of setting the stage for years to come, this strike as well as the one in 1974 were key events that management

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The strike was settled 119 days later with the workers receiving a 30 cents/hour increase and "...improvements in the pension plan, hospitalization and life insurance, vacation benefits, and the establishment of SUB, or supplemental unemployment benefits" (Murphy 1971d:1A).

On February 4, 1974 another "Strike Hits Motor Wheel" as the headline read. This strike lasted ninety-eight days. "More than 2,700 members of Allied Industrial Workers (AIW) Local 182 started their full day of their strike against Motor Wheel Corp. today, with most major contract issues still unresolved" (Bohardt 1974). This strike soon became much more violent and strife ridden than the 1971 strike. Motor Wheel Corporation also went to court to seek limits on picketing (Nixon 1974a). The violence, however, continued.

> Fifty helmeted Lansing Police wielding riot sticks waded into an angry crowd of striking Motor Wheel workers early this morning, resulting in a bloody clash that sent two pickets to the hospital...with gashes on their foreheads...and brought the arrest of four persons (Nixon 1974b). Also, police from Michigan State University were brought in on stand-by in unmarked cars (Nixon 1974b).

William Braman, president of local 182, said that the union was trying to "'keep the lid on' the violence and vandalism that has marred the strike since its beginning Feb.3" (Nixon 1974b). What became very clear in this strike is that capital (i.e. Motor Wheel) could use the "state" (i.e. police force) in their favor to control and manipulate

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labor. It is unfortunate that Michigan State University police were also involved in such actions. On the heels of reports of violence, company spokesman Douglas Pearson said the strike jeopardized the continued operation of Motor Wheel in Lansing. "'If actions like this continue, the future for Motor Wheel in Lansing, its 3,320 employees and its $40 million yearly payroll is indeed very dim'" (Nixon 1974). This comment or threat demonstrates that the managers/owners of capital were conscious of the power it had.

On February 12, 1974, members of other unions marched peacefully to City Hall to demonstrate their solidarity (Nixon 1974c). However, this solidarity did not apply to non-strikers who were supervisors. These supervisors eventually started to operate the plant and obviously caused a great deal of anger and frustration on the part of strikers (Nixon 1974d). Mark Nixon, staff writer at the *State Journal* who covered this strike, presented a detailed interpretation on March 3, 1974 that demonstrates he had some insight into the strike and the variables involved when he said:

> Beneath the violence and heated claims and counter claims by Motor Wheel and the union, several underlying factors kindled the antagonism. Before AIW members walked out Feb.3, there were persistent rumors among union rank-and-file that as much as 30 per cent of the entire work force would be laid off. Motor Wheel has confirmed that layoffs, including a possible elimination of one of three work shifts,

> was being considered before the strike... There is also considerable speculation that Motor Wheel, the third largest employer in Lansing was about to pull up stakes (1974e:B3).

The union officials argued that these scare tactics are used every time contract negotiations arise. "But according to Paul W. Fair, vice president and general manager of the automotive parts division, the company is 'taking a serious look at [its] Lansing-made products, which in the future may be impractical to produce here'"(1974e).

After the strike was eventually settled, many workers felt that it was only a matter of time before Motor Wheel would close the entire plant and move to a non-union area or even out of the country. These types of feelings were a precursor to Bluestone and Harrison's work, which came out in the early 1980's.

As the 1970's rolled on, contract negotiations continued with threats of walkouts while the company laid off around 1,000 workers in 1974-75 during a recession and the unemployment rate in Lansing was 7.6 per cent (Nixon 1976f). However, in 1975-76 Motor Wheel "...created a group of new stamped steel styled wheels which have been introduced on new Chryslers and Fords, and new Polycast styled wheels are used on 1976 model Chevrolets" (*The Lansing State Journal* Feb.8, 1976) which breathed new life into Motor Wheel. In addition to this development, new furnaces with pollution controls were installed at Motor Wheel's Centrifuse Foundry. This was all part of "Motor

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Wheel Corp., having one of its better years, had a record payroll in 1976 of $46.9 million for 3,252 employees in 1976" (*State Journal* Feb.6, 1976). Still in 1976, Motor Wheel would take applications for production jobs and would do some hiring.

Like many industries that required large amounts of energy to manufacture their products, Motor Wheel felt the increase in production costs when oil prices went up during the energy crisis of 1973. This is also roughly the point when the "major economic expansion of the capitalist world-economy following the end of the Second World War...came to an end" (Wallerstein 1991:123). Depending on how one interprets this decline, 1968 could also be a critical time. The important point here for Motor Wheel is that macro economic forces started to play a larger role in the tenure of Motor Wheel. Wallerstein succinctly summarizes this "Golden Age" (1945-1973) in world economic history.

> It was the greatest single expansion in the history of this world-system going back to 1500... It was a period fueled by the relative monopolies in a few leading products for which the rate of profit was high, and the surplus-value of which was very unequally distributed, socially and geographically.
>
> For all the standard economic reasons, this expansion came to an end and has been followed by an economic stagnation. It came to an end because the relative monopolies were eroded by entry into the market of a large number of competitors, seeking to get on the bandwagon. It came to an end as well because of the declining productivity, caused by rising retention of the surplus value, both by direct producers and by managerial strata. The result was a severe decline in profit rates (1991:123-24).

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The last two statements are of special import to this study because there were major strikes at Motor Wheel in 1971 and 1974 over issues of compensation. As noted, the American union worker during this period earned an income that allowed him to live a middle class lifestyle. The American union worker is an example of Wallerstein's "direct producer" and as will be shown in the section presenting the data (especially chapter III) some workers sensed that this point in Motor Wheel history marked the "beginning of the end" for many workers and even the company itself. Motor Wheel ended the 1970's by laying off 500 workers (Schneider 1980) and may be an example of what is happening and will happen in this next period which Hobsbawn terms the "Landslide, 1973-1991" (Rosenberg 1995:143). This period is "characterized by a renewed loss of control and partial collapse" (Ibid.). And for many workers this was very true.

The Second Beginning of the End or The Decade of Layoffs (1980's)

The 1980's started with layoffs in March (270 workers) and April (225 workers) when Motor Wheel was normally employing about 3,100 persons in Lansing (Lang 1980). At the announcement of the April layoffs, Motor Wheel said it would invest $3 million in modernizing the heavy truck hub and drum facility (Ibid.). In September, things only got worse for the average Motor Wheel worker.

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> Today 2,000 Motor Wheel workers--roughly 63 percent of the total work force of about 3,200--are jobless.
> Mike Ryan, Motor Wheel branch chairman of the Allied Industrial Workers (AIW), the primary labor union at the plant, said that all workers hired since 1973 have been laid off (Schneider 1980).

This reference to 1973 roughly coincides with Wallerstein's and others' references to the world economic decline. This may be an empirical example of how macro forces eventually influence the micro context. The president of Lansing's Motor Wheel Corporation was just as glum.

> With a smile that is pure irony and a chuckle that contains not a trace of mirth, James R. Glass, president..., ponders a question to which there is no happy answer.
> What does the malaise of the limping domestic auto industry mean to the health of Motor Wheel? 'It has affected us in a very, very bad way,' Glass replies. 'It's been terrible for us; absolutely terrible' (Ibid.).

Thus, 1981 was a year when many workers were forced to leave Motor Wheel-- many for good. It was also a time when "Lansing came close to losing its third largest firm, the Motor Wheel Corp., when the company was losing money last year...Motor Wheel's six plants lost more than $10 million in 1980" (El Nasser 1981).

But Goodyear decided to invest $42.3 million in modernization for the Lansing plant. Motor Wheel and Goodyear also received "$2 million-a-year property tax break for the next twelve years" which meant that the city of Lansing had to sacrifice tax funds for education and

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infrastructure to keep Motor Wheel in Lansing. Motor Wheel was also down to 1,600 employees and the modernization program would not automatically bring back the 1,200 hourly and salaried workers who were laid off from the previous year (Ibid.). Furthermore, based on interviews with union officials, this was the time when "professional managers" were brought in, people with MBA's who, according to the workers, knew little of how to make a wheel but knew how to cut costs and people. A layer of management was reduced as well as work restrictions (Ibid.). Robert Mercer, president of Goodyear during this time also said, "that in times of prosperity, corporations' biggest fault is 'allowing the payroll to grow'" (Ibid.). This philosophy goes along with his other comment: "'We are forced to be competitive'" (Ibid.). This rhetoric implies a sort of "invisible hand of the market" view which is obviously pervasive in capitalism but also gives the managers of capital a blank check with which to affect human lives.

Besides the hiring of MBA's during this time, many workers talked about how Goodyear and Motor Wheel brought in consultants to advise them. However, according to several workers and union officials, management would not listen to the consultants. One worker, Tim, put it this way:

> Management ran this place into the ground... [and they] didn't listen to consultants...[Management] was only interested in short term profit. Managers know how to make bread and butter but didn't know how to put

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Eventually, according to this worker, the "consultants did not come back because management wouldn't listen." Furthermore, workers were not allowed to talk with consultants. This all happened right before Goodyear was bought out. This is why, according to Tim, Motor Wheel was only interested in short term profits and even sent "bad parts out that management knew were bad."

Management Buyout (1986): A Third Beginning of the End

On November 7, 1986, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. announced that it will sell one of its subsidiaries, Lansing-based Motor Wheel Corporation to fend off a $5.3 billion takeover attempt by an investment group led by Sir James Goldsmith of England (Chien 1986a). This group was already buying large amounts of Motor Wheel stock. "Motor Wheel workers reacted with a combination of worry and acceptance...to the announcement the company might be sold" (Chien 1986b).

"'There's a lot of apprehension,' said Art Hancock, 44, a 22-year tool room worker and father of five. 'It's not a real good feeling'" (Ibid.). Art represented many workers not only at Motor Wheel but across the country because layoffs were very often a part of the buying and selling of companies in the 1980's. "I'm worried about my job," said Jesse Guajrado, 44, a production worker for 18 years. 'This

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is the way I make my living. I don't feel real good right now'" (Ibid.). Jesse realized, as most workers do, the difficulty of finding decent paying jobs and the anxiety this causes. "'It's a business,' said Ernie Fox, 54, a nine-year machinist. 'If (they) have the money to buy the company, it's a free country'" (Ibid.). Ernie viewed the entire situation as part of life and America. "Ken Uhl has worked in the general plant for 18 years. 'You just have to take things day-by-day,' he said. "If they close it, I'll just have to find another job. There's nothing I can do about it'" (Ibid.). This type of deference to capital is an important theme and will be discussed more in chapters III, IV and V. Ken went on to say, "'I know it would be hard for me to find another job. There's nothing I can do about it'" (Ibid.).

Because production was said to be low, the union president at the time said they were meeting with management to improve productivity. "'We have to survive and we intend to survive,'" said the union president. "'We have a viable wheel operation here....'Motor Wheel is important to this city. We're trying to help the company. If you're not progressive today you die'" (Ibid.). This concept of "progressive" is provocative because as research went on it seemed to be a code word for competitive and where labor and management worked more closely. And some workers saw it as a way to exploit them more. Sometimes the concept of "quality

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circles" would come up as a strategy to improve quality and production. However, some workers saw it as pejorative.

Later in the same year (December 20, 1986) Motor Wheel announced that it will layoff 100 workers in 1987. Earlier in 1986, the Lansing plant lost 350 employees because Motor Wheel closed its foundry and moved its truck brake machining operation to Kentucky (Washburn 1986a). While all this was going on the Lansing Motor Wheel Corporation Plant was also "described as the least profitable of the company's six facilities..." (Ibid.). Thus, 1986-1987 was a very difficult and stressful time for Motor Wheel workers, but one that they were in some ways getting familiar with because of all the previous layoffs starting in the early 1980's. The Lansing plant would employ between 650 and 700 people after these new layoffs (Ibid.). What is interesting about the criticism that Motor Wheel was not profitable is that some of the workers interviewed said that the Lansing plant was less profitable because they did all the research and development and even created the process for production line set-up. By doing this, their productivity, measured in an isolated way, would make them less profitable. Also, it was said that once the Lansing plant figured out the production process for a new line of wheels they would export this to other Motor Wheel factories around Michigan and the country. Thus, these other factories received a production line with many of the bugs worked out by the Lansing Motor Wheel

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With all the talk of closure when Motor Wheel was for sale and the fact that workers were laid off before the sale and were scheduled to be laid off in 1987, many workers started to really think about the possibility of closure and thus, as it will be noted later through interviews, plant closure became a regular part of the workers' lives and found a place in their vocabulary. As time went on, workers started being creative with how they expressed their anxiety and frustration over the layoffs and the threat of a complete closing.

On December 31, 1987 the news broke of who purchased Motor Wheel. "Motor Wheel Corp.'s plants in Lansing and six other communities will continue production as usual, according to company executives who announced...they had purchased the company from the parent company Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company" (Albright 1987a). At first many workers felt some security because Motor Wheel President Joseph C. Overbeck led the management purchase of Motor Wheel. There were "...fears that cash-needy Goodyear might sell the subsidiary to corporate raiders" (Ibid.). Talk of low production rates continued into 1987 for the Lansing plant. "Problems lie in the aging plant, inadequate maintenance of equipment, not enough workers on the line and worker demoralization, the source said...." were causes of the problem (Albright 1987b). Workers cited some of the same

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things, but quickly added that they sensed that Overbeck was there to "milk the company". It is unclear when they actually developed this view because they were reflecting back on the time. What is very clear is that during the interviews, few workers had anything positive to say about Overbeck. And in an ironic ending it seems that Overbeck acted like a "corporate raider" if not being one.

In 1988 "Motor Wheel reached an agreement with a Grand Rapids company for its design and tooling operations" (Albright 1988a). The agreement made between Riviera Tool and Die Inc. and Motor Wheel Corporation was characterized as a "joint venture" by union officials (Ibid.). This interpretation was far from what the most affected, skilled workers saw. There were about eighty tool and die makers who would have to move to Grand Rapids or commute. Several of them chose to commute because they either could not afford to move or they had strong family ties in or around Lansing. What is interesting also is that none of the workers saw this "agreement" as a joint venture. In fact, the Riviera factory was non-union. At the time there were still 425 hourly workers in Lansing with fifty-eight salaried workers at the Lansing plant, and 200 employees in the corporate headquarters in Okemos, Michigan (Albright 1988a).

As the tool and die room (known as the Tool Room) was removed from the Lansing Plant more and more workers truly felt this was another sign of the end or a "third beginning

of the end". It was only a matter of time before the entire plant would close and this had differing effects on workers. Living with the threat of a complete closing was very stressful, while other workers, usually more senior workers, denied to the end that the plant would ever close completely. Furthermore, these workers thought their jobs were secure until their retirement when they would receive full pensions. This did not happen for many of them. These changes also reinforced, in the minds of the workers, the idea that management had to be doing something wrong and that it was not just workers or the union. As will be shown in chapters III and IV there varying views on what was happening, but many overlapped.

"'Hard work. Great Fun.' That's how Motor Wheel President Joseph Overbeck sums up the two years since he and other Motor Wheel Corp. executives bought the company from Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. in 1986 for $195 million" (Barker 1988). In 1989 Motor Wheel Corporation predicted that it would start selling aluminum wheels that would be produced by a "joint venture" in Somerset, Kentucky with Japan's Asahi Malleable Iron Company (Barker 1988). It was unlikely that the Lansing plant would ever produce aluminum wheels (Ibid.). This was another point of tension with workers and even union leaders, such as Leo, who felt that Motor Wheel took concessions from the Lansing plant and used the money to create the joint venture with Asahi in Kentucky, where

organized labor is weak. Obviously, this is something that is hard to prove, but what workers current and past at Motor Wheel know is that they made a great deal of concessions. The AIW even negotiated that when workers came back from a layoff in the late 1980's and early 1990's they would have to take a pay cut from approximately $14.50/hr. to $9.50/hr.

In 1989, the story of Motor Wheel continued with newspaper articles suggesting that it was still alive and being innovative. "Wheels Turn: Local Company has Rolled with many Changes" the title went in a 1989 *Lansing State Journal* article (Bohacz 1989). The article went on to discuss how Motor Wheel built Take-Apart wheels for the Army Hummer Field Vehicle. This was one in a long line of military contracts, as well as other products made by Motor Wheel over the years. Furthermore, Motor Wheel had clients such as the Big Three Auto makers: Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors. However, even with all these contracts, for various reasons, Motor Wheel was well on its way to a slow death and many workers and probably management thought so. During the late 1980's this feeling became more reified and almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

On June 27, 1990 another positive article appeared in the *Lansing State Journal*: "Motor Wheel rolling with new financing" the title read (Miles 1990) as if the media was trying to help an ailing company. Miles' article said that Motor Wheel was searching for a more flexible form of

financing, more like a consumer credit card. Motor Wheel chose "Congress Financial Corp. of New York, said Dick Tulley, executive vice president and chief financial officer of Motor Wheel" (Ibid.). In 1990 Motor Wheel actually won an award for "Supplier of the Year", which seems to mean that quality might not have been a problem. During the early 1990's there was not much news about what was actually happening at the Lansing Motor Wheel Plant. They still enjoyed their tax abatement "...relieving them from school, county, and city levies" until 1994 (Kyle 1996c). Employment was down below 500 workers. Wages were frozen in 1992, but in 1994 the company still was able to move its headquarters from a visible sight near U.S. 127 to a new building in Okemos, Michigan (Ibid.).

The Final Closing

The headline of the *Lansing State Journal* on Thursday, March 16, 1995 read:

Motor Wheel to close:

Lansing plant to shut after 75 years; 165 lose jobs "'There were no apologies' said employee Jon Isham" (Tompkins 1995) as he stood outside the Motor Wheel Plant off Larch Street on the north side of Lansing. Jon went on to say that he took a pay cut of $5.00/hr. from $14.00 to $9.00/hr. in order to keep the plant open, but the plant did not stay open (Ibid.). At the time, Jim Lounsbery, the vice-

president of human resources "conceded the manufacturer of steel wheels and other products failed to anticipate the sharply rising popularity of aluminum wheels, which now make up [at the time] 30 percent of the market" (Ibid.). This quickly was reified as the corporate line. Also, the anti-union rhetoric was so strong at the end of the 1980's that the company only needed to imply that labor was also a problem or "the problem"; some of the workers themselves came to blame the union for the closing of the plant. "Just not competitive" was said even by one of the former union leaders. However, many workers obviously came to hold management in contempt because they thought it was management's responsibility to foresee changes in the market and make the proper adjustments. Many workers became very bitter because management refused to re-tool the Lansing plant to make aluminum wheels--saving that for their so-called joint venture with Japan's Asahi Malleable Iron Company. At the same time, workers focused on the change in management style that started around 1980 when Motor Wheel brought in consultants with MBA's (mentioned above). The company also brought in managers with MBA's, who were, according to some workers, "businessmen, not industrialists", which meant that they did not know how the wheel industry worked. They just knew how to make money on paper. In addition, workers accused management of only listening to the consultants with whom they agreed.

Furthermore, workers saw that the whole "family" atmosphere was killed in the 1980's and this also caused the plant to close. Hence, once this metaphor of the family was discarded, it became easier to layoff workers and eventually close the plant. All through the 1980's many workers and even union officials argued to me that they "worked with management in good faith" to improve productivity, profitability, and quality, as well as took pay cuts and benefit reductions only to have management reduce the work force at the Lansing plant from 3,000 workers to less than 200 and eventually close the plant. As stated before, many workers are convinced that Motor Wheel took these savings and invested them in other factories or worse yet, pocketed the profits personally, as many workers accused Overbeck of doing. Indeed, "management greed" became a popular point of blame for the closing. It seems that the management style change in the early 1980's from paternalism and the "family" metaphor to viewing the workers as completely expendable had some workers harking back to the "good ole' days".

The Union Response: Leadership and Rank-and-File

The union response to the entire process of downsizing and eventual closure of the Motor Wheel plant varied. Also, the view of the rank-and-file of union leadership varied. As stated above, the union leadership insisted it worked with management in "good faith". It should be clear that this was

not the usual version of a closing as published in the popular press, where one day workers are working as usual and the next day the doors are locked. This closing was much more drawn out. This lengthy plant closing process, lasting well over ten years, can be viewed as a "chronic" closure and will be discussed further in chapter V. To some workers this may have helped them adapt because there was the chance that the plant would be kept open. To other workers it was torture and their feeling when the plant closed was "it's about time". The union president at the time of the closing (Leo) told me that if he had to do it all over again he would have tried to make the union much more militant in the 1980s and would have not cooperated with management. This would have been, because as mentioned above, he believed that the concessions of the Lansing plant helped to finance new plants and joint ventures in other areas. Thus, the Lansing plant, even though they cooperated, was milked dry. Former union officials, working for On the Job Training (OJT) however, just say that "Motor Wheel could not compete" in a world market; for all intents and purposes they held the company line (discussed more below) but still had sympathy for all the workers they were trying to place.

As will be noted, there were many workers, both production and skilled, who felt that union leadership in the 1980's only looked out for themselves, while in the 1970's union officials seemed to look out for the rank-and-

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file. Because of this unique situation, these workers provided a different set of views. Dandaneau's (1996) study of deindustrialization in Flint, Michigan pays special attention to the role of unions during the massive plant closing decade of the 1980's. Even though this present study does not focus on the union, it was a key variable in influencing workers in both positive and negative ways. Some workers went to great lengths to criticize the union as an institution, others criticized individual union leaders, while still others supported the union to the end.

Motor Wheel Today: Ended as It Began

Motor Wheel no longer exists. It took another year for management to completely close the Lansing plant. It was announced in the *Lansing State Journal* on February 18, 1996 in the Business section that: "Motor Wheel to fall silent: Longtime Lansing manufacturing plant to finally shut its doors" (Kyle 1996c). And on March 30, 1996, there was an announcement that Motor Wheel was to merge with Hayes Wheels to create one of the world's largest wheel and brake firms. It was a $1.1 billion deal (Andrejevic 1996). The headline made it sound as if it was a merger, but the article was less clear. "The Motor Wheel name was born in a merger more than 75 years ago and will likely end in one" (Ibid.). That is a very succinct statement and, from a perspective that sees the economy as "natural" it makes a lot of sense.

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However, for the people involved on an everyday basis, like the workers, it does not make sense since metaphors like "family" were so often used to characterize Motor Wheel throughout its history. The changes that came in the 1980s, such as the layoffs, pay cuts, and the final closing, all fed a growing contradictory model that some of the workers found difficult to reconcile. These contradictions are also part of the diverse group of expressions that workers have concerning the plant closing and will be presented in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER III

MOTOR WHEEL WORKERS

As stated in the Introduction, the particular group of workers in this study represented a complexity not easily understood in the current literature on deindustrialization. However, there are some common themes as well as background information which will help illuminate who these workers were. This section introduces many of the workers with the most salient views and experiences.[3]

Workers in this study were mostly European American and in their early 50s, living outside of Lansing in small towns and rural areas. Many of the households were modest but well kept and usually on sizeable parcels of land. Most did not socialize much anymore with each other. Many spent time working on their homes or vehicles. Several workers had RV's (recreational vehicles) and boats. One worker also made it a point to show me a picture of his thirty foot long Sea Ray boat. A few drew my attention to specific projects they were working on, ranging from renovation projects on their homes to restoring vintage cars.

Most workers were not quite old enough for full retirement, but many did manage to get some retirement by the time the plant closed completely. The workers in this study were among the last 400 to work at Motor Wheel. This Motor Wheel plant employed over 3,000 workers in the late

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1970s and the majority of these workers received little or no compensation. Workers with more seniority received more pension. Hence, while some workers were financially hurt, some were affected less. Several of the workers were involved in some financial activity outside of Motor Wheel while it was open and focused on this more once Motor Wheel closed. These activities mostly included small businesses with low overhead (e.g. antique business) or owning rental properties. Others had to secure work as they were laid off.[4]

The workers' average education was high school level with almost half of them having some type of formal apprenticeship training. These employees were viewed as skilled labor. Workers with no formal apprenticeship training were referred to as production workers, which is an etic category. Several workers did have some college credit while a few had college degrees.

Importance of the Family

Most workers in this study were white, with a few African-American and Mexican-American[5] workers; many workers across these three ethnic/racial groups articulated the importance of family in their lives. Also, in the six groups presented below, family issues were raised. Many of the workers explained how they wanted to provide for their family and for many years Motor Wheel helped them do that.

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However, starting in the early 1980s, more and more workers were laid off and there was a constant threat of layoff or closure. This made for a very stressful decade. The workers and their spouses worried and were concerned that they could not provide what their children needed or wanted. For somewhat older workers and their spouses, retirement plans were drastically altered. The "American Dream" was certainly fading fast for many, as Newman (1988, 1993) and others document.

Another topic related to family was the large number of workers who had relatives who worked at Motor Wheel. Well over half the workers in the study had some type of family connection to Motor Wheel. Several workers were second and even third generation Motor Wheel workers, or "Wheelers" as they called themselves. Also, nepotism was a very accepted way to gain employment at Motor Wheel and many workers talked about how they got jobs this way.

The concern for family was very acute in many of the workers because they knew their children were going to have a tougher time, especially if they did not get an education. Several workers had kids in college or just starting college and were frustrated that they could not help them more. Also, many of the offspring were staying at home and going to college, not going away to college; this was because of finances. Almost all the workers commented on their concern for their kids. Some even acknowledged that college was no

guarantee of a good job.

A final way family figured into many of these workers lives was how they used it to connect to the closing. Some went into detail about how the closing was like "a death in the family." One worker said he lost his dad in 1993 and this plant closing compared to that loss. To many workers, the loss of the Motor Wheel community was like losing their family.

While the six different groups of workers represent the range of workers, each of the workers had many more characteristics that made them hard to define. These groups are used heuristically. There did not seem to be any visible correlation between these six categories and who or what they blamed (chapter IV). There did seem to be a loose connection to how they blamed. The first major group of workers are the ones that seemed the most impacted, not only financially, but emotionally. These tended to be production workers because they had fewer employment choices once the plant closed.

Production Workers

Production workers generally had a more difficult time obtaining comparable employment. About half the study group included workers who were in this category. People outside manufacturing work sometimes refer to these workers as "unskilled" because they have not gone through a formal

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apprenticeship program. But, it is clear that these workers developed some sophisticated skills over the years. However, these skills are sometimes factory-specific which makes it harder for them to transfer to another factory.

John, a white production worker who did not like change or the idea of moving, was one of the most devastated workers in the study. He wanted to be near his family, but did not know what he was going to do financially. John had few resources or skills and felt he was

> too old for many places and too young to retire yet....We were locked out of the computer age, our stuff was old. I don't even know where to start in this area.

John was visibly distraught and felt a real concern for himself and his family. "I don't want to uproot and move. Raised a family here, my kids, grandkids are here. My mother is in this area," John said. Thus, he was determined to stay in the area because of his family. This is very common says Gene Koretz, in *Business Week,* regarding workers' "reluctance to move...many are afraid to leave friends and family to take jobs that may prove as impermanent as their former positions" (1995:38).

Thus, production workers like John, above, and Gary, below, had a much harder time than skilled workers. Gary was a white production worker and third generation "Wheeler". His grandfather was a union organizer at Motor Wheel in the 1930s, but his father was anti-union. Gary seemed to fall

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some place in between. With union wages, he built a new house on land that was his family's and thought "he had the world by the ass." Gary made about $14.00/hr. during the 1980s at Motor Wheel. After the closing he made $8.00/hr. in a non-union shop. Gary was a worker who experienced two closings before his present job. His first plant closing experience was with Motor Wheel; his second was with Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories in Mason, Michigan. Because he did not have a formalized skill he eventually had to settle for a much lower paying job.

Bill, an African-American production worker was also devastated. Until the closing he had positive views of Motor Wheel but now he feels "vengeful". It is "Shameful" and "It hurts!!" cried Bill. This was not an easy topic for Bill to discuss. Bill was very emotional about not being able to provide the same income for his family. He also worried that racism would keep him from getting a decent job. Bill wrote that it "terribly devastated" his family, and that "life goes on-- but it H-U-R-T-S!!"

Brian, a white worker, is another good example of the struggles production workers had when Motor Wheel closed. Brian was very proud that he had worked his way to quality control and knew a great deal about how different production lines work and how to set them up. However, he was only able to find a grinding job in the Lansing area after the closing. Furthermore, Brian said he had worked at Motor

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Wheel for over twenty-three years without missing a day, but because he lost his job he lost his will to work, had lost his work ethic.

Skilled Workers

The second general group of workers are the skilled workers who usually could find comparable work for comparable wages, especially if they wanted to travel. And travel they did. Some workers travelled to Grand Rapids (one hour drive) from Lansing while others travelled to the Detroit (two hour drive) area every day for work. Finding other employment was obviously easier for skilled workers. The other difference was that some of the production workers like Bill and John, as well as some others, generally tended to be more emotional when discussing the closing. Both groups tended to have very insightful and creative expressions about the plant closing.

About half the workers in the study were skilled. Jesse (Mexican-American worker and second generation "Wheeler") and Wes (a white worker) are two good examples of skilled workers who found other employment, but not before some struggle and travel. Jesse came from Texas like many Mexican Americans and found employment with the help of his family. He described how early on he saw the need for more formal training while at Motor Wheel. Jesse started in production and also worked on the paint crew with his father, but soon

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he got into a tool and die apprenticeship program. Jesse was very clear about how production work was not for him or for anybody else for any extended period of time. When Jesse was laid off from Motor Wheel he went to work in Grand Rapids for Riviera, the company that bought the tool and die shop from Motor Wheel. Like other workers he still lives in Lansing because he has family there. In Jesse's narrative and in the interviews, it became clear that he viewed the closing as a terrible human tragedy. At the same time Jesse also discussed how he used his own initiative to gain the skills necessary to survive. Jesse seemed to be referring to his own agency. He also resented how the union and management fought with each other. In fact, he came up with the term "corporate self-cannibalism" to describe how Motor Wheel destroyed itself from within, where workers and managers as well as owners were stealing parts and profit and generally "screwing" each other over.

Wes was another good example of a skilled worker who saw the plant closing as a terrible thing, but also had to make up his mind to move on. All through the 1980s, Wes and his wife Betty worried about the layoffs and how they were going to take care of their kids. They used up all their savings and remortgaged the house they had built. Eventually, Wes did get laid off, but like Gary, soon found another job with Wyeth. Also like Gary, Wes experienced his second closing with Wyeth. Wes and Betty struggled to

understand what was causing all these plant closings.

American Dream Rebuilders

At the same time, there were other workers and their families who reconstructed their "American Dream". But this took a great deal of struggle, sacrifice, and, most importantly, luck. Some workers said that this struggle made them a better person and that pulling yourself up by the bootstraps is a good thing. Chris, a white production worker, "pulled himself up by his bootstraps", to find another job. "We are better for it," Chris wrote. But this was not until after he and his wife had to sell everything. But now he has a new job working at the Soaring Eagle Casino, has health insurance, and a new mobile home.

Workers with Side Jobs

Thus, John and Chris represent two very different perspectives and experiences. But there are three more general experiences that merit an overview. There were production workers like Rick and Mac, who were both white and had side jobs while they worked at Motor Wheel. Mac owned some rental property and a snow plowing business. He clearly said he was a "business man" and had very few good things to say about the union or management at Motor Wheel. He was upset about the closing and dealt with it by concentrating more on his other businesses. He also liked to

restore vintage Cadillacs. His home was not large, but very neat with a pristine in-ground pool.

Rick's father worked at Motor Wheel for thirty-three years. His younger brother and uncle also worked there. They all made a pretty good living at Motor Wheel. Rick even said he did better financially than his father did at the plant. While working at Motor Wheel, Rick was into buying, refinishing, and selling antiques. I interviewed him in the new pole barn that housed his business. Rick had this to say in the end:

> I can't kick. I made a good living. I gripe they closed the door. Squeezed every last drop of blood out of us. Then they closed the door anyway....I lived through the best of times. Better than my parents, but my kids are going to do worse.

Hence, Rick, who was a production worker, did seem to have enough resources to do well, as did Mac. It is really difficult to find out how they accumulated enough resources to be in their current positions. However, Motor Wheel was a union shop with union wages. These workers were also involved in other economic activities while they were at Motor Wheel and this helped them make the transition to retirement.

Relieved Workers

While many workers were angry that Motor Wheel closed, there were other workers who also were "glad" or "relieved" it closed as well as being understanding and supportive of

corporations and their large profits. This really made a fifth group of workers. These informants seemed to work very hard at rationalizing the closing and they did their best to make it seem like a natural process. Many of these workers clearly had other sources of income. Furthermore, they knew they had benefitted from Motor Wheel and the "system" in general. They said they expected the closing because it was part of the business cycle and they planned ahead. Thus, they were going to do fine once the plant closed. To some of them the closing was a big plus in their life because it gave them a chance to do something else, like work on their farm or go into business for themselves. Kevin, a white production worker, felt "hurt" at first, but then decided "they [Motor Wheel] did me a favor when they laid me off...I am now working for myself." Doug, a white skilled worker, got to work on his farm more and it was a more positive experience because he "got to see things grow", not die like Motor Wheel. Furthermore, like other workers, Doug's family and friends were important because they are "...hard working, dedicated people, more concerned with people in this country, not by making profits from cheaper labor in other countries." Doug was very happy to get out of the whole factory life altogether.

Terry, a white skilled worker, seems to have had a similar experience to that of Wes and Jesse, but is much more positive about the situation. Terry saw the closing

coming and began his comments with:

> My feelings are probably not the norm. I had been expecting this for a long time and was sort of prepared. I have a good trade and had no problem getting another job, unlike many unskilled people.

Terry went on to say that his current job influenced his views because at his current job he is better off. Terry stated: "I am making more money, working less hours, and have less stress at my present job. Most of all I am drawing a retirement from Motor Wheel."

Carl, a white skilled worker, was probably the most adamant about Motor Wheel deserving to make a profit. He believed it was their right. But Carl also represents many workers who are also dynamic and contradictory with their views and feelings. Carl wanted "corporate America to survive", but also felt like he got "punched in the stomach" when he heard of the closing. Because all these workers are going through a process, their views were changing and I imagine after the initial shock, Carl started constructing a rational explanation as well as organizing a plan. Several workers seemed to be constructing an understanding like that of Carl's. His AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) sponsor convinced him that the plant closing was "not a catastrophe, but an opportunity" and helped Carl prepare financially: "got debt free, with a few bucks in the bank." Carl even earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Management of Human Resources before his final layoff. Now he works part-time as a human

resource manager.

Union Officials

A final general group of workers included the then present and former union officials. Some of them, Frank (white and a former union president), Larry (white), and Lonnie (African American) now work for On the Job Training (OJT). They generally felt that the corporation had the right to make a profit and stay competitive. If this meant shutting down plants, that was part of the natural cycle of business. Lonnie, Larry, and especially Frank did not want to really get into a conversation about why the plant closed beyond just not being able to be competitive. I sensed that it was not a valid or even comfortable topic to discuss. They really tried to see the corporate view while they also struggled with all the workers they knew who were going through tough times. They will be presented in more detail later in the chapter under the section: Union Views.

The other two union officials were still active in unions as the research for this study commenced. Leo was the union president at the time of the closing and is discussed later in this chapter. Scott, white and a strong union official at Motor Wheel, now organizes unions in the health care system. He wrote that he was concerned for his family because unions are seen by the public as negative.

Health Care, Lifestyles and Being a "Wheeler"

There were many other themes or issues which give a sense of who these workers were; they are briefly presented below. Also, in the context of the family, many workers expressed a concern that they did not have health care benefits after the closing. Some were lucky enough to have spouses who were still employed and had health care policies that covered them. Mike, a white production worker, wrote that after the layoff he did not have health coverage. He "was just praying nothing major would happen to me or my family. There were times when I was sick, I just didn't go to the doctor because I couldn't afford it." Many workers mentioned the health impact and how the stress of losing your job made you get more sick and depressed. Bryce, a white skilled worker, said he now takes Prozac for his depression related to the plant closing and the fact that he and his family "do not have the finances to do the things and go the places they [used] to." Bryce also has contemplated suicide. Furthermore, many mentioned the stress of not being able to find another job and not being able to do the things they used to do with their children.

Another major impact on the family was that for some workers it destroyed their family. Dwayne, a white skilled worker, stated: [I don't] "have a family anymore. I believe that Motor Wheel is partially to blame for it." The added stress of finding new work is often cited as a major stress

on families. Wayne said the plant closing "created a lot of stress. I am having to have family members (my sisters and my father) pay my bills." Added to this is Wayne's inability to do anything with his family or friends because he lacks money.

Cynicism also found its way into the discussion. Steve, a white skilled worker, said: "You go from $35,000.00 [a year] in income to $10,000.00 in income and then you can tell me if I took a beating." Mike used a rhetorical question to present his view about the impact of the closing: "Try living off of half of what you used to make. There [are] lots of $4.25/hr. jobs. You can't pay your house note with it. Lots of people became homeless."

Even though Tim, a white production worker, was also upset at the closing, "There is no stopping them [management], they have their reasons. They are going to do what they want to do. Bottom line, profit and loss. They don't care who got killed," Tim stated. At the same time, Tim showed me the thirty foot long Sea Ray boat that he was very proud of and how Motor Wheel made owning such a boat possible. But there are fewer manufacturing jobs that make this lifestyle possible. And this was not right according to Tim. Tim recounted his lifestyle during the Motor Wheel years when he would get off work, pick up his wife, and head to Lake Michigan for the weekend. Fewer and fewer factory workers are able to do this because there are fewer factory

jobs in general, especially jobs with union salaries.

Finding a "Wheeler" in Lansing in the 1980s and early 1990s was becoming harder and harder because they did not live there and there were fewer of them. What became even harder was finding somebody who knew what a "Wheeler" was. Cashing Motor Wheel checks even became difficult because many cashiers had never heard of the company. By the late 1980s, the once- prominent corporation in Lansing was not an important community institution. The Motor Wheel workplace was not a community, management did not want it to be and starting in the 1970s many workers moved away thereby destroying the traditional working class community. Motor Wheel was clearly not a source of identity anymore and any good feeling about working at Motor Wheel had also ended.

Matt, a white production worker, provided a window into how Motor Wheel was once a source for identity during its heyday, but then lost its symbolism as a Lansing icon. Matt wrote:

> Used to be that someone knew someone that worked at Motor Wheel. Used to take the paycheck and cash it. Now people have to look it up, never heard of it....People don't realize the impact an institution has on a community until its gone.

Being a "Wheeler" for some workers was a large part of their identity. For others it was still just a job. Still for others, Motor Wheel became less a part of their life, either because of the threat of a closing when they started to not

use it as much for their identity or because they had some conflict with management or the union.

Political Philosophy

The political philosophy of these workers ranged across the spectrum. Some workers were very Republican, while others were clearly Democrats. Still other workers made it clear that they were Independent. Some never really revealed to me their political affiliation. Probably most importantly, several workers made clear that their political views changed over the years, and in some cases their work experience seemed to influence this change. Part of this work experience included the workers' relationship with the union.

Even with all the corporate-led layoffs and the criticism of the United States government, many workers still managed to construct some type of American essence that romanticized past economic and political leaders such as Henry Ford and George Washington. This strain of patriotism had comments centering on more contemporary conservative political leaders that resonated with them. There was a constant attempt by some workers to try and find political leaders who talked about "their America". For example, Ross Perot was mentioned several times as was Pat Buchanan. Perot seemed to give some of the workers a sense of identity that included nationalism (at times xenophobic)

and a sense that they were being listened to and taken seriously-- something neither President Clinton nor President Bush did. Bush and Clinton were too caught up in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) to care about the average working man according to some workers. But support for Perot also meant not being able to be a strong union man, something that some of these workers saw as worth it to have a national figure constantly referencing them and their struggles as American workers.

Gary said: "I could listen to Ross Perot all day". To Gary, and other workers, Perot connected with them. It was not "the American way," Gary said, for corporations to be moving out of the country. Gary asked me rhetorically: "What about our home economy?" It was only Ross Perot who was protecting Americans according to Gary. Thus, because of government sponsored trade agreements, such as NAFTA, Gary had a real suspicion for government.

Gary represents a group of workers where nationalism is a strong theme and informs their political philosophy. "We own this country", á la Ross Perot, according to Gary. However, Gary's views seemed to turn more into xenophobia with the concern that Ford and Chrysler, according to Gary, "...are going to build truck plants outside Hanoi...." As a Vietnam veteran, it really bothered Gary that Americans were building factories in communist countries. And in a related

comment, it also concerned Gary that he could not compete with Mexican workers.

The political philosophy of Rick is also strongly nationalistic. Rick wrote that all the federal government wanted to do was help everyone but the people in the U.S. And the state government wants "...more tax and pay for themselves and want[s] us to take a pay cut so we can help keep our factory," Rick stated. Rick did not have much respect for the city government either-- seeing it as "...just as bad as state government." Finally, Rick also revealed his nationalism by writing: "[T]hey [foreign governments] love our government because we give to them and don't want anything back for helping them." Like Gary, Rick was a Perot supporter and a nationalist as the above comments suggest, although Rick made it clear that he was "not a separatist" by being a Perot supporter. He felt he was making "a protest vote to shake up the parties. Get so tired of their rhetoric. Put them down in the weeds." Rick was also referring to how "this country allows leveraged buyouts." This sheds light on Rick's views and how they can be possibly influenced by his views regarding politics and trade controlled by our government. Like many other workers in the study, Rick felt that both of the dominant political parties need to understand how the average working person has to "make do" but neither party does. This may be what Rick was referring to when he said: "Put them down in the

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Another worker with a similar, yet dynamic, political outlook was Carl, who constructed a potent view of domestic politics and personalities. Carl wrote that he was once "...an avid supporter of John and Bobby Kennedy. Today, I can barely stand the sight of Ted Kennedy" and now is "an admirer of Governor John Engler" (a Republican). Carl said "he is a man of his word." Carl made it clear that he is much more inclined to vote Republican today than he was in the past. He stated this in a survey and then reinforced it in an interview by saying:

> Today, the Republican party seems to be the party of innovation to me. I have very little respect for either party or for most politicians. They are very high-priced and visible whores.

This represents the dynamic and even contradictory nature of many of these workers. Carl was once a Democrat supporter, but now he is more of a Republican supporter. But this is still problematic because of his comment above regarding all politicians. And because of this comment: "I have no political affiliation with any party. I vote for who I think is the most honest candidate." With the above statements, framing Carl's political ideology is somewhat difficult and this is why he is one of the most salient examples of a dynamic and contradictory worker.

The nationalism of Carl also has another interesting aspect. Carl, who was very critical of other countries to

the point of being racist or xenophobic, told me about his view of race relations inside Motor Wheel, where Carl viewed Leo (union president at the time of the closing and African American) as a "contemporary of his" and "a good president." Carl voiced his approval of the Civil Rights movement and how it "opened up jobs for Blacks." Carl said there was still some racism, but he got along with Leo. Carl said he "used to get a kick out of how" Leo handled some of the racism. Leo would sometimes be called "boy" by white workers. Leo would then refer to white workers from Kentucky, of whom there were many, as "Southern crackers". It was other union leaders that Carl viewed as frauds and crooks. Carl may have provided me with this story to demonstrate that the issues he raised are ones of politics and economics, not race. This further complicates Carl's political philosophy. Finally, Carl is also a good example of a worker who has changed his views on unions as represented later in this chapter.

Political philosophy was not limited to statements of nationalism or strains of xenophobia. There is plenty of domestic criticism, as seen with Carl above. Mac added some domestic criticism that rivals Carl's dislike for Ted Kennedy. Mac said that he was very independent. "I don't want anybody to tell me how to vote," Mac said. Mac also revealed his politics by saying that Clinton is "like a woman with 20 credit cards." However, even with this sexist

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criticism of President Clinton, Mac insisted that he was neither a Republican or a Democrat. So, like some of the other workers, Mac was very critical of politicians, including Democrats. [6] Finally, like other workers, Mac liked to hark back to the "people who made this country great." Mac believed, as did many workers, that there was something inherent in how powerful and advanced America had become. Politicians and some business leaders were now destroying it. When Mac discussed how to keep plant closings from happening he said that we should not pit states against each other and that the government should keep this from happening. Mac stopped after he realized he was talking about government intervention and that would be "getting into socialism." The implication was that we could no longer talk about this as if it was off limits.

While it is now clear that there were workers with explicit conservative or Republican views as well as independent views, there were workers who had more liberal political philosophies. For example, workers like Wes and his spouse Betty were much more politically liberal overall and hence it is no surprise they had the more radical views about the problem. Both Wes and Betty blamed President Reagan for setting a certain tone in national politics that was hostile to unions; this tone was set when he fired the air traffic controllers. This was part of the destruction of the unions.

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Some liberal workers made their politics much more explicit. Workers like Scott were very liberal and left-thinking. Scott said that he has "been very active in Democratic politics, chairing the county party." This position helped when he was setting up programs for displaced workers. Other liberal workers just simply said they were liberal, as Doug did: "I'm somewhat of a liberal." Leo was more of a liberal, especially because he talked about organizing labor internationally and was very union minded-- being president at the time of the closing.

Trying to get a sense of the political views of the entire sample proved to be difficult. There were many more explicit negative comments than positive ones about politicians and the problems of government. Hence, this made room for some workers to talk about alternatives such as Ross Perot. Other workers, such as Kevin, frankly said that "if politicians [would] keep their noses out of things, everything would be better." This meant that politicians were screwing things up. This was also connected to the feeling that these people never really produced anything like "real workers". Overall, though, neither major political party had much support within this group of workers. For the most part there was criticism or silence.

Union Views

Even though the union was not the focus of this study, the workers, both pro-union and anti-union, thrust the issue into the study. I found the analysis and reflection on the union by the workers and union leaders very thorough and creative, as well as revealing. Workers generally were not afraid to offer me their views on the union. This even included blaming individual union officials for an array of problems.

The pro-union workers generally felt that the union worked with management to keep the factory open. The union voted on several occasions to take pay cuts and reduced benefits. Even with these concessions the union was not able to protect their jobs in the end. But there were many workers who still believed in the concept of a union and believed in the union at Motor Wheel. Other workers believed in union philosophy early in their career, but are less supportive of it today, partly because of the current leadership and partly because the power of capital seemed to make the union irrelevant. Thus, some workers may have needed a different ideology to follow. But there were clear examples of "union men" to the end.

Leo, as Local president at the time of the closing, went into great detail about what unions have done for the average working person, union or non-union, in America. Leo felt that the American public had no idea of what unions

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have been able to negotiate for everyone from workman's compensation to unemployment to better working conditions. Furthermore, according to Leo, the union was flexible and willing to work with management in order to keep the plant open. Leo felt that the "union worked in good faith with management to make the company profitable." However, if he had to do it all over again, he would have advised the rank-and-file not to give concessions in contract negotiations. This was because Leo felt that: "We gave Motor Wheel the capital needed to invest in other areas." In the end, Leo was still a very strong union supporter, as were others. Wes and his spouse Betty were strong union supporters and felt this way:

> Feel something change near the beginning of downsizing. Corporate America taking a new stance. [At an] all hands meeting, full plant meeting, we found out we will lose 1,600-2,100 jobs...Lose our brothers and sisters...Some people gave everything to Motor Wheel.

The above comments made it clear to me that Wes had some views that demonstrated his commitment to his fellow workers. There were few workers who referred to their fellow employees as brothers and sisters.

Union strikes were also important topics for Wes to discuss as well and provided an indication of his union views. When Motor Wheel wanted to reduce jobs, Wes said he was:

> Pro-union, paying union dues [for] 26 years... Union-- many, many people gain from unions...

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> Knives, guns, packed, smoked filled rooms. By God we won't stand for this.

Wes clearly supported the union concept and was involved in some "nasty" strikes. But Wes "wasn't always 100% for the union." Wes was a steward and the "union was out of line sometimes, but it was mostly the company." Even though Wes saw some problems with the union he was still much more supportive of the union instead of management.

Like Wes, Steve felt that he lost many friends (3,000) and relatives when the plant closed. Support of the union and seeing co-workers in a more personal light may be a symbol of workers who are more sensitive to the struggle of workers in general. Steve insisted that he always attended union meetings and was involved in what was going on in the shop and in the local. Steve was also a chief steward for many years and did not like to think about what would happen without a union. The implication was that things would have been much worse for the average worker.

Scott, as mentioned, was a strong union organizer and said that the corporation was the main problem and it was only the union that kept them from totally exploiting the worker. Scott saw unions as the only way to make working conditions humane. At the same time he saw how corporations were greedy and constantly wanted more and more from workers with little in return, including loyalty, without keeping up their end of the "social contract". Thus, Scott helps us to

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understand how unions can help keep the exploitation down. But without unions the exploitation will continue and certainly increase as many workers argued. Finally, Scott felt that "union people are people who work for a living" as opposed to politicians and others who do not produce anything but still make money.

Workers like Pete and Dan, both white skilled workers, were supportive of the union, but at the same time they saw the power of capital. The power of capital is in the form of the corporation and the individuals running them. Sam, another white skilled worker, followed this line of thought by saying that unions do "the best they can do with what they have to work with," which is constant threats of closure. Mike felt that: "Unions are good-they give you a feeling you have someone on your side. You can't get fired without just cause." Bill still believed in unions, "we still need them." However, even with the need for unions still clear, there were others who felt that unions were going about protecting workers' rights incorrectly.

In order for unions to once again become powerful some workers thought there needed to be new strategies. Leo felt that there needed to be more of a move toward global organizing and had been to Mexico talking to workers. Tim started out by saying that he was pro-union, but,

> I'm a Union Man, but we are playing basketball with a football. Hard to dribble that ball down the court. There are all types of excuses why the ball doesn't come up into their hands.

The basketball and football metaphor represents how the union strategy cannot cope with the changing rules of the game (the game being capitalism). Thus, I think Tim was getting at how capital is exerting more of the power it has always had under capitalism. With increasing global competition and increased technology, the "social contract" is not needed and thus capital can and does transcend national boundaries even faster. Hence, Tim appeared to be suggesting that the union has to play the same game as capital. This is also what Leo and others suggested. At the same time, union popularity is just barely holding on after the assault on it in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Therefore, the news of workers like Gary are understandable. In Gary's younger years he described himself as a "superstriker" and very pro-union, even though it went against his father. Gary's grandfather was an early union organizer and is probably "turning over in his grave" because of his son's (Gary's father) anti-union stance. Gary's father stressed "strong individualism and individual achievement" and felt there was no need for unions. Thus, Gary grew up with very mixed views on Motor Wheel. But for most of his career Gary seemed to have some support for the union. Even in the 1970's Gary was willing to have wildcat strikes if he thought it was the right thing to do. And as late as the early 1980's, Gary supported unions by going to Washington D.C. to march and protest President Reagan's

firing of the air traffic controllers.

But as the complexity of Gary unfolded and he reflected on his situation, having gone through two plant closings, he really is not a strong union supporter today. Gary admits he views unions differently now that he is older. He felt that:

> ... the unions got a lot. Unions have gone wrong with workers' rights. The union is wrong to get back workers' jobs when they get fired. Not right, you can't keep getting jobs back for people who should stay fired. Not right.

Remember that Gary now works for a non-union shop at half the pay, but likes it. Gary feels that it is part of the changing nature of the economy. Furthermore, even though Gary was a union supporter, he was critical of the UAW and their current demands with the "Big Three". Gary felt they were being greedy.

Frank, who worked for OJT, is a prime example of a worker who seemed to be tempered by historical events which can have very conservatizing effects on workers (McNally 1995). But he still was able to see how management brutalized workers during the strikes of the early 1970's. "The membership really got beat up," Frank said. Many times, as an union official he was "caught between a rock and a hard spot" regarding how to resolve issues surrounding the strikes. Frank went on to conclude that Motor Wheel "just couldn't be competitive and this included the union." The layoffs and plant closure seemed to have tamed this once strong union man. Frank's rhetoric and actions (as described

by other workers) both support McNally's (1995) view that layoffs have a very conservatizing effect on workers. I think this is also the same for Gary.

Lonnie, another former union official and employee of OJT, began by saying that he was very supportive of the union and his fellow employees at Motor Wheel. Lonnie stated:

> At one time people thought all union people were idiots. They really are brilliant. People are more astute now. You can't just tell them anything now. Unions push strong reforms. Unions help to make companies more efficient. Management can deal with workers more easily if there is a union.

Even though Lonnie was very pro-union he never really had anything negative to say about management. Like Frank, Lonnie felt that the reason Motor Wheel closed was because they "just could not compete." "Management is not dumb" according to Lonnie. Also like Frank and some other workers, Lonnie did not personally criticize any of the owners or plant managers. But other workers personally criticized the owners and managers. Thus, while Frank and Lonnie were not openly against the union or management, they were not really "union men" anymore. They could not be. Their main job was to find employment for their fellow workers and thus they had to keep good connections with managers in other plants. Furthermore, there was not a union for them to belong to and this may have given them more of a reason to see that the corporation "had to do what it had to do." Larry, another

OJT employee, also empathized with the workers who could not find work. But Larry also tried to rationalize the closing by seeing it as almost "natural" and that the solution for workers was "education and training" because unions were outdated.

While there were strong union supporters and workers totally against unions, there were workers who had more of a lukewarm approach toward unions. Joe, a white worker, said:

> Unions were needed in the early days. Are still a good thing to a point. Won too many arguments with weak management. Some poor workers needed to spend some time in the street to see just how good they had it.

Thus, there was at least the acknowledgement that unions were needed at one time. However, as noted, they became almost too powerful in the eyes of Joe.

> Some workers goofed off and I didn't need a union...[I] was well paid. I would do the extra things to keep the plant running... Goof offs got all the easy jobs.

Thus, as time went on, Joe felt that he gained from the "goof offs" to the point that he did not need a union, and that the union only protected the poor worker. This view intensified in the workers cited below.

As mentioned above some workers were union workers early in their career at Motor Wheel but changed their mind for various reasons. For some workers this change was very subtle and was probably because of many variables, not the least of which was the strong anti-union sentiment found and

manufactured in the American public and embellished by corporate ideology. Other workers were extremely explicit with their turn away from unionism. The most notable has to be Charles, a white production worker, who said "the union made him a Republican." According to Charles, the union made him a Republican because there were too many union leaders who abused power and did not treat him fairly when he filed a grievance. It became very clear to me that Charles used this personal altercation with the union to inform many of his lasting thoughts on the import of unions in keeping Motor Wheel alive. Thus, Republican politics gave him another way to view the closing where the union, as a whole, could be blamed.

Other workers like Carl demonstrated a transformation over time. Carl did think the union was useful at a certain point when he first started at Motor Wheel. Carl stated:

> The union was quite important to me. When I first hired into Motor Wheel, I was a very gung-ho union person. Over the years, the union pervaded every aspect of employment at Motor Wheel Corporation. It was every bit as important as management was to me. In a lot of ways, the union and my involvement in it, has shaped my life and my view of the world.

However, Carl was very dynamic and contradictory with his views concerning the role and track record of the union at Motor Wheel. He went on to say:

> I am no longer a strong union man. The reason? I was actively involved, over a long period of time, with the union. I know the union from

> inside out. My verdict is that the union stinks. Toward the end of my union career, it was very difficult for me to bargain on behalf of my union brothers when I had much more respect for the Management on the other side of the table.

This dynamic view was maintained by Carl in his interview. Thus, the union must have influenced him. From diving head first into it in his earlier days to becoming highly critical of the union, Carl was a person who wanted to develop strong opinions of things. Carl's very critical comments of other union leaders, some of the same ones other workers pointed to, reinforced how he used personal interactions to develop his views.

Other workers were more subtle with their jettisoning of union philosophy. Dwayne was one, who also changed his view over time.

> When I was younger I was more active in the union, but as I grew older I came to realize that if you kept your mouth shut and did a good job the union wasn't so important....In the beginning the union was very important. We had a strong union up to 1985 after that it went downhill. My feelings about it went downhill too.

Like Charles and even Carl to some extent, the interpretation of Dwayne is based on his interpersonal involvement, or lack thereof, at Motor Wheel and with the union.

CHAPTER IV

FOLK CONSTRUCTIONS OF A PLANT CLOSING

This chapter presents the workers' complex views concerning their feelings on what caused the plant closing. *Complex* refers to *who* the workers blame and *what* they blame for the closing as well as *how* they blame. Furthermore, *complex* refers to how many workers have multicausal explanations for the closing. Finally, *complex* refers to how some of the workers' interpretations are changing and even contradictory. All these varied, insightful, and dynamic responses form the "folk constructions" of the workers that describe how they interpret this plant closing in particular and deindustrialization in general. These constructions have been developed over the years and are still evolving. Themes or patterns of responses that surfaced during the fieldwork and analysis phase of the research were used to organize the workers' "folk constructions". In some examples I also use the notion of a "social contract" in the discussion of how workers view the plant closing.[7]

As stated before, the group of workers studied offered a rich diversity of views. As seen in the previous chapter, the process of trying to understand a plant closing can produce contradictory expressions. At the same time, in the midst of this diversity of expression, there are themes that are shared by some workers. Thus, I will be interpreting the

workers' perspectives.

The first section, The Blame Game introduces, in a quantitative manner, the different categories of blame. Tables 4-1 and 4-2 provide a succinct summary. The following sections include discussions centering on blaming the corporation, which includes management. Within this section, the areas of mismanagement and corporate greed as well as the ending of the "social contract" are explored. This same section will also incorporate how workers blame government and tie it to corporations and world competition. The next part includes discussions on how some workers blame the union, blame the union and management together, and whether they blame the economic system itself for the closing. I will conclude this chapter by providing some examples of workers who have more complex views.

THE BLAME GAME

Humans have sought to place blame for tragedies throughout history. Plant closings are no exception. Who and what people blame for a plant closing as well as how they blame can provide an insight into late capitalist culture. This section presents all the areas of blame for the Motor Wheel closing and for unemployment in general. Many of the workers' own expressions were used to illuminate the different yet overlapping themes. By doing this, a wider critique of deindustrialization was provided

by the workers. During the interviews, general discussions with workers about high unemployment and deindustrialization led to very dialogic conversations (See Foley 1990:226) that provided the study with some of its most insightful responses, including analogies and metaphors.

Table 4-1 includes the number of times each category was named by the workers. This provides a sense of what areas, from the perspective of the workers, are most important. Table 4-2 offers information that also includes what or who the workers blame for high unemployment in America. The same pattern persists when the issue of high unemployment is added to the reason for this particular closing.[8] As one can see, management is by far the leading cause for the plant closing in the eyes of these workers. It is also the leading cause for high unemployment in the U.S. Management and corporate America were often used interchangeably by these workers. World competition was also referred to as foreign competition. The "other" category was used for workers who blamed no one or nothing for the closing. Comments here included seeing the closing as part of some natural process. Finally, many workers often listed more than one cause for the plant closing.

TABLE 4-1
NUMBER OF TIMES WORKERS BLAMED EACH AREA FOR THE MOTOR WHEEL CLOSING

Management/ Corporation	Unions	Government	World Competition	Economic System	Other
30	6	10	12	0	7

When the question of what is to blame for high unemployment in America was answered, the responses in the other category decreased while the remaining categories increased dramatically (Table 4-2).

TABLE 4-2
NUMBER OF TIMES WORKERS BLAMED EACH AREA FOR MOTOR WHEEL CLOSING AND HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE U.S.

Management/ Corporation	Unions	Government	World Competition	Economic System	Other
35	10	16	17	6	5

Again, because this is not a statistically large group in quantitative terms, one needs to proceed with caution when generalizing beyond the scope of this study. However, because much time was spent carefully studying and obtaining the data, with the context fairly well understood, one can start to see trends in responses. Below, the quantitative data is integrated with the qualitative data. This provides a much richer interpretation of the workers and the plant closing.

Blaming The Corporation

The blaming of management or the corporation for the closing of Motor Wheel was obviously no surprise. In addition, the blaming of management quickly turned into blaming corporate America. And with the record profits of many corporations as well as the growing income gap in the United States, the indictment of the corporation is almost a given. The corporation was then linked to blame that included the government and world competition. This included the collusion between all three areas. Thus, this section will start with how workers blamed management and how their expressions included issues of mismanagement, greed, business and government collusion, world competition and the corporation, and the breaking of the "social contract".

The workers deferred much of the decision making to management and consequently blamed them more than any other variable (30 of the 45 workers or 66% thought that management was to blame in one way or another). "Poor management" and "greed" were often used when the workers placed blame on management.

Mismanagement

When workers reflected back on the closing they often started their comments with the term "mismanagement" or "bad management". By this they meant that Motor Wheel managers made all sorts of mistakes over the years. Some mistakes

were strategic types where workers said that Motor Wheel did not foresee the need to make the transition from steel wheels to aluminum wheels. As the 1980s came, more and more cars were outfitted with aluminum wheels. Motor Wheel kept producing steel wheels for the most part, especially at the Lansing plant. It was discovered later that Motor Wheel was collaborating with a Japanese firm to jointly produce aluminum wheels in another factory in another part of the United States. Nevertheless, the workers and even the *Lansing State Journal* used this reason as the overriding cause for the plant closing and probably helped to make the process sound more natural.

Indeed, Dwayne stated in his survey that: "...aluminum wheels were taking over the market" and Motor Wheel had not been able to make the transition, especially at the Lansing Plant. Scott wrote: "Motor Wheel stayed too long in steel wheels. I don't think they understood or prepared for the popularity of the aluminum cast wheel." Scott went on to mention that this was "among other management shortcomings", such as not understanding workers. Finally, other workers and the union president, Leo, said that Motor Wheel did not want to make the transition to aluminum wheel production and used the concessions given up by the union to invest in joint ventures.

Another area of blame within this category of mismanagement focused on how managers knowingly sent out bad

parts. This infuriated some of the workers. Tim said that [we] "had some bad wheels, knew they were bad and we were told to ship them to Chrysler." Thus, "decisions to send bad parts cost us big contracts," Tim stated. To some workers this was an example of how the corporation was only interested in short- term profits and thus it was more important for Motor Wheel to get the product out and not worry about quality. Mac's metaphor for the same issue was that management was "penny wise and dime foolish." Long-term viability was not something management could see or wanted to see, according to Mac.

Jesse was critical of management because he thought they did not listen to the workers. Other workers had the same concern when management hired MBA's to run the plant. Several other workers also thought that some of the managers and even vice-presidents really did not want the plant to be productive in the 1980s. They were just there to put their time in and get out because they "knew" the plant was going to close. Finally, poor management also included how the president and vice-presidents did not reinvest in the Lansing Motor Wheel plant at the end of the 1980s.

"Greed" is the "Problem"

As mentioned above, one of the most popular words to be used was greed. Most workers found that greed was the best way to interpret the plant closing. And in many ways greed

became a metaphor for all that is wrong with America and may even represent the breaking of the social contract. Nash (1989) argues this as well. Wilk (1996) argues that people, to varying degrees and in different ways, use a moral model as one ingredient when constructing their cosmology. More probable though, people use a combination of "the self interested model" and "the social model" as well as "the moral model" (1996:36-40). And here, these workers felt that corporations were acting immorally. Greed seems to speak to a sense of unfairness or the dissolving of any type of moral economy. Thus, this sentiment was found in many of the themes. Greed was also used to directly criticize management at Motor Wheel in particular and corporate America in general. To many workers, CEO's were greedy or becoming greedy, although, a smaller number of workers directed this term at other workers and sometimes the union. In the end though, to most workers, it was management and their greed that caused the plant to close.

Greed came in many forms and to workers like Wes, "greed set in" during the late 1970s and especially the 1980s when there was a new management style that stressed short-term profit over long-term survival of the plant. Hence, to many workers the 1980s was a time of greed and Motor Wheel workers were paying the price. At the same time, workers at Motor Wheel were internalizing the fact that it was management who really had the power, not the workers or

the union. "Corporate America, they're the ones who have all the control, they do what's best for themselves and blame everybody else," said Dan. "Look at the 1980s, corporate raiders, we got snowballed," Pete expressed. Ian, a white skilled worker, said that corporate America is "only out to make money. People are only a number," and Nick, a skilled white worker, blamed management for the plant closing saying they were "...self centered and [had] little feeling for the people who worked for them." Bill, when describing his feelings toward corporate America, wrote: "GREED, rich get richer and the poor remain." And Zach, a white skilled worker, offered a variation of this theme: "Greed. To hell with employees."

These views were not developed overnight. Over the course of the 1970s and especially the 1980s workers were increasingly bombarded with messages, signals, and actions from management that made them feel as if management was "out to get them" or at least exploit them more. Steve argued this very point: "Yes, my views have changed. I think all they care about is profit. They will do anything to make more money." Mike saw the problem as: "People at the top make all the money, the people who do all the work are the working poor. It should not be that way." It used to be more fair and Motor Wheel was viewed as a family. Presently, many workers fee this is not the case at all. Scott was very articulate with his analysis of the corporation and their

greed and wrote this about them:

> Corporations are insatiable in their lust for money. They want and demand loyalty from their subordinates but give little or no reason for people to feel that their loyalty matters. Push, push, push, never enough when you do better they complain that they still lost. Once in a while they should let you breathe deep before putting their foot in your ass again.

Scott's comments concerning lopsided loyalty demands could also imply an unfair social contract that the corporation was trying to force onto workers.

At times workers would use greed to attack individuals in the company. "It was all because of 'him'" was said several times. The "him" was John Overbeck, who was the president of Motor Wheel at the time of the closing. Several workers, like John, were convinced that Overbeck wanted to close the plant ever since he took over as president and even more so after he orchestrated the leveraged buyout from Goodyear in 1986. "The president shot from the hip, without regard to the consequences. He seized the opportunity to make a ton of money personally and took it without thinking once how it would affect his employees," Scott said.

To workers like Brian, a white production worker, Overbeck "sucked the company dry." But other workers felt this greed went beyond just one individual. Many of the workers also felt that the small group of managers who took over Motor Wheel in the late 1980s did so, to "milk it dry." Hence, "milking" or "sucking" the company dry became a

popular expression workers used. Zach was the most explicit about this: "We were treated like shit since 1986 when Goodyear sold out to nine individuals that drained us and the company."

Wayne, a white production worker, further demonstrated a keen understanding of how management was to be blamed and how it manipulated the workers: "I was angry, we were told at a meeting, not more than a year before, that the plant would never close." This type of deception made workers like Wayne very frustrated. Wayne "used to be proud" that he worked at Motor Wheel, "but as management changed and got nastier, so did my attitude change." What became clear to Wayne was that: "Corporate America is just after the almighty dollar. Yes, I used to feel corporate America (management) were friends-- They are not. They are just like government, only looking out for themselves." This comment on corporate America implies that Wayne once may have had some notion of a social contract. Also, the theme of criticizing government is present. Wayne is a good example of the dynamic nature of some of these workers.

The use of greed as an explanation for corporate wrongdoing was not limited to any particular worker. Skilled workers blamed greed just as much as production workers. The classic statement about greed, supplied by Bill and others, which is the: "Rich get richer, poor remain poor" rang true with many of the workers. Thus, citing of greed by so many

workers may be an example of what Fantasia (1995:280) calls an "emergent value" or a "collective consciousness".

Even though Overbeck and the vice-presidents received a great deal of criticism, Goodyear was not left out of the indictment. For example, Leo felt that "starting in 1980 like a snowball down the side of a mountain, deindustrialization took off as a way to super profits for corporations", and that is what Goodyear did through Motor Wheel. Leo was one of the people who said that around 1980 Motor Wheel started hiring "business people, not manufacturing people" to run Motor Wheel. Those people were the MBA's and they were "bean counters, they have no vested interest in a given operation. Therefore, no vested interest in the people." According to Leo, there is "more to making a dollar, it's the way you make a dollar." Thus, Goodyear was criticized early in the 1980s for seeking profits at any cost, even if it meant not producing a quality product or not updating production. Mike's comment summarized the issue of greed and responsibility: "How can it be fair when the rich get richer and the poor can barely pay bills, let alone take a vacation." It is management's responsibility to "keep up with new ideas and modern equipment."

Steve blamed management for the closing by building a plant in areas with "cheaper labor", and "corporate greed" for high unemployment. He then explained by writing: "'Inflation'. The cost goes up when we perform and make a

product cheaper, the cost does not go down. Our wages do not go up. The windfall goes to corporate America. 'Greed'." Steve was pointing to how workers are becoming more productive, but it is the corporation that is reaping all the benefits, not the worker.

Doug also provided a perspective that may help us to understand the 1980s better, where greed spread among many people at Motor Wheel. When describing how his feelings may have changed toward the corporation he said: "Yes, from what is best for the business to what is good for me, which permeates all the way through the organization to the worker, who say[s] 'They don't care about me, I don't care about them'." Jesse expressed this same view, but went on to say how workers stopped respecting each other. According to Jesse, greed, envy, distrust, backstabbing, lying, cheating and fighting became elements of a Motor Wheel culture that was in an extreme case of flux during the 1980s. And it was corporate greed that began this. This led to what Jesse referred to earlier as "corporate self-cannibalism."

Another aspect about corporations had to do with how they pitted communities against communities and workers against workers. Dennis, a white skilled worker, had a particularly insightful comment regarding this. He said: "Corporate America delights in this, local versus local" referring to how corporations have individual factories compete against each other. This was the case with some

Motor Wheel plants in Jackson, Michigan; Chatham, Ontario; Luckey, Ohio; and Ypsilanti, Michigan.

After the closing, many workers very clearly understood power because they experienced it first hand. They also understood that unionism, at least in this context, could not keep their jobs. They learned that, more than ever, they are disposable and that there is a great deal of collusion between government and management. These last two topics will be the focus of the next two sections. Finally, Joe and Wayne, independently summed up the situation about how power works with the classic statement: "Money talks and bullshit walks" which means that no matter what they said they did not have the resources, as workers, to keep the plant open.

Business and Government Collusion

While some workers said greed or mismanagement alone closed Motor Wheel, other workers went on to discuss how they believed that these problems were cultivated by the collusion between government and business. Some workers "harked back" to the "good ole days" while other workers kept a more critical view of what was happening. But many articulated that the reason the plant closed was due to business and government being "in bed together" and not helping to run the country or run the business. I see this as a form of political economy, not so much in the Marxian sense, but in the sense that some workers saw and understood

the collusion between business and government. This cooperation went against many of these workers' notions of fairness; they felt that government and business should operate more independently. "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine," is how one worker referred to the relationship between business and government. But, this philosophy was too political for many workers and concentrated too much power.

Gary, who had conflicting views of the union, did, however, also feel that: "Big government, big business [was] keeping the little man down and the big man fat". It was just more obvious and explicit than it had been in previous years. The only solution was to own your own business. Much of Gary's cosmology, or world view, is found in the metaphors and analogies he offered me on the situation of the United States and the plant closing. Starting with his key statement, Gary argued:

> Big business and big government always keeping the little man down and the big man fat. Never get rich working for somebody else, unless they're crooked...Always going to have lower classes-- little man must be able to buy what they produce. Can't level everything out, but you got to be able to go after what you want.

Gary's metaphor captured his dislike for the economic and political elite. At the same time, he was resigned to the idea that there will always be "lower classes" and this seems to be a given. "Can't level everything out," Gary said, because "you got to be able to go after what you

want." This sense of rugged individualism that includes individual achievement was very strong in Gary, as it was with his father and many Motor Wheel workers. While this ideology is sacred to Gary and others, the contradiction of the "Big Business and Big Government" is not overcome. No solution is offered outside of protectionism via some notion of American idealism that romanticizes the past. Gary's main criticism of modern leaders was that they do not remember or know American history or at least the history that Gary knew. Mac had a similar view and suggested that we "...go back to what the founding fathers said." By this I believe he meant that the founding fathers had some notion of freedom that we no longer have. This selective tradition, as Raymond Williams (1977) suggests, provides Mac with a way to interpret as well as critique the leaders today.

Steve also offered a structural critique, he acknowledged the relationship between government, law, and the corporation where the corporation utilizes the government to exploit workers. "The law allows them [the corporation] to use people up, and throw them away," according to Steve. Furthermore, there are laws that allow companies to easily move and abandon communities. Politicians receive support from big business so they listen to them. Thus, the government gives "...huge tax refunds and write-offs for relocating and such." And this was not right, according to Steve. Bryce said that we should "change the

laws in [the] U.S. concerning leveraged buyouts...When Goodyear sold Motor Wheel everything changed from cooperation with unions to an all out war with employees." Thus, workers like Steve and Bryce advocated some of the same solutions as Bluestone and Harrison regarding the role for government. Instead of having government cater to the corporation, government should look out more for the worker.

John also talked about the growing reports on corporate profits and connected this to politics. Like many of the other workers, he also discussed his criticism of government and how "the government will also eventually fall. These big politicians will also fall. They have not had to come down and live with us, out of touch." Thus, John was pointing to the greed of not only the president of the company, but also politicians. At the same time he seemed to be making a statement on class with his reference to how they "have not had to come down and live with us." Rick echoed this same view with the comment from the previous chapter on how politicians should come and live down in the weeds.

The politicians are implicated because they are controlled by the corporations as Scott pointed out:

> The federal government is controlled by those with the means to control it. Today's congress will let management work us for free if they can hide it. John Engler [Governor of Michigan] hates unions-- unions are people that work for a living-- he believes that we should be destroyed and he's doing his best to get it done.

Scott's comment demonstrates how he thinks business and

government collude through the governor's office and that real workers and their unions are the ones that will continue to get hurt. But other workers did not see it this way.

While many workers criticized this connection or collusion between politics and economics, other workers suggested there was a need for it. Matt said: "I'm a radical" regarding the government. Matt believed that state and local governments should "always sweeten the deal to entice business" for example, by offering tax breaks. Matt also believed that there should be lower property taxes in general to keep businesses in the state. Finally, there were workers who wanted a closer relationship between business and government and who wanted the legal system to allow businesses to get more resources from the government, as in other countries.

Blaming World Competition and the Corporation

As seen above, blaming world competition was often connected to the United States Government and corporate greed. Carl again attacked the government while he made clear in both his interview and survey that he had no problem with "free trade":

> I have no objection to fair competition on a level playing field. I object vehemently to high-ranking Republicans and Democrats being on Japanese payrolls as lobbyists. I would make it more difficult for the Japanese and their ilk to do business in the United States.

Carl continued with: "I want corporate America to beat the Japanese at their own games." Again, the articulation between economics, politics, and nationalism is clear with statements such as these. In addition, there is a sense of xenophobia present in the tone of his voice.

Dwayne cut to the chase with statements such as: "They are taking our jobs. Every month you hear about some company building a plant in Mexico." The reference to "they" is often used by many of the workers, most of whom are European Americans and are very nationalistic if not xenophobic. Gary, who was also suspicious of government and wanted a third political party, said that [we have to] "take care of our own first....We keep boosting up foreign economies. This is fair trade? Who is defining fair trade?" Pete was concerned about how the Japanese "...keep all people isolated so you can't have a union." This was added to his general concern that "[a] lot of things happened to a lot of Americans because of pressure put on us by the Asians and Europeans."

Some comments are less clear about how world competition is to be blamed. Steve said, "They are eating our lunch in the work place. They put more into R&D and they build a better product as a result of it." The implication is that other countries are running their economies better.

Others have become very cynical, like Doug, who said that world competition is driving down our standard of

living. You cannot compare our lifestyle to other countries. "Our standard of living is so much different from some of the countries we compete with. If it's our government's and business' goal to lower our standard of living, we are on the right track" said Doug. Dwayne followed suit and stated his view quite clearly: "The U.S. labor market can't compete with Mexican wages" because their lifestyles are not like ours. So, while there is a discussion of the link between business and government, there is no mention of the economic system as being problematic.

Blaming foreign competition was a popular ingredient in the overall mix and often overlapped with other reasons including blaming management and the union. Included were negative comments about NAFTA in the context of support for Ross Perot. Other workers would only state that it was foreign competition or the fact that the company could not be competitive or stay competitive. Wayne was even more blunt and, like Gary above, being involved in a war (WWII in the Pacific Theatre) seemed to help inform his strong view. Wayne stated: "We beat the bastards in the War and helped them to rebuild and taught them our technology and they turn around and kick us in the teeth." However, there were workers who saw it from another perspective.

George, a white production worker, "...used to think they [foreign workers] were the problem. But they weren't, corporate America was." This comment by George is insightful

because it speaks to his deeper understanding of how corporations were the problem. However, his analysis did not go further to criticize the economic system of capitalism. Furthermore, whether the workers agreed with it or not, they utilized, more or less, a social Darwinist model like the employees at OJT.

Many workers could not get beyond the fact that they "just could not compete," as Frank from OJT stated clearly several times. This may reflect what Dudley (1994) stated:

> Belief in free market competition and the survival of the fittest is more than just an economic model. These principles are also part of a meaningful cultural system that allows people to invest their behavior in the marketplace with moral significance. Darwinian thinking is not simply about the beneficial effects of eliminating the unfit. It is also about how success should be measured in a world where resources are limited and the competition is fierce.

Frank was a union official who was viewed by some as a person who helped out many workers. However, he was also viewed as somebody who took care of himself and his friends, and, at times, this cost the union. In the interview, it was clear to me that Frank internalized the model Dudley presented above.

Zach blamed corporate greed, their connection to government and foreign competition, as well as the idea of being "treated like shit." This is combined with very strong nationalistic views. Zach added a new variable which has to do with feeling like a "thing". This commoditization is a

topic addressed in the next section along with the breaking of the social contract.

> I think Big Business runs Gov. Therefore we are a number to be replaced by just anyone (foreigners). They [corporations] decide [who] to let in this country...Our gov. lets it happen because the people pulling their strings (corp. America) own too much in other countries, 'Greed' To hell with employees...Keep this country in this country.

As one can see, Zach mixed some very strong working class rhetoric with xenophobic expressions. But as Roediger (1993) and Takaki (1993) as well as van der Pijl (1997:39) point out, this is not really surprising. There is a long history of racism and sexism as well as xenophobia in the working classes, just as there is in the middle and upper classes. It is just now being studied and analyzed.

The End of the Social Contract and the Commoditization of the Worker

As several workers implied above the "understanding" between management and labor seems to have ended. Nash (1989) discusses this in some detail. Wilk (1996) uses the concept of a moral economy (Scott 1976) to help build his moral model of human behavior. The responses below loosely represent what both Nash (1989) and Wilk (1996) are suggesting, which is that many people utilize some sense of what is right, fair, and moral when discussing economics. The section on greed represented how some of the workers do not think corporate America is moral. But at the same time

there were workers who clearly saw the plant closing in social Darwinist terms where they could not compete (whether the "playing field was level" is another issue). What is clear is that discussions of corporate America before 1980 had one believing that capitalists were "family men" who treated their workers paternalistically as part of a "family" and that the "social contract" was the glue. There is still some of this management style today. However, as the 1980s evolved, there was less and less of this paternalism at Motor Wheel and a more social Darwinist model centering on competition took over. Symptoms of this change included the end of company picnics and bowling leagues as well as the elimination of many jobs. Steve insists that:

> There was a time when you could give your working years to a corporation and they would take care of you through old age. But not now. They just use you up and throw you away...The law allows them to use people up, and throw them away. The average age of the men they dumped was like 51 years old. Who wants to hire 51 year old men? McDonalds? I felt used, misused, abused, and crapped on...Union does all they can, but government keeps tieing [sic] their hands.

In Steve's written comments there was a clear indication that there was a time when corporations respected the lives of workers and took care of them or at least provided the means for workers to provide for themselves and their families. I interpret it as a type of social contract that is now broken. Steve summarizes this by saying "it is a fact that corporate America has no conscience. And they do not care about people. We are a number to them." Thus, Steve

also feels that he is commoditized. This may be an example of what Foley (1990:168) sees as the logic of capitalism being used on people where people see each other as dead objects.

Bruce, a white skilled worker, also felt this way: "Never realized until I was laid off that I was a commodity, that I had to sell myself." Being treated like a commodity also prohibited Bruce from retiring with the friends with whom he grew up and worked. His work life and some of his social life are going to end much differently than he had planned. Bruce said: "We were all kids together, in 20 years we thought we were going to retire together, mind set. We didn't retire together, we downsized together." This statement comments on how his world view changed drastically because of downsizing and can only be understood in the context of a social contract. Now that the social contract is over a new paradigm was being developed by Bruce. And this one is certainly less clear. One thing is certain for Bruce, his recognition of the "constant change" in the workplace.

Wes and Betty seemed to believe in a social contract and referred to it using the analogy of "checks and balances between the union and management." Betty was very explicit about it: "All those values are no longer there. The social contract destroyed." Manning, a white production worker, also alludes to a social contract when he wrote: "I think it

was a bad deal. I started working in '65 and thought I would work for life time." This reference to lifetime employment suggests that Manning figured that there was some type of agreement, informal or otherwise, that would guarantee him a job if he was a good worker and the company was profitable. Dave, a white production worker, "felt betrayed" by Motor Wheel because of all the years he put in at the factory. He also said he felt "sad and hurtful." And John, who was impacted in multiple ways by the closing, said he:

> Bent over backwards to help productivity [and] worked with management...We were out there on the line, but they cut the workforce right in half...Used the best years of my life and then they just threw us away. Motor Wheel doesn't take any responsibility regarding the people. Can't say all negative [things] about Motor Wheel. I was there 31 years. It just hurts so much to have the rug pulled out from under us. Kicked out the door. The day you look forward to retiring, not happening.

John felt that management could not or would not do what was right and that was not fair. In terms of the social contract, John seemed to be surprised that he lost his job, even though he said he understood that the plant could close completely. With all the threats of closure and layoffs, and some not coming true at the specified time, John may have felt he would be spared. Most importantly, John was clear about management not taking "...any responsibility regarding the people." This implies that management somehow broke a social contract it once had. John also said that management was "out of touch" with "the people" and this implies that

they were not interested in maintaining any type of informal agreement. In addition, John said that: "They [management] are only concerned about what their stocks are doing," and this further indicates that the previous relationship management had with labor was gone. As discussed, this breaking of the social contract seemed to have happened in the early 1980s when more MBA's were used to run the plants. John ended by saying: "I know in my heart I did my best, but it still hurts," which says that he could not do anything more.

Even Mac felt like a thing or an object, but it is much less likely he believed in any social contract. Mac said he felt like he was "discarded as a bunch of trash" after the closing and that he:

> shouldn't have been hurt...I could cry, but I don't...you just go about your business...Live with the cards you are dealt. I'm bitter, but it doesn't possess me...I'm a funny type of a person.

These comments reinforce how much Mac had reflected upon the closing, but did not allow it to overwhelm him. The metaphor regarding "cards" implies that maybe Mac saw the plant closing as random and thus possibly natural. But he still blamed management and the union.

As the social contract ended in the eyes of the workers, some began to internalize the idea that they were expendable and the new paradigm was one based solely on being competitive. Much like Willis' (1977) notion of

cultural penetration or interpellation, these workers were comprehending how they were actually viewed by corporate America, or at least Motor Wheel. This also supports Foley's (1990) argument that capitalism leads people to view each other as things. Some of the workers' seemingly contradictory statements may actually be pointing toward the contradictions in the political economy of America, and even the world. Therefore, with very little choice regarding political paradigms (especially acceptable ones) these workers' comments start to seem very rational.

Blaming the Union

Not many workers of any type actually blamed themselves personally. However, some workers did blame the union in some way for high unemployment in the U.S., with some even blaming it for the plant closing (See Tables 4-1 and 4-2). Some workers felt that the union was not flexible enough with management and some workers felt that it was too flexible. Charles insisted that the union was not cooperative with management and this was a major reason the plant closed. Charles said the union got 60% of the blame for the closing. Charles went into great detail on how he thought some union officials were unfair to some workers they decided not to like. Jesse also supported this view. Jesse wrote that the union stewards were getting "petty and mean" but were not willing to "...say it was the union that

brought down Motor Wheel." They just "...sure didn't help." Carl also felt that the union could be blamed for the closing because they did not understand business and what was needed to keep the factory open. To Carl, the union became only interested in itself, or worse, some of the union officials were only interested in themselves and their friends. Workers like Charles, Carl, and even Mac, who said he "had more fights with the union than management", all seem to blame the union based on interpersonal experiences with the union.

Others felt that the union protected workers who should not be protected. These workers were ones who were "lazy," came to work "high" or got "high" on the job, as well as workers who abused the workmen's compensation policy. Carl confessed that he was "...no longer a strong Union man," because it protected workers who were viewed as "lazy", "doing drugs" or just poor workers. This was part of the reason the plant closed. Jesse was especially critical of the large amount of grievances that were filed and how the union kept processing them.

Very few workers thought they were making too much money. Many were angry when they had to take a pay cut after coming back from a layoff in the late 1980s. Some workers were jealous of UAW workers at the Lansing Oldsmobile plants who made more money than they did. But only a few workers said that union wages caused the plant to close. Jack, a

white skilled worker, indicted the union by saying that: "Unions are pricing Americans out of the market." This is a very common criticism of unions today.

Overall, most workers had a view similar to that of John, which was that while he did not blame himself for the closing he did not think the union was totally innocent. "I'm not going to say that labor was always right," John stated, but management had the power and they used it. Many workers also understood the power of the corporation, and as Motor Wheel slowly closed this became very clear to most workers, even if they denied it up to the end, as did John.

The union was blamed for the closing in another way. Some workers, like John, were critical of the union for not organizing better between plants so they could have more of a coordinated effort. Part of these criticisms were also directed at previous union leaders who were concerned more for themselves. There were several workers who personally criticized former union officials for "being in the pocket" with management. Some of these union leaders were blamed for not standing up to management or giving in to management demands.

Another variation of blaming the union centered on work rules. Some workers felt that the strict union work rules, and how some workers stringently enforced them, made being productive difficult. Jesse told of a situation when he tried to increase productivity by helping to fix a press.

When the tool and die repair person found out about it he got very angry and wanted to file a grievance. A fork lift operator wanted to do this as well when Jesse moved some presses he was not designated to move. Jesse insisted he was just trying to be productive, but the worker was in tears. He thought his job might be eliminated if he was not needed and he had a family to take care of. This might be an example of how work rules and productivity clashed in a fast changing economy. Union work rules are developed to prevent extreme exploitation, but Jesse's point was that if the factory wanted to stay open they would have to be more flexible. It is very difficult to tell how widespread this type of conflict was at Motor Wheel. It does seem clear that problems such as these arose at times, but probably not enough to close the factory.

Blaming the Union and Management

It seems clear that management and the union, as well as the government, are to be blamed for the plant closing. But there were workers who took Jesse's above criticism regarding work rules and connected them to issues of mismanagement. Mac exclaimed in an interview, "The company and the union were stupid!" The union did not think enough about how it was conducting itself and management had a "bunch of educated idiots" (MBA's) running the place. Mac seemed to be jettisoning his working class identity and

affiliation with Motor Wheel. Mac could be in a contradictory class location (Wright 1985) because he sees the importance of protecting jobs but cannot see how it is feasible under this economic system. He may also be in a contradictory class location because he is an owner of a snow plowing business (buying labor power) while at the same time working for Motor Wheel (selling his labor power).

Other workers like Terry were doing the same. "I have my own views," said Terry. He felt that both the corporation and the union wanted too much. Ron, a white production worker, was convinced that after Goodyear bought the plant it would close. "I knew it would happen. Everything pointed to it after Goodyear bought it," said Ron. And like other workers, Ron blamed greed. However, Ron also blamed "unions for protecting those that should be fired as well as corporate mismanagement." Ron felt that it is not only management who look out for their own best interest but that most union members also "look out for #1." Hence, Ron found it difficult to identify with either management or the union and looked elsewhere for ways to interpret the closing.

These workers felt that the only way to "make it in America" was to "be your own man" and some, like Mac, did so by developing their own small businesses. They also felt that the corporate leaders of today did not have the integrity or vision of the industrialists at the turn of the century. It was clear that the workers with either capital

or skills could find another job.

This spirit of independence is very strong with some of the workers and may be the result of a lack of identifying with corporate America and the union. It also seems to incorporate the notion of "rugged individualism" that is prevalent in the U.S., where opportunity and mobility is glorified (Ortner 1991:71).

Blaming the Economic System?

It is clear that very few workers questioned the economic system itself. Some workers did criticize how people do not "play by the rules" or do not play fair. Very few workers wanted to say or write anything about this topic. There were about five skilled workers who did comment on the "economic system" along with other variables as possible reasons for plant closings. But no workers pointed to any structural contradictions in the system of capitalism. Only one worker (Jack) offered any explanation, stating that:" A lot of waste in government positions-continuing the classes of people rich and poor!" Here, Jack was referring to the government more than the economic system as the cause of the inequality. Some workers, like Mac, would start to discuss the economic system and what needed to be done in terms of corporations: how we need to control them as well as keep them from pitting cities against cities in America. He stopped short saying: "But

then you are getting into socialism", and the implication was that we could no longer discuss this point or that he did not like socialism. There was not alternative solution. This is a crucial point because the feeling was that the solution was somehow outside the realm of possibilities-- as though it was off limits to discuss this.

Carl did not blame the economic system. He just blamed the big players:

> I think it is a fair system. It is still possible, albeit improbable, for a poor person to become rich in the United States. I believe the American Dream is still alive. I would not want to live anywhere else.

Steve also thought the economic system is fair, "when there is no cheating. But we all know what is going on, don't we?" He also understood how the union no longer had much power. Thus, Steve offered a view or construction that was critical of the corporation and its management, and even the government, but he is not indicting the economic system. Charles talked about how the system should change regarding taxes: "I believe the tax system is totally unfair. We should have a flatter tax and stop taking from the achievers and giving to the non-achievers." This could be viewed as a systemic critique where Charles would like to see less welfare. This is not a radical critique which would call for the end of accumulation or point to any of the contradictions mentioned in the Introduction.

Most workers who chose to answer this question were

like Steve and Mike, who expressed: "How can it be fair when the rich get richer and the poor can barely pay bills, let alone take a vacation." Nick said: "No, not a fair system. Yes, my feeling[s] have changed because we are expected to work for foreign wages." Bryce echoed a similar view: "Yes, how can we compete with foreign compan[ies] that pay their workers 50 to 60 cents per hour? Our workers don't stand a chance in a global market until wages and standard of living come up to [the] level of the United States." Dan felt that "the middle class was being destroyed." Mike, Nick, Bryce and Dan come close to a structural critique. They understood that there was a problem with the economy, not so much in the logic, but in how people ran the economy. These workers and others see that a major problem was the greed of corporate America. This almost becomes a statement of class culture. Bruce said: It's [economic system] not perfect, never will be." Betty, Wes' spouse, was getting close to a structural critique because she seemed to understand the power of corporations and their lack of morality as well as their connection to politics and government.

Leo was another person who was very critical of what was happening and understood that there needed to be major changes in how workers organized. Leo was involved in discussions with labor leaders in Mexico and felt that organizing internationally was the only way working people would be able to provide a stable, fair, and decent

existence for themselves.

It was Scott who came the closest to actually criticizing the system of capitalism. Scott even used the term capitalism. He wrote:

> A capitalist society is good only when the welfare of its citizenry is solidly protected. We have abandoned any such protection! And will suffer in the long run.

Scott was worried that there is nothing protecting workers from the negative impact of capitalism. This includes the greed of corporations and their collusion with the government. Scott's issue of protecting the welfare of citizens from capitalism implies the need for a social contract. By saying people need to be protected from capitalism, Scott is almost criticizing the system of capitalism and can be seen as more radical than many of the workers. Thus, Scott is probably the most radical worker and his strong union activities probably have given him more ways to process this plant closing.

As the interviews took place it became very clear that the economic system was taken as a given or seen as natural. The problem was with who had unfairly manipulated it, like corporations, the government, "foreign" countries, or the union. Even though it was a dialogic process, I found that when the topic of the economic system itself came up there was no discussion of the possible contradictions inherent within. It was very difficult to get workers to talk about

any problems with the economic system. I will argue in the concluding chapter that workers did not consider the idea that the problem is the economic system itself because capitalism is made to seem natural through the ideological construct of common sense. Thus, because the economy was seen as natural, it was off-limits to criticism. Thus, the silence on this issue seems to support the notion that there is not a linguistic space to discuss the economic system critically.

"The Complex Problem"

As many workers continued to talk, their interpretation of the plant closing became more and more complex. This section will present a few workers and their complex expressions on the Motor Wheel shutdown. I will also mention some of the causes for the plant closing from the "other" category.

Some of this complexity included contradictory views on the union and the corporation and may be related to contradictory class locations (Wright 1985) in the sense that an individual worker may be both selling his labor power as a worker as well as owning the means of production and buying labor power outside of Motor Wheel. Therefore, being both a petty capitalist and worker may inform a worker in contradictory ways. His interests would be different and contradictory and this probably would inform his views on

the plant closing and who or what is to blame. Some workers supported unions at one time but not at other times. Other workers had mixed views of corporations. This was the case with many of the workers discussed above; Bryce is a good example of a worker with complex and seemingly contradictory views on the corporation and maybe even the union. For instance, Bryce had no problem with blaming American corporations for their greed, but felt that when Goodyear owned Motor Wheel, things were good. Goodyear was Motor Wheel's "sugar daddy" and a "great company to work for under Goodyear." At the same time, Bryce stated that "unions are needed more than ever in this changing business climate," but he "had a love-hate relationship" with the union. Bryce and other workers shared a suspicion of "new" management styles that only paid attention to short term profit and greed. In Bryce's "first few years working at Motor Wheel--paid off my house and bought a new house." And as some other workers, Bryce insisted that he had "always had my own viewpoint." Finally, Bryce was also concerned that even though he had it better than his parents, his children were going to be worse off than he was. Bryce believed that the economy changed, although he was not sure how, except that there was less opportunity. Bryce's father worked at Motor Wheel, as did his brother. Obviously his children will have no chance to work there. Newman (1993, 1988) and Ehrenreich (1989) support some of what Bryce said and experienced with

their studies on generational changes in economic opportunities.

Gary had been thinking about the plant closing for a long time and came to the conclusion that the truth is hard to find concerning why certain decisions were made about the plant or why the plant closed. Gary referenced all of the major variables and the overlap in reasons for the closing speaks to the complex ways workers interpret a plant closing.[9] Gary's comments below offer a rich cosmology of an American worker who is trying to make sense of an unstable economy and demonstrates how workers interrelate multiple variables when constructing their interpretations of a closing. Heuristically, it is helpful to look at Gary's complete explication again, which he provided during the second interview after we had finished all my questions and we were just talking. Gary summed it up with this original monologue:

> How can it be,
> -corporate profits
> -defense spending
> -space program,
> What about our kids? Not the American dream. Could listen to Ross Perot all day. [Our] lifestyle knocked down a bit or two. Big Business and Big Government always keeping the little man down and the Big Man fat...Never get rich working for somebody else, unless they're crooked...Always going to have lower classes. Little man must be able to buy what they produce. Can't level everything out but you got to be able to go after what you want...But all this will continue unless we get those guys out of here. Future, Perot looking out for us. We own this country.

Therefore, as seen here and elsewhere, Gary captured the complexity of the problem even though he did not question the system of capitalism. Others had complex views as well, but had not formulated them as much as Gary. Tim said he could see both sides of the closing: "Have to put yourself in other people's shoes," Tim said. Jack also saw the closing as being caused by "many complex problems. Government not controlling input-exports with an eye for an eye outlook." This "eye for an eye" metaphor seems to refer to a philosophy of always making sure that you get "your share," or "getting even".

Mac could also be said to have a complex view. Mac understood the collusion that arose between corporations and government. However, he was not ready to move into a discussion of how it might have been solved because it would take more direct involvement by a government that is willing to make laws to stop corporate flight.

Wes and Betty are somewhat different. They saw the problem as stemming mostly from corporate greed and irresponsibility. As Wes put it, unions were not always right, but the main culprit was the corporation. Wes and Betty offered one of the clearest views that internalized the power of capital; Betty, especially, understood how the social contract was broken by corporate America.

Terry viewed the problem in a complex way and placed blame everywhere. Terry's views are summarized below. He

succinctly blamed:

> Corporate America for putting $ first.
> Unions after reaching their basic goals keep wanting more without further education.

Dwayne also viewed the plant closing through the use of multiple variables:

> Government, Motor Wheel Corp. Local 182 and some employees. We need laws to punish Companys [sic] moving out and relocating elsewhere. We need to stop workers' comp[ensation] abuse, We need laws to stop unions from bargaining on plant closings in a way that fails to compensate every worker for years of service.

Dwayne offered a very clear assessment of the problems and what should be done. Dwayne's last comment pointed to the problem of who got compensation when the plant closed. As research started for this study, the union was negotiating the new terms for pensions, and some workers got much less than they deserved or none at all, as Dwayne alluded to. Thus, many of the workers could be said to have a complex and dynamic view of the closing where their emphasis is sometimes unclear or even changes. As with social scientists, these workers were trying to understand what was happening with incomplete information or information that had specific views shaping it.

Jesse's concept of "corporate self-cannibalism" spoke to much of the complexity behind a plant closing as well as possibly being an example of Dudley's (1994) model of "social Darwnism". From management greed, world competition, and government involvement to worker stealing and nepotism,

Jesse constructed his understanding. Included in Jesse's interpretation was his idea that companies like Motor Wheel promised too much to workers in terms of pensions and this was another reason Motor Wheel closed. This was one of the reasons included in the "other" category. Finally, Jesse offered a reason that is similar to a view developed by Harry Braverman (1974) which demonstrates how factory production line work degrades a workers' skills. This "scientific management" or "Taylorism" and eventually "Fordism" treated workers like just another thing or part and further alienated them. Jesse felt that factory work was dehumanizing and felt that no one should have to do that type of work their entire life. This helped cause the plant to close, Jesse believed, because production workers felt as though they were not really important, causing them to care less about quality. They were still angry about the plant closing, but only because they did not have a decent paycheck anymore. Jesse thought that most plants with human production lines would eventually close because they did not treat humans as humans.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
RATIONAL, NOT RADICAL WORKERS: TOWARD A "COMMON SENSE" UNDERSTANDING OF WORKERS

It should be clear at this point that this group of workers demonstrated a diversity of expression that is difficult to completely explain. Today's workers are bombarded with all types of information and go through many types of experiences. Chronicling these experiences and placing them in a theoretical context is a difficult task, but needs to be attempted if a better understanding of workers is to be developed. This knowledge may then help progressive policy makers and labor leaders make informed decisions. Also, academia needs a better understanding of the complexities and struggles workers go through so that a closer relationship between labor and academia can be reestablished.

Secondly, it seems clear that many workers developed a partial critique of the economic system through the use of the social contract, notions of fairness, and the concept of greed. These terms helped workers criticize certain participants or processes involved in capitalism. The contract that corporate America is breaking or has broken allows workers to criticize part of the economic system, but not the system itself. The social contract also leads to ideas such as moral economy and greed. By utilizing the term "greed" it could be said that workers are arguing against

the logic of capitalism, which calls for ceaseless accumulation. Corporations are involved in ceaseless accumulation and wealth is being concentrated. "The rich get richer," as one worker said. Therefore, some workers could have a sense of a moral economy. They could also be moving toward a critique of the system by blaming certain aspects or players. However, they are not calling for major structural changes beyond some government intervention or moral awakening on the part of corporate leaders.

So again, notions of a social contract, greed, moral economy, and even the myth of meritocracy may indeed help to deflect blame away from capitalism and help to promote it as a natural process. But these terms fall short in explaining why workers do not see capitalism as inherently problematic and contradictory to democratic principles and philosophy. It can even be argued that capitalism is contradictory to much of the environmental philosophies popular today. This is because of the emphasis on consumption in capitalism and the emphasis on reducing consumption in environmentalism. Overall, however, capitalism is still viewed as part of the "natural" world and not as a socially constructed and historically specific system that promotes inequality. Seeing capitalism as natural seems to be "common sense" (Hall 1988) and this idea will be explored later.

As chapter III and IV demonstrated, the workers in this study offer a wide variety of responses that make it

difficult to organize them into any idealized types without risking reification. The empirical reality is too complex in this study and as Wilk (1996:135) argues, "humans are complex economic beings and [are]...more complex than any combination of theoretical constructs" (1996:141). The workers' views were dynamic and sometimes contradictory. Through the research and analysis I more fully appreciated and understood the complexity of the working class in general and this group of workers in particular.

The folk constructions can be summarized around the five main areas of blame presented in Tables 4-1 and 4-2 in chapter IV. Also, many workers often provided more than one reason for the closing. Poor management or corporate greed was blamed the most. World competition and government collusion with other governments and corporations were blamed many times as well. Unions were generally blamed less than the above reasons, but still were a significant area of blame. The economic system was not really blamed directly or thought to be the problem. But, as argued, certain aspects of the economic system were blamed. No one actually came out and said the economy is the problem.

As suggested earlier, the literature on deindustrialization does not seem to provide the kind of theoretical guidance to understand the diversity of expression represented by these workers. The contradictory responses some workers provided may be an indication of

their contradictory class location (Wright 1985). Some workers were simultaneously a non-owner of the means of production and an owner of some means of production. Mac may be one such worker. He sold his labor power to Motor Wheel while he owned capital (i.e. snow plowing business and rental properties) and bought labor power. This may have put him in a contradictory class position. Jesse also offered some comments that could place him in a contradictory position. Jesse mentioned that during the 1980's he was trying to "do what it took" to keep the plant open. This meant fixing some of the dies (molds for the presses) and moving parts or machines. Jesse felt that this is what management wanted and would help keep the factory open. However, some workers expressed anger and fear when Jesse did these jobs because under the current work rules it was not Jesse's job to fix the die or deliver the part. They truly felt that their job was in jeopardy of being eliminated. Jesse felt torn about what to do. He wanted to help management and be more productive (from his view) to keep the plant open, but at the same time he did not want to eliminate a fellow worker's job. This put him in a contradictory position. The interests of workers like Mac and Jesse do not fit into a dualistic model of class relations. But, it is still unclear why many of the other workers did not question the economic system.

The community studies referred to in the Introduction

move analysis beyond the workplace and start with the macro viewpoint of Bluestone and Harrison. Nash (1989), Newman (1988, 1993), and Dudley (1994) offer excellent commentary on workers as well as worker views themselves within the context of a community. However, by placing the responses of workers in the context of a social contract or myth of meritocracy, they play down the diversity and complexity as well as contradictory responses workers have regarding the plant closing. The same worker may have more than one viewpoint on the closing as represented in chapter IV under "The Complex Problem". Furthermore, there is little discussion on the process workers go through when formulating their responses. Dandaneau's (1996) study is helpful because he discusses the complex concept of ideology and how it manifests itself in the union and community of Flint, Michigan. But all the above texts offer little in terms of understanding the different responses workers have regarding their plant closing, although in Newman's (1995) work she calls for such studies.

Lockwood (1982) acknowledges the differences in workers through his three idealized types and moves the discussion beyond more traditional Marxist views on class consciousness, which tend to homogenize workers. Lockwood's categories did serve as a heuristic tool for the research and initial analysis of the data. However, once several workers were interviewed and data was analyzed, it quickly

became very clear that today's workers, for a variety of reasons discussed below, were much more complex and diverse than Lockwood suggests. And the term worker may also be problematic because as this study demonstrated workers are much more than simply workers. Their lives and expressions are very complex. Because of this complexity there needs to be a more flexible and dynamic approach to understanding workers. As the Introduction suggests, the approach Willis (1977), MacLeod (1987, 1995), and Foley (1990) use provides this flexibility.

Resistance or Cultural Reproduction/Accommodation: Cultural Marxism

The studies that do offer an inroad as to why workers' expressions or understandings do not directly question the economic system itself are the cultural Marxists such as Foley (1990), MacLeod (1987, 1995) and Willis (1977). These three writers present, to varying degrees, a more dynamic way of how people conceptualize the economy and how capitalist culture is reproduced or resisted. It is clear that the above authors make a clean break from a deterministic understanding of how we resist or reproduce as well as transform capitalist culture. Structure is still dominant, especially economic structure. However, the process is much less direct than the more economic determinists once argued (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976).[10]

Willis' (1977) work, influenced by E.P. Thompson, was one of the first to construct a much more flexible and resistant "class culture" that was also expressive and distinctive (Foley 1990: 166-67). Class culture here would then refer to certain values and beliefs as well as practices that a majority of people from a certain class found acceptable and helped to reproduce. But it would have to be flexible. Foley (1990) found more than one "culture" in his study and this may be the case in this study. There did not seem to be one distinct culture at Motor Wheel. More probable, there were multiple cultures that overlapped. A distinct class culture was not present, probably because there were workers who identified more with management in philosophy and in consumption. Furthermore, some, like Mac and Rick, had different relations to production outside of Motor Wheel. So their class consciousness and culture would probably not be distinct or without contradiction. There does not seem to be one class culture because workers were influenced by multiple sources, not just the workplace. Boundaries became very problematic early on and diversity of thought was always present. Also, a distinctive class culture may not have formed because these workers lived far from each other and not in a traditional working class community. But, there were some themes such as greed, support for Ross Perot, and deep resentment for government that came through from many workers and may even be "emergent values" (Fantasia 1995).

There were very few positive comments about the government or politicians, but not all workers were Perot supporters or disliked government. One major difference between the studies mentioned and this one has to do with the age group. While this study focuses on men in their mid-to-late 50's, the above three studies use youths as their main group. Another major difference was that this study focused on a specific event (i.e. plant closing) and the language surrounding it. The other authors focused on the everyday lives of youths. Still, the way these authors construct a dynamic historical materialist approach helps us understand how capitalist culture is reproduced or resisted. These studies also move away from positivist tendencies and offer a move forward that the standard deindustrialization literature fails to do.

As described above, this genre can best be referred to as cultural Marxism. Foley (1990) and Willis (1977) found resistance and reproduction of capitalist culture. Willis suggests that the working class culture, with its penetration of capitalist ideology, was the beginning of a class consciousness. Foley suggests that the various cultures he encountered tended to reproduce capitalist culture. This present study contains elements of both resistance and reproduction. MacLeod's (1995) study stresses reproduction where structure and agency cannot be separated, but [c]ontrary to popular belief structure is the source of

inequality" (MacLeod 1995:253). By studying youths in a public housing complex, MacLeod is able to see how structure penetrates down into culture and individual agency. "Social structures reach down into the minds and even the hearts of individuals to shape their attitudes, motivations, and worldviews" (MacLeod 1995:255). Social structures, such as employment and educational opportunities as well as the political system and the media, seem to influence the workers in this study and inform their views on class, even though like many Americans they do not talk about class directly. This was demonstrated in chapters III and IV, where workers talked explicitly at times, but especially implicitly, about what influenced them. These social structures also included union structure and culture, as well as corporate structure and culture, which is shaped ultimately by global capitalism. The dynamic nature and nondeterministic approach of MacLeod is clear when he states: "Structures are not fixed, binding, nor unalterable, yet they often appear so" (MacLeod 1995:256).[11]

While MacLeod demonstrates the import of structure and how it influences culture and the individual, Willis stresses more resistance and "cultural penetration" of capitalist social relations by his working class youths in England. Willis sees them as not buying into the system and resisting in very creative and rational ways. This present study also presents workers who resist. Some workers

resisted by stealing parts or undermining management's attempts to increase productivity. And as Jesse demonstrated, it can be done in many creative ways. Workers also resisted working together because, as documented, they may have seen that it could possibly eliminate their own job. The views that criticize union leaders and the "bumping" of union workers out of jobs by other union workers also show how workers lacked solidarity toward the end of Motor Wheel. However, there is a growing concern with the reification of resistance in anthropological studies (see Brown 1996) and this may be why Foley stresses reproduction more than resistance.[12]

Foley's study group was also youths, but in South Texas. Here, he is able to show how these youths both consciously and unconsciously reproduce their social relations, mostly because they, like many Americans, have come to view each other as things. As demonstrated in this study, many workers also came to the conclusion that they were "things" to be "discarded" by capitalists after they were "used and abused". They may even be commodities, things to be bought and sold. Thus, like MacLeod, Foley presents how youths are enculturated into capitalism. Foley sees that "...our everyday national popular culture is generally inculcating people with an instrumental style of speech" (Foley 1990:193). This moves Foley into a discussion on ideology stemming from Marx.

According to Foley, Marx utilized at least two varieties of ideology. The first had to do with the typical dominant ideology thesis where:

> capitalist rulers and their cadre of intellectuals create explicit, conscious sets of ideas about politics, economics, aesthetics, and all aspects of social life...Ideology is the hegemony of one's class ideas over another" (Foley 1990:168).

For Foley, this is how Willis conceptualizes ideology and it exists and is taught in a variety of public institutions. However, the second version of Marx's view sees "...ideology as any form of social activity that enacts the fundamental logic of class relationships" (Ibid). Foley goes on to argue that in order to understand what is happening, both views of ideology are needed.

The important point in this second version is that people can unreflectively act out these exploitive relationships by treating each other like "...dead objects rather than living things. Consequently, the character of our everyday relationships becomes hidden from us" (Ibid.). There is a certain amount of validity in this statement when applied to some of the workers at Motor Wheel. Some workers did not seem to see a fundamental difference between themselves and management, especially the workers who actually identified more with management than the union. As ideology and class consciousness become more fluid, there is more room for divergent articulations of it, as is the case

at Motor Wheel. "In this sense, there is no ruling class socializing a working class. There is only a vast unspoken, unrecognized, ideological process that makes the commodity logic of capitalism seem normal and natural" (Foley 1990:168-69). I would suggest that some of the workers at Motor Wheel internalized the commodity logic in this fashion. These were the workers who were starting to see that management did indeed view them as "things" where they were discarded. And as the data show, many workers articulated a feeling of being just a "commodity" or a "thing". As some workers started to internalize their commoditization, they in turn, seemed to view and treat their fellow workers in the same way. This may be why some workers could treat each other so poorly; it became part of the culture and almost "natural", given the context of the 1980's as Jesse, Bruce, Doug, Wes, and many other workers suggested.[13]

Other studies are beginning to see schools, the media and now cyberspace as sites for information and dialogue which help people to understand the world. This study argues that the site of production is still one place, but not the only place, where a variety of metaphors and analogies are created, coopted from popular culture, and synthesized by workers to describe the process of the plant closing. This includes the alienation they experienced as they came to realize they were indeed a thing and maybe even a commodity

to be "thrown away" after they were used. I am not suggesting that language through the media or popular culture completely control the discourse, as Fantasia (1995:278) criticizes discourse analysis for. However, I am suggesting that they strongly shape it. By this I mean that popular culture and the media help set the boundaries of what is acceptable. They are not merely reflections of society, but operate in a feedback system where they have a great many resources to help inform or shape public opinion. This then interacts with workers' experiences to help inform or shape their views, and, as will be argued later, limits their interpretive options.

Bruce expressed this feeling of being a commodity when he said: "Never realized until I was laid off that I was a commodity, that I had to sell myself." Other workers expressed feeling like a thing. Steve captured this feeling when he said: "I felt used, misused and abused and crapped on." What Steve described is the feeling or realization that management in fact saw him and other workers as expendable. Bryce reinforced this view: "Nothing in my life can compare to the feeling of [the] plant closing-- the despair, feelings of worthlessness, unknown future [and] depression." Dwayne saw it in a similar way but included the impact on his marriage: "I felt anger, hurt, frustration, helpless and used. I felt the same way when my wife of 24 years divorced me. I believe that my job situation with Motor Wheel had

some influence on her."

Wrapped up in some of these workers was a notion of a "social contract" or "moral economy", where the metaphor of the "family" was used because that is what management used for so many years before the 1980's when it was discarded for the social Darwinist view of having to be "competitive". George, like many workers, internalized the notion that Motor Wheel was a "family" when he said that he had "[a] feeling of loss, empty, no security. After 24 years you feel part of a big family, now it is gone." In most of these cases, commoditization was being articulated more by management and became heightened in the 1980's with the new emphasis on competition in a global economy. But even some of the workers came to appropriate these views since they had very little choice.

Thus, profit at any cost became paramount, workers expressed feeling more like a thing to be discarded after they were used and one worker even expressed his feeling that he was a commodity. Feeling like a thing or even a commodity may lead to feelings of alienation. Foley stresses this Marxist notion in his concept of "alienated communicative labor", which helps to explain why some people reproduce their class culture. Mac not only felt alienated from Motor Wheel management, but from the union as well and he expressed this by calling people with college degrees who ran Motor Wheel (management) "educated idiots"[14] and the

company and union "both stupid". Thus, while Mac did not feel alienated in the actual labor process because to him, work was "natural", he did feel alienated vis-a-vis the union and management. Mac, as did many workers, then seemed to fill this void in his life with notions of being an "independent man". Chapters III and IV demonstrate clearly how many workers, feeling alienated not so much from the actual labor process but management and the union, seemed to develop a heightened sense of identity via "rugged individualism". This makes sense situated in Foley's view stated earlier that "...everyday national popular culture is generally inculcating people with an instrumental style of speech. Americans 'culturally reproduce' their individualistic, competitive, and materialistic society through using this alienating, manipulative communicative styles" (1993:193). As suggested, union members gradually came to view each other as things. How else could they "bump" each other from jobs or only look out for themselves during the 1980's and early 1990's? This may be an example of Foley's (1990) instrumental rationality found in capitalist culture where people increasingly treat each other as things and not as human beings. In good economic times, when there is an expanding industrial production economy, workers find it much easier to look out for each other as demonstrated in chapter II. However, as the world system increased in complexity and size, transnational

corporations and their production processes moved around the world more quickly, causing major structural changes in economies around the world. The first Americans to lose their privileged position in the world economy were production workers, unionized or not.

This privileged position also allowed many workers at Motor Wheel to organize their lives around the activities of consumption and leisure (Mac and his cars and Tim and his thirty foot Sea Ray boat). These popular cultural practices of leisure and consumption are the most socialized and even naturalized (Foley 1990). It was difficult for many Motor Wheel workers to critically reflect upon their consumption practices and hence, end up as the most used variables when people reproduce their class cultures.[15]

There were many reasons why certain workers developed particular views and actions. Wilk suggests this is a very complex process in which "people try to...balance self interest, group interest, and moral precepts drawn from our cultural beliefs" (Wilk 1996:40). People then operate in the "messy grey areas between" these three areas (Ibid.). This includes their "lived experiences" as well as "faith and conviction" (Wilk 1996:38). The workers who had clear influences from their spouses, such as June (wife of Victor), Betty (wife of Doug), and Sue (wife of Joe) all had more of a holistic and historical view of deindustrialization that took into consideration structural

factors and events like the impact of the firing of the air traffic controllers by President Reagan. This would include influences from the moral as well as social areas. The spouses were very clear about how they thought that today's society does not see people as humans and made it clear that there were moral problems with people in power. The spouses, as well as other workers, felt that the "self interest" area became too important for the corporate leaders. This was expressed through the strong use of the concept of "greed". Thus, there would be some rejection, through the metaphor of greed, of the ideology of unlimited gain or profit, at least in the workers' rhetoric, if not in their action.

This study found both resistance and reproduction or accommodation. However, many workers exhibited tendencies that could not be dualized into accommodation or resistance. Many workers found themselves in contradictory positions and McNally (1995) expresses how the working class is often placed in a contradictory position. Mac and Jesse did seem to find themselves in this position and reacted in contradictory ways that on the surface may appear irrational, but upon closer inspection their actions/views were quite rational. As suggested earlier in this chapter, they could be in a contradictory class location (Wright 1995). Still, because of capitalism, where all needs and wants as well as people are commoditized, these same workers had little choice but to acquiesce. This commoditization

limits the extent to which people can question the economy. Also, if people from a similar work culture do not interact on a regular basis there is less chance of moving toward a more radical critique of the economy. This was the case here and differentiates this study from Foley's.

Thus, the geographical barrier of this study limits the socializing of workers outside of the workplace and seems to promote a loose "speech community". This creates more privatization and is exacerbated by the increased use of home videos and the influence on the social lives of people. This is also coupled with the anti-union sentiment of many non-union and even some union people. However, this could be changing as evidenced in the 1997 United Parcel Service (UPS) Teamster strike, where the general public supported the union more than management (Greenhouse 1997). But overall, there still was not a questioning of the system. In fact, there was very little discussion of the economy as a social construction. It was taken as "a given", as something "natural", "taken for granted", and it was "common sense" that made the economic system of capitalism so or at least kept it that way. Therefore, if this plant closing disrupted the lives of many workers, even the ones that found decent jobs, why was there not more criticism of the system? In order to better understand this question and develop an answer, the concept of "common sense" ideology must be utilized.

"Common Sense" Ideology and Hegemony

Stuart Hall (1988) offers a way to understand the role of ideology in shaping what is considered to be "common sense" and how once this is formed, during "organizational" and "historical" moments, it acts as a parameter for acceptable discourse. Hall is able to do this by showing how politics and the media help to create what is "common sense". Furthermore, Hall does this without falling into the "false consciousness" problem that prompted Foley's criticisms of Willis' account. This will lead to a better understanding how the U.S. working class is responding to the wide ranging and devastating process of deindustrialization and provide some possible reasons why workers do not react in more radical ways to plant closings. It was argued here that workers internalized the plant closing in multiple ways not easily understood in the current literature on deindustrialization.

Hall (1988) constructs a dynamic historical materialist approach that focuses on how capitalist ideology is constructed and transformed. Writing about the popularity of Thatcherism within the working class of England during the 1980's, Hall provides a better way to understand the diverse views of the workers in this study. This can be done because there are some strong similarities between the Thatcher years in England and the Reagan years in the United States. Hall also offers a connection to the larger world economy

and its history, which amplifies the understanding of how the traditional British working class subjects could support a neo-Tory.

Thus, in order to construct a deeper understanding of how workers conceptualize a plant closing we have to move beyond what is now considered "traditional" deindustrialization studies because of their lack of historical materialism and ideology, as well the absence of a focus on the expressions of individual workers. Having said this, it should also be made clear that another theoretical construct, hegemony (closely related to ideology) will surface as crucial to a better understanding of workers and their views. This concept, originally developed by Gramsci, is utilized by many authors currently to conceptualize the dominance of capital, but in a dynamic way that is not absolute and where it has to be struggled over and constantly recreated and even transformed by the groups involved. "As Raymond Williams has argued of this Gramscian concept, hegemony is a process tied to unequal power relations such that dominant discourses shape people's interpretations and practices, but they never determine them" (Rofel 1992:82-83). This "openendedness" is both liberating empirically and problematic theoretically because the diversity of thought in this study made framing the issue difficult but not impossible. Furthermore, this study is attempting to provide a better understanding of the

variety of responses.

One of the main breaktroughs of the last twenty-five years in terms of ideology has been the move away from a "false consciousness" understanding of why workers do not revolt more. Marx is often criticized heavily for his reductionism and in today's context that is warranted. Many people today are thinking and processing the world around them and are doing it both alone and in groups. To say they are being fooled is far from the truth. Then why did Marx offer such an explanation, the question goes. Some Marxist writers forward the idea that Marx was writing against the strong idealism of the time and needed to be just as strong with his polemic to make his point (Hall 1996:30). I tend to agree.

Other writers since Marx, such as Althusser, have taken up work on ideology and have "...sponsored a decisive move away from the 'distorted ideas' and 'false consciousness' approach to ideology. [And] opened the gate to a more linguistic or 'discursive' conception of ideology" (Hall 1996:30). Included in this move was greater attention to how people come to internalize ideas and are able to speak spontaneously, within certain limits of categories of thought existing outside them (Ibid). Thus, ideology is no longer just beliefs or ideas, but because of Althusser's structural influences, now includes structures and institutions of society (Cormack 1995:10) which strongly

shape limits to conversation. Althusser promotes a dominant ideology thesis of the state where the "...*function* of ideology is to 'reproduce' capitalist social relations according to the 'requirements' of the system..." (Hall 1996:30). However, this view is still too functionalist for Hall and I agree. Althusser does include comments on how ideology "'expresses a will, a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality'"(Eagleton 1991:19). But this is still shaped from the top or structure.

However, if this "will" or "hope" is based more on "lived experience" as Eagleton (1991:20) suggests, and current reality within certain categories of discussion, we may still move forward to develop a better, more dynamic notion of ideology that includes agency. This agency will then allow for workers to help produce and reproduce views that support the idea that the economy is "natural".

For the purposes of the present study, we may then take the notions of "lived experience", "will", "hope", and especially "nostalgia" and apply them to the responses from the workers. However, they should be used with the understanding that language is "multi-referential" and "...the same social relation can be *differently* represented and construed" (Hall 1996:36). This is helpful because now the door is open for us to start to see how workers can have very diverse perspectives on the plant closing, even when they use some of the same concepts to describe the process.

Because of their different experiences they internalize change and causes of change differently. We may also start to see how they draw different conclusions. When this is applied to their individual "lived experience" and Hall's notion of "common sense" we may start to understand the possible reasons workers are not more radical, but still rational and varied in their views. But this still does not solve the "false consciousness" problem completely. There needs to be more discussion of Hall's construction of ideology.

The way to break out of the "false consciousness" understanding is by jettisoning the false dichotomy between what is real for workers and what is false. What I mean by this is that workers, like many people, process the complex world through *perceptions,* which are influenced from the totality of their lived experience. Also, we can move away from a "false consciousness" explanation by admitting that the market is real, as Hall suggests, and it is the focus of neo-classical economics, which obviously structures our discursive patterns, especially our economic lives.

The "false consciousness", or distortions of ideology, can be transcended by not neglecting market ideology, but by seeing that it is part of the total reality. As Hall argues, the "market is real". There is no doubting that. However, production is just as real, as is the inequality and exploitation caused by it. Therefore, the market needs to be

viewed as constructed and much of production needs to be viewed as exploitive. As Marx has shown, this is where exploitation begins. In the capitalist circuit, most of us only "...*see*, the bit we all experience daily" (Hall 1996:34). Thus, "[i]deologies emphasize some things and downplay others" (Cote and Allahar 1996:85). In this case, capitalist ideology, our view of the total reality, is restricted. We are not necessarily fooled nor do we have a false consciousness, just an incomplete one or one that is not balanced.

If the total reality is conceptualized metaphorically like a "wheel" with the different perspectives like "spokes", some spokes are constructed larger than others. This would be the case with how American society overemphasizes neo-classical economics and capitalism as "natural". Also, it would be impossible for anyone to fully understand the total reality. That is why anthropologists and other social scientists must admit they can only represent or construct "positioned" or "partial" truths (Abu-Lugho 1991:142). The problem in the context of Hall's work has to do with how certain views are overemphasized and others marginalized. Political and economic power via the media helps in this overemphasizing. Again, Hall suggests that there are parts of society or the economy that we are not heavily involved with and, therefore, remains unexamined for various reasons. The only exploitation that is expressed

in market ideology is when companies take large profits, while workers suffer (as in the recent UPS strike where a profitable company was unwilling to make many of their part-time workers full-time). But this type of information is also rarely reported, considering the amount of profit many corporations have generated in the last twenty years. Until there can be a shift to this understanding, the market will be viewed as the same as the economy and "natural". There may be a need to understand what humans need in a more natural sense. But before any of this can happen, there needs to be a discursive space to have these discussions.

The key point here is that the "market is the part of the system which is universally encountered and experienced the most. It is the obvious, the visible part: the part which constantly *appears*" (Hall 1996:34) and appears as "natural" or made to appear "natural" because, as stated before, there is not a linguistic space to discuss it in any other terms. This starts to give us more insight into how displaced workers do not seriously question the economic system. Without work in a capitalist society where everything is commoditized, alienation from the labor process cannot really be an issue. But alienation from society does exist for some people. At the same time, there is very little discourse available to express this and little linguistic space to express feelings of desperation. The popular ideology emphasizes struggle and survival--

"making do", not failure or the inability to find work. There are people on the edges of popular culture today who provide spaces for people to articulate frustrations regarding their economic and work lives. Michael Moore, through his films and books[16], is providing a discourse and space for the concerns of workers. However, I would argue that because this expression is very entertaining, almost too funny, it can be dismissed by public opinion makers. The only politician to seemingly put the working person at the center of the argument was Ross Perot, which the data did show very clearly. This includes the xenophobic and paternalism patterns as well. No Democrats and only one Republican (Pat Buchanan) were mentioned by workers to be explicitly concerned about the working person. Jesse Jackson, a politician interested in the welfare of working people, was not mentioned.

Within this sample group, the "lived experience" for many of the workers was one in which the economic system worked for most of their working careers. They "can't kick" as one worker put it. They made very good money and consumed as middle class citizens. The prevailing philosophy was that plant closings are natural, like the weather. Thus, they just had to deal with it and move on. For other workers it was devastating to a point from which they may never recover. But I argue, there is not an ethos that allows for open and honest discussion without being called a "failure".

The dominant ideology still seems to be: "Don't blame the system, blame yourself". This means that the myth of meritocracy Newman (1988) discusses probably still dominates and common sense ideology helps reproduce this dominance.

Workers need to work to provide for themselves and their families. This becomes "naturalized" or "common sense". Their experience and the categories for discussion are situated in market ideology, which includes the labor market and consumerism, but not the production process. With the Motor Wheel sample group, many of the workers were able to survive financially, further reducing the chances that they would radically challenge the tenets of capitalism beyond criticizing greedy corporate managers. It could then be possible that "[t]here is only a vast unspoken, unrecognized, ideological process that makes the commodity logic of capitalism seem normal and natural" (Foley 1990:168-69). But a diverse group of people have to identify with this ideology, even though they may interpret it in slightly different ways or not at all.

Again, Hall urges the use of language as a way to get at the point because it is "multi-referential"; different meanings can be constructed around what is apparently the same social relation or market relation. If the same relationship can be characterized differently or not characterized at all, as is the case in relations of production, the door is open for struggles over meaning.

This appears valid, especially in light of the traditional use of the dominant ideology thesis (see Ambercrombie and Turner 1981).

Foley and Hall agree that there '...is no ruling class socializing a working class" (Foley 1990:168). Without going into an entire history of ideology, it can be said that this was a first move away from a simple view that the dominant classes control the dominant ideology and thus shape the thoughts of the masses. As stated earlier, that is too simple, too functionalist, but it does provide the beginning of a more flexible concept of ideology. For example, it seemed to me that it was "common sense" for Mac that socialism is no good. Mac owns some rental properties and was describing to me what needed to be done in terms of corporations and how we need to control them as well as keep them from pitting cities against cities in America. He stopped short--saying: "But then you are getting into socialism", and the implication was that we could no longer discuss this point. Mac seemed to feel that discussing restraints on corporate behavior was not acceptable even though his own "independent" mind was leading him to say that something needed to be done.

It is no surprise that in public situations, discussing politics from a left position can lead to pejorative labeling, even in academia. Part of this comes from the new American myth that "capitalism beat communism". However,

there are signs that Marxist views are still around. Cassidy (1997) authored an article in *The New Yorker* titled "The Return of Karl Marx" which, among other things, mentions how some businessmen are taking some of Marx's criticism of capitalism seriously (i.e. the tendency of capitalism toward monopolies). This may be a small sign of a new linguistic space, but, overall, there are few areas for such discussions today.

There were times in the history of western capitalism when it was at least possible to discuss how to structurally shape the economy. Keynesian economic thought allows for that. But because of what Hall describes as an "organizational moment", when Thatcher was able to construct an "alternative ideological bloc", labor and other progressive political blocs were displaced. Hall states:

> The mission of Thatcherism was to reconstruct an alternative ideological bloc of a distinctive neoliberal, free-market, possessive individual kind; to transform the underpinning ideologies of the Keynesian state and thus disorganize the power bloc, by now habituated to Keynesian recipes for dealing with crises in the economic life; and to break the incremental curve of working-class power and bargaining strength, reversing the balance of power and restoring the prerogatives of management, capital, and control...The aim was to reconstruct social life as a whole around a return to the old values--the philosophies of tradition, Englishness, respectability, patriarchy, family, and nation (1988:39).

The similarities between Reaganism and Thatcherism are not coincidental, much like the similarities between President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair. England does offer a

heightened example because of a much more developed labor movement as compared to the United States, but the overall pattern is very similar. As several of the workers were quick to point out, President Reagan used the air traffic controllers strike as an example of how union strikers were not to be viewed with sympathy and support. This was tied to a growing anti-union sentiment across the United States. Because unions did have undeniable problems (well documented by the workers in this study) corporate managers were able to capitalize on this with the help of the state (federal government/President Reagan). Included in this mix was a media that was not the so-called "liberal media". Public opinion about unions and the poor economy in the United States was shaped in roughly the same way as in England, and the "liberal media" became increasingly controlled by corporate interests through takeovers and eventually some parts of the media took on a much more conservative voice in forming public opinion. Witness the rise in conservative talk shows and newspaper columns. Workers felt that they needed to be up to date or "modern", and for some this meant union bashing, even though they were in the union.

Because unions had well documented problems they were vulnerable to scapegoating and they were made the scapegoat in the early 1980's for the faltering economy. Obviously there were other scapegoats. Groups or people with xenophobic tendencies blamed the Japanese and the Mexicans,

and the Middle Eastern oil countries of the 1970's. Thus, to use Hall's model, part of the total reality includes the union because of the well documented problems, along with the xenophobia, the government, and greedy corporations. Not included, nor up for discussion, are the contradictions of capitalism as a historically specific and socially constructed system. This large and crucial part of the equation does not get a hearing. The power of capital can struggle with an advantage to keep the relations of production and other exploitations from being an issue. All the other variables may be considered "partial truths" or "positioned truths" (Abu-Lugohd 1991:142), the entire truth must include not just the market, but production.

Corporate America saw that in order to maintain and increase profits labor costs had to be reduced. Labor is the most direct source of profit manipulation or exploitation, as Marx predicts. By lowering labor costs in a multitude of ways from directly challenging labor at the negotiating table to layoffs and plant closings, capital gained the upper hand. This was in conjunction with an individualistic philosophy stemming from the White House as well as a nationalistic movement, evident in the workers' views in this study. As the struggle over meaning continued, it was the *corporate-led* media and President Reagan who could best organize an ideological bloc. Some Motor Wheel workers, like many workers in the 1984 presidential election, voted for

President Reagan, started to doubt unionist philosophy, and replaced it with individualistic and nationalistic sentiments. Some workers also expressed a nostalgic look back to an era which, to them, was a better time.

There is a temptation to fall back into a dominant ideology thesis to "explain" why these workers were not challenging the system. But this would be misguided. Language is multi-referential, concepts and terms may have different interpretations for different people. This allows for a more complex understanding. However, these concepts may be organized under a loose ideological bloc, and, as Hall argues, it is not absolute (Hall 1988:39), not even for Thatcher. But if the organizational moment succeeds politically, a "critical historical moment, representing a distinct phase" develops; this was the case under Thatcherism, as Hall argues (1988:53), and I argue under Reaganism. Workers from Motor Wheel passed through this moment (were participants in this moment) and thus some of them internalized the key concepts of "America", "family", "individualism", and "nationalism", to name a few, in such a way that they could support President Reagan and start to question labor policy. But some workers in this study went beyond Reagan and Bush to see Buchanan or Perot as politicians who represented them as American working people.

The use of "common sense" or what is "taken for granted" (Hall 1988:44) helps provide a better understanding

of how workers construct their views within a certain framework. Hall starts to give us some insight into how the current "common sense" is constructed. As stated above, workers, in fact all people, operate with partial knowledge of the entire capitalist system. This is partially influenced by class ideology. Also, dominant or ruling ideas do not completely shape any one person, although issues and ideas surrounding class or dominant ideas can come together at the juncture of popular culture. It is here that Hall argues the ruling ideas gain an advantage because:

> ...the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power of dominance over other modes of thought but also the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes. Ruling ideas may dominate as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable, within the given vocabularies of of motive and action available to us (1988:44).

Hall goes on to describe what mechanism allows/permits dominant ideas to have the influence they do. To the importance of language as multi-referential, Hall adds the issue of the "monopoly of the means of mental production" or as he puts it, "cultural apparatuses" (Ibid.). However, there is no guarantee that dominant ideas will be able to shape the popular ideology. Also, the so-called dominant ideas can be ones that many people from many different classes identify with because the "interests" of people are

variable. "Class is not the only determinant of social interest (e.g. gender, race). More important, interests are themselves constructed, *constituted*, in and through the ideological process" (Hall 1988:45). Chapters III and IV demonstrated that the workers in this study had many influences and interests that went beyond the workplace. Workers went beyond the workplace for ideas or information to better understand their situation. Nationalism was one source. But at the same time, nationalism was still connected to the workplace. It was also demonstrated that the interests of workers were variable and some workers chose to emphasize interpersonal relationships in their responses to the plant closing, as Charles did, while others such as Gary, emphasized nationalism and world competition. Furthermore, as Hall suggests, workers are interested in advancing in the system or at least not losing their place. This supports the idea that many of these workers are influenced by a multitude of variables and are constantly constructing and reconstructing their understanding of the plant closing and even placing it in the larger context of the world economic system. Thus, personal experience or "lived experience" is couched both within a context described above and within a context that includes, to varying degrees depending on the worker, articulation with the family/school/media triplet which distributes knowledge in a skewed way (Hall 1988:44).

One key variable, from above, that tends to have a dynamic relationship with people and institutions is the media. Larry, one of the union officials, said the media seemed to desensitize the public to the problem of plant closings. Other workers had similar feelings. "They [media] help make the 'intolerable' thinkable" (Hall 1988:47). Whether this refers to a certain amount of unemployment or the cutting of the social safety net, the media helps in forming the boundaries of "what makes good sense". If this can be translated into an organizational moment politically, then there is a very real chance for a critical historical moment, like Thatcherism, according to Hall, or Reaganism, as is argued here. Thus, hegemony forms and structures how popular ideology is actually played out or used.

Like popular ideology, hegemony is constructed and constantly reconstructed depending on how the struggle over meaning plays out (Hall 1988:53-54). By popular ideology, I mean what Hall sees as "common sense", and in the context of Motor Wheel and in the U.S. it includes at least the notions of "nationalism", "rugged individualism", and that the union for many workers is not that important. This downplaying of the significance of the union is probably a result of the anti-union 1980's, the failure of the union to keep Motor Wheel open, the concern over abuses by union leadership and the jealousy some Motor Wheel workers had for the United Auto Workers (UAW) and their level of compensation plus

their recent willingness to strike. The nationalist view seems to have been influenced by Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan, who offered a mix of xenophobia, racism, sexism, and classism (support for white "working people"). More investigation into the types of media that carry an overt and even covert political message, such as Rush Limbaugh, would be a very valid research topic/area. This would also require more participant observation as well.

Summary and Conclusions

The problem of this study is complex. We can never explain completely "why" workers view the Motor Wheel plant closing the way they do, but by allowing them to express their views in their own language, as well as asking them about other variables, a better understanding can be developed. Interpreting their views then allowed for a deeper understanding of what the workers were saying. Also, by allowing workers to describe how they felt about the closing itself, as well as corporate America, the union, government, the media, and any other areas such as education and religion, they could not easily be grouped within the three original ideal types of workers suggested by Lockwood. As the data demonstrated, many workers had widely diverging views. The differences between production workers and skilled workers had mostly to do with the ease of getting new employment with the same pay. As expected, the skilled

workers had a much easier time getting jobs that paid nearly what they were getting at Motor Wheel. However, some still had to travel. Also, many workers had a privatized tendency that may have to do with how almost all the workers are dispersed around Lansing; this was part of the end of any sense of Motor Wheel community.

When the issue of blame for high unemployment and plant closing is discussed the greed of corporate America is raised first and most often. Other areas such as world competition and the government also were blamed a great deal. And, as stated earlier, the actual responses proved to be much more valuable than trying to count how many times each area was blamed because some workers would not initially blame any area, but then they would criticize and assign blame when asked about "how they feel about each area". Hence, when the question was posed differently, different answers arose along with expanded discussion, especially during interviews. And as the data showed, workers' understanding was almost always situated in language that made their position "common sense", even though they were up against contradictory forces and their position or perspective had contradictions. However, as shown, many of their expressions were not radical but rational, given the context. Furthermore, these rational interpretations of the plant closing very often included a moral component that was expressed by focusing on the greed

of corporate America.

The sociological influences that became important in this study were current and past work experience (including the union), family and social networks, the media, and politics. Religion and education also had some impact. Another influence had to do with economic eras when many of these workers benefited from the expanding U.S. economy. It was obviously difficult to say which variables were the strongest. What was clear was that several variables often interacted to influence a worker's view.

The detailed ethnographic accounts showed how complex these workers were with their interpretations and their influences. Many workers like Jesse, Carl, Wes, Gary, and others had been thinking about the plant closing for a long time and in many ways, and therefore, ended with a variety of views. Union officials seemed to have been especially influenced by their work in relation to the union. The two union officials still working for a union, Leo and Scott, remain strong supporters of the union. The other three union officials are actually former union officials who work for OJT (On the Job Training). They are Frank, Lonnie, and Larry. They have much more conservative views, as McNally (1995) predicts, because they now work for a non-union organization that places workers and where it is probably more difficult to be critical of Motor Wheel management. I say this because all three of these people have a vast

professional network which enables them to find employment for the displaced workers. This network obviously includes managers from not only Motor Wheel, but other corporations. Thus, their more conservative views on the closing are very rational. They have come to realize, in practical terms, the power of capital and therefore seeing the closing as more or less a "natural" process of "just not being competitive." I would argue that this helps them to make sense of their world.

One reason workers are not radically criticizing the structure might be because they are constructing their understanding of deindustrialization with incomplete data. Because this plant closing happened over the course of at least ten years it resembles more of a chronic closure where workers were slowly laid off until the final closing. This could have allowed them more time to accept the closure as natural. A chronic closure of this type also has its benefits, but only to a small group of individuals. The owners of Motor Wheel seemed to reap high profits. The threat of layoffs and closures may reduce the risks of strikes, as I am sure it did in the 1980's. The layoffs and closure provided resources, as many workers argued, for the owners of Motor Wheel. Long, drawn out closures also tend to defuse public outcry and concern. This seems especially true at Motor Wheel because the actual closing took years; the final closing too was postponed several times. This, in

conjunction with the tax abatements, allowed for more profit. As the study clearly showed, many workers felt that both the owners of Motor Wheel and corporate America were very greedy.

Being a chronic closure was an interesting aspect of this study. Some workers even thought the closing process went beyond the ten years mentioned above. These workers saw the two strikes in the early 1970's as the "beginning of the end". Others saw the introduction of MBA's in the early 1980's as another prelude to the end of Motor Wheel. Still others saw the buyout by a few managers in 1986 as a third "beginning of the end". The theme that became clear, and seems to be found in other deindustrialization contexts, but not all, is that the constant threat of closures with coinciding layoffs can have a conservatizing effect on workers, as McNally (1995) argues. This was the case all through the 1980's at Motor Wheel. This was not a plant closing whereby one day the plant was open and the next day it was not. It was a long, drawn-out closure and "plant closing was a topic of discussion for ten years" causing persistent insecurity, as Wes and Betty stated. Thus, unlike some plant closings and studies where the announcement and closure are abrupt and often at the same time, this one was a prolonged closure. This may have helped cut down on explicit protest because there was always a chance, the workers said, the plant would be kept open. Thus, this

possibility could have influenced how workers reacted to the layoffs.

In some ways a chronic closure was better for a few workers because it gave them a chance to seek other employment. As the data/responses show, a few workers felt "it was about time"-- expressing relief at the closing so they could get on with their lives and figure out what they had to do next. However, for most workers, there was "no good time" for the closing. Overall, almost all of the workers felt "betwixt and between" or unsettled. This seems to be the norm today for many working Americans, union or non-union and also seems to be the norm for workers internationally. Therefore, change and insecurity may be the only constant in peoples' lives.

The major reason workers did not question the economic system more was put forth earlier in this chapter. Some worker views may point toward contradictions or problems in the economy, but the "common sense" terrain Hall describes so well does not provide a place or "linguistic context" for further development of such interpretations. This "common sense" is constructed, reconstructed and transformed, according to Hall (1988) through struggle and control over "the means of mental production". This may also help us to understand why some workers did not have much to say about the economic system--they instead focused on the specific corporation and the individuals who ran it. This was the

case many times in the research. In addition, the closing was used as a threat for a long time and then completed over a number of years, using seniority in a divisive way. This chronic closure could also represent a broader strategy of corporate America because, I would argue, it reduces workers' overt reaction to the plant closing. Furthermore, because working people are so busy working and strategizing how to adapt to the ever changing economy, they may not have the time or energy to analyze the system, especially when there are more practical issues at hand (e.g. how to make the next car or rent payment). Also, the actual sample group may be somewhat more conservative. Most of the sample group were white working class men who did make a good living at Motor Wheel even if they got only some of their pension. Many of the younger workers who were not in the study received nothing. Sure management was to blame, as many workers said, but the federal government was also allowing corporations to move and was giving money to foreign countries. This xenophobia and nationalism was not surprising and was rarely transcended. Thus, it should not be surprising that Ross Perot became the most popular political figure mentioned in the study. Further study of the Perot candidacy and television talk show popularity would enhance the understanding of the phenomena of working class support of conservative spokespersons and candidates.

Because figures like Ross Perot offer a "selective

tradition", as Raymond Williams puts it, workers are tempted to reflect back on the "good ole' days" when there was more stability and one knew one's place (Newman 1985b also discusses nostalgia). For many of these workers, their "place" in the economic chain or world economy meant a good paycheck. This generational view of economics was an influence and found expression through workers like Bryce, who said he worried that even though he did better than his parents, his children would not do as well as he (Ehrenreich 1985 as well as Newman 1988, 1993 carefully document this).

By analyzing how workers talked about this or how they developed their discourse on the plant closing, I began to move away from the structure-human agency dualism (Foley 1990:191) to incorporate voices that show "the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint" (Giroux as cited in MacLeod 1987:150). Thus, "individuals [i.e. workers losing their job] are not passive receivers of structural forces [i.e. deindustrialization]; rather they interpret and respond to those forces in creative ways" (MacLeod 1987:152). The responses, in this case, did not always follow labor's traditional overt responses such as explicit protest. They were couched instead in language that was creative and expressive, as well as personal and sometimes contradictory as Jesse, Leo, Gary, Carl, Mac, and many others demonstrated.

As many authors discussed above, I am moving beyond the earlier constructions of class culture that stressed economic determinism and homogenization. "There is no homogenous consciousness within the working class" (McNally 1995:25); these workers were "complex economic beings" (Wilk 1996). Strikes, layoffs, training, other unions (i.e. UAW), living in a dispersed community, as well as the political climate influence workers in similar yet often divergent ways. Because of this, a more fluid concept of culture is needed in order to better comprehend how workers conceptualize their situation. Foley (1990) argues for "[a] more dynamic, historical, and political concept of culture [that] is needed to describe the culture of a complex capitalist society" (Ibid.). Hall, drawing on Gramsci, allows for a more flexible and nonessentialist discussion on how the dominant hegemonic ideology is constantly constructed and reconstructed (Hall 1988:54). This study was nonessentialist and interpretations and influences were varied. This provided a path to move away from a "false consciousness" understanding of why many workers' lacked a "cultural penetration" of capitalist, hegemonic ideology or did not overtly resist the plant closing. In addition, it urges us to be much more careful with our theoretical labels. Finally, "folk constructions", influenced not only by work experience but other sociological variables such as home life and social life were found in this study and

others (see Calgione et al. 1992). Ideological messages were also present via politics and media and helped to provide a better understanding of the diversity of expression found in the context of a plant closing. The influence of spouses (Betty and Wes; Sue and Joe; June and Victor) and parents (e.g. Jesse's father) demonstrated how family and friends played a role in shaping how workers constructed their interpretations of a plant closing. The reading of business articles and texts by some workers and the referencing of political ideology of Ross Perot also demonstrated sources of influence.

All the above variables do not make it easier for people trying to "make do" in a capitalist society. Motor Wheel is a good example of how macro economic forces interacting with micro economic forces and personalities produce negative consequences for many. What makes this process especially hard to understand is the proclivity of most Americans and much of the world to see the system of capitalism as "natural". Once this ideological frame is in place as "common sense" (Hall 1988) along with the notion of "rugged individualism" it is difficult to shift or deconstruct intellectually, much less actually change. When most of society is commoditized along with its people, there is very little time and resources to tackle such a grand problem. Only when groups organize around this dilemma is there a chance that a "new social contract" (Nash 1989) can

be developed; and the new contract should involve workers from around the world, as Leo suggests. Furthermore, this "new social contract" must take into consideration not just market relations, but production relations as well. Furthermore, full employment and worker ownership must be a real possibility. This can only be done if capitalism is seen as a historically specific system. However, for this to happen, more discursive space is needed. Conceptually, we can start with Hall's acknowledgement that the market is real. Building on this idea, we can say that the "total reality" is like a circle or wheel comprised of many spokes, where the market forms one "positioned truth" or spoke. Other perspectives (spokes), such as production, are also present. Some certainly are more important than others. If space for this type of discussion is developed, "reality" can been seen to be more complex. This conceptual "reality wheel" has multiple perspectives that make up the "total reality"-- with the understanding that it is very difficult or probably impossible to understand the "total reality". Progressive social movements and their organizations are starting places for the development of this "reality wheel". Other places may be in areas where leaders are socially responsible and where issues of social justice are paramount. There is room in the main social institutions like religion, government, education, and business for this to happen.

One positive change is that it seems that more and more Americans are starting to realize that there is indeed a very distinct two-class system forming in the United States, as well as the fact that many corporate presidents and CEO's are greedy. Even writers such as Peter Drucker, who invented "the manager", feels that corporate managers are too greedy. They are reaping "...huge profits by firing their workers...' This is morally and socially unforgivable'" (Drucker as cited in Lewis 1998:5). In addition, David C. Korten, who labels himself a "traditional conservative" (1996:9), argues that corporations and world financial institutions as well as the U.S. government have harmed "third world" countries more than they have helped them in the name of development. It is valuable to have such criticism of corporations coming from the conservative end of the political and economic spectrum. Even businessmen on Wall Street are echoing Marx's view of free enterprise (Cassidy 1997:248). However, if the economic system is not taken to task, then the relations of production have very little chance to change.

Finally, one of the strongest metaphors to be used and then destroyed was that of Motor Wheel being a "family". To many workers and even management, Motor Wheel was a "family". Over the years, especially around 1980 and certainly by the 1986 buyout, "family" was gone and replaced by the concept of "being competitive". By jettisoning the

"family" metaphor, or folk construction, the new Motor Wheel management (in the context of the weakening U.S. economic hegemony over parts of the world and the need/want of record profits) justified the large scale layoffs, pay cuts, benefit reductions, and eventual closing. This was because viewing a business as a "family" was not cost effective. The compassion that usually accompanies the concept of "family" was gone; that added stress to the workers' families, as they made clear. For some workers the ending of the "Motor Wheel family" ended their own families. The term "greed" replaced "family" as the best way to describe Motor Wheel. In the end, most workers seemed to argue that "greed" was a major factor in destroying Motor Wheel. This, it should be noted, was in the context of many other variables as discussed above.

Some workers seem to be starting to apprehend the contradictory nature of capitalism and the power of capital, but are not necessarily resisting its implications. Some also have partial critiques that are not radical. These include expressions of a social contract, moral economy and the metaphor of greed. They then focus on key players or processes such as management, government, governments and corporations of foreign countries (world competition) and even the union. Many who may understand the process may have feelings of helplessness or feelings that plant closings and deindustrialization are inevitable. But, because this is a

capitalist system, where all needs and wants as well as people are commoditized, they often find themselves in contradictory positions, thus exhibiting contradictory reactions that some view as irrational (i.e. Nash 1989) while others do not (i.e. McNally 1995). The insecurities and contradictions caused by the market cannot be challenged on a large scale until the relations of production are changed so more workers own the means of production. Only then will democracy allow for a more just and efficient market that would provide for all humans fairly and consistently.

This study of folk constructions provides a richer, more dynamic, worker perspective of one plant closing. The study includes their creativity and ingenuity as well as their insecurities and inconsistencies. Some of their responses were surprising while most were very rational. The focus on greed by many workers spoke to a larger problem in American society. These workers also defied theoretical categorization, essentialism, and "false consciousness" explanations. Workers, like all people, cannot be oversimplified.

However, this study is not intended to be used to generalize across time and place, nor is it intended to be "the" plant closing story of the Motor Wheel Corporation in Lansing, Michigan. There are many more stories to be told about Motor Wheel. This is but one "positioned truth" (Abu-

Lughod 1991:142) of a larger truth constructed by one researcher and fifty people who were personally involved for much of their lives with Motor Wheel.

NOTES

1. All real names of the participants in the study have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

2. Long quotes from interviews are indented and single spaced. They can be distinguished from long survey quotes because they are prefaced with the word: "said" or a similar word. Long survey quotes are usually prefaced with "wrote" or a similar word.

3. When introducing the workers for the first time I provide their racial/ethnic category as well as whether they are production or skilled workers. This helps in differentiating between the workers.

4. The younger workers, who were impacted the most, were also the ones laid off first in the early and mid-1980s. Very few of these workers participated in the study because they had dispersed and their records were difficult to obtain.

5. Beside the large number of white workers, Motor Wheel had many employees who were Mexican American. An employee list given to me by the union shows that there were many Mexican American surnames. However, not many ended up in the sample, probably because my initial contacts were Anglos and some of the Mexican Americans might have not been able to read English. If I had been thinking less ethnocentrically I could have sent surveys in Spanish to the employees with Mexican-American surnames. This could have provided more Latino workers. However, I did have one Mexican-American worker in the sample who ended up being one of the most complex and helpful informants. Jesse is a second generation Motor Wheel worker. His brother also worked at Motor Wheel, as well as some other relatives. Jesse provided many insights through a life history, as well as short story he wrote about his Motor Wheel experience. He also provided more detail through interviews.

6. Future research could focus on the actual radio and TV programs, such as Rush Limbaugh, listened to and watched by the workers. This would mean doing more participant observation-- where the researcher would view and listen to the programs with the informant.

7. Question 18 on how workers feel about the closing will help to format the presentation of the worker views. Who or what a worker blamed for the closing may also be presented here if it helps to illuminate what a worker was feeling about the closing.

8. Questions 16 and 17 were used to gather reasons why this Motor Wheel Plant closed. This was done to elicit responses that helped workers make connections between different variables and was a way to be dialogic during interviews.

9. In some ways it would have been easier just to offer a complete view from each individual worker, but for organizational purposes and for clarity, I chose to divide the responses into their appropriate categories. Still, some responses were so intertwined, that to separate them out completely would have meant losing too much context and, therefore, understanding for the reader.

10. This shift to a cultural interpretation without ignoring structural constraints is usually attributed to E.P. Thompson and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It was there that the concept of "class culture" originated and later was utilized by various authors, especially in Britain (e.g. Hall and Jefferson 1976; Clarke et al. 1979; Clarke 1979, 1991; Willis 1979, 1981; Williams 1977, 1980; among others) and in the U.S. (e.g. Foley 1990; MacLeod 1987, 1995; among others). Thus, these works have less economic determinism, but still saw the economic structure as dominant.

11. The structures of the economic system are the most unalterable, especially to people with few resources. However, we are constantly seeing the flexible nature of capitalism and accumulation (Harvey 1991) as well as how it can be manipulated by transnational corporations and the lesser known institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

12. Foley goes to great lengths to explicate a theory of cultural reproduction and resistance through a "[s]ynthesis of Marxist class theory with ideas of communication from critical theory, symbolic interactionism, and sociolinguistics" (Foley 1990:186).

13. By using Habermas, Foley is able to employ a more philosophical version of Marx's class concept to demonstrate how people come to view each other as a "commodity" (1990:168-71). Here, "speech practices" in everyday life become a key to understanding how people come to view their world. Habermas, starting with the deterministic view of the Frankfort School, transcends it to build a "theory of communicative action" focusing on "'communicative labor' in the 'social factory' of everyday life and in 'non-productive' cultural institutions such as schools, media and families" (1990:174-75).

14. Mac made clear that he was not "not knocking" me. He

just felt that some of these MBA's did not know anything about producing wheels. All they knew about was making money by moving paper and squeezing labor and the plant. The important point here is that Mac could not identify with them or many of his fellow workers.

15. There are studies that do look at class in the cultural terms of leisure and consumption (see Halle 1994). Although Foley and many cultural reproduction theorists make clear this is not an absolute process, some people are able to change their class standing and others are able to challenge the existing relationship between technology, government, and capital. Some people and groups do resist while others "...consciously or unconsciously acquiesce to the dominant ideas and ideologies about their historical reality" (1990:190). At Motor Wheel there were workers who were doing all of the above.

Foley found people or groups who are resisting and preserving their humanity (1990:205), but he stops short of explicating his point about new critical social movements that he only acknowledges as challenging the state and "cultural life". The groups that are able to transcend this view are environmentalists, feminists, and gays, among others according to Nash (1989) and Brecher and Costello (1994). They point out that these groups are organizing and collaborating on solutions outside of the traditional structures of government and market. As many other workers in this study explain, they were very worried about how people were treated as things and not as human beings.

16. Michael Moore has been involved with workers' issues for a number of years and in a number of mediums. Starting in Flint, Michigan with the newspaper: *The Flint Voice*, Moore went on to make *Roger and Me*, a film that attempts to interview Roger Smith, the then Chairman of General Motors, on how he can lay off so many workers. There was a sequel to this called *Pets or Meat*. Moore then made *Canadian Bacon*, a movie that poked fun at the military-industrial complex. Then he created *TV Nation*, a television program dedicated to pointing out the contradictions in society through humor and satire. Finally, Moore is the author of *Downsize This!*, which takes direct aim at how corporations are destroying America through destruction of community. Moore followed this with a documentary film on his travels doing book signings in small- and medium-size towns across America. Michael Moore should be credited with providing a linguistic space for honest discussions of the economy and for workers to express their concerns and frustrations. Few people take risks like Michael Moore. Thus, it may be time for more people to take risks and provide spaces for sincere and honest discussions of capitalism.

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND SURVEY

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. Place of birth:

2. Year of birth and sex:

3. Current area of residence:
   City or township:
   County:

4. Highest level of education:

5. Marital status:

6. Number of people in your household:

7. Relationship of people in household to you:

8. Number of relatives within 50 miles of you:

9. Number of friends or relatives who lost their job at anytime because of the current plant closing or previous downsizing?

   Specify relative or friend:

   Did they lose their job because of a plant closing?

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

10. What was the title of your job when the factory closed?

11. Please describe the job:

12. How many times and for how long have you been laid off from this factory?

13. How long have you been employed by this factory?

14. How many different jobs have you had at this factory? Please describe each one:

15. What other jobs have you had in your life outside of Motor Wheel? Please describe each one:

VIEWS ON PLANT CLOSING

16. What do you think were the causes of this plant closing?

17. Who do you blame for this closing and what would have to change to eliminate closings like this?

18. Describe the feelings you felt when your job was eliminated due to layoffs or the plant closing. Are there any analogies you use to describe this or any other experiences that compare to this?

19. Do you think any of your current or previous jobs influenced how you view the plant closing? Please explain.

20. Do you think your family and friends influence how you view the plant closing? Please explain.

21. Do you think the media influences how you view the plant closing? Please explain.

22. Do you think your political affiliation influences how you view the plant closing? Please Explain.

23. Taking into consideration questions 19-22, what has influenced your views the most concerning the plant closing?
Please explain.

24. What are two main reasons for the high unemployment in the U.S.?

_____Corporate America
_____Unions
_____Government
_____Foreign Competition
_____Economic System
_____Other

Please explain your answers:

25. Please describe your feelings toward this factory. Have these feelings changed over time? If yes, why?

26. Describe your feelings toward Corporate America. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

27. Describe your feelings toward the Union. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

28. Describe your feelings toward the Federal Government. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

29. Describe your feelings toward the State Government. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

30. Describe your feelings toward the Local/City Government. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

31. Describe your feelings toward foreign competition. Have they changed over time? If yes, why?

32. Describe your feelings toward the economic system we operate in. Is this a fair system? Have your feelings changed over time? If yes, why?

UNION ACTIVITIES

33. During the last year you worked at this factory how often did you attend union meetings? Has this changed over your years at this factory? Explain.

34. Have you held any union positions? If so which ones?

35. Since the announcement of this closing have you called upon your fellow workers for advice, help or coun[se]l?

36. How important has the union been to you during your years at this factory? Please explain.

37. Do you spend much time with fellow worker/union members outside of this factory? If so, how much and what do you do?

38. Have you ever socialized with non-union employees at this factory? If so, what were their positions and how have you socialized with them? Has this changed over time?

FAMILY AND FRIEND NETWORK

39. Who do you socialize with the most? Were any of them Motor Wheel employees?

40. How will this plant closing affect your family life?

41. How will this plant closing affect your relationship with your friends outside of this factory?

HEALTH

42. How has the threat and eventual plant closing affected your health?

43. How will the loss of employment affect your health coverage?

FINANCIAL AND OTHER CHALLENGES

44. What do you anticipate doing for income after the plant closing?

45. How will you adjust to the changing income associated with the plant closing?

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW

46. Would you like to be interviewed by me? I would ask follow-up questions and discuss the plant closing in general. I would meet you at any location chosen by you. The interview would last as long as you want. Generally, they last from half an hour to two hours.
If yes, please provide your current phone number:_____.

LIFE HISTORY

47. Could you describe your life history. This will obviously be a very lengthy answer. If you like you can describe your life history to me if you allow me to interview you. If you choose to answer this question here you can do it by describing your life in general and include significant events or influences. Use extra paper if needed.

I realize this has been a long survey, but I greatly appreciate your knowledge and insights. Thank you again. Some questions adapted from Perrucci et al. (1988).

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