

# TRADE UNION QUESTION

## PART 2

In Part I of this paper, we outlined the Marxist-Leninist position on the trade union question. We discussed the forces that bring the trade union to life and determine its overall character. We explored that character and examined both the potential and the limitations of the trade union as an organization of the class struggle. In addition, we discussed the state of the unions in the U. S. today and analyzed the central task of communists within them. To capsule this perspective we advanced the slogan: **Revolutionize the Trade Unions.**

In this part, we intend to briefly discuss several important strategic and tactical questions facing those who set out to implement this task. Drawing from our concrete experience, we hope to clarify the objective conditions which provide the foundation for the application of this trade union program. Further we will attempt to sketch the outlines of the struggle to implement this program.

### WHERE TO BEGIN

The trade unions are presently instruments for the subjection of the working class to the bourgeoisie. Through their agents in the trade union movement, the bourgeoisie uses these organizations to tie the hands of the workers. Their agents preach the ideology of class peace, they encourage racism and sexism among the masses of workers and they have tied the labor movement to the rump of the Democratic Party.

Internally, the trade unions are bureaucratically structured in order to limit rank and file control; elections, when held, are infrequent and seldom democratic, contracts are often not submitted to rank and file ratification and international leaderships regularly dictate both the quantity and quality of any strike or struggle. Furthermore, the trade union misleaders openly defend the foreign policy of the U. S. government which is based on the suppression of the working and exploited peoples abroad.

This predominance of the bourgeoisie over the trade union organizations has proved extremely beneficial to the interests of the monopoly capitalists. In a period of growing economic instability and growing political isolation of the U. S. imperialists in the world, the bourgeoisie has been able to utilize its grip on the trade union apparatus to increase the exploitation of the working class. During the

1971 wage freeze, the monopolists were able to tie the working class' hands, holding down wages, and expand their rate of profit. Their willing servants at the pinnacles of the trade union movement were able to effectively block any mass challenge to these bourgeois policies, containing the workers both politically and economically.

Nevertheless, the intensified exploitation of the working class which began in the early 1960's did not slip by the proletariat unnoticed. In the trade union movement it produced a sharp increase in rank and file militancy. Shaken loose by the 1958 and 1961 recessions, the organized working class sectors began to struggle with increasing militancy against their declining economic conditions in bourgeois society. Since the 1970 recession the struggles of this trend have been both greatly intensified and wider spread.

All over the United States more and more workers began to express their extreme dissatisfaction with the course of capitalist development. In the economic arena, contract demands escalated and both the numbers and the lengths of the strikes climbed. The present level of strikes is greater than any time since the sharp class struggles immediately following World War II.

In the political arena workers demonstrations and popular protests proliferated. For the first time in decades, the working class began to demonstrate political independence of the bourgeoisie. The monopolists lost support for their Vietnam policies and found the sympathies of the masses creeping leftward.

At first, the thoroughly bourgeoisified trade union leadership was able to contain the growing militancy and dissatisfaction of the masses. Gradually, however, the effectiveness of even this bulwark of capitalism declined. The most class conscious workers recognized the deathgrip of capital on the trade unions. And they responded appropriately by organizing rank and file struggles and building rank and file organizations to spearhead a challenge to the bourgeoisie on two fronts —both within and outside the trade unions.

Taking the growing militancy of the broad masses of workers and the increasing number of rank and file organizations together, this developing rank and file movement represents the most concentrated expression of the growing resistance of the masses of workers to the bourge-

oisie.. For the workers, faced with intensified exploitation and deprived of their basic class organizations, the recognition came very quickly that they had to regain control of the existing trade unions if they were going to defend themselves. That same inevitable trade union striving that drove the working class to organize itself was shown once again albeit in a different form. Whereas in the earlier stage it had produced trade unions, it now produced the rank and file movement.

### THREE THRUSTS OF RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

Despite considerable divergence in time and place, the rank and file movement developed around three important thrusts. First it confronted the need for **far more effective economic struggle against capitalism**. Most of the workers in the rank and file movement had rejected the idea that the union should protect the company's profitability and thus called for an end to the sweetheart bargaining practiced in the trade union movement; the workers have urged their unions to engage in a **program of militant struggle to defend their day to day interests**.

Second, the rank and file movement has taken up the struggle for democracy in the unions. Demanding reforms in election procedures, union policies and practices which are open and available to the rank and file workers and rank and file ratification of all collective bargaining agreements, the rank and file movement has struck sound blows for democratization of the trade unions. Some of the more advanced caucuses in this movement have advanced demands which would tie the trade union leadership closer to the rank and file politically and economically by suggesting measures to institute recall procedures and to tie a leader's income to his ability to win economic gains for the rank and file.

Third, the caucus movement has taken up the struggle against discrimination. Recognizing that the widespread discrimination against women and national minorities saps the

unity of the rank and file, the advanced elements have sought to make their unions fight for the equality of all workers. They have demanded that the trade unions become active in the fight for the special needs of oppressed national minorities and women.

Frequently the caucuses which are most active in this struggle are made up predominantly of either national minorities or women. Recently, however, there is a growing trend towards multi-national and mixed organizations which actively fight the racist and sexist policies of both unions and companies. The most advanced elements of the working class movement have therefore understood the necessity of class unity in the struggle against racism and sexism.

These three thrusts around which the rank and file movement is presently being organized, represent the **embryo of a communist and class struggle trade union program**. The fight for militant unions is the battle for class struggle trade unions on an embryonic level, the struggle for democratic unions is the struggle for the control of the masses of workers over their class organizations and the struggle for unions that fight sexism and racism is the struggle for class unity in embryo. These embryonic struggles demonstrate a beginning consciousness that can provide a foundation on which to develop real class consciousness.

Left to itself, however, the rank and file movement will not develop its consciousness above this embryonic state. The workers will remain trapped in the reform struggle. The spontaneously developed understanding of the workers leads them to take on the class struggle with the goals of reform in mind. Because they do not see the fundamental workings of the capitalist system lying behind their oppression they are not conscious of the need to link up the struggle for vital reforms with an overall focus on the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

This basic reformism of the rank and file movement mars its effectiveness. All too often the struggle for effec-



SEAMEN SAY:  
LABOR  
MUST NOT  
HANDLE  
J. P. STEVENS  
GOODS



tive unions takes the form of struggling for a mere change in leadership. More energy is focussed on transforming individuals in leadership than in transforming the consciousness of the rank and file workers. The only guarantee of class conscious leadership is, of course, a class conscious rank and file. The struggle for democracy in the unions is all too often seen as a mere struggle for a more democratic union structure. The real causes for the lack of democracy in the trade union movement are not brought to the fore and little is done to struggle against the capitalist conditioned apathy so prevalent among the masses of workers.

Once again the emphasis is placed on one-shot reforms rather than protracted struggle for the predominance of the rank and file over the trade union apparatus. The struggle against discrimination is likewise not taken to the rank and file. Many caucuses make little effort to mobilize the masses of workers in struggles against racism and sexism, relying instead on the bourgeoisie's system of courts.

Thus, in spite of its tremendous potential, the rank and file movement remains dominated by reformism. Few even among the most advanced workers understand the capitalist-conditioned nature of their problems. For this, of course, the workers cannot be faulted. An understanding of the nature of the capitalist system does not grow spontaneously out of the economic struggle; it must be brought in from without.

It should therefore be obvious that the rank and file movement offers a unique opportunity to the developing communist movement. Because the workers are already involved in mounting struggles against some of the most important effects of the capitalist system on the trade unions, they are necessarily open to knowledge of the causes which lie concealed beneath the surface.

The workers involved in the rank and file movement sincerely desire to solve these problems or they would not go to such pains to organize. As communists, we can provide the understanding and leadership which will aid the advanced elements involved in the development of a revolutionary movement to transform the trade unions.

Thus, **the rank and file movement as it exists presently provides a starting point for the struggle to revolutionize the trade unions.** It is precisely this movement which provides communists with the most fertile soil for the development of a communist current struggling to implement a class struggle trade union program. Whether communists are successful in transforming the presently spontaneous and reformist movement into a conscious and revolutionary movement depends on the correct application of revolutionary tactics.

### THE SECTORS IN THE WORKING CLASS

The correct application of revolutionary tactics begins with an understanding of the different sectors of the working class movement.

In general the working class movement can be divided into three distinct sectors, the most advanced, the middle, and the most backward. The most advanced sector is made up of those workers who have the deepest understanding of the questions facing the working class movement. These workers are the quickest to respond to the tyranny of capitalism; they are the leading working class fighters in the struggle against all the various forms of exploitation and op-

pression in bourgeois society.

The advanced workers, however, are not just the quickest to respond and the most willing to struggle; they are not just the most advanced in their overall knowledge of the class struggle. These workers also **take up the task of organizing their fellow workers** in the struggle against capitalism; they provide the **active leadership** of the class struggle at every stage of its development.

The middle sector is the largest section of the workers. These workers, while they are not as advanced as the previous sector, are also willing to enter into struggles against capitalism; they too respond to capitalist exploitation and oppression. The chief difference between them and the former, however, is that they do not have sufficient independence to take on the leadership of the struggle; the level of political consciousness evidenced in a struggle depends not on them but on the character of the most advanced. The most advanced elements provide the conscious leadership and the middle sector provides the broad base.

The most backward sector is made up of those workers who are directly tied to capitalist exploitation (the labor bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy) and those who are most influenced by them. These workers are the farthest from class consciousness and thus bring up the rear of the class struggle. They are the least likely to become involved in a militant struggle and they are always ready to compromise. When they are drawn into the struggle (and they can be) they consistently drag their feet and constantly bemoan the rigors of the class battle.

### ADVANCED WORKERS IN THE U.S. TODAY

In the present working class movement in the United States, the most advanced workers are those who are standing at the forefront of the rank and file movement as a whole. These are the self-acting workers who have been providing the leadership for the growing rank and file movement.

They have been struggling for militant action to better the working class' economic conditions. Having led the organization of the rank and file caucuses, these workers are presently playing the major role in defining the political character of the rank and file movement. That character is reformist because of the level of consciousness of these advanced elements.

Every working class movement continually brings such workers forward. The advanced workers in the United States, however, —unlike the advanced elements in other countries— are not communists. There are two salient reasons for this. First, the influence of communism in the working class movement was broken with the triumph of revisionism in the CPUSA. It is only recently, after a breach of nearly fifteen years, that the revolutionary movement has begun to re-establish links with these critical elements.

Secondly, the forward development of the advanced workers was checked by the dominance of the bourgeoisie over the trade union organizations. Every time the advanced workers began to strain towards their natural allies among the revolutionary elements, the bourgeois labor leaders would red-bait them seeking to cut them off from those who could provide them with a real understanding of the society in which they lived. The strength of the class collaborationist labor bureaucracy has served as an im-

portant impediment to the development of links between the advanced workers and the newly regenerated communist movement.

Nevertheless, these workers remain open to communism — providing, of course, the communist forces consciously focus on trying to merge with them. The very experiences of the advanced workers provide a base for the development of communist consciousness. Their daily life teaches them the nature of capitalist exploitation; every day at the point of production they experience the domination of accumulated labor over its living counterpart, capital vampirelike sucking the lifeblood from living labor power. Rate-cutting, speed up, daily harassment by the bosses, these imprint the nature of capitalism on their consciousness hour after hour, day in and day out. This is fertile soil for revolutionary ideology.

The advanced workers, however, will not be won to communism on the basis of propaganda alone. Communists must join them in their practical struggles. Communists must join in their efforts to rally the broad middle sector of the working class into a resolute struggle against bourgeois domination over the class organizations of the economic struggle.

In the process of rallying the broad masses of workers and trying to advance the political level of their attacks on the capitalist system, **communists can merge with the advanced elements at the same time as they are struggling to win over the middle forces to a class struggle trade union program.** For it must be remembered that **the advanced workers desire above all else to lead their fellow workers to victory in the struggle to capture the trade union for the revolutionary movement.** It is precisely communists who can provide them with the correct understanding to do so.

Thus, merging of the communist movement with the advanced workers is the first step in the struggle to revolutionize the trade unions. (It is also the first step in the struggle to lay the foundations for a vanguard communist party.) This merger will develop in the process of the struggle to unite the most advanced elements in general with the broad middle sector of the workforce behind a class struggle program. The advanced elements (communists and advanced workers) must establish unity of action with the middle sector if they are to move the rank and file movement forward from its present embryonic state.

The unity of action initially established between the advanced elements and the middle forces will necessarily tend, in the early stages to be around relatively narrow reform demands. It may be established around contract demands which deal with higher wages, a cost-of-living clause, a right to strike clause, etc. Or it may be around an upgrading program to eliminate discrimination against Black or women workers.

But whatever the struggle the advanced elements must strive to advance the political character of the middle sector. By constantly uniting with the middle forces in concrete reform struggles and by consistently striving to elevate those struggles to a more advanced political level, the most advanced elements will be able to move the struggle forward and eventually bring it to the level of conscious attacks on capitalism as a system.

Bringing the reform struggle forward, however, demands an understanding of how to wage a reform struggle

in a revolutionary way. It is impossible to lead a reform struggle in a revolutionary way without a correct understanding of the dual nature of the struggle for reforms under capitalism.

## REFORM AND REVOLUTION

From a communist point of view the reform struggle is contradictory and two sided. First, it is an inevitable product of capitalism. The fundamental laws of the capitalist system necessitate a constant reform struggle by the working class. This struggle begins with the very basic nature of the worker as a wage-laborer; it is first and foremost a struggle over the conditions of sale and use of the commodity labor power.

Since the inevitable tendency of capital is to drive down the price of labor power in the market and to increase the exploitation of the laborer in the process of production, the working class is forced to constantly struggle to maintain its economic standing in society. All reform struggles under capitalism relate in one way or another to this basic struggle between capital and labor over economic standing in society.

On the other hand, the reform struggle just as inevitably stays within the confines of capitalist production relations. No struggle which accepts the basis of the economic exploitation of the laborer can possibly end that exploitation itself. Since the political dominance of the monopolists depends on their economic exploitation of the working class, no mere alteration in the relative shares of social wealth consumed by capital and labor can alter the fundamental picture. Moreover, it is precisely the exploitative relation between the two that determines their relative command on social wealth.

The two sided character of the reform struggle, i.e., that it is at once basic and fundamental and also limited and circular, provides a two-sided character to its contributions to the working class movement. The workers can learn valuable lessons from the reform struggle. They learn the necessity for unity and organization in the struggle against capital; the more organized and the more united the greater their strength.

Furthermore they confront the antagonistic interests of the capitalists. They see that they have to fight the capitalist to move forward and that he on the other hand has to fight them if he is to advance. Thus the reform struggle teaches the working class something of the nature of capitalist exploitation and how to fight it.

Nevertheless, the lessons taught by the struggle for reforms are imperfect. While the workers do learn the necessity for organization and unity, it is not necessarily the need for class organization and class unity in the struggle against capital; it is often merely organization and unity in the struggle against an individual capitalist.

Even more significant, however, is the fact that the struggle for reforms does not teach the workers the necessity for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. While it does teach them the need for struggle against the ever-expanding encroachment of capital on their well-being, it does not expose the impossibility of real working class well-being under capitalism.

Applying this dialectical understanding, communists have two goals in their leadership of the reform struggle. On

the one hand they seek to utilize the reform battles to strengthen the revolutionary unity, organization, and fighting resolve of the masses of workers. During the struggles of the workers, communists take care to aid the development of class unity.

They take care to see that the workers' organizations are strengthened, that more workers are brought into these organizations and that discipline is strengthened and good leadership developed. Furthermore, communists ensure that the workers understanding of the forms and methods of struggle against capital is developed in such a way as to encourage a continually expanding front to their attacks on capital and an equally expanding advancement of the political character of the movement as a whole.

On the other hand, communists ensure that larger and larger segments of the workers learn the narrow and circular character of the struggle for reforms. They strive to teach the masses that while the struggle for reforms is both extremely important and absolutely essential, that it can, nevertheless produce no lasting well-being for the working class. Every reform victory can be turned into a defeat unless the workers use those struggles to build their strength. Communists seek to teach the working class to

the interests of the workers and the capitalists. They will patiently explain the role of the labor bureaucracy in the trade union movement and the inevitability of such a bureaucracy under capitalism. They will explain the bases of racism and sexism in bourgeois society and the necessity of class unity in the struggle against them.

Even though the rank and file movement's political consciousness is at a low level, the experience of revolutionaries demonstrates that it is possible to introduce a class conscious understanding of the trade union question and win the mass of workers to it. The workers desire to understand why it is that the trade unions, which began as instruments in the working class arsenal, have been transformed into tools of the bourgeoisie. They desire to understand the forces that have turned their once democratic mass organizations into showpieces of corruption and autocratic leadership. Thus, there is a material base for a class struggle trade union program.

The objective forces, therefore, operating in the organized sector of the working class movement provide all the necessary preconditions for the development of a mass movement struggling to revolutionize the trade unions. This is proven by the tremendous upsurge in the rank and



make use of its reform struggles to make preparations for the seizure of political power.

Concretely, in the rank and file movement today, given the low level of the consciousness of the broad masses of workers, the unity of action between the most advanced elements and the middle section of the workers will tend towards the reform as opposed to the revolutionary side of the question. The advanced elements will seek to solidify their relationship with the middle forces around struggles for more effective trade unionism, for democracy in the trade unions and for an end to racial and sexual discrimination.

The goal of communists and the other advanced elements, however, should still be to constantly strive to raise the level of consciousness of the workers involved in these struggles as well as draw more and more workers into them. The advanced elements will seek to bring forward the reason for the bankruptcy of the trade unions. They will teach the masses of workers what is wrong with a trade union philosophy which is predicated on the identity of

file movement, by the spontaneous organization of rank and file caucuses by workers all over the United States and most importantly by the political character of the advanced elements. The rank and file movement offers communists opportunities which have not existed since the organization of the CIO.

#### THE LEFT-CENTER ALLIANCE

Thus the central task of communists working in the trade unions is the building of a stable alliance between the advanced or left-wing elements and the middle or center elements in the trade union movement. Joining with the most advanced workers and simultaneously seeking to win them over to communism, the communist movement must seek to construct a firm alliance consolidated on an action program geared towards recapturing the trade unions.

While the initial conscious level of the alliance will be around relatively narrow reform struggles such as the ones that presently characterize the rank and file movement, communists must constantly strive to advance the con-



scious understanding of the masses in the process of the struggle and raise them to the level of a class conscious understanding of the need to revolutionize the trade unions as the first step in the struggle for proletarian power.

In the early stages, the left-center alliance will involve relatively meager forces. Its most active partisans will be a handful of advanced elements who are seeking to win the center away from the reactionary, right-wing trade union bureaucrats and their flunkies. The center will be relatively passive; it will play a waiting game—waiting to see the program of the most advanced prove itself in practice. For the most advanced elements, the key will be to put forward the kind of program which will catch the eye of the masses, focus their attention on the struggle to recapture the trade unions and begin to move them into action.

Once the initiative of the most advanced begins to draw the center into conscious struggle to better their conditions, the advanced elements must move quickly but cautiously to consolidate their position. While maintaining the initiative and always striving to advance the center, the left endeavors to draw larger and larger numbers of center elements into the struggle and consolidate them into a stable alliance.

In the critical struggle to cement the left-center alliance, there are many tools. One of the most important is program. Program serves several purposes. First and foremost, program provides a conscious expression of the outlook of those most directly involved in building the movement. It describes their understanding of the forces to be drawn into the struggle and the context in which the struggle will take shape.

In addition, it describes the forms and methods around which the movement will be built and the long run aims of its builders. Thus program serves to make explicit the level of consciousness of the most active elements.

Secondly, program serves as a rallying standard for the masses. For them it serves to demonstrate the goals and the aims of those that seek to be their leadership. By pro-

viding in advance an understanding of the forces to be drawn forward and the forms and methods of the struggle, the program serves to prepare the masses for the trials and tribulations that lie ahead.

And by clearly setting forth the aims of the struggles it focuses the attention of the masses on the goals of the movement, enabling them to be more conscious and steadfast in pursuit of these goals. Properly presented and properly expressed, program can thus serve to draw the masses into conscious struggle.

Thirdly, program serves as a means for the most advanced to elevate the political consciousness of the masses. By providing the most advanced possible understanding of the nature of the struggle to be joined and an accurate assessment of the victories that can be won, program serves to educate the masses to their tasks and to show them how to achieve these tasks.

Finally, program serves to draw lines of demarcation between the most advanced and the most backward. By making explicit the aims of the left, program exposes the implicit assumptions of the right. Totally committed to spontaneity, the most backward elements strive to hide their aims; therefore, they must be dragged into daylight. By educating the masses of workers politically, the advanced elements can isolate the right and cement their alliance with the center.

#### PROGRAM MUST ELEVATE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MASSES

It is, of course, not just any program that can succeed in doing all this. If the program is too advanced or expressed in an abstract or artificial manner, the center will not be propelled towards it. It may still serve to express the consciousness of the most advanced elements, but it will remain impotent, isolated from the idiom of the masses.

On the other hand, if the program is merely an expression of the spontaneous strivings of the masses, it will not serve to draw them forward. It may provide political expression to their needs, but it will not do so in such a way as to strengthen their hand in the struggle against capital.

Thus program should strive to be as advanced as possible but not so advanced that it isolates the left from the center. It should seek to express the most advanced possible political consciousness, consistently striving to bring forward the class context in which the struggle is being waged; and it should be dynamic and not static. Only in this way can it serve to elevate the class consciousness of the masses of workers.

Organization is one of the most important weapons in the arsenal of the working class. In every struggle waged by the proletariat there are forms of organization which are appropriate. In the struggle to revolutionize the trade unions organization plays an especially vital role.

Since the key positions in the trade union apparatus are held by agents of the bourgeoisie, the working class must build organizations which will serve as base areas from which to strike at its class enemies. These organizations will be of differing kinds and will operate on different levels corresponding to the needs of the class struggle.

The most appropriate form of organization for the left-center alliance in this period is the rank and file caucus.

The rank and file caucus is an organization which is initiated by the most advanced elements for the purpose of drawing the center forces into the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its agents in the trade unions.

Its program is the program of an embryonic class struggle union which is striving to burst through the strictures placed on the rank and file by the dominance of the bourgeoisie over the workers' economic organizations. Thus, like the trade union itself, it should be a democratic mass organization in character which is geared towards united action at the point of production.

Above the rank and file caucus stand a variety of higher organizational forms which are broader in scope and of a more advanced political character. Among these are regional and national caucuses within particular trade unions, the left rank and file center which seeks to unite rank and file activists, and various other mass organizations.

At the most advanced level are the communist organizations, which provide a focal point for communist work in the trade unions. The two most important are the cell and the fraction. The cell is a democratic-centralist organization which is organized in a particular factory. It is made up exclusively of communists and unites them in their efforts to maximize their influence. It is the basic unit of communist organization—a party organization which takes on a wide range of party tasks.

The fraction, on the other hand, is geared toward the pursuit of party policy within a particular mass organization. In the case of a trade union fraction it seeks to unite all the party activists behind a common program geared toward a particular trade union. Naturally both organizations, while they may from time to time issue public statements of party policy, are basically secret in character.

### CRITICAL THRUSTS FOR THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE TRADE UNIONS

The program of the left-center alliance, as we see it, should be built around four critical thrusts:

- 1) *The fight for Class Struggle Unionism as the guiding ideology of the trade unions.*
- 2) *The fight for Democratic Rank and File Control of the trade unions.*
- 3) *The fight for Class Unity and Proletarian Internationalism.*
- 4) *The fight for Independent Working Class Political Action.*

We will develop each separately.

### CLASS STRUGGLE UNIONISM

The struggle for a proletarian trade union policy takes shape in the fight against class collaborationism in ideology and practice. Class collaborationism as an ideology preaches the identity of the interests of the workers and the capitalists. In the economic struggle, the workers are taught to perceive the profitability of their particular capitalist as something which they, themselves, must protect. It is all right to struggle for higher wages and better conditions but not to the point where the struggle threatens the competitive edge of "their" individual capitalist.

In the political struggle, class collaborationism preaches the identity of the interests of the working class with the bourgeoisie as a whole. Here too the working class

is told to protect the interests of capitalism and to subordinate their economic, political and social advances within the confines of the interests of U. S. imperialism. In practice then, in both the economic and political arena, class collaborationism must lead to the sacrificing of both the immediate and long run interests of the working class.

In sharp contrast, the proletarian policy in the trade union movement is founded on class antagonism. Class struggle unionism is the ideology and practice of that section of the workers which is conscious of their class position in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. While their particular trade union's membership is only a small portion of the working class as a whole, the workers speak and act as if their organization embraced the entire working class. They carry out their struggles, both the economic and political, with their class interests foremost in their minds. They see their struggles as a component of a broader long range struggle for the economic emancipation of their class and thus totally subordinate their struggles to the long run aims of the proletariat.

Although class collaborationism is presently predominant in the U. S. trade union movement, the seeds for its destruction exist within it. Class collaborationism cannot be fully homogeneous; otherwise it could not hold sway over the working class. What it does is to fit the consciousness derived from the spontaneous strivings of the workers into a context which is wholly palatable to the bourgeoisie. Not denying the necessity of the economic struggle (and its political component) it channels that struggle within the narrow limits of struggle against the effects—but never the cause—of capitalist exploitation. It binds embryonic class consciousness in a steel shell of bourgeois ideology.

Left to itself, the embryo will remain trapped in its steel encasement. It is only communism that can lead this embryo into full blown existence as class struggle unionism. To be sure the agents of communism among the advanced elements still seek to construct their ideology and practice on the foundation provided by embryonic consciousness. But the scientific knowledge to strengthen the foundation and construct the building will be brought to bear from



"Why don't you just put in a grievance, like everyone else at the plant?"

without.

The struggle for a proletarian trade union policy will necessarily disrupt the present unity of the trade union movement. The advanced elements, while they will direct their main blows elsewhere, will have to throw strong punches at the agents of class collaboration in the trade union movement. A well landed punch will, of course, disrupt the "unity" behind the influence of class collaborationism; this unity, however, is nothing more than unity between the class collaborationists and their imperialist commanders in the exploitation of the proletariat.

### THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

The main agents of imperialism in the labor movement are the labor bureaucrats. This stratum coupled as it is with the labor aristocracy, is a powerful agent of the proletariat's class enemy. They serve the monopolists in a thousand ways. To list just a few, they advocate and practice class collaboration; they are the main proponents of white chauvinism, sexism, and anti-communism; they faithfully support the rapacious foreign policy of the imperialists; they tie the labor movement to the rump of the Democratic Party, which represents the "liberal" wing of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

We could go on and on, but the main thing to remember is that they are the principal agents of the imperialists in the working class movement today, the main basis for opportunism in our movement, and they seek to use the trade unions as an instrument for the subjugation of the workers to the bourgeoisie.

The struggle to isolate and throw out these labor lieutenants of capital is thus a critical component of the overall struggle to revolutionize the trade unions. Again we will not fully discuss the nature of this struggle here (we are preparing a separate pamphlet on it), but we will outline the salient features.

First, the struggle to jettison the labor bureaucracy is bound up with the struggle against class collaborationism, white chauvinism and the subordination of the working class to bourgeois politics in general. The sharpest lines between the interests of the bureaucracy at the top and the rank and file workers at the bottom must be drawn ideologically and politically. Only in this way can the real nature of the bureaucracy be exposed.

Second, the rank and file proletarians must be rallied in a conscious struggle against the bureaucracy. There can be no question of a successful struggle against the labor bureaucracy which is not conscious of the nature of that bureaucracy, its social role, and who it serves. Finally, the struggle against the bureaucracy, like the struggle to revolutionize the unions in general, must be based on the rank and file membership. Bureaucracy cannot be eliminated short of the direct struggle of the masses of proletarians.

The struggle against the labor bureaucracy must be coupled with a struggle for democratic rank and file control of the trade unions. The trade unions must be renovated from top to bottom in order to ensure that the policies and actions are consistent with the needs and desires of the masses. This means that all policies are subject to full discussion and decision by the majority of trade union members. Union structures must be altered to ensure the rank and file full rights to elect and if necessary recall



UPI photo

all union representatives regardless of their official status. Furthermore, the salaries of union officials must be tied to the incomes of the rank and file.

### FOR CLASS UNITY AND PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for unity is of vital importance to the proletariat and therefore, to the proletarian policy in the trade unions. The strength of the working class depends on the unity of the workers in the struggle against capital. Where the workers are disunited, where they are fighting among themselves or struggling at cross purposes, they are weak. The history of the working class movement is full of examples of the strength that unity can bring to the proletariat.

Unity, like other primary questions facing the working class movement, is primarily a question of consciousness. True, the day to day experience of the workers at the heart of the capitalist process of production teaches the most socialized sector the need for unity in the struggle against capital. That unity, however, is no broader than the context in which it takes shape; it is the unity in the struggle against a particular capitalist employer. While this experience does provide a base for the development of the unity of workers, it does not lead to class unity. Class unity is a product of conscious struggle.

The first step in building class unity in the workers' movement is to broaden the workers' understanding of the need to weld their class together. Each particular struggle against an individual capitalist should be used to build not only the unity of the workers directly involved but also of the working class as a whole.

The workers directly involved should seek to rally their class in support of their particular struggles; they should strive to place each struggle in its class context. Furthermore, the most advanced sectors of the working class should tie each struggle into the broader political struggle of the entire class. In so far as possible, every blow struck against a particular capitalist should be integrated into the program of the proletariat as a whole.



The disunity of the U. S. working class is its chief weakness. Strikes are often carried out only with those directly involved in mind. Only rarely are they coupled with broader political demands. Even in the service sector and the public sector, which offer unique opportunities for broader political struggles, the scope of most struggles is narrow. Seldom are the strikes of hospital workers linked to demands for better health care or teachers strikes linked to demands for quality education. Workers have often been played upon to support higher prices for vital services in their struggles. In spite of a growing understanding of the need for working class unity as exemplified by the Farah strike and the more recent miner's strike, the working class has a long road yet to travel in its struggle for unity.

### STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

In analyzing the present features of the working class movement in the U. S., it is our conclusion that the chief source of working class disunity is white chauvinism. White chauvinism is an ideology which preaches that the oppression of national minorities in this country is a product of the "inherent inferiority" of these oppressed peoples. The different white chauvinist theories, which range from the Biblical theory to the bio-genetic theory, all share this common essence: the oppression of national minorities is justified by the character of those minorities themselves. The aim of such an ideology is to obscure the basis of national oppression in the fundamental economic and political nature of imperialism.

White chauvinism is the most important source of disunity in the proletariat for two reasons. First, because when white workers embrace white chauvinism, it necessarily cuts them off from an increasingly important sector of the proletariat. The national minorities in the United States are overwhelmingly proletarian in class composition and comprise nearly one-third of the entire proletariat. White chauvinism thus drives a wedge between the white sector of the proletariat and the proletarian national minorities, dividing and weakening the class as a whole.

The second reason is that the liberation struggle of the national minorities is bound up with and part of the U. S. proletariat's struggle for revolution. Since there can be no question of ending the national oppression of the minorities short of a socialist revolution, the liberation struggles of the minorities is profoundly revolutionary and strikes at the heart of imperialism. Where white chauvinism infects white workers, it cuts them off from their most powerful ally in the struggle against imperialism — the national liberation struggles of the national minorities.

Thus, white chauvinism is dangerous from two aspects — a proletarian aspect and a national aspect. White chauvinism, where it takes hold, renders revolutionary struggle impossible.

While this is not the place to fully discuss the correct approach to the struggle against white chauvinism, (see PWOC pamphlet *Racism and the Workers' Movement*), we will outline the most salient points of this struggle. First, the most important feature of the struggle against racism (white chauvinism) is the struggle for proletarian unity. For communists, our main aim is to unite the proletariat in the struggle against monopoly capital.



GOOD HEALTH  
CARE STARTS  
WITH GOOD  
WORKING  
CONDITIONS

PRETERM  
STRIKE 11/99

This unity however, does not drop from the skies; it must be forged in struggle. Proletarian unity can only be forged on the basis of a decisive defeat of white chauvinism. Any unity which is not based on the full elimination of white chauvinism will be purely fictitious.

Second, given that the main source of proletarian disunity is white chauvinism, the struggle against racism must be taken up by white workers. It is only when the white workers take up the struggle against the oppression of the national minorities (and its ideological justification) that real proletarian unity can be forged.

### OTHER DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS

Another important source of disunity in the working class movement is sexism. Sexism as an ideology serves to justify the oppression of women in capitalist society. The bourgeois idea that women should remain isolated from so-

cial production in the sphere of family reproduction is used to justify systematic discrimination against women in every area of capitalist society.

Last hired and first fired, paid less and denied job advancement, women are forced into the lowest paying and most menial jobs available. Like national minorities, they are expected to believe the sexist propaganda of the bourgeoisie and passively submit to discrimination.

Women have always played an important role in the working class movement. Not content to submit to their exploitation, they have been among the most militant fighters in hundreds of struggles. International Women's Day, which is celebrated by progressive social forces the world over, was initiated by a militant demonstration of working class women in New York in 1908. The tradition of U. S. women is a credit to the entire working class. And it is this proud heritage which must become the foundation for a resolute struggle against sexist ideology wherever and whenever it rears its head in the working class movement.

Anti-communism is a third form of bourgeois ideology which saps the strength of the working class. Anti-communism cuts the broad masses of workers off from the most advanced segment and cripples their ability to strengthen their hand in the struggle against capital. Without an organized vanguard, firmly rooted and solidly supported by the class as a whole, the proletariat will be incapable of revolutionizing the trade unions let alone wresting political power from the bourgeoisie.

The struggle for working class unity in the U. S. is a fraud unless it is linked through proletarian internationalism to the struggle for the unity of all workers and all oppressed people in the entire world. Imperialism is a worldwide system which ties the exploitation of workers in the

U. S. to the exploitation of peoples in all but the socialist countries of the world.

In the countries where socialism has yet to triumph, the masses are struggling sharply to drive the exploiters from their midst, just as the U. S. proletariat is fighting to overthrow imperialism at home. The socialist countries provide a major source of support for these struggles against imperialism and are therefore the firmest allies of the popular forces everywhere. Thus the working class and oppressed people in the United States have allies everywhere in the whole world.

The struggle for proletarian internationalism, i.e., unity in the struggle against imperialism by all the oppressed and exploited masses in the world, is vital to any working class. Here in the U.S., the leading imperialist power in the world today, proletarian internationalism has special meaning. The peoples of Vietnam, of Cambodia, of Palestine, of Portugal and Southern Africa have all struck blows at imperialism, blows for their freedom and ours as well. We on our end must return their contribution by striking hard at the soft underbelly of imperialism at home. We must consciously couple our domestic struggle with strenuous support of all liberation struggles of all peoples all over the world.

The main ideological block, however, to building internationalism is national chauvinism, the core of which is white racism. The blatant racism of the U. S. imperialists, exhibited recently in such "humanitarian" acts as the Vietnam babylift, has in part infected our class. We must struggle sharply to drive out such ideas of national superiority and show the imperialists by our deeds that we oppose their "national supremacy". For us, our nation can only begin to take its proper place among the world's peoples with the



triumph of socialism in the U. S.

### THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION

If the U. S. proletariat is to win political power, its struggle must find mass political expression. It is one of the central tasks of the industrial proletariat to rally behind its revolutionary banner the less organized, and more backward sectors of the proletariat. This can only be accomplished on the basis of mass political action on the part of the industrial workers which seeks to present the aims and methods of the proletarian struggle to the rest of the class, and further seeks to unite the class in the struggle against imperialism.

Moreover, the proletariat cannot win the struggle against imperialism alone. It must unite in action with the consistently democratic sectors of the oppressed and exploited peoples, raise and champion their democratic struggles and in turn build a firm alliance between itself and these forces in the struggle against imperialism.

Further, the proletariat must explain the anti-democratic, oppressive and exploitative nature of imperialism, and its only viable alternative, socialism, and thus win the democratic sectors to the struggle for the overthrow of imperialism. The democratic strata of the U. S. populace, that is the small and self-employed businessmen, small farmers, the non-proletarian and non-comprador sectors of the oppressed nationalities, students, intellectuals, etc., constitute a great strategic reserve of the proletariat and must be rallied to the cause. Once again, mass political struggle is the key.

It should be obvious that the present political struggle of the proletariat must change drastically before it can realistically address such a task. At present the industrial proletariat and the trade union organizations are tied to the rump of the Democratic Party, the party of the liberal wing of the imperialist bourgeoisie. The democratic-republican system, as long as it continues to capture the political struggle of the proletariat, is the main political instrument of the political subordination of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie.

The democratic-republican formula allows the masses of the working population to decide which sector of the imperialists will get to lead monopoly capitalism in the world-wide struggle to oppress and exploit the world's peoples for the next four years. There is no question of the proletarian viewpoint finding any real expression within these two parties.

In order for the proletariat to put forward its political attitude toward the pressing problems facing the working population, it must break free of the stranglehold of the two party system. The proletarian viewpoint must find independent political expression — that is, independent of the two political parties and independent of the bourgeoisie. Thus the slogan: "For Independent Political Action."

The struggle for independent political action is a central part of the struggle to revolutionize the trade unions. It is bound up with the fight for a class struggle trade union policy, for class unity, and the fight to rid the trade unions of the cancerous bureaucracy which dominates its high offices. The struggle for proletarian independence in general, and its struggle for independent political action in particular, is the most concentrated expression of the

economic struggle for proletarian emancipation.

Independent political action is the most undeveloped thrust in the rank and file movement today. Even the most advanced elements have little understanding of the urgency of the political struggle. Some have argued against mixing politics in the rank and file movement, and others, if and when they do address the question, urge the rank and file movement to fall behind reform Democratic politicians. Those few advanced workers who have understood the importance of this thrust have had little success with its implementation owing to the backwardness of the general rank and file.

This situation is nevertheless understandable; independent political action does not grow directly from the economic struggle in the way that embryonic consciousness of the need for better and more democratic trade unions does. Political action independent of the bourgeoisie can only be the product of conscious struggle and that means conscious subordination of economics to politics. There is nothing that the bourgeoisie strives so hard to prevent.

The development of this thrust, then, is one of the most urgent tasks of communists. Just as communists strive to bring politics forward in the revolutionary struggle in general, so they must struggle to build a strong mass-based political current in the rank and file movement. Such a current can be developed on the basis of consistent agitation for political independence coupled with an action program leading up to the running of labor candidates for political office.

### CONCLUSION

To sum up, communists must begin the struggle to revolutionize the trade unions by joining with the advanced elements in the leading of the rank and file movement. The rank and file movement, which is a left-center coalition, must be moved to a higher level by consistent agitational, organizational, and practical work guided by revolutionary theory and developed around the correct application of revolutionary tactics.

There are four critical thrusts around which this movement must be built: 1) The fight for Class Struggle Trade Union Policy, 2) The fight for Democracy and Rank and File Control, 3) The struggle for Class Unity and Proletarian Internationalism and 4) the fight for Independent Political Action.

The struggle to revolutionize the trade unions will not develop by itself; it can only be a conscious product of the unity of action between communists and the masses of organized workers. The unity of action beginning with the concrete expression of the rising class struggle in the trade unions — the rank and file movement — must be consciously developed into a class conscious movement struggling to revolutionize the trade unions.

Obviously, this is a long and protracted struggle which will force the revolutionary workers' movement through many twists and turns, through many advances and retreats, victories and temporary defeats. But if the tasks of the movement are handled correctly, if it is led by steadfast and disciplined proletarian elements, the movement will eventually succeed. For in the long run, no power on earth can stop the advance of the proletariat and its class conscious vanguard.