

White Collar Worker Bemoans Her Fate

Esther Dolgoff

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Last September 28, 1985 an article appeared in the editorial pages of *The New York Times* entitled “Clean Out Your Desk and Don’t Expect Thanks.” A woman named Diana Wissner-Levy “bemoans her fate”. Because of budgetary constraints, the “administrators” (her employers) laid her off and wanted her out as soon as possible—in two days—because it would be bad for the “morale” of the workers who were being kept on. She had to clean her desk in a hurry.

As she was removing the items which she had accumulated during her work as “administrative secretary”, she thought of the education it took her years to acquire to be eligible for such a position, the time spent looking for the job and the adjustments she had to make while working. She had only spent three and a half years at her job. Diana points out that even workers with 10, 15, 20 years and more of faithful service who “built the company” were discharged. She bemoans the chronic favoritism and internal political conniving of the company administrators who fired workers on the pretext that they were “not ambitious”, or “too assertive.”

Although the company is listed among the 500 most prosperous by the magazine of big business, *Fortune*, the company was out to make even more money by discharging workers. Diana suggests that a lot of workers’ jobs could be saved by reducing the unnecessary expenses of the big shot executives. No more 5-star hotels, no fancy restaurants to entertain business associates, cut by at least 10% the annual salaries of the executives whose salaries run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. And all these savings could go toward keeping employees working, would boost the morale of workers if they felt the “company cared” and the company and employees would become a “happy family.”

We are surprised that a woman of Diana Wissen-Levy’s education and intelligence does not seem to understand that in the capitalist system, people who work for wages—professional or manual—are considered commodities—dollars and cents, not human. Any person with a conscience can, of course, sympathize with a person who is fired from his or her job. The fact that it took her many years to become a professional does not alter the situation. It takes a manual worker—a carpenter, a cook, a dressmaker, a bricklayer, many years to acquire his or her skills. With the rise of capitalism and industrialization, manual workers have been forced to give up the tools which were once the extension of their hands and have become, themselves, an extension of the machine. The professional who thought he or she had some measure of security is facing the same situation. The machine, even in routine office work, even in the decision making, is taking over the skills of the workers. Diane Wissen-Levy’s cry is in essence, the cry of the world:

“How can they, in good conscience sleep, knowing that they have overturned our lives...we will have a hard time sleeping until we find our next job.”

We must point out that, unlike Diana, there are workers—both professional and manual, “white-collar” and “blue-collar”—who feel and know that something effective can and must be done. The human being, fortunately, is not like the bees, with a built-in behavior pattern. We human beings can change conditions and change our lives to build a world of equality, freedom, and justice. *“From each according to his/her ability. To each according to his/her need.”*

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Editorial Note: Esther Dolgoff wrote this for *Wobble: Bulletin of the Rank-and File Organizing Committee*. The ROC was an ad-hoc network of IWW members (1983–1985) who subscribed to the ideas Sam Dolgoff had advocated in *Notes for a Discussion on the Regeneration of the IWW*.

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