



Forces Gather For July 4th Demo

July 4th organizing conferences were held in Philadelphia on March 13-14 for the East Coast and in Cincinnati on March 20-21 for the Midwest. Another conference is planned for the South in the near future. These meetings were important steps forward in building for the demonstrations in Philadelphia—demonstrations in which workers and other people in the struggle will assemble on the day the high and mighty celebrate their rule. These demonstrations will challenge their lies about the past and the future they hold up to the masses—"more of the same." And it will be a concrete step in building a movement that fights the capitalists and their rule.

Over 500 people participated in the first two conferences. They came from the struggles of vets, of youth, from the growing fight for jobs and from the struggles going on in plants and shops all over the East and Midwest, from the garment shops of Reading and Pottstown to the coalfields of West Virginia, the auto plants and steel mills of the Midwest and the meatcutters strike lines in Milwaukee.

Both conferences were a powerful example of the spirit and unity of the revolutionary workers movement that is being built. Chants of "We've carried the rich for 200 years—Let's get them off our backs!" rang out with one voice from everyone there.

"I feel as though I've had the wool over my eyes and a heavy yoke on my back all my life—and just being at this conference I feel it lifting," one worker said after the first day in Philadelphia. "I really do believe the working class will be united," said a meatcutter in Cincinnati. And a younger worker in an unemployed workshop brought out, "You know, I've been thinking about those Bicentennial minutes they show on TV. And they always end up, 'and that's the way it was.' That's all they can say. But we're going to Philly to say, 'This is the way it is!'"

In Philadelphia, a speaker from the New York-New Jersey Worker summed up the thousands of outrages we see around us every day and all the explanations the ruling class gives for them: "Things are a little off the track, they say. Let's go back to the pure spirit of '76. But the founding fathers would have been proud of the guys selling red, white, and blue desk sets and the bosses offering us Bicentennial wages—200 pennies an hour. That is the spirit of '76!"

"They say it's a mistake, a mystery: something's wrong, but they don't know what. They say there's

some dark forces out there messing things up. Well, we say it's time to shine a light on those dark forces. There's a reason for all these abuses—we've carried the rich for 200 years—that's why!

"We're going to Philly to strip away the lies, point the finger of blame straight at the capitalist class and indict them for their crimes."

Power to Break Through

At both conferences, the opening speeches summed up and crystallized the understanding that workers brought to the conference, drawing out what it means for us to carry them, bringing out that only the working class has the potential power to break through their system whose crisis is daily making them a heavier burden on our backs. In Cincinnati, the opening speaker summed up the growing strength of the workers' movement that was evident at the conference:

"We have people here from the meatcutters' strike, from the mines, from all kinds of industries, unemployed workers, all nationalities, old and young—we have all different kinds of ordinary people here and the common thing between us is, we want them off our backs.

"And our strength is growing. For example, last summer when 80,000 miners went out, they didn't just face the mineowners, they faced the union leaders and the courts too. They waged a fierce fight and the rest of the working class rallied around them. I bet a lot of people here in this room gave money, sent solidarity letters, and so forth.

"Now, how come when the bosses say, 'this strike is going to cause you to be laid off,' how come those same workers rallied round? Because we saw it as a class fight. Some of our brothers against the enemy. And we stick with our brothers."

And people did come to the conferences with a sense that, as one worker put it, "we are beginning to unite as one." From the various battles and cities, people came to the conferences to take up the task of organizing a powerful statement for the working class and the people in Philadelphia. The very conditions of our class force us daily in a thousand ways to fight back or be crushed, but these fights must be welded together into a conscious movement of the working class against capital, a movement that not only fights against the attacks we face, but challenges the capitalists' actual rule.

The July 4th demonstration is one way to do that, to weld our battles together into one powerful fist aimed straight at the capitalists and their system. As the opening speaker at the East Coast conference said, July 4th is an opportunity to make a leap forward in building our working class movement.

"What will July 4th do? Think about it. We'll be standing up—the working class, united, saying No!—saying that the rule of the rich doesn't cut it—saying 'Get off our backs!' We'll be speaking out with one voice loud and clear across the whole country, thousands strong. . . .

"Our workers' movement is young," he concluded. "But look around—it's growing, it's for real. We're putting it together for the first time this way, this time in this young movement. This unity is just the start, but it's for real. We're on the right road. We've reached a point where we have to make a leap, jump over a wall to reach the next straightaway. It's not the last wall,

there'll be others after that, but it's an important one and we can jump over it."

The conferences themselves were living proof that it's possible and necessary to make this leap—a step forward nationwide in building a conscious movement of the working class which fights all abuses, all the effects of this system, to get at the cause—the rule of the capitalists. As the ruling class gathers to celebrate its birthday, the advanced working class forces have the potential to organize a powerful demonstration that will be a beacon to the rest of the class, throwing the bourgeoisie's lies of "common interests" back in their faces and focusing on the questions of jobs and war, which are both running sores that expose the bankruptcy of the system and important battles that the working class movement is taking up.

After the opening sessions people broke up into workshops to discuss how to organize for the demonstrations among employed workers, unemployed workers, vets and youth.

At the workshops and at the conferences generally the question came up: what is the relationship between the July 4th demonstration, its demands and its thrust, and the main struggles the masses of workers are now engaged in? This is crucial to building the July 4th demonstration and advancing the revolutionary workers movement, a question that faces many of the participants of the conferences as they return to their plants and shops to struggle with other workers to join in the July 4th demonstrations.

Each of the battles that workers are waging daily, the fight against wage cuts, layoffs, for better working conditions, etc., contain the seeds of the revolutionary workers movement. That is, all the struggles of the workers and all of the oppressed grow out of the contradictions of the capitalist system and the rule of the bourgeoisie, and all of these bring workers into struggle against the bourgeoisie. For communists and advanced workers it is important to expose the class relationships underneath all the fights the workers are waging, and build off the understanding workers are gaining in these battles.

The revolutionary workers movement, and actions like July 4th, cannot be seen as something entirely separate and detached from the struggles millions of workers are waging; in other words, not simply as demonstrations of the convictions of a handful of the advanced forces.

Nor will it do to make the flip side of the same error and pretend that the struggle of the masses of workers, as it is now, is the same thing as the revolutionary workers movement that is only beginning to take on a conscious form. Communists and the advanced forces must be in the thick of all the struggles against exploitation and oppression "developing this into an all-round battle against the capitalist system." (*Programme of the RCP, USA*)

In the day to day struggles the advanced forces must bring out the need to go beyond fighting simply to protect ourselves, but to build precisely such a movement. And the July 4th demonstration will be an expression of the development of this revolutionary movement, as well as a real blow to the exploiters' Bicentennial plans.

In this context, the importance of the demands of the July 4th demonstration stand out. For the revo-

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lutionary movement of the class can only develop in the course of real battles, flowing from real contradictions of the capitalists' system. Both demands of the July 4th action, Jobs or Income Now! and We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War! are key focuses for the struggle of the working class.

Both unemployment and war are among the ugliest, and most revealing, products of the capitalist system and become focuses of concern and struggle for millions. In the course of taking up these broad social questions, the advanced forces must help the masses of fellow workers understand how unemployment and war are a result of the rule of capital, and how the fight against them is a battle we can and must fight and is crucial to building a movement that, in the words of the *Programme*, "fights exploitation and all oppression in order to end wage-slavery."

By its very nature as the two hundredth anniversary of the capitalist political system in this country, the Bicentennial becomes a battleground for the different class forces to contend. For the working class the Bicentennial is an opportunity to, as the *Programme* also says, "infuse its strength, discipline and revolutionary outlook" into two of the major social movements in the country. It is an opportunity to ally masses from different classes and different strata (for example veterans and young people) around its revolutionary class interests. This is an important part of what is meant by "strengthening the proletarian pole" in society—building up the strength and leadership of a conscious, fighting workers movement.

"Build it Big"

Running through the whole conference was the determination, as one sum-up from a youth workshop put it, "to build for July 4th and the best way is to take it out big." People at the conferences felt that the slogan, "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!" expresses the feeling and experiences of millions of workers and that the slogan and demands of the demonstration have to be taken out as broadly as possible, to raise the questions and set off discussion and controversy throughout society.

As one workshop report summed up, "We have to take July 4th out broadly—even if everyone doesn't agree with us at first, that's okay, because discussing and struggling over it can help move us towards the day when everyone *does* agree."

The workshops focused on discussion of the overall slogan and the two demands and also touched on how to build for the demonstration. People brought up ideas for using posters, buttons and stickers and building broadly for July 4th. "Give me some stickers to put on the red, white and blue forklifts," one worker demanded.

Ideas came up for holding demonstrations at historic places, going out in May and June to hold street corner rallies, car convoys and so forth. An unemployed workshop talked about making billboards to take to the unemployment centers. In the vets' workshops the idea of organizing Memorial Day demonstrations was brought up.

In the employed workers' workshops, people talked about bringing the demonstration up in unions, fighting for endorsements, raising the issues and finding ways for workers who can't go to Philadelphia to unite with the demonstration and make their support a real force.

Going back to the different cities and areas, people agreed to form local July 4th Coalitions, made up of the sponsoring organizations and other groups or individuals who agree with the slogan and demands of the demonstration and want to join in building it. These local coalitions will take up the task of specifically planning how to build and organize for the demonstrations in the next few months.

Conferences a Success

Much was accomplished at the two conferences. Not only was understanding deepened of the importance of the demonstration and how to build for it, but also both conferences agreed that it's important to organize as many people as possible to be in Philadelphia from July 1 through July 4th.

The National Planning Committee of the July 4th Coalition (consisting of representatives from the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC), the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB) and the RCP) proposed to the conferences that demonstrations should be organized for all four days in Philadelphia, to bring forward the demands more sharply and to build up to the final demonstration on the Fourth.

People agreed, as one vets' workshop summed up, that "we've got so much to say we need more than a one day march" and that earlier demonstrations will

be an important way to build momentum for the 4th.

The conferences also helped to lay the basis for further advances in building UWOC as a national organization and in building up organization and struggle among youth. Unemployed workers and UWOC members from many different cities came together in the workshops for the first time and could see that struggle and organization is growing among unemployed workers.

Participants in the youth workshops, both on the East Coast and in the Midwest, summed up that com-

ing together from different cities for the first time, learning about common problems and struggles was an important step ahead—inspiring people to go out in the next few months and try to make some real advances.

People left the conferences with a better grasp of the tasks that face us in building the campaign around July 4th and with a deeper and stronger determination not only to build the demonstration but to build all our battles and weld them together into a conscious movement of the working class against capital. ■

Portland UWOC Defends Workers

Fight, Don't Starve!

The ruling class' windy proclamations about "recovery" have reached typhoon proportions, but reading between the lies shows quite a different story. Their claims of "improvement on the jobs front" are being used to justify wide-ranging attacks on unemployed workers. Arthur Burns of the Federal Reserve Bank is calling for unemployment benefits to be cut to thirteen weeks. This at a time when, for example, 4,000 workers in New Jersey exhaust 65 weeks of unemployment every single week! The "recovery" may be just hot air, but these attacks are real.

While Burn's scheme is still on the drawing board, extensions are already being cut in almost two dozen states, slashing benefits in many cases to 39 weeks or less. New laws are being proposed in Rhode Island, New Jersey and several other state legislatures, with rabid support from various capitalists, all aimed at setting up great obstacles to workers collecting unemployment insurance.

In addition to hoping to cancel out insurance benefits and save themselves millions and eventually billions, and get out from under any and all responsibility to the working class, the capitalists and their government are coming up with minute by minute schemes as to how fast and completely they can cut off food, welfare, everything! Under cover of their so-called recovery, they plot to do this. Under this system of wage slavery they hope not to pay unless the worker is slaving for them on a job.

The ranks of the unemployed organizing and fighting their schemes are swelling. All over more workers respond and understand better. UWOC is having more demonstrations, picket lines and will have contingents in every May Day rally around the country. The working class on the job and off demands Jobs or Income.

Fight, Don't Starve! and Jobs or Income! are one and the same fight. Striking city workers in San Francisco signed UWOC petitions and said, "You're damn right, they'd better give us our benefits." The determined demonstrations against unemployment benefit cutoffs in Ohio, Washington, New York, New Jersey, Georgia and Hawaii all put it clearly—the movement is on the rise. At planning conferences in March, delegations of unemployed made it clear they will respond in a big way to the July 4th Bicentennial demonstration in Philadelphia.

A story which illustrates what is taking place in this

so-called recovery is the fight going on now in Portland, Oregon. Chanting "Free Tom Bornson, Fight—Don't Starve!" a picket line called by the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC) marched in front of the Multnomah County Courthouse in Portland. The April 5 action began a campaign to free Tom Bornson and Lonnie Davis, two unemployed workers recently convicted of taking over a food stamp office to feed Tom's starving family.

The Bornsons had traveled all over the West in search of work when they ran out of money near Portland. Without a job or money, the family was forced to live in an old school bus. They ate one meal a day which Tom paid for by selling his blood. Soon their baby fell sick and the situation became desperate.

Tom refused to let his family starve to death. He and Lonnie Davis took over a food stamp office and demanded food and medical care for his family. When these demands were met, the pair surrendered. As Tom said, "I'm no criminal, but I'll do what I must to take care of my family."

Knowing that there are millions of us out there fighting in the struggle to survive, the bosses threw the book at Tom and Lonnie, threatening each with over 120 years in prison. In convicting them the court said what the system says to us every day, "You can starve but you better starve quietly."

Tom's lawyer, a former state prosecutor (!), claimed that Tom shouldn't be convicted because at the time of the holdup he was suffering from a "mental defect." He refused to let his family starve! What frightens the capitalists is that the whole working class has this same "defect"—we won't be ground into the dirt!

A couple of guys taking over a food stamp office is not the way we choose to fight. We build the strength and united action of the working class. But we've got to put the responsibility for the whole situation where it belongs, on the backs of the capitalists.

And as we organize in our millions to fight the bosses, we won't let them lock up Tom and Lonnie. It's a criminal system that takes away our means to live and then tries to lock us up when we refuse to starve. UWOC is requesting telegrams and mailgrams of support for them from all workers and workers' organizations: messages that demand their freedom. Please send them to Portland UWOC, PO Box 14452, Portland, Or. 97214. Free Bornson and Davis! ■

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