

14 Charles Lane  
New York, New York 10014  
June 1, 1974

TO ALL ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The recently concluded 3-year survey by Yankolevich & associates confirms what reports from several branches have been saying--that the radicalization has affected sectors of the working class.

Enclosed are some first-hand reports of working class actions and our participation in them, as follows:

1) The report from San Francisco about the Sears strike and the strike of municipal workers that almost became a general strike gives further information about our participation in these events than was appropriate for news coverage in The Militant. (Articles on this development ran at intervals from the beginning of this year until the story on the successful conclusion of the Sears strike in the May 17 issue, p. 11. Some of the Militant articles on the San Francisco Carpenters' strike last November-December, referred to in this report, are included in the pamphlet, "Construction Workers Under Attack" - Nat Weinstein and others.)

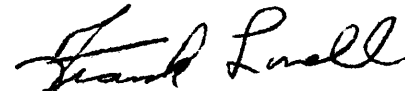
2. The report from Los Angeles contains a reference to the Militant coverage of that event. (see Militant, May 10, 1974 p. 3).

3) The correspondence with a steel worker and with teachers in Texas is part of the necessary preparation for informative articles that will appear in future issues of The Militant.

These reports provide some examples of how we apply the lessons we are learning from Teamster Rebellion and Teamster Power.

They can be useful for branch educationals on how we participate in the union movement today.

Comradely,



Frank Lovell  
Trade Union Director

REPORT ON SAN FRANCISCO SEARS STRIKE  
AND CITY WORKERS STRIKE

Recently in San Francisco, a sequence of labor struggles reached a height that approached a general strike in scope. The city workers struck, setting off a series of allied and supporting stoppages. The San Francisco teachers hooked on to the city strike in solidarity and to gain momentum for the pressing of their own demands. Bus drivers (MUNI, city surface transit system) respected picket lines and stopped bus service inside San Francisco, rapid transit workers (BART) respected picket lines stopping subway service in San Francisco, Oakland-S.F. bus drivers (A.C. Transit) stopped this intercity bus service one day and then crossed lines, and finally, longshoremen had begun to close down the port. Golden Gate Transit, the bus service between S.F. and Marin county, had been shut down and reopened by police. The San Mateo Central Labor Council announced publicly that at its next meeting (the Friday the strike was settled) it would consider closing down the S.F. airport in solidarity with the city workers.

The extension of the strike by placing pickets at first one, then another, of the above transit facilities and on the last day of the strike carrying the picketing to the docks, gave a snowballing effect to the strike.

At a high point in this rapidly unfolding display of pent-up discontent, a resolution was introduced into the S.F. Central Labor Council (CLC) calling for a one-day work stoppage. The resolution had been circulated by Sears strikers among a spectrum of leading labor bureaucrats. Reportedly (we never saw the signed list of endorsers) it was endorsed by official representatives of the Retail Clerks, Painters, Carpenters, Plumbers, Longshoremen, teachers, city workers and others. It was introduced and motivated by only two of the reported endorsers, Walter Johnson, Retail Clerks and James Ballard, S.F. AFT. No reference by either speaker was made to other endorsers and none of these other endorsers who were present spoke.

On the one hand, the speeches for the resolution were greeted by enthusiastic applause by the council delegates. On the other hand, after opposing arguments were presented by two Sailors union representatives, there was no significant participation in the discussion by rank and file delegates. There was no attempt by the chair to stifle discussion.

The resolution itself was designed to avoid, to the extent such a thing is possible, the appearance of criticism or challenge to the formal leaders of S.F. labors by the makers of the resolution. For this reason, it contained no date and left implementation to the CLC executive board. Even so, the AFT's Ballard felt constrained, after speaking effectively for the resolution, to move to refer to the executive board without, in effect, any recommendation by the delegates.

It is worth noting here the highlights of Ballard's speech motivating the work stoppage resolution. Ballard motivated Johnson's proposal on the basis that the strikes named in the resolution were not simply routine collective bargaining disputes. He said that "labor is facing a test" both here in S.F. and throughout the country. If labor doesn't meet this test in a united fashion, he explained, it could mean greater challenges and defeats in the future.

The referral motion was carried with only a sprinkling of opposition.

Two incidents, however, underscore the tense, near-crisis atmosphere barely beneath the surface. Normally the meetings of this body are open to all members of S.F. unions to observe the proceedings. This time, without even the formality of declaring the meeting in executive session, non-delegates were excluded--even those vouched for by officials.

The second occurrence came during the discussion of referral of the resolution. An old-time rank-and-file militant was rudely interrupted and prevented from speaking by shouts from the floor that he was not speaking to the point. These shouts came as soon as it became clear that he was speaking on the subject--he was trying to explain why he was against the resolution without the body registering an opinion on the substance of the resolution. (A favorite trick of these bureaucrats is to cover their disruptive tactics by acting the part of no-nonsense business-like rank and filers who rise in impatient indignation at long-winded speakers who are not even talking to the point.) This poor old-timer had been speaking for perhaps a minute, when he was shouted down. He lost his cool and was not effective thereafter.

The resolution included a call for a mass rally on the day of the stoppage. This was an echo of the previous meeting of this body, two weeks earlier. At that time Walter Johnson had introduced a resolution calling for a "general membership meeting of all S.F. unions" to consider ways and means to meet the attack on labor as exemplified by Sears' union-busting policy and related problems of working people. This resolution was referred too. It was "referred to the Secretary" (of the CLC) by the Secretary himself (Jack Crowley). Johnson took the floor at this point to ask if that meant that only the question of implementation--the setting of a date and the actual organization of the meeting--was to be referred? Crowley answered: Yes.

This little byplay reflected the backstage maneuvering going on and which continued into the subsequent meeting two weeks later. Crowley, repeatedly, would agree in private consultations to virtually any proposal made by the hard-pressed Retail Clerks to bring aid to the long strike. Nothing had come of these promises. The two meetings described above reflected a growing recognition that more than diplomatic behind-the-scenes fraternal armtwisting was necessary.

Four days after the work stoppage resolution was presented to the CLC meeting, the city workers strike was settled.

What are we to make of the chain of events culminating in the city strike? What was the impact of our participation, which was significantly greater in this arena than in recent years?

The Bay Area branches had taken note of some meaningful changes in S.F. unions so that from the first day of the Sears strike, in response to a call by these workers for support to their picket lines, we responded. Walter Johnson, Sec.-Treasurer of Local 1100, representing Sears workers and Jim Herman, Pres. of Local 34, ILWU were the moving spirits behind previous attempts at united labor

action, first in support of the over 4-month-long strike of long-shoremen in 1972 and then in organizing a general labor protest against rising prices and frozen wages in April, 1973. With the start of the Sears strike, these two initiated a Labor-Community Support Coalition to rally support behind the Teamsters, Clerks, Machinists, and Electricians unions.

After four months, two Teamsters locals accepted settlements and broke a pact made by striking unions at the beginning of the Sears strike to stay out until all grievances were settled. After Teamsters began crossing picket lines, Sears made public a proposal to the union that knowledgeable unionists agree amounted to a signal of intent to bust the Retail Clerks union at Sears. Sears strikers overwhelmingly rejected the proposal even though the real losers seemed to be only the minority of higher paid "big ticket" salespeople.

It was at this point that we offered to do more to help. One of our comrades approached the leadership of the union and the strike explaining that the SWP considered the outcome of this strike to be far-reaching for all labor and that we were deeply concerned. Our comrade indicated we were prepared to do what we could to help prevent a defeat and win a victory if possible. The authoritative strike leaders responded favorably and a meeting was set up between representatives of the strike committee, including Walter Johnson, and the two Bay Area branches. Collaboration continued along these lines up to the present.

We were extremely careful in these discussions to make clear the practical limits of our help: 1. We were far too small to affect the outcome simply through the addition of our own forces and that of those directly influenced by us. And, 2. that the key to any real change in the relation of forces was the degree to which the official union movement could be made to respond to this attempt to set back S.F. labor.

We explained further that our reinforcement of picket lines should be seen in this light. Thus such intensified activity could only be of short duration and was subordinate to a conscious and deliberate orientation toward bringing pressure to bear on official labor bodies to take responsibility for winning this strike.

We proposed a course of action on two connected levels. First, a mass labor conference was projected which would discuss and organize concrete aid to the strike. Ideally, such a conference would be sponsored and organized by the official central labor body, the CLC. Short of that, such an assembly could take place and be meaningful if it had at least nominal endorsement from this body or something very close to that. The key that made such a project feasible -- at least avoiding the disaster of a poor turnout, given the half-hearted foot-dragging likely from the labor bureaucracy -- was the sizeable Local 1100 membership itself. A respectable sized meeting could be fairly assured justifying the risk of building it as a convening of united S.F. labor.

Second, we proposed reviving the United Labor Action Committee as the instrument to both bring immediate reinforcements to the picket lines and to increase the pressure on official labor bodies.

Both proposals were implemented, approximately at least, and were modest successes. The conference was changed to a rally to which 1500 people came. Many politicians and some fewer labor officials were present. CLC Secretary Crowley spoke promising aid to the strike. The representative of the State AFL-CIO promised to put Sears on the "Don't Patronize" list (for those who might not know, this is a joke.) The capitalist politicians outdid each other with pro-labor rhetoric.

Just the same, with all the limits this thing had, it was positive. The SF Chronicle reporter who covered the story put his finger on the essential positiveness of the meeting, despite his intent. Seeking to ridicule the event, he characterized it as "an old-fashioned labor rally." It was appropriate. Here were gathered in one hall, besides those mentioned on the platform, maybe a thousand "middle class" mostly middle-aged women department store workers, representatives from the farm workers, the Farah strike, and a sprinkling--maybe as many as 300--varied trade union activists. Outside the entrance most of the political tendencies to the left of the Communist Party sold their press. Inside, when one of the speakers alluded to the antiwar stand of Local 1100, a rousing cheer went up from the audience. When a woman trade-unionist supporter sent up a note pointing out the "oversight" that a rally to support strikers, most of whom were women, did not have a single woman on the platform the chairman invited her up. This rectification was enthusiastically endorsed by cheers from the audience.

All in all, it represented, in embryo, the coming together of almost all stages of the recent radicalization process in the U.S. It was truly close to an "old-fashioned labor rally." Of the kind where various oppressed groups and social movements are brought together under working-class auspices symbolizing the central position of labor in the over-all struggle for social justice.

The rally, occurring some four weeks after our commitment, was also the pre-determined point we had set to take stock of our active participation. We assessed it as follows: The rally was in itself a step toward garnering needed support from official labor bodies. It served as a focus for general efforts to mobilize individual unions and rank and file activists in day to day support actions. A speakers bureau organized through the support committee spoke at many local unions explaining the issues and urging support to the picket lines, the rally and other aid. The response especially where we had union members was revealing of the potential. In the Painters union these were the major support actions: 1. \$50 per month donation for duration of strike, 2. At least 10 pickets per week organized and dispatched out of the union office, 3. An assessment of \$1 per month per member for the duration of the strike, up to six months. (The circumstances around this proposal is worth noting. It was presented a week before the rally and tentatively approved and finally voted on a couple of weeks after the rally. It passed by a 2 to 1 majority. There was opposition from the chief bureaucrat in this local, Morris Evenson, who was backed into a corner by the sentiment of the members and a majority of the other officials.)

A similar proposal was presented in a carpenter's local here, by a union member who had been centrally involved in the 7-week carpenter's struggle. The meeting was larger than usual because of

related issues scheduled to come up at the meeting, hanging over from the work stoppage. The chief official here, Joe O'Sullivan, a little smarter than his painter counterpart, offered a substitute motion of a \$1000 straight contribution to the strikers, which passed.

Following the rally there was a series of weekly mobilizations for picketing at a selected store. The actions were surprisingly well attended and effective. Many of the participants were people we had had contact with in other spheres of activity such as carpenter activists in the work stoppage last year. A few fulltime union officials began to emerge as regular and serious picketers. The political level of most of these union-conscious militants was symbolized by the "Alioto for Governor" buttons sported by many of them.

In this period of Saturday mobilizations a kind of "debate" shaped up over what to do next to win the strike. A number of officials, not the ones picketing regularly but others who were showing up as if to make the record and keep track of what was going on (they would not really picket, they huddled from one gate to another) began to raise anew their proposal for a work stoppage as the only solution to the strike impasse. From the beginning of our increased participation, people like Jim Herman, ILWU, for example, would counterpose this tactic to more modest proposals like the rally.

It was not an accident that those raising this idea happened to be identified with unions that had suffered marked setbacks in the way of government intervention that took away wages negotiated, signed and sealed, and in each case following strikes. (The two other vocal advocates of a one-day work stoppage were Evenson of the painters and O'Sullivan of the carpenters unions). Being under the most heat, they felt compelled to take a demagogic stance to the left of the bureaucracy as a whole--without really rocking the boat. The six-week long unofficial carpenters strike must have evoked the specter of a new revival of rank and file initiative and the thought must also have occurred to them that this surprising carpenter upsurge might be only the tip of an iceberg.

For other reasons Walter Johnson was swept up by this ultimatic approach. He was concerned however, by our coolness to this proposal. He wanted to know why--what we really thought about it. We explained that to our mind what was important were the practical steps that led to the kind of aid that in principle underlay the work stoppage tactic--the real solidarity and support of the S.F. labor movement. From the outset we had dismissed the work stoppage proposal as unrealistic and in the given context, demagogic and diversionary. We proposed, in contrast, another version of the general theme guiding our participation--a general membership meeting open to all members of S.F. unions. We suggested that a resolution be introduced into the CLC along these lines.

Following this suggestion, Walter Johnson, accompanied by a delegation of about 50 strikers as observers, introduced the resolution to the CLC. The exchange described earlier took place. (Crowley had nominally agreed to implement a general membership meeting.) Inconclusive as it was, we considered the outcome a big step forward, and so did Johnson.

In our view, it fit into one of the chief tasks a proletarian leadership must carry out--to develop consciousness among workers of their power when organized independently as a class for working class interests. Contrariwise, the labor bureaucracy consciously and unconsciously seeks to prove the opposite. At every step along the road they blame the ranks for their own cowardice, short-sightedness, corruption, impotence and paralyzed awe before the powers of capital. At every step, we sought by our actions, and proposals for action, to demonstrate that the only real obstacle in the way of the workers effectively dealing blow for blow against the bosses is the incapacity and unwillingness of the so-called labor leadership to lead workers in a fight for their own class interests.

Thus the introduction and nominal acceptance of the general membership meeting resolution was a step forward in that it pointed towards a practical path to victory for the Sears strikers and tended to put the onus for a defeat, if that should happen, where it belonged, on the class-collaborationist labor bureaucrats who would not follow the indicated class struggle path.

Less than two weeks after the CLC meeting they put the fate of the Sears workers into the hands of Brother Crowley, who was now empowered to implement a general membership meeting to consider and organize ways and means to end the strike favorably for the workers, the city workers went on strike. The dynamic of the development of the city workers strike changed the objective possibilities open for the Sears strikers, that is, had there been a modicum of leadership in the top echelons of S.F. labor.

Besides the unexpected and impressive display of workers solidarity that gave the city workers' strike a power that was inspirational, there was a parallel expression of something new in the air. That was the truly amazing sympathy for the strike by the general population. Although seriously inconvenienced--many had to walk miles each day to get to work--there was no sign of any antagonism to the strikers. The overriding justice of the workers' demands and the concomitant cold arrogance of the city officialdom, united the "public" behind the strike. It was just another expression of changing consciousness which was responsible in the first place for the dynamism of the strike.

The attempt by the bourgeoisie to whip up sentiment against "illegal" strikes by government employees never got off the ground. Even the attempt to whip up a hysteria against the "unconscionable act" (Mayor Alioto's gem) of labor solidarity of the busdrivers stalled dead in its tracks. The "sewage in the Bay" horror issue got barely little more mileage.

Mayor Alioto, campaigning hard for the Democratic party's nomination for Governor, was hard-pressed to retain credibility as "labor's candidate." His fortunes appeared to go up and down as he maneuvered absurdly and desperately between his obvious role as employer and his patently sham role of mediator.

The hard line against the strike was narrowed to the S.F. Chamber of Commerce and a few other isolated mouthpieces of the ruling class. A particularly insidious participant in this camp was a certain Rudy Tham, allegedly representing Teamsters who challenged the right of the SEIU (the union representing the



majority of the organized city workers) to negotiate for city employees. Challenging the authority and legitimacy of the strike itself, he stood alone among labor bureaucrats with the audacity to act out openly a judas role.

However, the confidence of capital was clearly behind Alioto's soft-cop approach. At the end of the strike the Mayor summed up this assessment of the real situation. He addressed himself to the hard line espoused by the Chamber of Commerce, the Governor and the judge who almost surrealistically declared the strike illegal, ordered everybody back to work forthwith, and ordered the Mayor to order the police to enforce his original order. Alioto pointed out in a TV newscast that had he listened to these "irresponsible" voices "we would have a general strike on our hands, now, with much violence and bloodshed." That this was not an overstatement of the explosiveness of the real situation was bolstered by a rueful reference in the same statement to the fact that "labor was united" in that struggle.

This evaluation of the changed level of consciousness and new combativity in the city workers strike corresponded to a parallel evaluation we had been coming to in regard to the serious consequences of the attack on Sears workers. We had observed a level of response that most of us did not expect. It had seemed from the beginning that our assessment would not seem credible to most workers--that this attack on this small group of workers posed a serious threat to all S.F. labor. That a setback at Sears would not only change the relation of forces between the department stores (most of which were "conglomerate" owned) and the relevant unions but also "puncture the myth" of S.F. being a solid union town. To our surprise and gratification this abstract logic was readily grasped by those workers informed of the facts. Why?

To put it in a nutshell: the meaning of Nixon's New Economic Policy, launched in 1971, the significance of which we have patiently explained since that time has come home to many American workers. In some cases--as with the independent truckers, the carpenters, the miners, etc.--with a bang. That living standards are indeed going down, and more importantly, the feeling is growing that the underlying crises are not going to go away. Topping it off is the crass, guileless and heavy handed bias of government policy against the exploited and for the exploiter. Add Watergate and the Energy Crisis and it explains why workers more readily drew the ominous implications in the long drawn out Sears strike.

These responses may well be symptomatic of general moods nationally and harbingers of more to come on a grander scale in the not too distant future.

It was in the light of this sequence of events and our gradual understanding of their significance that the proposal of certain bureaucrats for a general work stoppage required another look.

The city workers strike was three days old. A scheduled Saturday picket at Sears was turned into a CLC-sponsored rally. It was formally called in defiance of an injunction against picketing at that Sears store (Geary Street). On the speakers platform were an assortment of labor representatives and a few politicians. (It should be noted here that two SWP members spoke at this rally.



One as a candidate for congress and the other as a supporter of the strike, representing his local union). On the picket lines that day were several hundred pickets including new faces from the city workers and teachers now also on strike. That morning we had issued a campaign statement, for this rally, reporting the general membership meeting action of the CLC and the public calls for a one-day general work stoppage by prominent officials, naming Carpenter B.A. and Building Trades Council President Joe O'Sullivan as one example. We endorsed both the action and the proposal and called on the labor movement to set a date. At the rally, we were told by a Sears strike leader that Crowley was going to announce plans for the stoppage. As could be expected, he didn't. Johnson and Evenson, however, did propose the action again and other officials endorsed the idea from the speaking platform.

Sears workers, with our encouragement, asked Evenson what he intended to do about it. He suggested they draft such a resolution and together on Monday morning they would circulate it among officials seeking endorsements. And then submit it to the CLC meeting that night. Sears strikers asked us to help draft it. We did that. It thereafter underwent a series of changes as it was circulated. At the last moment the date was taken out at Crowley's insistence. The outcome, as outlined earlier, confirmed our estimate of the function of the "work stoppage" proposal to the bureaucrats who had been mouthing it. Our shift to support to this proposal helped to strip these fakers of their pretense of "militancy" as they disappeared into the wings when the issue was joined in the CLC meeting.

Our part may have been the weight that tipped the scales toward the issue actually being discussed on the floor of the SF CLC. Why was it correct now? Why at this point did it not in our opinion, serve as a diversion from some other more practical proposal for raising the level of class consciousness? Why was it not now "off the wall"? We had to be cognizant not only of resisting the pressures of the ultra-lefts and other opportunists but also not to allow their advocacy of a given proposition to stand in the way of our responding objectively to the concrete situations as they unfold. (It should be noted here that our ultraleft opponents displaying the knack of raising certain transitional demands at inappropriate times and in classically infantile ways had almost no effect on the unfolding of events. It seemed as if they were a group of extras in a stageplay reading lines from a script from another play.)

The call for a one-day work stoppage before the city strike erupted was artificial and unrelated to that stage of the struggle. It had no connection with the experience workers were going through. But during the city strike where there already had evolved a spreading of the strike that closely approached a modestly effective general strike, the tactic would appear comprehensible to the workers of this city. Reports were coming in from comrades on the picket lines that the pickets were discussing a general strike. The fact that the motion was on the floor of the CLC no doubt contributed to the threat already implicit in the snowballing city strike -- strengthening the bargaining position of city workers (as Alioto's comments mentioned earlier testify to).

Moreover, if the motion had indeed passed--particularly with the date, the upcoming Friday, left in--it would have happened, if there was no settlement. In any case, settled or not, a scheduled one-day general strike and mass rally would have driven home to both workers and bosses, the fact that no union was going to be busted in S.F. without a knowckdown dragout fight! It would have also put the moral authority of the entire S.F. labor movement behind the teachers' strike. It would have raised the level of class consciousness. It would have driven home the real meaning of the class struggle going on at that moment in S.F. It would have been an inspiring example for the whole U.S. working class.

At this point the Sears strike continues. To our amazement they recently voted by secret ballot by something like 150 to 2 to continue the strike! We are continuing to do what we can to help. Our scale of participation continues to be gauged to what is realistic.

Our participation was perhaps crucial in three ways. First we brought our small reinforcements to bear when it counted for much more because of the critical stage the strike was at at that moment. Second, we helped point these workers toward the necessary task of involving the larger forces. Third, we made it difficult for the bureaucrats to blame the workers for their own defaults, inadequacies and crimes.

Most important perhaps was the exceptional teamwork, the frank discussion, argument and problem-solving approach of all the comrades on both sides of the Bay which enabled us to absorb much more from the experience than would otherwise be possible.

I think we can say with assurance that in the eyes of our comrades as a whole (which is no small factor) and of sympathizers and simple acquaintances of the party, we have made good gains.

#### GAINS TO PARTY

Several comrades in various unions on both sides of the Bay were able to announce Sears support activities and in some cases form Sears support committees in their local unions. The YSA at S.F. State University sponsored a city strike support rally along with the teachers union and student government, attended by 500 students. Major officials of the AFT and SEIU spoke at the rally. At the height of the city workers strike, the S.F. branch sold 1,053 Militants in the City and Berkeley sold well too. Over the past few months, several hundred Militants have been sold to workers at picket lines and rallies, primarily to carpenters, teachers, city workers, and Sears strikers.

The party is presently sponsoring a class series on how to build a class struggle left wing in the unions. This class is intended as a follow-up for several trade union militants and other party sympathizers we've come into contact with in the recent labor developments in the Bay Area.

#### ROLE OF CP

The role of the Communist Party in United Labor Action Committee and the Sears strike has been peripheral and at times sectarian. Joe Figaretto, a leading CP'er and B.A. for ILWU Local 6, attends ULAC meetings regularly. Occasionally Archie Brown and an entourage

of young CP workers would appear at ULAC meetings but only recently have they participated in the weekly Saturday afternoon mass picketing. Coverage of the Sears strike in the People's World has been conspicuously absent.

In the preparation for the mass labor solidarity rally of 1500 in February, the CP intervened in ULAC meetings proposing to convert the predominantly trade unionist based ULAC into a broad "people's movement" coalition embracing struggles against all evils.

RED-BAITING

For a time, there was a different of opinion in 1100 on our right to sell Militants at picket lines and rallies and we never forced the issue. We've since reached an understanding that the Militant should be sold since it's the only paper with good coverage of the strike.

REPORT FROM LOS ANGELES -- MAY 13, 1974

It was not possible to give a full report of the developments among the county workers of Los Angeles in the Militant article. In this letter I will fill in some of this material. In addition, there are some important national implications we should be aware of, and should be preparing for. Finally, I want to give you a report on our participation in the events.

Los Angeles County employs 79,000 workers. In the aftermath of the 1966 social workers strike, led by Social Services Union, Local 535, and following a 280 (yes, two hundred eighty) day strike by Local 535 against Sacramento County, the state legislature passed the Myers-Milius-Brown Act. MMB, in essence, allows public employers to establish collective bargaining machinery, requires that public employers "meet and confer in good faith" with representatives of employee organizations, and allows for "memoranda of understanding" (contracts) to be signed.

The Los Angeles County Employees Association, which had long been a company union, fought vigorously against L.A. County's efforts to establish collective bargaining. It went to court to oppose the Employee Relations Ordinance passed by the county, but was defeated after several years of court battles. In 1970, the first collective bargaining elections were held. And the Employees Association lost the first several. Its officials, scared about their future, began shopping around for an international union to affiliate with. They settled on the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and became Local 660 of the SEIU. Its top officials have seven-year contracts. This outfit, LACEA/Local 660, has not undergone any fundamental transformation since becoming a union. Its staff and officials remain. Even its old constitution remains. In fact, there is no provision for a strike vote in its constitution. The executive board is empowered to call or stop a strike. It has about 30,000 members, distributed throughout most county departments.

The hospitals are organized by Los Angeles County Employees Union, Local 434 (SEIU), headed by Elinor Glenn, who is also west-coast VP of CLUW. She's an old ex-Stalinist, who runs her union, from what I've heard over the years, with a very firm hand. It has perhaps 5-7,000 members, and is the second largest county union. Local 535, social workers, was originally a sub-committee of Local 434.

Social Services Union, Local 535, in decline for the past four years (since 1296 social workers were demoted), has about two thousand members in the welfare department. It has exclusive representation only for the few hundred social workers who remain. Representation for the 3500 eligibility workers is in the hands of a "joint council" of Locals 535 and 660. This was a decision of SEIU at the time 660 affiliated. The clerical staff is exclusively represented by 660.

When collective bargaining procedures were set up in 1970, the county was divided up into 41 collective bargaining units. Negotiating teams from each of these units, consisting predominantly of workers, negotiated 41 different contracts in separate negotiations. And while many contract provisions are identical

from one unit to another, there are certain notable differences, especially the widespread differences in salaries for the county's many classifications of workers.

Some unions exist only in one department, such as 535 in welfare, 434 in the hospitals, and the AFSCME probation officers union in the probation department. Local 660 exists throughout most of the departments. Some collective bargaining units only exist in a single department, while others (Clerical with 17,000 being the most significant) cut across departmental boundaries.

Thus, L.A. County's collective bargaining procedures are designed to promote the maximum amount of confusion and discord among the workers and the unions. This has worked pretty well, from the county's point of view, which is why it was designed.

This spring, however, the top officials of the unions found themselves in a situation different from previous years. Inflation was really jetting along. The credibility of the government is at an all-time low as a result of Watergate, etc. San Francisco's nine-day strike had a deep effect here, the significance of which we have already drawn attention to in the Militant. And the consciousness of workers here is already deeper than it was in San Francisco at the time of its strike, as workers become ever more aware of how the inflation is socking it to them.

These top-level officials decided to copy the San Francisco model here in L.A. A Coalition of County Unions (CCU) was formed here for the first time in history. This coalition represented all the unions whose annual negotiations had reached the stage called "impasse". These were 36 of the 41 collective bargaining units. (Negotiations for the other units go on at another time of year.)

The CCU had a steering committee of two workers from each bargaining unit plus one official from each of the seven unions involved. The CCU met several times prior to the big events described in the Militant article. It is also very significant that AFSCME, which hardly exists in California and the SEIU unions were brought together in a coalition. There is great rivalry between these two internationals in California.

On the eve of the tentative strike deadline of April 29, the unions made hitherto unprecedented efforts to mobilize their memberships for the strike vote meetings. At these meetings, militant rhetoric which had never been heard previously from the lips of certain officials came gushing forth. Of course, they didn't want to appear too militant, and they didn't try to mobilize too much sentiment, but I heard them say things they'd never said before.

The president of LACEA/Local 660 told one meeting of 3000, "For 60 years we've been a company union. Two years ago we decided to join the house of labor. Tonight we'll hear no eulogy for the death of collective begging!" This was greeted with a roar of enthusiastic applause. Other speeches were given along similar lines.

The meetings overwhelmingly voted to approve a tentative strike deadline of April 29, unless the county came up with an offer better than 5.5% by Friday at 6:00 a.m.

As these big meetings were going on, the county Board of Supervisors, also with San Francisco on their minds, decided to raise their last offer from 5.5% to about 7.5%, with a \$50 floor. This \$50 floor affects a good number of low-paid workers in the hospitals, some of whom were making as low as \$450 per month to start.

County Personnel Director Gordon Nesvig notified the top officials of the unions, i.e., the Executive Directors and General Managers, that he wanted to see them. He refused to meet with the negotiating teams, which were composed of working workers. The officials agreed to meet with him on that basis. The county agreed to drop all its provocative contract issues. It had wanted to strip the new contract of numerous important provisions from previous contracts.

Here are some of the important contract changes the county had initially demanded. They wanted to remove a whole series of items about employee benefits from the contract. This meant that if there was any dispute between a worker and a county official, you could not use the grievance procedure to resolve the dispute. L.A. County's grievance procedure is very favorable to the workers, since it says that if a dispute is not settled within a definite and brief number of days, the issue is automatically resolved in favor of the worker.

They wanted to delete the provision requiring that the county provide free parking, and opened the possibility that we would have to pay \$8.50 per month for this "right". This was an especially galling thing to many workers. I am enclosing a full list of the contract changes initially raised by the county.

After meeting with the personnel director, the union officials apparently decided that the 7.5% offer was acceptable, and they did everything they could to ram it down the throats of the memberships. They also failed to inform the negotiators that they had arrived at an agreement with county management.

Thus, many of the negotiating teams, unaware that a deal had been made Thursday afternoon, continued to negotiate until Friday morning at dawn. They finally arrived at a tentative agreement of . . . 7.5% When they left the county administrative buildings, they saw the L.A. Times had hit the stands with a headline saying that the strike had been averted and an agreement reached. These negotiators began to smell a rat, and began to figure out that something had happened behind their backs. And they began to be angry about it.

I and some of the more conscious workers began demanding that the unions call a mass meeting to decide on whether or not to accept the county offer. The top union officials decided to have a mail ballot instead. These officials, and with very good reason, were terrified about what might happen to their little arrangement if thousands of rank and file workers got together to discuss it. From my post at the union's offices, I began

raising this idea with everyone who called. Hundreds of people called in, trying to find out exactly what was going on, and what were the terms of the proposed settlement. Confusion reigned supreme in the offices.

Parenthetically, the union officials, while building up for the big strike vote meetings, made a special point of stressing that no one should believe anything they read in the press or heard on the media. Now they remained silent when the press announced that the strike was off and an agreement reached. The Coalition of County Unions, the creation of which had given great encouragement to thousands of county workers who had never thought it was possible to force the county to do anything, was never called into session. Its steering committee was never called into session.

Thus, what had, in essence, occurred, was that the top officials of the unions made a deal behind the backs of the Coalition and the bargaining unit negotiating teams. Workers got madder and madder at that. So the idea of a mass, decision-making meeting caught on very rapidly. But, as indicated above, top union officials were bending every effort to prevent this.

In the hospitals, for example, Friday at noon had been set as the time for the strike-vote meeting. Union officials cancelled the meeting, but, contrary to their plans, 2-3000 angry hospital workers showed up. They angrily denounced Elinor Glenn and Sam McNeil, a top business agent of Local 434 when they tried to sell them on the settlement. Glenn and McNeil were booted off the platform. Later the Times tried to blame this on the Workers Action Movement, but that was a lie. I know of two or three PL-WAMers in the hospital, but they couldn't have created that ferment. This was confirmed by two members of the hospital workers negotiating team who met with some 535 people later on.

One business agent of Local 535 took the initiative and decided to go ahead and call a mass public meeting so the workers could get together and discuss the settlement. He went and made arrangements to hire the same Embassy Auditorium where the big strike-vote meetings were held. He found that Local 660 had hired the hall first, and had arrived with the check. He thought that was OK, and so the word was spread as far and as wide as it could that there would be a meeting that evening at the Embassy. All publicity was by word of mouth.

Some 500 workers showed up at the Embassy. But they were in for a very big surprise. They discovered that 660 had hired the hall and then decided to lock the workers out of the place. They were furious. One official from 660, whom I can't place for sure but am convinced that I've seen before on anti-war marches, etc., turned out to be the 660 sergeant-at-arms in charge of shooing people away from the Embassy. I'm almost sure he's a Stalinist.

Anyway, the 500 people then went over to the headquarters of Local 535 where they discussed the issues for several hours.

This meeting was significant because it brought together a large number of the most determined militants in this struggle, the best fighters among the thousands who were mobilized for



the first time. The meeting could only have an educational character, of course, since it was not "officially" called by 535 or any of the participating unions. And with the limited forces at our disposal, it wasn't possible to give concrete directions for the struggle. Our role was to draw the lessons of the experiences and point out the road to follow in the future.

Following the Friday night events, a meeting of the picket captains had been scheduled for Saturday morning. Some 100 people showed up for that. Again, they found themselves locked out of the hall where they were supposed to meet. They stormed over to the offices of Local 660, and raised hell with their officials over two issues: the need for a mass meeting and the problem of the secret negotiations. They were also angry about being locked out of the meeting halls. Following several stormy hours of discussion, the 660 officials promised they would try to pull together a meeting of the CCU. They never did this.

Another important meeting came up the following Wednesday. A group of angry stewards from Local 660, about 50 strong, decided to appear at the meeting of 660's Board of Directors (executive board). They showed up, made their anger known, and were thrown out of the board meeting, which declared itself in "executive session." They were outraged.

Local 535's officials turned out to be the least resistant to mass pressure in the situation. They finally agreed to call an open public meeting, of an "informational" character, to get reports and discussion on the proposed settlement. All those locked out of the 660 offices were invited to the 535 meeting, which was, however, very poorly attended, since the officials had not tried to build it with any enthusiasm. Nevertheless, it is significant that they called the meeting at all. A good discussion was had by those who came.

Many Militants were sold during these events, and the paper was well-received. After the feature article appeared, a member of one of the negotiating teams said he read the article, liked it a lot, but there was one paragraph he didn't understand. That was the paragraph explaining the secret deal (It was too compressed and therefore abstract in the paper). I explained it to him. He said it was the first he'd heard of it, and that that made the whole situation clear. He bought a sub.

The following weekend there was a meeting of the State Executive Board of 535 in Los Angeles. It was very poorly attended, for some reason, but some significant developments took place. The Los Angeles chapter president, who played a poor role in the big events, gave a lackluster five minute report on the events under the chapter reports part of the agenda. Two people from LA asked hostile questions. Then another member of the Board spoke for maybe ten minutes, drawing out the lessons of the experience as we saw it, pointing out the role of top union officials in making secret deals behind the backs of the elected leaderships of the unions and the rank-and-file negotiating teams. The reaction was very significant.

The Executive Director got up to speak. He didn't challenge what was said about the secret deals. He then said, "While I

wouldn't agree with everything in it, you can get a good idea of what happened in Los Angeles by reading Walter Lippmann's article in The Militant."

One of the 535 business agents spoke at the west side forum. He was completely sympathetic to the demands raised by the rank and file, and gave an excellent talk, though he didn't draw out the necessary political conclusions.

What we have seen here is the mobilization and radicalization of a whole new section of the working class, a section never previously mobilized in trade union activity. These county workers were nearly half Black, Chicano, or women. They were very young, on the whole. And they were moved in a way I've never seen them move before. The formation of the Coalition of County Unions was significant in building up this momentum.

We see that San Francisco was not a fluke, not an exception, but a harbinger of things to come in the unions. The party here was fortunate in that having San Francisco behind us, we were able to prepare well in advance for our participation in these events. We were able to issue an election campaign statement at some of the key strike-vote meetings. We were the only candidates who supported the demands of the county workers. We were able to get an SWP candidate invited to address the State Executive Board meeting, where he was received in a friendly way.

Top officials of the SEIU were affected by San Francisco. International President George Hardy, in his monthly column distributed to all 450,000 members of the SEIU pointed to the significance of San Francisco, and concluded "If it can happen in San Francisco, it can happen anywhere." The same issue featured a front-page cover and feature story on the San Francisco events.

Now that wage controls have lapsed, and in the wake of everything that's been going on, I believe we can look forward to more of these kinds of struggles, in the very near future.

Our attitude toward the settlement has already been indicated in the Militant article. One notable feature of this settlement has been the county's agreement to hire an additional 1000 eligibility workers in the welfare department. They had budgeted for 4500 positions, but only have 3500 now working. The 1000 new hires should mean that no worker will be above the specified caseload yardstick. This is a significant victory. In addition, the county agreed to at long last begin negotiating social worker caseloads within 90 days after the contract goes into effect, on July 1.

One of the union's business agent's, a young radical of some kind, spoke at two of our forums on the L.A. situation.

Ours was the only political tendency which operated in its own name in these events. We distributed a party campaign statement and sold the press at a good number of events.

The CP was present, but played no open, or even covert role. They distributed nothing. The few PL-WAMers distributed an initial leaflet which was quite clever, headed "Sign Up to Picket",

trying to appear as a sort-of official leaflet. Their idea of asking for \$140 per month across the board was well-received (who could be against it?). They distributed two leaflets, the second of which was quite a bit more off-base than the first.

\* \* \*

P.S. The voting results are in. I haven't been able to analyze them in detail, but in general, there was a large voter turnout, quite large, and within 535 there was a significant no vote of one third among the eligibility workers, the key welfare grouping. Within Local 660's eligibility workers, about one fourth voted no. The generally older and more conservative and better-paid social workers voted overwhelmingly to accept. While in the forefront of the struggle in 1966, they were among the most backward this time.

## Letter From a Steelworker

May 8, 1974

I suppose you know about this Memorial Day rank and file steelworkers conference in Chicago and know most of the details already. In case you don't, here is the schedule: (1) the conference is called by District 31 Right to Strike Committee and supported by all major rank and file steel worker groups opposed to the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA)--Ad Hoc Committee (Black), National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee (Stalinist), RAFT, IA Right to Strike Committee, etc., (2) agenda is open, (3) not an attempt to form national organization, (4) conference called to lay groundwork for organized intervention of anti-ENA opposition at September USWA convention.

Right now we have a somewhat sketchy idea of the details of this conference. If you have further information and/or suggestions as to how we should participate, respond as soon as possible.

All three of us in steel here plan to attend the conference. We've also got several steelworkers from a small rank and file group (the Worker Unity) to agree to participate (they have three members and two supporters) as well as one or two of our other friends in the mills. We take this conference and our trade union work in general very seriously and plan to carry out our work in this area accordingly.

Question: Do we have members in steel in Pittsburgh and Houston? I'm told we have 1-2 in Pittsburgh and almost a half dozen in USWA-organized machine shops in Houston.

Proposal: That these SWP members be contacted, given information on this conference and plans to help build it, and encouraged to attend if possible. I've been told that at least one Houston steel worker has already agreed to attend the conference.

## Letter to a Steelworker

May 14, 1974

This is in response to specific questions raised in your May 8 letter.

1) The Memorial Day Picnic and Raffle, May 27, and the 3-day conference in Chicago, is called by District 31 Right to Strike Committee.

I have not talked with anyone in Chicago on the Committee during the past couple of weeks, but my understanding is that the organizers of the picnic are preparing for a crowd of between 150 and 250. It is not easy to estimate how many will show up.

According to reports in Chicago that I heard recently, the Stalinists (National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee) are not supporting the affair. I have seen nothing in their Daily World building it. However, I would expect that most of their local people will show up to see who else goes and to make whatever contacts they can.

2) The combined forces of all anti-ENA steelworker groups are not great.

The organized groups you mentioned--Youngstown Ad Hoc Committee (Black), NSWRFC (Stalinists), RAFT, LA Right to Strike Committee (this one is new to me), etc.--are for the most part composed of radicals attached to one of the political sects--RU, October League, NAM, PL. They are all trying to attract the rather wide-spread anti-leadership sentiment in the Steelworkers union. But so far none have succeeded in doing so, and their method of operation precludes that possibility.

I think the Youngstown groups (RAFT and the Ad Hoc Committee) are the closest to the genuine anti-Abel sentiment in the union. They are trying to hold the line on working conditions in local 1462 where they are presently the leadership, and they are in opposition to the International on nearly every question as a result.

Unable to do much in one mill against the Steel Trust, the Youngstown militants resort to a campaign against the International up and down the line in order to explain to the workers why conditions are getting worse. It must appear to many workers as if these local leaders think their International union is a greater enemy than the company.

There are bound to be some cracks in the bureaucracy as the anger and frustration of workers mount. Very often this is vented on the local leaders, who are replaced by others. The replacement of officials is beginning to extend to the District level in the Steelworkers union. In the last election, some administration-endorsed District Directors (3 or 4 in basic steel) just managed to scrape through with the help of crooked elections and false counts.

The Sadlowski challenge of the fraudulent election in District 31 has attracted the support of a very broad section of the USWA membership there, perhaps a majority. This broad support for a change in District leadership has not extended to the Right to Strike Committee.

One of the reasons the RTSC remains small is the narrow sectarian aims of some of its members. While in Chicago I learned that this committee was diverted into an adventurist demonstration to impeach Nixon. The efforts of RU members in the committee to draw it into this action succeeded in discouraging most of the steel workers who had come to the committee in the hope that through it they could improve their conditions of work in the Chicago area mills.

3) There will probably be some militant speeches at the picnic and some good resolutions will be adopted at the 3-day conference.

The purpose is to muster support for the legal action against ENA, which may yet serve a useful end. But the organizers of the conference (they are the ones who initiated the anti-ENA law suit) have said from the beginning that they expect little from the court action unless there is a genuine rank and file

revolt against the conditions of the new contract. To date there is no sign of any such revolt.

The contract is worse in some respects than the previous one.

a) The probationary period for new employees has been increased to 520 hours of actual work, a period of approximately 13 weeks.

b) The productivity committees are continued; renamed "committee on employment security and plant productivity." Steel Labor (May) says, "This plant-wide advisory committee will continue to concentrate on productivity, employment security and company growth."

c) The grievance procedure remains as cumbersome as before and gets referred finally to arbitration. There is no mention of "strike issues," such as unsafe working conditions, arbitrary changes in production schedules by management, etc.

The Stalinist press carried a story that several union presidents refused to sign the contract when the final version was submitted to them (with changes from what they had been told would be in it), but I have seen no other reports of these protests.

The steel industry is presently booming, but this may not continue throughout the year due to cutbacks in the auto and construction industries. If cutbacks in steel follow, with widespread unemployment, then there will likely develop broad opposition to the new contract. But no such opposition exists at the present time.

4) There will probably be opposition candidates for the USWA September Convention in most locals. They will warn of what is likely to happen under the new no-strike contract.

The election will test the broad sentiment of the membership. It may be that a sizeable number of opposition candidates will be elected, but it is unlikely (extremely) that enough opposition candidates will go to the convention to offer any serious challenge to the Abel machine.

5) What should we do at the Chicago conference and Memorial Day picnic?

It is a good opportunity for us to meet some steel workers and talk to them about conditions in the mills and how changes will come about.

I understand SWP steelworkers in Chicago are preparing some good resolutions, but I haven't yet seen them. In general, it seems to me that we should strive to keep the whole thing open and directed more against the steel companies than the union bureaucracy.

There is no need for us to engage in heated discussions with the sectarians over fine points in their resolutions. It serves our purposes better to let them argue among themselves.

Everyone there will know that Abel is company-minded, a traitor to the union cause. There isn't much to be gained from repeating this obvious fact. It might be useful, however, to develop a plan to expose the steel trust and mobilize the USWA membership in opposition to what it is doing.

I thought the circulation of petitions against ENA, collecting 10,000 names, was a good idea. Conditions did not prompt demonstrations against ENA, but the petition drive registered considerable opposition to what the steel companies are trying to do.

A similar campaign against race and sex discrimination in the mills ought to get a good response right now. It is an issue that can rally large numbers of Blacks and others, under proper circumstances. Maybe they won't respond right now to calls for demonstrations, but they will later on.

The speed up, unsafe working conditions, pollution, health hazards are all issues that steel workers cannot escape. Campaigns can be organized around these issues in the mills and in the mill towns.

In the May issue of Steel Labor (p. 2) there is a big article on Reserve Mining Co.'s pollution of Silver Bay on Lake Superior. This may not be a direct threat to steel workers in Chicago or Cleveland. But they know something about what steel mills do to pollute the water and air. They should come to the aid of those steel workers at the Silver Bay plant who are in danger of losing their jobs. They should demand that the steel industry clean up Silver Bay and develop clean and safe methods of extracting ore. That project would keep all the workers in Silver Bay on the job for years to come. Such a campaign for safe, clean jobs would gain support in the union right now, and would prepare for actions against general unemployment in the steel industry that is likely to develop in the near future.

These campaigns have political meaning for us. They are the beginning of a movement to mobilize workers in action against the crimes of industry and the do-nothing (or company-support) policy of government.

The union can be brought into these campaigns on the side of the workers as their organization to help mobilize more forces. In this way the union bureaucrats are put in a position of supporting the demands of the workers or covering-up for the companies.

(The article in Steel Labor on the suit to close the Silver Bay plant is a brazen cover-up for the mining company. And the local officials are deeply involved on the side of the company because they don't see any other way to save their jobs, which is no way at all because that plant is likely to be closed. They should be demanding the necessary work that is needed to clean up the whole operation.)

I think this kind of discussion by us would be a healthy change of pace from the usual union politicking and small talk about the sell-out artists that characterizes such gatherings as the Memorial Day conference in Chicago.



5) About others who will attend.

I have heard nothing from Pittsburgh.

We know steel workers in Houston, but I have not heard from them that any there intend to make the trip to Chicago. My impression is that most of those who attend will be from the Midwest.

It is good that you are going with friends. The Conference should be educational, and maybe we can win over some young workers to our view of the problems steel workers face and the way to solve them.

Comradely,

Frank Lovell

From Member of the Houston Teachers Association, an NEA Affiliate

April 28, 1974

Dear Frank,

On February 14-16, the Texas Classroom Teacher's Association held their annual convention in San Antonio. The most important resolutions to be passed at the convention were 1) an escalator clause for all Texas teachers and 2) abolish the anti-strike legislation for public employees.

SWP members attended the TCTA convention, passed out campaign literature, and sold Militants. They met with a very favorable response to the campaign leaflet and sold about 25 Militants.

Our representative to the Houston Teacher's Association's Legislative Assembly (the policy making body) attends monthly meetings, sells about eight Militants at each meeting, and meets many teachers from around the city. About 100-150 attend these meetings. At one a resolution in support of the Farmworker's boycott activities was introduced. The motion passed, although with a split vote.

The Texas State Teacher's Association met in Ft. Worth on March 14-16. The TSTA includes administrators, unlike the TCTA. Our participation was similar to the one in February. Four teachers went--we sold 70 Militants and passed out a couple thousand campaign leaflets.

This convention revolved around unifying TSTA with NEA. Houston is one of the few cities in Texas where when you join the local organization, you are compelled to join the state and national organizations also. Right now most TSTA affiliates do not belong to NEA. The convention voted to conduct a mail vote of the TSTA membership on whether to unify with NEA. The HTA has been the leading force state-wide, in favor of unification.

A new school board was voted in last November, and since taking office in January, they have tried to bust-up the HTA. We have been involved in HTA's fight against the school board's union busting activity.

HTA won exclusivity in a vote taken last May. Teachers voted over 2-1 in favor of HTA as the sole voice of teachers in dealing with the school board. The other two teachers groups in Houston are the Houston Federation of Teachers, which was organized just a year and a half ago and the Congress of Houston Teachers. HFT has about 200 members. CHT is a right-wing, racist group which supported the conservative board candidates in the last election. (They were elected.)

In February this year, the new school board voted to remove exclusivity for HTA and organize an election among teachers to set up a "Teachers Council for Professional Consultation." By previous agreement with the old school board, there was not to be another election to consider HTA exclusivity before May, 1974. The Teachers Council for Proportional Consultation was to have seven members--each group (HTA, HFT, CHT) getting proportional representation based on a mail vote of teachers held in April, this year.

This whole development sparked a big response by HTA which has 5,000 members. HTA members were encouraged to attend monthly school board meetings to show support for HTA's exclusivity. HTA filed a suit against such an election and in the meantime, organized meetings of HTA members to get out the vote for HTA. We attended these meetings and took responsibility to get teachers at our schools to vote for HTA. The "Vote HTA" literature put out was quite good. We were seen as leaders of HTA, although certainly not "top" leaders.

The result of the voting was 62% HTA; 30% CHT; 6% HFT; 2% for "other organization".

The Militant Forum in Houston sponsored a panel on "Teachers vs. the School Board" right before the election. Six additional teachers came to listen.

The Teachers Council for Professional Consultation has 4 HTA, 2 CHT, and 1 HFT. They have not met yet.

Elections were recently held at some schools for next year's Legislative Assembly representative. We will be represented.

And finally, at the HTA's Legislative Assembly meeting on April 23, voting was conducted to choose 49 delegates to represent HTA at the NEA convention to be held in Chicago June 28-July 3. We will go to Chicago.

The fact that the SWP mayoral candidate, who is also a person who has sold The Militant at all the HTA meetings, was elected a delegate to the NEA convention shows an acceptance, if not agreement, with many parts of the SWP program by HTA activists.

Do you have any information on the convention scheduled and the basic issues that are most likely to come up there?

### Letter to Houston Teachers

May 3, 1974

Your letter of April 28 on Houston teachers, along with the SWP campaign statement on issues facing teachers in Texas and the forum leaflet, "Teachers vs. the Board of Education," all arrived yesterday. It was good you sent copies out because others are working on resolutions for the AFT convention, including one on NEA-AFT merger. They will find all your material useful, especially your letter.

We should exchange experiences and opinions on several issues. I hope this will start the discussion among teachers in several parts of the country.

#### 1) Merger

This is, as your campaign statement indicates, independent of and different from TSTA-NEA unification which seems to me to be a peculiar Texas problem. There may be similar separate

organizations of teacher-administrators and teachers in other states. In any case, the unification of such organizations is not a prerequisite for AFT-NEA merger nationally.

Negotiations for AFT-NEA merger broke down, ostensibly, over the issue of AFL-CIO affiliation. There are other, more important and more pressing, issues keeping the two organizations apart. The first of these is the determination of the entrenched leadership in both organizations to protect privileges and gain hegemony in any new organization that results from merger.

The vast majority of class room teachers favor merger, i.e., one union for all teachers. We should identify with this sentiment and become the strongest proponents of merger in both organizations.

Merger is not likely to come about by agreement at the top as happened in New York state. Such "merger" retains the separate organizational structures, does not strengthen the bargaining position nor the political independence of teachers, and is used by the merged bureaucracies of the two organizations to impose more rigid control and collect higher dues from the membership. I think there must be deep resentment against this in the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), but as yet this resentment has found no means of expression. It may come out at the NEA convention in Chicago, June 28-July 3.

## 2) AFL-CIO Affiliation

We do not make AFL-CIO affiliation a condition for merger, as the Shankerite leadership of AFT does. Teachers should first unite in a single independent organization. It is necessary, of course for teachers to identify with the union movement. This is recognized by the NEA leadership. But the AFL-CIO is not the union movement. The largest unions are not affiliated--UAW, Teamsters, Miners, West Coast Longshoremens, United Electrical Workers (the last three unions are not large, but they function outside the AFL-CIO), and the NEA.

In some cities (in Florida and Louisiana) there have been AFT-NEA mergers, but what relation the merged organization has to the AFL-CIO is not clear. It may be different from place to place. The United Teachers of New Orleans, a merged AFT-NEA affiliate, is seeking official recognition and collective bargaining rights from the New Orleans school board. UTNO has collected petitions for an election. The New York Teacher, the Shankerite publication (April 21) reports that "the old Louisiana Teachers Association, which was expelled by the NEA for barring Blacks from membership may try to get on the ballot."

In the case of the Houston Federation of Teachers (a miniscule organization of only 6 percent of the teachers), this Shankerite outfit serves as a cover and excuse for the "Teachers Council for Professional Consultation." Teachers who belong to HFT should be urged to join the Houston Teachers Association, to denounce this anti-union set-up and the Congress of Houston Teachers which is the reactionary School Board's agency organization for teachers. Under the circumstances the HFT weakens the cause of unionism and should not seek independent status but should instead support HTA to protect the bargaining rights of teachers.

The NEA is much better than AFT on such issues as union democracy, minority representation, community control, bilingual education, etc. These issues should be widely discussed by the membership for purposes of merging the two organizations, and merger should come about on this basis. This means an independent united organization formed by the majority in both organizations and with the leaders in both who agree upon these issues as the solid basis for unity.

### 3) Local school boards and school board elections

Teachers know more about the problems of education, are more directly involved in developing the educational system, and have an immediate and continuing stake in saving the schools.

The function of local school boards is supposed to be to develop and administer the best possible system of education. There should be no conflict between teachers and the school board, but there is.

The reason local school boards and teachers' unions confront each other in boss/worker relationship is the political structure in this country which allows only for representatives of the employing class, through the Democratic and Republican party machines, to be elected to public office. (This applies to school board elections which are often "non-partisan.")

The basic problem in most school districts is money. Money for schools ought to be appropriated by the federal government because that is where the money is. Instead of spending billions for military purposes, this money ought to go for education and other useful social needs.

Until the federal government can be forced to meet its responsibility to education, money should be demanded of all other possible sources--city and state governments through special education levies on business and industry.

Teachers should try to break down the false boss/worker relationship between teachers unions and local school board. The unions should try to explain the need of the local school board and the teachers to make common cause with the communities to raise money for education from those who control great wealth.

Teachers should run in school board elections as educators, union representatives, and defenders of community school needs--against the political hacks of the Democratic and Republican machines who have no knowledge or interest in education--in a broadly based independent campaign to Save The Schools.

We have discussed this before, and in Oakland, Twin Cities, and Washington we explored the possibilities. Last year we got little response to this idea in the unions, except for the start in this direction in Oakland, California. We ought to raise the idea again. Even where unions have not run their own independent candidates, it should serve as useful propoganda in support of the teachers when new contracts are being negotiated.

It may be that some discussion along these lines will develop at both the NEA and AFT conventions even without benefit of a resolution for independent political action of this kind by the union. A resolution would help.

Our SWP campaigns for school board by teachers have set good examples for the teacher unions. If the unions would run their own campaigns and run their own members for school board, independent of the local political machines, they would attract broad community support and they have the financial resources and the necessary connection with the rest of the union movement that makes it possible for them to win elections and change the anti-union, anti-teacher character of many local school boards.

4) The NEA Convention (Chicago, June 28-July 3)

This convention will probably bring some surprises, as the one last year in Portland, Ore., did. We can expect to sell large quantities of literature, as we did in Portland. We ought to give the convention full coverage in The Militant as we did last year.

Shanker will probably be there again in command of the big New York delegation. The NEA national leadership will be prepared for him again, maybe better this time.

Last year there were 9,000 delegates at the NEA convention which lasted a week. This year it is scheduled for six days, and there is no reason I know of to think it will be smaller.

As many teachers as possible should attend. It ought to be of special interest to AFT members in Chicago.

5) Block voting

This is a bureaucratic organizational matter, not a genuine political issue for us. However, it relates to democracy within the union. We should expose and oppose it.

This is a method used in New York by Shanker in both the NEA and AFT. It is accepted in several of the large AFT locals and used at AFT conventions.

In most of the big-city AFT locals, the leadership runs a slate of candidates for convention delegates which is usually elected, not always. In instances where some opposition candidates manage to get elected, the machine imposes the system of block voting by the delegation. This effectively prevents the opposition from being recorded, and sometimes prevents it from being heard.

I would think there will be considerable opposition to this business at the NEA convention, especially from some New York delegates. It may be one of the issues the NEA national leaders will try to use against Shanker.

Please let me hear from you at an early date on these and other issues of interest to teachers. I will undertake to circulate the correspondence.

Comradely,  
Frank Lovell