

Jobzines: Fanning the Flames...

Jobzines are one worthwhile method for a worker to stir up that pot that the boss would rather have you leave alone. I've been stirring away by this method lately, and I'm having a great time of it.

Whenever a working person decides to do something about their job, they will take an inventory of the various approaches, and then decide which of these are feasible in their situation. While the best approach of all is to organize a dynamic union and then take it from there, many workplaces do not lend itself easily to that method. For example, you may be a completely casual worker who wanders from job to job, never intending to stay for very long, like a waitress or a dishwasher. The employer who you actually see and dislike may not be the employer who pays you, as is the case if you're an office temp or a paid volunteer. The size and physical layout of the job site may be another obstacle. A human services worker, caring for disabled people in one among fifty rural group homes, or a visiting nurse, will face a major problem in finding enough coworkers to form an organizing committee before the next step can be attempted. One's work may be off on the fringes of things, or entirely illegal, as with a phone sex worker or a nude dancer, or a prostitute. For that matter, your boss could be a gangster, and not a regular businessman. Even worse, you could be in the army, where the discussion of an organizing drive can land you in Leavenworth. That'll put the chill on it every time!

For workers such as these, one viable method of changing the situation is to create a "jobzine." If it doesn't change anything on one's own jobsite, it may, at least, increase the awareness among workers in the same occupation. The term derives from "fanzine," which is a self-published journal by the fans of a particular band or type of music. A jobzine focuses on one's life as a worker, and is totally under the control of the one who produces it. Typically it will consist of only a few stapled sheets, have a circulation of 100 copies or less, and be produced on the company's copier or in a pirate-friendly copy shop where the editor has a discount. All of this depends on the skills and resources of the editor. The important things to remember are that a jobzine can't be destroyed by a boss or a union buster, it can contain literally anything, and it will happen even if the editor is anonymous or has never spoken to a single coworker about the project.

About two years ago, I began volunteering as a healthy subject for experiments that pharmaceutical firms must perform on humans before they can market a new drug. I am paid for doing this on a piece-work basis, but the compensation is often worth the trouble. In this line of work, one gets to know a lot of fellow guinea pigs, especially in Philadelphia, where there are many research units in the same area. There is a distinct culture among us because of the way we are isolated together for weeks at a time, sharing a rather odd experience.

However, almost none of the usual rules of organizing apply to human guinea pigs. We are not "employees," and our relationship with a particular unit doesn't take on the grinding quality of a workplace. We are expected to act like civilized people and to arrive and be stuck with the needle on time. Beyond this, we simply sit around reading, gabbing or watching videotapes. However, the recruiter who signs the volunteer on has the power to refuse anyone admission, and so there is an understanding that troublemakers need not return, just like in a regular workplace. There are good units and bad ones. Instead of labor laws we have ethical codes that are interpreted and enforced, after a fashion, by a board of doctors and two federal agencies.

What, I asked myself, can a labor activist do in such a situation? In a departure from the various organizing efforts with which I'd been involved, I took the example of two guys who had already taken possession of the terms of debate, as well as the culture of their jobs by publishing jobzines. They are Dishwasher Pete of *Dishwasher* and Keffo of *Temp Slave*, which are the classic, definitive works of the genre.

Pete has become a legend in the world of zines during the eight years he's been in print. He travels everywhere from Alaska to an oil derrick in the Gulf of Mexico, getting jobs as a dishwasher and throwing them away without a care, but writing insightful memoirs along the way from the anti-authoritarian worker's point of view. Cartoonists render some pieces into visual form, and dish washing-related passages from literature and history punctuate the every issue of this modestly presented journal. *Dishwasher* most distinctly captures the culture of the occupation by conveying the attitudes of "dishdogs" toward themselves and their

work, and savoring everything from early model dish machines to 1940s vintage restaurant training manuals, to historical accounts of dishwashers on strike at various times and places. Pete has been known to conduct some first-rate research.

Keffo's zine *Temp Slave* is also successful, and is now coming into its tenth issue. He fills it with criticisms and statistics on major temp agencies, a letters column, memoirs of rotten agencies and worse bosses by himself and his readers, and excellent cartoons. Every issue is relevant to the slave's life from beginning to end, and is peppered with Keffo's raw, much-loved "rip-'em-a-new-asshole" writing style.

In order to do what these guys had done, which meant to take ownership for ourselves, the workers, of both the guinea pig subculture and the terms of ethical debate regarding the use of human subjects for drug experiments, I started a zine called *Guinea Pig Zero*. In it, I share information about things like the experiments on inmates of nazi concentration camps, current news accounts of a young woman who volunteered for a \$150 gig and lost her life in the bargain, short literary selections on the topic, photos and illustrations, drug study memoirs by me and other guinea pigs, and report cards on particular research units.

These report cards were taken seriously and were covered in the press. Some time later, I was delighted to learn that one in particular had led directly to the correction of a problem. My write-up of the Robert Wood Johnson Hospital in New Brunswick, NJ, included the important fact that a volunteer needed to pester nurses before receiving his own copy of the informed consent document, which amounts to a heavy violation of the ethical rules. I knew shortly afterwards that the zine was being discussed by researchers, mostly with approval, but it was a few months before a fellow guinea pig described his recent study at the same

institution. "They laid two copies in front of me," he said, "one of which was for me, right at the beginning. After I had read it and signed, the lady put the thing into my hand, and kept double-checking afterward to make sure I wasn't leaving it behind."

The zine has improved the quality of the debate on bioethics by reminding the public that we have an awareness and a will and we're careful not to be casually misused by researchers, who we trust as far as we can throw them, but not an inch farther. The pharmaceutical companies, however, are hopelessly untrustworthy. My fellow research volunteers and I now have a forum to ourselves. We have a great deal of satisfaction from a creative project that's been a big success. It's important to realize, though, that the success of Guinea Pig Zero is helped along by the intense public interest directed at human research these days. Another major boost is that my comrade Alexis Buss does the zine's layout so well that GPZ's latest issue has waltzed into the company of professionally polished magazines simply because of her involvement.

Why not look over a jobzine or two, think about your job, and start doodling up a jobzine? If you have no computer, hand-write the thing, as many zinesters do. Get as creative as you like, or just give 'em the straight facts. You've got nothing to lose but your boredom.

Jobzine Reviews

These will give you a better idea of the various types of jobzines, and how to send for them (in alphabetical order).

Dishwasher (described above). Hand made. Send \$1 to DW, PO Box 8213, Portland OR 97207-8213

The Door #149. A dissident jobzine for Christian ministers – just what you've always prayed for. This time-honored, glossy-covered organ of satire has a 20-odd year history of bashing televangelists, popes and Mothers Theresa. The present cover anoints Beavis & Butt-Head the "Theologians of the Decade," for their timeless utterances "Thou Shalt Not Suck!" and "The Bible kicks Butt!" Also wonderful are an interview with a Christian nudist, lewdly religious personal ads, great cartoons, and plenty else that carries with it a quick wit and a professional command of Scripture. It's rather special when someone slams the problems of religion from the inside. Send \$22.95/year (6 issues) or \$4.50/copy to: The Door, PO Box 616, Mount Morris IL 61054-7610, or call 1 (800) 597 3667

Adventures of an Unemployed Entomologist #6 & #7. The anonymous bug expert is still working as a temp, but practices her profession with a passion nonetheless. She writes very well, so that one learns all about insects in a serious, but enjoyable, way while perusing this cleanly-prepared, cleverly illustrated newsletter-style zine. She also reviews museum shows, insect books, and the hiring practices of her would-be

employers. I strongly recommend this one, both as a jobzine and as a bugzine. I grabbed this issue by the base of the wing, bashed it on the ground, and pecked out its meat, the way a house sparrow devours a 17-year cicada, on the day it came in the mail. This is not something I do with every zine I get, let me tell you! Send \$2 to: UE, P.O. Box 3026, Worcester MA 01613-3026

Blow My Colon #3. Not one of my favorites, but worth reading, BMC is more sensational than it needs to be but reflects the helplessness workers feel on the job in its section "101 ways to murder your boss." We know that we can't really do anything about the asshole, so we talk about killing him, get high, and forget it – this is the sad, but common attitude of U.S. workers. I've heard people saying, "what if a pallet fell on

his head by accident" so many times that it's tiresome by now. However, few people discuss bossicide seriously, and the subject is totally forbidden in the mainstream media. When Joe the janitor comes to work with an Uzi and forty extra clips, the boss is almost certain to be the first one down, but the papers say only that a crazy guy shot his co-workers, and then wander off into his tragic personal life. Anyway, BMC devotes a lot of space to gas station and convenience store work, and carries job stories that are as good as any jobzine's. For two bucks, it's a square deal. Pasted-up & xeroxed. Cash to BMC, PO Box 1881, Santa Ana CA 92702

Fast Food Janitor #7. Entitled "The thanks I get." Gary Peterson is schlepping away at the lousiest of jobs, and writing about the particulars thereof, especially as it affects his body and its various functions. A bit overpriced, but where else can you get a careful comparison of the ass-widths of the staff of the Hardee's in Baldwin, Wisconsin? Hand-written. \$3 to: FFJ, PO Box 136, Hammond WI 54015

Lackluster Jobs #1. This one's a gem, and knows that it's a jobzine. The editors interview various types of workers, getting the seamy side of their professional jobs and creating a large, neatly done zine with a silk-screened cover, no less. Strongly recommended. \$2.95 to LLJ c/o Amy Balkin & James Harbison, 456 14th St. #8, San Francisco CA 94103

McJob, #1, #2 & #3. "The zine for the disenchanting employee of low-paying jobs," McJob is a well-edited and quite interesting jobzine, describing the current condition of the US work force. The narratives evaluate jobs the real way, i.e. for the environment, the boss, the stealing potential, and the way the person quit or got the ax. There's one report on a job suffered by a "girl reporter," as "an ambassador of Washington, D.C.,"

which reveals just how thin the veneer of patriotism is as it's presented to tourists at Arlington National Cemetery in those open buses. McJob takes in good contributed stories, cartoons and news clips, all of which keep right on the clear thread of the sheer absurdity of our lives as disposable slaves. Featured in #1 is an egg donor consent form, which is a real pain in the gut. This is one of the best jobzines out there. Hand-made, computer layout. Send \$2 to: Julie Peasley, PO Box 11794, Berkeley CA 94712-2794.

Static #1 (Summer 1996) This is a sabotage on the jobzine, if you will, and a sharp-looking piece of work at that. Huge at 62 pages, with fold-out sheets and variously colored stock, it's just the zine you need for skimming some of the cream off your boss's profits, and sabotaging billboards for the sake of humanity, and all of that scammy, youthful, poetic terrorism stuff. It's a well laid out, usable presentation of baseline anarchist non-cooperation. I like the "Sidewalk Bubblegum" cartoons by Clay Butler and the illegalist strategies to get back what

is ours. All of these are bad things to be prosecuted for, but hey, we've all got one foot in a forced labor camp and the other foot on a banana peel, anyhow. Desktop published. \$3 to: Squeaky, 1750 30th Street, #198, Boulder CO 80301

Stupor #5: Stupor goes to work. The employment issue. (January 1996) is "dedicated to publishing anonymous confessionals and rants for readers." This one is about as good as Fast Food Janitor, I guess, and shares the same tendency to wander away from job issues toward sexual anecdotes and clippings of bare breasts. I'm not complaining, since many people ventilate their slave-frustrations with just this sort of chatter. I remember it well from my days as a factory worker. There's one piece about a guy volunteering for an endoscopy study, which is quite a wiggler. Free. 2639 Evaline, Hamtramck MI 48212

Temp Slave! (Described above). Offset printed, neatly done. To order, send money to: Keffo, PO Box 8284, Madison WI 53708-8284

Xtra Tough #1. If you're wondering how things are for the herring and salmon fishing crews along the coast of Alaska, this jobzine is where to find contributions from editor Moe and her shipmates. Fun to read, hand-made. \$1 to: XT c/o Moe, PO Box 4076, Kodiak AK 99615

— Bob Helms, X341465