

LINE OF MARCH

P.O Box 2729, Oakland, California 94602

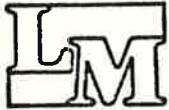
Conference Agenda
Political Report

Line of March Labor Commission

First National Conference
August 21-23, 1981
San Francisco Bay Area

Conference Registration: \$20.00

Additional Copies of Political Report: \$3.00



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Line of March Labor Commission - First National Conference

Tentative Agenda

Friday, August 21

- 7:30-8:30 p.m. Conference Registration
- 8:30-10:30 p.m. Orientation to the Conference: History of the Line of March Labor Commission and Goals of the Conference

Saturday, August 22

- 9:00-9:30 a.m. Late Registration
- 9:30-12:00 noon Political Report
- 12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch
- 1:00-3:00 p.m. Political Report (WORKSHOP)
- 3:00-3:30 p.m. Break
- 3:30-6:00 p.m. Political Report
- 6:00-7:30 p.m. Dinner
- 7:30-10:30 p.m. Summation/Discussion of work in the S.F. Blue Shield Strike *BARBARA PR...*

Sunday, August 23

- 9:00-12:30 p.m. Labor Aristocracy Manuscript *BOB, RANDY, FRED.*
- 12:30-2:30 p.m. Lunch; Summation of seminar experiences for those who will be leading the seminar this year
- 2:30-4:00 p.m. Report/Update on the work in ILWU 37, Seattle *TERRY, DAVID, MIKE*
- 4:00-6:00 p.m. Commission Future Plans *DAN.*
- 6:00-7:00 p.m. Summation/Evaluation *MAX.*

Materials: Enclosed is the agenda and political report. A second packet containing the preparatory materials for the labor aristocracy discussion, Blue Shield summation, and Future Plans discussion should be available approximately August 12.

Political Report

Introduction

Though this is the first political report drafted by the Line of March Labor Commission as such, the theoretical and political framework upon which it is based has been developing for quite some time. In particular, this report builds upon the foundation laid in the article "Communist Work in the Trade Unions" published in the March/April 1981 issue of Line Of March. This article, in turn, drew upon the political report to the August 1980 Conference of the Northern California Alliance, where many of the forces later to form this labor commission put forward for the first time a relatively developed assessment of the state of the U.S. labor movement.

Because of this history, it is quite useful to review the main points of the 1980 political report here, both to note the political changes which have actually occurred in the labor movement within the last year as well as to gain a sense of the extent of our progress in being able to understand and analyze this complex and important arena of class struggle.

The 1980 report situated the struggles of the U.S. labor movement in the context of the sharpening contradictions facing U.S. imperialism. It noted that the successful Vietnamese liberation struggle was a turning point for U.S. imperialism, significantly weakening it economically and politically. In response to the erosion of its power, a consensus was emerging within the U.S. bourgeoisie that it must put Vietnam behind it and go over to the offensive internationally and domestically.

The report emphasized that this offensive was taking shape even during the Carter administration, and had as conspicuous features a more aggressive and warlike foreign policy, a rise in racism, attacks on the labor movement and on the general standard of living of the working class. In the face of the increasing depth and pace of capitalist attack, the labor movement's response was assessed as weak and inadequate. The main reason for this inadequacy was targetted as the firm grip class collaborationism has held on the trade union movement for over 25 years. Precisely because the opportunist leadership of the organized labor movement had accepted the notions that "what's good for business is good for labor" and that U.S. labor's interest is bound up with imperialism's ability to expand, this leadership was unable to mount an effective resistance to the capitalist onslaught.

Given the inability of the "old guard" class collaborationists to lead the labor movement in defense of its interests, certain influential elements in the trade unions were breaking with some aspects of the collaborationist line.

The 1980 report highlighted the importance of this development, but noted the degree to which these forces were vacillating and inconsistent, particularly on the issues of war and racism. While the existence of these "dissident" forces provided more favorable soil for left activity and these elements would undoubtedly have to be allied with in many cases by the left, they could not be relied upon to play a leading role in forging a political trend in labor that would be firmly based on the policies of class struggle.

Last year's report also noted the relative absence of a mass rank and file movement in the unions, and the relatively peripheral role virtually all forces on the left played within the main struggles of organized labor. The partial exceptions to this were the social-democrats, whose influence is rising but whose ideology and politics are objectively firmly reformist, and the CPUSA, which takes a better stand on many issues but continues its long-standing tendency to tail middle forces.

Despite its present lack of influence, the forces within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend were targeted as holding the key to eventually realigning the labor movement on a class struggle basis and winning influence for revolutionary politics within it. Unfortunately, the potential of this trend remained largely undeveloped, principally because of the economist orientation and narrow political visions of the "fusionist" trade union line of the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee, (PWOC), the most influential line on the trade union question within the trend.

Today, the main contours of this report continue to hold up fairly well. However, there have been a number of important changes in the labor movement and within the left, as well as some advances in our ability to analyze this arena, that are important to note here.

In the labor movement, the most conspicuous change since the summer of 1980 is the increasing political initiative taken by the most rightist, class collaborationist forces, overshadowing by far any initiative from the left or center. This development is shaped, in the most immediate sense, mainly by the (expected) defeat of Carter's bid for re-election and the (unexpected) ouster of so many liberal Democrats from Congress in the 1980 elections. This change has thrown the Democratic party into disarray, and left the labor leadership without its traditional access to the centers of governmental decision making. Under these circumstances, and as the accelerating attacks on the working class begin to affect even the more protected strata of the class, these "labor Heutenants of capital" themselves are compelled to take more aggressive action to place themselves in the forefront of the simmering anti-Reagan sentiment among workers and attempt to channel that sentiment into a militant sounding but thoroughly backward political direction.

Within the left, two important changes have occurred in the last year which affect our work in labor. The first of these is the qualitative decline in the influence of Maoism and its class collaborationist line on the left in general and among aspiring Marxist-Leninists in particular. The Maoist groups of the "new communist movement" fielded many cadre into the labor movement in the early 1970's. Though the political primitiveness of Maoism limited their ability to gain influence as a coherent trend, a considerable number of these activists did establish themselves in local areas as militant trade union fighters with left ideas. Now these forces are politically adrift, as Maoism has become discredited and isolated in the broad peoples movement and as the various Maoist groups undergo internal crises (CPML and RWH) or try to adjust thier line to recognize, at least minimally, the realities of the international class struggle (CWP). The result is that Maoism's ability to become a political force in labor or even to retain the allegiance of its present cadre has been qualitatively eroded in the past period.

Second, and of even more immediate impact on our work, has been the qualitative altered political dynamics within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend. In the last year, the fusion line and PWOC/OCIC center have undergone a dramatic decline in influence. In this context, many trade union activists previously under the grip of this line's economism and narrow political visions are open to re-evaluating their views and broadening their political horizons concerning work in the labor movement.

Alongside this important change, the trend has scored a significant advance in tis ability to analyze developments in the class struggle in general and labor in particular with the development of the United Front Against War and Racism perspective. Many aspects of this line can be seen "in embryo" in the 1980 political report; but the synthesis of these more scattered views into a relatively comprehensive strategic perspective qualitatively sharpens our ability to map out a plan for trade union work in the coming period.

Overall, then, we can approach this coming year's work with a significant degree of optimism. Within the labor movement, a number of forces have been drawn into motion because of the severity of the Reagan attack, though in the absence of a strong left, the initiative in capturing this momentum presently rests with the most rightist, collaborationist forces. While the left remains generally peripheral to the mainstream of organized labor's struggles, the conditions within the emerging Marzist-Leninist trend are more favorable than ever before to develop a coherent, politically sound, professional and nationwide approach to communist work in the trade union movement. With this in mind, we turn to the substance of this year's political report.

U.S. Imperialism's Offensive Against the International Proletariat

The U.S. labor movement today develops and struggles in the midst of the sharpening crisis of U.S. imperialism. This crisis

arises directly from the underlying contradictions inherent in the capitalist system, contradictions which become particularly acute in the highest (monopoly) stage of capitalist development.

Today it is clearer than ever that capitalist property relations in the U.S. act as a qualitative fetter on the further development of society's productive forces. This is reflected economically in the tendency of U.S. monopoly capitalism toward stagnation; or looked at another way, capital's inability to smoothly reproduce and expand. From the point of view of the capitalists, they face a "profits crunch"; from the point of view of Marxim, we see the working out in life of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

This same contradiction between the forces and relations of profuction is reflected as well in the class struggle, pitting class forces representing the dying capitalist mode of production against those representing the rising socialist system on a world scale. Today, the forces objectively representing socialism appear on the world scene in three main forms: existing socialism, national liberation struggles, and workers movements in the advanced capitalist countries. Despite setbacks, in general, these forces are stronger today than at any time in the past, while the forces of imperialism are weaker; on a world scale, imperialism is losing the class struggle. Because of this, the crisis facing U.S. imperialism represents at heart ~~a weakening of the imperialist system as a whole--a crisis of imperialism--and not mainly a weakening of U.S. imperialism only relative to other rising imperialist headquarters.~~ From the point of view of Marxism, we see the unfolding in the concrete of the inevitable world revolutionary process through which capitalism will be ushered off the stage of history.

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Speaking more particularly, the present stage of imperialism's crisis began essentially with the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. The Vietnamese struggle inspired revolutionary national liberation movements all over the world; it drained the strength of U.S. imperialism economically and militarily, and it inflicted severe ideological damage upon the image of U.S. imperialism (both at home and internationally) as that "invincible champion" of "freedom and democracy." In the context of the U.S. defeat, U.S. imperialism's capitalist rivals gained a certain competitive advantage relative to the U.S. particularly given the increasingly outdated industrial plant in many U.S. basic industries. The ability of the U.S. ruling class to buy social peace at home through expensive concessions to large sectors of the U.S. working class was undermined. As well, the ability of U.S. imperialism to win support among the U.S. population to intervene militarily around the world to prevent revolution, and to militarily carry out such intervention effectively, was severely damaged. Consequently, in what amounted in essence to a qualitative setback for the imperialist system as a whole, U.S. imperialism was by the mid-1970's weaker than it had been at any other time since world war II.

This situation was clearly untenable for the U.S. bourgeoisie. The result was an emerging bourgeois consensus to go over to the offensive, to reassert control over countries slipping out of imperialism's grip internationally through war if necessary, and to increase the level of exploitation of the working class within the U.S. To pave the way for this offensive to be fully unleashed, the transitional presidency of Jimmy Carter served to "relegitimize" a strong U.S. defense policy and to impress upon the masses the need to make sacrifices for the "national interest." The effectiveness of Carter's transitional regime was indicated by the election of Reagan in 1980, which opened the door for the bourgeoisie to pursue its offensive against the international proletariat with full force.

Under Reagan, the basic contours and focal points of the bourgeois offensive have begun to stand out in sharp relief. The twin pillars of this offensive are the bourgeoisie's increasingly aggressive foreign policy including preparations for war, and a racially defined social austerity program for the U.S. working class.

Internationally, U.S. monopoly capital is predicating its policy on the assumption that it will be going to war to prevent revolution, and that any such war could well include direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union. The policy dictates both a massively increased military budget to finance imperialism's ability to fight such a war(s), and a mounting ideological campaign based on national chauvinism, anti-communism, and anti-Sovietism to ship up support for this policy within the U.S.

Within the U.S., the monopoly capitalist class is intent upon imposing a program of severe social austerity upon the U.S. working class, both to finance the most extensive military build-up in U.S. history and to give a swift economic boost to "profit-sluggish" capital. However, both because the U.S. working class is objectively a highly stratified class, and because the U.S. ruling class is highly conscious that it is a small minority of the population and must try to win support (or at least passive acceptance) for its programs among some sections or the workers, this austerity does not affect the working class evenly across the board. Rather it has a distinct racist edge. This edge is developed both by attacks that hit hardest at the poorest, least protected strata of the working class—which are disproportionately, though not exclusively, minorities, and by attacks that are more explicitly directed along the racial line at minorities. Clearly, the bourgeoisie's hope is that by ghettoizing the worst effects of austerity among minorities while cushioning the blow for the more stable, white sector of the class, an active and united resistance to this austerity program can be prevented.

The particular forms through which this attack is racially orchestrated are varied and sophisticated. They include

(1) avoiding budget cuts in so-called "safety net" programs which actually benefit mainly the more stable sectors of the class (for example, social security) while making major cuts in those programs that affect the more unstable strata (food stamps, aid to families with dependent children); (2) shifting government fund transfers from grants to cities--where minorities have political influence--to states--whose legislatures are controlled largely by white rural and suburban forces; (3) ending the funding for enforcement of affirmative action guidelines, while simultaneously loosening the guidelines for affirmative action and stopping desegregation programs; etc.

The point overall, however, is to organize the attack in such a manner that an austerity program which affects all workers to some extent is accepted and in fact supported by the more protected, largely white workers, because the biggest blows are restricted to minorities. Combined with the racist ideological offensive underway, and the jingoist agitation for "national defense" against "terrorism" and communism, the attempt is to forge a white, patriotic consensus within one sector of the working class in support of the bourgeoisie's overall attack on the international proletariat as a whole.

In the context of this offensive, the dominant circles of U.S. monopoly capital are also looking with more favor than previously on the growth of the "new right." In the last few years, a right-wing movement with strong tendencies toward fascist ideology has developed among certain strata of the petit-bourgeoisie and working class as well as a number of capitalists outside the mainstream of the U.S. ruling class. These forces have built an impressive network of support, presently utilizing attacks on women's rights and gay rights (mainly the abortion issue) as the spearhead of their organizing. While the big bourgeoisie itself is not at the center of this movement nor is it united with all aspects of the new right's program, the interests of these now two distinct political forces overlap considerably, and monopoly capital is utilizing this right-wing movement as an important buttress for its program of war preparations and racist social austerity.

Obstacles in the Bourgeoisie's Path

Undoubtedly, the U.S. bourgeoisie has marshalled an impressive array of weapons for its assault on the U.S. and international proletariat. However, a number of factors stand in the way of this offensive smoothly and easily achieving its desired results.

In the first place, even though capital's austerity program for the U.S. working class is racially orchestrated, all strata of the working class will have to suffer somewhat, creating some obstacles to this program being swallowed easily by large numbers of people. Reagan and his advisors sometimes attempt to hide this fact, arguing that the administration's program will, in

relatively short time, be "good for everyone." In making such promises, the administration utilizes the arguments of supply-side economics, which claims that if only government gets out of the way with its high taxes and excessive regulations, the economy will experience rapid growth, inflation and unemployment will both be reduced, and every stratum of society will benefit. Such rhetoric helped Republican politicians win election in 1980, but the logic behind it is looked upon as unrealistic and even dangerous by key figures in government and business who actually are occupied with generating and expanding corporate profits. These forces are particularly concerned about the negative effects of inflation on business (inflation makes it hard for business to plan investment and borrowing/lending policies, and hurts U.S. capital vis-a-vis its capitalist rivals). They do not believe for a moment that tax and domestic spending cuts alone will reduce inflation--particularly with the military budget expanding. They advocate tight money policies and other measures to reduce inflation by cooling off the economy--that is, by organizing a recession. Despite Reagan's optimistic rhetoric, recession is the actual prospect for the coming period, and all sectors of the working class will feel the pinch. Despite its differential impact, the belt-tightening of a recession is likely to reduce support for Reagan's economic policies even among the more protected strata of the class.

There is also a contradiction between the military build-up and the domestic side of the bourgeois offensive. The military is gearing up to fight a war, but the (largely minority) volunteer army is unreliable. Consequently, the military high command wants to re-introduce the draft and obtain more "educated and disciplined" (read: reliable and white) troops. Yet the relaunching of the draft would affect precisely those strata in the working class Reagan is trying to win to the program of austerity and war, and the bourgeoisie's memory of the spark the draft provided to the anti-war, anti-government sentiment in the 1960's is a strong one. This is the reason the administration is trying to avoid imposing the draft, though the contradiction in this policy remains an active one for the bourgeoisie.

Even if monopoly capital is somewhat successful at overcoming these obstacles and gathering significant support for its program among the more protected strata of the working class, there is no guarantee that this program itself will sufficiently revive the profit-making capacity of U.S. capital to get the economy running relatively well after a short and mild-to-medium depth recession. For U.S. capitalism is presently caught in a web of contradictions which are inherent in the system itself. The economy is not faltering mainly due to poor economic policies on the part of previous presidents, nor is U.S. power internationally eroding simply because previous administrations failed to get tough with the Russians. The essential problem was not irresponsible presidents, but irrational capitalism.

Of course, in the short and medium run, capitalism may succeed in mediating these contradictions to a certain degree and staving off a depression-like economic and accompanying political crisis. The system certainly will not fall apart of its own accord, and the weaknesses of the U.S. working class movement, particularly the possibility that much of the class may support key aspects of the capitalist offensive, provide some respite for troubled capitalism. However, the objective limits that do face the bourgeoisie mean we are undoubtedly in for a turbulent economic and political period ahead. U.S. imperialism is in economic difficulty and has less flexibility than at any time in the past 30 years. It has gone over to the offensive politically, economically and ideologically and preparing to do so militarily. This course will undoubtedly foster resistance, and this resistance itself - of the international proletariat including its U.S. detachment - will be an important factor in determining just how severe the crisis of imperialism will manifest itself this time around - and what its outcome will be.

The Capitalist Offensive and the U.S. Labor Movement

The austerity program being imposed upon the U.S. working class is, in essence the rate of exploitation of the U.S. working class. Inevitably, then, a specific capitalist assault on the organized labor movement is an integral feature of the overall capitalist offensive.

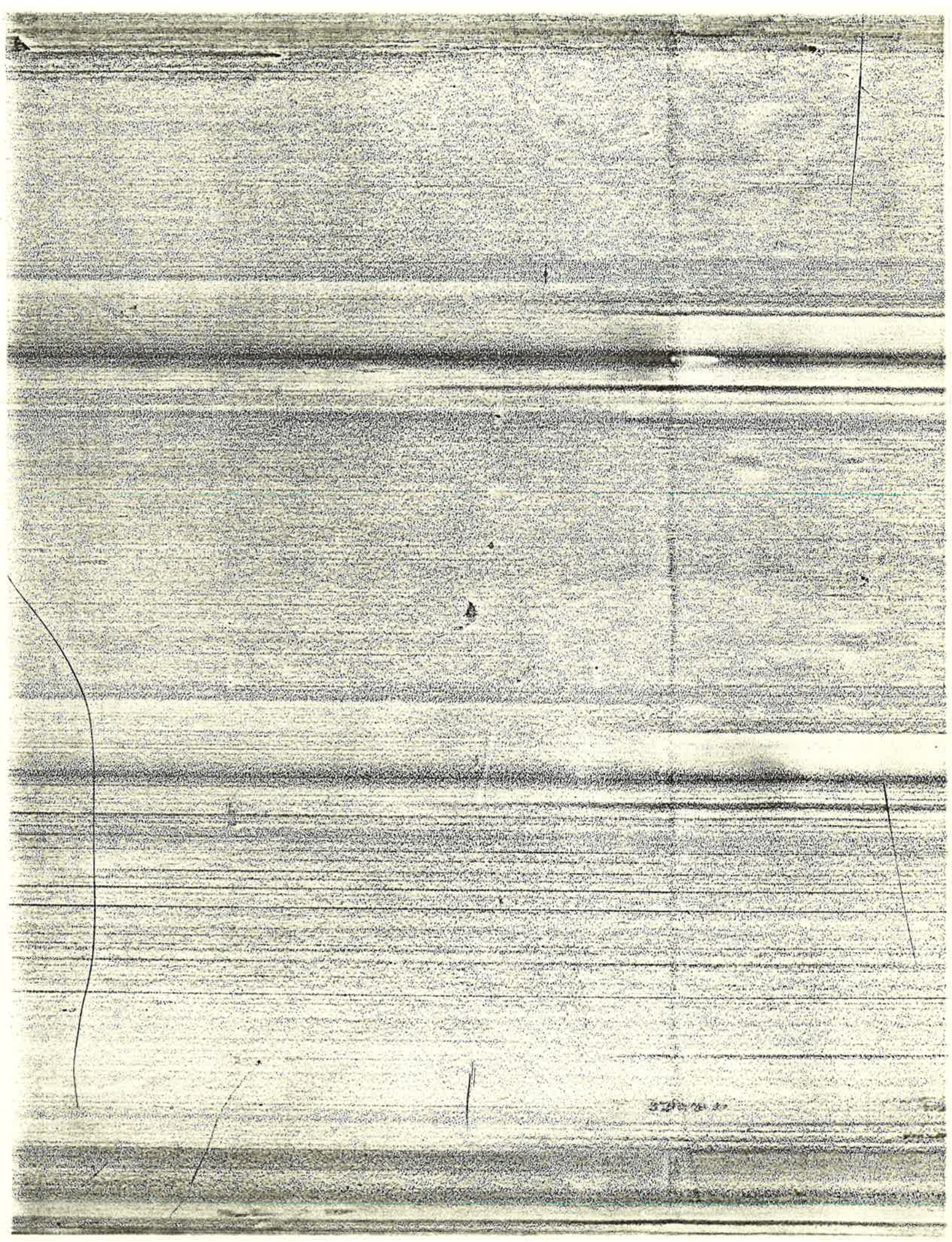
In the Carter high inflation years, the most conspicuous feature of the specific assault on labor involved employers taking a hard line concerning wages and cost-of-living allowances. This resulted in a steady drop in the real wages of U.S. workers. While employer resistance to adequate wage packages remains an important feature of the present capitalist strategy, increasingly capital is attempting to up its rate of exploitation of workers through a focus on expanding labor productivity in a variety of different ways. These include (1) runaway shop/plant closures to close down "outmoded facilities" in favor of ones with more advanced technology (most often located in low-wage, non-union areas in the U.S. or abroad) (2) layoffs, combined with expectations that the fewer remaining workers produce the same output; (3) weakening of health and safety and other regulations that increase cost per unit output; (4) intensified automation and retooling; (5) a general attempt, through a variety of means, to weaken unions and their ability to place any restrictions on management's efforts to squeeze more surplus value out of each worker. While these anti-labor measures affect the entire trade union movement to one degree or another degree, again the already least stable sectors of workers (largely minority) have the least ability to resist. Also, the attacks on workers in certain key industries where U.S. capital has outmoded facilities and faces stiff competition from abroad (auto, steel, rubber) and on public sector workers are particularly sharp. Since the public sector in particular is a sector where minorities have previously made significant gains, the racist edge to the attack on labor is quite sharp.

Probably the most publicized feature of the attack on labor is the

wave of plant closures which have taken place throughout the U.S. but especially in the heavily unionized areas of the northeast and midwest. Because of the "drama" of actually closing a plant, such closures receive widespread attention and are often portrayed as some sort of "special" event under our economic system. In reality, however, plant closures are only one among a spectrum of capitalist investment decisions in its constant search for greater profit. That spectrum includes (1) retooling existing plants with more advanced technology, usually accompanied by layoffs of workers; (2) transferring production in whole or in part to other existing facilities - preferably in low-wage, non-union areas - where there is less cost of production, also accompanied by layoffs; (3) building new facilities with more advanced technology - again preferably in low-wage, non-union areas - and closing down the old plant (classical runaway shop); and (4) ceasing production of that particular product and investing capital in another field - with a plant closure pure and simple. While some of these steps are more "dramatic" than others, they are all integral parts of the on-going capitalist "drama" of the search for greater profit through heightened exploitation of workers.

In any period, the operation of these decisions inevitably involves hardship for the working class. In this period of U.S. history, it is characterized in particular by the geographical shift in the concentration of U.S. industry from the heavily unionized northeast and midwest (the so-called frostbelt) to the generally unorganized states of the south and southwest (the so-called sunbelt) and to the colonial and neo-colonial countries. Moving plants to unorganized areas means not only generally lower wages, but no problem with the obstacles unions place on management's ability to determine working conditions in such manner as to achieve maximum productivity, of particular concern to employers in this period.

Closing unionized plants and moving them elsewhere is not only an attack on labor in the sense that it throws a number of union members out of work. As well, the threat of plant closures acts as a brake on labor militancy. Most blatantly, this occurs when employers actually threaten to close a facility unless the workers forego demanding wage increases, or in fact takes a wage cut, or allow various working-condition *protections* to be eroded. In the last few years, U.S. capitalists in auto (Chrysler) Steel (US Steel) and Rubber (Dunlop and Uniroyal) have actually forced UAW, URW, and USW workers in certain plants to take wage cuts under threat of plant closure. Besides the direct material impact of this tactic on the workers and unions involved, the ideological impact of these steps on the labor movement and class as a whole is severe: it sets the precedent of thinking that it is the workers who must "make sacrifices" when "their capitalist" gets in trouble, and that the source of workers difficulties is somewhere (Japanese workers, for example) other than in employers drive for profit and the entire profit system. This is particularly devastating when the unions making this concession are some of the historically stronger organizations in the trade union movement.



The ability of this "union concession" policy to be forced upon the labor movement is profoundly shaped, of course, by the overall economic climate and the policies of government. Clearly, in a situation with high inflation and high unemployment, where social programs such as unemployment extensions, job training programs, welfare payments, etc. are being cut back, workers think twice about risking their jobs. Under such conditions of economic assault of the working class as a whole, the spontaneous response of workers, even in the stronger organizations of an overall incredibly weak and vacillating labor movement, is to hang on to one's job, take a bit of a cut in pay, and surrender to working harder on the job. Employers are highly conscious of this, and are testing the waters, pushing here and there precisely to see how far workers will allow them to go before saying-- through action - enough!

Similar in impact to the plant closure tendency though taking a different form is the widespread layoffs facing public workers as federal (and state and municipal) government spending is cut to the bone. The all-out attack underway against social service programs inevitably means cutbacks in public employee workforces. In particular, education budgets are being cut back, and with programs such as the voucher system being ballooned in many areas, we are actually witnessing the beginnings of a serious attempt to dismantle the public education system in the U.S. (This attack particularly picks up speed as the public schools become heavily minority in composition). Overall, the fact that close to 400,000 of the nation's 2 million teachers received layoff notices this year (not all will end up being laid off) is the tip of the iceberg of the cutbacks on all forms of public workers in the coming period. This attack has a particularly acute racist impact because it is in the areas of public workers and their unionization, that a large percentage of minority gains in employment opportunities in the 1960's were made. As these gains are reversed through layoffs and wage-raise limitations, the impact is felt through out minority communities - simultaneously as the services provided by many of these same public workers are being cut back

Plant closures, layoffs, and the geographical shift of industry to low-wage non-union areas which presently accompany these phenomena are not simply devices to increase profitability and productivity in an immediate sense. They are also an integral part of an overall capitalist effort to qualitatively weaken the labor movement. Alongside these closures and layoffs diminishing union strength in key areas, an extensive union-busting industry has developed, selling its services to employers to prevent unionization where it does not exist and, increasingly, to attempt decertification where it does. At least in part because of the work of these firms, unions presently win recognition elections in only 45% in the "sunbelt".

Further, employer alterations in two "traditions" of collective bargaining in the U.S. are part of the attempt to weaken the labor movement. These are the erosion of "pattern bargaining" and "master contracts".

Pattern bargaining has been an informal part of U.S. capital/labor relations since World War II. The system works in such a way that certain key contracts, generally negotiated by large unions such as steel or auto set the "pattern" of wage gains and contract provisions that is then followed more or less in other negotiations in that and related industries. Historically, this has worked to the advantage of labor because the relatively stronger unions set the pattern and pull the weaker unions gains upward; employers have accepted this because it "evens out" their employee expenses and limits one area of competition with one another that could prove costly. Today, however, with employers scrambling to find each scrap of advantage over employees and competitors, the "traditions" of pattern bargaining are being ignored, and each union has to fight on its own for what it can get at the bargaining table. This of course, weakens in particular the already weak unions.

Master contracts are common bargaining agreements between employers and a union (or unions) in a single industry. Employers turned to jointly bargaining these contracts as a recognition of labor strength. Labor benefits from these negotiating policies in that smaller units in particular do not have to bargain separately with their weaker leverage, but "ride on the coattails" of stronger units, while employers accept this because of standardizing wage rates and, particularly for small firms, avoiding the expense of negotiating separately. Increasingly, however, employers feel strong enough to withdraw from master contract agreements and take their chances trying to drive wages for their employees down. In trucking, for example, the master contract which once covered the overwhelming bulk of cross country truckers now cover less than 50%

The erosion of master contract and pattern bargaining traditions overall serves to divide the labor movement and weaken its ability to combat an all-sided government/employer offensive. This exacerbates the problem that unions are already "overmatched" in bargaining with corporations which are increasingly organized on a conglomerate basis, with diversified investments in many different fields. This gives the employer the ability to withstand long strikes in one area, because their profit margin is not overall dependent on one industrial sector, not to mention one plant.

The focus of employers on weakening unions is also evident from the coal operators bargaining strategy that resulted in 1981's most significant strike. The coal operators pushed for a takeaway contract particularly on issues that affected the unions long run ability to protect its members and be a force in the industry, specifically attempting to take away the automatic union membership beginning the first day for new workers and to take away the royalty paid to the union pension fund when non-union coal is bought. Particularly since the percentage of coal miners represented by UMW has dropped steadily over the past few years (largely due to failure to organize in the west) losing these dearly won rights would significantly weaken the union. Consequently, it was on these issues rather than on direct wage issues that the union went out on strike. (As the coal industry locks like it will be actually expanding over the next few years, employers were prepared to be a bit flexible on wage demands proper though even here the settlement will not give miners much given the

rampant inflation rate). Essentially, the employers were going to push hard, and see how far they could push the union back. In face of determined resistance and a strike that obtained significant support from other sectors of labor and the progressive movement, the employers were eventually forced to settle without these takeaways. Thus the coal miners were able to hold their own, though not to make advances; while this in itself is a sort of victory in this period, given the expansion of non-union coal mining areas and the overall onslaught against labor, such limited "victories" will not be sufficient to stem the tide of attack.

The "bust the unions" approach of capital was also indicated by the government bargaining strategy during the postal negotiations this year. While eventually giving way on some wage demands, the government approach was designed to try to undermine the two large, urban based postal unions and "promote" the two smaller, rural based, more conservative unions. Clearly this was done not just to save costs of a wage bill, but to attempt to weaken these unions; this was also an objectively and probably conscious racist effort, as the larger, urban based unions are heavily minority.

Overall then, the contours of the capitalist direct economic attack on labor shape up as follows: in a climate designed to intimidate labor from taking militant action, be prepared to make some small concessions in wages in some sectors, but above all take a variety of measures to up labor productivity and weaken labor's general position in relation to management so it can offer no serious resistance to these measures or even to direct wage assaults. In short, increase the rate of exploitation of workers and deal a blow to the defensive organizations of the working class.

Political Attacks on Labor

The political attacks on labor since Reagan was inaugurated are fully consistent with this program. These political attacks are designed to weaken labor's ability to resist employer offensives, and to facilitate the orchestration of the capitalist offensive along racial lines. The alteration in the political climate surrounding labor legislation (and regulation enforcement by the executive branch) is probably best illustrated by a comparison between the last years of the Carter administration and the new Reagan regime. Under Carter's administration, the AFL-CIO leadership placed a major emphasis on passing the Labor Law Reform bill which would have made it easier for unions to gain recognition and collective bargaining rights. This legislation was not a qualitative threat to employer power and even a force such as Business Week mildly supported it as an example of "enlightened" labor policy that would preserve good relations between capital and labor. Despite this, major corporation lobbies opposed the bill and it failed in Congress. Carter had given it less than wholehearted support, and during this transitional presidency of a democratic president labor could not make progress in the halls of congress.

Today, however, there is not talk whatsoever of passing legislation favorable to labor. The question is how serious the anti-labor legislation of congress and actions of the executive branch will be. Signs are mounting that could be quite serious indeed.

This is evident from even a brief survey of the bills at various stages of progress through congress and proposals emanating from the executive branch. There is a move to repeal the Davis/Bacon act which provides that all those with federal construction contract pay union scale wages. There is the attempt to exempt youth from the provisions of minimum wage, thus creating a pool of cheap wage labor, particularly of minority youth. There are a host of various welfare law reforms that would institute essentially forced labor at low wages for the poor. There is an attempt to amend the Hobbs Act (which bars violence and extortion during interstate commerce) to include union activities under its coverage, making union members charged with "crime" on many picket lines subject to harsh federal penalties. Various provisions of Occupational Health and Safety Act are being gutted in practice through lack of federal enforcement, regulation alteration, and the mounting move to tie OSHA standards to "cost-benefit" studies. The Reagan administration is studying provisions for "guest worker" programs which would allow non-citizens to work here temporarily but would force them back to their country of origin when unemployed (thus avoiding unemployment, welfare, or social services to these principally non-white workers) and creating another pool of cheap, easily exploitable labor. Virtually all pretense at enforcement of affirmative action guidelines is being dropped, and discrimination suits will be seriously considered by federal agencies only if there is likely to be proof of conscious, intentional discrimination. Many forces on the right see these moves not only as significant in themselves, but as precursors to a national right-to-work law and a still greater qualitative weakening of labor's ability to defend the interests of the working class.

The ability of these anti-labor measures to take root is related to the shift in party alignments in the government that has accompanied the more bellicose consensus among the bourgeoisie and the political initiative of the new right. The Republican presidential victory and republican gains in congress have replaced Democrats who relied to some extent on a political base in labor, and thus took some pro-labor positions (though of course within the framework of bourgeois politics) with viciously anti-labor republicans. The labor leadership's traditional avenue to the seat of power — through the Democratic party's influence in government — has thus been considerably eroded. As well, the Democratic party itself has been sent into considerable disarray. Sensing the right-wing initiative, and getting a clear signal from their mentors in key circles of monopoly capital, many Democratic liberals to preserve their careers are making one concession after another to the ideology and political program of the right. Consequently, even as an opposition many forces among the Democrats have become unreliable friends of labor.

The overall impact of this political shift has been to complement the economic onslaught of capital and considerably erode organized labor's

ability to maintain the relatively stable position it had in the "golden era" of the 50s and early 60s. Though the attack is most concentrated among these sectors of the workforce who are unorganized and lack union protection altogether, among the weakest and most vulnerable unions, and in certain key basic industries, even the core of the most protected strata in the AFL-CIO, the building trades and other highly skilled craft unions are being hit.

The Labor Movement's Response

Overall, the labor movement's response to these mounting attacks has been far from adequate to defend workers standard of living and prevent labor's influence from eroding. This was the case even during the Carter period; Reagan's election has only highlighted this more sharply. [What is new about the present situation though is that the severity of the bourgeois offensive and the ouster of a Democratic administration and its replacement by an explicitly anti-labor regime has thrown virtually all sectors of organized labor, even the most rightist forces, into some form of opposition to official policy.] Under these new circumstances, the right forces in labor centered in the AFL-CIO leadership have moved rapidly to try to keep leadership of any developing resistance and shape it in a backward political direction. This is a significant change from last year when the political motion in labor was not centered around the actions of right forces, but upon the moves of center forces to Kennedy as the Democratic candidate over Carter (and even to make some noises about a labor party) while labor's old guard leadership was caught in a tactical political bind. This new situation creates some new opportunities ←
— and dangers — for the left.

The Right Forces in Motion

By right forces in labor we refer to the consolidated class collaborationist center organizationally expressed in the dominant leadership of the AFL-CIO. The core of their base is in the U.S. labor aristocracy as it has developed since WWII including the building trades, other skilled craft unions, and significant parts of such industrial unions as the IIA, AFT, IUE, USW. (The Teamsters today also constitute a base for the collaborationist trend, though the Teamster leadership is not a member of the AFL-CIO). As even these more protected strata of the class come under attack, the right forces are compelled to abandon their standard policy of trying to "reason" with the employers and government to give them a good deal, and offer some elements of resistance. At the same time, this resistance is completely shaped by their overall collaborationist ideology. The line guiding their activities amounts, in essence, to calling for a return to the golden days of the 50s and early 60s, when the informal social contract between capital and labor gave the more protected sectors of labor which they represent a "fair share" of the economic pie. They have no intention of opposing imperialist expansion abroad or its increasingly aggressive policies toward the Soviet Union. In fact, they actively support these policies and regard preserving the U.S. empire for capital expansion as a paramount concern of U.S.

workers. In this sense, these collaborationists are attempting to build a classically social-imperialist trend within the working class movement — one which explicitly holds that the interest of U.S. workers is bound up with the interest of U.S. capital and not with the international working class.

On "domestic" questions, they are forced to give lip service to the struggle against racism and women's oppression, but have no serious commitment to challenging the stratification of the U.S. working class along racial and sexual lines. In fact, they have built a base largely on support of precisely this stratification. Overall, their line is classically opportunist — a better deal within capitalism for a privileged minority of the working class in explicit opposition to the world proletariat and with any responsibility to the majority of the U.S. working class limited to whatever happens to "trickle down" to the deeper strata.

This is precisely the line on which these forces have been taking initiative in the period since Reagan's election. It translates into a concrete program involving at least the following steps.

First, rebuilding alliances with the most conservative wings of the other social movements that are brought objectively into opposition* to Reagan. In particular, this means strengthening ties with the most right forces in the minority movement, specifically the NAACP, the Urban League, and the like. Second, reforge the Democratic party into an effective political instrument which can serve the interests of labor as they see them; that is, a party based on a liberal, pro-labor domestic policy (including the maintenance of most government spending programs) while at the same time a firmly anti-communist party. In the present period, when important elements in the Democratic party appear to be moving too far to the right on domestic policy and the "left" in the party is too concerned with such issues as peace and gay rights (to them, the unholy legacy of the reforms of the McGovern era), this translates into more active direct labor involvement in all levels of the party structure.

Third, regroup the labor movement organizationally, through mergers between unions (SEIU/1199, ILA/ILWU,...) and the re-affiliation of major unions with the AFL-CIO (UAW, Teamsters, ILWU). But remain cautious at the bargaining table and remember that it is not a period favorable to strikers; also, be prepared to take some wage cuts if needed to prevent plant closures, but prefer government bailout programs to "sick industries" to keep workers from the unemployment lines.

Fourth, be prepared to take a few dramatic steps to breathe some life into the rest of this program, capture some political initiative (against both Reagan and the left), and display some muscle. Concretely this means taking the risk of an occasional mass mobilization such as the call for a national Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington, D.C. on September 19. This particular demonstration is particularly tied to mobilizing labor for intervention on behalf of Democrats in the 1982 Congressional elections.

Finally, while taking these steps, keep a tight rein on labor's political action and prevent left forces from gaining any initiative. Promote anti-communism and anti-Sovietism — for example by exploiting the situation in Poland to the hilt -- to be sure that any movement against Reagan takes a social-imperialist and not an internationalist shape.

On the basis of this politically backward program, the right wing of the labor movement is jumping headlong into political activity, trying to intercept the simmering discontent of the masses. In the process, they serve to open some leeway for left activity, and to this limited extent it can be considered positive. But we must have no illusions about what this initiative of the right actually represents. The main features of the class collaborationist line have not changed in the least; the only change is that this line must now emerge and struggle for influence in a movement at least formally calling for opposition to "Reaganism."

At present the rightist line does have considerable influence in the broad movement of opposition to Reagan, has dominance within organized labor, and even impacts and disorients some left forces. The influence of this line is indicated in part by its ability to identify "Reaganism" mainly with "nasty" attacks on "deserving white workers" (social security cuts, for example) rather than with its real essence as increasing imperialist war preparations and an upsurge in racism. Given the legitimacy of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism in the U.S. and the organizational muscle behind this line, it may well retain this influence for some time. As well, this line may actually produce results in capitalist concessions to the more protected strata of the class (In fact, sectors of capital will advocate such concessions precisely to head off sharper resistance and foster the growth of a social-imperialist trend). For these reasons, the danger of a strong and active social-imperialist trend growing in the U.S. labor movement absolutely should not be underestimated.

*overemphasizes
danger*

At the same time, the collaborationist line promises more than it can actually deliver and runs into a number of contradictions. The cuts in domestic spending and the squeeze on labor are intimately bound up with the rise in the military budget and the new anti-communist crusade, and U.S. imperialism no longer has the flexibility to pursue a guns and butter policy as in the 50s and early 60s. Consequently, the collaborationist line runs up against some objective obstacles in its attempt to guide a successful labor defense -- not only for the working class as a whole but even for the more protected strata which form the core of the AFL-CIO leadership's base.

This achilles heel, however, does not at all mean that workers following this line will automatically "move left" if the palpable results are inadequate. Where workers land politically and ideologically, particularly if economic conditions deteriorate, depends largely on what forces are able to intervene and offer an alternative explanation of events and strategy to change them. Here we should not underestimate the potential for the rising right-wing neo-fascist movements

to gain a significant base among certain strata in labor. Many union members abandoned the Democratic party and voted for Reagan in 1980; many are susceptible to the socially reactionary, racist, and anti-communist demagoguery of the new right and the rhetoric of the AFL-CIO leadership conciliated many of these very ideas. Therefore, there should be no false optimism about objective conditions doing the work of the left for it. The responsibility to move the workers leftward still falls to the left.

contrasts w/
p. 4

The Weakness of the Left

In the broadest sense we can define the left as those forces whose stated political line includes a vision of transforming the U.S. labor movement into a weapon of class struggle linked to a broader anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist social movement in the U.S. and internationally. By this criterion, the left in the U.S. labor movement today includes a number of trends and organizations, as well as a large number of socialist-minded independents and advanced workers who are not tied to any specific organization or trend.

Of course, this broad definition of left does not mean that all forces included actually play or have the capacity to play a left role — that is, to lead in the polarization and realignment in the labor movement required to forge a class struggle trend and further, to win influence for revolutionary ideas within that trend. Such a role could only be fulfilled by forces committed to internationalism (including defense of the socialist countries) and anti-racism, and prepared to confront the right forces head on. By this much more rigorous standard, the left consists of a much narrower spectrum of forces, including the emerging Marxist-Leninist trend, a number of independent forces and advanced workers, scattered elements from other trends, and, to a certain degree, the CPUSA. In particular, social-democracy almost invariably functions as a center force in the actual politics of the U.S. labor movement, and cannot be considered part of the left in this narrower sense.

The "narrow"
LOM left

While the broader definition of the left is useful in our struggles with other self-designated socialists to hold them accountable to some working class standards, in our assessment of the concrete political workings of the labor movement the narrower definition of the left is actually more useful. And utilizing this criterion, we are forced to come to grips with just how peripheral the left actually is to the main struggles of organized labor in this period. Left forces may lead politically in a few scattered locals, but virtually no major international union or city or state labor council is led by a consistently left line. The exception to this is the United Electrical Workers (UE), the only one among the old "left led" CIO unions to continue to function with a basically left line guiding its political and economic policy. As well, given the present balance of forces in labor and the ideological weakness of the left, there is an overwhelming tendency for left forces to try to break out of isolation by tailing any spontaneous militancy developing among the rank and file or seemingly aggressive action taken by union officials.

Given this immense weakness of the left, it is not surprising that there is no broadly projected left pole within the labor movement contending on a broad scale with the collaborationist initiative. Even if the left was stronger, however, this would be a complex period for it to chart an effective course. Its long term focus must be upon a break with collaborationism by a substantial sector of the labor movement, and the subsequent forging of a trend in labor based upon the politics of class struggle. Undoubtedly such a break would involve a sharp polarization with right forces on issues that inevitably would be thoroughly interwoven with the burning questions of the overall bourgeois offensive, the danger of war and the rise of racism.

*backing into
dogmatism*

Though this must be the left's vision, it is clear no such major break in the labor movement is on the immediate horizon. The right's present initiative, combined with the weakness of the left and the vacillation of the center implies a different scenario. Most probably the period before us will require left forces struggling to build a base of support in specific areas around left positions, trying to forge alliances with center forces and split them from the right, and making the most initial attempts to broadly project an alternative to social-imperialism before the U.S. labor movement.

In initial steps toward this end, the left has not done especially well in the last year. The CP, by far the largest left force in the labor movement is badly tailing right forces, apparently trying to promote the view that at long last "labor is taking the lead" in the working class resistance. This tailing is evident from their broadest propaganda (enthusiastically promoting the AFL-CIO Solidarity Day as if Lane Kirkland was about to become a tribune of the people) as well as their concrete policies in particular unions (in the AFT, the UAC caucus under their leadership takes a formal stand of opposition to Shanker but maps out no serious strategy of resistance; in the ILWU the party offers no serious resistance to the present leaderships attempts to move the union from the CP orbit into that of DSOC brand social-democracy; in the OPE/Blue Shield strike in the Bay Area CP forces counseled against stiff economic struggle and actively red-baited left and middle forces who wanted to fight a takeaway contract; on international questions, the party comes out in support of union resolutions critical of U.S. intervention in El Salvador but opposes any direct criticism of the AFL-CIO affiliated AIFLD program. Overall, the CP is quietly building its membership in labor, but vacillating in its responsibility to establish a left pole that could effectively educate the more advanced workers politically and ideologically.)

The most publicized left initiative in the past year was the conference sponsored by Labor Notes (an International Socialist-led labor publication) in Detroit in June. Reflecting some of the ferment in the labor movement in the wake of the Reagan attack, and the hunger for unity within labor's left wing, the conference drew an impressive attendance of about 5-600 people including rank and file activists and a number of local and regional union officials and staff. The fact that such a broadly representative gathering could be held under the auspices of a publication with open ties to a "revolutionary" socialist formation is a testament to the opportunity facing the left in this period. However, the potential of this conference to be more than an impressive gathering as no effective political program was advanced

was lost,

and, for that matter, little substantive political discussion took place. Instead, the discussions focused on organizational questions concerning a labor party and exhortations about the evils of the bureaucracy, reflecting IS's extreme version of the rank and file vs. bureaucrat framework for trade union work. The question of U.S. foreign policy and its relationship to the present assault on labor was not discussed and the question of racism barely mentioned at all. Consequently, the conference was mainly a vivid reflection of the activity — and limits of that activity — now spontaneously developing in labor circles more open to the left.

Left forces have done slightly, but not much better in other areas. Organizing by the Texas Farm Workers (CLP influenced) has proceeded this year, though without any major breakthroughs. In the miner's strike, some left forces (again including CLP) were able to play a role in strengthening the resistance to the takeaway first contract proposal; and in the process may have positioned themselves better for further work in the union. In a few local areas forces associated with the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend have gained some influence. But overall, the left remains in a weak position in labor. It is scattered and divided among itself, has little base of its own as the left, and has been unable to project a broad vision of a revitalized labor movement before the trade union movement as a whole. Even worse, much of the left is disoriented by the initiative of the class collaborationist right, and vacillating in its commitment to expose the underlying opportunism of these forces. Thus, while objective conditions are somewhat favorable for building influence for advanced ideas, the left is poorly equipped to seize the political initiative.

A Scattered Center

In the last half of the Carter administration, a "dissident grouping" of center forces began to be visible for the first time in some years in organized labor. These forces lacked a coherent and systematic world view — ranging ideologically from the most classically liberal new deal Democrats to the left-wing of social democracy — but were clearly dissatisfied with the Carter administration's track record regarding labor. Figures such as the UAW's Fraser, the IAM's Winpisinger, and AFSCME's Wurf made militant sounding statements about class struggle and opposition to the corporations, even at times talking of the need for a break with the Democrats and formation of a labor party. Basing themselves in unions particularly hard hit in this period, particularly in the service (SEIU and Hospital Workers Union II99) and public sectors (AFSCME) but also including auto (UAW) and some regions in steel (USW) these forces appeared to have some political initiative, especially since the right was tied to Carter and the left was weak.

The clear weakness of these forces, however, is that they lack a coherent political perspective to advance and thus lead a realignment or regroupment within the labor movement. While uncomfortable with the most blatant collaborationism, they remain influenced by anti-communism, inconsistent in their opposition to war and racism, and fear sharp economic struggle with employers. Consequently it is not surprising that whatever political initiative they previously had has faded as the right forces have taken initiative. While many center

forces continue to flirt with the left on particular issues, in the main they have stepped in line behind the right forces initiative, in part because the right is taking steps not much different from what they themselves advocated under Carter. Thus, while a year ago the distinction between right and center appeared to widen, Ronald Reagan as the "common enemy" has once again blurred that gap.

The main way in which the center has fallen in line behind the right is in regard to the approach to the Democratic party. Talk of a labor party in these circles has faded in favor of uniting with the AFL-CIO official leadership in the attempt to rebuild the Democratic party. In this they are strongly encouraged by the perspective of the DSOC which sees reforming the Democratic party as the key step to a socialist reform movement in the U.S.

In other economic and political fronts, the center forces display some diversity and independence from the right, occasionally cooperating with left forces. Around U.S. policy toward El Salvador, many center forces have taken a stand in opposition to intervention, at times holding conferences and meetings despite prodding from Kirkland and his top aids to desist from such steps. At the same time, these forces are reluctant to criticize the AFL-CIO affiliated AIFLD explicitly and bring the polarization over foreign policy directly internal to AFL-CIO politics.

In the field of organizing the unorganized, some of the strengths and weaknesses of these forces are effectively highlighted. In an area that the right has almost completely neglected, center forces in SEIU have cooperated with the national Working Women's organization to charter autonomous local 925 to organize office workers and clericals. The step toward linking the women's and labor movement's is clearly positive, and a break with the most narrow minded "possessiveness" about organizing as its exclusive property too prevalent in labor. As well, similar center forces have led around the line of "equal pay for comparable work" in being a tool to address the oppression of women workers, and the recent San Jose municipal employee strike partial victory may have national implications in popularizing this demand which targets a key aspect of women's oppression.

At the same time, the almost exclusive focus on linking clerical organizing with what remains a mainly white and petit-bourgeois led, narrowly based, women's movement has serious weaknesses. The center forces are paying much less attention to the key question of linking this organizing with the struggle against racism. As well, the comparable work demand is being used to channel the struggle of clericals into the narrowest legal channels instead of organizing to avoid confronting the attacks on affirmative action, and to ideologically reinforce certain racial and class prejudices. As well, at this point even the much heralded and well-financed 925 has actually done little in the way of organizing. In these ways, the center forces miss certain key aspects of the struggle to organize the unorganized, and fail to confront directly the racial stratification in the class.

In other areas, the center forces have seen mixed results for their initiatives. In steel the center forces around Balanoff and Sadlowski lost badly in the last election for regional offices. In the ILWU, on the other hand, center forces are moving successfully to move the union from the CP orbit to that of DSOC. The Coalition of Labor Union Women, once an important initiative including left and center forces, has become relatively dormant and right-dominated. On the other hand, center, and some left forces retain influence in parts of the unevenly active Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

Overall, the eclectic and vacillating character of these center forces is being revealed in this period. Clearly, these forces are unable to emerge on their own as an effective pole in the labor movement; they must ally with the right or left. In either alliance they could play an important, even under some circumstances the leading role; but they need one or another of the more consistent visions to their right or left to provide an overall direction for a dynamic political current.

[In the present period, with the left weak and the right taking initiative, it is no surprise that the center moves behind the right, though they hedge their bets a bit, retain some independence, and at times keep a channel of communication open to the left.]

*Summary
on
Center forces*

Sharp Contention in the Coming Period

On the surface, Reagan's election and the accelerating bourgeois offensive have brought unity to the labor movement. But beneath the surface opposition to Reagan, a bitter contention rages, a contention whose essence has not changed despite a change in presidential administrations. That contention is the battle between a deeply entrenched class collaborationist trend with a social base in the more protected strata of the working class and a perspective of class struggle that has not yet taken shape into a coherent political trend in labor. The right forces are highly conscious of the bitterness of that contention, and are moving quickly to seize the initiative with the opposition to Reagan — both to wring what concessions it can from monopoly capital for the strata they represent and to stave off the growth of a class struggle pole. This presents a major challenge to the left in labor to contend with the right and prevent forces presently in motion from falling completely under the ideological and political grip of the collaborationist, social-imperialist line.

Undoubtedly, the left's ability to engage in such contention is completely bound up with its ability to participate effectively in and in fact to lead in the day-to-day economic struggle of the trade unions. This is an indispensable condition for the left to be able to play an active role in forging a class struggle political trend in the labor movement. At the same time, it is hardly a sufficient condition; the left must also take the lead in bringing to the fore advanced lines around the political issues which such a trend would have to address if it is to be effective in defending the working class as a whole.

Clearly, in its present fragmented and primitive state, the left will have a difficult time accomplishing this task. Yet even this accomplishment would not exhaust the responsibility of the left; beyond

playing an active role in realigning labor around an advanced class struggle policy, the left has the particular responsibility to conduct independent work to win broad numbers of workers to a socialist perspective, that is to draw out and expose the real property relations which underlie capitalism in general and the present crisis in particular.

At present, that political force which must serve as the core of a revitalized left — the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend — remains too incoherent, primitive, and fragmented politically and organizationally to map out a systematic and nationwide program for conducting such independent work in labor. Indeed, we even will have difficulty in projecting a comprehensive program to forge a class struggle trend in labor that would be more than a string of generalities (of course, our experience is deeper and our insights sharper in particular local and union situations). What we are capable of, we believe, is offering some general guidelines concerning the key elements in the contention between the class collaborationist and class struggle poles in the immediate period ahead, thus assisting in the development of specific programs for struggle in specific concentration areas. Such specific programs, addressing the particular contradictions in each union in the context of the overall labor movement, are key elements in each union concentration's plan to penetrate and eventually seize control of that particular union. And such concentrations, while not the only aspect of the left's work in labor, are fundamental to any strategy to revitalize and realign the labor movement, as well as to build influence for socialism.

Some Guidelines

Concerning the day to day economic struggle of the unions, contention between the two poles will break out over the proper response to plant closures, layoffs, take-away contracts, and wage-packages that fail to keep up with inflation. While obviously specifics will vary from case to case, in most situations the collaborationist forces will counsel caution. Based on the view that the health and expansion of capital is crucial for the working class interest, the right will argue that workers should take pay cuts or forego raises to avoid plant closures, accept layoffs as long as they are done strictly by seniority, etc., all for the good of "our capitalists." (As well, while moves will be made to merge or affiliate unions that already exist for more economic and political clout, the pressing need to organize the unorganized will remain unattended to except by lip service. The promise will be made that through political action to oust Republicans and return democrats to office, import restrictions which are allegedly the essential source of the loss of American jobs, and government subsidies to ailing industries to keep jobs, that the interests of the employed workers will be protected.) The ideological argument will be promoted that the health of U.S. capital must be a paramount concern for the workers, and that labor discipline must be strengthened and productivity increased, will be dragged out to justify this course. Between this ideological offensive, the organizational strength of the right forces, and the intimidation workers feel

because of high unemployment, few social benefits, and inflation, there is good reason to expect that this course will find support even among workers in the less protected strata of the class.

It will be a difficult struggle, union by union and issue by issue as well as in the broad arena of "public opinion" for the left to pose an alternative vision of the economic struggle in this period and win support for it. Clearly, hollow and generalized calls for worker resistance and unity will not turn the tide. At the same time, patient work does have to be done to point out that the capitalists are in a period of pushing against labor as far as they can, stopping only when they feel resistance stiffening. In this situation, labor must push back even if in the course of this a number of battles are actually lost. For turning the tide has to be seen from a broader framework than each struggle in isolation; to stem the capitalist attack will require that unions actually expand their organizing work among the unorganized and build unity across union lines; toward this end, the fighting capacity of unions must be demonstrated. The precedents of take-away contracts and worker concessions to "keep capitalists afloat" only serves to enable the employer offensive to intensify both upon the workers immediately making the concessions and the class as a whole. Consequently, a pole must be established that says that workers will not retreat further than a certain point, and will fight to make that a reality. As well, the attempt to actually make a serious effort to organize the unorganized must be a key part of this standpoint, the complementary side to a strong stand where unions already exist. This stand of struggle in life sets the conditions for the beginning of the ideological polarization that must accompany any economic strategy if labor is not to be qualitatively weakened and isolated. Contrary to the rightist line that workers economic condition must be tied to the health and productivity of capital, the vision must be projected that workers who as a class have created the wealth of society deserve a decent living standard as a matter of course. In other words, workers have the right to a decent job at a living wage; if no job is available, they have a right to that wage anyway. Such slogans as "jobs or income now" or "guaranteed annual wage" which gained some popularity in the 1960s capture this vision; in this sense they may become components of a communist movement's "minimum program" which can crystalize the sentiments of the more conscious strata of the masses and at the same time provide an effective springboard to draw out the need for socialism (the party's maximum program) to replace capitalism. Unless an ideological polarization along these lines accompanies the various concrete programs that are developed to fight plant closures, take-away contracts, lay-offs, etc., the working class may win an occasional battle but lose the class war. In this sense, solutions like "nationalization of industries to keep jobs" or "worker buy-ups of factories with municipal subsidies", etc. to plant closures, for example, may be appropriate tactics in a particular situation, but they cannot define the essential programmatic and ideological response to the economic offensive of capital.

Undoubtedly, any attempt to raise a perspective demanding a guaranteed income for workers will have bound up intimately within it the polarization against racism and racist ideology. Behind the ideological

offensive around "productivity" and the health of capital lies the racist myth that minorities are lazy and don't want to work, haven't contributed anything to building the country, etc. The assertion that the "productive members" of society (read: whites of all classes) should not have to carry the "unproductive members" (read: shiftless minorities) on their backs is the bourgeois response to any program for guaranteed income, as we see most vividly in the propaganda around welfare/workfare programs. Consequently, any overall economic program of militant resistance to cuts, organizing the unorganized, guaranteed income for any worker while not working will have to be thoroughly interwoven with the agitation and overall struggle against racism.

Clearly, the left is quite some distance from being able to project any such an alternative vision for economic struggle before significant local or international unions, still less before the labor movement as a whole. However, beginning to think along these lines and digging in for the protracted struggle to formulate the specifics of such a program and make it a material force is a requirement of the present period. Recognizing that we may well lose a number of struggles with employers and with right forces in labor, the left must attempt to plant a firm pole concerning the conduct of the economic struggle, and begin to do the work required for it to eventually gain influence.

Clearly, contention around these most immediate economic struggles will be central to the overall battle between the two poles in the labor; so will the contention over the political issues which face unions springing inevitably from their role as organizations of the economic struggle with capital. [A key site of contention in this area will be around policy toward electoral work by labor unions. In this area, the right's program is clear: mobilize labor's energies to get back into the Democratic party and win influence there; nominate and elect pro-labor democrats to congress; challenge Reagan's budget, especially those cuts that affect the most stable, protected strata of the working class; defeat anti-labor legislation; but support the military build-up and the anti-foreign, anti-communist crusade.] Given the resources that can be mobilized to promote this perspective, its apparent "common sense" given the "open field" in the Democratic party in the wake of its severe 1980 defeat, and real prospect of it achieving some immediate, palpable results for certain strata in labor, this aspect of the right's general strategy is likely to gain important support (most center forces have already fallen in line behind it).

Again, it will be difficult for the left to place another pole before specific unions, still less the labor movement in general, and see it gain influence. One route many on the left have chosen to attempt to accomplish this is to raise the call for independent labor political action and, in particular, for a labor party. While the perspective of independent political action and/or a labor party is an important one to generally project before the trade union movement and should not be abandoned, it is not likely to be at all effective as the main rallying cry for a progressive political position in labor movement at this time. This is for two reasons. First, the motion toward the Democratic party among right and center forces is very strong right now, and with a reactionary Republican in the white house no serious effort at a labor party is likely to be launched in the near future. Second and more importantly, in the absence of a clear consensus among the left and center forces about what would be the politics of a labor party, this slogan often serves to obscure and hide

the key political questions of the period rather than bring them forward. For these reasons, we do not see agitation around a labor party as the main focus of the left's political efforts in labor at this time.]

no labor party now

Instead, the left's political focus in labor should be upon identifying the essential nature of the capitalist strategy in this period, and where possible involving the labor forces in effective action to combat it. Essentially, this means targetting the fact that the differential nature of the attack along racial lines is the key device by which the bourgeoisie hopes to weaken labor and the entire working class at this time, as well as bringing forward the question of the rising danger of war.

[It appears that the right is most vulnerable today on the question of war.] Given the obvious connection between the military budget build-up and the domestic spending cuts, and also given the still remaining legacy of anti-war sentiment from the Vietnam era, significant support can be won for bringing labor actively into the front against war. In fact, the motion around this issue has already begun, particularly around El Salvador. [Work here is not only for propaganda and education purposes; at a certain point the question of a union's stand towards U.S. foreign policy begins to interpenetrate very directly with the actual economic substructure of particular unions: This takes a variety of forms including investment decisions for union funds (divestment from South African companies) and for some unions refusing to deal with certain goods (longshore boycotts of arms to El Salvador or South African ships for example). Labor movement wide, this can begin to threaten the AIFLD program, a key mechanism for U.S. imperialist domination of other countries totally bound up with the politics of the AFL-CIO. A concerted attempt to move the polarization around war from the general one of formal resolutions into an actual struggle around the role of AIFLD abroad would mark a key step forward in creating a class struggle trend in labor.]

Despite its vulnerability on the war question, in the immediate period ahead it appears that the right forces will maintain the initiative in their drive to construct a full fledged social-imperialist trend and stifle the class struggle pole. The rank and file spontaneous activity of the late 60s has largely faded, and much of the base of the labor movement today is cautious and under the grip of the widely and aggressively promoted collaborationist line. Meanwhile the center forces, all of whose tendencies are characterized by a strong streak of pragmatism, are attracted to the promise of palpable results from the right's proposal. In general, a comment appearing in the San Francisco Chronicle concerning the population as a whole remains a somewhat apt description of the mood of many workers: "The budget cuts (Reagan) has made, which fall hardest on low-income Americans and Blacks especially, have been swallowed in large part because there is hope among middle income Americans that, coupled with Reagan's tax cut, they will make life easier for them" (Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, SF Chronicle, July 7, 1981). As long as this essential opportunism retains a significant grip on the U.S. working class, including its organized sector, the prospects for the collaborationist forces to retain their present dominance are strong.

At the same time, there are certainly areas where, even in the short run, headway can be made. In the public sector unions, and the hard hit auto, steel, and rubber industries, the opportunity for an approach of class struggle to gain influence is significant. Further, the opportunity exists for the left to position itself favorably and influence the inadequate beginning efforts certain center-led unions are making at organizing the unorganized -- particularly in the service and clerical sectors, linked to the SEIU/1199 and 925 merger. As well, in other more unstable sectors of the class, there is ferment and openness to more advanced ideas. Still, it would be unrealistic to expect rapid and easy gains, or a quick polarization across the board with any significant section of labor breaking decisively with the collaborationist leadership of the AFL-CIO.

Undoubtedly, a sharper assessment of the actual balance of forces will be attained through a careful study of the Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington (and perhaps other areas) on September 19. We will have to note carefully who attends, who is allowed to speak, what is the spirit of the mass marchers, etc.

If present signals are any indication, the AFL-CIO leadership will maintain a fairly tight grip on the march, with the bulk of official speeches criticizing Reagan but keeping the political focus narrow. The main referenced to "internationalism" are likely to be anti-Soviet and anti-socialist comments about Poland, and it is likely that such Democratic Party luminaries as Kennedy and Mondale will be featured prominently and promoted as the solution to Reagan. At the same time, we can expect some of the center forces who may get the platform to raise in some fashion the issue of the military budget. Meanwhile, every splinter group on the left will flock to this demonstration with one or another piece of propaganda, but what this will highlight more than anything else is the relative irrelevancy of the left at this time to the mainstream of labor politics.

Under these circumstances, we can project a difficult and protracted struggle before a significant section of the labor movement breaks with collaboration and realigns on a class struggle basis. With a longrange view toward leading this realignment, the left in this period must pursue a multi-levelled course. On the one hand, we need a serious concentration policy to "bore in" to specific unions; this requires mapping out plans in each to capture influence based on a program that targets the specific economic and political contradictions facing that union in the overall context of the capitalist attack. Such a long range vision allows the left to begin the protracted process of winning a base in the rank and file and moving center forces into alliance with the left. Further, at this stage propaganda work will play an important role in the effort, given in particular the ideological battle with the rightist line.

In addition to penetrations of key unions, the systematic use of campaigns brought labor-movement wide (both on the local and eventually national level) will be important to conduct social investigation into unions where the left does not have concentrations, conduct ideological work, and maximize the knowledge of influence of struggles in which advanced experience has been gained and/or the left has influence. Work to build trade union committees against U.S. intervention in El Salvador has been the broadest example of such work in the most recent period.

Any concerted ability to take up these tasks on more than the most primitive level, however, clearly will require unity on an advanced political line within the left; particularly to adequately guide national work in specific industries, unions, or sectors. As noted earlier, such unity does not presently exist on the left in general or, particularly, within the anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist trend. Developing an advanced line and unity around it then is an integral aspect of our long range task to win influence in labor; consequently a closer look at the left is required to map out plans to take this us.

The Left: A Closer Look

The weakness and isolation of the left in the U.S. labor movement is clearly a key obstacle to the creation of a coherent class struggle trend in the trade unions in the coming period. This weakness is not only expressed in the left's organizational fragmentation and amateurishness, though these are often its most obvious manifestations. Rather, the weakness of the left is expressed even more profoundly in its political immaturity, theoretical eclecticism, and ideological flabbiness, deeply rooted problems which are present in every left trend and/or organization to one or another degree.

In this period, these political, theoretical and ideological weaknesses are manifested in two (and somewhat related) ways. First, a strong tendency to harbor illusions about the actual political role of the right forces in the labor movement, and to underestimate the degree to which the collaborationist line can and does have a social base within significant strata of the labor movement. These illusions lead directly to overestimating the positive factors in such events as the AFL-CIO initiated Solidarity Day demonstrations and overestimating the degree to which the rank and file in labor are "moving left" as certain more militant rhetoric and grumbles of discontent are heard in union halls and on shop floors. This general orientation only obscures and underestimates the role the left will have to play in the coming period. (Here we should be careful to distinguish between breaking with these objectively right opportunist vacillations vs. falling into the most primitive and infantile ultra-left tactics in "exposing the misleaders of labor." Unfortunately in the history of our movement these two things have tended to go hand in hand. Of course, this is not inevitable; our task is to be theoretically clear on the role and influence of the right, ideologically prepared for the polarization with those backward ideas, and at the same time politically and organizationally mature in how we unfold this contention in a way we can win over all who can be won over.)

The second (somewhat related) major way the left's ideological and political weakness is manifested is the strong tendency toward a syndicalist romanticization of the rank-and-file as such that has long been a factor among U.S. leftists. The picture of the labor movement as a grand drama between an inherently corrupt bureaucracy and a spontaneously progressive and militant but misled rank and file has wide currency on the left. It is often an implicit and unchallenged assumption in left-initiated caucuses or organizations, and is reinforced

by the relative ease of uniting forces on the need to "represent the rank-and-file" compared to forging unity on a concrete and often controversial political program. Though dressed in a more militant and democratic form than that which sows illusions about right forces, this perspective likewise underestimates and obscures the key political role of the left and, in fact, almost invariably keeps left forces in labor limited to a "shop-floor" vision of labor politics, and therefore to political irrelevancy.

Considering the pervasive influence of these shortcomings throughout the left, it will require the most rigorous and protracted struggle to forge the left into a force that can play an advanced role in the labor movement. To take up that task a more detailed look at at least the key left trends is necessary.

In the broadest sense noted earlier, social-democracy is a left trend; however, social-democrats generally function as centerforces in the actual dynamics of the labor movement, badly tailing the right and in fact sharing to a large degree a number of their assumptions. Not unexpectedly, therefore, social-democracy today is a rising force; a number of trade union officials in particular have joined DSOC, and the DSOC/NAM merger to be finalized this year will increase social-democracy's organizational coherence.

The various Trotskyist groups also function within the left in the broadest sense; with the exception of the cautiously reformist SWP, Trotskyism more than any other left current is characterized by the most extreme versions of the rank-and-file vs. bureaucrat formula (this is fully in keeping with the classical Trotskyist stance of the pure "permanent opposition" force). This stance, along with Trotskyism's generally backward and/or inconsistent political positions on key questions make them highly unreliable forces in the politics of the labor movement. (The Workers World Party, the Trotskyist group least tied to classical Trotskyist positions and with political lines close to the trend on a number of issues does little if any labor concentration work and is almost exclusively pre-occupied with "demonstration and coalition politics.")

As noted earlier, the Maoist trend in the U.S. has undergone a qualitative decline in influence and coherence in the past year or so. This is due to a number of factors. The first and principal factor is that U.S. imperialism's increasingly aggressive international posture has heightened the contradiction between imperialism and the international proletariat and oppressed peoples at the same time that China is evermore openly allying with imperialism; this discredits and isolates Maoism within the progressive, anti-imperialist movement. Second, the internal struggle within the CPC has resulted in the complete reversal of the line of Mao and the Cultural Revolution, a change that many Maoists are swallowing but which leaves a significant number cynical and demoralized about China and their entire international trend. Third, the U.S. Maoism's primitive sense of politics and tendency toward ultra-leftism since the new communist movement's birth a decade ago has meant that Maoism never became a serious material force in the working class movement, and many Maoists are now increasingly aware of and demoralized by this fact. For all these reasons, U.S. Maoism has now entered a period of crisis from which it is likely to emerge only as a permanently fragmented and ineffective trend much like Trotskyism

but perhaps even less mature politically and theoretically.

In the context of this crisis, the many Maoist cadre who went into the trade unions in the early and mid-1970's are politically adrift. Significant numbers of these cadre--the best of whom dug in and actually attained some individual influence due to their commitment and organizing skills--are searching for a very pragmatic solution to their political dilemma: break with ultra-left tactics, and root oneself even deeper among the masses (this is occurring both on an individual level and, with the CPML and RWH's turn to explicit pragmatism--unity only on an immediate program for work among the masses--on an organizational level as well. In the process of this pragmatic turn, a strong tendency to conciliate the collaborationist line)particularly given the overlap of the AFL-CIO leadership's and Maoism's international line, has come to the fore.)

While many of the Maoist cadre have become deeply corrupted after years of training under an opportunist line, some may be open to realignment over the next period, particularly if the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend can demonstrate some ability to effectively intervene in the labor movement.

Unboubtedly, the emerging Marxist-Leninist trend will have to keep close watch upon the social-democratic, Trotskyist, and Maoist trends as our work in labor matures. In our view, however, the most crucial contention to determine the future of the left in labor will be with the modern revisionist trend, expressing itself organizationally in the CPUSA.

The CPUSA

The CPUSA remains the largest and most influential communist organization in the U.S., and certainly in the labor movement. It is the organizational heir at this point to 60 years of rich experience in the labor movement, with long-standing ties, and a certain prestige. Its cadre are sprinkled throughout the labor movement, with a number having achieved leading positions--though in few cases as open communists. CP cadre are fairly well positioned in basic industry, auto, steel, and rubber, and have influence in the UE, ILWU (fading), 1199, among others. Given the age bracket/seniority of these forces the CP has been less affected by the layoffs of the mid-70's than other left trends (reflecting in fact the opposite problem, retirement is a big drain on the CP's deployable cadre in labor). The CP is the sponsoring organization behind the Trade Unionist for Action and Democracy (TUAD), an intermediate mass organization with a fairly left program that publishes Labor Today and also maintains the Labor Research Association which publishes the monthly Economic Notes. The party has international ties with CP's throughout the world and, connected with and related to these ties, with the international labor movement, specifically, the World Federation of Trade Unions. Given this extensive network of ties and experience, the CPUSA would seem to be in a favorable position to exert a left influence in labor.

Unfortunately, the CP has demonstrated little ability to aggressively play this role, precisely because of the domination of this organization by revisionism. Revisionism has distorted the party's political line and corrupted its ideological and organizational fiber. Maintaining only a dim memory of what it means to play a vanguard role, the party has transformed the struggle for socialism into a gradualist battle for reforms that will add up to socialism and places the hopes of humankind for

peace and revolution on the supposedly rational wing of the imperialists who will realize that war is collective suicide and will consequently surrender their class rule without a bitter fight.

This right opportunist perspective is expressed concretely in the anti-monopoly coalition (AMC) strategy. The strategy proposes a two-stage revolution in the U.S. In the first stage, a coalition led by workers, and including the middle classes, and non-monopoly capitalists, with the benevolent approval of the rational monopoly capitalists will capture the state through electoral means; in the second, they will utilize the state power to curb and eventually end the power of the monopolies. The key to this strategy is keeping the broadest array of support for it at a given time (the key lesson of Chile is that broad based support was not kept), something possible by convincing virtually every strata of the population that an anti-monopoly government is in their direct economic interest, since monopoly exploits "everyone."

Of course, this is a completely unrealistic view of the revolutionary process in the U.S., and as such it distorts and infects the day-to-day work of the CP in the mass movements. Most specifically, it leads to a consistent practice of tailing backward political forces (keep them in the AMC at all costs) and of reducing the struggle to win agreement with socialist politics to economist arguments about how much better off we would all be without monopolies. This has a tremendously negative impact on the CP's work in labor, as it does on all other fronts.

In labor, the CP's work is predicated on the notion that the labor movement must be in the lead of the anti-monopoly coalition and that all forces in labor have the material basis to be active parts of the AMC. Consequently they pin their hopes on winning the AFL-CIO leadership to leading the resistance to capital—regarding any polarization with these forces as tantamount to sabotaging the anti-monopoly coalition because it narrows its base. They deny the social basis (protected strata of labor, stratification in the working class) for collaboration or, at best, minimize its importance to the point where it hardly exists. This is what lies behind their refusal to polarize an issues in labor, to promote the AFL-CIO solidarity day march as labor stepping forward to lead the peoples movements, and to view any effort at thoroughgoing exposure of opportunism in labor as ultra-left.

This vacillation is expressed in the CP's mechanical and tailist view of the "left-center" alliance concept. To the CP, maintaining the "left-center" alliance is the highest priority; given the inevitable vacillation of center forces, this translated directly into a tailist line that pursues unity at any price. Marxist-Leninists must recognize that a principled "left-center" alliance can only be forged in conjunction with a sharp left-right polarization that exposes the right's opportunism. This polarization is the basis upon which the vacillating center forces can and must be pulled into the front in defense of the workers interests. This crucial lesson concerning the laws of class struggle in the labor movement, confirmed over and over again by history (particularly the positive and negative experience of the CP in the 1930's and 40's), has been fully obscured by the revisionist CPUSA. Unfortunately, the result is that not only CP cadre, but many Marxist-Leninists outside the CP, including forces in our trend, have adopted the incorrect and tailist conception of the "left-cent" alliance.

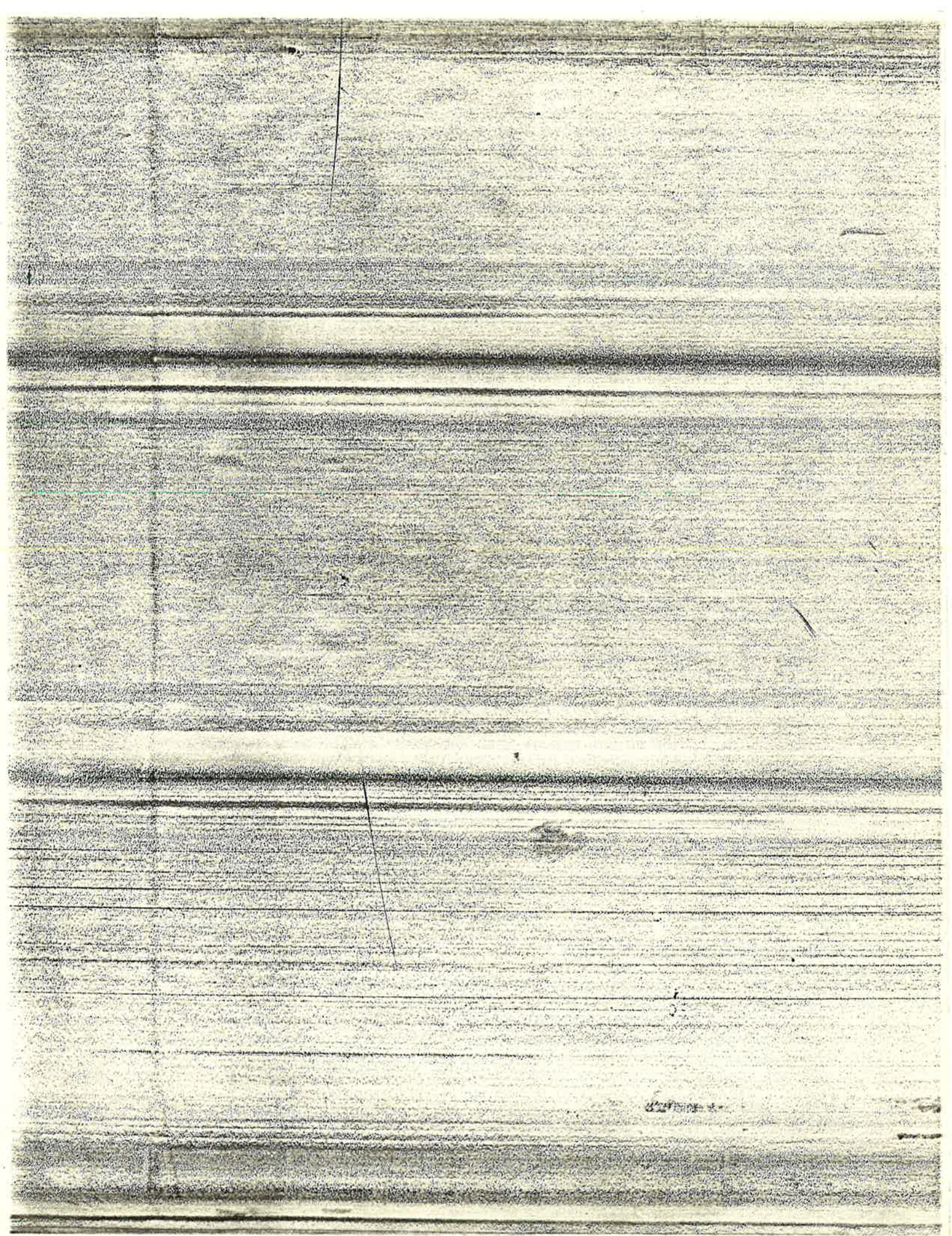
Consistent with the rightist deviation, the CP attempts to win every force in labor (and those outside) to sympathy for socialism on the narrowest economic arguments. The most blatant example of this is the attempt to promote the view that "detente means jobs", that is, to make the main argument for peace and normal relations with the Soviet Union rest on the logic that this will mean more jobs for American workers. (By this logic, they want to convince capital that it is in their interest to promote detente because it will solve their economic problems; the CP argues that Reagan and Co. are irrational because they are actually betraying their class interest by being so bellicose toward the Soviets). Similar economist arguments promising immediate "palpable results" shape the CP's attempts to win the class to the anti-racist struggle.

These rightist errors add up to a consistent tailist policy in the unions. In particular, the CP tails on precisely those issues where a sharp left pole needs to be established—the questions of war and racism. On narrow economic questions, the CP can assert its "revolutionary" role by calling for "harder struggle"—although even here it tends to avoid any serious criticism or struggle with right or vacillating center forces. But on the volatile questions of war and racism, the CP consistently backs off from a fight. The party opposes linking the struggle against U.S. role in El Salvador to the AIFLD program, implying that AIFLD could actually be won to play a progressive role. On the Weber decision, they made the main point of agitation in the unions respect for collective bargaining rather than the fight against racism. They do target the rising military budget as a key problem, but fail to take up the straight-forward defense of whom U.S. imperialism is preparing to attack, rather, restricting agitation to the narrowest economic arguments. In these ways, though the party's positions are often formally the correct ones, they abandon the rigorous struggle necessary to make them a material force in the working class.

Of course, a contradictory tendency is at work in the party; to the extent that this line is not actually able to stem the racist and in particular the anti-Soviet tide, and to the extent that the party still has a commitment to anti-racism and in particular to defense of the Soviet Union, some of the less corrupted forces in the party strain toward a more aggressive posture. As well, many of the party's activists are poorly trained theoretically and do not grasp some of the subtleties of the revisionist distortion of a Marxist-Leninist line. These are factors which make the possibility of realignment work with some forces in the CP a strong possibility in the coming period. At the same time, this can only be successful if accompanied by the most rigorous criticism of the revisionist line and its effect in practice.

The Emerging Marxist-Leninist Trend

Undoubtedly, the ability of our trend to effectively realign forces from the CPUSA (or any other force on the left) and to emerge as a force in the labor movement broadly is completely bound up with the maturation of our trend toward a more professional level of work in the labor movement. Though many activists in the trend have seen trade union work as a key (if not inherently the most important) area of communist work for some years, our trend has painfully far to go in this regard. By and large, our trend's work in labor is characterized by narrow political visions, a localist character, and an amateurish approach to work. Like other trends, we are strongly influenced by the tendency to harbor illusions about the right and to romanticize the rank-and-file. This present state



flows in part out of the historical fragmentation of the trend and its general inexperience, and in part from the domination of the trend for some years by a narrow, economist orientation to trade union work centered in the PWOC.

For the most part, our trend originated from various circles of communists involved in one way or another with the "new communist movement" of the early 1970's. The main national organizations in that movement failed to take a Marxist-Leninist stand around Angola, and it was the more scattered and less developed formations and groups that made up the bulk of the anti-revisionist, and anti-"left" opportunist trend as it took shape in the 1975-77 period. The bulk of these circles emphasized mass organizing as their main priority since the widespread summation of the degeneration of the ultra-"lefts" was that they had gotten divorced from the masses, and proximity to the masses was the key guard against dogmatism and ultra-leftism. Despite this priority, the shallow political lines and organizational primitiveness of these formations, combined with the general ebb in the mass movements during the mid to late 70's, meant that little real progress in mass organizing was actually accomplished. Thus it was only a few of the most developed circles--the PWOC, MINP-El Comite, or KDP, that were able to build any substantial base in any sector of the working class. Beyond these few developed formation, smaller circles or individual activists in the trend were occasionally able to stay in one area long enough to build a bit of a base, gain union office, or build a stable mass organization, but these efforts were largely scattered and unstable.

These limitations affected the gains of our trend in labor as they did in other areas of mass struggle. Concerning work in labor, however, these primitive beginnings were also framed by another contradiction, that of the racial segregation within the trend. For the most part, the minority activists participating in the initial core of the trend came out of the anti-racist or, in some cases, anti-imperialist movements, while many of the white activists came out trade union activity. In the absence of a leading line and centralized guidance to overcome this spontaneous division of labor, it was largely perpetuated and the ranks of the trend activists taking up trade union work were overwhelmingly white. And, particularly since little of the work of these primitive circles made substantial headway in winning advanced workers (including advanced minority workers) to active participation in the communist movement, this relative segregation has continued to the present day.

To a large extent, these early conditions were the result of historical accident, inexperience, and the spontaneous opinions of the initial forces in the trend. Relatively early on, however, they became framed by the dominant party building line in the trend, the fusion line of the PWOC. PWOC's perspective on party building closely linked to its perspective on trade union work rapidly gained influence in the trend, (particularly among those activists doing trade union work whose unity with fusion as a party building line often came after their agreement with PWOC's approach to trade union work). This influence had a contradictory impact on the trend's labor work. At first, its impact was largely positive. PWOC's line helped activists firm up their critique of ultra-left tactics in the unions, and offered many forces significant guidance in the nuts and bolts of trade union work. It encouraged local collectives to take a more systematic approach to their work, to begin to discuss concentration policies and to utilize propaganda more regularly (largely the Organizer). As well, in some unions and industries, it put activists in different

localities in minimal touch with one another. In these ways, it pushed the bulk of circles and individual labor activists in the trend forward from where they began.

On the other hand, the limitations and errors of PWOC's line soon became a fetter on the trend's development. In the zeal to demarcate with ultra-leftism, PWOC's line encouraged its followers to view with skepticism aggressive moves to co-ordinate work nationally or to advance unpopular political lines in the labor movement. While PWOC was hardly the worst offender in this regard, and even took up some struggle against its more backward followers, the line tended to reinforce some of the most backward localist tendencies in these circles. As well, the fusion line's tendency to romanticize the spontaneous struggles of the working class tended to keep activists trapped in a shop floor mentality, re-inforcing notions of the communist as spokesman for a disenfranchised rank and file rather than a political leader offering direction to revitalize the labor movement. Many activists looking to PWOC's line for guidance came dangerously close to adopting the thoroughly backward positions of opposing running for union offices in principle, viewing providing political leadership as inherently elitist, etc. In addition, the PWOC's failure to keep a broad political vision in front of activists reinforced the spontaneous sentiment to view the trade union question as mainly one of tactics and organization, and to underplay the role of political line. And in terms of racism, PWOC's backward line on superseniority and its generally economist orientation to the anti-racist struggle, as well as its fetish of trade union work as inherently the most important for communists, put severe limitations on these circles to effectively interact with the anti-racist struggle inside and outside the labor movement, provide some leadership in it, and based on that, seriously address the problem of composition of the trend's trade union activists.

Underlying these shortcomings is the very way in which the fusionist approach to work in labor posed the "trade union question." Essentially, the fusion line led with the opinion that the purpose of work in the unions is to locate the advanced workers and win them to communism. While this is true in the most general historical sense, it is misleading and in fact incorrect as an actual line to guide trade union work. Posing the question this way almost inevitably leads into a "shop-floor" mentality, where the actual political motion in the trade union movement is neglected or ignored in favor of concentrating attention on work with individual workers who display some spark of militancy or advanced political consciousness.

Rather than this way of posing the question, Marxist-Leninists must pose the question of trade union work as how to engage in the political contention in labor to eventually win broad influence for an advanced line in that arena of class struggle. Clearly, work with individual advanced workers will be a crucial part of this task, but this task will not be separated from or obscure the focus on the left penetrating and winning dominant influence in the labor movement broadly. By posing the question incorrectly in the first place, the fusion line prevents activists under its guidance, despite immense dedication and hard work, from successfully realigning the labor movement and winning broad influence for socialism within it.

These underlying weaknesses in the fusionist line manifested themselves in the manner in which PWOC led the attempt to forge national fractions in auto, education, and health, and the disastrous failure of these fractions. Clearly, PWOC was mature enough to realize that the time for local work to be raised to the level of national work, in general and in particular

unions, was overripe. In this sense, the call for fractions was positive. However, the political preparation for these was invariably sloppy, and they were not organized on the basis of a coherent leading line with a core of activists prepared to lead around it. Instead, they were announced with great fanfare but launched essentially as hollow organizational shells which some were supposed to be, merely by virtue of being a national organization, an advanced form. Difficult political questions (such as the actual focus of organizing in health and education, or struggles around the line on racism in the fractions) were avoided or dealt with purely organizationally. Thus the fractions were built on such a flimsy foundation that they were unlikely to succeed even before they became further distorted by the maneuverings of the PWOC/OCIC leadership in its sectarian attempt to isolate the rectification forces and then ultimately destroyed altogether by the backward campaign against white chauvinism. In the trade union arena, failure of these fractions were the final product of the failure of the fusion line.

The failure of these fractions has meant that the trend's trade union work remains scattered, amateurish and mainly local in character. Still, the potential of our yet scattered work to mature into a significant force is great, if only they can be gathered together and focused by an advanced line and national co-ordination. While the social investigation of this commission remains limited, we already can identify some places where trend circles or individual activists in or close to the trend have gained important experience and influence; these include a number of areas of trade union work in Philadelphia (though the cadre responsible for these gains are no longer united in a coherent circle); the work of MINP-El Comite in New York (here too a recent split has left up in the air the degree of cohesion and ongoing guidance that is present in the trade union work); work in the Cincinnati Teachers Union; work with the substitute teachers in Chicago; the relatively developed Massachusetts Trade Union Educational League; work in ILWU Local 37 in Seattle (increasingly this work is already part of nationally co-ordinated trend work in ILWU); work among clericals in the Bay Area. We are sure there are others. Additionally, we are aware of/in contact with trend activists in a host of unions, with significant numbers in (at least) the AFT and NEA, SEIU, and AFSCME. Clearly, it is not because our trend lacks forces in the trade union arena or direct experience that we are so weak and isolate.

Rather, the main problem at this point remains one of the line and, secondarily, of organizational coherence. Without unity on a political line to guide trade union work, it will remain scattered and our trend will remain peripheral to the labor movement. Here the legacy of the ill-fated OCIC fractions also has an effect; despite all the effort that went into them, little serious discussion and struggle over political line questions actually took place. Given this, the grip of both economism and simple confusion concerning the trade union question remains strong. A step toward breaking with confusion and the fusionist, economist prejudices has been taken with the publication of "Communist Work in the Trade Unions" in Line of March and the process around the article which involved over 225 activists throughout the country (not all labor activists). Still, significant struggle remains ahead concerning the line advanced in this article, both to deepen and refine it and to continue the polemic against economism.

The development of more advanced organizational forms for our trend's

labor work is linked with the success of this line struggle. As the trend begins to broaden its vision about penetration of the labor movement to a broad political framework and a nationwide orientation, we will be able to advance toward putting the trade union work of the trend on a more professional basis. Clearly, however, the line struggle in the trend takes place in the context of our ongoing efforts to strengthen the mass work being done, and to guide it from a national perspective wherever possible.

In assessing the work of the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend we have not attempted to analyze the line and work of the Communist Labor Party (CLP). In our view, the CLP objectively falls within the lines of demarcation that define this trend, but at present it takes no responsibility for its overall development; for that matter, the CLP apparently attempts to wall itself off from close work with almost all other left forces. Our study of CLP's line and experience in work with them remains very limited, and provides the basis only for the most initial opinions. Their theoretical framework for work in labor appears relatively advanced, with a perspective on polarizing the labor movement with the right and a rejection of rank and file prejudices; they appear to have rooted themselves in a number of important unions and conduct their work with a significant degree of professionalism relative to other forces on the left. At the same time, a tendency toward right errors seems to be a force in their line and work, particularly in their assessment that in this period the white workers are rising up to combat capital and the influence of rightist ideas on workers is fast fading; in this context, they too appear to become disoriented by the immediate currents in the spontaneous movement. Still, further investigation is needed before a firm evaluation can be made.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the present period offers a significant challenge to the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend. That challenge can be met only if we are clear on the essential nature of the present political situation in the labor movement and on the weaknesses and limitations which afflict the left in general and our trend in particular. In our view, such clarity must above all be based on the following propositions:

- 1) The present period is one of U.S. imperialism going over to the full offensive against the international proletariat; the pillars of this offensive are a more aggressive foreign policy including preparations for war, and a racially-orchestrated social austerity program for the U.S. working class.

- 2) The class collaborationist forces presently have the political initiative in the labor movement, and their actions are objectively steps toward the creation of a "social-imperialist" trend which would attempt to protect the interests of the upper, more protected strata of the working class and sacrifice the interests of the lower strata in the U.S. and the international proletariat. The material basis for such a trend to win influence among workers exist in the severe stratification, particularly along racial lines, of the U.S. working class.

- 3) The left must combat any tendency toward illusions about the "progressive" character of the initiative of the right forces (and secondarily any romanticization about the spontaneously advanced consciousness of the rank and file), and be prepared, in a mature fashion, to polarize issues with the right. This is crucial if the left is going to be

able to accomplish its long range task of leading a break with collaborationism and a realignment in labor resulting in a class struggle trend, as well as its task of winning broad influence for revolutionary politics in labor.

4) The crucial core of a revolutionary left that can accomplish these tasks lies within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend. Key to this trend's maturation as a force in labor are deepening the break with the narrow political visions of the previously dominant economist line, and developing an advanced perspective on the trade union question and a more in-depth assessment of the forces in labor, as well as stepping up the level of professionalism with which we take up our practical work, including the better use of propaganda and, in particular, strengthening our concentration work in specific unions and sectors, and beginning to develop nationwide co-ordination of this work wherever possible.

OUTLINE FOR LINE OF MARCH LABOR COMMISSION CONFERENCE ON THE LABOR ARISTOCRACY

There will be a short presentation, outlined below, to set the framework for the plenary discussion. Where possible we will note the page of the working paper where the ideas are more fully developed.

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PRESENTATION ON THE LABOR ARISTOCRACY

I--The political report draws out that the current period is one where the class collaborationists have the political initiative in the labor movement and are leading the fight against the capital offensive in an attempt to restore the protected status of the upper strata of labor, sacrificing the interests of the proletariat as a whole. The communist movement must cast aside any illusions about the character of this political initiative by the opportunist forces and be prepared to polarize issues with this right wing. The theoretical framework that lies behind this analysis centers on the relationship between imperialism and opportunism, in particular the labor aristocracy.

- A. The communist movement has displayed a tendency to downplay the persistence and influence of opportunism in the labor movement. This is reflected in underestimating the profound political task, the polarization with the right, that is required to realign the labor movement away from the influence of this opportunist trend.
- B. This underestimation of opportunism is reflected in the different analysis that attempt to account for its influence. Some forces refer to the dominance of bourgeois ideology and bourgeois illusions in the working class movement, others point to the carrierist intentions of the labor leaders. None, however, point to the underlying relation of imperialism to opportunism in a scientific manner. Our movement refrains from even using the term which most accurately captures this relation, the labor aristocracy.
- C. The incorrect analysis of the material basis for opportunism is also reflected in the various analysis about the nature of opportunism itself. Many in our movement view opportunism as an incomplete line, a line which need broadening if it is to take up the class struggle as a whole. Others simply view it as co-operation with one or another employer.

But opportunism is not simply narrow in terms of the issues, it is a well developed, mature and politically sophisticated political trend. It represents the alliance of a section of the working class with the bourgeoisie in struggle against the interests of the proletariat. It is not simply an abandoning of the class struggle, but is a political trend which is opposed to class struggle

II -Understanding opportunism all-sidedly requires that the communist movement raise its theoretical understanding of the relation between opportunism and imperialism. In general, opportunism is the result of the capacity of imperialism to bribe a section of the working class movement to join with the bourgeoisie in its fight against the proletariat as a whole. The headquarters for this trend is the labor aristocracy, which is granted concessions from the bourgeoisie such that they have an objective, although temporary, material interest in preserving and advancing imperialism. The labor aristocracy is protected from the worst features of capitalist production by the bribe, & can change its composition relative to the dynamics of imperialism internationally.

- A. Opportunism is the result of the relative privilege of the workers in the imperialist country over the international proletariat. (See quote from Lenin starting on page 12 of article.)
- B. The labor aristocracy is an opportunist political trend which depends on imperialist super-profits for its material base. (See the four features of the labor aristocracy outlined on pages 14 and 15.)
- C. The material base, which creates the social base for opportunism, is the capacity of imperialism to bribe a strata of the working class. The bribe is more than higher wages, it is an all-sided privileged life relative to the international proletariat and the lower strata in the imperialist nation. (See the section on page 15) (For U.S. post WWII see Section II #A pages 27-31)
- D. The labor aristocracy plays upon and reproduces prior class stratification. In the U.S. the racial stratification plays a central role in this process. (See pages 20 to 22.)

- III --The labor aristocracy has an objective basis to pursue a political direction which allies it with the bourgeoisie against the whole proletariat. Politically we can see this in the history of the labor movement in the past 40 years.
- A. The AFL-CIO merger represented the victory of opportunism in the labor movement. The broad influence of opportunism was the result of an expanded labor aristocracy due to the stabilization of U.S. imperialist hegemony. The labor movement as a whole was realigned to the right. (See pages 37 to 40)
 - B. Opportunism in the U.S. pursues an active policy of promotion of U.S. imperialism. This allows for the maintenance of the relative protected status of the labor aristocracy internationally. (See pages 40 and 41)
 - C. The political arm of the labor aristocracy is the Democratic Party. Here the opportunists in labor ally with those in other social movements to actively fight for its interests as the upper strata against those of the whole working class. (See pages 42 to 43)
 - D. The labor aristocracy has an objective interest in promoting racism and racial stratification. This protects the labor aristocracy from the competition in the working class for jobs. (See pages 43 to 45)
 - E. Opportunism doesn't simply forget about the broad issues of the class struggle, but actively struggles against the interests of the proletariat and pursues its own narrow interests. (See pages 45 to 46)

- IV -- Our conclusion is that opportunism must be exposed and isolated thru sharp political struggle in the labor movement. This requires a polarization between the left wing of the labor movement and this right class collaborationist headquarters in the labor aristocracy. This is the only manner in which the proletariat will break away from the influence of opportunism. This approach is opposed to that of the CPUSA which sees the polarization between the right and center forces. Their incorrect analysis stems from underestimating the strength, material basis and influence of opportunism in the labor movement.

DISCUSSION: The discussion will be organized around the following three topics.

- 1). The theoretical framework of the relation between imperialism and opportunism, in particular the labor aristocracy as the concept which captures the essential relation.
- 2). The composition of the labor aristocracy in the U.S. Our analysis leads us to analyze three fractions (pages 46 to 49) in the most recent period since WW II.
- 3). The political stakes for the proletariat in breaking with opportunism. This centers on the analysis of opportunism as a political trend in alliance with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat as a whole, reflected in its stand on the key issues facing the working class today.

We will then conclude with a recapitulation of the main features of this analysis and the task of communists.