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New York, N.Y. 10014  
January 16, 1976

To National Committee Members, Organizers, and  
Trade Union Directors

Dear Comrades,

The attached article by Sid Lens appeared  
in the September issue of Chicago magazine,  
which was a description of what Chicago would  
look like in the year 2001. We thought it  
would be of interest.

Comradely,

*Doug Jenness* *for*  
Doug Jenness  
SWP National Office

"THE CITY WILL HAVE A LABOR PARTY MAYOR."

by Sidney Lens

By the time the twenty-first century rolls around, the Chicago labor movement will have been transformed into a political party and the city will have a Labor Party mayor. So says Ed Sadlowski, director of District 31 of the United Steelworkers of America, who last year won the most dramatic upset of a labor bureaucracy in decades, and who in November will challenge the I. W. Abel machine for the national presidency of that union.

Sادلowski does not believe that the present union structure can survive the "assault of the multinational corporations and the conglomerates unless it makes political action its primary concern." The "big guys," he says, "are getting bigger and bigger, and we need political muscle to beat them."

As Sadlowski sees it, collective bargaining will be a minor activity by the year 2001; most of the conditions of work, including wage patterns and all social benefits such as health insurance, will be spelled out in national legislation. The local unions will acquire a new character --concentrating on enforcement of the laws within their jurisdictions, settling grievances, and, above all, beefing up a grassroots political arm. The steelworkers' leader expects the coalition of labor-union women, the various black caucuses, and white mavericks like himself to give the movement what the French philosopher Henri Bergson called the "vital impetus" for change.

Jim Wright, assistant director of the 180,000-member Region 4 of the United Auto Workers, and one of the leading black unionists in the city, says, "Discrimination will decrease to an extent, and we will certainly have a black as head of the Chicago Federation of Labor." On the negative side, however, he fears that collective bargaining will be emasculated by hosts of no-strike agreements such as already exist in the steel industry and have been endorsed by George Meany.

Wright does not see the development toward the twenty-first century as an orderly one. Chicago will have had a black mayor by then, but the pendulum will be swaying back toward the choice of whites for that office. The citizens of the city will grow more and more sympathetic to socialism--"because Chicago has always been a strong union and radical town"--but there won't be a Labor Party in power until at least five or ten years later.

The ranks of Chicago labor will expand, but not evenly. Blue-collar unionization will be at a standstill; white collar and public employee organization will grow at least five-fold. The unions will challenge "bigness" in management by becoming bigger themselves. Wright expects that the 150-odd national unions will merge and then break apart, and that local unions in Chicago will follow apace--so that many will have tens of thousands of members, instead of a few hundred or a few thousand as today.

Not unexpectedly, the top figure in Chicago labor, William Lee, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor and a close friend of Mayor Daley, believes the changes by 2001 will be more restrained. Lee, a tall Irishman who has been president of the CFL for twenty-nine years and before that was president of Bakery Drivers Local 734, a teamster affiliate, for twenty years, expects that labor will win many victories in the next quarter-century--but by pursuing traditional, not new, methods.

"By 2001," he says, "we will have a shorter work week, say thirty-two to thirty-six hours. Union organization will speed up in the service, retail, and government employee fields where we are now weak. Collective bargaining will be what it is today, but will be extended to public and other employees who don't have it now."

Will we have a labor Party? Lee doesn't think so. "I don't know if this country is ready for it. But labor will play a far more important role in politics than today. It will be the balance of power."

Lee's administrative assistant, Al Towers, who was once president of the Chicago Industrial Union Council, agrees with most of his associate's estimates, but not all.

"The prospects for growth," argues Towers, "are enormous. By 2001 we will be proportionately as big and powerful as the British labor movement. The AFL-CIO will then have 50 million members, and Chicago's half-million will multiply apace." Towers expects the teamsters and auto workers to be back in the central labor federation and collective bargaining to be relatively unchanged. He foresees the emergence of a Labor Party in Chicago, but as a reform, not a radical, movement. "There is no trend toward socialism in this country," he says. "We can expect that capitalism will still be powerful in 2001."

The strongest dissenter from this view is Jack Spiegel, Lake States district director of the shoe workers' union, a lifelong radical who makes no bones about his views.

"By 2001," he asserts, "we will have a new labor leadership in Chicago that will be radical in philosophy and totally disassociated from any old-line political machine. America itself, he claims, will be in the "first stages of a socialist society, most of its major industries having been nationalized. But it will be a socialism unlike any known today."

Under these circumstances, Chicago labor will play a different role from the present one. "There will still be collective bargaining, but unions and workers will have a deciding voice on how factories are run. The unions themselves will be far more democratic, subject to the wishes of their rank and file, and the standard of living will be much higher and far better balanced." Labor, says Spiegel, will consolidate a great coalition of minorities, including blacks, women, Chicanos, and the like. He anticipates that the unions will not only be part of the government in this city, as elsewhere and nationally, but very likely the most important segment.

Obviously there is an element of either wish fulfillment or self justification in all these judgments. Clearly, however, the character of the labor movement in Chicago will depend on what happens to the nation as a whole.

Chicago did not capitalize on the 1930s, as did Detroit and San Francisco. No big successful strikes took place here, and the unsuccessful Little Steel walkout that ended in the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 did nothing to strengthen Chicago's role.

Chicago's union structure, therefore, is generally conservative, as typified by its largest union, the teamsters. Wages are comparatively high, and the union leaders have a strong say in the Daley Machine. But idealism and the sense of solidarity are weaker today than in the days of Fitzpatrick fifty years ago.

How much of that will change is anyone's guess. Chances are, however, that labor, nationally and in Chicago, will undergo the same overhaul as it did in the 1930s when it moved from craft to industrial unionism, and from simple to "social" unionism; or in the 1880s when it shifted from "uplift" to "bread and butter" unionism.

Since America itself cannot stand still, but must decide between glaringly different alternatives, so labor probably faces a total remolding of its structure, philosophy, methods, and orientation.

Chicago, after all, is part of America