by Donna Shoemaker

A group of militant black workers have begun to organize at a Detroit auto plant and have thrown both the union and the company into a near panic. It is called the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), now located at the Hamtramck Assembly plant, also known as Dodge Main. It also has members in the nearby Huber Foundry. In both plants the workers are represented by local 3 of the United Auto Workers.

DRUM was formed last spring shortly after young militant blacks had helped lead a wildcat strike over the issues of speed-up on the line and blatant racism in the shop. Another wildcat, over similar issues, was initiated by DRUM this summer. Since then the group has been publishing its own newspaper which is widely read by black workers at the plant.

In Detroit, as in most urban centers, the semi-skilled and unskilled occupations in most basic industries are being steadily taken over by blacks. The concerns of the black workers are not simply bread and butter issues but involve job conditions and the racism of both the unions and management.

In many plants where black workers are clearly the majority, and where the local union is controlled by whites, black workers have organized themselves into concerns which press for demands. A recent example of this is the black bus drivers' strike where in Chicago where black workers walked out over demands against the company and the union, shutting down 50% of the operation.

From time to time black successes have also emerged in UAW locals in Chicago and Detroit, but there has been very little effective organizing there.

In the last election the DRUM candidate was allowed to put up posters and leaflets in the plant, but the workers themselves did not receive them on the job. DRUM candidates are now putting in an organizing drive in the local.

The struggle in Detroit, as in most urban centers, is a struggle over the control of the local union. The unions have failed to respond to the demands of the black workers.

UNION KICKBACK?

In a recent leaflet headed "LOCAL 3, WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH MY MONEY?" they pointed out that nearly half of the union dues collected by the local have been lost to the city of Hamtramck at one time or another, for firemen's and police salaries, etc. The local leaders' secret police are being used to prevent the circulation of this information.

"The other two who were DRUM candidates were made to suppress DRUM. We were made to say nothing because the idea of black unity was really being killed by the union," said a recent leaflet.

DRUM's long range goal is tooust the present leadership and eventually gain control of the local. It is this leadership which has worked with management to keep blacks out of skilled trades, to keep all but "teen" blacks out of local 3 offices and social events given within the local offices.

In this instance which has failed so far to respond to the demands of the black workers, DRUM is planning to replace it with one which will work for the black workers.

In a news release, October 5, 1968 DRUM stated that the "white ruling class cannot continue to survive without the black worker." It continued, "In the words of M. Dobbins, "The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the emancipation of the majority of workers who are black, brown, and yellow."

"We were trying to get the local to call a vote to replace the incumbent," said DRUM leader Ron March. "Then we had a unbelievable experience in the community. When people heard about what was going on they came down to support us."

"We're fighting for the idea of black unity, but the leadership is afraid of this," he said. "This is because they are afraid of the black community."

"DRUM supporters to the polls."

"Police Intimidation"

"When I went to the polling place," said one DRUM supporter, "they wouldn't let me in. I had people driving workers to the polls at the plant, but they had people watching people at the polls."

"We're going to fight them. We're going to turn out and we're going to prove to them that we're doing something about it."

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Since no candidate won a majority, March was placed in a run-off with a local leadership-backed candidate on October 3. Although no arrests were made during this election, all parking lots in the area were barricaded and the police began swarming with police.

March lost the run-off. Hundreds of rioters were brought in for the run-off. More important, when March competed to him the first time they were afraid to vote because of the mass of police around the plant and because of the police riot the week before, DRUM plans to contest the election in court.

Not a Failure

Although DRUM lost the election they did not view their efforts as a failure. Their existence was dramatized by the event and the injustices surrounding the election have been good educational and organizing issues. In addition, other small insurgent groups of black workers, influenced by the example of DRUM, have been forming in plants around Detroit, The Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM) is one example.

The appeal of DRUM is primarily to young black workers. In discussing why DRUM lost March said, "DRUM has formulated its plans around three factors: black unity, black awareness and black identity. All the young blacks dig the program. It is real to them because of the constant intimidation by management and the putting around of the workers by the supervisors that goes on all the time. Only the old guys can't accept the identity part because they don't want black identity. This system has taught them to identify with whites and integration all their lives. Now they have too big a stake in wanted things alone. So they'll slip someday in DRUM a bit till and never show their faces at election time."

Political Scope

Because of DRUM's dual appeal, some members are attracted only by its program of black consciousness, others by its wider revolutionary content. Therefore the political scope in DRUM ranges from winning equality opportunity in the capitalistic system for black to destroying the system altogether with blacks arising as the vanguard of the revolution. The more radical members are trying to develop an overall class consciousness in DRUM. They are studying their own history and reading Frans Fanon.

The White CRU

The strong anti-white bias in DRUM has been altered by a new development in the plant. Not long before the election a handful of young militant white workers formed a counterpart to DRUM called the Committee for a Real Union (CRU). CRU's immediate aim is to fight against the racism of management and to organize white workers around DRUM's demands concerning job conditions. In its leaflet CRU attacks working class

Crysler Corporation owns the Masonite plant. Chrysler is one of the world's ten largest companies in terms of sales. Its gross sales profits run over two billion dollars a year. You can find subsidiaries owned by Chrysler in France, Spain, Scotland, Australia, Venezuela, Switzerland, England, United States, Canada, Greece, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Philippines, Turkey, Belgium and Mexico.

The Board of Directors -- A Rank and File

Howard L. Clark is also President of American Express and director of these other companies: National Steel Corporation, Mellon National Bank, Cluett Peabody and Company, Lehman Corporation, G.S. Trumt Company, George Love is also director of Pullman Company, Union Carbide Corporation, General Electric, Mellon National Bank, Kilister used to be Vice Chairman of the Import-Export Bank and Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury of the U.S.

Their Masonite plant is the largest plant owned by Chrysler, nearly four and a half million square feet. It is the largest hardboard mill in the world. In the 1967-1968, 40,000 employees produced nearly 400,000 cars (Dodge Darts and Chargers and Plymouth Valiants and Barracudas).

Union struggle in Laurel Mississippi against the Masonite Corporation has, after a long up and down struggle, brought black and white workers together. The following appears in an article by Helbert Analavage of the SOUTHERN PATRIOT on the breaking of a contract in the Laurel hardboard plant.

Masonite obtained court injunctions against the strike and hired security guards from all over the south...as well as outside guards from Mississippi universitites. The company succeeded in splitting many black and white workers by playing one group against the other.

After nine months of struggle and five men killed, the International Revolutionary Workers Union Local 3465 under Trotsky's tradition, the National Labor Relations Board in Washington signed a contract with the company which the strikers called a "sweetheart deal". The strikers said they learned that Masonite was in talks with an international union with a $2,000,000 total to be settled for the local in leadership.

Nineteen hundred men were thrown out of work. It looked as if the local

MASONITE MASONITE MASONITE

Dope on Dodge

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Problems

One of the problems DRUM faces is that even though they may gain control of local, the corporation and the union can replace them all if necessary. Another problem is that DRUM's appeal is narrow or that attract large numbers initially and create the illusion of success, DRUM could find itself operating on the assumption that it had a large number of committed people when it had actually organized a few, don't realize it. It is very difficult in the midst of a lot of black. There would cease internal discussion and ultimately weaken the organization, DRUM will have to redirect this into a positive thing: a sense of their own history and of the class nature of this society, leading into a program for radical change.

The members in DRUM are not romantic, but are conscious of each step they take. Although they are inspired by Malcolm X and Frans Fanon, they are organizing according to the specific realities of Harlem and though they seek revolutionary change they don't pretend revolution is around the corner. They are hopeful at this point and have not yet lost their cool.