

THE COMMUNIST

WORKERS AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

"A communist should have largeness of mind and he should be staunch and active, looking upon the interests of the revolution as his very life and subordinating his personal interests to those of the revolution; always and everywhere he should adhere to principle and wage a tireless struggle against



all incorrect ideas and actions so as to consolidate the collective life of the Party and strengthen the ties between the Party and the masses; he should be more concerned about the Party and the masses than about any individual and more concerned about others than about himself. Only thus can he be considered a Communist."
Mao Tsetung

VOL. III no. 3

WORKERS CONGRESS (M-L) POB 1297 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60690

FEBRUARY 15, 1977 15¢

GAS SHORTAGE FRAUD

In the past two months a severe crisis has gripped the United States. Forces of nature brought freezing temperatures and heavy snow, but this catastrophe of nature was ruthlessly exploited and worsened a hundred-fold by a man-made catastrophe - the gas shortage created by the US oil monopoly capitalists. The US working class suffered great hardships: hundreds of people froze to death, over two million workers were laid off, gas bills became impossibly high and food prices shot up once again. And the reality is that these harsh conditions will be with us for a long while.

Despite all this, in the January 31, 1977, issue of THE OIL AND GAS JOURNAL, in an article that summarized 1976 from the perspective of the oil companies, this statement was made:

"In short, 1976 was a good year for the oil industry, and it appears 1977 should bring more of the same. But much of what might happen rests with the new Washington administration. Indications are that the industry can remain optimistic."

This statement, made in the face of the present crisis, clearly reveals the unbreachable chasm that separates the interests of the working class and oppressed masses from the interests of the US monopoly capitalist class and their "public" servants in government who are the source of the capitalists' "optimism".

OIL PROFITS CLIMB WHILE PEOPLE FREEZE TO DEATH IN HOMES

In the midst of the workers' misery, the capitalists are smiling and it's no secret why. Carter's recent energy bill has removed the past federal price ceilings from natural gas and this action insures that the oil monopoly capitalists will reap millions more in profits in 1977 than in 1976. And their 1976 profits were already on the rise. In the first 9 months of 1976, Conoco Oil Company made 363.1 million in profits which was \$30 million more than they made in the entire of 1975. Mobil Oil's profits from October to December were up 33.5% from 1975; Standard Oil of California's were up 14%; Sun Company's 43%; Cities Service had a profit gain of 43%; Exxon's profits of 2.64 billion represented a gain of 6.9% and Standard Oil of Ohio was up 8%.

While the bourgeoisie sat before warm fires in their mansions and congratulated each other, people were freezing to death in their homes. In Mansfield, Ohio, a retired worker of 74 years, who had been disabled from a stroke,

was found dead in his home where the thermometer read 9 degrees. His furnace wasn't working because his electricity had been cut off when he was unable to pay a bill of \$18.38. In the middle of January in Chicago, when the icy temperatures reached 19 degrees below zero, a 2-year old baby suffered extensive frost bite while inside the family's apartment. This 17 family dwelling on Chicago's west-side had been without heat for 5 days before anything was done about it. On February 1, in Brooklyn, New York, an elderly couple in their 80's were found frozen to death. The people who broke into the apartment found them encased in 5 inches of ice. Above their bodies icicles hung from burst water pipes. But for the bourgeoisie who own the oil companies it was a "good year" and "1977 should bring more of the same".

GAS BILLS AND RENTS INCREASE

The inability of the decadent US capitalist system to provide for the needs of the working class has resulted in increased attacks on all areas of workers' lives. Gas bills have become impossibly high. An estimate on extra fuel costs for homes was put at \$8.4 billion nationally, or an average of \$139 per household. And gas prices are going to rise further. In addition, large capitalist landlords are saying that their rent increases in May will be at a minimum from 10 to 12 percent. They warn of even higher increases if Carter's de-regulation of natural gas prices results in considerable gas price hikes. There have been reports from the east coast that some landlords, who own old buildings that they want torn down, have sabotaged the heating systems in their buildings in order to force tenants out.

CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF EDUCATION

The complete shut-down of many schools was a direct result of the artificially contrived shortage of natural gas. Present deficits in school budgets will worsen under the burden of increased gas prices. In Pennsylvania, 2.6 million children were kept out when all the state's public and private schools were ordered closed. The entire school system was also shut down in Ohio. This caused great difficulties for working mothers and single parents who had to either miss work or pay for child care. Under this circumstance, however, there were examples of spontaneous working class cooperation, where families with working parents shared child-care collective-

ly on a rotating basis. In other states, where schools remained open, the temperatures were often reduced to 50°, forcing the children to wear their coats and gloves in the classrooms.

AGRICULTURAL CAPITALISTS EXPLOIT CRISIS

Capitalist exploitation of the severe cold is of course not just limited to the oil companies, but to the capitalist class as a whole. Food prices will make a sharp rise. The cost of food has already jumped 4.5% nationally in the last two months - an annual rate of 26% - but worse is yet to come. Freezing temperatures in southern states, like Florida, have nearly destroyed the citrus crop; in the Mid-west, the cold has hurt the production of beef, chicken and agricultural products and an extensive drought has crippled grain, fruit and vegetable crops in the west. The large agricultural capitalists are not concerned with providing for the needs of the masses but only with getting the highest prices possible from the sale of this vital commodity, view this destruction as a blessing. A spokesman for the Florida Citrus Commission revealed the utter baseness of the capitalist outlook when he said:

"Mother Nature has given us the correction we needed. She bailed us out of a bumper crop. The growers were going to lose money, but now the problem has been taken care of." The capitalists in agriculture view a good and plentiful crop as a bad thing because it would mean a cut in their profits. This is the same type of reasoning that resulted in the fuel shortage and increasing attacks on the US working class.

MASSIVE LAYOFFS

Not only will workers face higher prices in all areas, but the capitalists are even depriving them of income to adequately clothe and feed their families. Over two million workers were laid-off due to the gas shortage and in many areas of the country

production will remain cut-back until April. Federal Power Commission member John Holloman III said on February 1 that:

"The crunch could be yet to come....I don't think you'll see any improvement in the industrial usage of gas for the rest of this heating season [which ends April 1]."

The layoffs were staggering. In Ohio, 1 million workers - 25% of the work-force - were laid-off. In New York and New Jersey combined, 1.5 million workers were told to stay at home. The mid-west was also hit severely. To make matters worse, at the same time as the capitalists slammed shut the factory doors in the faces of millions of workers, those workers who have not been able to win company-paid benefit plans in their contracts will face increased difficulty in getting unemployment compensation. Even before the crisis, 21 states had to ask the federal government for \$3.9 billion

in unemployment funds from bankruptcy. The sudden rise in unemployment will further drain these accounts. But many workers will not even be eligible for compensation under existing laws. In 1976, 2 million workers received all the benefits they were eligible to receive. Since layoffs generally are done on the basis of seniority, the large percentage of those recently laid off will be the workers most recently hired, those who had been looking for work for a long while and had used up their benefits. Also, some groups of workers - such as migrant workers - have not been eligible for unemployment compensation. (Recently in Florida, a state of emergency was declared which would have enabled agricultural workers to be covered on an emergency basis. This was opposed by the agricultural capitalists who put forward the ridiculous argument that if these workers were covered by unemployment compensation they would then prefer not to work. This position, which would have left thousands with no income at all, is an example of criminal negligence by the bourgeoisie,

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4

NOTICE TO READERS

With this issue THE COMMUNIST is taking up bimonthly publication. Consistent with the plan of the WORKERS CONGRESS (M-L) to fight for an ISKRA type newspaper for the Leninist trend as the main link in the fight to prepare the conditions for a new Communist party, we call on all comrades and friends to send in topical exposures, polemics, letters, criticisms and reports on their work and their use of THE COMMUNIST. Every comrade should strive particularly to develop worker correspondents as an essential means to link the newspaper with the working masses.

Subscription rates are \$4.25 per year.

Send to:
WCML
POB 1297
Chicago, Ill.
60690

The WCML can also be contacted at:
POB 11713
Los Angeles, Ca.
90111

SUMMING UP CALIF. PROPOSITION 14

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO UNIONIZE

THE BOYCOTT AS A TACTIC

The following contribution by the San Diego Organizing Committee (M-L) analyzes the connection between revolutionary work and the fight for reforms.

We want to emphasize the quote from Lenin which begins the article. Reformists work to improve the conditions of working and oppressed people without calling into question state power. Marxist-Leninists are guided at every step by the struggle for state power - as Stalin writes: "All work must be directed toward the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat." The question of state power is the whole difference.

But as the comrades correctly show, it is revolutionary shallowness removed from the actual struggle of class forces to suppose that work for the dictatorship of the proletariat can take place without waging a battle to embody reforms in law. Law is an apparatus of coercion controlled by the ruling class which guarantees its conditions of existence by force. The grip of the bourgeoisie on that apparatus can be weak or strong. Coercion can serve effectively or poorly. We take up legal struggle in order to weaken the ability of the bourgeoisie to use the legal apparatus of coercion to attack working and oppressed masses and to strengthen the position of the proletariat.

Mao Tse Tung writes: "it is the task of the proletariat in capitalist countries to educate the workers and build up strength through a long period of legal struggle and prepare for the final overthrow of capitalism. In those countries, the question is one of a long legal struggle, of utilizing parliament as a platform, of economic and political strikes, of organizing trade unions and educating workers." In the course of this struggle the conditions are prepared for armed insurrection.

How are we to prepare the final overthrow if we disdain legal struggle?

What betrays the interests of the proletariat is not the fight for legal reforms but the failure to fight reformism. Workers who put their trust in reformists, says Lenin, are always fooled, but workers who have seen through the falsity of reformism utilize reforms to develop and broaden the class struggle. The trade union struggle of the US working class has not been sold out through reforms enacted into law, but by the trade union bureaucrats who have worked to nullify those reforms and by the failure of communists to carry through a thoroughgoing campaign against reformism.

In this connection we look forward to the contribution promised by SDOC on right opportunist errors in the Proposition 14 campaign.

We agree with the comrades on the importance of support for Proposition 14 and the ALRA in spite of significant weaknesses in these measures, particularly their limitations on the right to strike.

The 1976 November elections brought before the public in California a number of issues including Proposition 14, the United Farmworkers Union (UFW) initiative on the state ballot. The outcome was a defeat for the farmworkers and a victory for monopoly capitalism. The UFW campaign behind Proposition 14 was aimed at protecting and strengthening the 1975 California Agricultural Relations Act (ALRA). If Proposition 14 had won there would have been a strengthening of workers the democratic right of unionization. This brings before us the question of how we, as Marxist-Leninists approach reforms. Our purpose in this article is to deal with that question. We take up the issue of Proposition 14 in an attempt to show how to apply this line to a current issue.

WHAT ARE REFORMS?

First, what are reforms? Lenin explained them as: "measures that improve the conditions of the working people without destroying the power of the ruling class." ("Marxism and Reformism", LCW, vol. 19) Reforms basically come about in response to the demands of a growing movement of the proletariat and oppressed masses.

BOURGEOIS SUPPORT OF REFORMS

In response to rising demands of the masses, reformists within the working class (such as Cesar Chavez) and the bourgeoisie itself will support certain reforms. The bourgeoisie does so in an attempt to weaken the working class movement, to divert it, to pacify it, and to split its forces. The reformists try to lull the proletariat into thinking that full democratic rights and an end to oppression for all working people can be achieved within the present legal structure-that revolution is not necessary. They promise harmony between capital and labor. In the campaign for Proposition 14, the line of both the reformists and the bourgeoisie was that the law would bring 'peace to the fields'.

However, Marxism-Leninism teaches us that all this is impossible. The bourgeoisie

state is a giant bureaucracy and armed force designed to suppress the working class. It is the capitalist class' weapon for maintaining its property and power. The bourgeoisie will never institute reforms within that state without trying to use those reforms to control the working class.

THE PROLETARIAN STAND

On the other hand, Marxist-Leninists support reforms, but solution to the exploitation and oppression of imperialism. Rather we support those reforms which can give the proletariat and its allies the opportunity to wage a stronger battle against the bourgeoisie. The experience of the struggle for democratic rights, and the concessions won from the bourgeoisie, raise the class consciousness and strengthen the organization of the proletariat.

Reformists seek to use reforms to lead the proletariat away from revolution. But this cannot lead communists to oppose reforms. Instead, we must expose the class collaborationist line of reformists and win the leadership of the mass movements. Through our work we should show, as Lenin has taught us, that the struggle against imperialism is inseparably linked to the struggle of the proletariat, both urban and rural, and its allies against opportunism and in preparation for revolutionary struggle.

We must base our support of reforms on a careful analysis of the historical conditions. As Lenin put it, we need to make a "strictly objective appraisal of the class forces and their alignment." (Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder).

SUPPORT OF PROPOSITION 14

It is within this framework that Marxist-Leninists should have supported Proposition 14 and should support the ALRA. We cannot oppose these laws simply because they received some bourgeois support. Support for the ALRA and Proposition 14 given by a number of bourgeois political figures was a concession to the long struggle waged by the farmworkers for the right to collective bargaining.

Besides giving UFW union organizers and farmworkers some stronger unionizing tactics, Proposition 14 had mass support within the working class and oppressed nationalities which provided a tremendous opportunity for communist agitation and propaganda among the masses. We could have not only helped organize support for the bill, but also spoken to its limits, exposing the nature of the state, the illusion of reformism, and the need for revolution. Especially we should have exposed the class collaboration of the UFW leadership under Chavez and the general reformist nature of the struggle for "peace in the fields". To the bourgeoisie and its reformist allies, "peace in the fields" means that the farmworkers should confine their struggle against the exploitative conditions of farm labor and all oppressive conditions which face the farmworkers to a non-violent bargaining for wages and benefits.

We supported Proposition 14 because, despite its shortcomings, it would have objectively strengthened the organization of farmworkers and their ability to struggle against monopoly capitalism. Farmworkers, as members of the rural proletariat, require unions-the basic mass organization of the working class, a historical necessity in the working class' fight against the capitalists. In addition, 14 and the ALRA provide communists with an opportunity to link the struggles of the rural and industrial proletariat. They put farmworkers on a more equal legal position with the industrial workers who already have the right to collective bargaining. It is easier to show that it is the same struggle. The effect of this is a strengthening of the fighting position of the class. At a time when the right to collective bargaining by industrial workers is being attacked by imperialism, this is particularly important.

The right to collective bargaining will not end the misery of the rural (or industrial) proletariat under imperialism. But the winning of this struggle will move farmworkers closer to seeing that only the destruction of the capitalist system will eliminate their exploitation. The struggle for democratic rights, like collective bargaining, is a necessary training ground for the working class. The working class only can be educated for the struggle to overthrow imperialism by engaging in the struggle for democracy. This is a training ground for the leaders of the class as well as the masses. In this struggle, it is the duty of the communists to link the struggle for democratic rights with the struggle for socialism.

The development of capitalism awakens the democratic aspirations of the people. Thus arises national consciousness, demands for education, and the trade union movement. Under imperialism, which must take away democracy to further exploit the working masses, these aspirations are likewise intensified. Thus the struggle must show that under imperialism democratic rights can be only partially achieved at best. That all reforms are temporary. That only the struggle against imperialism and for the dictatorship of the proletariat can lead to full achievement of democratic rights.

As communists, we must learn to give correct leadership to all forms of struggle. In this case, how do we deal with elections in a bourgeois democracy which involve a reform issue-Proposition 14?

Lenin has clearly put forth the Marxist-Leninist position on this question. Whether or not to boycott participation in bourgeois legal institutions (elections included) is a historical, tactical question. If gains can be made from participation in that form of struggle at that point of time, then it is used. (see "The Boycott", LCW, vol. 11) On the other hand, that participation is never seen as a primary form of struggle. Participation in legal work will always be of "modest importance" and to exaggerate its importance (as did the Menshevik faction of the party during those years) is definitely a form of opportunism.

The other side of the question is why and when do we boycott legal processes of the bourgeois state. Lenin dealt with this aspect when he analyzed the difference in the historical conditions of 1905 and 1907. ("Against Boycott", LCW, vol. 13) During the year 1905, the people were in a period of revolutionary upswing and on the offensive. There was no revolutionary call which they would not have taken up. The boycott itself is a revolutionary act-an act of defiance of the existing system used to overthrow the old or weaken it to the extent that it cannot function.

Unless there is a broad revolutionary upswing, unless there is mass unrest which overflows, as it were, the bounds of the old legality, there can be no question of the boycotting succeeding." This is not to say that the boycott itself cannot affect that upswing. If that upswing is just around the corner, a call to boycott can possibly help develop it. Under these conditions, in 1905 the Bolsheviks supported boycott of the Duma (parliament) and elections.

But by 1907 the conditions had changed; a temporary lull had occurred in the revolutionary mass movement. Moreover, the masses already did not believe in the 3rd Duma and a boycott of it would not agitate the people to a revolutionary upswing. In this situation, Lenin held that a boycott of the Duma was not a wise tactic.

Here the lesson becomes clear-we have to look at what the proletariat can gain from either participation in legal institutions or boycott of them. We have to weigh the facts of each situation-we have to look at the history around the issue before we decide to participate or boycott.

PROPOSITION 14

The essence of the struggle behind Proposition 14 was the democratic right of collective bargaining for farmworkers. Historically, this right has been denied them and their struggle for unionization has been a long and hard one. There has been labor organizations in California fields since the early 1900's. The power of agribusiness has succeeded time after time in crushing the farmworkers' movement. But every time the movement has re-emerged stronger than ever to continue the struggle. The United Farmworkers Union has led that struggle for unionization for the

last decade.

The UFW campaign for Proposition 14 was aimed at protecting and strengthening the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of August 1975. (see THE COMMUNIST vol. I, no. 11 and vol. II, no. 4) The ALRA is a reform measure which came about in response to the growing struggle of the farmworkers in the fields and the growing support for this struggle among other sectors of the population. The ALRA basically gave the farmworkers the legal right for the first time to vote for union representation and to engage in collective bargaining. The ALRA established the Agricultural Relations Board (ALRB). This is a five member board, appointed by the governor, which implements the act by holding supposedly fair elections for union representation, settling disputes over these elections, and dealing with other labor disputes. This board resembles the NLRB, the National Labor Relations Board, which covers non-agricultural workers under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act). With the passage of the ALRA, the UFW was better able to carry out union organizing drives. By the beginning of 1976, over 350 elections had been held, with over 40,000 workers voting, and the UFW had won a majority of them.

Although agribusiness had earlier agreed to the ALRA, it responded to these successes by mobilizing to kill the power of the law and thus to attack the right to collective bargaining for farmworker. When the ALRB ran out of funds in February 1976, only 5 months after it had begun operation, the agribusiness supporters in the state legislature blocked a special appropriations bill. They wouldn't agree to the funding unless amendments were passed which would have killed the effectiveness of the ALRA for farmworkers. Therefore, the ALRB was left with no funds to operate until the following July 1, 1976 when the new state budget went into effect. Agribusiness also went to the courts in an unsuccessful attempt to get the access rule declared unconstitutional.

In response to the attacks on the ALRA by agribusiness, the UFW decided to work for an initiative. (Under California law, voters can place an initiative on the ballot with a petition drive, and once it is passed it can only be amended or repealed by a vote of the electorate.) Proposition 14 was basically the same law as the ALRA. The most important changes were: 1) It directed the legislature to fund the ALRA. (We should note that it did not insure the funding but would have strengthened the chances.) 2) It provided union organizers access to the growers property (fields and housing) and to lists of employees (Access to property to talk to otherwise unaccessible workers had been only a policy of the ALRB and not part of the law.) and 3) The process of decertification was made more difficult.

Proposition 14 did continue to include several negative aspects of the ALRA. One was the limitation on use of the secondary boycott. A second was a limitation on the right to strike. Under the ALRA, when either the union or the employers want to terminate or change the contract before the expiration date, they must give 60 day notice and offer to meet to negotiate. During the 60 day cooling off period there can be no strikes or lock-outs. Thirdly, workers who have been on strike since before August 28, 1972 will not be able to vote in union elections.

Despite these aspects, the overall effect of Proposition 14 would have been to strengthen the campaign for unionization of the farmworkers as well as to protect to some extent this right from attacks of monopoly capital.

Opposition to Proposition 14 was monumental. It has been estimated that the "No on 14" forces spent at least 2 to 3 million dollars on an advertising campaign. Agribusiness ran a slick campaign using small farmers to raise the false issue of protection of private property. The proposition was feared enough that the legislature refunded the ALRB as a defensive measure against 14.

Proposition 14 was defeated in the election. A communist analysis of the reasons still needs to be done. We cannot attribute this defeat primarily to the amount of money spent by the growers, as does the reformist leadership of the UFW.

With the defeat of 14, agribusiness is again attacking the ALRA in the California legislature. Already they've gotten several amendments passed to limit its effectiveness. In doing so, they are attacking the democratic rights of farmworkers to unionize.

EXPOSE OPPORTUNISM

An important aspect of communist leadership of the struggle for democratic rights and the linking of these struggles with socialist revolution is the exposure of opportunism. We must expose reformists within the working class movement such as the CPUSA and the trade union bureaucrats. We must also expose the right and left errors on the questions of reforms made within the Marxist-Leninist movement. These errors are not only a reflection of revisionism, they are also a reflection of the amateurishness, fragmentation, and economism within the M-L movement. Although we must guard against both left and right errors, the right ones are the main danger in the communist and workers' movements today.

Here in San Diego, with the issue of Proposition 14, we have seen examples of both right and left errors. In this article we will analyze the left error-in essence refusal to support democratic reform struggles before the proletarian revolution- which was expressed in a leaflet put out by the Changing Times Bookstore collective several weeks before the election. In a future article we intend to analyze the right errors we saw during the Proposition 14 campaign. The essence of the right error was uncritical support of reforms and glorification and tailing of the spontaneous movement. A weakness of the Marxist-Leninist movement as a whole, which we shared, was the general inability to organize its political work around this struggle-to support and to give communist leadership to the struggle for Proposition 14.

THE LEFT ERROR

Although the Changing Times Collective (CT) uses high sounding phrases like "genuine" reforms, the essence of their line is opposition to reforms. This line shows that they don't understand how communists view and support the fight for reforms. CT's line on reforms has similarities to the left line of the "Revolutionary Wing" and the right line of RCP, both of which liquidate the responsibility of communists to give conscious leadership to mass struggles.

The "Revolutionary Wing" opposes democratic rights, such as the ERA, calling them false reforms. The Wing basically argues that because women cannot achieve full economic and social equality under capitalism, it is reformism and thus incorrect for communists to fight for any reforms-in the case of ERA for formal legal equality for men and women. (see PALANTE, vol. 6, no. 4 and "Defend the Democratic Rights of Women" in the COMMUNIST, vol. II, no. 9) They also oppose the ERA because the bourgeoisie could use it against women, because they don't think a mass movement of working women originated the ERA, and because they think the ERA divides the class, and pits women against men. The Wing took a similar position on this position in opposing busing for not being "revolutionary"- "instead of making reforms everything, they make them nothing." (See "Segregation and Busing"; THE COMMUNIST, vol. 1, no. 9)

The line of the CT on Proposition 14 also has similarities to the right opportunist line of the RCP which liquidates the struggle for busing and for the ERA and sees these struggles as dividing the working class. Such a line doesn't recognize the existing divisions between nationalities, sexes, and the town and country. Moreover, it doesn't recognize that these divisions, nurtured by the capitalist system for its own benefit, will only be overcome by taking up the struggle against the various forms of oppression, including the struggle against the chauvinist, bourgeois ideology that justifies those divisions.

The Changing Times Collective shows a narrow understanding of the role of the state and laws. They argue against Proposition 14, stating that it would bring the state into the struggle, with the farmworkers relying on the state to enforce their right to unionization. CT recognizes that the state is an instrument of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. But they then distort Marxism-Leninism by concluding that under bourgeois democracy legal reforms can never work to the benefit of the working class.

CT fails to understand that it is not the ALRA nor Proposition 14 that involves the state in the farmworkers' struggle. The courts, police, and other governmental agencies have always supported agribusiness against the farmworkers. Proposition 14 does not significantly change this relationship. Its importance is that it legally guarantees the right to collective bargaining, a right which has been the focus of farmworkers' struggles for many years. While we don't expect the bourgeoisie to voluntarily, fully, or permanently to honor this legal right we see the importance of communists exposing the bourgeoisie and their reformist supporters within the workers' movement in the course of the fight to win and extend this right. We also recognize the fact (which the CT seems to have forgotten) that historically the working class has, at least temporarily, won democratic rights in the form of laws-for instance, the eight hour day and the right to vote for women.

The CT collective says that they do not oppose all reforms only those that are not "genuine reforms". In this way they muddle their position, and they obscure that their line opposes all reforms before the proletarian revolution. They begin with a statement of why we should not fight for reforms. "If we spend all our time fighting for (and maybe even winning)

reforms for this or that particular injustice, we will have gained nothing. Capitalist society can always create new injustices faster than the most determined reformist can correct them." They then apparently contradict themselves by stating that we can fight for "genuine reforms" but that these cannot be "utopian schemes" or "counterfeit reforms put forward by the capitalists themselves." With this statement it is clear that the CT doesn't understand what reforms are. They say that "genuine reforms are won as a product of the overall struggle for the revolution." and that "if the farmworkers are to win their just demand for the right to access, they can do it only through their own efforts, through the militancy and the correct direction of their struggle" not through involving the state with a law. But reforms always take the form of law (or else contracts which are upheld by law). Reforms are efforts to change, to "re-form", the law, which the bourgeoisie uses to regulate our lives according to their interests. The CT is apparently establishing new criteria for communist support of a reform- whether it is put out by a militant movement and is not in the form of a law. Communists should instead base their position on the overall effects of a reform (understanding that reforms originate in response to the demands of the masses.) Basically, the CT is concentrating on the subjective will, not understanding how changes are made.

The CT's purism and idealism, another indication of their left error on this issue is shown by their pointing to negative aspects of Proposition 14 as a reason for opposing the entire law. They point to the provisions in 14 (also in the ALRA) which limit the secondary boycott and place limitations on strikes before the expiration of a contract. They also criticize the board being appointed by the Governor instead of being elected and their receiving of high salaries. However, they don't analyze the over-all effect of the total law-legalization of collective bargaining. Nor do they appear to understand that while Marxist-Leninists recognize that full democratic rights cannot be won under imperialism, we still support the fight for some reforms. Remaining pure might make some people feel good, but it does not forward the class struggle.

In the same leaflet the CT calls for a boycott of the November elections and of Proposition 14. Although they say that the reason to boycott 14 is that it is not a "genuine reform", the rest of the leaflet implies that there is never a time when the working class should participate in elections. The leaflet makes clear that the CT opposes working for laws. This is a dogmatic left error we have shown in our discussion on a Marxist-Leninist position on participation in elections.

Finally, the CT never takes up the task of communists in relation to the spontaneous farmworkers movement. Opposition to the current goals of that movement and vague calls for militancy are not sufficient to pass for a communist line on the farmworkers' struggle.

THE TASKS OF COMMUNISTS

We support Proposition 14 and the ALRA as reforms which further the farmworkers' struggle for the democratic rights of collective bargaining. As communists we need to not only have a political line, we also have to organize a way to put out our line and otherwise

GAS SHORTAGE
continued from pg.1

who are themselves largely responsible for the layoffs.) For these workers - facing shut plant gates and the shut pocketbooks of state unemployment bureaucracies - the only recourse will be meagre welfare checks.

Though many of the plant shutdowns and production reductions were forced on some capitalists by the oil monopolies, many view them as a blessing for it gives them an excuse for layoffs that would have occurred anyway due to over-stocked inventories stemming from continuing stagnation in the economy. This is another reason why the official national unemployment level will be nearly 10% throughout the upcoming year.

STATE RESPONDS TO NEEDS OF BOURGEOISIE, NOT WORKERS

Newly elected Jimmy Carter has certainly been living up to the "optimism" that the oil magnates place in him. He has been attempting a slick piece of demagoguery on the US working class, but most aren't buying his pious garbage. First, he preached a message of "national unity", claiming that "we are all in this together". He was trying to tell the workers that they should view as equally suffering the capitalists, who were busy trying to squeeze every last blood-soaked cent out of the workers that they could. Secondly, he was putting out the warning flag that we are just at the first stage of a long-term energy crisis, and that in the national interests (of the bourgeoisie) the masses of people would just have to realize that they had been using up too much heat in their homes and gas in their cars and would have to tighten their belts (another notch) and cut down. Thirdly, he said that he was going to live up to at least one of his campaign promises and give the oil companies what they wanted all along - increased profits through de-regulation of federally-imposed price ceilings on natural gas. He didn't stress this point - it was made under the cover of "getting available supplies where they are needed" - but this is what he meant. Actually, the energy bill does only this--while it lifted the price ceiling from \$1.45 to a maximum of \$2.25 per 1,000 cubic feet of gas shipped between states, it only gives the Federal Energy Commission the "power" to suggest, not enforce, that gas supplies within states, where they are most plentiful, be shipped to out-of-state areas, for example, the hard-hit east coast. The bourgeois state apparatus is quick as lightning when it comes to placing and enforcing with armed police injunctions against striking workers, but when it comes to private property owned by the monopoly capitalists it suddenly puts on kid gloves. The state, while guaranteeing higher prices and increased profits cannot guarantee adequate gas supplies to the areas that need them the most. The state is a willing partner in the oil monopolies extortion plot.

The truth of the matter is that when the oil barons claim that "no gas is available", they did not mean that there were no supplies, but simply that conditions did not exist whereby their sale of the gas would bring them the maximum in profits. Even with the present price increases, they are apparently willing to let the energy crisis sit on the burners a while longer, holding out for even more advantageous

THE COMMUNIST/Page 4

conditions to arise. That could take the form - once the masses had been properly primed by harsh conditions and the politicians' warnings of an "energy shortage era" - of a diversion of government funds from social programs to a subsidy plan for the oil companies. One such program, which was proposed by Gerald Ford in 1975, and was strongly backed by Nelson Rockefeller, was the Energy Independence Authority which called for initial federal backing of \$25 billion, and a long term funding of \$75 billion from the sale of government bonds. This "welfare" program would have in no way compromised the private ownership of oil production and shipping facilities - and profits. The purpose of the plan was to prop up the declining power of the US monopoly capitalists in the world today. In pursuit of this goal the monopoly capitalists generated the "oil crisis" in 1974-5, and now it is the "gas crisis" -- they are patiently extorting the country to get what they want.

BASIS OF PRESENT CRISIS

The present gas shortage stems from two basic features of a capitalist economy: the anarchy of capitalist production, and the fierce competition and drive of the monopolies for the maximum in profit.

The anarchy of capitalist production means that there is no overall social planning that could guarantee the production of necessary commodities on the basis of social need. Capitalist production becomes centered in areas where the greatest profit can be made. This would normally result in an eventual reduction in prices as competition intensifies, but monopolization - as exists in the energy industry - prevents this from happening. This means that vital commodities, particularly things necessary to maintain the lives of the workers, are not produced cheaply and in quantity. Monopolies can withhold production or supplies of commodities, as they did with oil and gas, to create artificial shortages and therefore artificial price increases.

The oil companies exercise tight control over all energy-related commodities. For example, Exxon Corporation pumps nearly 20% of the US gas supply each day; Texaco produces another 10% of the national supply - 18 of the top 20 gas producers are large oil firms. With almost complete control over these commodities, the oil monopolies find it easy to create artificial shortages. In order to boost the profits they receive from the sale of gas to the level of the record profits they had reaped from the "oil crisis", they have contrived the present gas crisis. The fact that this crisis hurt many capitalists should come as no surprise - the development of monopolies has meant an intensification of sharp and fierce inner-capitalist rivalry for maximum profits. Present cries for energy reforms or cries of "foul play" from capitalists and bourgeois politicians merely reflects this intense rivalry. Many companies, in the last five years, shifted from oil to gas in an attempt to escape paying the higher prices for oil that the oil companies had been able to force through. Large capitalist landlords also made this change. But now the oil companies have caught up with them again. As another avenue of escape, some companies have attempted to get into the gas business themselves.

Recently the Libby-Owens-Ford Company bought a 2,000 acre natural gas field with three wells that had been capped since 1975 for \$4 million from the Damson Oil Company. But this avenue of escape is extremely limited due to the oil baron's tight grip on the market.

BACKGROUND TO GAS "SHORTAGE"

The lowest estimates of existing natural gas supplies say we have enough gas to last 40 more years - and these statistics, coming largely from the oil companies who exercise a monopoly over the technology needed for this type of investigation, are undoubtedly lower than fact. The present "shortage" of natural gas - called methane - was first raised in 1968 after the Federal Power Commission denied a price increase to companies producing natural gas. There had been no substantiated gas shortage before this - as a matter of fact, oil companies were still burning off natural gas deposits so they could get more quickly at the more profitable oil underneath them. (This is still done in the Middle East on the basis that conversion and shipping costs are prohibitive.) In 1968 there was a leak from the FPC to the press that said the gas companies were understating their supplies by 42%. Despite this fact and in response to the false claims, in 1969 John Nassikas, the new head of the FPC, a former lawyer for private utility companies, secretary-treasurer for 30 corporations and a stockholder in Standard Oil and Mobile Oil, allowed price increases. This resulted in an increase in the production of gas from the 1967 level of 49.784 million cubic feet per day (mfpd) to a peak of 62.048 mfpd in 1973, when it began a decline to the 1976 level of 54.21 mfpd. Though the price increases started in 1969 had, by 1972, resulted in \$5 billion in added revenues for the oil monopolies, apparently this was not enough. The struggle for profits is for the maximum in profits. So gas deposits were capped, production was held up and gas supplies were shifted from interstate markets where federal guidelines had jurisdiction to intra-state markets where they did not. The oil industry openly stated that only the total removal of price ceilings would guarantee the "discovery" of adequate gas supplies:

"Oil and gas supplies are still held too low to promote an adequate level of development and encourage broad-based conservation efforts ("conservation" stemming from the fact that gas is too expensive to buy-ed.).

"President Carter's chief economic adviser seems to be on the right track. Commenting on the failure of regulation, he said the time may be ripe to bring Adam Smith to Washington."

"His invisible hand of competition can do more to balance supply and demand in a rational way than all the President's men and Congress too. Only de-regulation can assure increased gas supply." (OIL AND GAS JOURNAL, Jan. 31, 1977)

EARLY GAS CRISIS IN TEXAS

PROP 14 Cont. from p.3

support the struggles for reforms. We should always maintain an independent communist position, criticizing and opposing negative aspects of reforms. Without involvement of communists in the struggles of farmworkers, the leadership of that struggle will remain in the hands of reformists. As part of winning the leadership of the spontaneous movement,

What in fact can the working class expect from so-called "rational" competition that de-regulation will cause? A good example would be to look at the way gas is utilized in Texas, where, because it is within the state, the federal regulations did not apply.

There is a lot of gas available in Texas, but it is selling at \$2 and more per 1,000 cubic feet and so is not sold outside where it is needed because then it would have been sold at \$1.42 per 1,000 cubic feet. Six years ago 50% of this gas had been shipped out of state, but now it is only 27%. Because of the high prices that companies have been able to charge for their gas, millions of consumers have seen their bills triple in size. In the major cities, such as San Antonio, working class families have been forced to sell their homes because they became unable to afford the monthly utility bills. Also, small farmers have been driven out of business because they could not afford to pay for the gas needed to pump water for irrigation which is crucial to farmers in that area. For example, they were paying 35¢ per 1,000 cubic feet in 1974, but in 1975 the gas companies demanded \$1.85 per 1,000 cubic feet - an increase of over 500% in one year. Now that price is up to \$2.00. In 1975, in the area around Pecos, Texas alone, 600 families involved in farming were unable to plant their crops.

So, due to the "rational" competition in Texas, working class families were forced to sell their homes, small farmers were completely ruined and many small businesses had to close, adding to the unemployment. As far back as 1973, in San Antonio, which literally sits on a huge reservoir of natural gas, the city had to adopt emergency conservation measures, residents were asked to turn down their thermostats to 55° and street lighting was greatly reduced. In other words the standards of living for the great majority plummeted while the few who owned the gas companies reaped huge profits.

CONCLUSION

The present gas shortage is clearly an artificial one produced by the oil monopolies to further increase their profits and enable them to further establish their complete hegemony over all areas of energy related commodities. They will continue their extortion until the rate of profit they get from the sale of gas is at a minimum equal to what they already get for other commodities such as oil, and which gives them an advantage over other monopoly capitalists in the fierce struggle for domination. As this battle rages in the arena of capitalist competition, it will certainly accelerate the working class to move forward in defense of its own class interests in bitter opposition to the entire US capitalist class.

we must expose right and left opportunism. In addition, we must work to link the struggles for democratic rights with the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, where such rights will be fully realized. We should extend our workplace and trade union methods of work with the urban proletariat to work with the rural proletariat and include the rural proletariat in our efforts to win the vanguard to communism and build a new communist party.

SUPPORT THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING!