

SPARTACIST



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Conflicts Sharpen in Labor

The deepening political polarization of American society, triggered chiefly by the Viet Nam war and its economic effects, has begun to make itself felt within the labor movement. After a prolonged period of relative quiescence in the wake of the McCarthy witchhunt, which beheaded the labor movement by purging from its ranks the most active militants as well as all known radicals, a period of heightened struggle has begun. As is often the case, the most evident signs of this renewed upsurge are manifestations of friction and fragmentation at the top. The split within the union bureaucracy, reflecting the deep split in the ruling class itself over the Viet Nam war, is entirely limited to bureaucratic jockeying for position, but such a schism provides opportunities for radicals within the labor movement.

Inevitably, those within the union movement who fear the burgeoning mood of dissent among the ranks will get "out of hand" are moving quickly to keep it within "respectable" bounds. The Communist Party, despite its exposure as arch-betrayer of militant struggles during World War II and the organizational beating it took during the witchhunt, still has a trade union residue and is in the best position to take immediate advantage of any increased room to maneuver within the labor movement. The CP now prepares itself to play the same role it has played in the anti-war movement: to tie the militant upsurge to liberalism.

CP "Rank and File" Conference

In June 1970 the CP organized a trade union conference of some 800 delegates. The conference had a thoroughly respectable air, featuring many union officials and mayor-elect Gibson of Newark. It was remarkably low-key, little more than a passive adaptation to the widely felt need for a left labor grouping to counter the developing Meany-Nixon combine. A major aspect was defense of "progressive" union bureaucrats against attacks by both radical groups and rank and file militants. In particular need of such defense were the "liberal" Jennings leadership of the IUE and the old-time Stalinist Matles-Fitzgerald leadership of the UE. Thus Will Parry, Secretary-Treasurer of the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers, devoted much of his keynote speech to an impassioned defense of the GE strike settlement.

Let's look at the settlement. UE President Fitzgerald stated that the GE workers had lost 30c an hour during the previous contract due to inflation. The strike settlement called for a 53c an hour increase over 40 months (longer than the standard 3 years). To top this off, the cost-of-living escalator had a 21c an hour cap. Even with moderate inflation, the GE workers will be lucky if

their real wages in 1973 are no lower than in 1967! It was this sellout contract that 20 thousand workers (or a quarter of the strikers), including the major Schenectady local, voted to reject. The settlement was so bad that even as conservative a business union as the Machinists felt compelled to keep their GE plants out despite scant hope of victory.

After defending the GE settlement, Parry went on to defend union leaderships against charges of antagonism to the rank and file. What was involved was not a defense of the principle of leadership against anarcho-libertarian gripes, but a positive and specific endorsement of a substantial section of the existing trade union bureaucracies. Singled out for praise were Jerry Wurf (AFSCME), Leonard Woodcock (UAW) and Harry Bridges (ILWU). Parry's only attempt to provide political justification for this disgusting display was the inane argument that union leaders organize class-struggle actions such as strikes. Any moderately militant rank and file worker knows that these bureaucrats disturb their comfortable coexistence with anti-strike politicians only when forced to do so by their memberships. Moreover, the "liberal" union machines are by no means necessarily the most aggressive even in purely "business union" terms. By his own logic, Parry should prefer the reactionary head of New York's Central Labor Council, Harry Van Arsdale, who called a number of strikes when organizing New York's taxi drivers, to the CP's darling Bridges, who hasn't called a strike in 35 years!

The conference reaffirmed the policy which the CP pursued throughout the history of the CIO: to act as the loyal "left" supporters for "progressive" union bureaucrats and liberal bourgeois politicians. It is precisely this policy of seeking to build workers' confidence in their "progressive" enemies that facilitated the purges of the labor movement when the political climate turned reactionary. The CP tried to protect itself by adopting a fawning attitude to the CIO leadership, first Lewis and then Murray. To this end, they carefully avoided supporting any internal opposition in the coal miners' or steelworkers' unions, just as today the CP defends the sellout GE settlement and refuses to condemn the repression of Black caucuses in the UAW so as not to antagonize the Jennings and Woodcock leaderships.

Such opportunist tactics simply do not work. When the Cold War pressure got to Murray he announced, "there is no room for Communism in the CIO," to which the CP could only piteously reply, "Where is the Philip Murray *we* knew?" The CP's disastrous policy of capitulation thus prepared the way not only for its own

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destruction but for the purge of all militants and radicals from the labor movement.

The CP trade union conference clearly indicated the CP's continued refusal to break with the two capitalist parties. Against the demand for a political party of labor, the conference repeated the ancient Gompers axiom of rewarding one's friends and punishing one's enemies. The Democratic Party "friend of labor" myth, eagerly perpetuated by the CP, is a fraud. All bourgeois politicians, whatever verbal concessions they make to secure union endorsements and union members' votes, oppose the expansion of labor's power. The true sentiments of that classic "friends of labor," Franklin Roosevelt, were revealed during the decisive Little Steel strikes in 1937, when he said "a curse on both your houses"—this after Republic Steel had murdered 13 picketing workers! Similarly, for all their talk, not a single major liberal politician—not one—condemned Nixon's use of troops to break last year's postal wildcat.

Representatives of the Spartacist League at the conference opposed the disastrous policy of allying with the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie and their "labor lieutenants." Along with other militants, they put forward an oppositional proposal (see SPARTACIST #17-18). Appropriately, the left opposition at the conference was handled in much the same manner that the CP's friends in labor officialdom handle their own internal opposition: gross suppression.

The War Hits The Bureaucracy

The CP "Rank and File" conference took place in the shadow of the split in the union bureaucracy over the Viet Nam war. The split represents not so much a movement by the liberal bureaucrats to the left as the movement of the dominant Meany leadership to the right along with the general political climate, criticizing the national Democratic Party and flirting with the Republicans. It is Wurf and Woodcock—the supposed left wing—who are pursuing the same old conservative policy of seeking to maintain labor's traditional alliance with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

The past year has seen the emergence of a definite group of union bureaucrats who have joined the folk singers and liberal politicians on the speaking platforms of major anti-war demonstrations. In one sense, this is a simple reflection of these bureaucrats' ties to the liberal bourgeoisie. In part it represents a genuine desire to curb the war-generated inflation which is causing such dissension and militancy within the union ranks. Thus many anti-war bureaucrats are among the

leading advocates of anti-working-class wage-price controls. Some, such as Victor Gotbaum, head of New York's State, County and Municipal Employees' union, are seeking to strengthen their image as "progressive," "democratic" union leaders and garner middle-class liberal support to fortify their position within the labor movement.

Throughout the history of American labor, bureaucrats such as Hillman and Reuther have sought to draw attention away from their rotten record in fighting for their own members by projecting a liberal humanitarian posture. Thus David Livingston's Distributive Workers' union has recently shifted its attention away from the difficult job of organizing the mass of poorly-paid workers in light manufacturing, retail and wholesale in favor of organizing campus employees on the basis of a liberal anti-war, social do-goodism stance.

In good part, the development of anti-war activism among sections of the union bureaucracy is an attempt to undercut opposition within their own unions, especially unions like Livingston's Distributive Workers' union and Leon Davis' Hospital Workers' union which contain many Black and Spanish-speaking workers, many of whom are sharply critical of the Viet Nam war.

One of the most important aims of the anti-war bureaucrats, welcomed by the anti-war movement's established leadership, is to bring anti-war radicals back to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party by implying that liberal politicians represent the oppressed workers. The *New York Times* praised the Gotbaum-Livingston "labor-student" anti-war rally for the same reasons it praised the Eugene McCarthy campaign: in the hopes of bringing the student "crazies" back to the "mainstream" of bourgeois lesser-evil politics. The rally, itself a perfunctory affair, was a deliberate attempt to squelch the nascent impulse following Cambodia-Kent State toward anti-war strikes. Its political thrust was, of course, to build support for liberal politicians, such as Paul O'Dwyer, then Democratic Party hopeful for senator.

For Anti-War Strike Action

While the activity of the anti-war wing of the union bureaucracy poses the danger of strengthening bourgeois control of the anti-war movement, it also creates an opportunity to turn the movement in a genuine working-class direction. The Spartacist League has continually maintained that the felt need for more powerful anti-war tactics should take the form, not of futile attacks by isolated radicals against the cops, but of *working-class* action. Now that a number of important unions, for the bureaucrats' self-serving reasons, have taken verbal anti-war positions, the need for such a strategy is even

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more obvious. Anti-war union activists should launch agitational campaigns to have their union call a one-day strike in conjunction with the next national protest. The inevitable opposition from even the most "progressive" bureaucrats to mobilizing the real power of the working class against the war will expose them and convince many workers that *all* sections of the existing labor bureaucracy must be thrown out.

The Legal Trap

Because of the overtly dictatorial regimes in many unions, some honest militants as well as some self-proclaimed radicals have turned to the government and its complex of labor laws, such as Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin, in the hope these will give them a handle to fight corrupt and undemocratic bureaucrats. That liberals should look to the state to enforce union democracy is understandable; liberals regard the state as class-neutral. But for socialists, who recognize the state as an instrument of *class oppression*, to advocate government intervention in determining the leadership of the unions, whatever the pretext, should be unthinkable. The appointees of the capitalist parties do not act in the interest of abstract democracy. The major result of the Landrum-Griffin Act—the rank and file's so-called bill of rights—was the railroading of Jimmy Hoffa, a tough and troublesome business unionist, to further the career of Bobby Kennedy.

Even strong advocates of governmental policing of the unions, such as Burton Hall (Workers Defense League) and Herman Benson (*Union Democracy in Action*) continually complain that

somehow the government always seems to favor the bureaucracy against rank and file oppositionists. The Labor Department's benevolent indifference to Boyle's open intimidation of the Yablonski forces (UMW) is well known; the Morrissey caucus in the NMU, which banks heavily on government intervention, is continually the victim of pro-Curran judgments. But even if appealing to the courts were successful in terms of immediate goals, such a policy allows goons like Boyle and Curran (who work hand in glove with the bosses and government officials when it's in their interest) to pose as independent-minded union patriots and deride their opponents for crying on the shoulders of outsiders in the liberal establishment.

Government intervention played a major role in destroying the CP base in the labor movement. In the mid-fifties, the Seafarers International Union sued for jurisdiction over the CP-led Marine Cooks and Stewards. Knowing that the membership of the MCS opposed such a merger, the National Labor Relations Board ordered that the voting unit be all West Coast unlicensed sea personnel; thus, the MCS was voted out of existence by the membership of another union! Biased NLRB judgments were also important in the absorption by the UAW of the CP-led Farm Equipment Workers. Recently, most cases of government intervention into unions have stemmed from appeals against corruption or discrimination. But it should be clear that this same weapon will be used against any militant class-conscious opposition which is successful in unseating the sellouts. State intervention in union affairs is a powerful means for the ruling class to determine the leadership and policies of the labor movement. Any increase in state control over the unions, regardless of the ostensible reason, must be opposed.

"Good Guyism"

Due to the weakness of the organized left within the unions and their extreme bureaucratization, many oppositional challenges are of a purely personal character. Oppositionists emerge who have no serious policy differences with the incumbents, even of a "business union" sort, but merely present themselves as honest and democratic in contrast to the corrupt and dictatorial "ins." Good examples are the Yablonski campaign in the UMW and the Morrissey caucus in the NMU.

Overthrowing an entrenched bureaucracy requires the full commitment of the rank and file. Workers are not going to risk their jobs and often even their physical safety just to see the same policies carried out, only with a friendlier face! Even sincere unionists who restrict their platform to "good guyism" in hopes of enlisting

"broad" support thus undermine their own potential strength. But even where they do unseat the incumbents, they are but a diversion from the pressing task of radicalizing the labor movement.

The labor movement recently has witnessed a tendency toward "palace coup" oppositions: the long-time lieutenant of some tarnished union head—someone who's negotiated all the rotten contracts and policed the union on his master's behalf—suddenly turns on the leader and declares himself an honest and militant unionist. Examples abound: the McDonald/Abel fight in the Steelworkers, Carey/Jennings in the IUE and Morgenstern/Hill in the SSEU.

In 1957 a rank and file steelworker named Donald Rarick, a political conservative, ran a surprisingly strong campaign against the incumbent McDonald, around the issues of opposing a dues increase and salary raises for union officials. The Rarick challenge was beaten back, but it alarmed the bureaucracy by showing McDonald's vulnerability. To avoid a real rank and file revolt, the bureaucracy turned McDonald out to pasture and pushed forward I. W. Abel, the union's long-time Secretary-Treasurer. When McDonald appealed for outside supervision of the presidential election, the pro-Abel executive board rejected it, thus showing the supposed reformers' total lack of interest in union democracy.

Some radicals, notably the International Socialists and Workers League, admit there are no substantive differences between such bureaucrats but still maintain that radicals should support all nominally left oppositions even when their programs fall qualitatively short. They argue that such oppositions are part of an inevitably radicalizing process; or, after Abel, us. This is simply a comforting myth. The forces of bureaucratism and inertia in the trade unions are strong, particularly after an exhausting faction fight. The leaderships which rode in on the CIO revolt against the AFL—Murray, Bridges, Curran, Quill—remained in power for decades. What such arguments really show is that their proponents prefer opportunist adaptation to limited bureaucratic revolts against unpopular regimes to the prospect of building truly class-conscious oppositions among the rank and file.

By now, those who once argued that the Abel and Jennings revolts were part of a movement to the left have been proven wrong. Abel has been in power for six years; Jennings for five. Politically nothing has changed: Abel is a down-the-line Meany supporter, and Jennings, privately touted as a liberal, hasn't even taken a public position on the war. Even as business unions the Steelworkers and IUE haven't improved. The 1967

steel contract (51c an hour raise over 3 years) is as bad as any McDonald ever negotiated; the GE settlement was a disaster. Nor can one argue that left oppositions have flourished under these regimes. In fact the strongest challenge to Abel, that of Narrick, was clearly from the right, although partly motivated by resentment over the 1967 contract. "Palace coup" oppositions are not bridges to strong rank and file movements; they are often all-too-effective substitutes for them.

Enter the Black Movement

The various Black groups within the unions constitute an important potential locus for rank and file struggle. Some Black caucuses can be valuable components of a revolutionary workers movement and can play a vanguard role in leading class struggles against the bosses; others are essentially a diversion from struggle; while still others are positively dangerous to the organized working class, Black and white.

Chief among the latter are those groups with a Black Nationalist dual union perspective. While revolutionaries have a responsibility to defend individual militants in these groups against victimization by bureaucrats and bosses, we equally must present implacable political opposition to the disastrous consequences of Black Nationalist ideology. The ease with which such groups can become simply anti-

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labor is demonstrated by Joe Carnegie's "Fight Back" group in the New York transit union. Frustrated by his failure to build an effective opposition to the Quill-Guinan TWU machine, Carnegie sued to have the TWU decertified—because it refused to sign a no-strike pledge!

The best-known of the Black union caucuses is the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (formerly the Revolutionary Union Movement, or DRUM) among Detroit auto workers. While much of the impetus for the

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group was the legitimate grievances of Black workers, leading to successful wildcats around these issues, DRUM soon revealed the dangers of Black Nationalism as a guide to labor militancy: along with many good demands, DRUM agitated for more Black foremen and corporate administrative personnel, thereby proclaiming greater kinship with the Black petty-bourgeoisie than with white fellow auto workers. The DRUM forces abandoned any possibility of leading a struggle against the Reuther-Woodcock machine when they called for Black workers to stop paying union dues and channel this money instead into the "Black community."

Careerism vs. Class Struggle

Some Black caucuses can best be described as careerist, acting as pressure groups to get more Blacks—usually the caucus leaders—into union posts. They generally collaborate with their respective union bureaucracies.

A good example is the Black Caucus in the Social Service Employees Union. Initially, the Caucus opposed the merger of the relatively democratic and militant SSEU with Victor Gotbaum's conservative and bureaucratized District Council 37—until Gotbaum privately assured caucus leaders that the Black Caucus would continue to receive goodies under the new arrangement. Needless to say, the Black Caucus showed no particular concern over the new contract which perpetuated the low-wage pattern for the largely Black titles, such as case aide and homemaker, restricting its interest to the position of the college-educated "professionals," the Black caseworkers.

Perhaps the most important careerist Black caucus is the Ad Hoc Committee of Concerned Steelworkers. Practically the sole concern of this group is getting a Black member on the union's national executive board. An all-white executive in a 25 per cent Black union is certainly a glaring injustice, but to devote the energies of Black steelworkers to fight for this kind of tokenism is a betrayal of their desperate day-to-day needs. Since the Concerned Steelworkers lack a program capable of enlisting white workers' support for a Black union leader on the basis of a commitment to fight for all the workers' needs, they are forced to collaborate with Abel and supported him in the anti-McDonald campaign. In fact, the Concerned Steelworkers' support for Abel has actually strengthened racism among the steelworkers by allowing right-wingers like Narriek to identify the Black group with Abel's sellout in the 1967 contract agreement.

However the 1968 experience of the Concerned Transit Workers among Chicago bus drivers is a good counter-example. Around issues such as repair of unsafe buses, increased bus runs and

elimination of a broken-up work day, the Black leadership of the CTW led two highly successful wildcats, carrying the majority of white bus drivers along with them. By providing genuine class leadership, the CTW was able to get white workers to support its demands for more Black representation in union posts and prohibiting the (largely white) retirees from voting on issues concerning only active drivers.

The attempt of some politically conscious Black caucuses to strive for radical leadership of the class as a whole is represented by the Black Panther caucus in the Fremont, Cal. GM plant. Its program includes opposition to the Viet Nam war, defiance of anti-labor laws and "30 for 40." A caucus spokesman notes the caucus is formally open to white and Chicano workers but that social pressure (on both sides) militates against a genuinely integrated caucus. But the Panther caucus has yet to overcome its self-limiting concept of a localized, largely Black pressure group. If the Woodcock bureaucracy is to be overthrown—a precondition for realizing the Panthers' demands—an integrated opposition must be built throughout the union. Without such a perspective, any ethnically-based caucus risks degenerating into passive adaptationism, in uneasy alliance with the union bureaucracy.

Overcome Ethnic Exclusiveness

True to its traditions of yellow journalism, the Workers League's *Bulletin* ran an article headlined "Black Caucuses Are Reactionary," in toto. (This did not prevent the WL, in its typical opportunist adaptationism, from supporting Stanley Hill, candidate of the CP-Black Caucus bloc in the SSEU, or from recent uncritical enthusing about the Panthers.) Whether or not a particular Black caucus is reactionary is not determined by its exclusionism or even by the subjective attitudes of its members, but by whether its program objectively leads to united working-class action. In a country for immigrants, as ethnically conscious as the U.S., most mass movements will exhibit certain ethnic biases. The Molly Maguires were

exclusively Irish Catholic and believed they were fighting a "WASP" bourgeoisie; yet even the WL wouldn't dare declare the Mollies reactionary. Groups such as the United German Trades and United Hebrew Trades were the fore-runners of the cigar makers, brewers and garment unions.

The best of the Black caucuses suffer from a contradiction between the revolutionary thrust of their program and regressive exclusionist organizational concepts which prevent that program from being carried out. It is the responsibility of Marxists to seek to overcome these contradictions, not turn our backs on thousands of militant Black workers by a convenient "reactionary" label.

It is not separate Black organizations which are primarily responsible for undermining class unity, but rather racism or apathy toward racial injustice on the part of conservatized white workers. Rather than demanding—as the WL "Black Caucuses Are Reactionary" position implies—that Black workers must wait to struggle until all workers are ready to "unite and fight," we recognize that Black workers' action against the bosses generates a strongly felt impulse for the most militant white workers to ally with the Blacks against the common class enemy, thus providing the objective basis for revolutionaries to project united struggles and discredit Black Nationalists who continue to pose ethnic exclusionism. Thus, where Black caucuses exist and command the loyalty of the bulk of militant Black workers, we seek while working to build integrated caucuses to engage in principled common action, both around the workers' general needs and against the double oppression of Blacks, seeking uncompromisingly at the same time to win the mass of Black workers away from their caucus mis-leaders.

In certain union situations, there is a legitimate need for an inclusive organization primarily concerned with the special oppression of Black workers; similarly other groups of particularly oppressed workers—apprentices, women workers, immigrants—may require separate organizations of struggle. But such groups are not, as the International Socialists believe, in themselves the vanguard of union struggle. Rather, certain such caucuses may become components of a regroupment process toward united radical caucuses based on a shared oppositional program.

The split at the top, the Viet Nam war, inflation and unemployment, Black caucus developments—all these provide an objectively powerful opportunity for Marxist intervention in the union movement. There is no room in our tactics for vacillation or opportunism, for our aim is nothing less than to turn the power of the organized working class against the capitalist class. ■

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PL AT A DEAD END

The Progressive Labor Party stands today a subjectively revolutionary organization bankrupt in its guiding conceptions, its prestige at a low ebb as the result of years of left-right-left shifts on virtually all major questions. This state of affairs must be apparent to the more perceptive of PL's membership and periphery despite efforts to cover the confusion by optimistic bombast. By 1968 it was evident that PL, burned by disasters such as Algeria and Indonesia, had awkwardly abandoned its orthodox Stalinist-Maoist approach to nationalism and, however much seeking to delay the reckoning, stood estranged on major issues from its mentor, the Chinese Communist Party. Referring to PL's empirical rejection of aspects of Stalinist opportunism, the Spartacist League in June 1969 termed PL's course "Trotskyism with a pre-frontal lobotomy." Recently the sharpness of the choice facing PL—to opt for genuine Leninism-Trotskyism or spiral into a rejection of Leninism as it repudiates Lenin's betrayers—becomes clearer as PL flounders over the question of the trade unions and mass work.

Only a short time ago, a hallmark of PL was "base-building" in mass and especially union work. Crude as its "base-building" concept was, PL fought hard against groups which regarded the working class as inherently reactionary (such as the RYM-Weatherman splitters in SDS) and against the Labor Committee's orientation of endless mass leafleting campaigns from outside. Now, however, PL is furiously emphasizing "mass sales" of *Challenge* rather than systematic colonizing into unions while professing that any PLers in factory situations will work as "open communists." Earlier, PL's main union policy revolved around the same concept as that of Browder's CP: the "left-center coalition" strategy—in practice an alliance with left-talking would-be bureaucrats and their hangers-on.

Dual Unionism Implicit

The Campus Worker-Student Alliance (CWSA) line, pushed in SDS by PL supporters to the exclusion of virtually all other arenas of struggle, was implicitly abstract propagandist in nature. PL-SDS refused to call for unionization of campus workers or to deal politically with unions when the workers were organized. Frightened by the rapidly revealed reformist content of the only trade union policy it knew, PL sought to become more "revolutionary" by holding itself aloof from the scene of its demonstrated opportunism—the unions—through the abstentionist, implicitly dual-unionist CWSA. The concentration on campus workers provided PL with an additional advantage: while

the plight of oppressed campus workers helped win class-guilt-ridden students, the CWSA was also an activity in which PL's opportunist errors and the triviality of its demands would not damage its reputation as seriously as the same errors in a union-organized, more politically conscious and economically powerful sector of the class engaged in industrial production.

PL-SDS has now downgraded the CWSA strategy but continues to denounce as "elitist" the idea that SDS should bolster its material support to workers (e.g. UAW strikers) with explicit programmatic demands to assist in crystallizing militant left-wing caucuses in the unions. SDS is unable to break from social-workerism (locating the axis of struggle in self-criticism over "individualism," "racism," "male chauvinism") because they lack a program to fight oppression, clinging to support of the bourgeois family, opposition to abortion and college "Open Admissions," refusal to be openly socialist, etc.

The CWSA strategy offered no answer to unionized workers seeking to fight within the complex, demanding and confusing arena of their unions. The groundwork was laid for PL to retreat into SLP- or Wobbly-type backwardness, characterized by glorification of the hypothetical apolitical "honest worker" and avoidance of the long-term struggle for leadership within the key trade union arena.

PL does not, of course, proclaim indifference to union struggle. But an organization must retreat from an arena for which it lacks a program. PL explicitly rejects the "Trotskyist" (and Leninist) concept of *transitional program*—which gives communists a bridge between the workers' felt needs for immediate improvement of their lot and the ultimate demand of state power. Lacking such an approach, PL must shuttle impressionistically between the obviously desirable "minimum" demands well understood by all workers (the CWSA's "rubber mats for the cafeteria") and empty ultimatism.

"Historic Penalty for Opportunism"

PL recoils from the results of its "left-center coalition" opportunism and, recently, from its trivial, moralistic CWSA orientation in SDS. But its reaction can be no more than to run

blindly from opportunism. PL is at a dead end in its interpretation of communism; its subjectively revolutionary impulse is at odds with its own history as a left variant of Stalinist-Maoist revisionism. PL has been shoved off its Stalinist base. Two years ago it repudiated its former line of supporting "progressive" nationalism, thus implicitly criticizing the Communist Parties from Stalin to Mao on this fundamental question. Now it stands face to face with the implications of its opportunism toward the unions. Its reaction on both questions is a classic case of sectarianism as opportunism standing in fear of itself. In its confusion, a large section of PL may find *Leninism* as easy to abandon as the Maoist caricature of Leninism, central aspects of which it had already dropped ("New Democracy," the two-stage theory of revolution, peaceful coexistence with reactionary "Third World" regimes, etc.) without Leninist analysis.

PL has taken the same position on elections as the confused anti-opportunists criticized by Lenin in *Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*. Lenin saw that ultra-leftism (and anarchism, its "purest" form) was a sort of "historic penalty for opportunism." Though recognizing the impulse which drove some communists away from electoral struggle and activity in reformist-led unions, Lenin was no less quick to point out the result of such a policy—separation from the struggle for the consciousness of the mass of the workers, a mistake which saves inexperienced communists from opportunism *only* because it separates them from real struggle with all its temptations to adaptationism.

For a Political Party of Labor!

To its revolutionary credit, PL does not mimic the pseudo-Trotskyism of the Workers League in calling for a ready-made opportunist Labor Party. But its response is to deny the relevance of a workers' party to the needs of the U.S. working class, replacing a concept of struggle for a real workers' party by the sterile slogan of "the elections are a hoax." Plenty of workers and students have long believed that "you can't fight City Hall," but most people who consider the elections a hoax also believe revolutionary politics are a fraud because of the history of betrayals by self-styled revolutionaries. PL's reject-

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Syndicalism and Leninism

One surprising effect of the French May-June 1968 events has been a resurgence of anarcho-syndicalism within the U.S. left. In fact, the French events completely reaffirmed the fundamental thesis of Lenin and Trotsky: that the mass reformist (Stalinist or social-democratic) party of the working class can deflect even the strongest spontaneous impulses toward revolution, in the absence of a pre-existing revolutionary party with considerable authority in its own right. Precisely what was lacking to carry the French workers

from general strike to taking power was revolutionary *political* organization—a vanguard party. But the New Left drew the conclusion that spontaneous localism is revolutionary and all centralized parties counter-revolutionary. The glorification of spontaneity fit in with classic New Left biases toward “doing one’s own thing,” and variants of syndicalism became the form under which New Left radicals turned toward the working class.

For a syndicalist, the revolutionary

process is supposed to take roughly this character: A wildcat strike creates a strong factory committee, which declares its independence from the official union and establishes e.g. the “liberated area of the Metuchen GE plant.” When enough such “liberated industrial areas” exist they combine and the system is thus overthrown.

However, the existing relatively centralized union structure is not a plot by bosses and union bureaucrats, but a victory gained by long, bitter struggles. Most syndicalists look back to the thirties as the heroic period of U.S. labor, but fail to realize that the main object of the labor struggles of the thirties was the consolidation of atomized factory groups into strong national unions. The principal goal of the great 1936 GM strike was to establish a single union to bargain for the thirty-odd GM plants. Before this, all bargaining was done at the plant-wide level. Some plants were organized, others not; some had localized unions, others had unions with broader aspirations. It was easy for GM to play one plant off against another or to shift production if one plant was particularly troublesome. The auto workers instinctively recognized they would have to give up a degree of local autonomy to achieve any real bargaining power.

Even now, it is the existence of 14 different unions as well as many non-union shops that has allowed GE to walk all over its workers for so many years. The growth of conglomerates has faced a number of unions with greatly reduced leverage.

Form and Content

The existence of strong working-class institutions under capitalism—unions or parties—necessarily creates the *objective* basis for privileged bureaucracy. A sure-fire cure for union bureaucratism is not to have unions at all! The corollary, of course, is that the workers are then completely at the mercy of the bosses. There is no mechanical solution to the problem of democracy. The only answer is an aroused and conscious working class which controls its own organizations, whether these be hundred-man factory committees, unions of hundreds of thousands or mass parties numbering in the millions.

Another important aspect of the syndicalist perspective is what form rank and file opposition should take: union-wide caucuses based on a comprehensive radical program, or attempts to undermine the centralized power of the bureaucracy through factory-level organizations? The goal of socialists in unions is not occasional defiance of

... PL

tion of the workers’ party demand merely *sidesteps* the need to convince workers that revolutionary politics are qualitatively different from capitalist politics and the political cynicism they generate among the masses.

In PL’s pamphlet “The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike Against General Motors 1936-1937” Walter Linder correctly notes that a major consideration preventing Roosevelt from intervening militarily against the strikers was the fear that “*the final result might become a strong case for an independent workers’ party to challenge the ruling-class parties on a higher level. . .*” (p. 121) Apparently the bosses did not believe, as PL now insists, that such a party is simply a trap for the workers! PL does not lead the workers to the Democratic Party as the CP did in the thirties, but neither does it call for a *political* alternative to capitalist politics.

Since PL does not regard a workers’ party as a significant step forward for the workers, one logically can ask what they think of unions. The world’s rottenest Labor Party does not have a more treacherous and pro-capitalist leadership than the American trade union movement. But isn’t union organization, even with its inherent limitations and potential for bureaucratism and co-option, still a gain for the workers? What condemns a workers’ union or party to the leadership of the “labor lieutenants of capital” is precisely the weakness of the revolutionary forces within it. And if communists dare not fight the union fakers for workers’ leadership, how are they ever to go up against the entire bourgeois social order, the capitalist state which hires and fires the bogus leaders of the working class?

“Trotskyism” as Secret Remedy

PL is indeed moving left from many of its previous positions. But, equating Leninism with their own Stalinist tradition and the garbled Menshevism of

Maoism, PL recognizes its mistakes only by threatening to jump “left” past both Lenin and the working class, from opportunism to sterile sectarianism. No amount of ultra-revolutionary rhetoric, no amount of gimmickry or genuine hard work, will compensate for PL’s theoretical confusion.

The only way out of PL’s present bankruptcy is to come to terms with authentic modern Leninism—Trotskyism. PL’s present rejection of key aspects of Stalinist-Maoist revisionism does not substitute for consistent communist program; it merely removes the greatest formal obstacle. PL will either discover the Leninist road in the only tendency—authentic Trotskyism—consistently opposed to the revisionism PL rejects, or reject Lenin along with the usurpers of his mantle and be lost forever in the wilderness of backward sectarianism and political banditry. Often PL seeks to dodge the issue of Trotskyism, sometimes invoking the straw man of the ex-Trotskyist SWP, while adopting particular quasi-Trotskyist positions empirically and without acknowledging their source or wider implications. (Canadian and European Maoists have accused PL of such “Trotskyism,” not without reason.) This is a self-destructive method, ensuring vulgar empiricism and sporadic opportunism. It is the method of those who say they are revolutionaries without acknowledging Marxism—at best a confusion of the inexperienced radical, at worst the device of opportunists to make a left turn while keeping their class options open.

Trotskyism is not an antidote to be taken in small doses by an organism living on a steady diet of Menshevism. Rather it represents the continuation of Bolshevik politics. PLers must understand that PL’s opportunism has been the result not of Leninism, but of pseudo-Leninism, and that its refusal to deal with Trotskyism is at the root of its inability to effectively distinguish the genuine from the revisionist in communist politics. ■

the bureaucracy, but rather its overthrow to command the tremendous power of the organized working class for revolutionary ends. Strong factory committees and wildcats can be potent weapons in discrediting an incumbent bureaucracy and strengthening internal opposition. But such localized and episodic organizations are no substitute for all-union program-based caucuses, which alone can pose an *alternative leadership* to the bureaucracy as a whole.

As Marxists, we do not take a fetishistic attitude toward the existing jurisdictional union structure. A bureaucracy may be so entrenched that an opposition cannot gain the formal union leadership regardless of how much support it has. In such a case, an opposition may be forced to split from the official union. The NMU and Amalgamated Clothing Workers were created when militant oppositions split from the official unions. But such splits are justified only if the opposition has gained the unquestioned loyalty of an economically viable section of the work force, leaving the official union an empty shell, not when they mean the voluntary isolation of the most militant and conscious minority of workers, leaving their fellows still under the sway of the sellouts.

Another facet of syndicalism is the belief that the main activity of revolutionaries is to foment trouble in the shops, the more trouble the better. Its fallacy is demonstrated by recent events in Italy. The anarcho-Maoists have made deep inroads among Fiat workers, who have been systematically sabotaging production. Fiat's giant Milan plant has been operating at 50 per cent of its normal capacity. One way Fiat has reacted is to purchase 30 per cent of Citroen, the French auto firm, and they are quite capable of closing down the Milan plant and shifting production elsewhere, out of Italy altogether, if it is more profitable. Thus militancy for its own sake simply leads to unemployment.

General Strikes and Reaction

A rational syndicalist might agree that atomized militancy can be self-defeating. He would counterpose the syndicalist panacea of a general strike. While a general strike always raises the question of embryonic dual power, it cannot overthrow capitalism in itself. The capitalist state must be smashed in its most concrete manifestation, the armed forces. If the army is not defeated or won over politically, it will suppress the general strike.

One of the most important general strikes in history occurred in the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution. It was an explicitly political strike, designed to extract concessions from the imperialist powers. The strike was characterized by a division of labor whereby the Communist Party ran the strike and

the national bourgeoisie commanded the army, through Chiang Kai-shek. When the bourgeoisie reached *its* compromise with the imperialists, it suppressed the CP and Chiang's army forced the strikers back to work at gunpoint. The Chinese revolutionaries learned the hard way that control of the labor movement is insufficient for revolution. (The Maoists draw the wrong conclusion—namely, that the labor movement is irrelevant as long as one has an army!) Political and military as well as economic organization are necessary. And winning over the soldiers, who are not subject to the discipline of the labor movement, requires a political party.

All general strikes create sharp political polarization, in which all sections of society come down for or against the strike. Even major industrial powers such as Japan, Italy and France contain large peasant populations which must be won over to the workers' cause if the strike is to be successful. The demand for workers' control of production is not sufficient; enlisting the support of the peasantry requires a program of e.g. reduced taxes and rents, changes in land tenure, easy agricultural credit, etc.—demands which can be put forward convincingly only by a revolutionary party capable of establishing a socialist government.

General strikes and serious industrial disruption create economic hardship for the entire population. It is certainly not true that all those not directly involved in a general strike will oppose it because of the hardships entailed; but such hardships must not be open-ended. Unemployed workers, welfare recipients, peasants and small shopkeepers will support a general strike if they believe it is a step toward creating a revolutionary government with a positive program to meet their needs. But if the strike appears interminable, self-centered and purposeless, these intermediate layers and backward sections of the working masses will turn to reaction.

This is demonstrated by the rise of Italian fascism. Following World War

ures, city-wide general strikes. After a few years of this, demobilized soldiers and other unemployed workers, civil servants, small shopkeepers and farmers were prepared to support Mussolini's "law and order" movement. It has been noted that fascism develops in periods when the labor movement prevents capitalism from operating smoothly but is unable to overthrow it. Syndicalism, to the extent it is successful, creates this very situation—a revolutionary situation without the strategy necessary for assuming control of the state—thus paving the way for the triumph of reaction.

The resurgence of radical syndicalism is a reaction against the economist and class-collaborationist policies of the trade union bureaucracy. But syndicalism is only economism in reverse: accepting the working class' lack of organization, especially *political* organization—and refusing to recognize the *dialectical* character of the bureaucratized workers' institutions—the contradiction between class-struggle and ruling-class elements which can be resolved only by principled intervention by revolutionaries to replace iron-fisted control by capitalism's lackeys with working-class leaders armed with a real program of class struggle. ■

... CHILE

(Continued from Page 8)

SWP; they are just more critical within the same framework. Healy's *Workers Press* of 12 Sept. concludes, "There must be a preparation for class action to defend Allende's victory and his election programs to meet this danger." And the U.S. Workers League states: "There is only one road and that is the revolutionary road of the October Revolution . . . As a step in this understanding the workers must hold Allende to his promises . . ." (*Bulletin*, 21 Sept.)—invoking the October Revolution, they demand the masses should compel an essentially bourgeois government to achieve socialism!

Not surprisingly, during the 1917 February Revolution in Russia the vacillating resident Bolsheviks, including Stalin, came up with the very formula the WL has rediscovered: to support the provisional government "insofar as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution." Lenin telegraphed his protest from abroad: "Our tactic; absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the proletariat the sole guarantee; . . . no rapprochement with other parties." All we could add today is to repeat Trotsky's fundamental conclusion about our epoch that the time has never been more urgent for the building of the international party imbued with Leninist aims and Lenin's determination. ■

MARXIST BULLETIN NO. 9

Part I

Basic Documents of The Spartacist League

Resolutions and Statements on Internationalism, Principles, Black Freedom. 35¢

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I, the Italian working class, under strong syndicalist influence, engaged in a tremendous but un-coordinated wave of industrial militancy—factory seiz-

CHILEAN POPULAR FRONT

The electoral victory of Dr. Salvador Allende's Popular Front coalition in Chile poses in sharpest form the issue of revolution or counter-revolution. The Chilean crisis is a fully classic expression of reformism's attempt to derail the felt needs of the working people for their own government to rule society in their own interests. The revolutionary duty of Marxists in Chile and internationally should be utterly unambiguous. Above all, the experience of the Russian Revolution and of Trotsky's critiques of the Spanish and French Popular Front governments of 1936 illuminate the objective of revolutionists in such a situation.

Dr. Allende's candidacy, which gained a plurality on 4 Sept., was based on a coalition of reformist-labor and liberal-bourgeois parties, including the pro-Moscow Communist Party, Allende's own somewhat more radical Socialist Party, the very right-wing Social Democrats, the rump of the liberal Radical Party, fragments of the Christian Democrats, etc. To gain confirmation by the Congress, Allende agreed to a series of constitutional amendments at the insistence of the dominant Christian Democrats. Most crucial among these were the prohibition of private militias and the stipulation that no police or military officers will be appointed who were not trained in the established academies.

With the maintenance of the foundations of the capitalist order thus assured, Congress elected Allende president on 24 October. He has now announced the division of spoils in his 15-man cabinet: the CP gets economic ministries, Allende's SP the key posts of internal security and foreign affairs, and a bourgeois Radical the ministry of national defense. This is reformism's answer to the Chilean masses' years of struggle and their desperate hopes that Allende's election would open up for them a new way of life, but they will not be held for long inside the Popular Front's bourgeois straight jacket.

It is the most elementary duty for re-

volutionary Marxists to irreconcilably oppose the Popular Front in the election and to place absolutely no confidence in it in power. Any "critical support" to the Allende coalition is class treason, paving the way for a bloody defeat for the Chilean working people when domestic reaction, abetted by international imperialism, is ready. The U.S. imperialists have been able to temporize for the moment—and not immediately try to mobilize a counter-revolutionary coup on the usual Latin American model—because they have softened the anticipated nationalization losses through massive profit-taking over several years.

Within reformist workers' parties there is a profound contradiction between their proletarian base and formal ideology and the class-collaborationist aims and personal appetites of their leaderships. This is why Marxists, when they are not themselves embodied in a mass working-class party, give reformist parties such "critical support"—against overt agents of capital—as will tend to regroup the proletarian base around a revolutionary program. But when these parties enter a coalition government with the parties of capitalism, any such "critical support" would be a betrayal because the coalition has suppressed the class contradiction in the bourgeoisie's favor. It is our job then to re-create the basis for struggle *within* such parties by demanding they *break* with the coalition. This break must be the elementary precondition for even the most critical support.

The Left Views Chile

Chile's most extreme known formation, the Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario, comprising Guevarists, semi-Trotskyists, etc., demonstrated conciliationism toward Allende as his campaign wore on and on 4 Sept. issued a call for the workers, students and peasants to support his victory, thus throwing their weight behind the popular illusions.

While the "revolutionary" Chinese Maoists have been very diplomatically noncommittal, for Gus Hall of the U.S. CP, "the elections in Chile are a revolutionary, democratic mandate of the people." He goes on, "Does this experience deny the theses of Debray [i.e. Guevara and Castro] and Mao? Yes it does." (*Daily World*, 17 Oct.) Not to be outdone in enthusiasm, Castro's *Granma* of 13 Sept. headlined Allende's election as "The Victory of People's Unity," thus willy-nilly sharing the same bed with Gus Hall and once again exposing as political charlatans those who preach confidence in the Cuban leadership.

Tragically, most of those formations

claiming the heritage of Trotsky's Fourth International have taken the same road, in disorientation or conciliation to Popular Frontism. At its April 1969 World Congress the United Secretariat majority around Livio Maitan affirmed that the strategy for Latin America was "rural guerrilla warfare" with a peasant base and a petty-bourgeois (student) derived cadre, thus rendering themselves irrelevant in the face of urban-based upheavals in Latin America. How about the United Secretariat minority, grouped around the American Socialist Workers Party? Their spokesman, Joe Hansen, stood on apparent Trotskyist orthodoxy, seemingly rediscovering the need to build revolutionary workers' parties as the key to the Latin American revolution, but this was just a fig leaf to cover the SWP's descent into legalistic reformism. The first response of Hansen's *Intercontinental Press* (14 Sept.) was agnostic, concluding, "Undoubtedly Allende's program is more radical, on paper, than the program of the Popular Front of 1938. But it remains to be seen what his bourgeois allies, present and prospective, will allow him to put into practice."

Behind the SWP's bland know-nothingism was its operational position: critical support: "It would be a crime to whitewash the UP [Unidad Popular]. But failing to recognize the positive elements in it, condemning it in toto out of some sectarian dogmatism,

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would mean suicidal isolation." (*IP*, 5 Oct.) To be sure, the SWP "knows better." But after all the Allende candidacy was enormously popular among the Chilean masses, so these revisionists chose to feed the illusions which block the path to socialist revolution and expose the workers, in this situation of great social polarization, to the danger of victorious reaction and right-wing terror.

Healy's Pabloism

The alleged anti-revisionists of Gerry Healy's "Fourth International" stand only qualitatively to the left of the

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