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Unearthing Labour's Cultural History in B.C.

Sara Diamond

I say with all seriousness that a cultured workers' movement is a workers' movement strengthened a thousand fold. And a workers' movement cannot become cultured if it is taught to distrust and sneer at any art that does not come out of its own class. Workers need to feel the impact of all of the art energy that has every been generated.

THIS QUOTE DERIVES NOT FROM THE DEBATES OF the intellectual left of the 1960s to 80s but rather from the pages of the *B.C. Worker* of 1935, the Communist Party of Canada's Western newspaper. Its author is Guy Glover, the then co-director of the Vancouver Progressive Arts Players' production of *Waiting for Lefty*, which would go on to win the provincial round of the Dominion Drama Festival and prize for best English play in the Ottawa finals.

It is relevant here on two levels. First, it was part of a sudden flurry of cultural activity and discussion within the ranks of the left, an activity that was to continue for some three years, wane and then re-emerge in altered form during the latter war years. Second, it represented one of two quite polarized positions on the development of a cultural political consciousness, positions which to this day co-exist. Glover's opponents saw the value of art production only if it was in direct service to the revolution, with the proletariat as the revolutionary class. Art was simply one form of ideological expression, the artist's allegiance defined irrevocably by the hand that fed her or him. Bourgeois culture, in both form and consciousness was moribund. It was possible, through conscious effort to develop art which was proletarian in its character, untouched by bourgeois ideology. A considered critique of form as well as content was a waste of time.

The other position idealized creativity, tending to strip it from its material location, but placed a positive emphasis on cultural experience as freeing and pleasurable as well as instructive, an experience that questions critically as much as it answered. An art that was subordinated to the political line and immediate needs of any class was "a caged eagle: a stinking unnatural object." The working class did not need protection from bourgeois culture, but rather the right to draw from it to build its own cultural expression. Artists must choose "sociologically" where they would place their

class allegiance.

The weakness with both of these positions was that they ignored the existence of indigenous, fragmented, often locally-based expressions of working class cultural experience, expressions from the daily experience of working class people where they are located, in communities and workplaces, and which, although not coalesced into a self-conscious cultural practice, represent a real and important rupture from the dominant ideology. Both rely instead on "others", whether the party, or the intelligencia, for the creation of, on one hand "working class culture" and on the other, "good art." While I believe that the contribution of left-leaning artists was an important one in creating one stream of a "culture of resistance" in British Columbia, I believe equally that we must include the expressions that working class people themselves organized if we are to truly understand the dynamics of class consciousness and cultural experience.

Defining Terms and Contexts

A working definition of a "culture of resistance" would be useful at this point. Once given, I'll examine its application to three areas of B.C.'s cultural history: that of a small logging community in Lake Cowichan in the years 1935-45 and particularly the role of the I.W.A. Women's Auxiliary in developing a cultural life; then, the experience of workers in a fruit canning operation in the Okanagan in the early 1950s and finally, the cultural activities associated with the B.C. Communist party in Vancouver in the years 1935-45.

A culture of resistance is rooted in the specific conditions which its members experience: geographic, economic and cultural; these conditions may be shared with other groups and this awareness can be part of the cultural expression, or the expression can be insular. But it will be specific. A culture of resistance is activating and empowering rather than passively consumed. It is critical of existing social relations, either consciously or objectively. It has a collective quality to its practice. Lastly, I believe that as a partial rupture from the dominant ideology, it will reflect the continued dominance of aspects of that ideology, either in form or content.

Lake Cowichan

What is interesting about the Lake Cowichan Women's Auxiliary is that it played the major role in forming both a formal and informal cultural life within its community - one administered, fought for and partially defined by the women in question. The 1930s was the first period in which a stable workforce developed for the wood industry in B.C. High levels of unemployment encouraged men to settle near the expanding logging operations to insure that they would be called back after shutdowns. Companies found this accessible, as yet non-union, skilled labour force an amenable development, assuming that loyalties to wife and family would discourage unionization in a hard economic period. The opposite occurred: a community meant that men were committed to staying with one company, therefore improvements in conditions were worth fighting for. And on top of this, there was an unforeseen dynamic: women who settled in the Lake Cowichan area experienced the direct effects of their husbands dangerous and exploited conditions in the woods, as well as the total lack of amenities. They quickly became a powerful and organized force fighting for safety, decent housing, electricity, schools, roads, communications, and a community which would support the development of the unionism required to achieve these goals. This is what women reacted to when they moved to The Lake in the 1930s:

CONDITIONS:

Lil Godfrey: There was no indoor plumbing, no electric light, no running water. We had a well. Then a fellow installed a small water system; you couldn't waste water and you didn't have hot water, just cold water on the back porch. At first we had gas lamps or coal, up 'til 1937. There was no power. Period. No washing machines or electric irons. The first electricity we had was run on a big diesel engine down on the corner, hooked up to a water system just for lights and one at a time. Lights would go out at one o'clock in the morning, and you had to have all your work done by then. If you got up on early shift, which the

loggers had to do in those days, you wouldn't have any light. In the summer, when the water got low, it would just be a little yellow flicker up there.

Laurie Belign: They used to log quite close; you could hear the whistles from the wood. So many whistles would be a death, so many whistles an accident. All the women would gather and wait; it was seven whistles was a death. They used to be terrified for that next whistle. Whenever the ambulance went by, you went down, just to see whether it was your one or who it was. It was someone you knew, always. It was a closely knit community. One of the first projects of the auxiliary was to demand a better road from Lake Cowichan to Duncan because the hospital was in Duncan.

June Olsen: You didn't have any guarantee of working. If the boss didn't like the colour of your eyes he could fire you. A lot of the men had to go out of the woods by speeder and they worked six days a week. They'd come down to their families Wednesday for two hours and then they'd have to go back to camp. Then they'd come out Saturday night and have to be back in camp Sunday night. There really was no family life ... You were just a grass widow. All you saw was women and children.

The Auxiliary was organized by local union men and a committed woman, Edna Brown. It provided an essential social network for isolated women, but one that was oriented towards achieving specific goals. Even the reluctant joined, as this testimony from Eva Wilson suggests:

"We arrived after Fred got fired for organizin' the miners. The scow that went from Number One to Protection was called the WE TOO so he edited this paper and it came out for a long, long time; it was called the WE TOO, but it was 'WE TOO WANT A SQUARE DEAL'. When they found out who was editing the paper, out he went. We were married in '33, I didn't know anything about it until after we were married.

"We came to Youbou on the 24th of May for a week-end and I been here ever since. It was '34 when the loggers

walked over the back of the mountain and came to pull the mill out. Fred was workin' on the loading deck. He was the only one that came out in sympathy with the loggers. Fred 'worked' for a week and a half and never let me know; I put up his lunch every morning. I was never so mad in my life because he had promised me he would never organize again. But that was a laugh! He was on the picket line. When I found out, God was I mad! Jesus! Well you would have been too, making his lunch for a whole week and a half. What could I do; married with one baby. You couldn't leave your husband in those days, with a family. No car, no money, or anywhere to go. You had to stick it out.

"To keep peace in the family I joined the auxiliary. I was taking a real good active part in it because Fred and Archie and Hjalmar were travelling by boat, sometimes they had to swim too, to get to Camp 6. They were trying to organize the camp. They'd come home 3 - 4 o'clock in the morning. I would have a big pot of stew ready for them; they'd be frozen. They stayed a lot at my place."

The women initiated countless dances at the picket camp, an outpost created for the 1936 strike in the woods industry. Dances and social gatherings drew the community together as a unit, but they also served as a cover for signing up new union members. During the strike the Auxiliary pooled food from hunting, gardens, and local farmers, insuring that none would go hungry. The women campaigned for and won a new road to Duncan, the route that ambulances carrying wounded loggers would travel. It also enforced a morality based on male responsibility to women and children:

Eva Wilson: We'd go so we'd get the money off them. That's why the women walked in a body across to meet the men. Otherwise the floozies from the Red Light District would meet them first ... Then we'd walk to the speeder on Sunday night and then, of course the women would get together and sit and knit until three o'clock in the morning.

As the community expanded with the lessening of the Depression, new women were urged to join. Most inhabitants of the village were engaged

in logging related activities. Outside of the auxiliary's events there was little to do, other than provide for the necessities of life. There was no radio, for example, due to the mountainous terrain and the underdevelopment of B.C.'s airwaves. There were no movies.

With the outset of the war the auxiliary expanded to over 50 members as logging boomed and sign-up continued in the industry. The priority was no longer industrial action, but the fight against fascism and the development of activities to support the war effort. Logging was an essential industry, so many of the area's men remained on the job. The women met weekly to conduct social, educational, business

tickets), took over the local Parent Teachers Assoc., making it an active force in the area, and in 1942 organized the United Organizations, a co-ordinating committee of all of the existing women's groups which had developed since the war. On top of this were regular bazaars, card games, bake sales, concerts, parties, dances and, at the end of the war, a local theatre group. As well, Scandinavian members helped to initiate a Scandinavian Club, to hold folkloric events. They adopted positions to argue in the United Auxiliaries of the union and sent delegates, many of whom had never been outside of the small radius of Vancouver Island, to Oregon conventions. Their events drew up to 500

tal, political voice in their community and beyond, access to new skills and a definite respect at the Lake. Second, the auxiliary was above all staunchly pro-union and functioned as an instrument to increase working class identification and organization. Where, then, did it fail to rupture from the dominant culture?

Many of the members did not see themselves as challenging traditional female roles, although they would have fought against restrictions on their auxiliary involvement. Also, the auxiliaries' political and fundraising priorities were defined by the union (albeit with discussion) and these, in turn, were defined by an increasingly centralized Communist Party leadership cadre. Support for the war effort meant a reiteration of patriotism and a de-emphasis on class struggle. And finally, the cultural forms and actual content did not directly challenge bourgeoisie culture, although the context of their use did.

Oliver, B.C.

The second experience is that of members of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union in the Aylmer's cannery in Oliver, B.C. Alma Faulds had led an unsuccessful strike against the cannery which was lost when fruit growers' wives crossed the picket line made up of other working women. The union remained in the plant and was able to win improvements in conditions and wages, but it opted for gradual reform rather than strike action. The workforce encompassed many German immigrants, Douk-bours and Anglo-Saxon workers.

Alma used cultural activities to develop a strong sense of workplace community, pleasure in the work process (which was tedious and heavy) to unite diverse national groups and to wrest occasional concessions from her employers. Other union members participated in the almost daily pranks: sticking tails on the rumps of unsuspecting co-workers, gluing a prankster's sandwich together, exchanging amusing gifts, spinning yarns. Workers collaborated on regular theatre events which re-enacted amusing incidents and humbled harsh foremen. Alma and others provided a running commentary of doggerel on the bulletin board, cartoons and art displays.



Children in Sports Day Parade 1945

and political planning. They rotated chairing and speaking skills, and attended union meetings to argue for policies which they supported. They initiated a Red Cross Club, swimming instruction for children, knitting clubs, taught knitting, sewing, tatting at the schools, made jam for the T.B. solarium, lobbied for milk for school children, fought for a high school, secured medical facilities in the village, set up cooperative playgroups for local kids, organized mountaineering hikes for children, brought in speakers from outside the community on current political and women's issues, established a loggers' sports day, children's parade, Lady of the Lake contest (the winner was she who sold the most

residents from the area around the Lake.

There is no question that these activities were rooted in local conditions, that there was a collective quality to the experience. In the absence of formal cultural institutions, they represented a self-created cultural life. The Auxiliary reflected a critical consciousness in two important ways. First, as women, its members would otherwise have been restricted to a traditional isolation within their own domestic units. The auxiliary, although based on the traditional division of labour in the family and associated with traditional women's social and cultural activities, also provided the women with an instrumen-

Management tolerated, and at times encouraged, this activity. It served as an outlet for tensions on the shop floor, perhaps regulated supervisory personnel who got too big for their boots and provided a means of settling local grievances, while solidifying a positive attitude towards work.

In the following examples, Alma and her co-workers confront a foreman; deal with an incident of sexual harassment and force the company to live up to a promise to let them off early:

One year my sister-in-law came along and said, "Why don't you do

Venables white lumberman's socks and put blue ribbons on them, and I made a baby bonnet with ruffles and a white flanelette night gown and we borrowed a pink lady's bedjacket. I made a rattle out of a big tin of apple juice and I covered it with blue paper and put sand in it so it rattled and my husband made a handle for it. We had a wine bottle for the baby bottle, and I didn't know but Morris [the actor] filled it halfway with liquor so that he could stand this whole thing. And when we pulled the curtain there he lay in the crib and was kicking his stupid feet and Freda Hutton was singing, "Hush-a-bye baby..." I don't know whether it

all of the girls. So I did a little story on that. I asked management if we could decorate the bulletin board. George Elliot said, "I'm very suspicious of what you're going to do, but I'm also very curious, so go ahead." So this guy (the inspector) was propositioning my younger sister, who was 19 years younger than I am and expecting her second baby. And all the women were wearing button-up shirts to protect themselves from him, and little scarves. He was real macho and he was dirty and this was before the days of women talking about being harrassed. So I decided this was not quite right.

So I drew a take-off of him and signed it Chief Lung Inspector. So one of the foremen came out to say, "What do you mean Chief Lung Inspector?" And I said, "Don't you read Readers' Digest? The little boy came home and his mother wanted to buy him a V-necked sweater and he got upset and said: 'I don't want a V-necked sweater because the other day my teacher wore one and one of her lungs fell out.'" It took about two minutes for that story to get to the back to the fruit inspector and he was furious, he was embarrassed and he didn't talk to me for two years.

One Halloween, we had been promised that we would get off; we were working nine hours a day, six days a week, from early September and by the end of October, a lot of the packers were flaked out. When management came along and said, "On Saturday we're only working half a day," it meant a great deal to us. In the meantime, B.C. Fruit Trees decided that they needed to fill another order and management came along and said, "You're not going to get a half day off." Although we were happy to work and get the wages, after two months you became very tired working 54 hours a week. So after the manager came round, the manager's wife said to me: "Alma, we've got to do something, we have to have a half day off on Saturday." The manager didn't know.

We decided to decorate the bulletin board. I said, "I'll go home and get my kids to cut out a whole bunch of cats sitting on a black fence, and we'll have a moon. She says, 'I'll bring a skeleton and you write some of your poetry.'" So what do I put:

"The Swiss still yodel, the Swiss still yell, but all of our plans are shot to



Trocedero Strike 1930's

something about Bob Venables?" Bob Venables was the show-off foreman, the big trap. I decided that we would do the life of Bob Venables. It turned out that the night he was born, his father had got very drunk and couldn't stay in the house and went out to sleep in the hay loft. We managed to get the baby carriage that had been Bob Venables' original baby carriage. We talked one of the men into being Bob Venables as a baby, one woman was Bob Venables' mother: I had a skirt my mother wore in 1913, it was felt green ... Management was terrific, they always cooperated. I would have fits: is this going to go over; have I got the right to do this; can I make fun of the packinghouse? I got the baby

was revengeful; I think there was a need to make fun of the things that happened. We did the whole life of Bob Venables: he nearly died. It went on and on. The manager went to school with him and he had a year book. He wouldn't let me see the whole year book, just that parts that pertained to Bob Venables, "just in case some day, Alma, you might decide to do a take-off on me." And the whole family came forth with gossip. And in the end we all sang songs like The Packers Lament: "You come to work each morning..."

We did a take-off on the fruit inspectors. They, ordinary, very common people, became part of management. We had a fruit inspector and he would stare down the front of the blouses of

Hell. We want it off, we've had a shock, we have to work til 5 o'clock! We now implore the powers that be, perhaps they'll let us off at 3."

That was from the workers. Then I did one for management:

"Now do your work and don't lament, So much time off won't pay your rent."

We decorated the stupid bulletin board with all these things; the manager's wife and I came in early in the morning. Before the ten o'clock recess the foreman came round and said, "I think you should look at the bulletin board Alma." And by this time Charlie Morgan, the manager, had got busy and written a doggerel verse, "O-W-E-D to the workers: you'll be through at 12".

Again, these cultural expressions are specific to a concrete working class experience; they occur within the confines of a plant, but reflect the attitudes of a fairly conservative group of workers who lived in a tightly knit, single-industry community. Theatre, verse and art are used to confront working conditions, to allow a collective identity which helped to sustain union organization. There is a collective quality to both the execution and content of events. Although critical of immediate workplace conditions and hierarchies, this activity is limited to an acceptance of ongoing work in the plant under the same, if slightly improved social relations. While an acceptance of different cultural groups resulted from this atmosphere, verses and parodies also reflect stereotyping. Sexism was a definite element of both pranks and theatre: Alma uses a sexist joke to challenge an inspector who sexually harrasses.

Vancouver

Alongside these indiginous expressions, a far more self-conscious cultural movement had emerged, as both adjunct and direct expression of the B.C. Communist Party. Developing in the 1930s in the urban context of Vancouver, workers' theatre, arts and publications sought to challenge the surrounding bourgeois culture that denied the reality of working class life and reinforced a reliance on bourgeois political solutions.

This cultural movement emerged in a period of political crisis. Vancouver was a closed middle class W.A.S.P.

community, one that was experiencing an "invasion" of the nation's unemployed, out-of-work "bindle-stiffs" from the province's resource industries and immigrant workers. Throughout the 1930s, Vancouver abounded with militant unemployed organizing, Communist-led sit-down strikes, a vibrant women's movement, violent police repression of the 1935 Longshoremen's strike and of actions by unemployed. A growing working-class political life was divided primarily between the blossoming Communist Party and the social-democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

At the same time, a stultified middle class tuned in to primitive radio stations, attended the downtown cinema and local theatre, desperately denying that they too might end up on a bread-line. Working class cultural life centred on the street and in local gathering places. Here political debate occurred, and music and humour abounded. There was second run movies, long-standing minority community activities and sports.

The city was polarized along class lines. Given this context, it is not surprising that progressive intellectuals such as Guy Glover and Garfield King, a local civil rights lawyer, decided to organize a popular theatre, one that would show up moribund and romantic bourgeois culture, and provide a vital political alternative. They hoped that the *Progressive Arts Players* would "draw its support from the people itself", while convincing them that they must act to change reality in a global sense.

In early 1936, less than a year after they had begun, the *PAP* won the regional competition of the Dominion Drama Festival with their production of *Waiting for Lefty*. The police censors had attempted to close the play, then settled with the removal of two words, "fruit" and "Sonovabitch", from the script. (The threat of censorship plagued political organizations and progressive arts throughout the Thirties: everything from Tim Buck's speeches on the radio, to Chinese revolutionary movies were cut and theatre licences were revoked.) Packed houses meant that the *PAP* was not closed down altogether. In B.C., the left theatre presented plays by local writers such as Hal Griffin rejecting a

total Americanization of content.

Moving to a mobile format in 1937, the *PAP* toured its one-act plays such as *Hostage*, *And the Answer Is* and *Bury the Dead* to anti-fascist groups, unemployed and youth organizations. It favoured unemployed workers as actors and drew from communities such as the Eastern European, with existing living theatre traditions, for its personnel. The *PAP*'s relationship to the Communist Party was apparently symbiotic - party-led events and organizations created performance venues: the politics and cultural stance of the party influenced the content of plays and the resulting cultural milieu allowed for a holistic view of politics. The *PAP* inspired other left-wing troupes and in 1937, the CCF began a theatre group in Vancouver; a *PAP* existed in Victoria and small theatres sprang up elsewhere.

The Communist Party also developed a dynamic workers' press during the Depression. It is here that the greatest leeway is given to immediate working class expression, with the development of worker-correspondents from 1935-37, at *The B.C. Worker* (later *The People's Advocate*). These correspondents contributed news, analytical articles, poetry, prose, reviews, cartoons, woodcuts and humour pieces. Dialogues or mini-plays were often used to explicate political predicaments. Prose always had a political moral behind it; for example, in the story, *Her Wedding Night* (October 4, 1935), a man who has rejected marriage in the spirit of "free love" realizes that his girlfriend is right: Communists do support the working class family and legal marriage. Poetry rejoices in "A Workers Press": "...the melting pot/into which we pour/the fiery liquid/and seething passions/long smouldering 'neath injustice," or calls to office workers to rise up: "Look to steel!/Look to coal!/Look to lumber!/Everywhere the answer is the same,/To be free..." The paper coached its lay writers to help them to express the party line in their articles.

As Popular Front policies became more current in the province, the party's attitude to cultural activity seems also to have changed. In the early 1930's the Party condemned bourgeois cultural as expressed through high art, theatre and the mass culture of Hollywood; favouring instead the creation

of new cultural forms based on the struggle for socialism.

By 1937 the party press points in a new direction, towards a fascination with Hollywood and mainstream sports; a rediscovery of bourgeois art and an internationalization of cultural reportage. Film columns that had recently denounced the industry's decadence now provided updates on gossip, as well as progress reports on the organization of the studios, reviews of films such as *Juarez* where, "Hollywood Pays Its Tribute to Liberty", and news of stardom's growing support for the Spanish Republic.

The message is confusing: the reputation of the stars and their support for radical politics on one hand is used to legitimize the left; on the other hand, the function of and ideology within mass culture is not examined.

International sports comprises one of the major features of the paper, and international coverage such as reviews of Jean Renoir's new films or Italian Marinette shows, book reviews from the American Communist press, the filming of *Spanish Earth* by Ivans and descriptions of Soviet and Chinese films become a regular feature.

In part, these changes represent the growing working class access to the mass media as much as the party's shift to a more liberal stance. At the same time however, Canadian cultural events slid into the back pages and then out of print. There is no reportage of local minority cultural activity, whether Eastern or Northern European, Native, Japanese, Chinese or East Indian, despite the existence of active and radical expressions in these communities. The turn to mass culture is not theorized except for a single article on the *Vancouver Theatre of Action* that called for an interactive theatre that comes to its audience, capable of constructing a relationship with the viewer, one that will challenge the growing appeal of mass culture.

The war brought rapid cultural advances to Vancouver as well as thousands of prairie migrants; new industrial and service jobs and a booming trade union movement. Radio became widespread and varied, movie houses, concert and dance halls catered to working class audiences who could afford leisure activity for the first time.

The Communist Party's position on the war underwent a number of dram-

atic changes, from an anti-war stance, to support for the Hitler-Stalin Pact to all out support for the war effort after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Apparently, conflicts and confusion about shifts in the Party line vis à vis the war resulted in the dissolution of the workers' theatre movement.

By 1943, a left-wing cultural movement, the Labour Arts Guild re-emerged. It was led by John Goss and comprised of intellectuals in and around the Labour Progressive Party (CPC). It was "a community effort on the part of workers in industry and the various arts, designed to foster closer cooperation between organized labour and those engaged in advancing the progress of music, fine arts, literature and drama." It encouraged unions to introduce cultural events into workplaces where they had jurisdiction, in order to assist the war effort. Films, dances and concerts could be held at noon hours and shift changes.

Its most notable achievement was the "B.C. At Work Exhibition", a tribute to industrial workers in B.C. and worker-artists. The trade union movement contributed \$600 in prizes for the contestants. The exhibition ran from November to December at the Vancouver Art Gallery, then moved to the more accessible Boilermakers' Hall. Majorie Robertson, a Boeings Aircraft worker won first prize for her sculpture of a rivetter at work on a plane. Other images included foundry workers, prospectors, millworkers, dairymen; an extensive painting by cartoonist Fraser Wilson, detailed the efforts to organize the West Coast shipyards. The federal government perceived the exhibit as an effective boost to the war effort; and produced a pamphlet, *The People Paint*, in the hope of stimulating similar efforts in other cities.

The Guild reintroduced a workers' theatre, producing *Six Men of Dorset*, about Communist political prisoners, with a cast of trade unionists. Yet despite numerous concerts and events during the war years, the Guild seems to have disappeared by 1945.

Through the 1930s and '40s, the cultural movement associated with the Communist Party played an important, if limited, role in developing an alternate culture. While indigenous cultures of resistance tended to work from the bottom up – that is, finding the drama, humour and at times the

political lesson in concrete daily situations – the urban cultural left tended to adjust theatre, literature, music and art to express a political purpose. Specific cultural forms were endorsed or rejected in part because they corresponded to a particular stance – be it militant or populist. The B.C. party was fairly autonomous, with a strong working class base; cultural activities reflected this in choosing work by local authors, playwrights and artists. While instigators of the cultural movement were usually from outside the class that was represented on stage or canvas, they effectively incorporated workers and unemployed into events, and inspired some local initiatives, such as a shipyard workers' review.

Ultimately, the progressive cultural movement came up against the growing hegemony of mass culture and the breakdown of community and workplace-based audiences. While the wartime leftwing culture had provided a proud and positive image of working class people and an outlet for working class artists and writers, this expression occurred within the strict constraints of the party's all out support for the war effort. The idealized imagery masked the conflict within working class experience although it depicted working class contexts. While L.P.P. union leaders used the radio to argue pro-union politics and the right of women to continue to work, there was no attempt to critically deal with the growing domination of mass culture over previously semi-autonomous forms of working class expression. If anything, party cartoons and movie reviews regurgitated the dominant culture. In the post-war period, the increasing separation of artists from working class experience, the continued subordination of culture to party policies and blindness to the dynamics of working class cultural expression meant that left-wing cultural activity would grow nostalgic and marginalized in the face of a growing reaction. Attempts to create a working class cultural alternative would lie dormant until the radicalization of the late sixties and early seventies. The Solidarity movement of 1983 would see the first incorporation of cultural workers into trade union and popular mobilizations on a mass scale in almost forty years.

Sara Diamond