

UAW "Shorter Work Time" Hoax

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Delegates of the United Auto Workers (UAW) National Ford Council meeting in Washington September 9-11 routinely approved the only resolution to come on the floor, a proposal from the leadership making "Shorter Work Time" a key demand in the 1976 auto negotiations. This token gesture seeks to translate the strong sentiment among auto workers for a shorter workweek to combat layoffs into a bogus "time bank" plan, whose impact on unemployment will be paltry, if not counterproductive.

After two days of exhorting the assembled local bureaucrats to "go visit your congressmen" (along with the telling admission that "nothing happened" after the union's February 5 pressure-the-Democrats jobs rally), UAW's Ford Division Director and Vice President Ken Bannon introduced the resolution. He largely repeated a "program" outlined in a July 1974 Ford Council motion: less time on the job, more leisure time, reduced unemployment, no increase in overtime. Though purposely vague, the actual intent is revealed by the inclusion of a quote from a 6 June 1974 news conference by UAW President Leonard Woodcock:

"Well, you talk about the question of a four-day week—the bonus hours plan is a method of shortening the individual's work time. It's true it's only in a small way—half an hour per week in the agricultural implement contracts. But building on that, it is possible to shorten the individual's working time by periodic weeks off but still maintaining the basic 40-hour week...."

The "bonus hours" or "time bank" plan won initially at John Deere Company in

1973 has become increasingly popular with auto executives plagued by high absenteeism and faced with current reduced production needs. The one-half hour paid time off per week—only about three days per year!—for perfect attendance was originally proposed by Bannon to curb *absences*, not unemployment. And indications so far from the agricultural implement companies are that, to the limited extent it has been an incentive, the plan *reduced* the number of jobs available! With less absenteeism, fewer surplus workers are needed to fill in vacancies.

The fraudulent guise of a job-producing "shorter work time" label is required now because of the depression-level unemployment in auto. Last winter nearly 300,000 production workers (38 percent of the total) were on indefinite or temporary layoff. Even with the current upturn in production (caused more by balancing out of the 1975 models and introduction of the 1976's than by increased sales), 84,000 remain on the recall lists. As Bannon pointed out, these figures do not even include the workers who have lost their recall rights—nearly 20,000 just at Ford—or those whose jobs have been eliminated by attrition and speed-up. Bannon estimated that 138,000 jobs had been lost in the industry during the last two years.

Pressure for union action for jobs has been building up, especially since the GM and Chrysler SUB funds ran out of money this spring, sharply increasing the misery of those sacked. Several Detroit-area locals have erected billboards supporting "30 for 40." During the last depression and again following World

War II, the Trotskyists popularized "30 hours' work for 40 hours' pay" as a concretization of their slogan for a "sliding scale of wages and hours" to spread available work to all. The UAW's paper program has included "30 for 40" since 1936, but it has never been seriously bargained for.

Some pressure, albeit timid, is also coming from the "National Short Work Week Committee" headed by Cadillac Local 22 president Frank Runnels. Aspiring to higher office and seeking a power base, Runnels has sought to group around himself other local-level UAW leaders. He recently held a Detroit meeting drawing representatives from over 60 UAW locals, many of whom had previous connections with the "30 and Out" campaign for "early retirement." The insufficiency of Runnels' call for a meager four days/nine hours is underlined by reports that he is even willing to compromise on that! Perhaps he, Woodcock and Bannon can all agree on "39-and-a-half for 40."

This meeting of the Ford Council, which as usual produced no concrete accomplishments, did emphasize the necessity of a new class-struggle leadership for the UAW. Not one of the 146 voting delegates—mostly local presidents and paid officials—uttered a peep in protest over the resolution's advance billing of an obvious sellout. The motion was read by an administrative assistant to Bannon and passed unanimously with no discussion.

What is shaping up as the "Great Short Work Time Hoax" is strikingly reminiscent of the fate of "voluntary overtime," billed as a key demand in the 1973 auto

negotiations. The pro-capitalist UAW tops settled for 60 hour workweeks at Ford, 54 at GM and Chrysler—which just happened to be the standard overtime already being worked at the respective companies!

The exigencies of periodic capitalist crises—and the profit-hungry companies' preference for paying fewer workers time-and-a-half for overtime, rather than incurring additional "fringe benefit" expenses by more hiring—mean that the lives of auto workers are punctuated by grueling overtime and long layoffs. Even the 40-hour week, center of bitter labor battles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is a myth for auto workers except during economic slumps (and then only for those who avoid the layoff list). Securing an end to unemployment means preparing the ranks of labor for sharp class struggles, beginning with the fight for a massive reduction of the workweek at no loss in pay and factory occupations of shut-down plants.

But it is the capitalist system itself that is the cause, and the fight for jobs must aim at expropriating the companies and vastly expanding production in a rationally planned economy under a workers government. Those who pretend that something less will suffice—whether "36 for 40," lobbying for the Democrats' drop-in-the-bucket jobs bills or some other reformist panacea—are only trying to fool the workers. If successful in winning office on their gimmick programs, they will only replace the Woodcocks and Bannons with more of the same. The fight for a consistent, class-struggle leadership of the workers movement is the key to victory. ■

OL Supports Meany's Grain Boycott

Maoism and Anti-Communist Protectionism

George Meany and Teddy Gleason, the arch-reactionary AFL-CIO chiefs who recently called a short-lived boycott of grain shipments to the Soviet Union, are not alone. On the same side in the "struggle" to blame U.S. food-price inflation on trade with the Soviet Union stand the Maoist October League (OL) and the ex-Maoist Progressive Labor Party (PL), both of which recently endorsed the anti-communist, protectionist grain boycott.

In a leaflet announcing a demonstration against President Ford in San Francisco on September 22, a coalition put together by PL included the demand, "Stop the U.S.-Russian Grain Ripoff." Nowhere in the leaflet or in the pages of *Challenge* was PL's policy on the grain deals explained, however.

The October League made the mistake of trying to justify its support for Meany/Gleason anti-communism. "Soviet capitalists are all too glad to buy Western grain," says the OL's *Call* (September 1975), since they are strapped by stagnation in agriculture. This is allegedly because "the revolutionary enthusiasm of Soviet peasants which was responsible for the great advances in agriculture under Lenin and Stalin, has been wiped out" under Khrushchev and Brezhnev!

It is impossible to keep a straight face after reading such assertions. To begin with, even official Russian historians now admit that peasants slaughtered over 50 million cows, sheep, goats and horses in response to Stalin's forced collectivization. Far from producing great advances,

Stalin's autocratic arbitrariness set Soviet agriculture back for decades. Furthermore, it was Stalin who for half a decade was a leading opponent of Trotsky's call for gradual, voluntary collectivization!

Denouncing Meany for "demagogically using" the boycott which he and ILA head Gleason called and ended by bureaucratic fiat, the OL proclaims that "thousands of longshoremen took a militant stand" against "Soviet manipulation" of U.S. prices. But workers who, against their real class interests, are enlisted in a protectionist, anti-communist crusade will not stop to distinguish Mao's China from Soviet "red bosses." One sign on the Houston docks during the boycott read, "Let Commies Starve"! The mind boggles at this attempt to defend Stalin's worst crimes while in the same breath "critically" supporting the anti-Soviet ploy of the most reactionary elements of the American union bureaucracy.

The OL's contradictory position is, however, consistent Maoism—that is, the nationalist world view of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy as opposed to the internationalist interests of the proletariat. In order to improve their position against the rival bureaucrats in the Kremlin, Peking leaders call for strengthening NATO forces in Europe and continued U.S. military presence in Asia, while grasping the bloody hands of "Third World" despots like Bandaranaike and Mobutu in warm friendship. To support the same ends, the October League lines up with the worst anti-communist elements of the labor move-

ment (and through them with U.S. imperialism) in an unholy alliance against the USSR.

And what about these "Soviet capitalists"? The puerile "theory" that the USSR was above reproach under Stalin but then somehow reverted (unnoticed at the time) to capitalism under his successors in 1956 not only makes the question of which class rules dependent upon the mere whims of a few top policymakers, but above all it serves as a cover for the innumerable betrayals of the Maoist bureaucracy. Trotskyists, in contrast, defend the still-existing economic conquests of the Russian Revolution (nationalization of the means of produc-

tion, planned economy, etc.) against both the mismanagement of the Stalinist usurpers and the aggressions of imperialism.

The real interests of the international working class lie not in protectionism but in an end to all restrictions on trade with the bureaucratically deformed workers states. In the imperialist countries it is the obligation of the class-conscious workers to oppose all protectionist trade barriers. The longer that Arab countries are blamed for oil price increases, the Soviet Union is blamed for inflation of food prices, etc., the longer the real culprits—the monopolistic corporations—will get off the hook. ■

PDC Campaign for Jagadish Jha a Success

The Partisan Defense Committee (PDC), legal defense arm of the Spartacist League, reports that the defense campaign waged on behalf of Jagadish Jha has been very successful and that substantial funds for his legal fees were raised by this effort. Jha, a veteran Indian Trotskyist, has suffered repeatedly at the hands of the Indian government for organizing West Bengal peasants and agricultural workers beginning in the late 1940's. He and 150 fellow union militants were hit with a lengthy series of court battles after leading a successful agricultural workers strike in the Bankura district during late 1969. Jha became a focus of PDC defense support in March of this year, after it was learned that the "United Secretariat," with which he is associated as a member of the Communist League of India, had criminally neglected this valiant militant in favor of more "popular" cases and issues. The Partisan Defense Committee thanks readers of *Workers Vanguard* for their generous support of Jagadish Jha.