



Workers' Action 5 cents

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Mass Producing Children

Here's an article sent in by one of our readers. We'd like to see more! So-called "professionalism" has been used for years to prevent teachers, nurses, social workers, etc., from organizing and struggling as the workers they are. We believe the best way to correct the all-too-obvious shortcomings of the AFT is by joining and fighting inside for a militant program that really deals with the problems faced by teachers.

By D.R.

What is the toughest assembly line job you can think of? Working in an auto plant? A furniture factory? Would

you believe teaching in the public school system? Sound strange? It's not, really. Under capitalism, the education of young people is an assembly line job--and one of the toughest.

Look at it this way: a teacher in our society is expected to mass-produce children instead of cars. He has nine months in which to attach all the necessary intellectual nuts and bolts before the children move on to the next grade for further grinding and polishing.

The above analogy is not far-fetched. This past year I have been teaching 5th grade in a rural California community. There are 32 children in my classroom. About two-thirds are white, the remainder are Japanese, Filipino and Spanish-American. Their parents are mostly in the middle in-

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PANTHERS TO ALLY WITH BLACK CAUCUSES

The UAW Black Panther Caucus at the Fremont GM plant has scheduled a conference for Saturday evening, April 19 at the Black Church on 42nd and Grove Streets, Oakland, California. Under the guidance of Kenny Horston, leader of the caucus, participants will open negotiations for an alliance between the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers of Detroit. The League is the organizing tool of militant black workers in the Detroit area, with caucuses at

Dodge, Chrysler, General Motors, Ford, and others. Speakers at the conference will include Bobby Seale, National Chairman of the Black Panther Party, David Hilliard, Chief of Staff of the Black Panther Party; Masai, Political Theorist of the Black Panther Party; and John Watson, member of the Central Staff of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and editor of Wayne State University's paper, The South End. (See editorial about the conference on page 2).

YOU CAN FIGHT STANDARD OIL!

Below is an interview with Gale T. "Jake" Jacobs, Secretary-Treasurer of Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Local 1-561 which has recently concluded long strikes against Standard Oil and Chevron. The workers at the Standard refinery won substantial economic gains and returned to work in a stronger position. This outcome was made possible through support from militant students who were simultaneously waging their own struggles at U.C. Berkeley and S. F. State.

The OCAW local was in a weak position going into their first strike in more than 20 years. The disastrous strike in 1948 enabled Standard Oil thereafter to divide the workers and introduce a number of other unions into the refinery, all with differing contract termination dates. With approximately 50% of the workforce scabbing, the OCAW workers were having a difficult time. In addition, the membership soon saw that all the power of the state--the cops, Courts, and City Council--were arrayed against them. A peaceful picket line in Martinez which included wives and young children of workers was attacked and maced by the cops. Jacobs was beaten and arrested in the police station. Company oil tankers did not hesitate to run through union lines, killing Richard Jones, a Black striker, in the process. When the Courts handed down an injunction forbidding more than five pickets at any one gate, it looked bad for the strike.

Its back to the wall, the union looked for and found a valuable ally in the radical students. The students showed up weekly, sometimes in hundreds, to man picket lines, turn back scab cars and trucks, and back down a company goon squad. Workers and students--both of whom had previously had little understanding of each other--soon developed a new respect. The strengths and shortcomings of worker-student alliances are discussed in the editorial on page 2.

In addition, the role played by the various state organs, agents of the company, was plain to the workers,

and Jacobs called publicly for the formation of a new political party to represent the interests of all oppressed groups (see below). These two steps forward in the labor movement--alliance with students and moves toward a labor party--will soon be expressed in other labor struggles.

Unfortunately the outcome of these two strikes was not all good. As Jacobs points out, the issues at Chevron involving maintenance of the union shop, were far more important than the purely economic issues at Standard. This fight was lost. Three months was a long time for the men, who are mostly family heads. The Chevron workers went back just before the deadline when they received letters telling them they would be fired and permanently replaced when 90 days were up. The union had decided to continue the fight at Chevron through nationwide boycott of Chevron-Ortho products, but the International intervened to cancel the boycott causing Jacobs to remark, "This narrowly based opinion and decision of our International is tantamount to consignment of the local to certain defeat."

Jacobs is a courageous and honest union leader who does not hesitate to lead in difficult circumstances. He is not perfect, however. Unfortunately, towards the end of the Chevron strike he contradicted his previous correct position about the need for independent political action by workers--the major lesson of this hard fight--and instead joined COPE in endorsing four Democrats of the Richmond City Council election, even though his own experience had taught him that the Democratic Party, as well as the Republican Party, is a tool of Big Business.

The fight was lost, but there will be others that will not be lost. The best assurance of final victory is to stick by the lessons learned in struggle rather than to expediency and so-called "political realism". Labor needs a party of its own; OCAW should have run an independent candidate or slate of candidates for the City Council.

Interview With "Jake" Jacobs

Q. What do you think of the settlement at Standard? Was it a victory?

A. The battle against Standard is not over. The workers at Chevron, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Standard, are still out. The primary issue at Chevron is the company's demand that the union shop be scuttled. The settlement at Standard is not everything we hoped for, but our people feel it was an honorable settlement. It was a big settlement economically, and that was the main issue there, though it wasn't quite up to pattern--2¢ to 3¢ below. The fact that we were able to back the company down on their demand to discipline or discharge strikers was a real victory. Our people are generally pleased with the settlement at Standard. We could reach an agreement with Chevron if they would withdraw their demand to end the union shop there.

Q. What is the position of the union now? Was it strengthened by the strike?

A. All things considered, there have been some tremendous strides

forward that have resulted in strengthening us and will aid organization of the refinery. (We've had an open shop at Standard, and we don't want the same thing at Chevron.) This was the first strike in about 20 years, and it's completely changed the attitudes of our workers on a lot of things, shaken them out of a complacent attitude, for example towards students and towards the labor movement in general. Locally we developed during the strike a hard core of strikers. About 650 stayed out, and of these 200 were very active, here every day, fighting hard. This gives us a good strong base to build on, and will have a strong effect in eventually organizing Standard. But much depends on what happens at Chevron. The battle at Chevron is far more important in regards to the goals and principles involved than at the refinery. The goal of unions to establish union shops is far more important than the economic issues. We don't feel we were strong enough to raise the union shop issue at the refinery this time, but it may be a strike issue in two years.

Q. Do you have any criticisms of the international for their role during the strike, for example in regards to their settling piecemeal which would tend to leave the weaker locals such as yours isolated and struggling alone?

A. I have no criticisms. The entire union did the best it could with what it had to work with. However, there hasn't been a victory until every last plant has settled with an honorable agreement. It was a good strike all across the country, but it's not over yet. There are a couple of companies we knew in the beginning would be the toughest, and we are prepared to fight to the end with every resource and energy we have.

Q. What led you to invite student participation in your strike? Was there opposition within the local to this? What has been the reaction from your members to the aid they got from students?

A. We had had student support previously in some of our disputes, for example with the Misco Scientific Instrument Company, and from this had



from The Militant "JAKE" JACOBS, oil workers' leader, after being beaten in a police station.

developed a relationship with some of the people from Berkeley. We had a general idea of what was involved with the student movement. An understanding has developed between us--between the laboring people and students--here that couldn't exist with other locals that haven't had that kind of contact with students. When the strike started, students came out to our lines on their own. We had no objection. I had felt for a long time that there were a lot of misinterpretations and misunderstandings about students that were actually hurting the labor movement. A lot was suddenly realized by our people, and positions I had held all along were verified. As far back as 4 or 5 years ago I had been talking about minority groups--the Third World--and labor getting together and facing the fact that this country is controlled by a corporate elite. However, you can't always get up and talk about this to the membership--something has to happen to make them realize what is going on and open their minds. The kind of contact we've had has increased the understanding by students of our problems and by our people of theirs. We had a hell of a time during the strike in this local on the question. Our membership is just like the general public. They read what the papers say, that students are raising hell, violent, etc., and they are turned off. Up until a certain point the students were coming on their own

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Editorials

Nationalism and Black Caucuses

The conference in Oakland April 19, between the Black Panther Party and League of Revolutionary Black Workers of Detroit (based on militant, Black workers' caucuses, mainly in auto plants) to negotiate for an alliance is a historic breakthrough for both the workers' and the Black movements. Workers need to have a radical political party which belongs to, and is controlled by them. The left-wing Black power movement needs to be based more on Black workers organized as workers, than only on the community, which is composed of all classes and has different problems.

The most important division in society is the class division, between those who own and control the means of production and distribution (factories, mines, railroads, utilities, etc.), and those who work for a living. The question of special oppression because of race is important, but it is really a part of this main division.

For instance, most Black people are working people (or unemployed workers), but some are business and professional people. It is mainly these middle and upper-class Blacks, the "Black Bourgeoisie", who want to make a deal with the system at the expense of all Blacks. They have a class interest in being "Toms". Organizing Black workers into militant caucuses and political groups is therefore better than a movement based on an all-class "community" or "nation" concept.

Black nationalism is a right-wing theory which leads to opportunism, betrayal and even murder, as the shooting of two Black Panthers by nationalist Ron Karenga's group shows. However, both the Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers of Detroit (which are left-wing groups) hold nationalist ideas. This is a contradiction in their positions, which will hurt both the workers' cause and the cause of Black liberation, unless it is resolved.

The DRUM caucus (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, part of the League) displayed this contradiction when it led militant, wildcat strikes for Black workers' demands (even mobilizing some white workers), but then also demanded things like a Black member on the General Motors board of directors. What good would a Black board member do for the average Black worker--for any of the workers?

Also, is the League of Revolutionary Black Workers a caucus within the unions or an independent union for Black workers? Separate, "revolutionary" unions have been tried before and failed, because most of the workers were in the old unions and stayed there. By going separate, militant workers, white or Black, merely isolate themselves from their fellows, whom they should try to reach from the inside if they can.

Raising demands which benefit Blacks as a community or "nation" more likely than not means promoting the "leaders" of the community (most of whom are too busy being liberals at the moment) rather than liberating all Black people from racism and other forms of oppression as well. Raising demands which flow from the needs of Black workers as workers, however, will aid all workers. When militant Blacks go on wildcat to defend a brother fired without cause, for instance, this benefits white workers, too. They also can be fired without cause. Whether whites realize this yet or not, it is still true, and very soon they will have it proven to them in struggles of their own.

Black workers and radicals hold nationalist views because they see that all Blacks are judged and treated the same according to skin color, just as in Germany, under Hitler, all Jews got the same axe. Only a working-class program offers a real alternative to racism, however, because only the workers, united, can overthrow the capitalist system that causes racism.

Racism hurts whites, too, though not as much. White workers' wages (especially in the South) are kept down by their own exclusion of their Black brothers from jobs. Racism has historical roots. It was fostered and developed consciously by the capitalists to keep Black and white working masses apart and fighting one another.

To deal with the capitalist oppressor, raise demands which are for all Black workers and all workers.

Workers and Students

Many working people are suspicious of students and resentful of student activists. They feel that anyone who has the "privilege" of going to college should spend his time getting his education, and that students are just wasting the taxpayer's money by "rioting" and causing trouble. Student demands, however, should be considered on their merits, not simply rejected out of hand.

As an S. F. State strike leaflet pointed out, it is the capitalist trustees and board members of the colleges and universities—the same bosses who employ large numbers of workers in California—who are misusing taxpayers' money by taxing the poor for the education their sons and daughters don't get, and then using the funds to find better ways to exploit their workers! One of the demands of the S. F. State strike was for a policy of open admissions for all black and other minority people. This is something that is in the interests of all working and poor people to support, including whites, since an open admissions policy for the specially-oppressed minorities would prepare the way for open admissions for all working and poor people (strong support for this larger demand was

present at both S. F. State and Cal strikes), which is the same as calling for free, public higher education. The labor movement has fought for—and won—public education in the past; now that higher education is more important for everyone, we should fight for it again.

In raising this demand, the militant students were reflecting the interests of working and poor people in society. Students are not all the same in their interests and political beliefs. Some want to milk the system for all they can by being high-paid professionals, technicians, and businessmen. But those students who really want to change society because they have become aware, as students, of the monumental injustices in society, are likely to reflect the interests of the oppressed and exploited.

He who says, "Down with students," then, is probably just saying that because he's against the things that student movements are fighting for in society, many of which should be supported by working people in the same way that we would support each other's strikes, for instance. This is not to say, however, that the student movement is above criticism. The

Workers' Action

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Letters to the Editor:

We call the attention of our readers to the fact that we welcome LETTERS TO THE EDITOR from rank and file union members. Our space is limited; please be brief!

Another Reason for a Labor Party

Workers' Action,

Please send me \$1.00 worth of your second issue so that I can distribute them around in Lincoln. Inside is enclosed \$1.00. Also could you send me your bundle rates.

Several weeks ago on "Meet the Press", the first question asked of Senator Dirksen was what bills was Congress going to consider first-of-all when it reconvenes. He promptly answered that stronger anti-strike legislation would first be proposed. He went on to say that the longshoreman and machinist strikes were practically crippling the nation. True to Dirksen's words, Nixon has asked the Labor Department to look over the Taft-Hartley Act, so that more "flexible and stringent" laws can be passed.

For a workers' revolution,
D. E., Lincoln, Nebraska

On the Job Organizing

Dear Friends,

Recently had the opportunity to look over a copy of Workers' Action and also your Wallace pamphlet. I thought that it was excellent for on-the-job organizing drives around the general question of worker activity. Right now I am involved with a drive at the Scovill Plant in Waterbury, Conn. We are working around the central question of the Vietnam war and particularly the effects that the present war-oriented economy have on the working class. Most of the organizing work calls for on-the-job type activity, such as general educational and such discussions with workers in the plant. Right now

students need to find a way to get the movement off campus and involve working people in large numbers in struggles for working-class oriented demands. In fact, it is only recently that you can even talk to students about "the working class" without getting a big argument about how "workers are backward", and other such excuses for not trying to reach the only class in society that can attack the problems at the root.

What can students do for workers besides come down to the picket lines once in a while? The good thing about militant students is that they have intellectual skills, experience with such things as strike leaflets and publicizing struggles, and are able to formulate demands and connect various specific problems with general conditions of society, thus helping to broaden the base of the struggle and the people's understanding of it. Students will be an indispensable part in the building of

we have one organizer inside of the plant (myself) and as soon as opportunity presents, we will have two or more working inside the plant, with some work going on outside.

In relation to this it might be possible to utilize your paper. I would like to know more about how you are set up and particularly how you utilize the paper out on the west coast. Also would like to know if you could use articles, etc. from this end of the business?

Hope to hear from you soon and carry it from there.

Yours for worker solidarity,
E. S.

Waterbury Workers Project

Workers' Action is intended to be used as an aid in building militant caucuses within unions. -Ed.

A National Newspaper?

Dear Workers' Action,

Just a note. I have been meaning to write to you for the past two weeks, but everything seems to get in the way whenever I want to write anything. We've had some action out here with a Teamsters local that I am sure your readers would find interesting. Problems: i) It has already been written up in the Guardian; ii) we have had no direct contact with the situation, it is just general news. I'll try to get something to you in a week or so.

Is it possible for W.A. to become a national newspaper? Can someone explain this to me? Just what can I do to help you from here--besides an occasional article for general interest?

I enclose a few bucks. We can use about 30 copies of W.A. for circulation to trade union contacts in this area.

Fraternally,
S. S., Chicago

We agree that a national militant workers' newspaper would be a good thing; however, at the present time we have neither funds nor staff to do this ourselves. We do invite our subscribers and readers across the country to send articles of interest. -Ed.

a workers' political party, although they will play this role by representing the real interests of workers and the working class, not of students.

At the present time, students who have left the campus and gone into factories are a big help (and could be a bigger help if more of them would dedicate themselves to the task) in forming militant rank and file caucuses in unions around demands such as those in the Workers' Action program (see abbreviated version this issue). Militant groups throughout the working class, fighting for these immediate economic and political working-class interests, will be the basis for the real student-worker alliance. Mutual support is not enough: the students (and workers) must come to realize that it is the workers' movement that has the power to change society fundamentally, and that the student role has to be one of aiding and formulating the working class interests.

Jacobs Interview

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to the lines with the unofficial approval of the leadership, and some came over to the union hall and talked to us and I welcomed this. An opportunity came to enlarge upon a relationship that I felt for a long time was needed. Our membership was receptive to getting help and support. During the week of February 7 it became apparent that we couldn't continue to ask people to help us while refusing to recognize the problems they were facing--it had to be a two-way street. At that point I took it upon myself to come out as an individual at a press conference in support of the student demands--not that I agreed with every demand--but on the basis that when they supported us they didn't tell us what our demands should be, and that we had a common enemy. However, I did have a pretty good understanding of their demands, and basically I agreed with every aspect with the exception of one or two things--for example, as a trade union member I can't agree with the position that demands should be non-negotiable. I called for a mutual aid and assistance pact between students and laboring people. I pledged myself to go back to the local union to try to bring the membership to support these positions, and as much of the labor movement as I could. I came back and called an Executive Board meeting. We had a Donnybrook for several hours on the issue of the problems of students, our own problems, and our

more children

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come group. The children are like children everywhere: wriggly. (Can you imagine trying to attach a nut or bolt to a car that wriggles?)

Each day I am expected to teach my thirty-two youngsters the following subjects--Arithmetic, Writing, Grammar, Spelling, Reading, Social Studies, Science, Art and P. E. Also, I am expected to eat lunch with the children and I am in charge of the Safety Patrol. The latter assignment alone deserves the full-time attention of a lawyer.) After school there are conferences with parents, the principal and other teachers. In the evening there is always work to be done--correcting papers or preparing the next day's lessons. Ditto for weekends. In all, I work at least fifty hours a week. For this, my take-home pay at the end of the month is \$343.

Worse than any of the above, however, is the fact that I am expected to play the role of a public school "cop". That is to say, a teacher is supposed to regiment the children, to prepare them to passively submit to life as a wage-slave when they leave school. This means continually jumping on children for talking, daydreaming and playing with other children. In effect, one is supposed to transform them into something other than children. This is probably what accounts for the enormous weariness of most teachers. The children resist that transformation, and rightly so.

What is the answer to the above dilemma? The American Federation of Teachers? Not at this point, and perhaps never. The A. F. T., like most American unions, is not striking at the root of the problem. Rather, the union is concerned primarily with increasing the pay of teachers and making relatively minor changes in working conditions. Even so, the vast majority of teachers outside the big cities consider the A. F. T. a bunch of radicals and irresponsible trouble-makers. Such teachers have been duped into thinking of themselves as "professionals" rather than workers. Don't you be duped, however, in your thinking about teachers. They are one of the most oppressed segments of the American working class, the more so because they don't realize it.

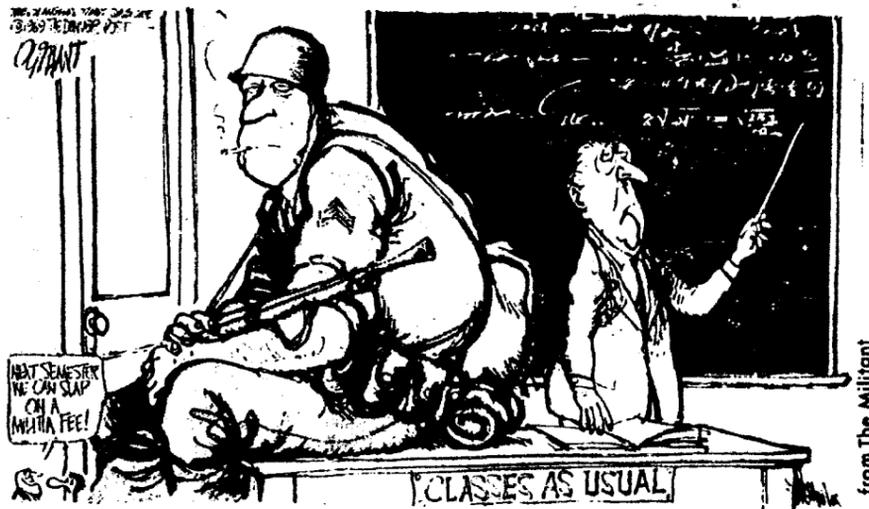
common enemy. We went deep into the political questions. We wound up with a unanimous vote by the Executive Board to go on record in favor of the student and teachers' strikes at all the universities. At this point we had to bring this to the membership. We had a big membership meeting that was well attended. In fact, there were two meetings of three hours each with long, open discussion, and we went through all the student demands. The membership was hesitant on various demands of the students. There was even quite a bit of racism expressed. The end effect of our full and open discussion was at the following meeting on Sunday. The membership voted by better than 2-to-1 to support the striking students and teachers. After looking at all the pros and cons, they realized a lot they read in the newspapers was not true--this they had recognized in the newspapers in connection with their own strike.

Q. Did those who were opposed to this stop supporting the union?

A. No, the majority rules. There were lots of doomsday predictions that half our membership would break and go back to work, but it didn't happen. Only 4 or 5 went back because of this. Sometimes it is necessary to take a stand. Our members witnessed the activities of the police department in connection with the strike, and they can't deny there is something drastically wrong in this society that is supposed to stand for freedom and justice. When you say to them now that progressive social changes are needed, they understand.

There are two things that worry Standard Oil--their public image and their political position. There are serious political overtones for Chevron in the joining together of workers and students and the Third World. The Black community in the city of Richmond is 30%. Standard has seen the people in the Black community beginning to identify with labor. The students coming over to Richmond to support the strike raised tremendous political implications to this company. And it could go far beyond here. When workers and people from the Black community begin to realize they are all exploited, although to different degrees--when people wake up to this, something will be formed that Standard better be worried about.

Q. When you spoke at the University at the TWLF Community Support Rally, you said that a new political movement was needed. What did you



mean by this? Did you mean a Labor Party?

A. I meant to include all people--labor, students, teachers, ethnic groups, and people in all walks of life that are exploited by those in control of this country, the corporate elite. That is what you get into by talking about strictly a labor party. What connection would students have to a labor party? Labor could form the base, but I don't think it should be restricted completely to labor. Such a movement would have a good deal of importance for students and teachers also. The people who presently run the colleges and universities represent the Establishment that is our enemy. They are using our tax dollars to apply modern psychological techniques in order to mold the students and bring them out into society to do what they want them to do. Students are the people who will be the brains of tomorrow, and the teachers the ones that teach them. If we had more favorable ties, we could educate the entire public.

I don't think you can say that labor would be the strongest potential element in such a movement. We need to educate the people in organized labor. At present they are more educated by the Establishment than by us. I don't agree with the present party system. Both parties have become part of the Establishment. I'm a registered Democrat, but I see no difference between the Democrats and Republicans because both are a bunch of middle-of-the-roads. They have one foot in the Establishment and the other in the corporate elite. On big issues they do what they want and on little appeasement issues they toss us a bone. How do you overcome this? We really have a one-party system right now and we need another party. There has to be confrontation on the controversial is-

AFCSME

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educated and inexperienced membership, it has created a miseducated membership. If in fact AFCSME does feel a need to carry on a real struggle in the future, it will then find that it has educated its membership in individualism over collective struggle. It will not be able to rely on a membership recruited on the basis of scabbing and trained in scabbing. The only hope for AFCSME is that all those opposed to this course and who see the need for a real union on campus will form a caucus to educate the membership properly. This education will now have to begin on a very low level indeed, on the very basis of collective action and traditional trade unionism. This is a shameful thing.

issues before they are resolved. Another party must be established, and probably the only real base would be organized labor. Organized labor, while smug and complacent, with a lot of the leadership having become part of the Establishment themselves, is at least an organized group with which you could work. Such a party could represent not only labor but the ethnic groups and students as well, all those with common problems and common objectives. It could best be put by saying if you don't own it, you work for it. And if you work for it, you had better be on the other side of the fence. Everyone that works for it has common problems and objectives. I have a cause and I want to extend it. I think the best way I can work is in the ranks of labor.

Q. What happened to the General Strike that was called by the Contra Costa CLC--why didn't it come off?

A. It's the same problem we were talking about before. A lot of the leaders, primarily in the Building Trades, are very fearful and feel there are some things you don't do. They lost sight of the fact that a lot of things done by labor have been illegal. In fact, the labor movement itself was built completely illegally--in those days it was a conspiracy to organize against an employer. We know who is in control, who passes the laws, and who the laws favor. This has to be changed. Sometimes it is illegal to call a strike, if the contract hasn't expired. It may be illegal, but on the other hand it may not be immoral. Sometimes the laws are immoral and wrong.

In the present labor leadership, a lot are for the status quo, older, been around a long time. They have positions, sit at their desks, and take Friday afternoons off. They don't want to jeopardize their positions, and this is their biggest mistake. For they are going to lose their positions eventually because the young workers, the young labor movement, isn't going to stand for it very much longer. This extends to the entire AFL-CIO. There is all kinds of dissatisfaction.

Our Program in Brief

We are an independent group of working people and rank-and-file trade union members. We formed the Committee for a Labor Party, and publish Workers' Action, to help in the fight for better unions--militant and democratic unions--and for independent working-class political action. This is our program in brief:

1. END RACISM IN THE UNIONS. SUPPORT BLACK SELF-DEFENSE!
2. ORGANIZE THE SOUTH AND ALL THE UNORGANIZED
3. END UNEMPLOYMENT - 30 HOURS WORK FOR 40 HOURS PAY!
4. HUMANIZE WORKING CONDITIONS.
5. FOR A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING FOR ALL
6. IMMEDIATE and UNCONDITIONAL WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. TROOPS FROM VIETNAM.
7. END ATTACKS ON LABOR AND REPEAL ALL ANTI-LABOR LAWS
8. FOR THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE AND STRIKE BY ALL PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
9. FOR RANK-AND-FILE CONTROL OF THE UNIONS!
10. FOR A FREEDOM-LABOR PARTY

For a complete version of the program, and information about regular CLP meetings, write in or call. We need your support and participation!

Committee for a Labor Party
P. O. Box 8174 Emeryville, Ca.

TH 1-2489

CAMPUS UNION FAILS CRUCIAL TEST

by Marilyn Robertson, AFCSME Member

Can and should a union at the organizing stages—300 out of a possible 5,000 members—under any conditions go out on strike? This is a question faced over the last months by AFCSME Local 1695, non-academic and technical employees at the University of California, Berkeley.

U.C. Racism

The question was raised by the Cal campus strike called by "Third World" (black, brown and yellow) students in opposition to the discriminatory practices of the Administration in college admissions and hiring, and the de facto racist content of education. Only 2.5% of students and 9% of employees (the University is Berkeley's largest employer) are from minority backgrounds, while minorities represent 25% of the community as a whole. Students demanded the establishment of a Third World College that would serve the interests of the minority community and, initially, open admissions for minority students. They called upon unions of campus employees to strike with them.

AFCSME was admittedly weak and small, its membership middle class with little understanding of traditional trade union struggle. On the other hand the membership had a number of potential strengths. It understood the divisive nature of racism in the working class, and that the racism practiced by the University affected them, too, even though the protest against it was initiated by students. They overwhelmingly sympathized with the Third World demands. In addition the union had many "labor" issues to fight for. Cal employees have no collective bargaining agreement, no dues check-off, no unemployment insurance, no social security coverage, and no employer-paid pension plan. Pay-days come only once a month even though state law requires that employees be paid a minimum of twice monthly. In short, University employees have no rights at all.

There was only one principled and practical course: to strike. Racism is not only a "moral" question, but a question of the very survival of the union movement. Black and white workers must be organized and united. For AFCSME to side-step this question would be particularly disastrous. The idealistic younger workers the union must win in order to organize and build would be repelled by a union that copped out on this issue. So would the student allies that are essential for the union to win struggles of its own. And, if the spearhead of the militant student movement at S.F. State and Berkeley were smashed by the rising wave of repression—Reagan in California and Nixon and the nationwide, million-dollar anti-union campaign of the National Association of Manufacturers—no campus union would have a ghost of a chance of getting control of its working conditions.

Leadership Crucial

The role of the AFCSME leadership was crucial if the inexperienced membership was to be led forward in the struggle and organized to win. Proper leadership would not only mean advances in the struggle against racism and winning important trade union demands; it would also help build the union. It would create respect among militant students, and strengthen the position of those who see that the student movement can only go forward by solidarizing itself with the workers' movement. But the AFCSME leadership instead of leading the union forward, at every step held it back; not only undermined the struggle, but even undermined the very future of the union by attacking the principles of trade union struggle! And they did this consciously and purposefully. The AFCSME leadership is not a well-meaning but naive and inexperienced

group of young people. Rather, the leadership is composed of highly conscious "politicos", many of them affiliated with organizations claiming to represent the vanguard of workers' struggle. Their treacherous misleadership was conscious, willful and traitorous. Rather than attempting to win the membership to the indicated actions, they capitulated to the backwardness they attributed to the membership.

Meetings, Meetings

The union met frequently during the course of the campus strike which began January 22. Motions to strike made at the first three meetings were met with fear, hostility and ridicule by the leadership. At one point—at a time when the campus was under actual military occupation, complete with gas and beatings—newly-elected union president Phyllis O'Donnell objected to discussion of a strike motion on the grounds that it took time away from discussion of "realistic" proposals (a letter to Heys, a proposed third-force "Blue Ribbon" committee to intervene, and off-duty hours picketing of a police station or City Hall). Of course it was necessary for the political future of these "workers' leaders" to "make the record" against racism. This they did—verbally. Resolutions were passed supporting the strike demands. Union members wore "support" buttons and arm bands, "joined the line" during lunch breaks—while continuing to work! The TWLF struggle was reverentially referred to, while the TWLF's main request—that employees stop work and join the

pus, settlement of the Third World demands, an in-service training program to up-grade minority workers, and "trade union" demands.

At this meeting the leadership reaped the fruits of their previous defeatist role. Their argument all along, catering to and creating backward fears among the rank-and-file, was that to strike would mean probable loss of jobs of all strikers and destruction of the union. The strike motion was voted down! Even so, a majority voted to strike. The strike vote lost only by the undemocratic requirement of a 2/3 vote. This is a feature included in bureaucratic-inspired union constitutions to prevent rank-and-file majorities which have become militant from taking action which the bureaucrats for their own reasons oppose.

A new strike vote meeting was set for one week away. In the meantime the AFT strike continued. At this time president O'Donnell stated she did not know whether the motion to respect the AFT lines still held or not. Executive Committee member Florence MacDonald made a motion that the membership return to work (that is, cross AFT lines) starting an hour and fifteen minutes late in order to first picket. More embarrassment. The issue was finally settled by tabling the MacDonald motion and by viewing the past motion regarding AFT lines as still in effect but up to the individual as to whether it would be respected or not. This was a preview of things to come.

Strike? Who, Me?

The final strike meeting a week later (late February) followed the most

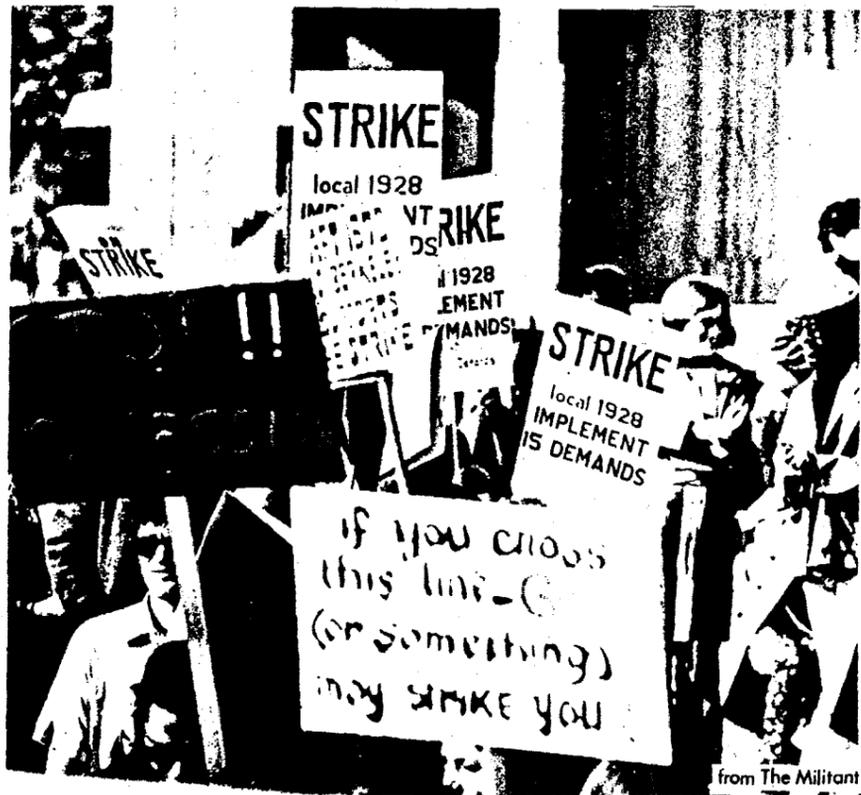


MARILYN ROBERTSON, one of the few campus employees to honor picket lines from the beginning of the recent campus strike.

This time the strike vote passed by a 2/3 majority. Now a new stage of treachery opened up. Some in the union have claimed the passage of the motion itself was part of a deal—that in order to preserve their reputations the leadership agreed to allow scabbing on their own strike in exchange for votes "for" by people actually intending to work. Whether or not there was an actual "deal", in effect this was what happened. It was made plain by the leadership that members who "had to" could continue working and still remain valued, respected and socially acceptable union members, particularly if they contributed to the strike fund. This failed to educate the inexperienced membership of the essential of trade union struggle, that during a strike, on which ultimately, the power of a union lies, everyone strikes. No one can "afford" to miss work. Unity in a strike assures that the strike is as powerful as possible, especially necessary in the case of a small, weak union such as AFCSME. To make scabbing acceptable jeopardizes those who stay out, and opens the way for those initially striking to go back to work en masse at the first economic pinch. President O'Donnell even went on to say at a work meeting the following Sunday that the strike was symbolic only and not intended to try to shut down the university. In short, the leadership took a "no win" position, hardly one to sustain the membership during what was anticipated to be a long hard strike ahead. In addition, the recruitment drive, that was for the first time organized during this period, stressed that those joining did not have to strike. This is building on sand. AFCSME also continued "officially" to allow scabbing on its sister union, the AFT. Even AFCSME president O'Donnell crossed the lines to work one afternoon where in her opinion the work to be done was "important". The union became a union of scabs, as the majority of the membership crossed AFT lines, having been told by the leadership that respect for AFT lines was "suggested" only.

Quicksand

The strike on the Cal campus is now over. No gains were made. It has been a defeat for the movement, a defeat for the campus unions, and a god to the forces of reaction. The AFCSME leadership has placed the entire union in jeopardy. It has built on quicksand. Worse than having an un-



Picket line scene during recent campus strike at U.C. Berkeley

strike—was ignored.

By the fourth meeting, weeks later, things were so bad that, at last, a motion to call a strike meeting passed almost unanimously. The AFT had already voted to strike after a peaceful picket line of their members had been set upon by cops and the picketers arrested en masse. At the same AFCSME meeting a motion to respect AFT strike lines also passed overwhelmingly.

Reluctant though they were to lead a strike, the leadership in order to preserve their individual political reputations at this point and not be by-passed by the membership, came into the fifth meeting with a strike motion. The demands included shutting down the cam-

pus, settlement of the Third World demands, an in-service training program to up-grade minority workers, and "trade union" demands.

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