



A JOB AIN'T THE ANSWER

plants we work in create new Love Canals. But rather than accept responsibility for changing the system which has turned us into slaves to constantly-expanding toxic wastes, and constantly-expanding multi-national corporations, we beg the master to give us back our jobs so he can lay us off again.

HOW DID THINGS GET SO BAD?

50 years ago most Americans didn't have this slave mentality towards jobs. Jobs mattered, and people flocked to the big cities. But millions still lived on small farms or in small communities or ran small businesses, and some even dreamed of one day owning their own business. We saw ourselves NOT AS LABOR but as members of families and communities and as citizens, working to create the goods and services needed by our country and our people. Factory work was hard, wages low, but mass production was just beginning. Even though we were producing for the market, capitalism was still progressive because we were still producing for basic needs.

NOW THE PARTY IS OVER. U.S. capitalism has entered into a new stage, the stage of multinational capitalism. Seeking greater profits, U.S. capitalism is rushing to join foreign capitalisms, abandoning American workers. American cities and the American people. The productive base to support social and public services is drying up. As the price for remaining in this country, U.S. capitalism is demanding increasing concessions from workers.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

Faced with this crisis we have only two alternatives:

1. *We can continue to put our faith in capitalism, hoping that things will get better when all around us they are obviously getting worse.*
2. *Or we can refuse to accept the slot of Labor and Job-Holder to which capitalism has reduced us. As human beings and as citizens we can take responsibility for the struggles necessary to create a new economy, an economy which serves our deep human need for the kind of Work that develops our skills, encourages our cooperation and enables both men and women to work and share in building strong families and communities and in making political decisions for our communities and country.*

To those who ask what do we do in the meantime, we should make clear that there is no longer any meantime. Between today's crisis and tomorrow's new society there is only continuing disintegration and demoralization until we are ready to commit ourselves to the revolutionary struggle for a NEW AMERICA.

GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND CO-WORKERS TO DISCUSS THIS LEAFLET. Contact the NOAR branch nearest you so that we can talk about what you and we can do together to create a new future for ourselves, for our children and for our country.

JOIN NOAR IN MEETING THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF THE 1980's!

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No Answer in 1981

DAN S. WANG
ON JIMMY
AND GRACE
LEE BOGGS

Racism. Exploitation by gender. Corporate power and globalized labor. Environmental catastrophe. War.

The year was 1981. The leaflet is dated February, less than a month after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan.

| *How did things get so bad?*

By the time this question was asked directly in literature disseminated in the Detroit area by the National Organization for an American Revolution, the explosive anger of Detroit's 1967 rebellion had faded into a dull despair. White flight was a done deal. Business was on the move, first to the suburbs, then to the Sun Belt states, and in the decades that followed, to the economies of the global South. Coleman Young, one of the first of a generation of African American big city mayors, proved himself powerless but for the capacity to entrench his own corruption. Waves of layoffs and plant closings dominated the news—and would for years to come.

The Great Society, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration Act of 1965, and other progressive initiatives from the Sixties were in place, but seemed the product of a different age, though only a decade and half earlier. The militant mass movements that forced government and corporations to bend policy had disintegrated, due both to internal fragmentation and external repression. Jimmy Carter, the “human rights” president, had been deposed by a telegenic right winger who first usurped power within the mainstream of the Republican party and then went on to dominate coverage in the national news; in effect, Reagan mastered the media.

It is important to recall the context not because the pamphlet seems dated otherwise, but rather for the reason that without it the text reads as an impressively on-point picture of our twenty-first century situation. But for a few adjustments of terminology and updating of issues, this might have been written six years ago instead of thirty-six. The basic analysis remains totally relevant.

| *Getting jobs, keeping jobs, making jobs—that's all most people can think about.*

That is certainly all the Democrats can talk about, even now, seven decades since employment and population peaked in Detroit and other midwestern industrial centers. Ever since at least the first Bill Clinton campaign a full generation ago, when he turned the pressure up on George Bush Sr. with his quip “it's the economy, stupid,” the Democrats have sunk their whole strategy into the Good Jobs barrel. “Good jobs”—a pablum of false humility and magical thinking—has become a political orthodoxy.

Long before capital needed to invent climate liars, the conventional political wisdom of Good Jobs forced leaders to deny evidence. A politician today risks excoriation for stating the obvious, that the jobs of the post-WWII economic expansion that were automated out of existence or outsourced to international labor markets are not coming back. To say that the typical factory job, even at the height of American manufacturing, hardly qualified as desirable work by any human standard is practically a heresy.

A heresy to capitalism is a revolutionary statement.

James and Grace Lee Boggs were the primary authors of “A Job Ain't The Answer.” Unflinching in their assessment and having already gone through remarkable turns in their political thinking, both together and separately, the Boggses faced an ugly truth with the honesty of true revolutionaries: that American workers collude in their own exploitation, that blacks collude in their own oppression, that women collude in their own relative powerlessness. Having lived and worked in the heart of the industrial beast, Detroit, through the peak years of industrial growth and into its decline, the Boggses understood that the capitalist-imperialist powers reduce human beings profoundly. Through working in and observing the city and factory floor environments, they could see that reduction of humanity was not only a matter of alienated labor, not only a matter of racialized exploitation, and not only a matter of gendered wage theft. Modern capital even reduces peoples' capacity to dream, peoples' capacity to desire more than what industrial

society can supply. For NOAR the smallness of workers' demands, of black people's notion of freedom, of women's understanding of equality—these were part of the problem, too. Because *a job ain't the answer*.

As we fall further everyday into the morass of fascistic overreach by conservative forces, the stakes are finally becoming clear. It is all or nothing. The reactionaries now wield the full arsenal of the most powerful security-surveillance-incarceration complex ever known—and even then, not fully known, precisely because of its tentacular structure. Aggregate global indebtedness nears four quadrillion dollars, an amount that will never be repaid. Climate change in the form of extreme drought, floods, pests, and viruses will create mass insecurities never before weathered by modern capital's monocultural food and health systems. The grabs are underway for scarce water, fossil fuels, arable land. Rising virulence in ethno-nationalism exacerbates strife already constant due to social inequalities. For the mean and depressingly unimaginative architects of policy, war is the solution.

Years later, Grace said in an interview that she thought the NOAR project had held up well. Having struck an ideological path with the Johnson-Forest Tendency, then having worked in tandem with Black Power and radical Black labor groups, and seeing the trends of industrial capital up close in Detroit, the Boggses helped to found NOAR to renew the project of addressing root problems. But this time they assimilated into an overall analysis all the insights of earlier experience. Their conclusion, put simply, was that none of the problems of inegalitarian distribution of resources or political power—no matter the priority framework, eg anti-sexism, labor struggle, racial justice, or whatever—can ever be resolved by merely demanding “good jobs.” It is built into the structure of production that any such jobs will only further advance oppressions, inequities and social breakdowns elsewhere.

The shifts in the global economy and political climate since 1981 have been huge. Today's mediascape, economy of precarity, proliferation of subcultures, technologically lubricated global mobilities of every sort, and not least the revanchist Trump regime, together demand a new analysis. But NOAR's arguments from that year read as the foundations for a new synthesis.

| *“The time has come for us to challenge everyone we know and meet to repudiate the individualistic and materialistic values that have made us collaborators with capitalism in destroying our own humanity.”*

The above passage was part of their conclusion. Let us use it as our starting point—this time asking, *If a job ain't the answer, what is?*