

60,000 MARCH IN WASHINGTON D.C. Unemployment Demonstration

Vol. 1, No. 3

May-July 1975



In a display of militancy and strength over 60,000 workers came to Washington, Saturday, April 26th to protest unemployment and demand "Jobs Now," in the largest demonstration for jobs held since the massive rallies and marches of the 1930's.

The April 26th Rally was organized by the Industrial Union Department (IUD) of the AFL-CIO. Rank and file pressure for mass action was largely responsible for forcing union leaders to push for the Washington protest. However, only a few of the union bureaucracies made more than a token effort to mobilize their 6 million members.

And it is little wonder that these labor "leaders" were reluctant to tap the power of growing rank and file discontent. They have consistently made the running of "their" unions a private affair. They have sold out both the economic and political interests of the workers they have sworn to represent.

STADIUM RALLY NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

The leadership of the IUD believed that a contained rally inside RFK Stadium would eliminate the possibility of any disruption or independent demonstration of militancy by the rank and file.

Hoping to confine April 26th to a "pep rally" for the labor bureaucrats and the Democratic Party, the leadership of the IUD was to be sorely disappointed.

As Walter Burke of the United Steelworkers Union was reading a prepared speech for I.W. Abel who was unable to attend the rally, two workers ran onto the field holding signs for more jobs. They were cheered by onlookers. Security guards were booed as they roughly escorted first a man, then a woman off the field.

As Hubert Humphrey, next on the schedule of speakers began his speech, more and more people streamed onto the field, eventually surrounding the front of the speakers platform. Humphrey's attempt to calm the people on the field was a total failure. After trying to pick up and lead their chant of "We Want Jobs," he was reduced to saying to the angry and frustrated crowd of workers, "God Bless You!"

The composition of this demonstration against the official leadership of the rally was extremely mixed. Left political groups and rank and file caucuses made up about a third of the participants. The other two thirds were employed and unemployed workers from a variety of unions -- it was ridiculous to make the charge that this spontaneous demonstration of almost 2,000 workers was an organized radical plot or "Watergate Trick" to disrupt the rally.

In fact, a lack of leadership from the Left and from rank and file trade unionists in opposition to the collaboration of the IUD bureaucracy, was a great shortcoming of April 26th.

Workers interviewed by the ORGANIZER best summed up the reasons for the spontaneous outburst. A middle-aged autoworker from Local 906 in N.J. said he was on the field with a group of 40 or so other Local members because, "We are tired of the promises and speeches of politicians and union leaders."

Two young, Black hospital workers from New York said they were "fed up with speeches." "What we need is to have our voices heard."

A laid-off worker from New Jersey captured much of the spirit of the protesters when he said, "How are we gonna let them know just how bad things are by sittin' back and just listenin' to a lot of garbage."

Many workers, after venting their pent-up frustration and anger at the speakers' podium then left the field. But as some left, others arrived. The leadership of the rally was either unable or unwilling to continue over the presence of the hundreds of angry protesters on the field. The microphone was turned off and the labor bureaucrats and politicians filed off the platform. April 26th ended in disorganized confusion. The participants slowly left the stadium for their buses, trains and cars.

The reaction to the rally and its chaotic ending was mixed. Many felt that the hard times workers face was the major reason why people

went onto the field. Others were disappointed that the speeches could not be continued. Most labor officials, predictably, blamed "the radicals" for disrupting "their" rally.

LESSONS OF APRIL 26TH

The April 26th rally in Washington clearly demonstrated the inability of the labor bureaucracy to direct and organize a truly representative protest of rank and file workers. Political action for jobs for so many union leaders has been confined to "lobbying" in the halls of Congress and State legislatures.

Times demand the mobilization of their membership, but the union bureaucrats fear this, for the rank and file, once set in motion is likely to begin by shouting down and removing those very same bureaucrats and their Democratic Party "friends."

The April 26th action, as timid a conception as it was, was still too strong a medicine for the likes of George Meany and the right wing of the AFL-CIO brass. Now Meany will be telling the IUD sponsors "I told you so",

Undoubtedly the militancy of the rank and file and the visible strength of the left wing, will give the IUD leaders pause before they call another action. But it's doubtful that the rank and file will give these leaders any excuse of inaction.

TASK FOR THE LEFT

For the left wing of the workers movement, the class struggle oriented rank and file forces including the new Communist organizations, the April 26th demonstration was an indication of the growth of influence and strength.

Class struggle slogans (for a shorter work week with no loss in pay, an end to racism, militarism, and aid to reactionary puppet regimes abroad, for union democracy) were in evidence throughout the stadium and contrasted sharply with the timid half measures and vague slogans put forward by the rallies sponsors.

Yet the rally remained too fragmented and politically immature to mount an effective challenge to the Labor bureaucracy. The col-

lapse of the rally before the militancy of the ranks created a vacuum that the organized left forces were unable to fill. Out of the chaos on the field, no clear credible voice emerged that was able to rally the rank and file forces and stamp a real political direction on the spontaneous demonstration.

The task for Communists and class struggle forces in the workers movement is to fill the vacuum in the coming period and wrest away leadership of the struggle for jobs from the discredited labor bureaucracy. This will require unity of action around a clear set of demands to end the crisis capable of winning the support of broad masses of working people.

We must step up our work in the unions, among the unorganized, and among the unemployed to bring masses of workers into the struggle for these demands. And we must break down the fragmentation of the movement by building strong local, regional, and national coalitions capable of building mass mobilizations around the question of jobs.

THE UAW BUREAUCRACY Which Side Are They On?

Vol. 2, No. 5

Oct.-Nov. 1976

"General Motors and the UAW have a greater community of interest than of conflict."

"I have nothing but the kindest feelings for the General Motors Corporation."

—INTERNATIONAL UAW PRESIDENT
LEONARD WOODCOCK

Many UAW members know that the leadership of our International Union has given up the idea of taking on the Auto Companies head on. The days of the sit-down strike and the mass picket line are over, as far as Woodcock is concerned. When a strike is called, an all-out effort to force the companies to grant our demands is dropped in favor of half-stepping and passivity.

In explaining the Leadership's approach to strikes, UAW International Secretary-Treasurer Emil Mazey says that a strike takes the wind out of the membership and makes it easier to sell them a bum contract. In his words, "I think that strikes make ratification easier. Even though the worker may not think so, when he votes on a contract he is reacting to economic pressures. I really believe that if the wife is raising hell and the bills are piling up, he may be more apt to settle than otherwise."

(Mazey misses the point that many

thousands of striking auto workers are women with husbands at home and still thousands more wives aren't sitting at home griping about the bills but are out working or perhaps even striking themselves.)

The leaders of the UAW are much more sophisticated than the bureaucrats who dominate the AFL-CIO. Woodcock and Co. are good at looking like fighters while they sell the workers mediocre contracts and praise Jimmy Carter as the saviour of the working class.

When you look below the surface, though, the UAW and the AFL-CIO are basically the same. Lack of democratic control over the leadership and its policies, high salaries, powerful positions in the government, and social status from hob-nobbing with the rich -- *all these things form the foundation of the UAW bureaucracy and its pro-company stand.*

WHAT MAKES A BUREAUCRAT?

UAW International officers earn far more than the average autoworker. Leonard Woodcock makes about 40,000 dollars a year, plus expenses. International officers direct a staff of one thousand employees, and control a treasury that stood at 162 million dollars in 1974. The strike fund alone was up to 170 million dollars in 1976.

Occasionally they supplement their income with payoffs and cash from the union's till. International Vice-President Richard Gosser, long-time buddy of Walter Reuther and the senior UAW Vice-President, resigned from the union in the early 60's after being investigated by the Senate and convicted of income-tax evasion.

UAW officers often serve on government boards and commissions, and sometimes are offered high-paying government jobs when they leave the union. Jack Conway, former President Reuther's right-hand man, left the union in 1961 to take a job with the Federal Housing Administration. Soon after, Leonard Woodcock (then a UAW vice-president) was offered an ambassadorship or a sub-cabinet post.

More recently, Woodcock has been named to the National Productivity Commission and the National Commission for Industrial Peace. And it's an open secret that if Jimmy Carter becomes president of the US next January, Woodcock will be named Secretary of Labor or Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.

INDUSTRIAL PEACE = "LABOR PEACE"

The US National Commission For Industrial Peace is a good example of the close ties between the top leaders of the