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Underneath the Hard Hats: A Political Forum



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Underneath The Hard Hats: A Political Symposium

By Diana Lurie

"...The people I work with are well over 200 pounds and I'm damned if I think we need a wrench to take any man down..."

Upper, lower, middle. Black, white other. Catholic, Jewish, Protestant. (Is no one something else?)

Straws and samples, percentages and probabilities—by now we have had our customary glut of data about what this or that part of the electorate will do on Election Day. But what I for one can't seem to get enough of is some understanding of what people are *thinking*.

I'm especially confused by the thoughts of one group in particular, the group that the press and everyone else have decided to call "hard hats." Since they earn their living in various construction trades, I suppose the hard hats figure in the pollsters' tallies somewhere—white, working class (which, for American construction workers, is middle class), mostly Catholic, many with a fierce and visible sense of patriotism, few with college credits. And I gather from the polls that although construction workers have a long history of militant trade unionism, many of them have decided to abandon the Democratic Party, their political home for so long, to support Republican Nelson Rockefeller for governor and Conservative James Buckley for senator. Okay, that's what the polls say they are doing. But what are they thinking?

Toward the middle of October—a pollster's habit, this compulsion to pinpoint the moment—I spent some time with five construction workers who live in Brooklyn. I had a tape recorder with me. I told them I hoped to get down, faithfully and fully, what they said and then condense it into a kind of forum

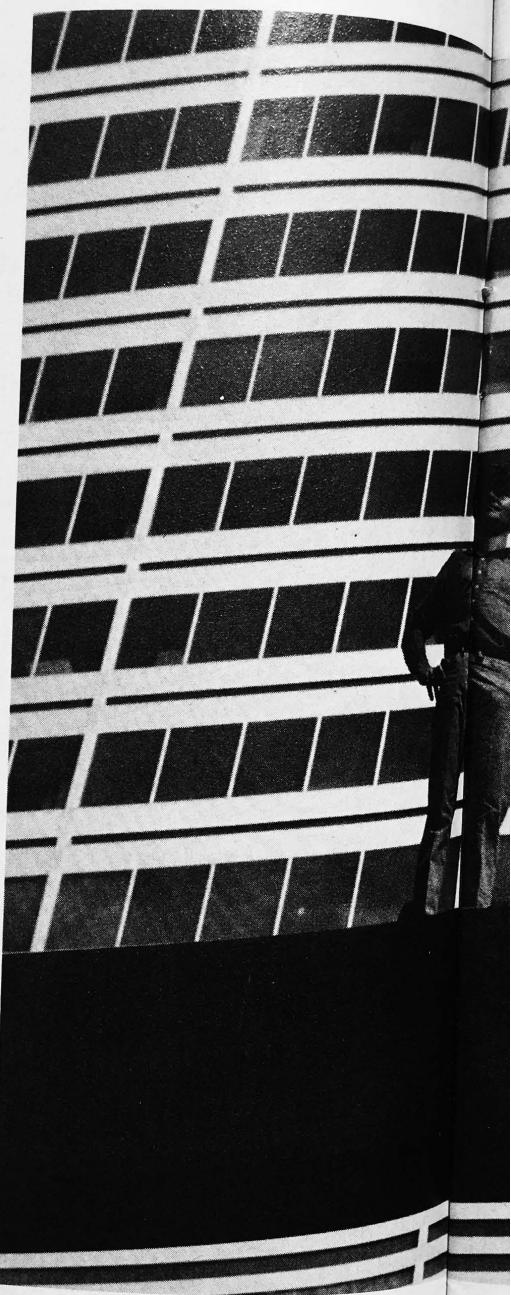
in which they could define and expand on what they felt were their issues and interests in the campaign.

One of them, Eugene Schafer, a 31-year-old ironworker, is running on the Democratic ticket for the State Assembly in Bay Ridge. His storefront headquarters on Bay Ridge Avenue is festooned with flags. Schafer proudly claims that he carried an American flag in the violent confrontation between hard hats and students protesting the Vietnam War in Wall Street last May. Sitting on wooden crates and sipping beer in Schafer's storefront, too, were three other ironworkers; Harold Gaffney, 35, Frank Donohue, 37, and Pat Devaney, 44, who showed me a newspaper photograph of himself punching an anti-war demonstrator in the face last May. The fifth man I spoke to is John Farrell, 34, a stone derrickman and father of seven, whom I saw in his house on East 27th Street in Flatbush.

I've gathered the stuff of my separate conversations under several headings. They reflect, as I said, these workers' chief concerns.

On James Buckley

Schafer: Buckley is my man. He is in favor of persecuting those so-called left-wing, intellectual radicals who bomb our buildings, try to tear this country apart, destroy our flag, spit on our flag and burn our flag. If they don't support the country, they can get the



hell out. The U.S. used to be second to none. Today everybody's looking down at us and I don't want any part of a country like that. My only hope in New York is Buckley, who is trying to bring the country back to Number One.

Gaffney: Buckley was over in Wall Street one day and he read a fifteen-page statement which didn't pull any punches. He says a lot of truthful things that some people don't want to hear and I think he's not afraid of repercussions. I'll definitely vote for him.

Devaney: Buckley's for bringing authorities back into the schools—for law



and order, tackling dope problems and good sound government. We need this because a real problem today is getting the people back together again and preventing an attitude of "You're on this side of the street! We're on the other, let's throw rocks!"

Farrell: Buckley talks like he's selling America, but he doesn't appeal to me because I don't think he is for the unions. With him, it's all an individual thing where you make it on your own. Here's a guy whose family's money's in oil. But most hard hats aren't turned off by Buckley coming from a wealthy family. You see, they're not looking to be turned on. They're just looking for

the guy that makes sense—and Buckley does make sense to them. They are convinced Buckley's *the guy*.

On Ottinger & Goodell

Schafer: I think Ottinger is an opportunist playing both ends against the middle and hoping like hell he gets in. In some of his papers he's all for the U.S. helping to teach the Arabs about warfare. On other pieces of paper he's all in favor of sending arms to Israel. I think Ottinger's for Ottinger and nobody else. Charlie Goodell is a jerk. He's been against everything that the President of this country has stood for

—yet he's a Republican. Nixon's our President and he's the man I'll stand behind. As for Agnew, he should keep up the good work, especially when he called Charlie Goodell the Christine Jorgensen of the Republican Party. Mr. Agnew's the first man with moxie enough to come out and say what he wants to say. We need someone who ain't afraid and who is not going to be buffaloed by some political hacks. I would love to see Mr. Spiro Agnew as our President and Mr. George Corley Wallace as our Vice President. I think Vice President Agnew is a prince.

Donohue: I think Goodell is a joke.

Gaffney: Goodell doesn't know who he

"...The U.S. used to be second to none. Today everybody's looking down at us. I don't want any part of a country like that..."



Eugene Schafer with the flag: "It took working men to stand up."

is. Ottinger? I really don't know much about him.

Farrell: I haven't made up my mind who I'm going to vote for. Buckley was claiming that Ottinger has a batting average of .005 because in four years in Congress he put up 360 bills or something like that and only two of them were passed. How can he deliver?

Devaney: Ottinger's the lesser of the evils, but I definitely would vote for Buckley. Goodell's viewpoints sicken me. He bends all the way. He's very opposed to our troops in Vietnam, but Israel was a different subject.

On Rockefeller & Goldberg

Schafer: Rockefeller puts food in my children's mouths by initiating new buildings all across the state, so I'm for him. How can Goldberg call himself a Democrat this year when last year he wouldn't endorse Mario Procaccino, the Democratic candidate for mayor, but came out for John Lindsay? Goldberg quit his job as Supreme Court Justice, Ambassador to the United Nations, and his job as a labor mediator. What's to say he's not going to quit the governorship of New York? He was a very brave man until he became

a tool of the party bosses. Today he's a puppet on a string. He's letting them call the shots and he's doing the dancing. I would say the party bosses are the higher echelon of the liberal Democratic party and Arthur Goldberg does not believe in the democratic society. He believes in the liberal democratic society. The liberal way of government in this country is to allow people to do as they damn well please. I think Arthur Goldberg, Jacob Javits and John Lindsay are some liberals who are responsible for the insanity around us. Javits said, "Get out of Vietnam and go to Israel." He's not trying to take the country out of battle. He's trying to move the battle for his own benefits.

Devaney: I don't like Goldberg since he leans over toward the factions of welfare and Israel. The Mideast is a powder-keg and I don't think anyone should meddle in it.

Donohue: I'm a construction man and Rockefeller is a builder and that's good enough for me.

Gaffney: I don't think Rockefeller should be in politics. He has too much money and he doesn't understand the needs of the common people. He plays the old game of what he and his fam-

ily have done for the City of New York, but the Rockefellers certainly have done a lot. Also I guess at the time of his divorce Rocky gave up the White House, so I think he's content to be the governor of the State of New York and I don't feel he's on the make.

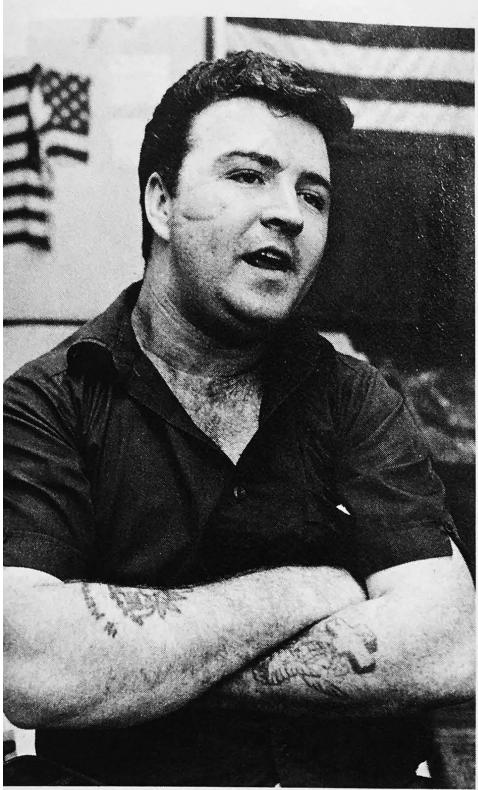
I doubt Goldberg really wants to be the governor but I imagine he was the best person that the Democrats could come up with. Goldberg's a Democrat but he also backed up Lindsay. I think he's a bit of a turncoat. Besides, if he had the old razzle-dazzle, I think he would have jumped in the forefront more in the UN. But he has no charisma. I guess I prefer Rockefeller for governor because of the building. Naturally, I got to look to my stomach first.

Farrell: Rockefeller's not the worst guy in the world. You can't blame him altogether about inflation and dope addiction and the crime in the streets, which, as they say, are issues. His ads on television drive me up the wall because it's all him. He started the addict program, he started this, he started that, but I don't think Rockefeller has helped the city at all. I mean not at all. Like I voted for the transportation bond but the subway's terrible now, the service is slow, the trains break down and the fare increase hit a lot of people. I used to take the bus to the subway. Now I walk to save the 30 cents. And beer has also gone up. On a limited budget, it all hurts.

Goldberg seems a little weak in his personal appearance, like he doesn't have the drive or something. Maybe he's hell in a courtroom, but outside he's not. All in all, I'll probably vote for Goldberg for governor—at least he's a change.

On Lindsay & Welfare

Devaney: Lindsay's an egotistical slob, only impressed by himself. He caters to the colored population and the Puerto Ricans and he never thinks of the honest working man. Lindsay's always cheating me by giving away all my money that I put into taxes to all these welfare groups. There should be some way of keeping people that just arrive into this city off welfare. I am the one that is getting hurt. I've always said that if a man wants to receive welfare, let him report to the office and give him a broom and let him work for his money. In my work there have been numerous times when I have seen blacks who can't do some construc-



Harold Gaffney is for Rockefeller: "I got to look to my stomach first."

tion jobs because they aren't qualified. If they can handle a job, no sweat, but they don't want to do our kind of work because actually it's a lot of physical work. I think they say, "Well, I was getting so much on relief or welfare, why should I get out and break my back?"

Gaffney: In America we have so many different nationalities and yet people have learned to live with each other. The colored are not accepted by a majority so there must be something radically wrong with them. I think it's not only lack of education, but I think it's lack of respect for others. I am not prejudiced but I do believe that Lindsay caters to the colored for their votes. I also believe the majority of colored don't have too much intelligence and are not educated enough to vote.

Schafer: I have no prejudices against any man that's got guts enough to stand alongside of me and work, and a lot of black guys work with me. I do draw the line at mixed marriages by people who want to be in the news—not by people that love each other. Sammy Davis Jr. and May Britt ended in divorce. Now if these people loved each other, they would stay married. All they're going to hurt are the children they bring into the world. A white-and-black marriage is not going to breed the prettiest child in the world. It's going to breed a sort of high-yel-

low, half-straight-half-curly-haired child. That child is looked upon by other kids as a freak of nature.

I think Lindsay's for Lindsay and there's danger written all over his face. This is no longer the land of the free—our rights have been taken away by the mayor of New York. He would make a damn good mayor of North Vietnam. Let him tear down that country—like he's doing in New York. This mayor preaches equality for people, but I ask why not equality in sanitation? All Mayor Lindsay does is take care of Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, South Bronx. But in Bay Ridge where everybody takes care of their own property, he ignores us.

Devaney: Services have deteriorated here. Subways, garbage collections—I mean we've never had such filth. There are times when I feel like a forgotten American.

Farrell: My wife thinks Lindsay's a social butterfly and I think Lindsay's a guy who wants to do the right things but he doesn't have the organization power. It's like when Kennedy got in, he had all kinds of programs and all kinds of ideas and a brain trust of Galbraith, Rostow and Schlesinger, and they didn't accomplish a damn thing. It took Johnson to get in there and effectively put all this stuff through. Some people are terrific organizers, but Lindsay messes up on the details. I do think he's honorable and I voted for him because I just couldn't see Procaccino at all.

Gaffney: Lindsay's crying about money, but he's got a million people he creates jobs for. My uncle was a pot-hole inspector who made \$10,000 a year and

all he had to do was go to the Municipal Building, sign his name and collect his money. Lindsay would stoop to any means to achieve the goal that he wants—and that's the Presidency.

Donohue: A politician is a double-talker and I think Lindsay's an ambitious politician who has made a lot of deals to get where he is and now he's got to pay off.

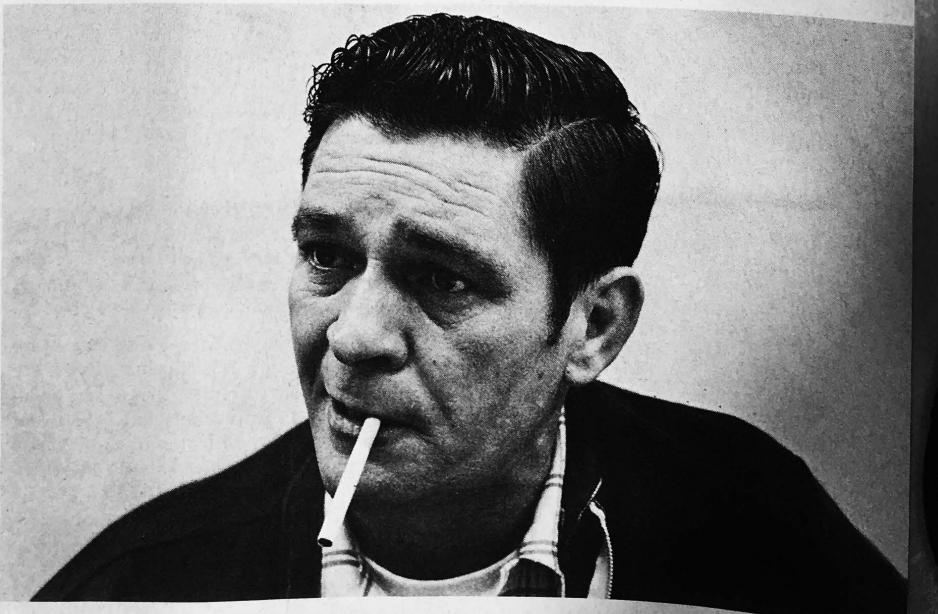
On the Flag at Wall Street

Schafer: People talk about the so-called hard-hat demonstration. This was not a hard-hat demonstration. It's just that it took men who wear hard hats, the working force, the working individuals of this country, to stand up. They took all they could. They just couldn't swallow any more anti-war demonstrations. Especially seeing enemy flags being raised in the ranks of the demonstrators. I thank God I was born in the United States of America, a free land, a free country. I felt that this time this was my duty, my call—I owed the flag that much.

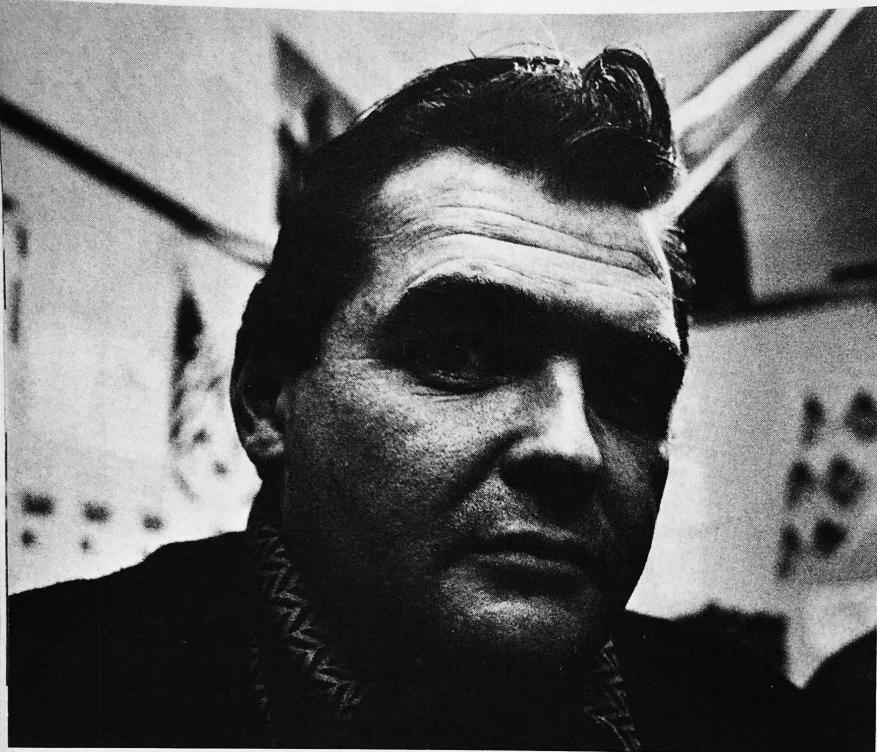
Now Adam Walinsky has stated that if he's elected Attorney General, he's going to consider it a trivial offense if anyone burns or desecrates an America flag. It makes me feel pretty crummy that this type of man is running for public office. It's not a trivial offense—it's sacrilegious.

A Vietcong flag was raised last May in the back of a group of about three to four hundred male and female medical students in Battery Park. The organized anti-war demonstrating students used obscene words and obscene

Pat Devaney: "Goldberg leans over toward the factions of Israel and welfare."



"...Buckley is my man. He is trying to bring the country back to Number One. Ottinger is for Ottinger. Goodell is a jerk...."



Frank Donohue: "I'm a construction man and Rockefeller is a builder."

signs in front of our American flag on our building and then they raised a Cuban Liberation flag. Anybody who raises an enemy flag in our country is a traitor. I was up on the building looking down at them, grabbed our American flag, held it up on the steel structure and when they continued obscene signs and words, I grabbed the flag and ran down thirteen flights into the street and right into them. I was grabbed, mauled, kicked in the groin, and the flag was torn away from me and ripped up in pieces. No, I wasn't bleeding—only my pride.

The next day a police car pulled up at the job site and the officer told us, "Fellows, there's another demonstration at the Subtreasury Building today." It was the day the schools were closed to pay homage to the kids killed at Kent State. I got a big American flag and the fellows decided to march with me. I carried the flag up to Broadway and Wall Street and I could see three or four blocks of faces—a complete sea of faces of chanting people against the war in Vietnam. There was only about 30 of us left out of the 150 who began because the fellows actually got scared when they saw all the faces. I had decided to go ahead because

something is in your heart that keeps you going. This is a cause, a major cause in this country. This country is being divided by the liberal left-wing faction of the country. Again, the flag had been torn up, there was some fighting, but no wrenches were used. The people I work with are well over 200 pounds and I'm damned if I think we need a wrench to take any man down.

Devaney: The flaunting of the Vietcong flag symbolized decadence in our government. If my kids went out with a Vietcong flag, I would disown them. I'd lock them right out of my home. The bombings, the scenes in the universities, the rioting, the fighting. It makes me feel terrible that the cop hasn't got his club where it should be—right on their heads.

Gaffney: The students with the Vietcong flag didn't realize what they were doing. I felt sorry for them. The Communists use propaganda and I feel that they put a lot of Communist teachers in the colleges. They get like a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old kid and brainwash him. Still, I have a lot of confidence in most students. They can do as they want—as long as they don't tear down my building!

On Kent State

Devaney: I felt that Kent State was justified because it finally put some power behind the troops that were going to Vietnam and I imagine the kids provoked the National Guard. I have no regrets it happened.

Donohue: It's a sad and terrible thing that happened and I feel very sorry for students and families. Sure it did bother me when Lindsay flew the flag at half-mast. A lot of policemen and firemen were killed in New York and we don't have any flags at half-mast.

Farrell: My sympathies are with both the students and the soldiers but I think parents cater to the kids and created them the way they are—as monsters.

Schafer: The children that were murdered at Kent State should have been in their dormitories studying to become real smart human beings. Not learning to demonstrate, tear down buildings and get into different factions like the Weathermen and the SDS.

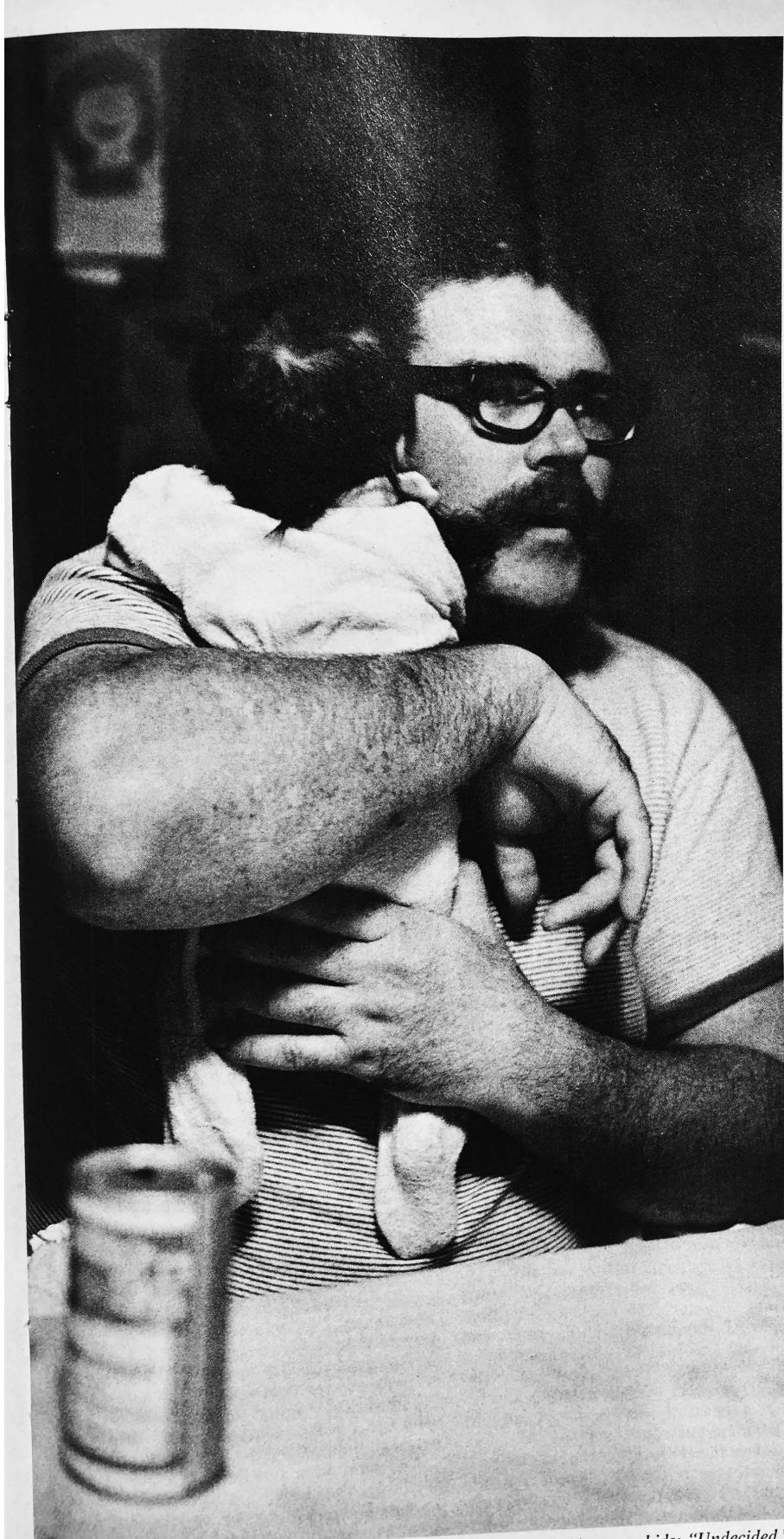
I sat in a foxhole for 29 months while they threw shells at me in Korea so I'd still have a free country for these punks to grow up in. The punks! If I knew what I know now I wouldn't have went to Korea for any goddamn one of them. Yes, I would have gone for the country, but I would have expected the country to stay the way it was instead of the country turning around the way it is.

I'm not an educated man and I'm just going by what my heart says. I was a smart-aleck punk kid. My parents did want me to go to college but my father died when I was ten years old and I grew up in the streets of New York. I was out in street gangs with tough people in tough neighborhoods. Today I don't let my kids get away with a damn thing when I'm around. And while I'm away, they have the fear of their father in them. They look at me as a leader.

The students these days are a product of progressive education. They are allowed to get away with a lot. When we did something wrong as kids, our wrists were slapped. All these kids last year at Columbia were out demonstrating half the school year, yet all graduated. I guess maybe our feeling towards them might be sort of jealousy.

On the Future

Devaney: My hope is that my children



John Farrell and the youngest of his seven kids: "Undecided."

will lean toward my way of thinking. I'm not trying to brainwash them. I think they should have their own ideas but I want my kids to believe in America and a good government. I have a son who is seventeen and a daughter who is twenty. My daughter marched with me at Wall Street and when I got home my son was proud of me and what I stood for. The national situation doesn't make me desperate or distressed. I can still go out and I can eat a steak when I want it. The one thing in this world is your stomach.

A lot of our boys in Vietnam, they've gotten onto pot. I can overlook pot. It did nothing to me when I tried it in the service. I got sick. It doesn't really do much to the other fellows. I am very open-minded on this subject. I'm really concerned about the hard drugs—the uppies and the downies.

Schafer: I haven't discussed the pot situation with my sons because they're a bit too young. However, I instructed them that if anybody—and I mean anybody, even a teacher in school—offers them candy or gum or any type of medication, they're to take nothing, but to tell me what happened. I will go and investigate it myself.

I think that the drug program or the concept of drugs in this country is what's starting all this trouble. And it's keeping the trouble brewing. These kids haven't got guts enough on their own without taking some sort of narcotics or drug to do these things. I think it's connected with the left-wing takeover of our educational system through our professors and our teachers.

Since our march I've been called a brownshirt bully boy and read that my march was the same as Nazi Germany and that the people lining our way were a bunch of neo-Nazis. I don't like to be called a right-winger. I'm a plain ordinary human being in New York and I'm an American. I also think I'm a forgotten American because my community is falling apart. The streets are caving in, the sanitation's lousy, the sewer system stinks, the industry's gone out of our community, we've lost over 117,000 jobs. Welfare's on the rise. This is very bad for the morale of the people. We people in Bay Ridge are a proud race and we have always worked for what we want and I have always admired the rugged individualism of America. The Australian people have it today—they stand up for what they believe is right. So far nobody's been able to slap them down. I'm going to give the U.S. the next couple of years and unless I can see a drastic change, one where our establishment goes back to the way it was ten years ago, I'm leaving.