[[[Revisions still to do: Intro update, Kimeldorf (1999), Kimeldorf (2002), and Silver in V, Helphand in VI, Kantorovich in VII.]]

Strategic Position: Working Power over Production, and How Labor History, Economics, and Sociology Have Ignored It
Or,
Working Power over Production: Labor History, Industrial Work, Economics, Sociology, and Strategic Position

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Introduction (no quote without author's permission): Reasons, Consequences, Previews

Who will read this book?

Its subject is labor in conflict with capital in the modern world. Many who have picked the book up will now put it down. "…labor in conflict with capital in the modern world." Just nine words, and already such sleepiness. Why read on?

The subject is so old, so rarely now on the mind of educated readers anywhere, so tiresome. Intellectuals figure they have heard it all before, and now that "the modern world" means "the American world," they are sure the story is finally over: labor lost, forever. Capital does not read, but its big owners and managers do, and while they keep an eye on the conflict, they figure they have bureaucratized it, discounted it, hedged against it, and will always move a jump ahead of any serious problem. Labor does not read either, but workers living from regular paychecks do, and while they pay close attention to the conflict, they cannot agree any longer what to do about it, or if there is anything to do about it, but just suffer it. The labor movement, organized labor, unions, in the United States the AFL-CIO, insists on the conflict, but promises cooperation with capital in return, and seems able to do little more now than express indignation at its continual losses. As for the casuals, on-calls, and temps working at part-time jobs and part-time wages, and those who work at home or out on a job, but not for wages, housewives, freelances, independent contractors, the self-employed, and beyond them the marginals, informals, illegals, undocumented, the *clandestinos*, hustling a living however they can from day to day, and beyond them the unemployed, and prisoners, all labor's own dreaded reserves, they all have other kinds of struggles to fight. How could a book on labor and capital interest them?

Besides, having written this book, I know it is not easy to read. It is mostly history, in pieces, as examples, and inevitably unresolved. It offers neither entertainment nor rebirth, neither survey nor instruction. It is as clean as I could get it of romance or illusion, about persons, causes, and ideologies, a book intended for serious students of a serious matter. It takes concentration to understand. It is an argument, as tight as I could make it (almost), to move the reader to recall or recognize the force of certain tiresome but mighty facts, above all labor and capital in the modern world, and to see through them, in the old idea of the division of labor, a new meaning of great, real power. The subject of labor in conflict with capital may be dead, but if not, if it is live, it is dangerous to the actually existing order of the world. The argument here comes into focus on a now almost entirely forgotten concept, that modern divisions of labor, however they change in modern economies, have some technically "strategic positions" in them. Wherever these positions may be, shifting as they may, what makes them strategically important is that work there (skilled or not) matters much more than work in other positions (skilled or not), because it holds a division of labor technically together, in production. If work there stops, this forces extensive disruption of work elsewhere. And if the disruption happens in an industry "strategic" in production at large, this forces disruption across the entire economy, even internationally. Such power seems strange in the modern world. It is a power civil, invisible, and at work (of all places), not everywhere at work, but at certain, special places there, often not the obvious places, and if not obvious, not easily discovered either, and often not the same places for very long. Vastly ignored, it is a power of vital material importance in every country, the power to refuse vital force at particular places of urgent material necessity, in some cases to inactivate production

essential to the national productive system, and let inertia force material disconnection and spread economic paralysis. Its reality is not easy to understand, much less believe.

Whoever may still be reading may well sigh, “Hard to read, and hard to believe? You bet. This is just a big strike, the old ‘general strike,’ only now he’s calling it the ‘strategic strike.’ May Day, shmay day. Get over it. And if it’s such a BFD, why has everybody but him ignored it? Never happened.” So another potential reader puts the book down and moves on.

That would get wrong what the book is for. Let me offer two short explanations, like in a prospectus. The “strategic” concept here is not of an event, an experience, of reliving old, wild excitements or anticipating dramatic new crises, End Times for CEOs, CFOs, and CSOs, an Anarchist Rapture. Its premises are the actually engineered structures of leverage in a country’s productive installations, including its means of transportation and communication. Ideas of “strategic position” even at work will vary, so that there may be legally strategic, politically strategic, morally or culturally strategic, commercially strategic, financially strategic, or labor-market strategic positions, or several such positions at once; but these are strategic advantages brought from the outside to work, not built into the work. The strategic idea here is of positions at work on which the work at many other positions technically depends. The concept of a technically strategic position at work is of a position engineered into a material structure for collective labor, a position from which the technical leverage over the collective output is powerful, working power over production. “Technical” in many circles has now come to mean something trivial, boring, superficial, procedural, something important persons need not waste their time on, should leave to underlings. I want to show it may instead

mean something very important. The argument here, to show this strangely ignored, specifically technical power, which is also the power to stop production, is not about law, politics, morality, culture, commerce, finance, or labor markets. It does not resort to any such field to advocate any general or particular use of working power over production. Its concern is not to promote experiences, but to explain an obscure but always present ability to force material breakdowns and social crises.

Second, although vastly ignored now, workers' technical power over production continually alarmed the public from its early applications in the 19th century until the Cold War. Because workers actually used this power often to broad effects, the notion of technically strategic positions emerged in public discussion in the 1890s. Because these positions matter most in strategic industries, a concept of them, the suggestion of a theory of the power in them, first appeared explicitly in the United States during World War II. And precisely because the practice of such power and the thinking about it go back so far, this book is mainly a history, to show how the thinking (through much fogginess and vacillation) reached a moment of clarity in the 1950s--then pretty much faded away. The reasons for the concern fading are easy to see. Since World War II much legislation and public policy have been to limit the use workers make of technically strategic positions, and much private investment has gone to abolish established positions by the adoption of new technology. Meanwhile the professionals on whom the serious public depends to form its views, the critics, intellectuals, and academics who might have analyzed the changes in technical power, have concentrated serious public attention on government and business. This is largely why the ignorance of workers' technical power is now so vast: Mystified by the power of state and capital, the public does not recognize, neither

does labor, that while the new technology keeps eliminating old strategic positions, it also keeps creating new strategic positions, if not as many, maybe more powerful positions, in the same place or elsewhere. But the workers in these positions, skilled or not, usually know their advantages. They may quietly apply them for special deals, and management, which knows them too, makes the special deals, until capital moves the operation, or trashes its technology for a new one, or goes into another line of business. If such workers in a strategic industry hold to broad commitments, they may so threaten "national safety" and international business that they gain collective control of all work in the industry's new technology, for broad general benefits, as they did on the U.S. Pacific Coast in 2002.[1]

But I want the book to do more than make its contention about labor and tell the history of the concept key to understanding it. This argument about an ignored, invisible, vital working power of massive force may have the consequence that its readers, any of them left, will begin to think differently about labor's conflict with capital. If they can conceive of technically "strategic positions" in production, in a plant, an industry, an economy, even globally, they may develop a capacity for generally "strategic thinking" about labor and capital. I must emphasize that "strategic positions" are only places, objects, or objectives, whereas "strategic thinking" is evaluation of them in the context of conflict. Just thinking about "strategic positions" does not amount to "strategic thinking." Only if you think how one side or the other in the conflict could use these positions, to prevent a battle, or to fight to deceive the other side, or weary it, or flat destroy it, are you beginning to think strategically. I must emphasize too, "strategic thinking" does not mean

[1] Evelyn Iritani and Marla Dickerson, "The Port Settlement: Tallying Port Dispute's Costs," *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 2002, p. C1; Kathleen McGinn and Dina Witter, "Showdown on the Waterfront: the 2002 West Coast Port Dispute," *Harvard Business School N9-904-045* (April 28, 2004).

the public agitation over "strategy" embroiling major U.S. unions for the last several months. "Strategic thinking" (private or public) is not making lists of tasks or goals or hopes, which is so far all that have appeared for the AFL-CIO to resolve at its national convention in July 2005.[2] Debates over "what we must do" will not yield a strategy, but at best an agenda. Anyway a strategy is not a plan you simply think up and apply while the other side sits still. "Strategic thinking" means calculating the most probable powers and fields of the forces in conflict for the period you intend to fight, calculating what you can win or lose, deciding among your prospects what you most want to win in the conditions before you, what you have to win, and what you cannot risk losing, and devising a strategy, a general plan of operations, to gain all you can and avoid all the damage you can from a foe doing likewise. But as a way of thinking it means more. It requires at the very start that you think about the nature of the conflict, figure what kind of conflict it is, whether you can change its nature, or have to take it as it is. This is the biggest question about labor in conflict with capital, what kind of conflict it is, because it may be any kind involving free labor at a wage. It may be an individual worker against an individual employer. It may be several small groups of workers each fighting for its particular claim against a small company, or a combination of such groups fighting for a common claim against three or four big companies. Or it may be many different sorts of groups coordinated in a large organization fighting for various claims against a huge corporation. Actually it is all these kinds and others, every day, in every country. And at its most general it involves much more, because, workers being human, free labor at a wage actually happens (has to happen) in the midst of all their other social connections

[2] My latest check was March 29, 2005. AFL-CIO, "Strengthening Our Union Movement for the Future: Proposals," http://www.aflcio.org/aboutaflcio/ourfuture/proposals.cfm.

and arrangements, involving many people who are not working for wages, or working at all. Ultimately labor's conflict with capital is like a war of resistance against occupation, a great, long war in which there are several sides, frequent disputes on all sides, shifting alliances, but always the two great original enemies, ever developing new weaponry, intelligence, reserves, strategies, fronts, operational missions, orders of battle, tactics, for a war maybe without an end.

The metaphor is far from perfect, but not too much of a strain. Think of a war in a modern country occupied by a global power, where probably 80% of the 16-to-65 population support the occupation (at least accept it), banking on its promises of safety and happiness. Probably two thirds of the 16-to-65's could not serve in the resistance anyway, for lack of the proper qualifications, most of the third who could serve stay clear of it, too worried about their individual situations to do more than grumble, and most of the rest are just struggling for a better deal under the circumstances, leaving only a remnant in militant action, who often endanger their families, friends, and fellows, but are continually recruiting, continually losing members, continually operating to defeat the occupation. On the other side are the occupiers, masters at distracting and reassuring the occupied, unable to defeat the resistance because they cannot abolish or destroy its source, on which the occupation also depends, but continually changing circumstances to undo struggles for a better deal, and continually attacking the continually regenerated militants. The war may end in a miracle: The occupiers' promises of safety and happiness come true, and the militants give up; the occupiers mellow, so does the resistance, and they all live in pursuit of happiness ever after; all the occupied unite in support of resistance, overthrow the occupation, and make the country their own again; the militants

find the right strategy, apply it, liberate the country, and put it right. Secular projections of the war tend to the grim: The war goes on practically forever, the occupation more or less in control indefinitely; the occupiers so mismanage the occupation that they lose control, the resistance takes charge, and mismanages the liberation; the occupiers so ruin the country that neither they nor the resistance can run it, and among the ruins new, improvised organizations emerge, some to plunder far and wide, others to defend their local territories, maybe in time to confederate them. Without wonders force is inevitable, whether or not it comes to any resolution.

This is generally strategic thinking about labor's conflict with capital, when you think technically as well as otherwise how both sides engage in contention so serious. But this kind of thinking has its consequences too, and they may be troubling. As you think how to fight such an occupation, or such a resistance, how to use labor's technically and otherwise strategic powers, or capital's power to divide them and leap ahead, as you think how at least not to lose the struggle, maybe to win it, even technically to win for good, as otherwise you could not win, and think what this winning would mean, you may ask new questions--decidedly not technical questions. You may ask as you would about a war, what the conflict is really for, who is it that the fight is for. You may ask, if labor could ever win such a conflict, how it could not mismanage the liberation, what it would have to do right, what its responsibilities in liberation would be, for whom is it ultimately fighting. You may then begin to ask in this great, long conflict who you are, where do you belong, to whom do you belong, which is your side, which side are you on, who is on the other side, who is alien to you, to whom are you alien. These are old questions in the conflict between labor and capital, questions of "consciousness," as they used to call

them, before they confused them with questions of "identity." With whom do you share most in your clearest sense of a world in conflict? Your family? Your friends? Your fellows at work like you at home, or in your trade or profession, or at work where you work, the sisters and brothers there, or your colleagues? Or is it your company? Your business or industry? Your club? Your church, mosque, tabernacle, or temple? Your fellow faithful (or unfaithful) everywhere? Or are you closest to your neighbors? Your townspeople? Your fellow citizens? Or fellows under oath, in uniform. Or fellows on the street, or out of a job, or in prison? Or your color of people? Or fellows of your language or dialect? Do you line up with people healthy and sound, or with people disabled somehow? The young, or the old? The educated? The uneducated? Men? Women? Gays? Lesbians? Working people anywhere who may never be more than working people, however they work, wherever they work, whoever they are? Or the relieved, the protected, the established, the privileged? Insiders or outsiders? In this great, serious conflict, who are your comrades, to whom will you be true? And for whom will you and your comrades fight, only for yourselves, or for others? Who are your people? Who are "we"?

It is not an idle question, cheap introspection, if you have comrades. Having comrades, being a comrade, the word so hard to hear now demands reflection. One on active duty testifies: "It's harder to be a comrade than a friend. It's different than being a brother," or a sister. "Friends and brothers" and sisters too "forgive your mistakes. They are happy to be with you. You can relax and joke with them. You can take your ease with them--tell them tall tales. Comrades are different. Comrades forgive nothing. They can't. They need you to be better. They keep you sharp. They take your words literally." They

count on your words, act on them, and are frank in return. As the comrade here has lately praised another, now gone, "You never had to chase your answer. He said it to your face."[3] They have to trust each other, absolutely, because the stakes are so high, not their individual lives, not only their personal honor, but above all their collective honor, the good of their company and that of the people for whom they fight.

The serious question then remains, who are your people, the people to whom your comrades and you commit yourselves? In this great conflict, which capital cannot win (although it may never lose), but labor might win, who are "we"? And what difference do "we" make? If "we" are only family or friends, or other sorts of forgiving, mutually devoted folk, together you already have all you need, or can have, and will make no difference to the conflict either way. Bless your stars. Enjoy the mutual devotion; let your comrades go, let labor and capital fight for themselves; survive.

But if your people are a broader group or a movement of the kind typically formed in modern society, they may make a difference. It is a classic modern relationship, an association of passing acquaintances or e-correspondents or distant strangers who share some particular fear, interest, duty, purpose, grievance, creed, or culture, who cooperate from calculation or solidarity, maybe both, and are trying to move the occupying power to better a particular condition. Altogether these associations make a definitive difference. Struggles to move power to better particular conditions are democracy. In occasional coalitions and continual rivalry with each other, they benefit one group or movement or another. The gains divide the beneficiaries, and always rouse new movements from new fears, interests, grievances, and so on, more democracy. If a movement begins to cost capital too much, as technically strategic workers demanding

[3] James Gormley, "A Fire Captain's Eulogy," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2001, IV, 7.

more for themselves sometimes do, capital moves, leaves that area, and develops another, democracy's freedom. These struggles are schools where your comrades and you pay to learn capital's power in perpetuity, its tight margins on hope and satisfaction, its end to history, because now there can be nothing really new under the sun, except in the market, then only to consume. You go to schools of magic and tragedy. The difference your people make, accepting the occupation, being grateful for investment, free in a world impossible to change, is to contribute to capital's power. Not unless a movement technically powerful in production decided to better conditions at large could it threaten to reopen history.

If your people, the "we" you have at heart, are a uniformed civil or armed service, they have their associations too. But mainly they have their department, or their corps, and their unit, their company. And there they already have their comrades, among them yours and you. Between labor and capital these official groups make a great difference. Their struggles are somewhat like ordinary struggles, but in part radically different, because of their sworn public missions and essential duties. The services struggle with the public for the direction and resources necessary for them to do their missions, and against each other for public support and sometimes in the very performance of their duties and critical tasks. Since capital's modern democratic societies cannot reach a consensus even on building codes, police discretion, or who takes charge at a big fire, much less on war or peace, the public cannot give the services clear, consistent directions or reliable budgetary projections. But the struggles between the services teach your comrades and you to respect capital, resent the public, stick tight to your own service, and institutionally distrust the others. These feuds cannot abate (except in public relations)

through any Regional Emergency Management Plan, or even a declaration of war. In the civil services and the military your comrades and you witness the public's abuse of the oath you swore, using your shared selflessness to cover its selfish schemes. You go to schools of loyalty and tragedy. Under the occupation the great difference "we" make is to protect capital's safety, peace, and quiet. It is a difference strategically much less technical than political and moral. To take it away need not disturb production, but would disable capital's government.

Think again: What if this occupied country's society is alien to your people, or "we" are alien to it, because of color, language, customs, ideas, values, religion? For now, like family and friends, they make no difference to capital or labor, but in a crisis between them they may make all the difference. They struggle to survive against integration into modern society, to avoid dissolving into democracy's movements, to keep their own integrity. Their struggles encourage alienation, are schools of estrangement from the regular rivalry for better conditions, schools where your comrades and you learn to make coalitions beyond democracy's borderline. Your people will not join the resistance either. But they live near danger. On their reservations, concentrated in their territory, neighborhoods, communities, in their own movements, underground or up in the open, occasionally edging here into regular movements, there into the resistance, but never for long, they are at once more isolated, more exposed, more suspect, stronger, and more independent. In prison, where many are, some train together for bigger, more dangerous projects later, as mercenaries or pirates; others heal together, deepen their alienation, and turn like prisoners of war to organize their units, subvert official command of them, and leave them only according to a collective plan, militants of an

alien cause. Most of your people cannot help contributing to capital's profits, but insofar as they do not gather in technically strategic positions or merge their struggles into the others, they contribute nothing to capital's power or to labor's. Among them your comrades and you learn independent faith and hope. For now this matters only for the survival of deliberately alien communities. But in a great crisis this commitment to something beyond occupation and resistance, not stuck in the market, not for consumption private or public, but something different from the past, some alternative for the future, this would weaken capital's defenses materially and morally. And if a major coalition of alienated forces allied with the resistance, they would have territorial bases and disciplined communities to support its taking charge. Most of all, more than any other of labor's allies, they would provide the best guarantee that the resistance in charge would not botch liberation by settling back into that old democracy, inviting capital's restoration, but fight beyond the end of an old history, into a new history. The difference "we" may make here, not from any technical position, but because of their independence, now allied as they are in the struggle, but not of it, confident that they can change history, would be to turn liberation into the making of a new world.

But what if your people are who they are only because of some objective criteria, people in principle and maybe all in practice unknown to each other except objectively? What if in particular "we" are one side or the other in the great conflict, capital or labor? Neither side is an association, although both feature associations, Citigroup, for example, or the International Transport Workers' Federation. Your people are in categories, and in these in particular, capital or labor, not because of their feelings or thoughts or status or standard of living, but according to their connections to production in modern economies,

either owning finances, means of production, hired labor's effort at work, and the resulting product, or owning abilities to work and the compensation for it. Each side needs the other materially to be what it is. The relationship between them, an alternating current of dependence and conflict, is there whether the people in the relationship know it or not; it is their condition and their situation regardless of their sense of it. Oddly, to know who "we" are objectively requires some subjectivity, independent thinking.

If your people are capital, the occupying power, they now dominate the so far existing modern world. Since private businesses are all theirs (saving weird exceptions), they own besides all their other means of production all the technical positions in production, including the strategic ones, and financially they can change technology or reduce or shut down an entire industry, annihilating massive strategic power, by a click on "send." Their order is normal, which means democracy is normal, maybe perpetual (if not eternal), and resistance, being inevitable, is normal as well. That capital has protection is normal too, because of militants and aliens, but since history has ended, life without deep change is the norm, and it can stay so. To the degree "we" keep promoting leaders who are sound, canny, prudent, and enterprising, this regime will continue. Its two essential premises are capital's freedom, to come, go, and make its own rules, and the labor market, or employment for a wage, unemployment, or self-employment. Your comrades and you, thinking for yourselves, may have time to observe capital's virtues, its stupendous power to deliver things and action for sale, its sunny spirit, its dynamic energy, mobility, and short memory, its standardized measurements, its capacity to plan, motivate, concentrate, and innovate, its censuses, its pragmatic grasp of facts and details, its drive, determination, honesty, and accounting systems. To the degree "we" fall apart,

swindle and defy each other, go hog wild, and promote slick or stupid leaders, this regime will crack, and your comrades and you may observe capital's vices, its stupendous waste, its duplicity, greed, flightiness, and ignorance, its evasion of the costs of the damage it does, its awesome inequalities, its dazzling corruption of public and private affairs, its contempt for dupes and suckers, its absolute shamelessness. In the deep crises where capital might lose to labor, however, "we" figure "we" could soon return to rule, for another long round of democracy. This is capital's difference in the great conflict, that your people will not lose for good unless they destroy the world, or let their enemy, labor, believe the world could work better without them.

If your people are labor, which most adults under occupation are, they mostly accept capital's domination and continual divisions of them, to which they add their own divisions. The fattest and sassiest, "we" who own two homes, an SUV, and a sweet car or two, and a camper and a boat, still live only a few paychecks from one house and a junker, and only three months more from a foreclosure notice and the repo man. But they are typically indifferent to the ranks of the less bully, "we" who live but five paychecks from the street, who are themselves typically indifferent to the unemployed, who look down on the homeless. As a labor-backed U.S. president once (reportedly) remarked, "It's a recession when your neighbor loses his job; it's a depression when you lose yours." Without any union, bad or good, as most of labor worldwide now stands, "we" organize against each other to grab the lesser evil. In bad unions, rackets, "we" hold onto the lesser evil. In good unions "we" cut deals against each other, poaching contracts, trashing pensions, or taking two-tiered wages. An old story: To the degree labor remains divided, not technically or industrially, but by wealth or income, or politically, racially, or

ideologically, or by religion, language, sex, or gender, so that fellow workers fight each other, some gaining, others losing, labor's typical story, it remains in subjection. To the degree it unites, pulls capital into collective bargaining, and applies its united powers for a comprehensive good deal, it approaches economic democracy--full employment, low wage differentials, general insurance, investment in science, health, housing, education, and information--until capital gains more power, and reneges on the deal. To the degree the resistance uses strategic power in strategic coalitions to fight capital, for example, in alliance with consumer cooperatives, it removes production from capital's to labor's control--well, to some workers' control, those in this production, managing themselves in league with their allies--until capital from elsewhere delivers better goods for less. In labor's feuds, deals, and resistance your comrades and you may witness its virtues, its natural power to work, its pride in work, its capacities for organization, encouragement, and solidarity, its fortitude and long memory, its creativity, curiosity, inventiveness, and discipline, its discriminating sense of justice, its indignation at unfairness. So too you may witness labor's vices, its resignation to the world, its touchy modesty beyond work, its passive, plaintive resentments, its nostalgia, grudges, sacrifices, and irresponsibility, its fears of militants and worries (whatever the movement says) about aliens, its fear of anything very different. In deep crises the resistance wants only to take charge, so that labor stays labor, except in charge; "we" would prefer capital's return than not to be labor. What else but alien influence could move the resistance to coordinate strategic operations to change history? This is labor's difference in the great conflict, that your people will not win for good until it dawns on them they do not need capital, they end

their relationship with it, and act on alien support and their own power to make the world new and better for all, even the wretched of the earth.

If you are still reading, if you have thought through these possibilities (maybe others too), and know who your people are, you may know more about your "identity." And having seen who "we" are, you may begin to think, in this conflict, which neither side may ever win, but which labor in changing might conceivably win, what do you do about it? The issue here is action, not how I act, but what action I take. It is another old question, which they used to call "free will," or "initiative," or "choice," and now call "agency," although it is actually a question of fidelity, obligation, and commitment. It is a question to resolve among comrades, who will remind you what commitment means.

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Books of history vary in the kinds of stories they tell for the arguments they make. This one is a story of searches, my search into past searches for ways to explain, support, or overthrow the modern world's economic order, my argument being that in the modern world labor (largely unawares) has the material power necessary to make a new order, so that if it decided to (some "if"), it could. At the end is a loaded suggestion about labor history, its use for the present and so for the future too.

My own search started for a practical purpose. I needed to resolve a question in my work on the country of my main professional concern, Mexico. This is the reason for Chapter I: Trying to teach modern Mexican labor history and write about it, I read for guidance maybe 200 modern labor histories about countries all over the world (as well as Mexico); missing from almost all of them was what workers technically, systematically, did at work. Here I show these histories' typical concentration on "culture," as if that

alone defined workers. Even excellent books skimped on matters of production. The few that went seriously into them treated them like a ritual; they missed the technical relations. Until I understood how these happened and what they meant, there was much I could not explain to my students or myself. And I did not understand them until I understood an argument by one of the great U.S. labor economists, John T. Dunlop, about "the technical context" and "strategic position."

Hence Chapter II: I wanted to know where Dunlop got such an idea, how he formed it into a concept crucial to explaining modern labor history and contemporary labor movements, what it meant and how it had affected labor economics. This search took me back into 19th-century Western Europe and United States, when people began thinking of war when they discussed conflicts between employers and workers. Since I was searching printed sources, most of the virtual belligerence I found came from professionals at ideas, intellectuals, academics, public social scientists, private pundits. But often they were lifting the language of war from business and labor, and some of the language came directly from labor leaders. Typically the references were to "strategic strength" in the labor market, seldom to "strategic position" in production. About power in labor markets, Dunlop learned studying economics. About workers' power over production he learned most as director of research at the U.S. National War Labor Board during World War II, when he had to report how strategic actual (or potential) labor disputes were to U.S. production and military operations. All his professional life, which lasted until he died in 2003, Dunlop taught at Harvard University about power in law, institutions, and values as well as in the market and at work. He claimed a theory that these different kinds of power meshed into an "industrial relations system," but the

lessons he always taught, from practice, were about the disharmony among them, the incompatibilities, friction, discrepancies, conflicts, obstruction, and the wise (and stupid) moves to overcome them or go around them. In practice he proved a masterly strategist in collective bargaining and arbitration, not only because he knew (or could find) where strategic positions of all kinds were, which powers either side could use against the other, and if either could win or both had better settle, but above all because in any dispute he knew what he wanted, to return workers to production at the highest levels of security and compensation the business could afford. So when Dunlop said "strategic plan," he did not mean a wish list. He would have scoffed at a plan without a definite purpose, an accurate reading of all the "contexts" of power, agreement on where and when to engage the enemy, provisions for support, and leadership able to use the engagements for the determined purpose. Strategy in theory and practice is to change the balance of forces, maybe just a little, for a few, maybe hugely, for multitudes. Dunlop (to my knowledge) never considered the following prospect, but from his perspective it is nevertheless clear: Well-combined operations, if they included technical stoppages in the right order at the right time, could change the entire structure of power; technically strategic workers could change the legal, moral, and economic rules. No surprise, Dunlop's concept of technical power went nowhere in labor economics.

From the Dunlopian perspective and respecting his rules, various notions now flying around the U.S. labor movement look naïve or worse. For instance, "density," union membership in any workforce. Of course the labor movement wants it, but density in general, unspecified, is like numbers in war, too vague to measure the power necessary to concentrate at decisive points. Where is the density technically? How strategic is the

industry where it is? Is this density connected to others in strategic departments and industries? What makes these densities an effective alliance? What supports them, protects them? For another instance, reform of the law to favor the labor movement. The notion begs the question. If the movement is weak enough it needs the law in its favor, how can it hope to change the law? Appeals for justice against great propertied interests are not famous for swift or just results. Unless the labor movement will use labor's technical power, its major power now, it will not gain the political power to force its legal changes, which moral appeals will then justify. For yet another instance, an economy with more "manufacturing," in other words, more workers of the kind the labor movement used to organize by the millions. Quite aside from this notion's fantastic quality, that by petition or command history (but just one stream of it!) will repeat itself, regardless too of the fog around these manufacturing plants (restored to make steel, more cars, rubber, or updated to make nuclear plants, digital servers, probiotics?), no matter the real costs most working people everywhere would pay for U.S. manufacturing dominance now, and forgetting the issue of just who would do these jobs, it is again begging the question. Actually, worse, in the United States in 2005, it is begging business, or the government, or both, for investments to rebuild the labor movement. This is otherworldly. And "otherworldly" is the right word. Campaigns to hog manufacturing (old or new products) in the United States pull the labor movement here politically and morally away from labor movements elsewhere in the world, even as tighter international economic connections offer the U.S. and other movements more powerful opportunities (especially in transport and communications) for technically strategic international cooperation. It is otherworldly of the U.S. labor movement now--whatever its members

think--to act as if "we" were only U.S. labor. It would be still worse if it began to act as if it represented the world's workers. But since modern production, including logistics, transport and communication, is now to a critical degree international, the U.S. movement in the interest of its own members (maybe despite them) must make international commitments, or betray its members, allowing them to betray themselves.

Dunlop himself did not enter these kinds of international questions. But he did compare several countries' industrial relations systems, to explain how cultural, political, and economic factors, including industrial and technical factors in production, go together differently in each country to make its characteristic "web of rules" for conflicts between capital and labor. For an example (particularly useful to me) of how his explanation runs, here in Chapter II I briefly compare the United States and Mexico between 1900 and 1950, to show why industrial and technical powers mattered even more in Mexican than in U.S. labor organizations until World War II, but splintered for political reasons at the outset of the Cold War, a disaster for Mexican labor. In tighter focus I try to show how Dunlop's conception of strategic positions at work helps me understand my particular Mexican concern, modern labor history in the Gulf-Coast state of Veracruz between 1900 and 1950. This is a history of several struggles, of workers in several different industries fighting different kinds of companies, in different cultures of business and resistance, with different ideas of struggle, on different political leads, in different organizations of struggle. Without Dunlop I could give no more than a social explanation of these different struggles for power. But from him I can also tell which industries in the state were nationally strategic in the economy, which were key in politics, which unions were industrially strategic, which were politically strategic, where

the technically strategic workers (skilled or not) were, and how they used their power, for broad causes or only for themselves and their racket. I can distinguish between social forces and material forces.

Studying where Dunlop's concept came from, I saw the trouble scholars deep in the background had suffered over the idea of power in economics. For them, theoretically, power could not happen in markets or production. If power did happen, they argued, it fouled the economy; the market was no longer free exchange, production no longer a firm's transformation of inputs into outputs for maximum returns. Of course they granted power really did happen, but they insisted their theory explained the essence of economic reality best if it ignored the appearance of economic reality, power included. I could see their logic, but it meant in effect they were explaining figments of their imagination. Power really has been essential to modern markets, in capital's great corporations. And it really has been essential to modern production, in technically and industrially divided labor's cooperation at work. Since there really are strategic positions at work, I wondered how far back before Dunlop social science had been denying them, and how much Dunlop's argument, if almost completely wasted on historians and economists, had enlightened other social scientists over the last 50 years.

This is the reason for Chapter III. The first half is the story of my search through the most reputable theories of society from the conscious beginnings of sociology in the 1830s to World War II, hunting for any sort of concept of workers' power in production, their power over production, because they can stop it. I myself was not trying to theorize anything, only trying to find anticipations of Dunlop's argument. The second half is the story of my search through standard European and American sociology from World War

II to the start of the current century, trying to trace the effects of Dunlop's argument on contemporary sociologists, to indicate its influence on them. Like the stories of most searches, these are stories mostly of frustration, of finding one after another some of the highest-powered social scientists in the modern Western World staring right at the technically strategic point, but looking right past it, or confusing it with another, or wandering intellectually around it, almost stumbling over it, but missing it, or even getting the point, then losing it. After Dunlop explained the concept, for a while some labor sociologists took his point, but before long forgot where it came from, began to think it was theirs, forgot what it meant, and eventually let it go to pursue other problems. A few others caught the point themselves, even framed Dunlopian arguments, but to no enduring effect. That interested me too, why neither Dunlop's nor any other argument about workers' technical power went far in the field before it faded away. In part, less than labor economists, but still to a remarkable extent (and not on principle), labor sociologists generally avoided any question of power. In part, as Dunlop himself observed, workers staged fewer dramatic displays of their technical power. Because of the Cold War, legal, political, and moral constraints on labor increased, while the market promised jobs in reward for obedience, a promise labor largely accepted. But closer to the point here, the mainstream sociologists who grasped labor's technically strategic power could not see (any better than the labor movement) what positive use labor might ultimately make of it, what a final objective might be, only more of the same. They focused on the question as long as it seemed scary, then turned to more interesting concerns. On Dunlop's special turf, "industrial relations," a kind of economic sociology, a few specialists remarked on the technically strategic angle, but without his argument's

point, or any vision of what labor could win. If a deal is the alpha and the omega, why think how far conflict can go?

It had already dawned on me that I needed to know if the Reds, European or American, had ever thought of technically strategic work. I set to reading them, and found they had, which explains Chapter IV. The first to write about it was not Karl Marx, or Friedrich Engels, but a young intellectual in the German Social-Democratic Party in the 1890s. He did not call these positions "strategic," but he certainly saw them that way, and foresaw capital's "technical development" enabling European labor's technically strategic workers to force revolutionary conditions. He was clearer than anyone else (but Dunlop) I had read on the subject, clear particularly about the strategic importance of transport and communications, above all railroads, the key to European production and politics then, and he certainly had a vision to far horizons. Following him I found European Social Democrats continually discussing strikes, not just for labor's ordinary causes (higher wages, shorter hours…), but for radical political demands, mass action, social upheaval, bringing down the government. Social Democratic leaders debated strikes involving railroads explicitly in terms of strategy, "the strategy of overthrow" vs. "the strategy of exhaustion," right up to 1914, the eve of World War I. I cannot enter their debate, but I do try here to show how they saw the issues of technical, industrial, and political power. Far more than any university then their organizations were the best in the world for teaching a grip on these questions. It is strange (though not for me to pursue) how after the war they lost their focus on them, as if they left them to the sociologists to answer, or not.

But what about the Russian Reds? After all they actually made a revolution. If I had read the West Europeans debating strategic industrial action, I had to see if the Russians had thought of it so explicitly, before or during their political action in 1917, or afterward. Hence another search, hence Chapter V. The short story is, no, the Russians did not think of it so explicitly, at least not until the 1920s. Before 1917 Vladimir Lenin had a very strategic understanding of railroad strikes, and to make the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 he dealt with the Russian railroad unions. But when he wrote "strategy," it was always about armies or politics. So far as I can tell, not until 1921 did he write about production in literally "strategic" terms. Trotsky too understood about railroads, but he never came as close as Lenin to discussing them "strategically." Of all the Bolsheviks, Stalin probably best understood how railroad unions worked strategically. But he kept (at least in print) to the line of "political strategy and tactics." I make no judgments here on Bolshevik strategies. I am only trying to show the strategists themselves often acting on labor's power in technically strategic positions, sometimes putting their ideas in (literally) mechanical terms, but rarely (if ever) describing power or force in any terms but political. This is interesting here, not for whatever it may suggest about the labor history of power in the Soviet Union (a matter of interest now only to professional historians), but for what it suggests about old-time Communist organizing outside the Soviet Union, which reflects some light on other ideas of organizing. At the Communist International's Lenin School in the 1920s and early '30s foreign Communists, some of them Americans, studied (among other subjects) labor and the labor movement in their country, learned the technical and industrial places (and others) where it made most strategic sense to organize, and learned why, always to the political

point--to overthrow capital and make their party's revolution. When they went into practice, they stayed focused on the strategic places, and over and over again used them strategically, because unlike most other sorts of organizers (not to mention sociologists) they suffered no confusion as to their objective.

The best evidence of Communist strategic thinking about labor then I found in the public record not of the Comintern (a political organization), but of the Comintern-run Red International of Labor Unions. This is the reason for Chapter VI, to show the evidence, because it comes more openly and more direct from the RILU than from anywhere else I know, and because hardly anyone else has publicized it or studied it. The thinking at the RILU congresses and conferences was not high theory. The delegates were not scholars or intellectuals; they were left-wing labor leaders, workers used to fighting for power, most of them Communists, but some radically and on principle independent of any party. They did not attend these meetings to discuss Marx or Lenin or any doctrine, but to talk shop about strategic organization for their cause, labor worldwide in a Red labor movement. Their ideas were practical. Their language was plain. And their sense of labor's technically and industrially strategic bases, battles, and operations was explicit and extensive (already 20 years before Dunlop put the concept in writing). The point here is again not the history, although it might interest historians, or the motive doctrine, which is debatable, but the remarkable example of sustained focus and continued effect. The organizers who learned their lessons in the RILU could keep thinking strategically because they knew where they wanted to go. Despite the tremendous terrors through which the survivors among them lived, worst of all the long Nazi-Fascist-Japanese war on the world, especially on people like them, they kept their

strategic sense, and many of them whether they stayed in their old party or not kept fighting for labor for decades, and from technical and industrial as well as other perspectives kept fighting strategically. Some organizers now and some intellectuals who abhor Communist ideas occasionally allow their admiration for old Communists organizers, for their "dedication." Their remarks usually seem to be about morale, in praise of a dedicated spirit. More interesting, more practical, and what I emphasize here is their mental dedication, that because their minds were on a purpose they were always thinking how to connect means, actions, and ends.

As soon as I decided to search the Red literature, I knew I would need to come up close to the present. I expected to begin the last part in 1945, for the context of the Cold War and its aftermath. But I found it needed to start in 1935, when the only Communists in the world then in control of a country, considering the Nazi-Fascist-Japanese threat to them, decided they could live with capital's democracies, which they did for the next 50-odd years. This explains Chapter VII. There are a lot of threads, because there are a lot of different Reds in the second two-thirds of the 20th century, including the various New Lefts of the last third of the century. But mainly I try to show two lines of trouble through that long history. First is the difficulty Communists had all that time in publicly debating any "strategy" for labor, because coming from them the word would appear to signal a plot against established authorities, democratic, despotic, or Communist; if they had plots, they were not going to discuss them in public. The second line, more open to study, is the difficulty other Reds and Leftists Old and New had in distinguishing between labor's technically strategic power and its social and political power, to the extent that (like sociologists then) they typically did not see or soon forgot the former, and pushed

only the latter. Yet again my point is not historical, whatever its historical interest. It is to indicate the long lapse in the Left's public attention to workers' strategic power in production, working power over production, its continual concentration instead on civic movements and elections. Looking hard, I found a few brilliant exceptions, but the Left's general neglect of them makes my point clearer.

The Left could well have geared technical questions into politics in the 1970s, but (as I trace here) missed the chance. An old American Red, using technical cases, argued that capital's progress in technology ("automation") was subdividing modern labor in detail, deskilling it, thereby degrading it. His argument drew the Left, especially the New Left, into a major international debate. Critics mostly attacked his technological resignation. Few noted (I mention some) that capital's new technologies also meant newly combined labor and new skilled positions, or that the increasing technical division of labor could actually increase the power at remaining and new technically strategic positions. No one (I read) noted that in a new coordination of labor some unskilled and deskilled positions could remain or become technically strategic. Instead, the New Left for the most part concluded that in capital's domains the labor movement's old fortresses were the only strongholds labor could ever have, which meant either defending them forever, or assuming labor's irrelevance in any new society. Technically, industrially, this made no sense; if railroads in some countries and soon wired phones everywhere were losing their old importance, transportation and communication mattered more than ever. But it became a common view on the Left, especially in the United States and Britain, that the new industrial terrain (which very few reconnoitered) would probably be hopeless for labor, impossible for a labor movement. Consequently American and British

Leftists had precious little but cultural or political advice for unions still struggling over technologies far from new by the 1990s. I try to show here how a serious, coordinated movement could conduct technically strategic operations for labor at large--and not only labor, but many whom capital has now cut from its payrolls. But anyone who wants a map or a manual for such operations has totally misconceived strategic planning and thinking.

It is worth recalling that Red literature on labor's strategic positions in production early featured international designs against capital's rule. The contemporary Left remains as sharp as ever at financial, commercial, and political analyses of labor's international troubles, national, racial, cultural prejudices, foreign companies ripping off national resources, or from another angle immigration, from yet another trans-border or overseas outsourcing. But it has hardly any technical or industrial analysis to offer labor movements for international cooperation to resist capital, much less go on the offense. Now that the Left's cultural and political strategies for "another world," in their liveliest expressions at the World Social Forums, are evidently useless against capital's projects for the world, its lack of strategic thinking about capital's technical and industrial vulnerabilities worldwide (greater than before because of globalization) leaves labor movements to improvise all their international operations. I emphasize here the thanks capital owes the Left for leaving it so free after the Cold War to expand deunionization everywhere, speculate in pensions and social insurance wherever still funded, whiplash labor markets toward perfection, and if possible implode within a generation.

On the really biggest particular international question, China, the American Left now urges the AFL-CIO to establish relations with the All-China Federation of Trade

Unions. (The AFL-CIO is currently about one-tenth the size of the ACFTU.) This turn would be in the obvious interest of the AFL-CIO. If the ACFTU were to persuade the Chinese government to induce Wal-Mart (which buys 70% of its merchandise from China) to accept unions in the United States, it would give an enormous boost to the U.S. labor movement. If the Left anywhere could persuade the U.S. movement to give the ACFTU technical support against, for example, Monsanto's or Cargill's agro-bio-chemical exports to China, it would do the ACFTU, Chinese labor, and Chinese peasants some good, and maybe win the U.S. movement some colossal allies. But nowhere does the Left appear so engaged. Unless it at least starts politically and technically strategic cooperation between the AFL-CIO and the ACFTU, the two most important labor organizations in the world now, it will fail its main cause in the building century.

Finally Chapter VIII. Here I trace the history of the notion of "strategy" in business. This notion is probably as old as trading outside the tribe. The use of the words, "strategy," "strategic," and so on, to mean a plan or operation or advantage for beating other businesses, probably dates back to the 1830s. It has been popular among businessmen, journalists, and economists in the United States for the last hundred years. (Weirdly, economists one after another have written as if they themselves had just come up with the idea, as if they did not know the idea's history.) At the end I note that among a business's various strategies is its labor strategy, that while it needs to contend strategically with its rivals and enemies in the market, precisely in order to succeed against them it also has to contend with its inevitable enemy in production, its "associates," "partners," employees, or simply workers. It is continuously struggling with them, over differences large and small. And sometimes, to avoid a critical defeat by a

rival or an enemy in the market, or gain a critical victory there, it will (if it can) take the risk of installing a new plant or process or system of work, thereby destroying its workers' strategic positions at work. The modern conflict between capital and labor happens then both from day to day in every way it can and in episodic crises that are specifically technical. Understanding it has to involve considering it in time, has to be historical. Acting on it, taking a side in the conflict, fighting for capital or labor, takes specific historical understanding, particularly of the technical matter, but has to fail unless it looks forward.

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Ten years ago the U.S. government's concern "to enhance work-place productivity through labor-management cooperation and employee participation," as per the Dunlop Commission, failed. Ten years ago the AFL-CIO finally dumped its long-established Cold-War leadership. Ever since the U.S. labor movement has been debating "strategy," to try to find the right "strategy" to stop its decline and regain its old influence on national economic and social policy. For the last several months the debate has been urgent, involving threats to break the AFL-CIO apart from inside if it does not put much more assets into unionizing campaigns. Proposals and rebuttals have been earnest, but rarely very informed, consistent, or even clarifying.[4] Preparations look poor for the resolution due at the AFL-CIO convention just next month.

Most dubious in the debate is the assumption that major labor organizations anywhere can change anything fast or much by any particular act. Most destructive is the attitude therefore that the less done, the less effort wasted. Most confusing, however, is

[4] For a recent helpful discussion, see the short articles by Jonathan Tasini, Jack Metzgar, Kate Bronfenbrenner, and Juan Gonzalez, "Labor at the Crossroads," *New Labor Forum*, XIV, 2 (Summer 2005), 9-37.

the use of the word “strategy.” Excited debaters will roll a list of several aims, aspirations, a condition, three approaches, a prospect, and a plan (assuming moreover a totally passive opponent) all into a single “strategy.” They do not distinguish between different strategic fields, morality, markets, politics, social movements, and production. They show no sense of multi-dimensional operations (as if they could fight a modern war without a joint staff). Worst, as usual, they have no focus on what they want to win. Getting bigger or stronger is not a strategic goal. Consider two atypical previews of the AFL-CIO in 2015. (a) Despite fierce uproars in July 2005 hardly anything changed in structure or strategy. Passionate demands for more organizing continued. Passionate denunciations of China for repressing democratic unions there increased. Service unions almost disappeared, as Wal-Mart expanded into the hotel, restaurant, and care-taking industries. Unions in manufacturing, transportation, and communications shrank to nubbins. Firefighters and police unions disappeared by conversion into National Guard units on permanent active duty in the War on Terror in Northcom, the U.S. Northern Command. Republican Congresses, presidents, legislatures, governors, mayors, and courts restricted application of labor laws to maybe half of the once eligible working population. Nationally, union membership declined to 8% of the remaining eligible workers. The AFL-CIO’s 60th national convention resolves, “…these trends cannot continue.” (b) In militant outbursts 60-odd unions at the convention in 2005 merged into one general workers’ union, the GWU-USA, to organize everyone in the United States who works for a living. It at once established international relations with the ACFTU, which in 2006 committed funds to the GWU to unionize Wal-Mart in the United States. The GWU collapsed in 2008. From a lockout then at U.S. and Canadian Pacific ports and

almost simultaneous truckers' strikes at Wal-Mart distribution centers in California, Texas, Indiana, Florida, and Georgia, the ILWU, independent owner-operator trucking organizations, and the Teamsters organized a new U.S. Transport Workers Association, which by 2010, on credit from the ACFTU and defying impotent federal injunctions, National Guard units refusing orders, forced Wal-Mart to sell its superstores (at cost less depreciation) to a consortium of the USTWA, Wal-Mart's "associates," and the towns where the stores were. Other associations then organized likewise in the energy, communication, health-care, child-care, food, sanitation, construction, and custodial industries, and made similar acquisitions there. In July 2015 these consortia send locally chosen delegates to the first convention of the new World Federation of Globalized Labor, Villages, and Exchanges, meeting in Shanghai, representing an estimated 300 million people in some 300 organizations in 50 countries, aiming to "abolish exploitation everywhere in our common, enduring struggle for peace and justice worldwide."

Neither (a) nor (b) is a prediction. Together they are only exaggerated (?) examples for readers to test their own strategic thinking, in particular about labor's technically or industrially strategic positions, and what use they could be, for whom they could be used.

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But the footnotes! If you have come this far, you have noticed them. They are many and long. But do not quail at them. As historians and professors know, but innocent readers do not, you do not have to read them. But do not think they do not matter. Think of them like a foundation. Your house has a foundation; under your apartment's weight-bearing walls are others, all the way down to the building's basic, weight-bearing beams.

You do not need to study them, but there would not be a structure without them. The footnotes matter here, not because they contain part of my argument, but because they are the direct sources and evidence for it. They show I am not fooling, not making the story up. If what I am arguing makes sense to you, ignore the footnotes. If you doubt my claims, look at my sources, and check them yourself. But why the different languages? Because where English translations from other languages exist for these sources, they are often “free translations,” interpreting the author’s thought, for example, inserting “strategic” where the author did not actually write it. I did not want someone else’s interpretation, but as close a translation as I could get from the actual words the author used, being very careful about the originals. If you can read the originals, you can check them; if you cannot, because you have had more important things to do than learn to read other languages, ask someone who can to check them for you. I worked hard on these notes, because my argument about labor in conflict with capital depends on them, and I want the reader to see the dependence in all its depth and breadth.