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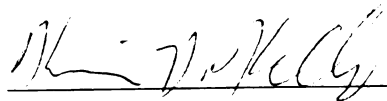
**A TALE OF TWO STRIKES: THE DIFFERENTIAL
EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN UNSUCCESSFUL
STRIKES AND SUCCESSFUL STRIKES**

presented by

Joshua Sean Smith

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

MA degree in Sociology



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**A TALE OF TWO STRIKES:
THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN
UNSUCCESSFUL STRIKES AND SUCCESSFUL STRIKES**

By

Joshua Sean Smith

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ABSTRACT

A TALE OF TWO STRIKES: THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN UNSUCCESSFUL AND SUCCESSFUL STRIKES

By

Joshua Sean Smith

This paper explores the relationship of strike participation upon class consciousness, as defined by Marx, within the working-class. Initially, it was hypothesized that workers participating in successful strikes would exhibit a less developed class consciousness than workers who participated in a successful strike. In-depth personal interviews were the selected method, concentrating upon the quality of the responses and the spoken words of the participants. Although the set of respondents is too small to make any sweeping generalizations, those workers who participated in an unsuccessful strike exhibited the elements of a more highly developed class consciousness than those who participated in a successful strike. Ultimately, this study points the way towards further research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the impact of strikes in the formation of class consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer the following research question: is there a difference in the subjective effects of participating in a strike between those who participated in a short-term relatively successful strike and those who participated in a long-term relatively unsuccessful strike? Particular attention is given to the participants' development of a class consciousness and a model is offered to explain the differences between the two groups.

This paper also seeks to address a current imbalance in the scholarly literature on strikes. Most recent sociological literature on the subject approaches strikes from a quantitative methodology; the actual lived experience of the workers themselves is generally ignored. The working-class, in general, is missing from intellectual discourse, as noted by Kornblum (1974, p. 3-4). This study focuses on the lived experiences of members of the working-class, and hopefully serves as a small step towards remedying the current scholarly imbalance.

It is also important to note some of the base assumptions that have guided this research project. This paper is informed with a Marxist theoretical orientation; although this approach has fallen out of fashion as of late, it is of particular importance in studying and understanding strikes. Notably, the idea that class conflict is inherent in all class based

societies (Marx and Engels 1978, p. 56, 244). In a capitalist society, which certainly describes the United States presently, workers are compelled to organize into labor unions in order to collectively fight for their class interests (Marx and Engels 1978, p. 64; Lenin 1978, p. 60).

Although class conflict is inherent to all-class based societies, strikes are the form of conflict unique to capitalism (Hyman 1972, p. 169). Lenin states, “it is a fact that in every country with a capitalist system there are strikes of workers”(1978, p. 60) . Strikes date back to the earliest period of capitalism, to early nineteenth-century England (Marx and Engels 1987, p. 3-4). Strikes are a social fact of capitalism.

A less tangible concept of central importance is class consciousness. Marx (1978), as noted above, felt that workers are compelled to collectively struggle against capitalists. At first this struggle is individual and sporadic; at later stages, as workers are brought together in more centralized work places, they begin to identify their interest collectively and in opposition to the collective interests of capital (Marx 1967, p. 68-79) The definition of class consciousness used in this study is four-fold: 1) an understanding that the interests of workers are collective; 2) that these interests are opposed to those of the wealthy and corporations; 3) that unions are a vehicle for workers to further their interests; 4) more radically left-leaning political beliefs. The extent to which the individuals studied hold each of these values is the basis for determining the development of their class consciousness¹.

¹ This is similar to a definition of worker's consciousness offered by Perrucci, et al (1985), which consisted of 1) awareness of and identification with the interests of other workers; 2) awareness and rejection of the interests of management and ownership; 3) readiness to support political action that advances the

These assumptions are important to note, for in the world of bourgeois economists, notably the neo-classical and Austrian schools², workers and capitalists do not have opposed interests; under such assumptions, unions can only be considered irrational, as can strikes. This means that participation in unions, as collective organizations of the working-class, and strikes, as collective conflicts between capital and labor, are due to a lack of perspective of the participants--essentially, their ignorance. This rather shallow set of assumptions are best countered by the above noted assumptions.

Moreover, within sociology, the concepts of class struggle and even class have seemingly disappeared; Marxism is considered “unscientific.” In such an environment, it is necessary to acknowledge the basic premises informing a Marxist approach of a given subject.

interests of workers (p. 251).

² There is consensus in the Austrian school, for example, on the point that unions are a “threat to the liberal competitive order” (Steele 1993, p. 74); that unions retard wage competition, negatively affecting economic conditions for other workers, “if a union achieves a wage higher than each individual could get by himself, the loss of revenue will be borne by those excluded from the market . . . The unemployed or would-be entrants, for instance” (Shand 1984, p. 131-2); and the sentiment that wage competition is not only good, but just, as “the price for the factors of production tend to reflect the demand for them” (Osterfeld 1988, p. 81). There is, of course, no mention of social class in any of the reviewed literature.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The sociological literature on strikes, as noted in the introduction, is primarily quantitative in its methodological approach, particularly the journal literature³ (Stoner and Rajarora 1987; Perrucci, Perrucci, Targ, and Targ 1985; Rubin 1988; Turnbull, Morris, and Sapsford 1996; Grant and Wallace 1991; Skeels, McGrath, and Arshanapalli 1988; Church Outram, and Smith 1991; Humphries 1990; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1991; Olzak 1989). The study of Perrucci, et al, (1985) of a plant closing in Indiana is most relevant to this study, as it is similar to the experience of one of the groups of workers studied. The Stoner and Rajarora (1987) study focused on the psychological health of strikers, is also of interest to this paper.

There are criticisms, other than mine, of this fetishism of quantitative methods in the sociology of work. Oestreicher (1993) notes that the tendency of many studies to be driven by a purely quantitative results in the following problem, “. . . questions which do not lend themselves as readily to quantification receive less attention” (p. 543). Simpson (1989) critiques research into the sociology of work for ignoring the actual workers it purports to be studying. “In my opinion, we have learned very little about work and

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There are reams of qualitative studies of strikes in history journals, notably Labor History. None were relevant to this study, but such studies would serve as excellent sources of future sociological analysis.

workers” from quantitative studies (p. 579).

The literature outside of the scholarly journals exhibits greater diversity in methodological approaches. Cohn’s (1993) study of French Third Republic coal miners is a highly relevant study of various union strategies and the levels of success associated with them. Cohn found that short strikes are more strongly associated with successful conclusions (from the workers’ perspectives). The longer a strike lasts, he posits, the more can an employer shift production to other facilities or employ replacements; capital has deeper pockets than labor (p. 217-19). He also found that more militant tactics on the part of the union are more likely to produce solid contracts for the workers involved (p. 213).

Most exhaustive of all, both in terms of sheer mass of data and analytical rigor, is Franzosi’s (1995) study of the post-war Italian labor movement. His ambitious project synthesized quantitative and qualitative methods; Franzosi was mindful of the inadequacies of a purely quantitative approach (1995, p. xvii). Franzosi (p. 72) found that increases in employment tend to be correlated to increased strike activity, a phenomenon noted earlier by Marx in 1853 (1987, p. 41) and Knowles (1952, p. 148).

In addition, a strong, albeit under-appreciated tradition exists in sociology of qualitative studies of working-class people and communities (Rubin 1994; Kornblum 1974; Chinoy 1955; Feldman and Betzold 1988). Another study by Bendix (1956) of managerial ideology and worker control, would be of use in a more exhaustive study of industrial conflict. These studies were of great importance in guiding the methodological approach of this study, and a great debt is owed to them.

The most important of these studies was Chinoy's 1955 study of autoworkers in Lansing, Michigan. He found industrial workers to be in a contradictory position: they largely accept the American cultural aspiration of upward mobility and financial success, but they have little opportunity to achieve these (p. 4, 123). This contradiction is partially resolved by redefining success. Instead of upward mobility and wealth, success comes to be identified with security--stable, well-paying employment (p. 124-5). Still, this only partially resolves the conflict, and the workers are faced with the fact that they will likely remain factory workers. The result is a general sense of discontent (p. 128).

This is even more problematic in the current era of downsizing. Feldman and Betzold (1988), in their study of autoworkers in the Detroit area, pointed out that the traditional working-class goals of security and stability are increasingly in jeopardy (p. 12-13, 281-90).

METHODOLOGY

Two groups were studied, one group having participated in a short and relatively successful strike and the other having participated in a long, unsuccessful strike. UPS workers were chosen for the former, Melling Drop Forge strikers for the latter. The UPS strike lasted from August 4 through August 18 of 1997 (Gabory 1997, p. 1+). The company met the major demands of the union.⁴ The Melling Drop Forge strike has been ongoing since November 18 of 1996 (*The State News* 1997, p.1). The strike reached its height of militancy in late May and early June of 1997. A mass rally on May 29 was dispersed by the use of tear gas by the Lansing Police (Piatt and Bauza 1997, p. A1+). A police summit in Lansing on May 30 was attended by nearly 250 people, many of whom were angry Melling protesters; the only response issued by the Lansing Police Department was the following statement given by a department spokesperson: "Tear gas is the most efficient way of dispersing crowds without causing injury" (Bauza 1997, A1+). The company has hired replacement workers and it seems unlikely that the workers of UAW Local 724 will ever return to work at Melling (Piatt 1997, p. C1+).

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Specifically, UPS agreed to continue to allow the pension fund to remain under union control and to bring more part-time workers to full-time status (Gabory 1997, p.1+).

These strikes meet the defined criteria.

It is worth noting that both groups of participants are from the Lansing area. Lansing is a medium sized industrial city possessing a highly unionized workforce⁵.

The selection of participants was began by calling the respective locals; the purpose of the study was explained and list of members was solicited. Neither local was amenable to the idea of giving out a list of their membership. The Teamsters local offered to provide a list of individuals interested in participating in the study. Eventually given a list of three people was offered, each of whom was reached and for which interviews were scheduled. One of the UPS workers was not home at the time of the interview and innumerable phone calls to the person's home were not answered. A replacement could not be located, so the study had to proceed with only two individuals from the UPS group.

The UAW local suggested that directly participants could best be found on the picket line. Initially, it was difficult to find workers who were interested in participating. Although all of the people spoken to were interested in the study, most of them felt that they had nothing of importance to say, despite assertions to the contrary (Field Notes, p.1). Eventually, workers were found who agreed to participate in the study.

In-depth personal interviews were the chosen method. There were areas of inquiry and a set of specific questions, but, following Dexter (1970, p, 110), the interviews attempted to be more of a discussion than an interrogation. This seemed to make the participants more relaxed; Dexter (1970, p. 110) finds that this is more likely to produce accurate

⁵ The population of Lansing in 1990 was 127,321 (*World Almanac* 1996, p. 405).

responses. Babbie (1992, p. 293-6) dichotomizes interviews into structured (survey research) and unstructured (field research); the interviews used in this study were semi-structured. All of the interviews took place in the respondents' homes; notes were taken and each interview was recorded onto cassette.

In-depth personal interviews are able to provide a glimpse into the thoughts and experiences of respondents in a way that survey research cannot. This paper will seek to draw upon the strength of this methodology, the rich and detailed thoughts and opinions of the respondents.

There are several possible criticisms of the methodology used in this study. Dexter (1970, p. 120) notes that the responses of participants are only the opinions they hold at a given moment in time, under certain circumstances. It is, therefore, possible that, had conditions been different, the responses may have been different. Of course, it may be the case that the respondents are simply lying. This is a flaw inherent in any method that uses personal opinions or recollections, including survey research. It is hoped, however, that the informal method minimized this.

Another criticism of the methodology used in this study is the small number of participants. This makes it impossible to make any broad conclusions about strikes in general. Fortunately, what the data lacks in size it makes up for in quality. Moreover, in analyzing the data, I will concentrate upon the individuals involved using a model based on a larger quantitative study⁶ by Perrucci, et al.

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This interplay between quantitative and qualitative methods illustrates the most useful aspects of both approaches: the dialectical interaction between the two synthesizing various aspects about a given sociological phenomenon and reaching a higher state of knowledge than is possible in isolation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The best way to summarize the results is to use, as much as possible, the words of the respondents. The strength of the in-depth interview is that it allows the participants to respond in their own words. This was used effectively by Lillian Rubin (1994) in *Families on the Fault Line*. She presents lengthy passages from her interviews and extensive quotes from her respondents. This allows her to give a portrait of the subjective lives of the workers she interviewed and gives a richness to her subsequent analyses.

UPS

As mentioned previously, there were two respondents in the UPS group. Both were males, one Hispanic and one white, both approximately in their 30's. An important finding was that both of the respondents are making more money (per hour) than before the strike⁷. Both respondents implied that they were satisfied with their present contracts (Interview Notes, P. 2-6). When asked to self-rate their social class, both individuals chose middle class (Interview Notes, p.1). Respondent 1, when asked why he

⁷ \$.75 to \$1 per hour more, as reported by the respondents (Interview Notes, p.1)

chose that particular designation, said “Most of my friends seem middle class. It seems like I live at a middle class level, from the media” (Interview 1)

Respondent 2 was uncertain initially. “That’s a hard question to answer.” I asked which he would choose if the choices were lower, middle, and upper. His responses displayed a desire for social mobility: “I guess middle-class, but I want to move up to upper-middle class” (Interview 2).

The respondents were somewhat ambiguous in their attitudes towards politics and unions. Respondent 1 changed from voting Republican to voting Democratic, and his responses were more consistent than the second respondent’s:

Q: What do you think of the congress and the president, considered separately?

R1: Uh . . . they [congress] flop around, so its hard to tell. I still think most of the Congress is big-business oriented . . . the president is more union oriented.

Q: Are government policies oriented towards working people or the wealthy and big business?

R1: I think with NAFTA and all that stuff there, its more oriented towards big business. Local government, I would say, now supports unions. I think both our strikes (UPS and Melling) have gained sympathy. (Interview 1)

Respondent 2, when he was asked about the impact of the strike on his political beliefs had the following to say:

R2: Do you mean country-wide, in general, or what?

Q: In general.

R2: No, it really hasn’t changed much.

Q: What do you think of the congress and the president, considered separately?

R2: I’ve never really had too much of an interest in it [politics]. It seems like they [politicians] always get their way no matter what.

Q: Are government policies oriented more towards working people or the wealthy and large corporations?

R2: It seems like they make a lot of laws right now that are pretty beneficial to people that are wealthy . . . seems like middle class people really have to struggle. A lot of things government asks for, we [the middle class] have to give, even though

we're not involved besides the income we pay. (Interview 2)

The statements of Respondent 2 are indicative of a sense of alienation from the political system. He sums up his thoughts on politics with, "It's a crude world. I wouldn't want to be in it" (Interview 2).

The respondents' thoughts on unions yielded similar responses. Neither respondent reported the union as having a significant impact upon their lives; neither indicated that they had become more or less supportive of unions as a result of the strike (Interview notes, p. 2-3). Respondent 1: "... I personally haven't become more unionized or less unionized as a result of the strike" (Interview 1).

Respondent 2 was more elaborate in his response:

R2: I've seen both sides of the fence. I've never had any problems with the company or the union.

Q: Has the union had a major impact upon you life?

R2: Well, I pay union dues every month.

Q: Just that

R2: Well, I can't say that. I don't know if you've ever worked for a union company before. It's totally different. I've worked union and non-union shops. I guess the management's a lot different. UPS is probably on of the toughest companies to work for in the nation--it takes a lot out of you. One of the reasons we are union is because we have to put up with so much stress, time commitments . . . I am glad we have a union. (Interview 2)

This said, and although he reported no change in his attitudes towards unions, he had this to say when summing up his experience with the strike:

A lot of turmoil in the household, uncertainties, et cetera. It made me think quite a bit about unions and working for a union, and if I still want to be in a union environment. If I could, I'd try to get out of a union environment . . . So much of it [the work process] is out of your control . . . being in a union shop there are so many uncertainties. You're basically at their [the union's] mercy. (Interview 2).

This is very interesting, especially given that the strike was largely successful and could be seen as a sign of empowerment for the workers involved.

Both respondents noted a shift in the way the strike was conducted. Initially, the focus was on the specific grievance with UPS. In the course of the strike, however, the union strategy shifted. The union made the case that it was a stand for all union members (Interview Notes p. 2). Respondent 1 noted the following. “At the beginning it was fighting for us. Somewhere in between a bigger cause. Then they started to focus more on issues that affected all union members . . . The more they pushed that issue, the more the news media was apt to come out, and they did. And people worry about those issues . . .” (Interview 1).

The statements of Respondent 2 corroborate this opinion. He has some interesting comments about the leadership of the Teamsters and unions in general.

R2: The biggest thing was the pension fund. They [Teamsters] didn’t want to turn over the pension fund for UPS employees to UPS. And I kind of agree with the company on that. . . With [former Teamster President] Carey it wasn’t just a strike for UPS employees, but a statement to all unions throughout the nation that we have to stand together against these major corporations. But I saw him in the spotlight, and so did a lot of other employees, and thought it was political on his part.

Q: Do you think that the media is anti-union?

R2: Absolutely. Oh yeah. In a heartbeat. We’re getting smaller and smaller--unions--throughout the nation. Our numbers are declining . . . We’re becoming endangered, almost like a bald eagle. Protected but endangered. (Interview 2)

Both individuals display something of a class consciousness, albeit in an embryonic form. They seem to have an understanding that government policies are generally directed towards the benefit of wealthy individuals and large corporations. Respondent 2 at times he indicates a high degree of class consciousness; he is aware that he benefits

from being in a union and that the media is anti-union, yet he also questions his desire to remain in a union. When the UPS strike became linked, by Carey, to broader issues affecting all union members, he saw this as politically motivated. Respondent 1 seemed to be more consistent, but neither respondent could be described as politically radical. For instance, neither respondent reported any problems with the police (Interview Notes, p. 3).

As a result of the strike, both respondents seem to perceive more tension in the workplace (Interview Notes, p. 3-6). As noted previously, Respondent 2 found himself questioning his interest in remaining in a union due to workplace tension, among other factors.

Respondent 1 noticed a significant difference between the way management treated workers before and after the strike. "Looking back, it was kind of strange. The company was trying to buy people--parties, social events. After the strike it ended. Local management hasn't forgiven us" (Interview 1).

Neither respondent reported any effects on their physical health. Both, however, expressed an increased sense of worry as their current contract approaches its end and another strike becomes possible. Although they both live at the same level of comfort as they did before the strike, they both plan to save more in preparation for the possibility of future strikes (Interview Notes, p. 4).

R1: I wasn't one of these guys that lives paycheck to paycheck . . . still, we cut back [during the strike] waiting for the long haul. A lot of uncertainty, but it really didn't hurt me. . . "

Q: How has the strike had an effect upon your financial future?

R1: Well, we're more cautious about how we spend money; [we] save more, look a

little more in the long term. (Interview 1)

Respondent 2 expressed similar concerns, although he appeared a bit more worried:

R2: Approaching the end of this contract, six months or a year, we'll be saving more. You betcha.

Q: So there's more uncertainty approaching the end of this contract than in the past?

R2: Yes. I think everybody, not just people that work for this corporation, but as a nation, the media, everyone's gonna be looking at us . . . Six months ahead of time we'll have to put money away, money that's accessible.

Q: How has this impacted your financial worries?

R2: It starts right now [the worries]. It's taking place as we speak.

The support of family members tends to be correlated with reduced stress levels in strike participants (Stoner and Rajarora 1987, p. 68-9)). For this reason, participants were asked about the reaction of their family members and the importance of these reactions.

Both of the UPS respondents are married; both reported that the reaction of their spouses were important to them (Interview Notes, p. 1, 6). Both of their spouses, initially, were pro-company and against the strike, possibly because the company sent out propaganda to the spouses of employees, as noted by respondent 1 (Interview Notes, p. 6).

R1: At the beginning my wife was totally pro-company. Most of the wives were . . . as the days went through the strike and they actually heard what was going on they came more to the union side, but not totally. They said 'you guys go ahead and fight it out.' You see, what the company did was send all the propaganda home straight to the wives. So they were reading all this stuff, but were only reading one side of it. When they started seeing both sides of the issue, they said 'This stuff [company propaganda] doesn't make any sense'. (Interview 1)

The wife of respondent 2 was anti-union before the strike, which caused conflict at home.

R2: She was pretty upset, at the union actually. Pretty anti-union . . .

Q: Was her reaction important to you?

R2: Well, of course it was important.

Q: Did you feel like you were caught in the middle?

R2: It was like catch-22, yeah, sure . . . She's anti-union, doesn't know anything about the union, doesn't work in a union environment. So I'd say she doesn't understand unions.

Wife: I don't agree with unions.

R2: Yeah, she hates unions.

Respondent 1, however, felt that the strike brought him closer to his family. I asked him if he thought his family was close. He said "very close." Are you more close since the strike. "Yes" (Interview 1). He found his family to be emotionally supportive during the strike (Interview Notes, p. 6). He also reported that the strike brought him closer to his co-workers:

R1: Well, it brought us a lot closer. We learned a lot about each other out there, got to meet their families. Even to this day when someone asks you to do something, you feel more obligated. Before, it was like, 'I'm in a rush, I gotta get home.' Now it's 'sure, I'll help you.'

Q: So you depended on each other on the picket line?

R1: We had a thing in common, we were there for each other. (Interview 1)

Respondent 2 was more ambiguous. He found that the strike brought him closer to some of his co-workers, but more distant from others (Interview Notes, p. 3).

Q: Did the strike bring you closer to your co-workers?

R2: Closer in what way?

Q: Are you more likely to consider them as friends than just co-workers?

R2: Maybe more distant from some people I didn't want to see anyway (laughs), so it worked out to my advantage. Closer, No. The way the union had the picket line structured you were always out with the same group of people. I got to see some people I'd never seen before, so from that angle it was kinda nice. . .

It was interesting to meet some of the guys that had been there 25, 26 years. One guy had been there 29 years. What would it be like to be that guy? His last year and he's out on strike. (Interview 2)

Both respondents agreed that as a result of the experience of participating in the strike that they are more likely to listen to others and empathize with their problems.

Respondent 1 found that, "I listen more to other people, to what they're saying. I take

more time with people” (Interview 1). Respondent 2 experienced a similar effect:

- R2: Yeah, it gives me a better understanding of the effects it had when we went on strike. Uncertainties--if we're gonna have a job next week, all these things . . . It wasn't just me--it was a large group that went through this stuff
- Q: Has it made you more understanding of other people's problems?
- R2: Oh sure. Yeah. I know where they're coming from.

In general, the results for the UPS group were ambiguous--not a surprising result with such a small number of participants. The level of accord on tensions in the workplace, the positive affects of collective action with co-workers, and the beneficial aspects of belonging to a union warrant further research into the topic.

The fact that both participants noted a bias towards big business and the wealthy in government policy is also interesting. These individuals exhibit an embryonic class consciousness. The ambiguity about unions on the part of respondent 2 and the fact that neither individual explicitly identified their interests as workers with those of other workers shows that it is not a strongly developed class consciousness, which also warrants further research.

Melling

The ongoing Melling Drop Forge strike is set within the context of nearly 20 years of wage and benefit concessions. The strike centers around a company proposal that cut wages and benefits \$9 per hour and the termination of health coverage for current employees and retirees (Martin 1997, p, A1+). It seems as if there is little chance of the strike coming to a successful conclusion for the members of UAW Local 724. Cohn

(1993, p. 217-19) found, in his study of coal miners' strikes in the Third Republic that longer strikes are generally less successful than short ones. As strikes increase in length, management can shift production to other facilities or hire replacement workers; the latter has happened at Melling. Knowles (1952, p. 125) notes that scabs are often used to break strikes. The events at Melling fit a model of deunionization put forth by Block, et al (1996, p. 29-30). The company puts forth demands that it knows the union will not accept, forcing the workers to go on strike. The company then hires replacement workers; a decertification vote usually follows. In fact, the Melling strikers are worried about a decertification vote taking place (Piatt 1997, p. 2C; Field Notes, p. 2).

As a result of this, the workers have been financially devastated. One of the respondents interviewed in this group is employed; the other two are disabled and living on strike pay of \$150 per week (Interview Notes, p. 1, 4). Perrucci, et al (1985, p. 241) in their study of a plant closing in Indiana that, after 8 months, only 71% of the displaced workers were employed. Those employed made only 67% of their former wages.

Respondent 1⁸ is employed full-time. "Before the strike I was at \$13.17 per hour, and after I started at \$8.25 per hour" (Interview 3). When asked if he lived at the same level of personal comfort, he replied, "Yeah, but I work a lot more hours." (Interview 3). So you live at the same level, but have to spend more time to get it? "Yes, but I take the over-time if they offer it" (Interview 3).

The effect on the other two respondents has been more severe. Respondent 2 had to

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Since the results are discussed separately, the respondents for each group are labeled according to the order of the group they participated in.

move back in with his mother.

R2: I can't afford to do nothin' anymore. You know how hard it is to move back in with your mother after you've lived on your own for 10 years? . . . Well, it's hard to say 'I need some help mom, I can't survive on my own.' She said 'move back in', which helped me out a lot, 'cos I'd have nothing [otherwise]. That's a pretty good deal. (Interview 4)

Respondent 3 has also been economically devastated. "I don't spend any money . . . the food bank feeds me" (Interview 5). This has adversely affected his diet. "Eating from a food bank, I eat a lot more canned goods and less fresh produce" (Interview 5).

Their plans for retirement have been impacted, a phenomenon not experienced by the UPS workers.

Q: How has this affected your future financial plans?

R1: Well, uh, it put quite a crimp in them (laughs). I was hopin' maybe I could retire someday. I have to put some more years into workin' now . . . I was hopin' to maybe retire out, get a part-time job, and use that money [his pension] for my real retirement, and it doesn't look like that'll happen now.

Respondent 2 is disabled. He was able to work at Melling largely through the help of his co-workers. He does not think that employers will be willing to hire him, and his financial future looks grim (Interview Notes, p. 2, 4).

Q: How has the strike affected your financial worries?

R2: I try not to worry about money, 'cos if I worried about money, I'd be worried all the time. . . I was lookin' forward to my 30 years and gettin' done with workin' . . . I would've been 48 when I retired--if this company wouldn't have fucked us over. That's how they did it. They bent us over and screwed us, and it didn't feel good either. (Interview 4).

This is hard on a man who has spent his entire adult life working. Rubin (1994, p. 104-5) notes the affects of unemployment on working-class males. It destroys their sense of identity, which is largely structured around their jobs and their ability to provide for

themselves. Respondent 2 is all too aware of this: “It looks like I’m gonna be a mooch for the rest of my life, it looks like now, and I don’t wanna be a mooch” (Interview 4).

Respondent 3 is also disabled and the impact of the strike on his retirement plans has not been positive. “It’s hard to say right now . . . It’s obviously impacted them and I can’t make any plans” (Interview 5).

Owens’ (1994, Introduction, p. 67) series of interviews with British coal miners displaced by a 1984 strike found many of them to be angry. This overall sentiment is, perhaps, best summed up by Respondent 2:

I’m angry I guess (laughs). I busted my ass for 10 years in a hell hole and I’ve got nothin’ to show for it now . . . ‘Cos corporate sons-of-bitches took my work away . . . I’m more mad about what they did to those people [with 20 or 30 years in at Melling] than I am about what they did to me. (Interview 4).

The strike has not had a positive impact upon their economic well-being, but they did report some positive affects in other areas. Two of the respondents reported a renewed faith in the kindness of others and the generosity of the community. Respondent 1 states, “I can’t believe how generous people have been with those strikers . . . I think people have given \$120,000 to those strikers⁹” (Interview 4). Respondent 3 said, “I’ve received a lot of support from the community. And, I guess I would have to say it has changed my perception of it . . . I’d have to say it has improved¹⁰” (Interview 5).

Respondent 2, however, has become disillusioned. Although he has received

⁹ Respondent 1 had over 30 years in at Melling, so he does receive a limited pension. Moreover, since he is now employed he refers to the strikers in the third person, perhaps distancing himself from an unpleasant experience (Interview 4).

¹⁰ Respondent 3 has repaid this generosity by donating time to charitable organizations (Interview Notes, p. 5)

substantial support from his union¹¹, he does not view people as positively as he did before the strike:

Well, it's altered the way I perceive most Americans. Let me reword that--some Americans. I don't think they know what it means to be American, I don't think they know what the first name of the country stands for, United. I don't think most people care if it don't happen to them--and that's a damn shame. (Interview 5)

Respondents 2 and 3 also reported that the strike brought them closer to their co-workers (Interview Notes, p. 3). "We're all united" as a result of the strike, according to Respondent 2 (Interview 4). Respondent 3 said the strike has "drawn us closer together and there has been a bonding," He stated that it was not a particularly close-knit group before the strike, "but it is now" (Interview 5). Respondent 1 said that he felt more distant from his former co-workers as a result of the strike (Interview Notes, p. 3).

The respondents did not report any negative psychological affects resulting from the strike, other than those that can be inferred from the above information. Respondent 3 did say that he was sometimes more irritable, but overall, this is surprising given the severity of the economic impact on the participants (Interview Notes, p. 5). Stoner and Rajarora (1987, p. 68-9) found that having significant savings and participating in a short strike tend to positively impact strikers' psychological health. Both of the UPS respondents had enough savings to weather the strike, and the strike was brief, so it is not surprising that they did not experience any harmful psychological affects. In fact, respondent 1 of the Melling group reported that he feels better about himself now than he did before the strike (Interview 4); this may be due to the fact that among the Melling

¹¹ "It's been paying strike pay, health insurance--it's been helping out as much as it can" (Interview 5).

participants he has fared the best economically since the strike.

Perrucci, et al, (1985, p. 244) found that displaced workers tend to have increased rates of depression than employed workers. Stoner and Rajarora (1987, p. 68-9) also found that a high degree of commitment to the union had a positive impact upon strikers' psychological health, which possibly played a role in mitigating the negative effects of a lengthy strike and severe financial impact for the Melling participants--all three exhibited a strong commitment to their union and unionism in general (Interview Notes, p. 1-2).

The most interesting difference between the two groups of individuals studied was the presence of a more highly developed class-consciousness in the Melling group. Whereas the UPS workers displayed an embryonic, at times ambiguous class-consciousness, the Melling workers left little to doubt. This was true both in their political beliefs and their attitudes towards unions¹².

Respondent 1, when asked to describe his political beliefs, said:

R1: I guess you'd have to say sort of socialistic. Unionism, you know, everyone sharing in one common goal. I don't consider myself to be a socialist per se, but I guess that I'm really kinda left of center.

Q: How would you describe your attitude towards your union?

R1: The union? My basic faith in the union is still around and I think it is really necessary we have them . . . The last 10 years its been management [on the offensive]. . . And as a union member, I think I'm still paying for Reagan being in there. When he fired all of the PATCO workers, that did, I'm telling ya, that strike right there did more harm for the common, ordinary working man than anything else that's happened in my lifetime.

Q: Has being in a union, then, had a beneficial impact on your life?

R1: Overall, yeah. Even with all the downsizing over the years with our company, it would have been much worse had we not been organized. No doubt in my

¹² The extent to which "unionism" can be equated with class-consciousness is debatable. It is not the intent of the present analysis to equate the two. It must, however, be noted that "unionism" is an important aspect of class-consciousness.

mind. (Interview 3)

A self-described liberal Democrat, he had harsh words for Republicans: “Well, with the Republican congress, they’ve certainly helped out the more affluent part of the populace” (Interview Notes, p. 2; Interview 3). He had the following comment concerning Governor Engler: “Engler is always right there to try and take something away from the workers” (Interview 4). He did not think that his political views had changed as a result of the strike (Interview Notes, p. 2-4)

Nor did Respondent 3, who was quite radical in his political views. When asked about his political party affiliation, he bluntly stated “I really don’t belong to a party. I consider myself to be an anarchist” (Interview 5). He self-rated his social class as proletariat; when asked why he chose this, he replied, “Proletariat means working-class. That’s what I am” (Interview 5).

His attitude towards his union remains strong, as shown by the following extract from the interview:

Q: Has your attitude towards your union changed since the strike?

R3: (After a lengthy pause) Well, I guess I don’t think there should be a need for unions, but there is because of companies’ attitudes, capitalist attitudes. In a perfect world there’d be no need for unions--wouldn’t need one.

Q: What do you think of the actions taken by your union during the strike . . . ?

R3: They’ve been looking out for us. They’ve been helping us survive. They’ve been doing what they’re supposed to.

Q: Are you glad that you’re in a union?

R3: Yes. If you’re working for a place with an attitude like this one, a union is necessary.

His responses, when asked about government, were also illuminating:

Q: What do you think about the congress and the president, considered separately?

R3: It doesn’t impress me.

Q: What's wrong with it?

R3: It's not accomplishing anything it says it wants to accomplish, like health insurance . . . It's too middle-of-the-road.

Q: Do you think that the policies of the federal government help the wealthy or working people?

R3: Wealthy

Q: Do you think that government--local, state, and federal--supports unions?

R3: No . . . it supports corporations first, unions second . . . Even the Democrats put unions second. (Interview 5)

Respondent 2 was the only one who thought that the strike had changed his political views. Before I began to ask any questions, he stated, "I have no confidence in America anymore. I think the united part ought to be changed to corporate--Corporate States of America. That's the way I see it right now. It's real bad" (Interview 4).

Later in the interview when asked if he thought that the strike had an impact upon his political views, he responded:

R2: Big impact. It's changed my political beliefs all around . . . Makes me mad, I mean, a lot of 'em ain't true, what I thought were my political beliefs--I mean they [Melling] just said 'Cut 'em off, throw 'em out the door.' I guess the United States of America should change their name to Corporate States of America as far as I'm concerned.

Q: You definitely did not feel that way before the strike?

R2: No, I didn't. I thought this country was a good country. I have my doubts now.

Q: Does the government help working people or corporations?

R2: Right now, at this day and time, it'd be corporations. The rich man, the man with money.

Q: You feel pretty strongly about that statement?

R2: Definitely.

Q: Does government--local, state, and federal--support unions?

R2: All in all, I think government is pretty anti-union all across the board. (Interview 4)

Respondent 2 also had some interesting things to say about the union movement. He displayed a highly developed class-consciousness and seems to have done some extensive reading on the history of the union movement.

Q: Is your attitude towards your union more positive or negative as a result of the strike?

R2: A little bit of both . . . I think it's more positive 'cos the union is there to help us through the good times and the bad times. And the bad thing about unions: they're not united enough. Three's gotta be one local instead of a whole bunch of little locals. If one walks, they all should walk . . . if that happened, unions would be strong again . . . I read history books and things like that. I read history. And I look through the history books about the union movement in the old days, and the only way it got anywhere was when everybody was united.

Q: So you think it's important to be in a union?

R2: Oh yeah. Everybody ought to be in a unions--in one big local¹³ . . . it's too bad that people won't listen. It's going backwards now. (Interview 4)

Neither of the UPS workers reported any problems with the police (interview Notes, p,

3). In the Melling group, Respondent 1 also stated that he did not have any problems with the police (Interview Notes, p. 3). Neither Respondent 2 or Respondent 3, however, thought highly of the Lansing police.

Q: What do you think about the police in your community--the Lansing police?

R2: I have no respect for Lansing police officers . . . I think that the Lansing Police Department has no respect for the citizens or working people of Lansing.

In response to the same question, Respondent 3 said, "I don't trust 'em. I had more trust and faith in them before the strike, but I have none whatsoever in them now"

(Interview 5). Both respondent 2 and respondent 3 seemed to imply that the police, in Lansing, were primarily occupied in protecting the property of corporations (Interview Notes, p. 3).

All three of the Melling participants noted the difficulties faced by organized labor, particularly labor laws (Interview Notes, p. 2-3). Respondent 2, in summing up his experience in the strike, observed, "It's a good fight . . . and it's not a fair fight the way

¹³ The idea of "one big local" goes back to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or Wobblies, as they were commonly called).

the laws are--it can't be fair the way the laws are" (Interview 4). Respondent 3 noted, "Well, the laws favor corporations . . . As far as being a member of the working-class, I'd definitely say the laws favor corporations rather than the working-class" (Interview 5). Respondent 1, noting the decline in the number of unions members, said, "I think the Republicans have something to do with that" (Interview 4).

Pope (1997, p. 1027), in his study of the reaction of organized labor to repressive legislation and legal precedence in the early twentieth century, found that union members constructed an alternative conception of what was fair and just based on their need to organize. This alternative conception of justice was contra posed to that of the state. Union members acted in accordance with the former and held the latter as unfair-- similar to the Melling strikers' concerns about the difficulties facing union, particularly the statement of respondent 2.

Analysis

As stated previously, no conclusions about strikers in general are possible from this limited data set. It is, however, possible to analyze the responses of the workers studied. The analysis will concentrate upon the differences in the level of development of class consciousness between the two groups.

As stated in the introduction, there are four elements to class consciousness as defined

by this paper: 1) an understanding that the interests of workers are collective, or common to all workers; 2) these interests are opposed to those of corporations and the wealthy; 3) unions are a legitimate vehicle for the advancement of the interests of the working-class; 4) a receptivity to radical left-leaning politics. Table 1, below, summarized the results for each group. The Melling group possesses all four elements, whereas the UPS group possesses only one. It is ambiguous on two of them, and there was no receptivity displayed to radical left-leaning politics.

Perrucci, et al, (1985, p. 257) found that there were several factors correlated with the development of class consciousness among workers. Workers who experienced the following were more likely to develop a class consciousness: 1) economic distress; 2) perception of strong community and unions support; 3) positive interaction with their union; 4) a high sense of mastery, or control over their destiny.

As summarized in Table 2, below, the Melling workers experienced all of these factors; the UPS workers were ambiguous on all of them, and neither of the UPS participants had experienced financial distress as a result of the strike.

The fourth factor, a high level of personal mastery, is the most difficult to define in terms of the responses to this study. It should be noted, however, that at least one of the Melling respondents (Respondent 2) thought that if working people united in unions that they would have control over their fate. Moreover, the other two Melling participants stated that unions were important for advancing their interests as workers, implying that, at least partially, organized working people can control their fate.

Table 1

Elements of Class-Consciousness in Each Group

<u>Elements</u>	<u>UPS</u>	<u>Melling</u>
1) Understanding that the interests of workers are collective	Ambiguous	Present
2) The interests of workers are opposed to those of corporations and the wealthy	Present	Present
3) Unions are a vehicle for the advancement of class interests	Ambiguous	Present
4) Receptivity to radical leftist politics	Not Present	Present

Table 2

Factors Contributing to the Formation of Class-Consciousness

<u>Elements</u>	<u>UPS</u>	<u>Melling</u>
1) Financial Distress	No	Yes
2) Perception of strong community and union support	Ambiguous	Yes
3) Positive interaction with their union	Ambiguous	Yes
4) High sense of personal mastery	Ambiguous	Yes

The UPS participants were much more ambiguous in their responses. Respondent 2 implied that unions can advance the interests of workers, again implying control over their destiny, but he also thought that being in a union meant a lack of control over the work process. Respondent 1 of the UPS group also implied some sense of personal mastery, but there were also some ambiguities.

The results of Table 1 indicate a higher level of class consciousness for the Melling workers; Table 2 (above) attempts to offer reasons why. The findings of Table 2, based on the results of Perrucci, et al (1985) give ample reason as to why the Melling workers exhibit a more highly developed class consciousness.

Again, the results of this analysis are valid only for the five workers interviewed in this study. It is completely unwarranted to make any sweeping conclusions based on these results. This analysis does, however, offer sociological insight into the lived experience of the participants of this study.

Another noteworthy distinction between the two groups was a sense of anomie in the Melling respondents that was not present in the UPS group. Two of the Melling respondents expressed uncertainty about their future, a sense that the assumptions which they had structured their lives upon had fallen apart. Merton (1968, p. 216) defines anomie as “a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured” means of achieving them. Chinoy (1955, p. 124) found that the workers he studied regarded stable employment and decent wages as a primary goal. Given that the Melling workers,

particularly respondents 2 and 3, are no longer able to achieve this, the level of anomie they have experienced is understandable; there is a definite disjunction between the goal of steady, well paying employment and the means of achieving it.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to accomplish several goals. The first was to address an imbalance in the contemporary sociological literature on work and strikes, which is primarily quantitative in methodology. The extent to which this was achieved is open to question, but the insight provided by the interviews could not have been gathered using a quantitative approach. The colorful and illuminating responses of the participants would have been lost in a quantitative analysis.

A second goal was to focus on the forgotten sociological concept of class, particularly the lived experience of the working-class. That has been the focus of this paper, concentrating on the specific action of strikes.

A third goal was to offer a sociological understanding of the lived experience of the participants. Although no conclusions can be drawn about workers as a whole, the experiences of the workers interviewed and their class consciousness has been analyzed and reasons posited for the differences between the two groups. The results were interesting, and warrant further research into this area, both quantitative and qualitative.

Future research should, however, concentrate upon correcting some of the limitations of the present study. Foremost among them is the need for a larger number of respondents. This is vital to the task of reaching conclusions about the working-class as a

whole. Moreover, future studies should not be restricted to one location; rather, a variety of geographic regions should be studied. This study also is limited in that, excepting one individual, all of the respondents were white, and all were male. A Marxist analysis of the working class is incomplete without taking into account the ways in which race and gender affect the strike experience¹⁴.

It would also be of interest to follow-up the study ten to fifteen years in the future in order to see how the participants attitudes have changed. This is of particular importance to the Melling group, for the after-effects of participating in a prolonged strike and losing their jobs may take years to fully deal with.

¹⁴ This is important for another reason as well. Trotsky (1978, p. 18) noted that black workers “can become revolutionary ahead of white workers, [and] furnish the vanguard of the revolution.”

APPENDIX A

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SELECTED QUESTIONS

I. Demographic

- 1) Sex:
- 2) Age:
- 3) Marital Status:
- 4) Children:
- 5) Education:
- 6) Religion:
- 7) Race:
- 8) Job/Occupation:
- 10) Approximate Income:
- 11) Political Affiliation:
 Before:
 After:
- 12) Social Class:
 Why have you chosen this classification?

II. Consciousness/Ideology

- 1) Has the strike had an impact upon your political beliefs?
 In what ways?
- 2) Has your attitude towards your union changed? (More Positive or negative)
 In what ways?
- 3) During and after the strike, based on the actions taken by your union, do you think it was:
 A) fighting for its members
 B) looking out for itself
 C) a tool of management
 Why do you feel this way?
- 4) What kind of an impact has your union had in your life (beneficial? None?)
- 5) Describe how the strike affected your relationships with your fellow workers.
- 6) What do you think of the current political leadership of the US? Why?
- 7) Does the federal government help working people or the wealthy? Explain.

III. Financial

- 1) Income:
Pre-strike:
Now:
- 2) Describe the affect the strike has had on your financial situation.
- 3) How has the strike affected your future financial plans?
- 4) Describe the differences, if any, in lifestyle before and since the strike.
(Can you afford to live at the same level of comfort, easier/harder to make ends meet; etc.)
- 5) What kind of an effect has the strike had upon your financial worries (if any).

IV. Health

The Following can be answered by a yes or no:

- 1) I experience greater levels of stress since the strike.
- 2) I am more irritable since the strike.
- 3) I drink more alcohol since the strike.
- 4) I smoke more since the strike.
- 5) I feel more depressed since the strike.
- 6) Describe how the strike has affected your physical health.
- 7) Describe the effect the strike has had upon you mood?
- 8) How has the strike altered the way you feel about yourself?
- 9) How has the strike altered the way you perceive other people?

V. Family

- 1) How did your family help you cope with the strike? Supportive?: Yes or No.
- 2) Was this important to you? In what ways?
- 3) Has the strike brought you closer to your family or has it made you more distant from them?
Describe.

VI. General

Sum up, in your own words, what this strike has meant to you and how it has affected your life.

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