

# View from the Top

Thorstein Smith

1969

A wave of strikes has been hitting Italy, France, and West Germany, in many cases over the opposition of official union leaderships. A recent strike in Italy was conceded by Fiat to have involved 1.3 million men and to have been 75% effective.

The main issue for European workers continues to be wages: for a 48-hour week at Pirelli (tires), the average worker makes \$160 a month. A quarter-million coal miners in Germany recently won 14% pay increases:

The odd part of this is the myth of European labor strength: in France, only 3.2 million of 12.5 million wage earners are unionized! The proportion in the U.S. is higher than that—some 20 million out of about 70 Million.

But the proportion of that 70 million which is blue collar continues its decline. In 1940 blue collar workers made up about 55% of the labor force, while what C.W. Mills called “the new middle class” of managers, salaried professionals, sales people, and office workers made up about 25%. By 1950 this was up to 40%, by 1960 about 47% with blue collar workers down to 45%.

Much of this increase in white collar workers is accounted for by creeping (state) “socialism”: in 1920 about 2.5 million people worked for government. In 1961 nearly 9 million worked for the government, excluding the armed forces—6.5 million of these worked for state and local governments—constituting some 15% of the labor force.

These workers, blue or white collar, may be an aristocracy of the world’s labor force, but they do drink a lot. According to the *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 2, 1969), “alcoholism costs American employers \$4 billion per year in lost time and ineffectiveness.” It’s the single biggest factor in absenteeism. The “Employee Alcoholism Counselor” is a new specialty at some major corporations.

Employers are also worrying about increasing numbers of higher-paid workers taking Mondays or Fridays off without pay, thus creating an informal four-day work week. With unemployment creeping up to 4.5% of those known actively to be seeking employment (not the same as actual unemployment), the four-day workers will be the first to go.

Meanwhile, you can get a kennel accommodation for your dog at one place in Jersey for \$10.50 a day (the executive suite) with lower rates for studio apartments and efficiencies.

That’s for those of you who, like the chief executive officers of America’s top five corporations, make between \$290,000 and \$795,000 per year (before taxes).

In a study of the top jobs in 500 major companies, the average paycheck was \$188,000. Top man at GM gets the \$795,000 figure, Ford rates \$600,000, and Standard Oil of N.J. \$450,000. AT&T’s man pulls down a mere \$295,000 and GE comes last in the top five with \$289,000. Compare that with Tricky Dick’s puny \$200,000.

From the other side: according to Ralph Nader (*New Republic*, Oct. 11), fewer law school grads are interested in Wall St. law firms, and more and more firms are having to take on public service jobs to attract bright grads.

Some firms are setting up “community services departments,” or letting their members spend company time on public service activities. This is called “pro bono” work—“for the good of the people.” Roughly similar to the Mafia sending Xmas baskets to the wives of their victims.

One of the best-organized radical caucuses is among profs of English and modern languages in the Modern Language Association. A radical, Louis Kampf, active with the New University Conference (which operates a caucus inside MLA) has been elected 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, which means in time he may end up as president.

The caucus is setting up a series of workshops at the MLA annual meeting over Xmas in Denver. Write to Florence Howe, Goucher College, Towson, Md., for more info.

From NUC's new constitution: "We commit ourselves to political struggle for a new American form of socialism. We commit ourselves to replace a system that is an instrument of class, sexual and radical oppression with one that serves the people." Right on.



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