Preface

On 2 July 1974 I began work as a miscellaneous machine operator at the engine division of Allied Corporation—a multinational that produced, among other things, a wide range of agricultural equipment. The piecework machine shop of the small-parts department reminded me of Donald Roy's famous accounts of output restriction. After rereading those articles, I was struck by the similarities between his observations and my own at Allied. But this was nothing unusual. I knew that machine operators in Britain responded to piecework in just the same way that Roy described, by goldbricking, quota restriction, and by establishing informal ties with auxiliary workers. I therefore turned to Roy's 546-page Ph.D. dissertation, crammed full of vivid details relating his experiences between 1944 and 1945 in a shop that produced railway jacks. In the opening chapters I discovered that the layout of the machines—the drills, mills, lathes, etc.—was quite similar to the layout in my own shop, and I drew the reasonable conclusion that machine shops are generally organized in similar ways. Moving further into his dissertation each day, I eventually came upon a reference to the Illinois Central

Railroad, which Roy, like myself, rode from the University of Chicago to where he worked. And then I encountered a reference to the town where his company, which he called Geer, was situated. It happened to be the same place where I was working and living. But this was not surprising; after all, there were many machine shops in the area. Then I caught a reference to a four-story building. Lo and behold, according to my fellow workers, Allied had once been located in a four-story building. Indeed, the building stood abandoned next to the Illinois Central Railroad tracks about a mile away from the present site. Yes, a few of the old-timers could remember a jack shop. The clincher came toward the end of the dissertation, where Roy let drop the number of his union local. It was the same as my own. I had indeed fortuitously stumbled on the very factory that Roy had studied thirty years before. Even though Geer had been taken over by Allied, Roy's Jack Shop and the small-parts department in which I worked bore a remarkably close resemblance to each other. To discover what had remained the same on the shop floor and what had changed in the thirty years separating Roy's experience and mine inevitably became one of the central tasks of my study.

Donald Roy's dissertation provided the empirical context. But the analysis of the shop floor required a framework as well as a focus for assessing changes over time. Roy's theoretical concerns were deeply embedded in the tradition of industrial sociology and revolved around "restriction of output." In attributing the source of this "problem" to the rational response of workers to managerial irrationality, Roy successfully upended the gospel according to Elton Mayo, which accounted for restriction of output in terms of workers' nonlogical system of beliefs and their failure to comprehend managerial logic. The debate that threads through the industrial-sociology literature is caught up in the same problematic—why workers don't work harder. The difference between radical and conservative accounts lies in the assumptions they make. Radicals point to restriction of output as an expression of class consciousness, of the structural and inevitable conflict between capital and labor, or of the alienating nature of work. Conservatives, on the other hand, working from assumptions of underlying harmony, attribute restriction of output to the natural indolence of workers, poor

communication between workers and managers, inadequate attention to the human side of the worker, or the "false consciousness" of workers in not appreciating that their interests are identical with those of management. As I understood the issue, the conflict and consensus perspectives both seemed out of tune with what was actually taking place on the shop floor. Instead, the terrain of discourse should be transformed and the original question posed in different terms. As the Lynds put it in 1929: Why do workers work as hard as they do?

The actual narrative in Roy's dissertation suggests that this is the more reasonable question. Machine operators in Roy's Jack Shop worked at a hectic pace and could become furious if interrupted. To be sure, it was a piece-rate system, but, as Roy makes clear, operators were not "busting their asses" for a few extra cents. Nor did they launch into their work through any great love for the bosses. Indeed, throughout his dissertation Roy highlights their resentment at being treated like "yardbirds." Yet, paradoxically, he tried to measure and explain the time that workers "waste." He did not examine why they didn't waste more time, although answers can be found in his account. Between the observations he made and the questions he posed there seems to be a basic incongruity.

The intensity of work struck me as forcibly at Allied as it did in Roy's account of Geer. In the beginning, largely out of fear and ineptitude, I shifted between contempt and awe for what I thought was an excessive expenditure of effort and ingenuity. Why should workers push themselves to advance the interests of the company? Why cooperate with and sometimes even exceed the expectations of those "people upstairs" who "will do anything to squeeze another piece out of you"? But it wasn't long before I too was breaking my back to make out, to make the quota, to discover a new angle, and to run two jobs at once—risking life and limb for that extra piece. What was driving me to increase Allied's profits? Why was I actively participating in the intensification of my own exploitation and even losing my temper when I couldn't? That is the problem I pose.

For Karl Marx it was also a problem, and his solution was coercion. At the time he wrote, unbridled subordination of labor to capital could explain much that took place on the shop floor. The system of piecework was used to intensify work arbitrarily, since

workers were unable to resist arbitrary price-cutting. Where there were time wages, the overseer could arbitrarily fire workers for failing to fulfill their quotas. But with the emergence of trade unions and the protection of certain minimal rights of employment, the threat of losing one's job or failing to obtain a subsistence wage was gradually unhinged from the application of effort at the workplace. Coercion alone could no longer explain what workers did once they arrived on the shop floor. As my day man, Bill, assured me, "No one pushes you around here; you've got to get on with the work yourself." An element of spontaneous consent combines with coercion to shape productive activities.

Within the Marxist tradition the most sophisticated and enlightening analysis of consent is to be found in the prison writings of Antonio Gramsci. However, he is more concerned with the organization of consent in the political arena than he is with the labor process. In developing theories of the state, the party, and the intellectuals, he incorporates and combines force and persuasion, coercion and consent, domination and hegemony. Only in one essay, "Americanism and Fordism," does he examine the labor process itself. There he considers the revolutionary changes in the labor process taking place in the United States before, during, and after World War I. Unhampered by the parasitic residues of previous systems of domination, in the United States the entire life of the nation revolves around production; "hegemony here is born in the factory." In this study I try to develop and elaborate this suggestive but elusive comment. In contrast to the conventional wisdom among both Marxists and non-Marxists, I propose to demonstrate how consent is produced at the point of production—independent of schooling, family life, mass media, the state, and so forth. In short, the book takes off with a critique of Marx only to return, with the instruments of Marxism, to his focal interest in the labor process.

Let me hasten to add that this is not an exercise in neo-Marxism, Marxist revisionism, or any other label social scientists may apply to the Marxism they may wish to take seriously. Rather, it is a Marxist study. That means at least three things. First, I am concerned with change and continuity in capitalism conceived of as a particular way of appropriating unpaid labor from direct producers. Second, I assume that capitalism is not the last type of society in history.

There is no reason that history should somehow stop with capitalism. Third, I take as a point of departure the possibility and desirability of a fundamentally different form of society—call it communism, if you will—in which men and women, freed from the pressures of scarcity and from the insecurity of everyday existence under capitalism, shape their own lives. Collectively they decide who, how, when, and what shall be produced. It is in terms of this possibility, although not necessarily its inevitability, that Marxists interpret the present and the past. Sociology, on the other hand, treats this possibility as either utopian or with us already. It therefore looks upon the future as ironing out the imperfections of the present, and upon the present as the natural and inevitable culmination of the past.

Just as sociology has borrowed much from Marx and emerged in part through a debate with him, so Marxism cannot afford to dismiss sociology. Instead, it must selectively incorporate sociology's partial truths. Indeed, the most outstanding Marxist theoreticians of the twentieth century—Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, and Galvana Della Volpe—have all freely borrowed from liberal and conservative social theory and philosophy. Marx himself established the pattern by taking Hegel, Smith, and Ricardo, among others, as points of departure and transforming their insights into the basic elements of his own theories. In my endeavors to build a theory of the capitalist labor process, I shall take the dominant perspectives of industrial sociology as my point of departure and reintegrate its many insights into a Marxist framework.

Accordingly, the main dialogue that flows through these pages is with sociology. For reasons of space and ease of reading I have avoided entering into debates with alternative Marxisms. But it should not be inferred that there are no other Marxist approaches to the labor process. The most prominent and comprehensive of these is Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital,* which appeared while I was struggling to make out at Allied. No one writing on the labor process in 1978, particularly those writing in a Marxist tradition, can be uninfluenced by this creative rehabilitation of Marx's own theory of the labor process. As I have elaborated at length elsewhere, the approach I adopt here has been largely shaped in

opposition to many of the dominant themes of *Labor and Monopoly Capital.*[1]

Limitations of space have imposed other constraints on the contents of this book. Although it would have brought more life to the account, for the sake of excursions into theorizing I decided to sacrifice some of the rich ethnographic data I had collected. Also dropped are fourteen graphs that statistically document some of the conclusions I draw, chiefly in chapter 8, where I discuss changes in the labor process that resulted from the recession of 1974–75. All the graphs can be found in my dissertation, "Making Out on the Shop Floor" (University of Chicago, 1976). A third omission is the ritual methodological appendix that sociologists, unlike anthropologists, for whom participant observation is their trade, feel compelled to include. The special problems of a study made over a period of time, in which the observations of one participant observer are compared with those of another, would perhaps make such an appendix more necessary. One particular problem I confronted in evaluating the differences between Roy's and my own observations lay in distinguishing actual changes in the labor process from differences in our perspectives and situations. Since we were in almost identical positions in the labor process, and since the experiences we recorded were largely a function of those positions, I am confident that the changes I present are "true" changes and not artifacts of any different orientation. As I suggested earlier, Roy's concern with restriction of output in no way restricted his vision and portrayal of the totality as it appeared to a machine operator. To help readers judge for themselves as to the validity of the comparison, I have quoted extensively from Roy's dissertation.

No doubt some will raise their eyebrows at the sweeping conclusions I draw from a single case study. What relevance, one may ask, does a study of a relatively insignificant piecework machine shop in the Midwest have for understanding the basic production technologies of modern industry—the assembly line, the continuous-flow technology, office work, and so forth? Such skepticism is frequently voiced by those steeped in the methodology of statistics, that is, of generalizing from a sample to a population. But there are ways of understanding the relationship of the part to the whole other than through statistical extrapolation. First, there is the position

that regards the part as an expression of the totality, that is, each part contains within it the essential principles of the whole. By studying Allied in comparison with Geer, I can extract essential attributes of the labor process under advanced capitalism—for example, the construction of consent through the internal labor market and the internal state. Second, there is the complementary notion of the totality as composed of mutually interdependent parts. By understanding the relationship of Allied to other institutions, such as the family, the school, the state, the trade union, other corporations, and so on, we can begin to construct a picture of the entire society. This is generalization by extension from the part to the whole.

Yet my main endeavor has been to use the case study to illustrate and develop a theoretical framework for understanding and posing questions about the capitalist labor process. If the conclusions I draw provoke readers to deny their validity, I shall be more than satisfied that my efforts have not been in vain.

Field workers have numerous debts to record and tributes to pay. These acknowledgments are made somewhat difficult in the present case because, as a condition of my research as a participant observer, I had to assure Allied personnel, both management and workers, that I would preserve their personal anonymity and that of the company as well. For this reason I have also omitted all dates of publication when citing newspaper and journal articles about Allied Corporation.

My first acknowledgment is to my fellow workers. If it is nothing else, this study is about their lives on the shop floor, and its completion depended on their willingness to include me in their community. Although I frequently explained why I was there, they regarded my enterprise with a mixture of disbelief and amusement. Some couldn't understand why there wasn't an easier way of obtaining a degree than by working in a factory for a year. Others assured me that if I ever got my dissertation published, and if they were mentioned, it would surely be a best-seller. From time to time people would come up to me with a juicy story and say, "You, put that in your book." Their good humor and willingness to respond to some very strange inquiries made my task much more pleasant.

Particular thanks must go to my day man—Bill—who taught me how to get by and make out. He tolerated my incompetence and tempered the rougher sides of working life with his sense of the absurd. Even such characters as Morris (the trucker), Ed (the rate-buster), and Jim (the union president), although they frequently aroused the ire of their fellow workers, nevertheless added drama to the shop floor.

I should also like to thank trade-union officials and management for providing me with data and interviews. The personnel department was always helpful in supplying me with information. I was also able to trace, to places as far apart as Springfield, Illinois, and Southern California, a number of management officials associated with the old Geer Company. I am grateful to them for granting me interviews.

Intellectually, my debts are widespread. My interest in the organization of work was first cultivated in Zambia, where I undertook a number of studies of the copper industry between 1968 and 1972. During this period, Jaap van Velsen gave me an intensive training in social anthropology of the "Manchester School" variety. His teaching is deeply embedded in the way I orient myself to theory and research, and it pervades the analysis in this book. My debts to Bill Wilson, who chaired my dissertation committee at Chicago, are too numerous to record. From the beginning of my first year in graduate school he has given me unswerving moral support and constructive criticism in all my intellectual endeavors. Without his courage and his confidence in his own judgment that what I was doing could indeed be regarded as sociology—a position he held in opposition to a number of his colleagues—the dissertation, and now this book, would never have been written. My debt to Adam Przeworski can be expressed quite simply. His seminar on Marxist theories of the state in 1973–74 turned out to be a transformative intellectual experience. It had all the exhilaration of a puberty rite. Both Bill and Adam devoted a great deal of time and energy to guiding the dissertation through its various stages.

They were aided and abetted by Charles Bidwell, Raymond Smith, Richard Taub, and Arthur Stinchcombe, whose healthy skepticism and critical commentary forced me to reconsider and reformulate many parts of the study. Special mention must be made of Donald Roy, who enthusiastically supported my return to Geer.

His comments on an early paper were particularly important in confirming my interpretation of changes that had occurred over the past thirty years. Had I deliberately planned to undertake a "revisit," I doubt that I could have chosen a more astute and perceptive field worker or a richer account of shop-floor life.

Since arriving in Berkeley, I have been forced to shift my intellectual orientation somewhat. Both Margaret Cerullo and Tom Long have persuaded me of the dangers of competing with sociology on its own terrain in the production of a Marxist "science." They have convinced me that Marxism without critique is as dangerous as the history of Marxist "science" is ignominious. Their influence can be found in a number of places in the book. As friends who share my interests and with whom I share my work, both Erik Wright and Bill Friedland have been important in their encouragement and criticism of the completed dissertation. As a referee, Maurice Zeitlin went far beyond the call of duty in providing twenty-five pages of relentless criticism. The very substantial rewriting of the original manuscript is largely a response to the many weaknesses he drew to my attention. For their comments and advice at various stages I would like to thank José de Alencar, Paul Attewell, Robert Blauner, David Brody, Mitchell Fein, Bob Fitzgerald, Gretchen Franklin, Robert Jackson, Randy Martin, Lynne Pettler, David Plotke, and Ida Susser, and I owe thanks to Olivia Inaba for her expert typing and for catching many errors in the manuscript.

In adapting to, or resisting, the processes of mortification that characterize graduate life in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, I depended on a number of friends for moral and intellectual support. I thank them all, but in particular Terence Halliday and Kathleen Schwartzman.