
ECONOMICS, LABOR, & BUSINESS

Union Distress

"It Isn't Labor's Day" by A. H. Raskin, in *The Nation* (Sept. 9, 1978), 333 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014.

American organized labor is in trouble. The number of union dues-payers is declining (one in four workers now belongs to a union, compared with one in three at the end of World War II). Labor's hopes of reversing this trend through a 1978 Labor Reform Act were shattered by successful corporation lobbying in the Senate.

Signs of union distress are everywhere, writes Raskin, former *New York Times* labor reporter. Management is becoming more aggressive. Employers are learning new ways to bust unions. They are going to the bargaining table with demands that unions give back some of the prerogatives surrendered to labor over the years. "The classic tug of war over money has taken second place in negotiations to a defensive battle by unions against a take-away of contract-guaranteed limits on management's freedom to manage," Raskin contends.

Automation, notably in newspaper publishing, has shifted bargaining power from labor to management. On top of this have come intensified import competition, chronic stagflation, a shift of industry and jobs from the unionized Northeast to open-shop plants in the Sun Belt, and the change from a production economy to one in which seven out of ten jobs are in service industries.

Having joined with management in recent years in various joint efforts aimed at solving everything from the energy crisis to New York City's fiscal woes, Big Labor now finds itself politically weak and unable to mount an effective strategy of resistance against corporate attempts to weaken union power.

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Reflecting on the Fabricated Man

"Unanswered Questions On Test Tube Life" by Andre E. Hellegers and Richard A. McCormick, in *America* (Aug. 12-19, 1978), 106 W. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

The July 1978 birth to Mrs. Lesley Brown in Oldham, England, of the first "test tube baby" was a major medical achievement. But the euphoria surrounding this well-publicized event may be premature, argue Hellegers and McCormick, of Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute of Ethics, for it raises profound moral and ethical issues that affect such basic human concerns as parenthood, sexuality, and personal identity.

Some of the ethical considerations surrounding *in vitro* fertilization were raised earlier by theologians in discussing artificial insemination. In 1949, Pope Pius XII flatly rejected the "licitness" of artificial insemination.

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nation by the husband (A.I.H.) on the grounds that it converted marriage and the home into a biological laboratory. Subsequently, however, many scholars and religious leaders have distinguished between the unitive and the procreative aspects of marriage (which Pius XII deemed inseparable), maintaining that A.I.H. can be seen as completion rather than replacement of sexual intercourse. The Bishop of Cork, for example, has no objection to the test tube method "if there is no other possible way for [childless couples] to have babies."

More specific problems related to *in vitro* fertilization persist, however, according to Hellegers and McCormick. Among them are: the question of zygote loss (gynecologist Dr. Patrick Steptoe estimates that he failed to achieve embryo transfer with 200 fertilized ova before succeeding with Mrs. Brown; "Are these really mini-abortions?" the authors ask); the risk of fetal damage and deformity borne by the child; a growing cultural tolerance of even more radical developments such as "third party" donor insemination and the carriage of the fetus by a surrogate womb; and the diversion of medical effort from more important programs such as basic health care.

In vitro fertilization offers desperate, sterile couples a new hope, but the authors caution that "there just might be benefits we can never enjoy because we cannot get them without being unethical."

Ending Disrespect for Learning

"What's Behind the Drop in Test Scores?"
by Christopher Jencks, in *Working Papers*
(July-Aug. 1978), Center for the Study of
Public Policy, 123 Mt. Auburn St., Cam-
bridge, Mass. 02138.

Widely publicized reports of declining test performance (notably on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or SAT) by American students since the 1960s have convinced many people that U.S. schools are now turning out illiterates and have prompted new support for a "back-to-basics" movement.

But today's students are not doing worse than their predecessors on tests of *basic* skills, writes Jencks, a Harvard sociologist. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, has reported that 17-year-olds actually scored higher on tests of "basic literacy" in 1974 than in 1971.

Since the observed decline in test performance shows up only after students have completed the fourth or fifth grade, Jencks writes, it indicates a decline in the more complex skills and knowledge that tests like the SAT are designed to measure—i.e., ability to infer and analyze, breadth of reading, and knowledge of literature, history, politics, and science.

Rejecting most of the explanations popular among social scientists (e.g., broken homes, working mothers) and the public (which blames TV and parental permissiveness), Jencks attributes this slump to a "crisis of legitimacy" during the tumultuous 1960s. Bored with traditional academic subjects and losing respect for learning, teen-age stu-