

# The Labor Aristocracy: The Material Basis for Opportunism in The Labor Movement Part III: The Polemic Within the Communist Movement

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## Introduction

In addressing the problem of proletarian revolution in the contemporary era, Lenin continually stressed that “the fight against imperialism is a sham and a humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.”<sup>1</sup> Considering the extent of Lenin’s polemic with Karl Kautsky and other conciliators of opportunism who claimed the mantle of Marxism, he might well have added: this struggle must necessarily begin with a polemic within the communist movement itself.

The reason for this is not hard to discern. The fight against opportunism, so central to the transformation of the proletariat into a self-consciously revolutionary force, can never take firm root and gain momentum without the effective leadership of the conscious, communist element. Therefore the defeat of opportunism within the workers’ movement requires, in the first place, the defeat of *illusions about opportunism* among the communists.

It was just such illusions that, in Lenin’s day, led Kautsky and so many other prominent figures from the Second International directly down the road to class collaboration with their “own” bourgeoisies during World War I. It was to expose and defeat these illusions that Lenin made his groundbreaking analysis of the problem of opportunism in the labor movement in the imperialist countries. In polemic with Kautsky and other centrists who viewed opportunism as a fleeting aberration with no substantial material base, Lenin brought to light “the most profound connection, the economic connection between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the opportunism which has triumphed (for long?) in the labor movement.”<sup>2</sup>

That connection lay in monopoly capital's capacity to generate gigantic super-profits and to utilize a portion of them to bribe the upper strata of the working class and create a *labor aristocracy* "corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie."<sup>3</sup> This privileged stratum of workers, in turn, constitutes the social base for an opportunist political trend that forms "an alliance" with the bourgeoisie "directed against the mass of the proletariat."<sup>4</sup>

Lenin emphasized that the labor aristocracy and the opportunist trend to which it gives rise had become "inevitable and typical" features of the class struggle under imperialism; that "in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into *two international camps*."<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

For Lenin, all attempts to obscure this stubborn reality, especially those conducted in the name of defending the supposedly inherent revolutionary virtues of the working class, constituted nothing but "official optimism," "optimism which serves to conceal opportunism."<sup>6</sup> While this malady had to be exposed again and again in "shades of difference" on matters of theory, its dire consequences were profoundly political. "Official optimism" inevitably leads to the conciliation of opportunism and ultimately can lead to open class collaboration, as in the case of the Second International. For this reason, agreement on the theory of the labor aristocracy and its political implications (that is, the need for an "immediate, systematic, extensive, and open struggle"<sup>7</sup> against opportunism in the workers' movement) became the cornerstone of the communist movement's demarcation with social democracy and the formation of the Third International in 1919.

### The Struggle Among U.S. Communists

With this background in mind, one might surmise that firm unity on Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy and ongoing discussion as to the current forms of opportunism would be a conspicuous feature of today's communist movement, especially in the heartland of world imperialism, the U.S. After all, Lenin's theory appears strikingly relevant to the contemporary U.S. Economically, important sectors of the U.S. working class have enjoyed a degree of prosperity over the past few decades unprecedented in the history of the international working class.

Politically and ideologically, these same sectors of the class (their composition overlapping considerably with the organized trade union movement) have given consistent support to the main initiatives of imperialist foreign policy,\* co-operated or acquiesced in the main-

\*Of course, by the early 1970s, a significant portion of organized labor did move into opposition to the war in Viet Nam. By the time it did so, however, it was tailing virtually every other sector of U.S. society, including, for that matter, a certain section of the bourgeoisie itself.

tenance of racism within the working class, and failed to produce even the most rudimentary mass form for independent political action outside the framework of the two capitalist parties. In short, U.S. working class politics have been dominated for almost three decades by a classic social-imperialist trend.\*

Despite these facts, the dominant view within the U.S. communist movement concerning opportunism in the workers' movement strikingly resembles the earlier "official optimism" to which Lenin so strenuously objected. In particular, the main organization representing communism in the U.S., the Communist Party USA, treats Lenin's profound insights concerning the labor aristocracy as an outworn and obscure part of Lenin's writings with little, if any, applicability to the contemporary U.S.\*\* Furthermore, in an inevitable corollary, the CPUSA promotes the most dangerous political illusions about the depth of opportunism's roots and influence within the working class and the bitterness of the struggle needed to isolate and defeat it.

Of course, the CPUSA is careful not to repudiate openly (or even question) Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy. However, its operative class analysis and political line guts that theory of its revolutionary significance. The CPUSA's official view has qualified the labor aristocracy nearly out of existence; to the degree a labor aristocracy exists at all, it is seen as an insignificant and ever decreasing minority of U.S. workers; at most a few of the highest paid union bureaucrats and exceptionally privileged skilled workers "who can write their own ticket."<sup>8</sup> The CP is forced to admit that some backward ideas influence the working class to some degree; but it maintains that these ideas persist only because they are *imposed* upon the working class by the bour-

\*Social-imperialism refers to the politics of those in the labor movement who strive for social reforms and sometimes profess a certain desire for "socialism," but who do so on the basis of support for imperialism. The term originated during World War I to describe the leading European parties of the Second International, and their affiliated trade unions, who collaborated with their "own" bourgeoisies in hopes that a patriotic victory would lead to economic benefits and reforms for the workers. Unfortunately, Maoism's gross distortion of the term to describe the Soviet Union necessitates explicit efforts to recover the original and correct meaning of the category.

\*\*Certainly the CPUSA is not the only communist grouping holding this line; rather, it holds a more sophisticated version and enjoys more influence in the trade union movement than any other communist formation. Ironically, in obscuring the importance of the labor aristocracy and the material basis for opportunism in the labor movement, the CPUSA and the major Maoist "parties" of the infantile left New Communist Movement share the same basic line and orientation.

geoisie's sophisticated propaganda apparatus and its handful of conscious agents within the workers' movement, that they lack a firm and stubborn material basis (in imperialist bribery) within the working class itself.

Because opportunism lacks any substantial material base, the CP reasons, whatever backward ideas exist within the working class are shed relatively easily as soon as the contradictions of capitalism sharpen significantly. In this scenario, the deepening crisis of imperialism can be counted on to produce, spontaneously, ever higher levels of political consciousness and working class unity. The role of communists, then, lies principally in facilitating this spontaneous forward motion and prodding it to the left. But this must be done ever so gently, for under no circumstances should the communists risk disrupting this steady leftward flow by mounting any open struggle with reactionary lines and forces and thereby promoting a split in the working class ranks.\*

At first glance and from the broadest historical vantage point, this perspective might appear consistent with the Marxist-Leninist tenet that the proletariat as a class is forced by the very conditions of its economic existence to lead all the oppressed in the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. However, this general truth of scientific socialism, which captures the historical function of the working class, does not and cannot explain the complex process through which the proletariat arrives at revolutionary politics. These broad generalizations can all too easily turn into mere platitudes and economic determinist fantasies when they are not augmented with a scientific and detailed analysis of the historically specific stratifications that divide the working class of any country and give rise to countervailing political and ideological currents which obstruct the proletariat's ability to carry out its historic mission. This is precisely the case with the line of the CPUSA, which views the political consciousness and motion within the U.S. working class (organized labor in particular) through those rose-colored glasses which are the hallmark of official optimism. Despite the grip that pro-imperialist views continue to exercise over the workers' movement, and in spite of the lack of any mass political force representing the distinct interests of the working class as a class, CPUSA General Secretary Gus Hall claimed at the party's recent Extraordinary Conference that "More

\*Here the CPUSA has managed to collapse entirely questions of principle with questions of tactics. Being prepared to split politically the workers' movement on the decisive questions of revolution and counter-revolution is not ultra-leftism, but the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from Lenin's profound insight that the movement is *already split* economically by imperialist bribery of the labor aristocracy. Standing firm on this matter of principle is totally distinct from the tactical blunder of isolating the communists from the mass of workers through infantile left approaches to mass activity.

than ever before, the working class is painfully conscious of the fact that it is the corporations and the ruling class who have gotten our country into the mess it is in. And they are fast becoming conscious of the fact that it is the working class who will have to lead the way out of it."<sup>9</sup> CP Labor and Farm Department Chairman George Meyers echoed Hall's message when he glossed over the deeply rooted opportunism of the AFL-CIO leadership with the astounding claim that there is a "rapidly developing shift away from the class collaborationist conceptions that have been dominant in the AFL-CIO since its founding in 1955."<sup>10</sup> For the benefit of those skeptical party members who still cannot be roused to action solely by the call for the working class to rise in defense of its hard won gains (a defense the class is definitely having considerable trouble with), Hall offered this startling prediction: "The objective conditions and the fightback forces are moving in the direction of struggles that will shift the working class to an offensive posture."<sup>11</sup> Finally, despite the fact that hostile elements ranging from the New Right to conservative Democrats to anti-Soviet social democrats are stepping up their base-building activity in the working class (all with some success, we might add), the CPUSA fails to mention the fight against opportunism and emphasizes only "organizing and mobilizing the growing militancy of the working class, helping to mold it into a cohesive united fighting force."<sup>12</sup>

In advancing such a line, Hall, Meyers, and the other leading comrades in the CPUSA have certainly earned Lenin's apt designation as "optimists in regard to opportunism." We would concede that U.S. imperialism presently faces a most profound political and economic crisis and that, in the midst of that crisis, there are new stirrings of activity within the working class; that this opens up new opportunities for revolutionary work. However, our contention with the CP's line is that realization of the political potential inherent in such a period is hardly a foregone conclusion. In fact, this is precisely where the question of communist leadership on the basis of a *correct political line* becomes a decisive material force on the direction and pace of historical development. In particular, how firmly communists grasp the complexities and contradictions which make up the spontaneous political and ideological tendencies taking shape within the working class—the negative tendencies toward national chauvinism, racism, and class collaboration *as well as* the positive ones towards key elements of class consciousness and unity—determines to a great degree how effectively communists will be able to intervene and lead the working class in the struggle for its genuine interests.

In this context, the fate of the workers' movement in the immediate period ahead rests in no small measure on the degree to which active struggle among communists can expose and defeat simplistic illusions about the inevitable smooth forward motion of the workers' movement, as well as all the theoretical and ideological underpinnings which bolster

these political illusions. This is not mere hairsplitting, but ultimately a life-and-death struggle to replace the politics of illusion with a perspective that restores Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy to its rightful place at the center of the communist class analysis. This perspective holds that the split and demarcation with opportunism is the axis along which the U.S. working class must be trained and transformed into a consistent revolutionary force capable of seizing power from the most powerful and bloodthirsty bourgeoisie in existence.

It is on this level and for these stakes that the debate over the nature and roots of opportunism within the working class movement must be joined and fought out successfully. Unfortunately, the CPUSA has developed a sophisticated technique of obscuring this central line struggle: it caricatures all attempts to call attention to the existence, scope, and influence of a labor aristocracy on U.S. working class politics as abandonment of the notion that the working class is the principal agent of revolutionary change under capitalism. Admittedly petit bourgeois versions of class analysis have penetrated the communist ranks (particularly during the heyday of the New Left in the late 1960s), but the CP tends to use these as "strawmen" for demagogic arguments which obscure the more knotty and substantive line differences among communists. The real debate among U.S. communists is not "Can and will the working class lead the revolution?" but rather "How will the U.S. proletariat be transformed and forged into a revolutionary force and united on that basis?"

No amount of obscurantism and maneuvering can prevent the more fundamental questions involved from coming to the surface time and again on the agenda of the communists. At the heart of the matter is this crucial point: Is the U.S. working class a basically homogeneous class that can, over time, be mobilized in its entirety as a revolutionary force? Or has imperialist bribery produced the irrevocable economic and political conditions for a *split* in the working class such that the working class will be transformed into a revolutionary force only in the course of isolating and defeating the opportunist trend rooted in the social base of the labor aristocracy? As a corollary, can the U.S. working class be brought to a consistent and thoroughgoing class consciousness primarily on the basis of the economic struggle; or must the class be united against the cutting-edge political questions of war and racism in order to fight with determination against both the bourgeoisie and its political agents within the working class?

Differences on these questions, subtle as they might appear on the surface, cannot be considered of minor or secondary significance. Quite the contrary, an understanding of these questions must constitute one of the cornerstones upon which any general line or strategy for the U.S. revolution is built. Consequently, a careful criticism of the CPUSA's notions on the nature of the labor aristocracy and the struggle against

opportunism within the working class movement will also throw a spotlight upon the deficiencies in the CP's general strategy, the Anti-Monopoly Coalition path to power. Indeed, the Anti-Monopoly Coalition strategy glosses over and effectively liquidates the struggle against opportunism within the working class and its material basis in the imperialist-bribed labor aristocracy. Thus the struggle for a correct understanding of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy and its use in the class analysis of the U.S. social formation is the axis of the struggle between a revisionist and Marxist-Leninist general line for the U.S. communist movement and working class.

### A Debate of Long Standing

We lay no claim to originality in attempting to refocus debate on the labor aristocracy; contention and debate among communists over the nature and sources of opportunism in the U.S. working class is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, recognition on some level of the historical persistence of opportunism within the labor movement has been inescapable—a profound verification of Lenin's theory that the opportunism of the labor aristocracy is a permanent feature of the class struggle under imperialism. Consequently, the controversy has resurfaced again and again on the agenda of U.S. Marxist-Leninists as they attempt to explain the phenomenon of opportunism and how to combat it. This contention was much of the substance of the original demarcation between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, it underlay the long and bitter struggle in the CPUSA in the 1920s over "dual unionism," and it was an issue in the historic struggle against Browder revisionism in the '40s.

More recently, explicit struggle over the question of opportunism and the labor aristocracy broke out within the CPUSA during the flow in the mass antiwar and anti-racist movements in the late 1960s. Numerous articles appeared in the pages of *Political Affairs*, the party's theoretical journal, as the CPUSA struggled to understand and properly react to the reactionary role of the AFL-CIO Executive Board as regards the Viet Nam War and the Black liberation struggle; to the radicalization of certain key sections of the working class, especially minority workers; to the rise of the New Left and Black Power; etc.\* Understandably, many of

\*Among the articles in *Political Affairs* explicitly addressing these questions were: *Marx and the Historic Role of the Working Class* by Hyman Lumer, January, 1968; *Will American Labor Lead the Socialist Revolution?* by Victor Perlo, January 1968; *Notes on the Aristocracy of Labor* by Carl Bloice, May, 1968; *The Roots of Opportunism in the Working Class* by Lumer, November, 1968; *Opportunism in the Trade Unions and the Struggle for Peace* by Albert J. Lima, January, 1969; *Approach to Work in the Trade Unions* by James West, March, 1969; *Trade Unions—Schools of Socialism* by Herb Kay, March,

these articles were written as a critique of then current New Left theories that denied the revolutionary potential of the working class altogether. Simultaneously, however, there was an attempt to wage a serious debate on a more solid Marxist-Leninist foundation. The most concentrated expression of this latter inner-party debate was an exchange of views between West Coast CP leader Albert J. (Mickey) Lima and the party center, unofficially represented by James West and Herb Kay.\* This debate explicitly addressed the content of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy and its applicability to the U.S. today, the politics and strategy necessary to forge the class consciousness and independent action of the U.S. working class, and the tactics of the struggle against opportunism.

Lima polemicized against what he claimed was a liquidation of the labor aristocracy by Gus Hall, Hyman Lumer, Victor Perlo, George Meyers, and other CP leaders and advanced his contrary view that "the U.S. ruling class has at its disposal the most colossal means of bribery in every form that has ever existed in any country."<sup>13</sup> Lima also held that the "two main political and ideological questions in labor are racism and imperialism" and that "unless the struggle against racism and imperialism is also carried on within the labor movement, we will not be conducting a struggle against the main obstacles on the path to class consciousness."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, because "racism and imperialism are not being imposed on a reluctant labor movement and leadership" and "because we are dealing with *conscious defenders of capitalism*," Lima maintained that "the struggle will also have to be directed against the top leaders of the organized labor movement and to influence and win the

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1969; *Further on Labor Opportunism* by Lima, May, 1969; *Lenin and the Struggle Against Opportunism* by William Weinstone, April, 1970; and *Lenin on the Trade Unions* by George Meyers, April, 1970.

\*After Hyman Lumer's *The Roots of Opportunism in the Working Class* appeared in the November, 1968, *Political Affairs*, Lima opened the explicit debate with his January, 1969 article, *Opportunism in the Trade Unions and the Struggle for Peace*; West and Kay responded in March with *Approach to Work in the Trade Unions* and *Trade Unions—Schools of Socialism* respectively; Lima's rejoinder, in the May, 1969, issue was *Further on Labor Opportunism*. The public debate was dropped at that point, but William Weinstone's *Lenin and the Struggle Against Opportunism* in the April, 1970 *Political Affairs* may be taken as the party's official position after the debate was "resolved." In the appendices accompanying this article, we have reprinted four of the major articles from this debate: Lumer's November, 1968, article, Lima's two pieces, and West's response to Lima's first article. We have included these articles in full both to give readers the full flavor of the debate and because we are not interested in vulgarizing the CPUSA's line in any way; the reader should have full access to the presentation of the CP's position by its strongest adherents.

base which they have among sections of the working class."<sup>15</sup> (Emphasis in original.) Lima stopped short of openly questioning the strategy of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition, but he did argue that "to pose imperialism in opposition to the anti-monopoly coalition is nonsense. Is it conceived that such a coalition will come into existence without a powerful, anti-imperialist movement in the country?"<sup>16</sup>

In response, West criticized Lima for violating the supposed Marxist tenet that "Defense of the trade unions (whatever their shortcomings) is a sacred duty of Communists and class-conscious workers."<sup>17</sup> He chided Lima for going beyond acceptable "constructive criticism accompanied by a discussion of ways and means to overcome shortcomings, which helps the class and the labor movement solve their problems. . . ." <sup>18</sup> He polemicized against incorporating the struggle against imperialism and racism into the CP's trade union program because to do so "is out of kilter with the present level of struggle and consciousness in the labor movement, thereby objectively setting the stage for future 'disappointments' when the labor movement fails to measure up to those tasks."<sup>19</sup> Rather he argued that this program should be basically economic in character and that Lima's approach "can only lead to loss of confidence in the working class."<sup>20</sup> West was perceptive enough to note that "Lima is suggesting an anti-imperialist alliance should be the strategic objective, rather than an anti-monopoly alliance."<sup>21</sup> (This apparently constituted a veiled warning to Lima that he was treading on thin ice and should take heed of the possible consequences.)

Underlying West's position was the defense of CPUSA labor chairman Meyer's view that "at the present time there is very little room for the application of this theory [the theory of the labor aristocracy] in our country."<sup>22</sup> As Kay put it, backing up West's attack on Lima's position, "What no Marxist can ignore, is that the operation of the class struggle, as an inherent feature of capitalist society, constantly works to counteract and offset the inroads of opportunism on the working class as a whole."<sup>23</sup> More generally, West articulated the classical economic determinist position that

"The *consistent*, upward-progressing, self-interest struggle of the working class. . . may be diverted or slowed down, by misleadership or lack of sufficient class and socialist consciousness, but it rises again and again, asserting and reasserting itself, pressing on irresistibly."<sup>24</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Unfortunately this debate was not carried through to completion, at least not publically, and no official position was asserted in the wake of the exchange. But a review of the CPUSA's documents, subsequent positions and practice leave no doubt Lima's position was rejected and that of West and Kay constitutes the line of the CP up to today. And

there are no indications that any serious discussions or struggles over this line have re-emerged internal to the CP since that time.

Our point in focusing attention on this earlier debate is not to argue that the present article has any direct continuity with it. Rather, we simply wish to suggest that the struggle over the question of the nature and source of opportunism in the labor movement is an objective and inevitable feature of the struggle for communist unity in this country—and will remain a major point of political and theoretical contention so long as a conciliationist line dominates the Marxist-Leninist movement. Rather than disappear in periods when the spontaneous class struggle moves into a flow, it will in fact intensify, because it is in just such periods that communists must confront and analyze the conflicting political motions of a class that is hardly homogeneous, but deeply and bitterly *split*.

It is in this context that we attempt here to raise and focus again the debate among communists over the theory of the labor aristocracy and on the centrality of the struggle against opportunism in transforming the U.S. working class into a truly revolutionary force. In doing so, we inevitably are forced to ideological battle with the same right opportunist line that dominated the CPUSA in the late 1960s. Because of this, we can learn much from that earlier debate, most of all that we objectively have no choice but to pursue the debate until a Marxist-Leninist line on this question replaces the currently dominant opportunist one.

## I. The CPUSA's Theoretical Liquidation of the Labor Aristocracy

All opportunist political lines advanced in the name of Marxism-Leninism ultimately seek their justification in the realm of theory, so it is here we begin our critique. Despite its strident claims to orthodoxy, the CPUSA has actually gutted Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy of its revolutionary essence by systematically revising all of the crucial concepts and categories that make up the theory—super-profits, bribery, privilege, and the labor aristocracy—and replacing them with non-Marxist and obscurantist notions.

Recently the CPUSA's theoretical work on the character of opportunism in the U.S. working class has been extremely sparse. Fortunately, however, all of the main theoretical propositions and assumptions which underlie the CP's position were explicitly advanced in the course of the debate on this question which took place in the pages of *Political Affairs* in the late 1960s (and to which we have already referred). In the course of that debate, representatives of the CPUSA national center elaborated the theoretical basis for the party's view that no substantial labor aristocracy has existed in the U.S. since the end of World War II. Essentially that theoretical basis consisted of two main

propositions: first, that super-profits from U.S. imperialist exploitation are too limited to support a sizeable labor aristocracy, and are declining even more as the crisis of imperialism deepens; and second, that no significant section of the U.S. working class can be considered either bribed or privileged.

As we will show, these assertions have nothing in common either with orthodox Leninist theory or with contemporary U.S. political reality.

### A. Super-Profits

The heart of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy is the proposition that the emergence of monopoly capitalism allows the bourgeoisie to generate gigantic monopoly super-profits and utilize a portion of them to bribe the upper strata of the dominant-nation working class, thereby producing the material basis for an opportunist, class collaborationist trend within the working class. Applying this theory to the development of U.S. imperialism since World War II leads to the conclusion that the U.S. bourgeoisie has, for over thirty years, reaped monopoly super-profits and bribed a section of the U.S. working class on an unprecedented scale.\*

In disputing this analysis, the CPUSA argues that the broad shift in the balance of forces between capitalism and socialism on a world scale has meant that U.S. monopoly capital since World War II has not had the economic wherewithal to generate super-profits sufficient to bribe a significant section of the U.S. working class. The main theoretical prop for this assertion is the argument that imperialist super-profits derive only from the export of capital *outside* the U.S. and, therefore, are too meager to bribe more than an insignificant handful of U.S. workers. Further, imperialism's overall historical decline means that the already small pool of super-profits is shrinking and, as a result, even the relatively small labor aristocracy that may have existed in the U.S. is shrinking with each passing day.\*\* The political conclusion is, of course, that

\* U.S. imperialism's ability to reap such super-profits was (and is) based on the overall level of development of its productive forces and its overwhelming hegemony in the world capitalist system, hegemony based on dominance over its rivals in industrial production, control over raw materials, command of liquid capital, export of capital, and, not least, military supremacy. For a more detailed discussion of the U.S. bourgeoisie's ability to generate super-profits and utilize bribery, see Part II of this article in *Line of March* #12, especially pp. 87-90.

\*\*The CPUSA never spells out clearly whether or not they believe a substantial labor aristocracy *ever* existed in the U.S. Some vague and passing reference may be made to a period in the distant past when some significant number of workers may have been bribed, but such comments are inevitably made only when accompanied by the strident assertion that this is no longer the case. The political or theoretical point is always the same: to argue that there is no substantial material basis for opportunism within the working class.

opportunism has no enduring material base in any significant section of the U.S. working class.

Economist Victor Perlo enunciated the CP's central economic argument most explicitly:

"Doubtless some labor leaders and some workers are bribed. An important task for Marxist researchers is to locate and measure this phenomenon. But we can show now that it is *necessarily limited to a small fraction of the working class.*

"Officially reported profits from private foreign investments totaled \$7.5 billion in 1967. Adding the various forms of hidden profits. . . brings the total to \$21.5 billion, which is 5 per cent of total wages and salaries paid in the U.S. Even if it were all used to bribe a section of the working class, only a rather small minority could be paid enough to really satisfy them. But of course, the imperialists make these profits primarily for their own use, using only the leavings for bribing labor leaders and workers."<sup>25</sup> (Our emphasis.)

Perlo's whole argument is based on a subtle yet crucial theoretical distortion of Marxist political economy.

First of all, contrary to Perlo's assumption, super-profits cannot be narrowly restricted to the proceeds from U.S. capital's foreign operations. Capitalist monopolies amass super-profits *wherever* they operate, whether in advanced capitalist countries or underdeveloped countries, whether at home or abroad. The source of monopoly super-profits is not simply foreign investment, but the *general* existence of monopoly domination of the economy. This domination allows monopolies to obtain super-profits not only from the export of capital, but from the extraction of enormous amounts of relative surplus-value from its workers "at home" (due to the high level of development of the productive forces, from skimming off in various ways a share of the profits obtained by non-monopoly capital, and by being able to concentrate its investments in the most profitable industries).\*

To understand the magnitude of this theoretical "shade of difference," consider that profits (after taxes) of U.S. domestic non-financial operations in 1967 were 4.5 times their foreign investment earnings.\*\*<sup>26</sup> Perlo himself admitted that "enough [of the super-profits accruing from U.S.

\* Criticism of the view that monopoly super-profits were derived only from the "foreign" side of imperialism's operations made up a key aspect of Lenin's polemic with Kautsky 70 years ago. See Part I of this article, *Line of March* #11, pp. 73-79.

\*\* Although not all profits, at home or abroad, are monopoly super-profits, this figure nonetheless roughly indicates the relative weight of U.S. monopoly capital's operations inside the U.S. compared with abroad.

foreign operations] could be set aside to make a decisive subjective difference to several million workers, if the amount was concentrated among them."<sup>27</sup> When the super-profits generated by monopoly corporations within the U.S. is added to this, the CP view that U.S. imperialism lacks the capacity to bribe a significant section of the U.S. working class collapses entirely.

At the root of Perlo's error is his acceptance of the bourgeois economic notion that imperialism's foreign operations can be formalistically separated from its domestic operations. Quantities of super-profits aside, the key to the Leninist analysis of imperialism is that it is an integral world system of capitalist exploitation consisting of distinct national and individual capitals. From this standpoint it is clear that the super-profits generated by U.S. foreign operations are not a mere "bonus" to imperialism, or "used simply to bribe workers" and "enhance" monopoly capital's domestic operations. Rather the export of U.S. capital is an integral and crucial function in the process of capital accumulation in the U.S. as a whole. The centerpiece of the capacity to generate super-profits is the existence of monopoly capital as a whole, not the fetishization of U.S. foreign investments. The dominant U.S. position in the world imperialist economy provides a powerful impetus for expanded domestic industrial production, permits favorable terms of trade, intensifies the concentration of capital and in general raises the overall rate of profit obtained by U.S. monopoly capital. In addition, it reduces pressures on monopoly capital to further intensify the exploitation of U.S. workers and permits a more flexible attitude toward trade unions and social reforms. This "flexibility" of monopoly capital is not extended across the board, but rather allocated in such a manner as to split a privileged upper stratum of the class off from the rest; thereby generating the basis for a powerful political support for imperialism within the working class itself.

Finally, we must take exception to the obscurantism fostered by the CPUSA's position that the monopoly bourgeoisie's ability to reap super-profits has been steadily declining at least since the mid-1960s, if not since 1945. Carl Bloice, now editor of the CP's West Coast newspaper, the *People's World*, argued this position in 1968—that changes such as the increasing challenge to U.S. imperialism "through competition from the Soviet Union and the growth of economic nationalism in Western Europe" combined with the "negative effects of automation" and "the cost of foreign military adventures," had the effect of "shrinking of the economic base for opportunism and social chauvinism"<sup>28</sup> in the U.S. working class.

In the very broadest historical sense, of course, this assertion has some merit: but when advanced as a concrete analysis of U.S. imperialism applicable to the thirty years after World War II, it falls flat on its face. And this is the problem: For the CPUSA, such statements are advanced

in service of a line that objectively trivializes the degree and extent of the privileged stratification within the U.S. working class. Rather than illuminating the path to transforming the consciousness of the U.S. working class—and highlighting the immense challenge facing the conscious elements—this perspective fosters the illusion that the force of objective conditions alone will mitigate and eventually eliminate the serious contradiction of opportunism splitting the U.S. working class.

The crux of the problem in Bloice's evaluation, which the history of the last 15 years has borne out, is that despite U.S. imperialism's weakening political position and heightening economic contradictions, it still has displayed enormous political, economic, and military reserves that enable it to sustain its dominant position. The fact is, U.S. imperialism has been able to mount an impressive counterattack against the international working class and keep its imperialist rivals at bay despite substantial setbacks in Southeast Asia, Southern Africa, and the Middle East; the devaluation of the dollar and the oil price hikes; the erosion in the domestic consensus caused by the mass movements of the 1960s and early '70s; the Watergate scandal; etc.

Further, and this is actually the most significant point at issue, the social consequences of U.S. imperialism's deepening economic crisis are *not felt equally by the whole working class*. Instead the labor aristocracy has generally been shielded from the harshest impact; and the lower, more unstable strata of the working class, especially minority workers, have borne the brunt of capitalism's contradictions—to say nothing of the impact on the section of the international proletariat in the oppressed nations. Thus, while we would grant that during economic downturns the labor aristocracy usually contracts to some degree and may experience a relative decline in its standard of living, still the gap between the lower strata and the labor aristocracy not only persists but can often *increase*; and as a result the political and social split in the working class can often become *aggravated*. (This is reflected today, for example, in the *growing* relative and absolute gap between whites and minorities and the growth of a more violent "white rights" movement.) In short, attacks on the working class in imperialist countries are almost invariably orchestrated according to the laws uncovered by Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy; these attacks do not take shape as an across-the-board onslaught that promises to eliminate smoothly the social and political contradictions between the bribed upper strata and the lower strata of the working class.

Precisely because of this reality, increased attacks on the working class produce two *contradictory* impulses, first, the motion to unite the class in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie, second, the counter-veiling motion to split the class as major portions of the labor aristocracy spontaneously mobilize to defend their privileged position against the lower strata "at home" and against workers and oppressed peoples

abroad. To obscure and belittle the latter dynamic, as the CPUSA does, is to surrender Marxism-Leninism in favor of wishful thinking.

### B. Bribery and Privilege

According to Lenin, the super-profits accruing to monopoly capital lay the economic basis to *bribe* the upper strata of the working class by extending to it an economic, social, and political system of *privileges* that are denied the mass of workers.

Contrary to Lenin's analysis, the CPUSA not only holds that the U.S. bourgeoisie lacks significant super-profits; it also mounts a polemic against the notion that the concepts of bribery or privilege are any longer relevant or useful in describing the position of anything but an extremely small and constantly shrinking number of highly skilled craft workers. Instead, the CPUSA argues that, first, the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by significant numbers of U.S. workers is not the product of imperialist bribery but rather the result of militant working class struggle against capital; second, the much vaunted privilege of the U.S. working class, including its upper strata has been grossly exaggerated by bourgeois propaganda; third, far from being either bribed or privileged, the U.S. working class is suffering from intensified capitalist exploitation; and fourth, taken as a whole, U.S. workers lose more than they gain from imperialism. In short, as far as the CPUSA is concerned, the Leninist categories of imperialist bribery and a privileged labor aristocracy are inapplicable, outdated, or of such extremely marginal significance that they deserve no pivotal importance in conducting a class and political analysis of the U.S. society.

To illuminate the theoretical poverty of this approach, the CP's arguments must be examined and critiqued one by one.

### Bribery as an Objective Social Relation

First of all, in place of the Leninist conception of imperialist bribery, the CPUSA substitutes a benign rendition (in the finest tradition of liberal and populist scholarship) of militant workers struggling heroically for reforms against a scheming bourgeoisie seeking to use such reforms to divide and confuse them. An example of this pristine version of the history and character of the U.S. working class is given to us by CP leader William Weinstone in the course of his article, *Lenin and the Struggle Against Opportunism*:

“[The capitalists] have also cunningly employed the two-fold policy of concessions and violence to weaken and retard the militancy and class consciousness of the workers. The battles of the people have compelled the monopolists and their government to extend the numbers receiving social security and establish medicare, to introduce supplementary unemployment insurance for some better organized

workers, to increase vacations, to make loans to college students, to grant some rights to Black people, etc. These have not been achieved without hard battles of the people. Through these concessions, which are in fact utterly inadequate, they seek to slow down the development of class consciousness."<sup>29</sup>

On one level, of course, this statement is certainly true; however, when placed at the center of an analysis of opportunism in the working class, it is far too simplistic and one-sided, containing illusions which class conscious workers, much less communists, can ill afford. Even on the factual level, many of the reforms referred to by Weinstone were not won as a direct result of fierce struggle, but were part of a reform policy of "enlightened" capitalists who saw the importance of buying social peace and ideological support with economic concessions. Moreover, the most substantial "securities" (that is, job security, pensions, health insurance, etc.) have been enjoyed almost exclusively by the privileged labor aristocracy and never by the U.S. working class as a whole.

But even more insidious than Weinstone's empirical one-sidedness are the theoretical distortions which lie behind the CPUSA's position. The Leninist concept of imperialist bribery should not be understood as a moral judgment implying that the bribed workers are personally corrupt or that they never do battle with their employers. Rather, bribery in the Marxist-Leninist sense is a category that captures an *objective social relation* between a section of the working class and the imperialists, regardless of the motivation or militancy of the particular workers involved.

More specifically, bribery is the relation whereby a labor aristocracy enjoys exceptional conditions of life relative to the rest of the working class, which arise on the basis of the development of opportunism and class collaboration with imperialism. Bribery does *not* mean that the labor aristocracy has escaped its exploited relationship to capital and therefore never engages in economic struggle—even very militant economic struggle—with capital. Rather, Lenin's major contribution was to throw a spotlight on the fact that the privileged sections of the working class continue to fight capital, but on a qualitatively different (advantaged) footing from the rest of the working class at home and abroad. Consequently their capacity to wrench substantial concessions (for themselves) can not be attributed solely to their own level of activity, organization, and class consciousness. These may play a role, but the *decisive* aspect of this phenomenon is the action of monopoly capital to buffer key sections of the proletariat in their home country from the harshest ravages of capitalism, thereby effecting the material basis to split the working class and politically and ideologically tie an important section of the proletariat to the defense of imperialism.

Looked at in this way it becomes clear that Lenin's concept of bribery by no means requires any conscious double-dealing on the part of the

workers involved, nor does it mean that the labor aristocracy is merely a passive recipient of bourgeois largesse. The point is that the question of bribery hinges not on subjective questions of intent or methods of struggle, but on the *objective* criteria of the *relatively privileged terms* on which the struggle with capital is waged.

Having utterly confused the subjective and objective aspects of the "bribed" section of the working class, it is not surprising that CP writers, like Weinstone, would perpetrate grossly one-sided and simplistic assessments of the complex motion of the class struggle in the U.S. What has happened in this country has not been simply "battles of the working class" and attempts by the bourgeoisie at co-optation to "slow down" the development of class consciousness, but a dramatically successful case of imperialism's capacity to stratify and split the working class, in terms of material conditions of life as well as politically and ideologically. This phenomenon, especially in the decades following World War II, has not simply slowed the development of class consciousness but actually *reversed* many of the gains forged within the organized labor movement in the 1930s and '40s. The result has been a U.S. trade union movement dominated by one of the most virulent forms of opportunism in the history of the international working class movement. Despite the present "hard times," this opportunism has yet to be openly and widely challenged, much less defeated. To imply otherwise is to spread serious illusions within the workers' movement and effectively disarm it.

#### Are Some U.S. Workers Privileged?

Turning our attention to the notion of "privilege," we note that the CP goes to great lengths to challenge, even ridicule, the notion that any significant section of the U.S. proletariat can be considered "privileged." Again from Weinstone:

"It is true that there has been improvement in the material conditions of some sections of the workers for a number of reasons, including the strength and struggles of the workers, the increase in the number of breadwinners in the family, the relatively long period of employment resulting from the special market conditions created by ravages of the war, the development of the scientific-technical revolution, the two wars (Korean and Vietnam) and the vast expenditures for the huge armament programs, etc. But the real wages of the workers have remained stagnant or decreased since 1965, and labor has been intensified, as shown by high accident and sickness rates and workers' exhaustion.

"Contrary to the bourgeois myth makers, the needs of the vast majority of the people are never met. Moreover, today much of the increased wages of recent years is being wiped out by inflation, high taxes, high transportation rates, etc. There are officially more than three millions unemployed. Most important is the stark fact that about

40-50 million people are desperately poor, especially among the Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano and Indian peoples, white workers in stagnant industries, the aged, etc."<sup>30</sup>

Again, what Weinstone says here is undoubtedly true, and could serve as a useful refutation to bourgeois sociological claims that the U.S. working class is disappearing and transforming into the mythical "American middle class." However, we take exception because this seemingly orthodox defense of Marxism is advanced in the service of an incorrect line which basically liquidates the Leninist concept of privilege and thereby glosses over the vast stratification of and contradictions within the U.S. working class.

Defending the Leninist notion of privilege does *not* require one to simultaneously deny the fact that "the needs of the vast majority of the people" are not being met. Nor does it imply that the privileged workers have joined the ranks of the petit bourgeoisie or bourgeoisie. Privilege, like bribery, must be understood as an *objective social relationship* between the upper strata of the working class and the more unstable mass of workers. Even if many of their needs are not met, the upper strata remain privileged in the sense that they receive political, economic, social and cultural benefits that are denied to the rest of the class. The notion of privilege, then, is complementary to that of bribery: bribery describes the social relation of the labor aristocracy to the imperialists, and privilege describes the relationship between the labor aristocracy and the masses of workers in its own country and internationally. In other words, the labor aristocracy is *privileged* relative to the rest of the working class precisely because it is *bribed* by the imperialists.

Weinstone and the CPUSA, however, refuse to face squarely the sober fact that sections of the U.S. working class enjoy a degree of protection from poverty, unemployment, racism, and the insecurities of old age that are completely unknown to the vast majority of the class. For example, while Weinstone laments the falling real wage of U.S. workers in the 1965-70 period, he neglects to point out the real income of white married men in full-time "blue-collar" jobs rose dramatically.<sup>31</sup> Consequently he constructs a theoretical smokescreen designed to hide a political ostrich act. But facts are stubborn things, and when all is said and done, we are left with the reality that a conspicuous phenomenon within the working class is a bloc of relatively privileged and definitely patriotic workers (mostly white and usually racist) who are jealously guarding their "American" or "middle class" way of life and are prepared to actively defend U.S. imperialist interests in world affairs and racism at home.

#### Are Exploitation and Bribery Mutually Exclusive?

Perhaps recognizing that arguments such as Weinstone's are inadequate to defend its contention that no significant number of U.S.

workers are either bribed or privileged, the CPUSA adds an even more sophisticated theoretical defense of its political position. In this connection, the arguments advanced by Hyman Lumer, former editor of *Political Affairs*, are some of the best the CPUSA has to offer. Lumer argued in 1968 that the rising real wages and improvement in the conditions of U.S. workers were offset by intensified exploitation and relative impoverishment. Therefore, he asserted that it was incorrect to claim that many workers (and in particular workers in the monopolized basic industries) could be part of the labor aristocracy since they obtained only a declining share of the values they produced. According to Lumer,

"At the same time, the exploitation of wage labor, far from easing, has intensified. The very advance of technology creates a growing pressure on capitalists to step up the rate of exploitation (the ratio of unpaid to paid labor). . . . Consequently, even despite rising real wages, workers' earnings have formed a declining share of the values they produce. Perlo, in the article cited above, points out that real wages and salaries per unit of output have tended to decline over many decades. In this connection, Varga\* raises an interesting point. He argues that the *principal* source of funds for bribing a section of the working class is the growth of labor productivity unaccompanied by a shortening of the hours of work. This means that the capitalist class appropriates a much greater share of the product than it did at the close of World War II, giving it considerable reserves for such bribery (pp. 134-135). But if this is the case, what it means is *the funds available for bribing a section of the working class are obtained primarily from the increased exploitation of the main body of workers in this country, and especially of the workers in manufacturing where the rise in productivity has been the greatest.*

"Hence, while the working class as a whole is subjected to the impact of bourgeois ideology and is in great degree influenced by it, at the same time the growing exploitation of the workers at the hands of the capitalist class throws them into incessant conflict with their exploiters. Only a comparatively small section finds itself in a favored position at any given time, and such a favored position is by no means permanent. A rapid worsening of conditions can throw even the most favored sections into militant struggle against the ruling class."<sup>33</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

\* Eugene Varga was a major Soviet economist whose book *Politico-Economic Problems of Capitalism* (published in English in 1968) was often quoted by CPUSA leaders during this period. Ironically, some of Varga's conclusions are directly at odds with his CPUSA admirers. For example, Varga wrote that "If we approach the problem of the labour aristocracy on a world scale we must consider most U.S. industrial workers (except Negroes, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, etc.) as forming a labour aristocracy as compared with workers in other (cont.)

Here Lumer attempts to rebut the view that any significant section of the working class is bribed by the monopoly capitalist class, and to refute the notion that the split in the labor movement on this basis is a permanent feature of economic and political reality in the imperialist countries. In particular he lodges his strongest argument for excluding unionized workers in basic industry from the labor aristocracy. He does this by arguing that increased rates of exploitation offset monopoly bribery. However we encounter with Lumer only a more subtle theoretical distortion of the Leninist concepts of privilege and bribery.

The essential flaw in Lumer's argument is the curious assumption that bribery or privilege is premised on a decrease in the rate of exploitation of the bribed workers by the capitalists; in other words, workers can be considered bribed only if they are less exploited than the bulk of the working class. Yet this assumption is completely false. In fact, the social relation of bribery and privilege and a *high degree of exploitation* are usually complementary, not mutually exclusive. Increased rates of exploitation often lay the basis for increased bribery and an improvement in the conditions of life of the labor aristocracy.

For example, bribery and privilege have been historically associated first and foremost with an increase in the real wages of the upper, more stable section of the working class. And it is precisely increased rates of exploitation of the workers by the capitalists that lays the basis for them to grant such wage concessions. In particular, Marx's theory of the production of relative surplus-value shows that the development of technology, by driving down the labor time necessary to produce the value of labor-power, enables the capitalist to increase the surplus-value wrung from the workers while simultaneously granting them a rise in real wages. The main social burden of this method of increasing the production of surplus-value is borne by the section of workers displaced by automation, whereas those that remain are often granted relatively higher wages.

It was precisely this dynamic in the post-World War II period in the U.S. that enabled monopoly industries to extend substantial privileges to the organized industrial workers. Stepped up exploitation of these workers hardly ruled out their being bribed, but was, on the contrary, a major contributing factor allowing this bribery. And this is precisely the phenomenon that Lumer attempts to obscure theoretically.

### The Cost Benefit Approach

For those who remain unconvinced even by Lumer's relatively sophisticated effort at ruling out the existence of any substantial labor

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capitalist countries," and "the layer of the labour aristocracy is wider in the U.S.A. today than it was in Britain even during the period of its highest prosperity."<sup>32</sup>

aristocracy in the U.S., the CPUSA has one last-ditch argument left. This is the thesis advanced by economist Victor Perlo that U.S. workers cannot be considered bribed because a "cost-benefit" statistical analysis demonstrates that workers lose more than they gain from imperialism. Perlo frames his argument as follows:\*

"If U.S. imperialism has multiplied its profits, in comparison with the old British empire, by a factor of perhaps 5, its costs of maintaining its neo-colonial empire have been increased by a factor of—say—100, and are increasing more rapidly than the profits. . . .

"Naturally, the monopolies get the profits while the people pay the costs. It is clear that no matter how much of the profits from abroad the monopolies use for bribing some workers, labor as a whole, the majority of the people, are net losers. At the same time, this high cost of imperialism limits still further the extent of possible bribery of sections of the working class."<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly U.S. working people are forced to pay a highly disproportionate share of the costs of building and defending the U.S. empire, and it is certainly true that monopoly capitalists benefit from the empire qualitatively more than do the workers who, in the final analysis, only become more deeply enslaved by capital under imperialism.

However, such "general truths" obscure the kind of concrete analysis called for by Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy and demanded by the complexities of the motion of the actual class struggle in the U.S. What Perlo's reasoning conveniently glosses over is that, while capital appropriates the lion's share from the operation of U.S. imperialism, the workers of the imperialist countries also benefit. And, while it is true that *taken as a whole* the U.S. working class loses far more than it gains from imperialism, the "costs" and "benefits" of the system are not shared equally by all strata of the working class. Rather the labor aristocracy is relatively buffered from the "costs" and enjoys a disproportionate share of the "benefits" compared with the rest of the working class. Mechanical economic arguments such as Perlo's that fail to pay attention to the

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\*To put Perlo's remarks in context, it is necessary to note that they are found in his article, *Will American Labor Lead the Socialist Revolution?*, which is intended as a defense of the revolutionary potential of the U.S. working class against those New Left theorists who would deny that potential. This was and is an admirable mission, and we unite with Perlo in taking it up. However, it is both theoretically inaccurate and politically ineffective to hinge this defense upon the denial that there is any substantial material basis for opportunism in the U.S. working class. Perlo makes this error, as he consistently equates the reassertion of the Leninist notion of the labor aristocracy with the anti-working class notions of the New Left. Making such an equation gives the "official optimists" like Perlo an easy target to take polemical shots at, but is useless in a serious debate among communists.

stratification of the working class in favor of trotting out general platitudes are of little use in explaining the concrete realities of life under imperialism or the real politics of the class struggle in the U.S.\* This stratification is precisely the point of departure of Lenin's analysis, attempting to grasp the nature of the antagonistic split between the privileged labor aristocracy and the lower strata of the working class in the imperialist countries—an analysis which the line of the CPUSA attempts to bury beneath a mountain of vague and lifeless truisms about the evils of imperialism and the hardships it imposes upon the working class.

### C. The Capitalist Market and Divisions in the Working Class

As we have demonstrated, the CPUSA has gone to great theoretical lengths to justify its view that no substantial labor aristocracy exists or could possibly exist in the contemporary U.S. The CP has attempted to limit the concept of super-profits to the proceeds accrued to U.S. capital from its overseas operations as a means to deny that U.S. imperialism has the economic capacity to bribe any substantial number of workers. CP leaders have consistently distorted the Leninist concepts of bribery and privilege into subjective, moralistic notions, treating any attempt to apply them to the U.S. today as petit bourgeois slanders against the working class. The net political effect of all this theoretical sleight of hand is the belittling of the profound significance of the economic and political split that exists in the working class and the opportunist trend that takes root in the upper strata.

While we believe the critique we have made in this section thus far refutes each of the CPUSA's theoretical distortions point by point, there remains one more level of theoretical discussion necessary before the CP's distortions of Leninism can be thoroughly exposed and rooted out. This level concerns some fundamental points of Marxist political economy and, of necessity, must be taken up at a relatively high level of abstraction. Because distortions on this level ultimately lie at the nub of the errors made by the CPUSA (and others) in dealing with the notions of imperialist bribery and privilege, we ask the readers' indulgence as we at least identify and locate the theoretical issues involved.

### The Factory and the Marketplace Under Capitalism

Capitalist production arises on the foundations of commodity production, and in turn develops commodity production to its most generalized, all-pervasive form. Even in its most mature form, when the

\* Similar mechanical "cost/benefit" analyses proliferate among those who also wish to obscure the privileges accorded to white workers on the basis of racism in the U.S. Not surprisingly, Victor Perlo is in the forefront in making these apologetic arguments as well. See his work, *The Economics of Racism*.<sup>35</sup>

society has become thoroughly polarized between a small, concentrated grouping of monopoly capitalists and a multi-layered mass of propertyless workers, capitalist production does not, and cannot, break out of the defining context of generalized commodity production. The exchange of commodities is not an ideological smokescreen to hide the fundamental property relations—it is the form and substance in which the capitalist property relations exist. In short, the marketplace is as important as the factory in understanding the functioning of capitalist society.

Under the guise of "getting to the essence of things," the one-sided analyses of the working class from the "point of production" which are so common on the left result only in a profoundly subjective and overly simplistic grasp of the actual dynamics of capitalist production *as a whole*. Undoubtedly, the essential condition of *all* members of the working class, crystallized at the point of production, is that they are essentially propertyless (that is, in terms of means of production); consequently they are yoked to capital as the very condition of their survival. In this relation as wage slaves, the workers *as a class* are merely provided sufficient means to reproduce themselves and their families at a subsistence level while they create surplus-value for the capitalists. As a result, the very conditions of existence of the working class increase the strength and power of its class enemy.

This is the common class condition that constantly throws workers *together* in struggles against their individual employers. It also sets the basis for a broader and deeper class consciousness—the recognition of the need to unite the working class in the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the rule of capital. From this vantage point it is certainly true that any differences or contradictions among the proletarians (between employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, etc.) are merely *quantitative* and fade into insignificance when contrasted to their common contradiction with the bourgeoisie.

But if the matter were merely this simple and clear-cut, the working class would certainly have put an end to capitalist exploitation some decades ago. There are a number of complications, the first being that workers cannot live solely by going to the factory to be exploited; they must also interact in the *marketplace*, both to sell their labor-power to the capitalist and to purchase the necessities of life. And in this marketplace, the bitterest contradictions break out—contradictions between competing capitalists for the realization of their respective profits and, of particular relevance to our discussion here, competition among the proletarians for work. Examined from this side, the fundamental property relation of capitalism is mediated through the laws of generalized commodity production and exchange—and the differences and contradictions *among the proletarians* are not at all insignificant, but rather surface as a substantial material force in the *overall* functioning of capitalism. As Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist*

*Manifesto*, "the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers."<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the dynamic of intense competition among the workers themselves was not a feature of capitalism solely in its early stages. This dynamic has only intensified and become more complex with the advent of monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

To begin with, there arises the most graphic inequality between the conditions of life and work separating the workers in imperialist countries from their counterparts in the colonial and neo-colonial countries. The latter proletarians (taken as a whole) experience a qualitatively intensified exploitation because their oppression as workers is mediated through the nationally oppressed condition of their whole country and people vis-a-vis imperialism. This economic situation in turn creates the material basis for a *relatively permanent* political split in the international proletariat, due principally to the opportunist (social-imperialist) trend which takes root in a section of the working class of imperialist countries. To date, there is no indication whatsoever that this definite material inequality within the international working class, and all the political and ideological contradictions which flow from it, is smoothly and steadily resolving itself in favor of a homogeneous international proletariat exploited by monopoly capital.

Closer to the controversy at hand, the advent of monopoly capitalism also brings profound transformations to the character of the working class in imperialist countries. While the working class grows in absolute size and in its proportion of the total population, the stratifications within it only become deeper and more complex and systematic. In particular, the existence of imperialist super-profits lays the basis for a sharp stratification between a bribed and privileged labor aristocracy and the rest of the working class. While it remains true that all workers are at the mercy of capital and must compete with each other to survive, this competition (like the competition between monopolies themselves) intensifies and takes on a new quality. Specifically, the labor aristocracy now competes on systematically more advantaged terms than their class brothers and sisters in the lower strata. The upper strata enjoy substantial advantages in opportunities to secure work, the quality and duration of the work, as well as the terms of employment (wages, fringe benefits, working conditions, etc.). The stratification in the working class becomes structural and systematic, with a vast stagnant and latent reserve army (both internal to the country and foreign "guest workers") at one pole and a comparatively stable labor aristocracy at the other.

How does this situation affect the relationship of the workers to capital? It remains true, of course, that the working class as a whole is exploited, and that the value of its wages, *taken as a whole*, are determined by the means of subsistence required for their sustenance and reproduction as a class. But, on the concrete level, the wages of *different*

*strata of workers* oscillate above and below the social average, often to a considerable degree. And it is the privileged strata, bargaining with the capitalists on relatively favorable terms, which consistently obtains a wage at or above the value of labor-power.

The importance of such stratifications internal to the working class are often obscured by other phenomena. To begin with, the aristocratic strata of labor still stand in a fundamentally exploited relation to capital. Consequently they too must struggle and haggle with their employers. Their gains often appear on the surface to be solely the result of their own efforts, thereby hiding the element of bribery. In addition, the basis on which certain sections of the working class become the recipient of imperialist bribery is not determined in a purely arbitrary fashion, by lottery or alphabetical order. The bourgeoisie seizes upon previously existing social divisions among the population, and in so doing hardens and aggravates those contradictions qualitatively. For example, we find in France that the national rights of "Frenchmen" prevail over Algerian "guest workers" in the choice of the best jobs, highest wages, etc. In Northern Ireland it is the "right" of Protestant workers over Catholic workers. In the U.S. the labor aristocracy intersects with the contradiction of racism and the "natural birthright" of white workers over Black, producing a largely white upper stratum.

Contradictions and inequalities similar to those in the labor market, also impact the worker as he or she enters the commodity market as an individual free to purchase whatever his or her money will command. Here, too, inequalities *among* the workers come to the forefront as a material force and cannot be dismissed as inconsequential without subjectively distorting the social reality.

Although it is undoubtedly true that the working class *as a whole* is united in the condition that they are unable to purchase the means of production in the marketplace, they can and do differ substantially among themselves in the extent of the *means of subsistence* they command with their wages. Therefore it is sheer pedantry to suggest that in the U.S. a worker that makes \$15-\$20 per hour, owns his own home in a "white" suburb, enjoys health care and pension security, a four-week annual paid vacation, etc., is in an identical position as a chronically unemployed worker locked into an inner city slum, or that the two will spontaneously develop the same political consciousness. The challenge is to analyze thoroughly such inequalities and the material force they exercise on the consciousness and politics within the working class—not gloss over it with platitudes about the fact that both belong to the same working class.

In conclusion, a myopia which focuses on the relationship of the worker to the capitalist in the realm of production—while neglecting the fact that the capitalist property relations are mediated through the system of generalized commodity production and exchange—cannot

successfully bring into clear perspective the theoretical categories of imperialist bribery and privileged stratification within the working class. Instead, the examination of this central contradiction of opportunism in the working class will continue to be confused and trivialized; the phenomenon of a relatively stable and permanent opportunist trend splitting the working class of imperialist countries will continue to be incorrectly reduced to a temporary problem of false consciousness induced by the manipulative power of bourgeois propaganda upon the working class.

## II. The CPUSA's Political Conciliation of Opportunism

Although the theoretical errors made by the CPUSA may seem a bit subtle and abstract, these small "shades of difference" blossom into a full blown right opportunist line and practice in the realm of politics. What Lenin called "optimism in regard to opportunism" has become virtually the party's trademark, as the CP consistently distorts the nature and balance of political forces operating in the working class movement in order to paint the rosiest picture possible. No matter what setbacks or negative developments are occurring in the workers' movement, one can always count on the CP to predict an imminent leap in the class consciousness of the working class, and to tail after and curry favor with one or another opportunist or reformist force within the spontaneous movement.

Like the CPUSA's distortions on the theoretical level, its skewed political analysis and practice is hardly presented as an open departure from orthodox Leninism. Rather, a relatively developed and sophisticated logic is presented to justify the CP's right opportunist line. If the CP's errors are to be brought into clear focus, we must now take up the task of systematically reconstructing and critiquing the CP's political logic on this matter.

As noted earlier, the starting point of the CPUSA's political perspective is that the labor aristocracy is, at most, a tiny minority of the working class, consisting solely of a small and dwindling number of skilled craft workers. The CP does not consider top labor bureaucrats to be part of the labor aristocracy, but identifies them, along with the skilled workers, as the only social base for opportunism within the U.S. working class. These labor bureaucrats are depicted as thoroughly isolated from the rank and file as a whole and able to stay in power only through anti-democratic maneuvers within their unions. The other side of this analysis is that industrial workers are considered to be automatically immune to being either bribed or privileged and are, by definition, the "front-rankers" in the struggle against capital.<sup>37</sup> The CPUSA reduces the labor aristocracy to the most insignificant layer of the class, holding that the working class has objectively achieved an historically unprecedented

homogeneity and is steadily overcoming previous divisions based on craft, region, race, and nationality.

As a direct corollary to the proposition that the labor aristocracy is all but extinct, the CP transforms the meaning of opportunism from that of an objective political alliance between a section of the working class and the bourgeoisie into a series of the most subjective and metaphysical notions. First of all, the principal expression of opportunism is reduced metaphysically to a lack of militance in conducting the economic struggle, while the politically substantive problems of racism and jingoistic patriotism among U.S. workers are viewed, at most, as secondary features of opportunism. Furthermore, the concept of opportunism is stripped of its social meaning by narrowing it to only conscious acts of individual betrayal. As a minor concession to the social reality of the present day U.S., the CP has developed the vague and muddled analysis of the "influence of opportunism" among workers in order to explain away the inescapable political and ideological backwardness of the working class as solely the result of the influence of bourgeois propaganda with no substantial material basis whatsoever within the working class. The bottom line of the CP's account is that opportunism within the U.S. working class is not a very significant problem, since it is restricted to self-conscious acts of treachery, lacks any social base in the class, and is constantly undermined by the spontaneous economic struggles which continue to break out between labor and capital.

The line, strategy, and tactics guiding the CP's intervention into the working class movement are based upon this overall political assessment. The central feature of that line is the classically economist proposition that the main arena of the class struggle is the economic conflict between the basically homogeneous working class and the bourgeoisie, which spontaneously propels the workers toward revolution. The CP's view is that workers, in the course of economic struggle, inevitably become conscious of their antagonistic class contradiction with capital; therefore, conducting this economic struggle in a militant fashion is the key to the maturation of the working class into a self-consciously revolutionary force. The decisive question of political line that guides the workers' movement is glossed over in favor of the more amorphous notion of "militance." Consequently, in the CP's view, the economic self-interest struggles of the workers, no matter what strata of workers are conducting the struggle or what line leads them, are inherently progressive and lead inexorably to class consciousness.

In this scenario, the role of the communists (the conscious elements) is no longer to bring an advanced line to the working class movement, to divert it from its spontaneous path of reformism and opportunism; it is merely to champion and encourage all manifestations of economic militance, particularly among the rank and file, and to help build forms of

organization that can unleash the spontaneously advanced sentiments of the workers.

If follows from such a romantic view of the economic struggle that the trade unions are seen (almost by definition) as the most developed expression of the working class struggle, since they are the basic economic organizations of the class. Organized labor is thus seen as essentially synonymous with the workers' movement, and defending the trade unions is considered a "sacred duty" of communists no matter what political stands the unions may take. Trade union leaders are portrayed as the representatives of the working class in all political movements, and the organized labor movement is considered, *a priori*, the leading force within the anti-monopoly coalition. Movements other than the trade union movement, such as the anti-racist movement or the women's movement, are not considered integral parts of the political movement of the working class, but rather as allied democratic movements. The working class content of these movements is not judged by the line and composition, but rather, mainly, if not solely, by the degree of official trade union participation.

Shackled with the backward and mechanical line that the economic struggle is the quintessence of the class struggle, the CPUSA looks with great expectations to the very impending economic crisis as the magic catalyst that will crystallize the long awaited revolutionary class consciousness among the workers. In times such as these, when the economic difficulties of capital are increasing and the workers' movement can be expected to become spontaneously more militant, the CP anxiously awaits the leftward motion among workers and warns its members to avoid any political polarizations that might "alienate" the slower moving center forces. Implicitly, the CP indicates communists should not distinguish themselves by the advanced political line they bring to the movement, but rather by their dedication and militancy in the economic struggle. The objective development of the crisis will ensure the rest.

Above all communists must be patient, and realize that history is on our side. In the view of the CP, the contradictions of capitalism guarantee us that, in time, the workers have no choice but to come to revolutionary consciousness and overthrow their exploiters. To try to force this inevitable revolutionary process forward is not only ineffectual, it is downright counterproductive, for it will only alienate workers from communists and thus deprive communists of both legitimacy and the proper positioning when the final conflict arrives.

In our view, this political analysis and strategic line is laced from top to bottom with the most profound economic determinist and right opportunist illusions. Taken as a whole, the CP's line represents a gross underestimation of the strong material basis for opportunism that exists within the U.S. working class and an insidious conciliation of the

pernicious racist and social-imperialist trend which rests on that foundation. The implementation of such a line will not result in the smooth and steady radicalization of virtually all sectors of the working class, but the communists' surrender of the leadership of the working class movement to the political representatives of the bourgeoisie.

As we noted earlier, even within the CPUSA itself there have been manifestations of reluctance, and at times even opposition, to fully embracing this backward line, Lima's criticism of the CP's trade union line and work being the most conspicuous case in point. Lima's critique had no significant impact on the CP's overall direction, however; it has stayed the course of right opportunism and tailism right up the present.

The results of this backward line and strategy have been extremely negative, and are bound to stand in sharper relief in the years to come as the economic crisis deepens and the bourgeoisie intensifies its attack on the international working class. At precisely the moment when broader sections of the working class are again stirring, and new possibilities exist to conduct the struggle with opportunism effectively—*without isolating the left and communist forces*—the CPUSA finds itself abjectly tailing the class collaborationist leadership of the AFL-CIO. Such is the political tragedy, but also the inevitable consequence, of the incorrect political line that presently dominates the CPUSA.

We want to substantiate further this overall criticism of the CPUSA's political line and strategy, so we now turn to a point-by-point analysis of its component parts.

#### A. The CPUSA's Illusion of a United, Homogeneous U.S. Working Class

The CP's flawed political line and strategy rests upon a distorted analysis of the objective composition of the U.S. working class. Though the CP rarely puts it this concisely, the heart of its analysis consists of four main propositions: first, the U.S. working class has attained an unprecedented degree of objective oneness and homogeneity, and can therefore be expected to march forward politically as a united class; second, the labor aristocracy in the U.S. is confined to a small and dwindling section of skilled craft workers; third, in the absence of any substantial labor aristocracy, a labor bureaucracy, isolated from its rank and file, has become the main social mainstay of class collaborationism; and finally, the main social base for class struggle politics in the U.S. is the industrial worker at the point of production.

These four simplistic and erroneous propositions flow directly from the CP's abandonment of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy. In essence, the CP has jettisoned Lenin's analysis of a relatively permanent split—economically and politically—in the working classes of imperialist countries in favor of a notion of unity and homogeneity. It has

substituted the narrow and antiquated category of skilled workers for Lenin's concept of an imperialist-bribed labor aristocracy to justify its view of a weak social base for opportunism. It assumes that the labor bureaucracy is, almost by definition, isolated from its rank and file. And it has replaced Lenin's concept of the lower strata of the working class with the fetishized category of industrial workers as the most durable social base for revolutionary politics.

We will examine each of these propositions in turn.

#### The Working Class: "A New Level of Oneness?"

CPUSA General Secretary Gus Hall puts forward the party's analysis of the U.S. proletariat in the following terms:

"In the past, its ability to create a small but influential 'aristocracy of labor' was one of the methods used to divide. . . .

"However, we are now in a different situation. U.S. monopoly capital no longer has the same resources to draw on domestically or on the world scene. . . .

"When all of this is added up it signifies that our working class has reached a *new level of oneness*, a multiracial, multinational, male-female working class, national in scope. These developments have prepared the working class for organizing the unorganized, for a new level of affirmative action programs, a new level of class consciousness, for class political independence and for a new working class offensive."<sup>38</sup> (Our emphasis.)

Lenin's analysis was completely the opposite of the CPUSA's fantasy of homogeneity and unity: ". . . in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into *two international camps*, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant nation bourgeoisie. . . ."<sup>39</sup> (Our emphasis.) Contrary to the CPUSA, Lenin showed that the working class is antagonistically *split*, economically and politically, between an imperialist-bribed labor aristocracy and the masses of the lower strata of the class. He demonstrated that the advance of the working class movement is dependent upon the ability of a revolutionary trend to take shape in opposition to the pro-imperialist, opportunist trend.

In short, the fundamental error in the CP's analysis of the composition of the U.S. working class is that it qualitatively obscures the stratification of the class. The CP's assessment that the class has achieved an unprecedented homogeneity and can be expected to act as a united class conscious force in the realm of politics is a dangerous illusion that utterly obscures the crucial and protracted task of fighting opportunism and establishing a social base for the revolutionary trend in the lower strata of the class.

#### The Aristocracy of Labor: Skilled vs. Unskilled?

Although the CP views the U.S. working class as fundamentally

homogeneous, it cannot escape some concession to social reality; therefore it recognizes a limited division within the working class while attaching the least possible political significance to it. In a polemic against any who would attach major importance to imperialist bribery of a significant sector of the working class—but again using anti-working class New Left theorists as a convenient foil—George Meyers, head of the CPUSA Farm and Labor Department, posed it this way:

"Much of the confusion over the question of the 'aristocracy of labor' injected by Marcuse and other petty-bourgeois radicals has been pretty well cleared up by life itself. It is rather difficult these days to put auto and steel workers in that category. Workers who can be defined as part of the 'aristocracy of labor'—and I would define them as those who can write their own ticket—have always been small in number and are growing even smaller (unless we want to put the trade-union officialdom in that category).

"However, a serious problem does exist, and that is the problem of narrow craft unionism which occurs among skilled workers, carefully instilled in them during the lengthy apprenticeship training program. It is particularly damaging because of its influence within the AFL-CIO, which is controlled by the craft union leaders, and it provides Meany with his reactionary base. It is a selfish, racist trend within the trade union movement—a go-it-alone unionism epitomized by Meany's failure to lead any coordinated drive to organize the unorganized."<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the stratification in the working class in the U.S. is not a problem of imperialist bribery and opportunism, but of skilled vs. unskilled workers and craft union narrowness; and what's more, this problem is steadily being diminished, because, according to Lumer (here quoting Varga again), "the proportion of highly skilled craftsmen in the labor force has decreased and . . . the gap between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers has greatly narrowed."<sup>41</sup>

Such arguments constitute a serious revision of Lenin's position that imperialist bribery based on monopoly super-profits, not the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor, is the basis for the formation and reproduction of the labor aristocracy. Unlike imperialist bribery, the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor arises out of factors internal to the labor process and is in no way a distinctive product of imperialism. While this distinction was perhaps the main source of political backwardness among a section of the workers in the pre-imperialist era, under imperialism Lenin showed that it was superseded by the much more stable and powerful social relation of imperialist bribery; and on that basis, opportunism developed into a permanent political trend with a much broader social base in the working class.

Of course it is true that this new social relation of imperialist bribery enveloped and transformed already existing stratifications in the working class, such as unskilled vs. skilled, rather than creating whole new distinctions out of the sky. As a result, the organized craft workers have

historically constituted the most stable core of the labor aristocracy. But the CP's failure to look beneath the surface of the craft unions' conspicuous role within the labor aristocracy has caused them to collapse altogether the concept of skilled workers and the concept of labor aristocracy, at the same time erroneously equating narrow craft unionism with the opportunist politics of social-imperialism.\* Such equations, however, will not do. Not only are these two concepts distinct theoretically, they are far different in real life. Since World War II, the gigantic super-profits garnered by U.S. imperialism have enabled it to stabilize and expand the labor aristocracy in the U.S. to unprecedented levels. This expanded labor aristocracy includes not only its historical core of unionized AFL craft workers, but also substantial sections of unionized industrial workers in the monopoly industries organized by the CIO and teamsters who benefited substantially from the dominant position of U.S. imperialism and U.S. monopoly corporations after World War II. The inclusion of a substantial section of industrial workers as a part of the relatively stable social base for opportunism was crowned by the merger of the AFL and the CIO in 1956. Further, the inexorable process of proletarianization of previously independent or elite petit bourgeois occupations—combined with the massive expansion of the unproductive sectors of the U.S. economy—brought new sections of the workforce into the proletariat and new strata into the labor aristocracy. Thus, the labor aristocracy has extended far beyond the ranks of craft workers to include many industrial workers, technicians, proletarianized professionals, and privileged government workers. Together these forces play a politically decisive role in the labor movement, corrupting it with social-imperialist and racist politics in alliance with monopoly capital and tying labor to the apron strings of the Democratic Party.

By equating skilled craft workers with the labor aristocracy, the CPUSA has drastically and arbitrarily narrowed the composition of the labor aristocracy and thereby trivialized its importance as a social and political force for opportunism in the U.S. working class.

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\* With this in mind, the weaknesses even in Meyers' criticism of the roots of George Meany's class collaboration stand out. The privileges of Meany's reactionary base in the building trades rested not simply on craft exclusiveness but even more upon the extensive privileges it received from U.S. monopoly capitalism: a constant injection of jobs on military projects, interstate highway construction, and government-promoted "building booms." Privileged job conditions included a legalized high wage floor on all government-related projects (now under attack in the drive to repeal the Davis-Bacon Act), control over entry into the building trades, and government accommodation to the most racially exclusive workforce in the country. In other words, monopoly bribery is largely responsible for the protection and extension of the privileges of the construction workers—and Meany's social-imperialist politics is an accurate reflection of this tie to the imperialist bourgeoisie.

### The Labor Bureaucracy

Having all but eliminated the labor aristocracy as any substantial social force in the U.S. working class, the CPUSA is forced to search elsewhere for a category of people that can be targeted as the social mainstay of the all-too-obvious influence of backward politics within the working class. The grouping the CP has chosen for this job is the "labor bureaucracy," the top officialdom of the organized labor movement. As Lumer put it (again citing Varga), the labor aristocracy is "being increasingly assisted or even superseded by the labor bureaucracy."<sup>42</sup>

The CP seems to have a correct notion that the labor bureaucracy is categorically distinct from the labor aristocracy. It also accurately notes the inherent tendencies toward opportunism that spontaneously flow from the objective position of the labor bureaucracy under capitalism, i.e. the impulse toward individual corruption and collaborationist deals with the capitalists.\*

However, the CP errs when it scorns any notion that this labor bureaucracy wields any significant political influence among the rank and file, when it heaps sarcasm on the notion that "this bureaucracy truly expresses what these workers consider to be their real interests,"<sup>43</sup> and when it argues that the bureaucrats win and maintain their posts mainly through undemocratic maneuvering and strong arm tactics rather than because of substantive support from their base. Contrary to the CP's assertions, in many unions the labor bureaucracy is only too closely in touch with the sentiments and aspirations of much of its rank and file. In other words, the leadership has been able to "deliver the goods" in the economic realm, while taking jingoist stands in support of U.S. foreign policy and on questions of racism that are not at all in contradiction to the views of much of the union membership. In point of fact, few serious challenges to the labor lieutenants of monopoly capital have been made in the last 30 years. Those challenges that have been mounted have, not surprisingly, been centered in unions whose racial composition and economic stratification put a large section of the rank and file in contradiction with the more privileged, aristocratic workers. (As the economic situation has gotten bleaker in recent years, there is also the phenomenon of a more rapid turnover in union officialdom at lower and middle levels; but in the bulk of cases this has only replaced one group of officials who have recently had problems "delivering the goods" with another grouping promising more effectiveness in economic battles, with no substantial *political* shift in the stand of the leadership.)

Overall, the main point we are attempting to make here is that today's labor officialdom is not a mere collection of isolated bureaucrats who

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\* Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, the CP's understanding of opportunism as a conscious act of economic betrayal is tailor-made to describe the all too familiar behavior of reactionary labor bureaucrats.

command power and influence solely because of gangster control of the unions' organizational apparatus. Rather, they are true labor lieutenants of capital—the recognized political and ideological leadership of a broad social-imperialist trend in the labor movement with a strong unity of interest with that section of their rank and file who are members of the labor aristocracy.

#### Industrial Workers: "Front-Rankers" in the Class Struggle?

Accompanying the CP's incorrect narrowing of the social base for opportunism to the skilled workers or the labor bureaucracy is its equally metaphysical notion that the industrial workers are permanently and inevitably the leading political force within the workers' movement. CPUSA National Chairman Henry Winston elaborates "the Marxist-Leninist concept of the leading role of the industrial working class"<sup>44</sup> as follows:

"... while the basic industrial sector has a common interest with the majority of wage workers, it does not have an identical place with them in the system of capitalist exploitation and the struggle against it. Because of its unique position, this sector is decisive in forging the unity of all the diverse segments of wage workers and in forming an alliance between the workers of hand and brain with all the exploited and oppressed.

"Not only is this industrial nucleus the most cohesive sector of the working class, it is also the greatest *direct* producer of surplus-value, the source of capitalist profits. And, to a greater degree than any of the other producers of surplus-value, the 'front rankers' occupy the *central* position within the system: they are the ones who, in the struggle for the division of the value they produce, most directly confront the decisive sectors of monopoly. Thus, the influence of this industrial nucleus—the most potent force in the class struggle—is decisive in every aspect of the economic, social and political battle of the exploited and oppressed."<sup>45</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Now, it is definitely true that industrial workers are central to the production of surplus-value; they are one of the most socialized sectors of the working class; and they directly confront the monopoly captains of U.S. industry. However, in making the leap from this assessment of the economic position of the industrial workers to the assertion that they necessarily play a leading political role, the CPUSA is skating on extremely thin ice. The point is, the degree to which a given sector of the proletariat will eagerly embrace revolutionary politics is not determined solely by their specific role in the production of surplus-value or even their degree of socialization, but also by the extent to which they experience and grasp the inherent social consequences, particularly the insecurity of the proletariat, of the capitalist mode of production.

Consequently, it is no small matter if a section of the industrial proletariat is buffered through imperialist bribery. This is precisely why Lenin, in attempting to analyze the concrete political potential of different sectors of the working class, did not fetishize the industrial workers *per se*, but spoke instead of the key role of the lower strata of the working class, "the lowest mass, the real majority."<sup>46</sup>

Now, apparently part of the problem here is that the CP has uncritically become a slave to its own history. It is true that in earlier periods of U.S. history, up through the 1930s and into the '40s, the industrial sector of the U.S. working class was not only significantly more socialized than almost any other sector, but did also constitute the main contingent of the lower, more oppressed strata of the working class.\* Under those conditions, the task of unionizing the industrial workers coincided with organizing key sections of the lower strata of the proletariat, thereby linking the party with a social base that was most open to upholding the class struggle politics of anti-fascism and anti-racism, as opposed to the labor aristocracy (centered at the time in the craft unions of the AFL), which was clearly identified as the social base for opportunism in the working class movement. At that time, the industrial workers could definitely be said to be the "front-rankers" in the battle with capital.

However, after World War II the bourgeoisie had gained both an intense awareness of the economic and political importance of the industrial proletariat and the economic wherewithal to attempt to bribe it. Through a combination of a withering political attack on the left-led industrial unions and the granting of an extensive system of imperialist-based privileges, the bourgeoisie and its labor lieutenants transformed the political and social conditions of this sector, incorporating much of it into the labor aristocracy. The organized industrial workers in the monopoly sectors became—with a few notable exceptions such as the left-led United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) and International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and a large share of the Black workers in this sector—an important component of the labor aristocracy and have consistently functioned as a consolidated base for class collaborationist, social-imperialist politics in the labor movement.

Nor is this situation drastically altering in the midst of the present economic crisis. Certainly the industrial workers, especially in steel, auto, and rubber, are being hard hit. Just as the hegemonic position and

\*The other key component of the "proletarian mass" in the period was the Black masses, who intersected with, but were far from identical to, the core of the industrial proletariat. Along with spearheading much of the effort to organize industrial workers, the CP distinguished itself in this period by championing the struggles of the Black masses—in the fields and tenements as well as in the factories.

prosperity of U.S. imperialism after World War II led to an expansion of the labor aristocracy to include many industrial workers, the economic crisis is now giving rise to a *contraction*, and the industrial workers are losing many of their privileges. But the collaboration between the labor lieutenants of capital and capital itself is shaping events in such a way that the disproportionately Black middle and lower strata of the industrial workers are the ones being eliminated from industry through lay-offs and automation; while those (largely white) workers that remain are being maintained as part of the privileged labor aristocracy, albeit at a slightly lower standard of living than previously, but privileged nonetheless. The point is, while there are signs that the U.S. labor aristocracy is contracting, it is not disappearing. And there are no indications that either the bourgeoisie or its labor lieutenants are interested in witnessing the resurgence of a class struggle trend in this key sector of the economy without the bitterest of fights—a fight which our official optimists will prove completely ill-equipped to lead on behalf of the class struggle wing of the proletariat.

For our purposes here, the point to be stressed is that we must update our assessment of the politics which will be generated spontaneously among industrial workers and of the degree to which they will eventually function as a reliable and steadfast base for a consistent class struggle trend. Because industrial workers still play such a crucial role in the economy, they are certainly a focus where communists must concentrate a great deal of attention. But rather than being a sector where socialist politics can be expected to gain influence rapidly, easily, and “naturally,” this sector, taken as a whole, can be expected to split—with those advanced workers ready to fight in the interests of the entire working class facing off with their well entrenched, reactionary, patriotic, and racist counterparts. In fact the industrial sector can be expected to be the site of the most intense and bitter battles between the tendency toward class collaboration and the tendency toward class struggle. This fight will be irretrievably lost if the communists harbor the slightest illusions that the class struggle trend will automatically win out, that opportunism has no substantial and durable base among the industrial workers and will be easily shed at the first sign of economic hard times. Today the industrial sector *only in part* coincides with the lower strata of the working class from which the true bulk of “front-rankers” in the class struggle will step forward, and no romantic memories of the 1930s or persistent illusions about the supposed shallow roots of opportunism should be allowed to obscure that fact.

Overall, the CPUSA’s assumptions about industrial workers hold up no better than its erroneous thesis of a steadily more united, increasingly homogeneous proletariat. Taken together, they lead the CP to view its strategy and tactics through rose colored glasses—producing thoroughly

distorted notions of the actual structure and political makeup of the U.S. working class.

### B. Distorting the Nature of Opportunism

Although the CPUSA qualitatively underestimates the social base for opportunism within the U.S. working class, it obviously cannot ignore completely the phenomena of opportunism among workers. Thus, the CP has developed a fairly consistent set of opinions about the nature of opportunism, its influence within the class, and its sources.

General Secretary Gus Hall delineated the party’s understanding of opportunism in the following manner:

“Opportunism is a form of accommodation to the pressures of the enemy. It is a form of retreat in the face of difficulties in struggle. It occupies the vacuum that is created by lack of confidence in mass struggles, in the working class. It is a form of self-excuse. It leads to softening one’s blows, to growing hesitation and passivity. *It leads to lack of militance.* And it leads from accommodation to capitulation.”<sup>47</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

At the CP’s recent Extraordinary Conference, he reiterated this assessment. “In auto, rubber, and the teamsters there is an attitude of retreating without a fight. An attitude that says to the bosses: ‘What can we do? We haven’t got a chance. Everyone has to sacrifice. Times are tough for everyone.’ This is class collaborationism in the era of decline and contraction of monopoly capitalism.”<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore in the midst of the inner-party debate of the late ’60s Hall insisted that “Opportunism is a much more conscious current. It contains an element of being bought, a conscious selling out, of betrayal. Therefore it must be seen in a narrower, a more limited framework. . . .”<sup>49</sup> James West echoed this position in his polemic against Albert Lima in the strongest possible terms: “In rejecting the idea that Communists must evaluate opportunism in the labor movement as containing a conscious element of sell-out and betrayal, Lima underscores his insistence on approaching the *whole class* as either opportunist, or under the influence of opportunism. . . .”<sup>50</sup> (Emphasis in original.) In short, the CP’s understanding of opportunism is that it is a conscious betrayal by individual class collaborationists expressed mainly in passivity rather than militance in the economic fight against capital.

This view does violence not only to Lenin’s theoretical work on the labor aristocracy, but to the most basic tenets of the historical materialist understanding of politics. Marxism is a science precisely because it holds that the main political trends in society are objective reflections of the interests of historically definite classes or class strata. In applying this point of view to opportunism in the labor movement, Lenin concluded that opportunism is in essence a political “alliance between a

section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat." Still further, he emphasized that "opportunism is no chance occurrence, sin, slip or treachery on the part of individuals, but a social product of an entire period of history."<sup>51</sup> Yet the CPUSA has adopted the worst elements of the bourgeois-subjective approach to politics and reduced opportunism to "conscious betrayal" by individuals.

Given the CPUSA's insistence that opportunism is conscious, it should come as no surprise that the party considers very few workers to be opportunist. This notion is a dearly held doctrinal commitment in the CP, even though it runs smack in the face of political reality. After quoting Lenin's famous definition of opportunism as the alliance of a small minority of workers with the imperialists against the masses of workers, Hyman Lumer completely distorts its meaning with the following skewed interpretation: "What stands out in this definition [Lenin's] is the idea that opportunism is the betrayal of a *small minority* of the interests of the *overwhelming majority*."<sup>52</sup> (Emphasis in original.) In short, the CP's subjective definition of opportunism leads directly to the political conclusion that reduces the opportunists from a fairly powerful and materially-based political trend to a small band of no-good conspirators who will not be too difficult to dislodge.

Even at those times when the CP does not reduce the definition of opportunism to the absurd level of individual treachery, it distorts the actual political content of opportunism by reducing it to passivity and lack of militance in the economic struggle. The more important criterion—a particular trend's stand on the central *political* questions of the class struggle—is dropped right out of the picture. In the U.S., the two key political questions for the workers' movement are imperialism and racism, not only in regard to the struggle against capital but also in relation to the contention within the labor movement. Indeed, economic struggle itself will be conducted in a thoroughly opportunist fashion if it does not actively take into account the stratifications within the class arising on the basis of imperialist bribery and racist privilege. In this context, restricting opportunism to mere passivity in the economic struggle is completely inadequate to draw a firm line of demarcation between class collaboration and class struggle in the U.S. working class. Yet this is exactly the muddle the CPUSA finds itself in.

For the CPUSA, anti-racism and anti-imperialism may be important questions of the class struggle in the abstract, but they are not treated as forming the decisive axis around which the working class must be polarized in order to forge a consistent revolutionary trend. In a classic example of "bowing to spontaneity," these questions are overtly excluded from the CP's trade union program\* as being "out of kilter with

\* That is, their program for forging the left/center alliance in the labor movement.

the present level of struggle and consciousness in the labor movement."<sup>53</sup> Far from making them key to the struggle against opportunism or the forging of the working class into a class for itself, the CP holds that raising the issues of racism and imperialism "can only lead to loss of confidence in the working class."<sup>54</sup> We would argue just the opposite—that failure to split the workers' movement on the questions of imperialism and racism inevitably leads to a loss of confidence by the class conscious workers in the communist party.\*

### The Source of Opportunism

Having redefined the nature of opportunism to minimize its profound political impact on the working class movement, the CPUSA proceeds with equal vigor to distort the source of whatever opportunism does exist among workers. The CP begins by making a major distinction between opportunism, which it sees as conscious, and the "general influence of opportunism endemic to capitalism which seeks to poison all."<sup>56</sup> According to the CP, this influence has little if anything to do with the labor aristocracy, the labor bureaucracy, or any other social stratum within the working class. Rather,

"The impact of capitalist ideology on the working class has other, more basic sources than the bribery of a section of it. In the first place, workers are infected with bourgeois thinking because they live in a bourgeois society in which the mass media, the cultural institutions and the educational system are owned or dominated by the capitalist class.

\* The CP is quite adamant that the question of imperialism should not be added to its trade union program, but it sometimes suggests that the question of racism should be. For example, West admitted that "Lima correctly places the struggle against racism as a key task today. . . there can be no development of class consciousness without the consistent struggle against racism. . ." <sup>55</sup> However we are wholly unconvinced that the CP practices what it occasionally preaches on this matter. A classic case of the CP's schizophrenia as regards the struggle against racism was its stand on the *Weber* affirmative action which reached the Supreme Court in 1979. A few years earlier, the Steelworkers Union and the steel companies, involved in a racial discrimination suit, had reached an out-of-court settlement which provided for a quota-based affirmative action training and promotion program. This consent decree agreement was written into the subsequent union contract. Brian Weber, a white steelworker, then filed suit against the program, charging "reverse discrimination." The CP's correct response was to help mount a campaign against Weber's suit. What was instructive was its approach: In the Black community the party's propaganda supported its position by correctly labeling Weber's suit "racist" and supporting affirmative action. But in the labor movement the CP took an entirely opportunist approach. There they assiduously avoided the question of racism and affirmative action, stressing instead that Weber's suit was an attack on the unions' right to collective bargaining.

Workers are immersed in capitalist propaganda twenty-four hours a day, and the ruling class works deliberately and tirelessly to instill in them every form of ideological backwardness."<sup>57</sup>

It is fitting to recall that Lenin was led to formulate the theory of the labor aristocracy precisely because these types of earlier explanations for opportunism—bourgeois ideology and petit bourgeois influences—were completely inadequate to explain the strength and stubbornness of opportunism in the most developed workers' movement. Opportunism in the German proletariat, for instance, found its strongest bastions of support in the social-democratic-controlled trade unions (and it should be underscored that unlike their U.S. counterparts, these German unions were largely organized on an industrial basis at the time Lenin was writing). Further, the nature of opportunism in the labor movement had qualitatively "matured" so that it was no longer merely limited to narrow trade unionism, but had grown into full scale political support for the policies of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

It was this historical development that impelled Lenin, as a thoroughgoing historical materialist, to seek the material basis in the class structure of imperialism that could explain the strength and extent of this political phenomenon. In so doing, he developed the theory of the labor aristocracy that clarified the fact that the super-profits generated by imperialism and their use to bribe a privileged stratum of the working class had become a permanent and politically potent feature of the working class in the imperialist countries.

The slightest contact with political reality in the U.S. shows that the phenomenon of social-imperialist opportunism is unprecedentedly virulent and widespread and that Lenin's theory is all the more needed to explain and transform working class politics in this country. However, in the face of this fact, the CPUSA distorts and liquidates Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy and sets us back to the inadequate pre-imperialist explanations for opportunism—craft exclusiveness, bureaucratic corruption, the entry into the working class of formerly petit bourgeois elements, and the generalized influence of bourgeois ideology on the workers—precisely the explanation Lenin considered inadequate and transcended with his theory.

So the CPUSA has come full circle in its class analysis. Having gutted Lenin's theory of its coherence and revolutionary essence, they have proceeded to distort the nature of opportunism, its sources, and even to heatedly deny its extent within the U.S. working class. Opportunism has been reduced to barely more than a phantom enemy, one whose defeat

\* Insofar as the CP considers any social force within the working class to play a role in the penetration of bourgeois ideology into the U.S. working class, it is the "constant influx of petty-bourgeois elements into its ranks" that is to blame for corrupting the pure workers.<sup>58</sup>

does not require sharp political and ideological struggle led by communists, because it will disappear by itself. Such touching faith in spontaneity was captured by CP leader Herb Kay who wrote:

"What no Marxist can ignore, is that the operations of the class struggle, as an inherent feature of capitalist society, constantly works to counteract and offset the inroads of opportunism on the working class as a whole."<sup>59</sup>

It is this virtual liquidation of opportunism as a problem of any dimension in the class struggle and the notion that the spontaneous struggle will by itself overwhelm opportunism that form the qualitatively flawed political analysis of the CPUSA. In having so mystified reality, the CP's attempts to forge a communist strategy and tactics to fight opportunism are compromised from the beginning.

### C. Glorification of the Economic Struggle and the Trade Unions

After redefining the labor aristocracy as a negligible social force and distorting the Marxist-Leninist definition of opportunism, the CPUSA compounds its errors by building its political strategy around the notion that the economic struggle (as contrasted to the political and ideological struggle) is the key to forging the class consciousness and unity of the U.S. working class.

Even if there were no labor aristocracy, this perspective would be flawed. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin made a searing critique of an almost identical economist strategy advanced by the revisionists of his day, in which he painstakingly demonstrated that such a strategy bowed to the bourgeois trade unionist consciousness that spontaneously dominates the working class and is utterly incapable of winning the working class to socialist politics. However, with the advent of imperialism, this erroneous strategy acquires an even more dangerous dimension: the spontaneous motion of the labor aristocracy is not just reformist, but often runs *directly against* the interests of the working class as a whole. Consequently a strategy centered on the economic struggle not only bows to spontaneous trade union consciousness, but actually conciliates the opportunist political trend rooted in the labor aristocracy.

In its most vulgar expressions, the CPUSA's version of economism goes so far as to completely equate the concept of "economic struggle" with that of "class struggle." Gus Hall was at one time, quite critical of those party members who failed to grasp this key point:

"At a time when the economic questions and problems faced by the people, and in the first place by the working class, have emerged onto the very center of the stage, we have tended to move away and ignore them, or to deal with economic questions as one of the many we have to deal with. As a party we are not sharply, clearly and consistently

focused on the class struggle as the main point of reference. We are not sufficiently involved or concerned with economic problems or economic struggles of workers.”<sup>60</sup>

Contrast Hall's perspective to Lenin's:

“We are all agreed that our task is the organisation of the class struggle. But what is this class struggle? When the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their employer or employers, is this class struggle? No, this is only a weak embryo of it. The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle only when all the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed not against individual employers, but against the *entire class* of capitalists and the government that supports that class. Only when the individual worker realizes that he is a member of the entire working class, only when he recognizes the fact that his petty day to day struggle against the individual employers and individual government officials is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire government, does his struggle become a class struggle.”<sup>61</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

In essence, the CPUSA has abandoned Lenin's view that class struggle is an essentially political struggle by the workers as a class against the bourgeoisie, and reduced it to the struggle for economic reforms. By adopting this view, the CPUSA qualitatively surrenders the basic goal of communist strategy: to train the working class politically and ideologically in order to become a truly revolutionary class force in U.S. political life. Of course, by the standards set by the CPUSA, such training is hardly necessary: even most of the labor aristocracy, (including a substantial section of the “labor lieutenants of monopoly capital”) already qualify as determined class fighters, not class collaborationists, because they display militancy in the economic struggle. Hall argued this point at the CP's recent Extraordinary Conference when, after again defining class collaboration solely as “the attitude of retreating without a fight,” he emphasized that “outside of the teamsters and rubber, most unions are *not* adopting the no-struggle position.”<sup>62</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

On most occasions, however, the CP does not express its economist outlook in quite such a blatant form. Rather than equating class struggle with economic struggle, the party advances the somewhat more sophisticated, but no less bankrupt view that the economic struggle is the special key to the development of class consciousness. General Secretary Hall is most avid in promoting this position as a necessary antidote to what the CP leadership perceives as past weaknesses:

“The main line of our party must be a fight for the living standards of the workers and the people, to fully support the workers in their strikes

for increased wages and improved living standards. . . . We have to keep emphasizing the basic Marxist-Leninist tenets; that in the struggle for human rights under capitalism the main arena of struggle is the class struggle; the main issues of contention are in the economic sphere; the main force in that struggle is the working class.

“Therefore, for us that is the main point of reference.”<sup>63</sup>

What Hall holds out as the “main line” of the CP is nothing more than a modern day version of the line of the economists that Lenin summarized and critiqued. Lenin's main point was that the key to the development of class consciousness of the proletariat was not the exposure of economic atrocities or the economic struggle, but the education and training of the class around the central *political* issues of the day:

“The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class consciousness, unless the workers learn to observe from concrete, and above all from topical (current), political facts and events, *every* other social class in *all* the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of *all* aspects of the life and activity of *all* classes, strata and groups of the population.”<sup>64</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Lenin's point was this: The class struggle spontaneously breaks out in numerous forms, specifically as economic (e.g., trade union) struggle, political (e.g., parliamentary) struggle, and ideological struggle. Communists must intervene in these struggles, using their socialist ideology to train the workers in the ability to recognize and consistently practice class politics. To limit the communist work to the economic struggle and, Lenin added sarcastically, even so militant a task as the “economic struggle against the government,”<sup>65</sup> is to fail to divert the working class movement from its spontaneous path of bourgeois trade union politics and ideology. Moreover, contrary to the CPUSA, Lenin strongly emphasized that the economic struggle plays *no special role* in the development of the class consciousness of the workers:

“‘Economic’ concessions (or pseudo concessions) are, of course, the cheapest and most advantageous from the government's point of view, because by these means it hopes to win the confidence of the masses of the workers. For this very reason, we Social-Democrats *must not* under any circumstances or in any way whatever create grounds for the belief (or the misunderstanding) that we attach greater value to economic reforms, or that we regard them as being particularly important, etc.”<sup>66</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

In striking contrast to Lenin, the CPUSA has adopted an economist strategy that downplays the training of the working class around the central issues which face it, and instead centers its program around the

economic demands on the mistaken assumption that the economic struggle plays some special, almost mystical, role in the formation of working class consciousness. This is a tailist line that would have to be rejected as bowing to the spontaneous bourgeois trade union consciousness of the working class even if there were no labor aristocracy in the U.S. However, the problem is vastly compounded today since this line is being advanced in the most developed imperialist country in world history, a country whose working class is deeply split by the desertion of a substantial labor aristocracy to the camp of imperialism.

Despite this, the CP clings to the notion that economic struggles for the immediate self-interest of workers (from whatever strata) are not only inherently progressive, but a direct springboard to anti-capitalist consciousness. As James West put it,

“The self-interest of the working class, by its very nature, impels the working class to struggle against the capitalist class, even in cases where individual members of the class have visions of becoming ‘independent’ businessmen or farmers.

“The *consistent*, upward-progressing, self-interest struggle of the working class must, to win a complete victory, move to anti-capitalism, to the overthrow of the exploitative system. It may be diverted or slowed down, by misleadership or lack of sufficient class and socialist consciousness, but it rises again and again, asserting and re-asserting itself, pressing on irresistibly.”<sup>67</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

West completely ignores the fact that the working class is not homogeneous and that not all U.S. workers have the same immediate “self-interest.” To the contrary, the class is divided between skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed, etc., and the competition within the class for jobs, promotions, and training is intensifying. Most important, however, is the fact that in the U.S. the social relations of racism\* and imperialist bribery segment and stratify the class into competing parts whose self-interests are not only dissimilar, but often downright antagonistic. Indeed, the bottom line of Lenin’s theory of the labor aristocracy is that imperialist bribery creates a privileged upper stratum of the class which has a selfish but *objective economic self-interest in collaborating with the imperialists* against the rest of the class. Based on its objective status as a labor aristocracy, a section of U.S. workers is spontaneously impelled not toward class struggle, but toward class collaboration!

These workers are hardly incapable of militancy, but the point is, this militancy is most often in defense of their privileged position and runs *against* the class interests of the U.S. and international working class taken as a whole. While it is true that all workers, including those in the

\* See Linda Burnham and Bob Wing, *Toward a Communist Analysis of Black Oppression and Black Liberation, Part III, Strategy, Line of March #9.*

labor aristocracy, are objectively compelled to struggle against capital due to the objective nature of the wage-labor condition that enslaves them, it is also true that the objective conditions of the labor aristocracy under imperialism produce a countervailing spontaneous political motion toward opportunism that, left unchallenged, has historically overwhelmed the class struggle tendency in that section of the class.

From this point of view, West’s messianic vision of an irresistible self-interest struggle of the working class utterly fails to deal squarely with the struggle against opportunism in the working class—and actually produces the illusion that even the most privileged workers are spontaneously drawn, by the logic of the capitalist economy, to a class struggle, anti-capitalist position! Such a line can never even challenge, let alone defeat, the racist and pro-imperialist opportunism that grips the U.S. working class.

### Trade Unions and Communists’ “Sacred Duties”

Flowing directly from the CP’s overall economist strategy is their glorification of the trade unions. Since the economic struggle is the key to the development of working class consciousness, it logically follows that the economic organizations of the working class—the trade unions—are viewed by the CP as the most advanced expression of the class struggle. In fact, the CP’s equation of “class struggle” and “economic struggle” leads them to the view that all other struggles—except the socialist revolution itself—should be viewed as “democratic,” not “class” struggles and that the trade unions and the party are virtually the only working class organizations in existence. As a result, whenever the CPUSA press discusses the working class or the working class struggle as a distinct category, the real topic is the trade union movement. This is an extremely serious error, which leads the CP into a number of severe political miscalculations. For one, the CP is prone to measure the extent of “working class involvement” in non-trade unions struggles for peace, Black Liberation, electoral work, and so on—solely by the degree of official trade union participation. The CP also gets locked into the position that “Defense of the trade unions (whatever their shortcomings) is a sacred duty of Communists and class conscious workers.”<sup>68</sup> Even the worst of opportunist unions should therefore never be subjected to anything worse than “constructive criticism accompanied by a discussion of the ways and means to overcome shortcomings. . . .”<sup>69</sup>

This line is another form of the CPUSA’s conciliation of opportunism and the labor aristocracy.

First, West’s sacred pledge to the trade unions is tantamount to a promise never to attack the opportunist leadership of reactionary trade unions and onesidedly forgets that, as Lima put it in his response, “Communists have other sacred duties, such as conducting the struggle

against racism and imperialism, both inside and outside of the labor movement."<sup>70</sup>

Second, it should be remembered that less than 25 per cent of U.S. workers are members of trade unions and that a disproportionate number of those organized are part of the labor aristocracy. Thus, to narrow one's vision of the working class movement to the trade unions drops the majority of the lower strata from one's political purview and bestows undue importance upon the labor aristocracy. In particular, it is a grave misassessment to consider the Black movement as strictly a democratic movement and to lose sight of its character as principally a movement of the racially oppressed section of the working class.

And third, to mechanically designate non-economic or non-trade union struggles and movements as "democratic" movements tends to surrender the struggle for a proletarian line within these movements. This is precisely the CPUSA's practice in the women's, peace, and anti-racist movements, in which they trail behind the petit bourgeois democratic forces.

All of these errors flow inexorably from a line that gives the economic struggle a "special significance" in the class struggle, downplays the role of communists in undertaking the political and ideological training of the working class, suggests that all workers have an identical immediate economic self-interest, and grossly overestimates the role and importance of trade unions. In this manner, the CPUSA's economism combines with its liquidation of the labor aristocracy to produce a strategic framework that surrenders the U.S. working class movement to opportunism—without a serious fight.

#### D. The CPUSA's Present Perspective: Illusions for the 1980s

The CP's conciliation of opportunism and glorification of the trade union movement is not simply an ideological posture unrelated to the party's operative line and concrete practice, nor is it a perspective that the CP left behind when the flow of the late 1960s gave way to the ebb of the mid and late 1970s. On the contrary, "official optimism" remained enshrined as a sacred principle in the CP right through the 1970s to this day; it is the line under which every CP cadre is trained and it thoroughly pervades the party's political program and day to day practice in the class struggle.

In the early 1980s, the most graphic expression of the CPUSA's official optimism was its rose-colored assessment of the AFL-CIO-initiated Solidarity Day march for Jobs and Justice on September 19, 1981.

For Marxist-Leninists who are willing and able to face squarely the stratifications within the U.S. working class and the grip of opportunist politics on a substantial section of the working class, the actual political

content and significance of Solidarity Day is not that difficult to unravel. Solidarity Day represented, undoubtedly, working class discontent with Reaganomics. But it was at the same time a stark reminder that the grip of opportunist politics over the mass workers' movement remains extremely strong. For, while Solidarity Day definitely represented a shift to more activist tactics on the part of the AFL-CIO leadership and its base in the labor aristocracy, it represented no shift at all in the fundamental political perspective upon which this trend in the workers' movement is based. Reflecting the opportunist trend's continued commitment to imperialism's foreign policy objectives, demands for peace or even for cutting the military budget were *excluded* from the official Solidarity Day program. Reflecting the degree to which the labor aristocracy continues to defend the stratification internal to the U.S. working class, demands that explicitly and forthrightly challenged racism also were conspicuously lacking. And finally, reflecting the labor aristocracy's determined allegiance to bourgeois politics, the thinly disguised immediate objective of the march was to increase labor's clout within the Democratic Party and to serve as the opening shot in that party's campaign for the 1982 Congressional Elections.\* At bottom, the main thrust of the march (and the whole approach of this trend to the fight against "Reaganism") was that the President should lighten up on those "honest, hard-working, loyal Americans who made this country great." (Read: white, labor aristocracy.)

In essence, such popular language captures quite well the underlying politics of the Solidarity Day March and, more generally, the opportunist trend in the labor movement. This trend is bitter that its many years of faithful service to monopoly capital are being overlooked as it is being forced to make sacrifices to pay for the bloated military budget and shore up faltering profit margins. However, this discontent should not be misinterpreted to mean that the opportunists are about to challenge the need for an aggressive military defense of the "American way of life," much less to question the superiority of the capitalist, free enterprise system. There is also no indication that they have any intention of uniting with the demands and struggles of the international working class or the lower, heavily minority, strata of the working class at home. But yet they are determined—and quite capable of putting up a major fight, including mass mobilization of their base if necessary—to be sure that their own "self-interests" are defended and their privileged position retained, that they not be forced to pay an "unfair share" of shoring up U.S. imperialism, and that non-aristocratic (particularly non-white) upstarts not be allowed to use this opportunity to undercut their leadership in the labor movement. In short, with these "labor lieutenants of capital" at the

\* Giving the show away, Election Day, November 2, 1982, was proclaimed as Solidarity Day II.

helm, we have a classic example of the AFL-CIO moving actively to defend the interests of a minority of workers at the expense of the interests of the vast majority of the international and U.S. proletariat.

It is only such an analysis of Solidarity Day that can possibly alert communists not only to the opportunities but also the difficulties that face us in the labor movement in the years ahead. Blinded by its official optimist line, however, the CPUSA insists on viewing only the rosy side of events and completely missed the real nature and significance of Solidarity Day. According to the CP, Solidarity Day signaled nothing less than "a developing labor-led people's upsurge with long range implications. This historic event has created a new situation in the trade union movement and changed the political climate of the nation."<sup>71</sup> Surrendering even its commitment to the "facts" in order to serve its backward line, the CP claimed that Solidarity Day "was a profound demonstration against racism" and a "resounding march for peace as well."<sup>72</sup> Negating altogether any problem of opportunism and describing this demonstration in the most romantic of terms, the CP proclaimed:

"Solidarity Day differed from previous marches in some important respects. It was the first mass march ever led by a united trade union movement in alliance with the major democratic currents in our country. It raised a multiplicity of issues of common concern. In essence, Solidarity Day was a *labor-led, anti-monopoly movement*. Its composition and numbers mark the highest point yet achieved by mass political demonstrations in our nation's history."<sup>73</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

This glowing assessment of Solidarity Day has played no small role in shaping the CPUSA's steadily mounting agitation for an intensified "all-people's fightback," agitation which made up the central theme of the CP's Extraordinary Congress held last April in Milwaukee.\* It was at this conference that George Meyers, chairman of the CP Farm and Labor Department, argued that Solidarity Day was "a dramatic expression of the beginnings of a new day for organized labor" whose main content was that there is a "rapidly developing shift away from the class collaborationist concepts that have been dominant in the AFL-CIO."<sup>74</sup> Other CP leaders added equally glowing reports about the progress in other fronts of the mass struggle, with Hall noting:

\* An all-sided analysis of this conference's proposals and formulations is not attempted here. Such a task would be an extremely worthwhile and revealing one, and will undoubtedly make up an important part of the ongoing contention between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism. For the purposes of this article, however, we comment only on certain aspects of this conference that shed light most directly on the CPUSA's views concerning the labor aristocracy and opportunism within the working class.

"The first public meetings of the unemployed are being organized by some trade unions. . . There are militant protests against the skyrocketing utility rates in many parts of the country with slogans like — 'nationalize energy' and 'people's power—nationalize energy' . . . the first actions of farmers are taking place. . . the senior fightback movement is in full swing. . . there are environmental groups organizing against the poisoning and raping of our land. . . the peace movement is literally busting out all over."<sup>75</sup>

Given the immense new opportunities at hand, party members were exhorted to become more active in the growing spontaneous fightback and to turn the people's rising discontent into action. No mention, much less a serious analysis, was made of the grip pro-imperialist and racist opportunism still holds on large numbers of workers or of the consciously pro-imperialist role played by the AFL-CIO Executive Council and many other ideologically motivated forces active in the trade union or other mass movements. The CP's task was never posed as forthrightly challenging opportunist ideas in the workers' movement, but framed almost entirely as translating already existing mass sentiment into action.\* If such action could in fact be stimulated, Hall assured his audience of wonderful times to come, being reckless enough even to suggest that the workers' movement, while on the defensive in an immediate sense, was rapidly gearing up for the offensive, that "the working class is developing movements and struggles that are preparing the ground for going on the offensive in the class struggle."<sup>77</sup>

Were the CP's superlatives in describing Solidarity Day and its rosy assessment of the present state and immediate future of the working class movement mere excesses of zeal at the sight of new opportunities for

\* In classically economist fashion, Hall formulated the relation between the party and the masses, between consciousness and spontaneity, as follows:

"This potential is building up. But it is important to understand that much of the potential that is building up will not turn into mass actions if it is not consciously stimulated, mobilized, and organized.

"The spontaneous element provides the mass sentiment. Mobilization, organization and planned, conscious initiatives move this sentiment onto the action level."<sup>76</sup>

So, where Leninism regards the role of the conscious element as bringing an advanced political line and a socialist world outlook to a spontaneous movement which otherwise will be dominated by bourgeois ideology, Hall thinks the role of the communists is to bring "action" to a movement that already has the necessary sentiments but, without communists, may fall into inactivity or indecisiveness. This gross distortion of Leninism aside for the moment, the tradition of the U.S. working class is such that its problem has hardly been one of needing to be prodded into "action;" the question always has been in what political direction will its militant activity be channelled.

political work, we might be inclined to temper our criticism. But these analyses are anything but a reflection of some excessive enthusiasm for the prospects in the workers' movement; they are profoundly inaccurate political conclusions which flow directly and inevitably from the CPUSA's fundamentally flawed outlook, orientation, and line. The point is, once the CPUSA theoretically discarded the Leninist thesis of a stubborn material basis for opportunism in the U.S. working class, and as a result, an inevitable political and economic split in the workers' movement, it cannot help but fall victim to such an inaccurate view of the political realities in the U.S. today. If there is no substantial labor aristocracy, if there is no strong social-imperialist trend in the workers' movement, if the economic struggle is in principle the centerpiece of the class struggle spontaneously pushing the whole working class to the left, well, then, a march of 500,000 workers led by the official trade union leadership is, not surprisingly, everything wonderful that the CPUSA says it is.

When this is kept in mind, the vital importance of theoretical struggle over what appear to be the most subtle "shades of difference" becomes crystal clear.

#### E. Liquidation of the Labor Aristocracy and the CPUSA's Anti-Monopoly Coalition

Of course, our shade of difference with the CPUSA concerning the labor aristocracy hardly takes place in isolation from the broader struggle over the CP's revisionist deviation in its general line and strategy. On the contrary, the CP's view of the labor aristocracy is both a reflection and an integral component of its overall strategic line for the U.S. revolution, the Anti-Monopoly Coalition. While this is not the time or place for an all-sided examination and critique of this backward political perspective,\* it is both necessary and appropriate to draw out here, if only briefly, the intimate connection between the CP's abandonment of Leninism on the question of the labor aristocracy and its overall errors concerning its general line.

Central to the Anti-Monopoly Coalition line, as to any proposal for the U.S. revolutionary process, is a particular analysis of the strategic enemy forces, that is, the bourgeoisie, and of the strategic revolutionary forces, that is, the working class and its allies. Most previous critiques of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition have focused on the relatively conspicuous errors it makes in analysis of the bourgeoisie, in particular the bourgeoisie's relation to the capitalist state and the mechanism by which state power can be wrenched from its grasp. Concerning this aspect of

\* *Line of March* #2 features an initial attempt at such an all-sided critique in an article by Ralph Beitel and Bruce Occeña entitled *Toward a Critique of the General Line of the CPUSA*.

revolutionary strategy, the CPUSA departs rather markedly from Marxism-Leninism in its assumptions that, because of a fundamentally antagonistic split in the bourgeoisie between monopoly and non-monopoly sectors, a democratic, anti-monopoly government can come to power through electoral means and effectively remove the bourgeois state apparatus itself from the control of the largest monopoly corporations while capitalism and capitalist monopolies still survive. Then in the second stage of this fantastic scenario, in what amounts to a two-stage revolutionary process, what will occur is "the extension of popular power to all branches of government," the final curbing of the power of the big monopolies, and the dawn of the socialist era in the U.S.<sup>78</sup> There are more and less vulgar versions of this perspective\* but all versions have in common the notion of a basic, antagonistic split in the bourgeoisie and the view that the bourgeois state can be removed from the domination of monopoly capital by electoral means. No matter how hidden beneath a host of qualifications and hedges, this perspective is a basic deviation from Marxism-Leninism on the central question of the revolution, the question of seizing and holding state power.

\* Undoubtedly one of the more vulgar versions is that contained in the most recent (1981) program of the CPUSA. This program contains no mention whatsoever of such fundamental Marxist-Leninist concepts as the dictatorship of the proletariat or the need to smash and break up the bourgeois state apparatus, and poses the process of seizure of power as follows:

"The Communist Party participates in the anti-monopoly political alignment and would serve, along with others, at the people's will, in an anti-monopoly government brought to power by the victories of this coalition. . .

"The electoral victory of a people's anti-monopoly party most likely would not produce a drawn out period of equilibrium between an anti-monopoly administration and a capitalist economy in which the monopolies retained positions of strength. In the course of a many-sided struggle, which would necessarily involve millions of people against the monopolies, it would become apparent to the majority of the working class and most of its allies that they were dealing with an organic crisis of an outdated social system which is exploitative, oppressive, corrupt, racist, dehumanizing and irrational. It would become clear that fighting to restrain monopoly is not enough. Capitalism itself must go.

"The decisive steps in ushering capitalism to its historical exit will be both political and economic. On the one hand, it will require the extension of popular power to all branches and levels of the government, making the working class, with its allies, the dominant force in society. On the other hand, the people will have to take control of the commanding heights of the economy, first of all by bringing into the public domain the property of the big industrial, energy, mining, transportation, banking, insurance, agribusiness and wholesaling corporations."<sup>79</sup> (Our emphasis.)

While criticism of this central error has been noted and pursued by others previously, what has received insufficient attention in the critique of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition is its analysis of the strategic revolutionary forces, the proletariat and its allies. On this end of the revolutionary dialectic, the CPUSA also abandons Marxism-Leninism, in particular Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy is rejected. A linchpin of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition strategy is the assumption that the U.S. working class is essentially a homogeneous entity, able to smoothly and relatively harmoniously unite around a revolutionary vision of its political tasks. Once this assumption is made, the central problem of the revolutionary strategy in the U.S. is no longer how to *unite the working class* around a revolutionary line, but rather how to *find allies* for the workers' movement from other classes and social strata, in particular, the petit-bourgeoisie and non-monopoly bourgeoisie (i.e. the question of the popular front). It is this broader front that constitutes the strategic revolutionary formation, and the key link in the preparation for revolution consists in defining a political program that can bring the front into existence and retain the support of *all elements* right through to the capture of political power. Not surprisingly, opposition to the monopolies is viewed as something almost everyone can support—and this is where the general line is pegged for the CP's revolutionary strategy. By watering down the political unity necessary for the revolutionary forces to take power from an anti-capitalist to an anti-monopoly level, the CPUSA exposes its skewed vision of the revolutionary process in the U.S.—and it is this mistaken vision that gives the Anti-Monopoly Coalition both its name and its fundamental content.

Of course, the problem here is that this elaborate scenario falls apart in the face of Lenin's line that the working class in the imperialist countries is far from marching shoulder to shoulder against the monopolies or towards socialism but rather is *economically and politically split*. Once this is grasped as a sober reality, the real crux of revolutionary strategy in the U.S. comes into sharp focus: the problem of uniting a materially stratified and politically divided working class around a revolutionary, anti-capitalist line. Certainly, the question of finding allies for the revolutionary working class forces remains an important consideration, particularly in waging the fight against fascism and in defense of democracy and peace. But the more important *central focus* of the strategy is determining the process by which the opportunist trend, rooted in the labor aristocracy, can be challenged and isolated. As Lenin put it, "No preparation of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is possible, even in a preliminary sense, unless an immediate, systematic, extensive and open struggle is waged against this stratum, which, as experience has already shown, will no doubt provide

the bourgeois White guards with many a recruit after the victory of the proletariat."<sup>80</sup> We would take this one step further: in the U.S., the axis around which this "systematic, extensive and open struggle" must be waged is formed by the questions of imperialism and racism, the two material, political, and ideological bonds by which the labor aristocracy and the opportunist trend are tied hand and foot to the U.S. bourgeoisie.

It is the CPUSA's convoluted attempts to ignore and obscure this point that makes the Anti-Monopoly Coalition strategy a qualitatively flawed strategic perspective; one that leads the party into every sort of muddle as it tries to put this strategy into practice. This qualitative error is responsible, ultimately, for the CPUSA's consistent practice of tailing the petit bourgeoisie and even liberal bourgeoisie in broad cross-class movements. It is their flawed general line that also leads the CPUSA to distort the task of building the left/center alliance in the workers' movement. As a result, rather than the left assuming the responsibility to advance a line which can bring center forces and the broad mass of workers into a durable *strategic* united front—a class struggle trend in the labor movement—the notion of left/center alliance gets reduced to a prescription for the left to permanently tail behind the most hesitant and reformist center forces.\* And it is this error that leads the CP to utterly trade the goal of guiding the spontaneous movement by exercising political leadership for the modest objectives of being accepted by the center forces as hard workers and militant fighters for demands and reforms which the spontaneous movement adopts on its own.

Undoubtedly, the task of expanding and deepening this initial outline into an all-sided and comprehensive critique of the Anti-Monopoly Coalition line remains before us. It is a crucial task, absolutely central to the defeat of revisionism and the reuniting of the U.S. communist

\* A detailed examination and criticism of the CPUSA's distortions on building the left/center alliance would require a work in itself; a contribution to that task is contained in the *Political Report to the First National Conference of the Line of March Labor Commission*, in *Frontline* #1, August 1981. Here we only want to emphasize that the correct application of the left/center alliance strategy necessarily implies a political polarization between right and left to illuminate sharply where the line between class collaboration and class struggle is drawn on any given question or series of questions. On this basis, a patient and systematic struggle with the center is taken up to win them to the class struggle pole. In contrast to this approach, the CPUSA attempts to build the left/center alliance by setting the level of the front at whatever is acceptable to center forces at a given time. The political difference between these two approaches is whether or not the class struggle trend is built on a firm and stable footing and whether or not the left has any real political initiative within it. And the theoretical "shade" which determines which of these approaches one adopts is the question of whether or not a material basis for stubborn opportunist politics (a labor aristocracy) exists within the working class.

movement on the basis of a Marxist-Leninist line. Even now, however, it is safe to say that one of the spearheads of such a critique must entail the exposure and criticism of the CPUSA's distortions of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy. This theoretical error is the point around which the CP distorts the existing political reality and belittles the problem of opportunism within the U.S. working class.

### III. The Struggle Against Opportunism Crystallized in the United Front Against War and Racism

Considering the substantial grip opportunism has on the U.S. working class (and the unfortunate history of communist conciliation of it), the task of challenging and isolating this retrograde trend will be protracted and difficult. In Part I of this three-part series, we elaborated the most general Leninist principles regarding the fight against opportunism; in concluding this article, we will attempt to outline, in brief, the application of these principles to the struggle against opportunism in the U.S. working class today.

As we noted earlier, the starting point for taking up the fight against opportunism is a firm grasp on Lenin's dictum that, in the imperialist countries, the working class is *already split*, economically and politically. U.S. communists must be absolutely clearheaded and forthright about the fact that a section of our working class has "*already drifted away* to opportunism and to the imperialist bourgeoisie."<sup>81</sup> Given this, Lenin's warning is quite appropriate: "... unless a determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties—or groups, trends, etc., it is all the same—there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement."<sup>82</sup> Any temptation to conciliate the opportunists as the "leaders of the organized working class," "the militant front-rankers in the class struggle," etc. must be flatly rejected and the intrinsic connection of the struggle against opportunism and the struggle against imperialism fully drawn out. In short, the revolutionary wing of the U.S. proletariat will develop only to the degree that it confronts and opposes the opportunist wing rooted in the labor aristocracy; and the key to its ability to do so is the communists' correctly identifying the political axis around which the split in the working class movement revolves.

In the U.S. that political axis consists of the questions of imperialism and racism; and exposing opportunism and isolating the social-imperialist trend consists, above all, in challenging all manifestations of jingoistic patriotism and racism within the U.S. working class.

No detachment of the international proletariat can fully grasp its historical predicament or become truly class conscious unless it comes to view the world from a thoroughly internationalist perspective; and nowhere in the world does this point require more emphasis than in the

U.S. The U.S. working class will simply never make its "revolutionary rupture" with the U.S. bourgeoisie unless it systematically repudiates its pledge of "patriotic loyalty" to the most powerful and ruthless capitalist class in world history. And the challenge to these "patriotic bonds" will not be successful unless the link between their ideological hold on U.S. workers and their stubborn material basis in imperialist bribery and privilege is kept in mind at every point. Lenin attempted to bring this link to the light of day in developing his theory of the labor aristocracy, precisely to arm the conscious elements in the workers' movement with a tool to challenge national chauvinism and to lead the transformation of the workers' movement into a self-consciously internationalist and revolutionary force.

In the U.S., the problem of pro-imperialist patriotism among workers based on imperialist bribery is qualitatively compounded by the intersecting ideology and social relation of racism and racial privilege. U.S. racism has given rise to a distinct form of opportunism—racist class collaboration—on the part of those white workers who place "loyalty to their race" above the bonds of class. Those workers join in a racially-defined white united front with their own bourgeoisie to defend their racial privileges against their non-white class brothers and sisters. Thus, while imperialist bribery and the labor aristocracy are not the same as white privilege and the white united front, the two intersect and reinforce each other to produce an extraordinarily reactionary and powerful opportunist force in the U.S. working class. On the one hand, imperialist bribery provides the key material basis for continuing the system of white privilege under imperialism, especially since the demise of the Southern plantation system; the labor aristocracy is both the chief beneficiary of white privilege within the working class and the political center of the racist white united front among white workers. On the other hand, by expanding the material basis for opportunism to include the mass of white workers, the system of white privilege enormously expands the political influence of the labor aristocracy within the class. The overall point is this: the struggle against imperialist opportunism and the labor aristocracy in the U.S. is inextricably bound to the struggle against racism and the white united front in the working class—and vice versa.

The second key point of the Leninist orientation to the struggle against opportunism is that communists must base themselves in the lower strata, the basic mass, of the working class. This section of the class constitutes the majority, has the best material basis to reject opportunism, and is the social base for the revolutionary and class struggle trends in the working class movement because it suffers the full force of imperialist exploitation and oppression. Lenin's polemic in confronting Kautsky's demagogic obscuring of this point is still appropriate today:

"One of the most common sophistries of Kautskyism is its references to the 'masses.' We do not want, they say, to break away

from the masses and the mass organizations! But just think how Engels put the question. In the nineteenth century the 'mass organizations' of the English trade unions were on the side of the bourgeois labour party. Marx and Engels did not reconcile themselves to it on this ground; they exposed it. They did not forget, firstly, that the trade union organizations directly embraced a *minority of the proletariat*. In England then, as in Germany now, not more than one-fifth of the proletariat was organized. . . . Secondly—and this is the main point—it is not so much a question of the size of an organization, as of the real, objective significance of its policy; does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, i.e., does it aim at their liberation from capitalism, or does it represent the interests of the minority, the minority's reconciliation with capitalism? The latter was true in England in the nineteenth century, and it is true of Germany, etc., now.

"Engels draws a distinction between the 'bourgeois labour party' of the *old* trade unions—the privileged minority—and the '*lowest* mass,' the real majority, and appeals to the latter, who are *not* infected by 'bourgeois respectability.' This is the essence of Marxist tactics!"<sup>83</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

As Lenin clarified in *Left Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, a determined struggle against opportunism is not a call to abandon the trade unions, indeed Lenin makes clear that positioning within the trade unions, even when dominated by reactionaries or fascists, is quite important. However, the reactionary trade unions cannot be enshrined in principle as the main site of communist work—this depends on concrete, historical circumstances. Lenin's main point was that communists "must absolutely *work wherever the masses are to be found*,"<sup>84</sup> (Emphasis in original) which includes, but is far from exclusive to, the reactionary-led trade unions. Insofar as he did call for work in such bodies, by no means was this seen as a directive to conciliate its opportunist leadership. To the contrary, work in the trade unions, as elsewhere, is only useful to communists to the degree that it advances the struggle against opportunism and thereby prepares the proletariat to seize power.

In the U.S. today the dominance of opportunism in the trade unions is extraordinary. Yet, as in Lenin's time, U.S. trade unions organize only a relatively small minority of the working class, less than 25 per cent. Thus, while positioning in the trade union movement is important, especially in those unions which represent the lower strata of the class, organizing the unorganized is crucial to penetrating the lower strata.

Here again the intersection of race and class is crucial to gaining our strategic bearings, for the system of white supremacy and racial oppression has relegated a highly disproportionate number of racial minorities to the lower strata of the working class. Work among the racially oppressed is thus crucial not simply to the struggle for democracy, but as a fundamental point of working class strategy.

Moreover, such work should not be limited to organizing minority workers on the job—it is absolutely crucial for communists to work in the minority communities which are the concentrated product of *both* racial oppression and the lower strata of the U.S. working class.

Third, communists cannot allow themselves to fall into "official optimism" and to cultivate illusions among themselves or within the working class that periods of economic crisis will, in and of themselves, produce a smooth and spontaneous political and ideological maturation among the workers. Undoubtedly, economic "hard times," such as those gripping the U.S. today, give rise to spontaneous activity among workers and open up vast new opportunities to break the influence of the labor aristocracy over the lower strata and even to winning certain forces in the aristocratic sections of the class away from opportunism in the course of struggle. However, the pivotal point that must be firmly understood by the most conscious, communist elements is that this positive potential will not be realized automatically; it remains dependent upon the degree to which a forthright and consistent challenge is mounted to opportunism, specifically, to U.S. patriotism and racism. Even in periods of economic hardship, these *political questions* are the axis around which the political and ideological maturation of the working class movement must take shape.

Particularly in periods of economic difficulty, communists must be extremely skilled at handling the dialectic of unity and struggle within the workers' movement. Without a doubt, communists must support and become involved in all struggles of workers against the bourgeoisie; we must take advantage of the changed objective conditions and the widespread stirrings of spontaneous motion in the working class to reach out to new forces and to build unity, if only on the most immediate issues, with the broadest array of forces possible. *At the same time*, we must step up our ideological and political exposure of the negative influence of opportunism in the workers' movement and the defeat ahead if this opportunism is not challenged at every turn. Avoiding the amateurish approach of the infantile leftists who can do little more than rant and rave about "misleaders" and "agents of the bourgeoisie," Marxist-Leninists must be able to put forward, in an accessible, mass way, a substantive critique of the workings of opportunism, and must be prepared to challenge the opportunists tit-for-tat for leadership in the many mass struggles that are now on the horizon.

At the same time, communists cannot allow what motion exists among upper strata workers to obscure the need for the movement to base itself, first and foremost, in the lower strata of the proletariat. The temptations in this direction will be tremendous: upper strata workers already have various organizational forms in place with which communists can interact (not only unions, but more stable community and political organizations as well). These organizations of upper strata workers have

more "legitimacy" and more access to those who presently hold the reins of power. The present composition of the communist movement will spontaneously push it in that direction. To follow this path of least resistance would be fatal; it would leave the communist movement, like social democracy, rooted in those strata of the workers (and the radicalized petit bourgeoisie) who are most prone to vacillate in the twists and turns of the revolutionary struggle, who are the least reliable base for sustaining a revolutionary trend in the workers' movement. If anything, in the present period of heightened imperialist crisis, communists must step up efforts to build their firmest base in the lower strata of the working class.

### The United Front Against War and Racism

When we soberly consider what it will take to challenge and defeat opportunism in the U.S. working class, the enormous stakes in the struggle to unite communists on an advanced line and orientation concerning the labor aristocracy are put on the table. Clearly, the battle against opportunism will be protracted and difficult, and it will require the communist movement achieving its maximum clarity and mustering its maximum resources in order to succeed. All belittling of the problem of opportunism in the working class, all official optimist illusions only disarm the communists and threaten long range negative consequences and setbacks. The point we made at the beginning of this article gets driven home with renewed emphasis: *a determined fight against opportunism in the working class movement begins with the struggle among communists against the conciliators of opportunism within our own ranks.*

It is for this reason that we have spent such time and energy on the reconstruction and critique of the line of the CPUSA. The CP remains the largest and most influential organization in the U.S. communist movement; it is the formation that principally symbolizes communism to the U.S. masses, and it is the communist organization with the broadest ties and deepest roots in the working class movement. Consequently, its backward line of trivializing the labor aristocracy and conciliating opportunism causes the greatest amount of confusion among communists and perpetuates the most dangerous and widespread political illusions among the more advanced elements in the working class. Given this, it is no exaggeration to say that one of the most concrete gauges of progress in this line struggle is the extent to which the present line of the CPUSA gets re-evaluated and critiqued, both internal and external to the party, and the extent to which it is eventually surrendered or at least isolated among U.S. Marxist-Leninists. It is obviously too early to tell the exact path this line struggle will take, but it must and will be pursued nonetheless.

Here it is also important to highlight another point mentioned earlier in this article: the struggle over Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy is part and parcel of the broader line struggle among communists over the general line and strategy for the U.S. revolution. Again, the line advanced by the CPUSA, the Anti-Monopoly Coalition path to power, must be the main point of reference in taking up any serious re-examination and criticism of the U.S. communist movement's present state of fragmentation and confusion. Because of this, the struggle to reassert and reaffirm a Leninist line on the labor aristocracy cannot be fully consolidated in the U.S. communist movement until the Anti-Monopoly Coalition line is also surrendered, and replaced with a revolutionary strategy that gives the struggle against opportunism in the U.S. working class its proper weight and focus.

In our view, the formulation that most accurately captures the point of contention with the CP and must eventually replace the Anti-Monopoly Coalition line as the dominant view among U.S. communists is the perspective of forging a *United Front of the Working Class Against War and Racism*.\*

In contrast to the Anti-Monopoly Coalition strategy, the United Front line poses as its central objective the struggle to unite the U.S. working class, the only thoroughly revolutionary class in the U.S., around an advanced revolutionary line. Even further, this line targets imperialism and racism as the two main political and ideological questions around which the struggle must be waged to accomplish that objective, precisely because imperialism and racism constitute the two essential foundations of capitalism in this country and because, in the form of imperialist bribery and white privilege, they are the two main social relations which promote opportunism and class collaboration within the workers' movement. According to this view, the transformation of the U.S. working class into a self-consciously revolutionary force, as well as the successful development of a broad popular front built around the working class united front, are inconceivable without a determined struggle to break the present hold of the social-imperialist labor aristocracy and the racist white united front over the political, ideological, and organizational life of the U.S. working class—in short, without politically organizing the split (which already exists) within the working class.

It is for this reason that a Leninist understanding of the labor aristocracy is indispensable to the formulation of a correct strategy for

\* The United Front Against War and Racism was first advanced to the U.S. communist movement in *A Communist Proposal for A United Front Against War and Racism* in *Line of March* #5. It has been further elaborated in *The U.S. Prepares for War—Against Whom?* in *Line of March* #7, *Racism—The Cutting Edge of the Bourgeois Offensive* in *Line of March* #8, and *The Defense of Women's Rights in the U.S. Today* in *Line of March* #9.

the U.S. revolutionary process. And it is for this reason that much of the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism in the U.S. communist movement will be reflected, in a concentrated fashion, in the struggle to replace the Anti-Monopoly Coalition with the United Front Against War and Racism as the strategic line that most scientifically and accurately captures the particularity and laws of motion of the U.S. working class's struggle for socialism.

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*Errata in Labor Aristocracy, Part I (Line of March #11) and Part II (Line of March # 12):*

Part I:

- p. 74: References 32 and 33 are transposed.  
 p. 84: Third paragraph, line 6, "expansion and contradiction" should read "expansion and contraction."  
 p. 95: Line 10, "workers of the oppressed nations are partners" should read "workers of the oppressor nations are partners."  
 p. 107: Reference 1, "Moscow Publishers" should be "Moscow: Progress Publishers."

Part II:

- p. 116: Reference 1, "Moscow Publishers" should be "Moscow: Progress Publishers."  
 Reference 2, "Vol. 5" should be "Vol. 21."