

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

# The Workers' Advocate

## Supplement



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# The CPUSA's work in auto and the change in line of the mid-1930's

**Speech at the Third National Conference  
of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA  
Fall 1986**

We continue our coverage of the Third National Conference by printing a speech on how the change in line of the international communist movement in the mid-1930's was reflected in the U.S.

It was this change in line that set the Communist Party of the USA on the road to ruin. It was once the revolutionary vanguard of the workers; up to the mid-30's it was the finest working class political party ever seen in the U.S. But today it is no longer revolutionary; it no longer fights for the class interests of the working class. It is communist in name only; it has trampled on Marxism-Leninism and betrayed the cause of communist revolution. Instead it cringes before the American bourgeoisie and the Democratic Party as well as apologizing for the new Russian revisionist bourgeoisie. It is now a phrasemongering tail of the capitalist liberals and the trade union bureaucrats.

The political collapse of the CPUSA resulted in the struggle to build a new Marxist-Leninist Party. But the history of the CPUSA still provides valuable lessons for party-building today.

The speech has been edited and expanded for publication.

This speech is on the harmful change in line of the Communist Party of the USA in the mid-1930's. It will not deal much with the theoretical formulations of the line given throughout the 1920's and 30's. Instead it will trace how work among the

auto workers was affected, concentrating on the work for organizing an industrial auto workers union.

### OVERVIEW

The work of the CPUSA among the auto workers went through various stages.

\* First there is the period prior to the Great Depression of the 1930's. This is the decade or so from the founding of the Party to the depression. In this period the Communist Party step-by-step transformed itself from a militant-talking organization on the social-democratic pattern, marked by the traditions of the left wing of the Socialist Party, to a communist-style organization of revolutionary struggle.

Among the auto workers, despite various weaknesses, the CP took up building communist cells at the factories (party shop nuclei), put out communist shop papers, brought the foreign-born into the

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**THE DEMOCRATS WRING THEIR HANDS ABOUT CENTRAL AMERICA:  
ARE THE CONTRA CRIMINALS EFFECTIVE ENOUGH TO EARN THEIR SUPPORT?**

The following article was written at the end of February, but didn't make it into the **Workers' Advocate** for lack of space. Since then, the Democratic-controlled Senate has voted to authorize the release of the \$40 million in military supplies that are the final installment of the \$100 million in aid for the contras voted by Congress last year. Despite contragate, despite the resignation the week before of their favor contra criminal Arturo Cruz, despite a majority in the Senate, the Democrats couldn't even unite on a symbolic vote against the war on Nicaragua. 14 Democrats joined with 38 Republicans on Wed., March 18 in the 52-48 roll-call vote; after all, the Democrats don't want to look soft before their bourgeois backers.

This is the same Senate that voted 97-1 the week before, on Thursday March 12, to endorse a so-called Central American peace proposal by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. It would be hard to find a more dramatic illustration that diplomatic pressure on Nicaragua and military pressure are two sides of the same coin. The same Senate that votes more guns and bullets to kill Nicaraguans also votes with a single mind to step up the diplomatic offensive.

Meanwhile it has been announced that the C.I.A. is now providing the contras with detailed information on civilian economic targets inside Nicaragua. And the U.S. military buildup in Honduras continues. The more Congress talks, the more Nicaragua bleeds.

The exposures from contragate have brought out mountains of information about the crimes of the White House against Nicaragua. The U.S. crusade against Nicaragua has been shown to be based on lies and intrigue. Behind the big talk about fighting for "democracy" in Nicaragua, we have seen the mobilization of a worldwide contra-aid network of the most brutal and sordid forces -- from drug lords in Colombia to the racist regime in South Africa, from zionist Israel to the tyrants of Saudi Arabia.

But what is the Democratic-controlled Congress doing in the face of these revelations? Are the liberal politicians using the scandal to finally put an end to Reagan's attempts to subjugate Nicaragua?

Some news reports on TV and in the press may give that impression, but that's not really what's going on.

True, you will find grumbling among some Democrats about Reagan's Nicaragua policies. And once in a while, even some harsh-sounding statements. But in fact the Democratic "opposition" in Congress is mainly interested in helping Reagan sort out what's most effective in securing the interests of American big business in Central America. After all, the Democrats don't want to buck the spirit of bipartisanship which is all the rage in Washington.

Last year, the Republicans and Democrats in Congress approved \$100 million in aid for the contras. According to this law, Reagan was to report to Congress this February to get approval for the release of \$40 million out of the \$100 million. Because of the contragate scandal, and because of embarrassing wrangling going on within the contra leadership, the Reagan administration delayed its report. It is due to be submitted soon.

Some of the liberal Democrats are posturing as if they are standing up to Reagan's request for the \$40 million. At the same time they admit that they don't have the votes to override an expected presidential veto of a refusal to authorize this money. Thus they can freely posture, without changing anything.

But let's take a look at the key Democratic

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proposals. Are they guided by the desire to stop U.S. attempts to strangle Nicaragua? No. These proposals stem from the concern of the Democrats to distance themselves from the contragate scandal. But even more importantly, these proposals are guided by their worry that the present U.S. program in Central America is not being effective in subjugating Nicaragua.

One of the main ideas tossed about in Congress, especially in the House, is for a moratorium on contra aid. Imagine that. They won't even fight for an outright ban.

### **The Real Concern — the Contra War Hasn't Strangled Nicaragua**

A whole section of the Democrats in Congress, along with certain high-ranking political and military officials in the administration, are concerned because the contra war alone has not proven sufficient to force Nicaragua back under the thumb of U.S. imperialism.

This gets to the heart of the Democrats' difference with Reagan on Nicaragua. They do not disagree on support for the counterrevolution against Nicaragua. But while Reagan wants to do it through an outright military victory over Nicaragua, the Democrats would prefer to see if the Nicaraguan government can be pressured to capitulate in other ways. This is what is behind their talk of a "political solution" or a "peace initiative".

### **The New Dodd Bill**

A bill sponsored by liberal Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) has become the most prominent of the Democratic Party proposals on contra aid. On February 18, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved one version of this measure. Its sponsors acknowledge that even if this bill passes Congress, it couldn't be sustained against a Reagan veto. But it is still instructive to examine Dodd's initiative, to see how the Democrats "oppose" Reagan over Nicaragua.

\* Dodd's bill, which is co-sponsored by Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), wouldn't block the \$40 million. It claims that it would use the \$40 million towards "relocating" and "disbanding" the contras. Now, can't you just see the CIA, Pentagon and contra leadership using these funds for passing out severance checks for the contra troops? No doubt, they'd use it just as they used the last shipments of so-called "humanitarian aid."

\* The other concrete proposal in Dodd's bill is for \$300 million in aid to muscle up the Salvadoran, Honduran, Costa Rican, and Guatemalan regimes.

But diverting funds from direct support for the

contras towards aid for Nicaragua's neighbors is merely juggling the account books of how the squeeze is to be applied against Nicaragua. These neighbors are well known for having been mobilized by imperialism as a springboard for aggression against Nicaragua.

El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras are intimately connected to the contras. The entire territory of Honduras has been turned into a base camp for the contras and for the Pentagon itself. Costa Rica hosts the southern branches of the contras, and El Salvador has most recently served as a launch site for the CIA's secret contra resupply operation, the one in which Eugene Hasenfus was involved.

Meanwhile, Guatemala has claimed to be entirely unconcerned with Nicaragua. But now the Tower Commission revelations have brought out information indicating that Guatemala too has been aiding the contras. (*New York Times*, February 28, 1987)

\* The Democratic alternative of course repeats the rhetoric of pursuing the Contadora "peace process". The Contadora talks involve pressure on Nicaragua by the capitalist powers of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama. The Contadora plan is not an antidote to military aggression as it is made to appear; it is in fact a complement to it. The message to Nicaragua from the Contadora "peace process" is: "If you jump off the cliff by yourself, then we won't have you pushed off."

When all is said and done, the difference between Reagan and the Democratic alternative comes down to this. While at this time Reagan is asking for \$40 million for the cause of trying to crush Nicaragua, the liberals are proposing to add \$300 million more. And this is supposed to be an alternative?

### **Build the Mass Struggle Against U.S. Imperialism**

The revelations of contragate will not make anti-Reagan warriors out of the liberal Democrats. The Democratic Party is clear about its intentions towards Central America. While the liberals are amenable to some playacting against the unpopular aggression in Nicaragua, the Democratic Party's only differences with the Reagan administration are over **how**, and not **whether** to trample the Nicaraguan revolution.

The workers and progressive people who want to see an end to the criminal war upon Nicaragua cannot be satisfied with playacting in Congress. Clearly, it is up to us to combat the U.S. imperialist war. Our energies must be focused on building up a militant movement in the streets. There is no other way. <>

## Dual Tactics of the Afrikaner Racists to Preserve White Domination ON THE SECRET DOCUMENT FROM THE "BROEDERBOND"

Today the Botha regime is wielding the big stick against the black South Africans. It has made every form of protest illegal. It has put cordons of troops around various black townships. Torture is business-as-usual in South African prisons. And South African armed forces murder squads make periodic raids on the neighboring countries.

Far from being embarrassed by this display of brutal criminality, Botha's racist regime is boasting of its toughness in the current election campaign (whites only, please).

But it feels the ground shaking under its feet. It feels that repression alone might not work. Recently a member of the ultra-racist Hersitgte Nasionale Party, which believes simply in the big stick, revealed an internal document from the secret society of white racists called the "Broederbond" which discusses the possibility that new and more deceptive forms might be needed to preserve white domination. For the ultra-racists and fascists of the old school of the Hersitgte Nasionale, this was a big scandal.

### What is the "Broederbond"?

The "Broederbond" is an elite group of Afrikaners (the majority language grouping of the whites). It includes government figures from the ruling National Party such as chief executioner President P.W. Botha himself. It is a pillar of South Africa's regime of torture and racism, and it is devoted to preserving not just white, but Afrikaner-white rule.

Yet the slim reports about its secret document, "Basic Constitutional Preconditions for the Survival of the Afrikaner", suggest this document worries about the need to paper over white rule with the use of black sellout politicians, the Clarence Pendletons and Booker T. Washingtons of South Africa. It suggests that it might be necessary to allow suitable blacks in the government, even a black president.

It can be recalled that some time ago Foreign Minister Roelof "Pik" Botha came out with the statement that he would be willing to work under a black president, for which he was suitably reprimanded by chief racist President P.W. Botha. It may be that Pik Botha had the discussion in the Broederbond on his mind. P.W. Botha was hitting him over the head not just for opening this discussion publicly, but probably also for forgetting that this was only a contingency plan, if mass murder of the blacks and repression of other activists failed to achieve the desired effect.

Well, the Broederbond document is reported to

say that it would allow some racially mixed residential areas -- on a voluntary basis. That is, everywhere else would remain compulsorily segregated. And why should the black masses remain angry at exploitation and lack of all rights if a few rich blacks get to rub elbows with P.W. Botha himself (ugh).

Of course, the Broederbond won't even play with the idea of majority rule. Majority rule is thrown out under the code word of preventing the domination of any one ethnic group. That is, the government must ensure that the black majority has no real power, and the Afrikaners can veto anything they don't like.

### A Remarkable Similarity Between the Racist Plan and the Liberal PFP Plan

This plan seems to have some remarkable similarities to the schemes of the white liberal Progressive Federal Party. There are the same catchwords against the domination of any group, the same concern to ensure that the whites remain in real control.

This may be no accident, as the PFP sees its role as being advisers to the apartheid government, teaching it how to make some changes to avoid revolution. The similarity of the PFP and Broederbond plan reveals the falseness of the promises of the capitalist liberals of South Africa. They are united with the racists in wanting to avoid revolution and true majority rule; and revolution is the essential thing.

At the same time, the existence of this document is another sign of how all trends in South Africa are being forced to reckon with the possibility of revolution. Even the mainstream of Afrikaner racism, the Broederbond, feels the ground shaking under its feet. (In this regard, it can be noted that, in early March, 27 academics from Stellenbosch University, which the press tells us is the "intellectual cradle" of the ruling National Party of P.W. Botha, have come out to urge Botha to process along the road to "power-sharing". So apparently the ideas of the Broederbond document are in the air.)

The revolutionary ferment must have gone very far that even the most crusty, entrenched enemies of majority rule feel compelled to play at reform. Naturally, there should be no illusions that the racist rulers are going to peacefully reform themselves into giving up white minority rule. What is happening is that the racists who are wading through blood to preserve their privileges, and who plan to wade through a lot more, feel that force

alone may not be sufficient. They may need to split and disorient the black masses.

### Reformist Blindness

But there are some who see such plans not as a sign of the strength of revolution, but as presenting the possibility that the racists are changing their spots.

The African National Congress of South Africa, for example, talks of revolution but dreams of a deal with the regime. And the regime itself, despite the murder squads it sends out against ANC members and supporters, despite its public fuming against the white businessmen who travel abroad to meet the ANC, itself finds something interesting in the stand of the ANC.

On one hand, the Botha regime murders ANC activists, and on the other hand, it has its feelers out to see if the ANC leadership will capitulate. For example, a while ago ANC officials met with the Broederbond, and its chairman, J.P. de Lange, in New York. The agenda of this meeting was not revealed. But the existence of the Broederbond's new document gives some idea of what was attracting the ANC leadership.

### Tambo Marks the 75 Anniversary of the ANC — By Meeting Shultz

The Reagan regime itself, composed of the most diehard backers of the apartheid regime, is jumping into the game of trying to disorient the black masses, the game of supplementing force with diplomatic initiative.

The Western powers have been trying to get the apartheid regime to take a few more steps to implement some sort of plan to bring in black sell-outs to the ruling apparatus. So Reagan's administration too is exploring the possibilities of having more black traitors coopted in South Africa. Buthelezi, for example. Imitating the Botha government itself, the Reagan administration engages in the dual tactics of helping Botha and company exterminate the ANC and exploring whether the ANC leadership will capitulate.

January this year marked the 75th anniversary of the ANC. It also marked the first meeting between ANC leader Oliver Tambo and Reagan's Secretary of State Shultz, a champion ranter against revolution as "terrorism".

### What Shultz Asked for

In these talks, Shultz tried to get the ANC to renounce armed struggle. This would mean that the ANC would have to get down on its knees before the racist government. The South African

racists are shedding rivers of blood; they recognize no rights but the right to preserve racism; but Shultz wants the ANC to play the game of being a legal opposition (in a land where blacks have no legal rights). This means the continuation of white racist domination in one form or another. But what of that? The Reaganites are in favor of white racism. And for Shultz, the most important thing in South Africa is to avoid revolution.

As well, Shultz wanted the ANC to break all its ties with pro-Soviet groups and the Soviet Union. It should be noted that the Soviet Union is not a backer of revolution in South Africa, and the South African pro-Soviet party, which parades under the name of communism, is neither revolutionary nor truly communist. But for the Reagan administration, the key issue everywhere in the world is fighting for unrivalled U.S. domination.

Of course, the talks were private, so there may well have been other things that Shultz said.

### Tambo Prettified Shultz as an Opponent of Apartheid

Naturally Tambo could not agree to these conditions. But neither did he put forward a correct stand.

Tambo didn't agree to renounce armed struggle at this point. But the ANC has made no secret of its desire to find an alternative to revolution. It however holds that the regime must give it a few concessions before armed struggle is renounced. It uses a small amount of armed actions as a negotiating tool with the white racists.

So what did Tambo do? Here was Tambo talking to one of the most fervent apologists of apartheid in the world, the Reagan administration. The Reaganites not only support white rule in South Africa, but are on a racist offensive in the U.S. But instead of encouraging the struggle against Reaganism, Tambo came out of the meeting talking about how both he and Shultz oppose apartheid and are searching for ways to end it. Tambo said that he and Shultz "found there was a large area of agreement on the nature of the apartheid system, on the need to abolish it, and we are considering together the best ways to achieve it." ("Detroit Free Press", Jan. 29, 1987)

To advance hand in hand with Shultz is to abandon the revolution. But then again, this is the logical outcome of the ANC's constant appeals to the Western capitalist powers to intervene in South Africa to avoid a cataclysm.

Tambo went so far as to say that Shultz expressed no opposition to how Tambo outlined his view of a future South Africa. Incredible! The

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See SOUTH AFRICA

## HAROLD WASHINGTON AND THE CHICAGO ELECTIONS

On February 24, Harold Washington made his first step in his bid for reelection as mayor of Chicago. He defeated former mayor Jane Byrne in the Democratic primary. In the April 7 general election, Washington will face a Republican as well as two Democrats who set up their own parties to run in this election.

The two Democrats are Hynes and Vrdolyak. Thomas Hynes and his Chicago First Party have the support of many of the old political bosses of the infamous Democratic machine. Edward Vrdolyak has set up the Illinois Solidarity Party. Vrdolyak has been the chief mouthpiece of the racist opposition to the Washington administration in the so-called "city council wars". The political forces which supported Byrne in the primaries are now lining up behind these challengers to Washington.

The February 16 issue of the **Chicago Workers' Voice**, paper of the MLP-Chicago, carried an article on the primaries criticizing both Byrne and Washington. It pointed out that both of them come from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. But once she became mayor, Byrne "quickly proved that she too would carry out the capitalists' orders and implement the Reaganite offensive."

And Washington has also shown that "he is opposed to any real fight against Reaganism and he too follows the orders of the rich bankers and industrialists." The article stresses that to fight racism and Reaganite reaction the workers need to build their own revolutionary movement independent of the capitalist parties.

The following extracts from the article go beneath the election rhetoric and look at the issues at stake for the masses and the record of the Democratic Party candidates.

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Again the workers are being treated to a new round of electioneering. On Feb. 24, the primaries for the city elections will be held. The Democratic Primary pits former mayor Jane Byrne against Mayor Harold Washington. A lot of agitation is being done to provoke interest among the masses in this election. "Your voice is your vote" and "the politicians won't hear you if you don't vote" are two of the slogans being raised to make it seem that solutions to the problems facing the people can be found in this election. But for the workers and oppressed masses to judge this election we have to discuss what are the issues facing them and what are the solutions of these two candidates.

A major issue underlying any interest in this campaign among the masses is the necessity to wage a fight against racist reaction. In Chicago racist attacks involving serious injury and arson have increased over the last three years. And people well remember the open vile racism of the Bernard Epton campaign four years ago, a campaign which provoked a great deal of outrage.

Furthermore, the workers and oppressed face the necessity to wage a struggle against the overall Reaganite offensive. What's needed is a mass political movement of working people, a fighting movement that can beat back the capitalist offensive of hunger, racism and war.

So where do the candidates stand on these issues?

Jane Byrne has found her base of support in the political forces of open Reaganism. While not running an openly racist campaign as Bernard Epton did four years ago, she is supported by the same political forces which backed him. Racism against a black mayor is a barely covered over issue in her campaign. All progressive people are against this racism and want to fight against it. Some people are saying that the way to fight Reaganism and racism in Chicago is to vote for Harold Washington.

But does Harold Washington represent a real fight against Reaganite reaction and racism? The Chicago Branch of the MLP does not believe so. Four years of his administration has shown that he is not for such a fight. In fact, on many issues he has actually supervised the capitalist offensive against the masses.

### **Jane Byrne Carried Out the Reaganite Offensive Against the Masses**

Jane Byrne finds her political origins in the so-called "liberal" Kennedyite wing of the Democratic Party. In her first run for mayor eight years ago she claimed to be against the machine. She had the image of being against the racism of the Bilandic administration. She had the support of the left wing of the Democratic Party including Jesse Jackson and Don Rose. However, her reformer image was quickly tarnished by her reactionary policies.

During her administration much outrage was developing against racist police murders and harassment. In July 1980, Richard Ramey, a partially crippled black man, was beaten to death by three police officers for the crime of smoking a cigarette on the "L". There were 19 hangings in the Cook County jails in 29 months. Most were brushed off as suicides, often with preposterous excuses.

Shortly after coming into office, Jane Byrne developed hysteria around the serious issue of street gangs. But rather than develop a fight against the kingpins of the drug trade or against the social and economic conditions which are a breeding ground for the gangs, she used the issue as an excuse for massive roundups and harassment of the Puerto Rican youth. Jane Byrne's racism was further revealed by her 1979 promise to rid the city of "illegal aliens". (Yes, this is the same "I speak Spanish" Jane Byrne)

Harold Washington defeated Jane Byrne four years ago in part because of an anti-racist fight that was developing against these outrages. One can remember the cheers when Harold Washington promised to fire Police Superintendent Brzezczek.

Jane Byrne carried out the Reaganite offensive on other fronts as well. She presided over the layoff of hundreds of Chicago teachers as an austerity measure to pay off the city's huge bank debts -- and further, the bankers were given absolute say over the school budget. This ensured a further deterioration in the schools. Her administration greatly increased the tax burden on the working masses. She became well known as a strike breaker. She attacked the CTA strike and supported the cuts in the cost of living raises and pensions of the CTA drivers. Even her daughter threatened to become a scab driver in this strike. Jane Byrne organized scabbing against the fireman's strike.

It is no wonder that today the masses who are interested in fighting Reaganism are not supporting Jane Byrne. It is Harold Washington who today manages to keep an image of being a reformer, an opponent of Reaganism. But it doesn't take much digging to see that Washington is not for a genuine fight against Reaganism.

#### **Harold Washington is an Obstacle to the Fight Against the Reaganite Racist Offensive**

We warned four years ago, and it is even more clear today, that Harold Washington is not for a real mass fight against racism. In 1985 the Chicago police drove by and ignored the racist attack on a black family on Roosevelt Road in Chicago and nothing was done about it even though Mayor Washington appointed a black chief of police. Even more telling is the fact that when the Klan and Nazis wanted to demonstrate in Marquette

Park last summer, Washington's administration handed out the permit, and his police prevented anti-racist marchers from entering the park to protest this activity. And it was Harold Washington and his political supporters that opposed having a demonstration or taking any action against the Klan and Nazi's in the first place. Alderwoman Marlene Carter publicly called for people to stay away from anti-racist protests and afterwards she denounced the protests that took place in spite of the Washington administration's opposition. One could hardly say that Harold Washington is for a real fight against racism. In fact he is an obstacle to it.

#### **Is Harold Washington Against the Concessions Drive of the Bourgeoisie?**

On this question too, Mayor Washington is an obstacle to the fight of the workers. While he has claimed to be for the workers he is known for crossing the picket line of the **Tribune** strikers. And it was his police force which attacked the solidarity rally for the **Tribune** strikers, arresting many and breaking the lines so that the scab trucks could go through. Furthermore, his administration's plans for city finances is to carry out big layoffs and impose concessions on the city workers.

#### **Harold Washington is Not a Friend of the Immigrant Workers**

Harold Washington has an image of being a friend of the Hispanic and immigrant workers. In January 1986, he declared that the city of Chicago would not cooperate with the INS **unless it was against Federal law**. This did little at the time to prevent the harassment of immigrants; and now with the passage of the racist Simpson-Rodino law, such "noncooperation" is clearly against federal law.

Has Mayor Washington come out against this law? No! Have his aldermanic supporters in the Hispanic community such as Jesus Garcia and Luis Gutierrez come out against this law? No. In fact, their silence has been deafening. This law represents a big attack on the immigrant workers and on Spanish-speaking people in general. And the Mayor and his supporters are not for any kind of a fight against it. <>

## USX PLANT CLOSINGS EXPOSE THE ROTTEN CONTRACT SIGNED BY THE USW HACKS

The Feb. 1 issue of the **Workers' Advocate** carried the article "Bitter Lessons of the USX Strike". The March 1 issue contained a follow-up: "USX Workers Left High and Dry at Tarben Chemical". Below we continue our coverage of the treachery of the USW hacks to the steelworkers who had waged a determined six-month strike.

Just four days after the contract was ratified, USX's chairman David Roderick announced a restructuring plan for the company. He said three plants will immediately close. This wipes out 3,700 workers' jobs. 2,436 jobs are lost at the USX Geneva Works in Provo, Utah; 914 at the steel making side and pipe mill at Texas Works in Baytown, Texas; and 204 at National Tube in McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

It was public knowledge that the restructuring plan was imminent and an open secret that it would include plant closings. But the leaders of the United Steel Workers (USW) union did nothing to alert the workers to this danger or to protect the workers' jobs at the bargaining table.

Meanwhile, many other USX workers have not been called back to work after the contract was ratified. USX is restarting very slowly, "as the market allows." For instance, the company announced that the Fairfield, Alabama plant -- which was supposedly "saved" in negotiations -- will not start up for two more years. And at the South Works in Chicago only half of the 800 workers have been called back so far. Many other mills may never reopen.

The striking workers in many states were able to draw unemployment compensation during the work stoppage because the company locked them out. By now their benefits are exhausted and those still on layoff are out on the street with nothing.

This is the bitter fruit of the contract foisted on the workers by the USW leaders. But these outrages are only the tip of the iceberg. Despite the claims of the USW hacks, it is a job-eliminating contract through and through. Take a look at a number of its main features.

\* During the strike/lockout, USX "sold off" its Chemical Division in Clairton, Pennsylvania to USX managers. As well, 50 warehouses around the country were "sold". While the name of the owners was changed, these facilities will still serve USX and frequently have the same bosses. Nevertheless, the workers at these places were split off from the other USX workers. They've been confronted with separate contracts containing enor-

mous wage, benefit, and job cuts far larger than at the rest of the USX facilities.

The union leaders accepted this situation and formally recognized it in the USX contract by negotiating early pensions or severance pay for some workers at the "sold off" facilities. The rest have been left high and dry. Workers at the Chemical Division are still out against the terrible concessions demands, but the USW hacks have told the other USX workers to cross their picket lines and go back to work.

\* 1,342 jobs are to be eliminated through a supercrafting clause. It allows the company to combine certain jobs which, on top of eliminating 1,300 jobs, puts more work on the workers who remain.

The USW hacks have told the workers not to worry over this because the job cuts will come through attrition accomplished with early retirements. As well, they say some of the laid off workers will be called back.

But they forget to point out two workers must retire for every worker who is called back. That is, twice as many jobs must be eliminated by supercrafting and job combination as the number of workers who are called back.

\* Wage and benefit concessions totalled \$2.50 an hour in the first year and \$2.00 in the remainder of the contract. This includes a \$1.00 an hour wage cut which lasts the life of the contract. These wage and benefit cuts were modeled on the cuts in the contract at Bethlehem steel, but are even steeper.

\* It is a four-year contract. This will make getting back to an industry-wide contract and a united struggle against concessions that much more difficult.

\* Finally, there are two provisions which the union leaders bragged "preserves jobs".

The first is the new clause on contracting out the work of steel workers. This clause is essentially the same as those put in contracts at the other steel companies last year. It does nothing to reverse past contracting out, which at USX has been massive. Further, this clause has not stopped subcontracting work at Bethlehem Steel and at other companies. They simply violate the contract. USX is notorious for breaking even the old, looser contracting language. What will stop them from violating the new clause. Only mass struggle can stop the subcontracting of work. But the USW hacks have refused to allow any struggle except at contract time, and even that they've sabotaged. The workers are expressing little faith that this clause will do much for them.

Secondly, USX agreed to invest \$500 million to



## CORRESPONDENCE: PROTEST TEMPORARILY HALTS DRUG TESTING

The following letter was received last month from a worker involved in resistance to drug testing at the work place.

In December '86 Mirror Systems Inc. in Cambridge MA. (a subsidiary of Times Mirror, a Fortune 200 company) announced that it was going to start drug testing in compliance with a corporate-wide directive. Times Mirror was obviously in a hurry to jump on Reagan's gestapo-style drug testing program. But the management assured the workers that there was no need for concern. They would only be screening new job applicants, not people already employed. And not to worry, this policy would be mostly directed at people who work in more dangerous jobs such as newspaper press operators and delivery truck drivers in the other subsidiaries. Because Mirror Systems jobs are in programming, technical and clerical work (and not considered hazardous) the screening process would be minimal. In other words the workers should just ignore this minor bureaucratic change because only a few people would lose their chance for a job.

But the workers were not fooled. They knew this was just the same tired tactic of trying to sneak more arbitrary harassment into the work place hidden in small steps. It was decided that in order to fight the obvious next step of drug testing current employees, they must defend the rights of future co-workers and unite with the workers at the other subsidiaries around the country against this attack.

A committee of workers from various departments was formed to organize the struggle. It was decided that a letter of protest would be drafted to summarize the major points of opposition and

build two continuous casters. One is to be built in the Edgar Thompson Works outside of Pittsburgh and the other in Fairfield, Alabama. But these investments don't have to begin until the last year of the contract. Given the long delay, some capitalist economists question whether the new continuous casters will really ever be built. And even if they are constructed, jobs will still be lost. While a con-cast is a more modern steel making method, it itself eliminates hundreds of jobs by closing soaking pits and blooming mills and cutting back work in related departments like railroad, bricklaying, maintenance, etc. <>

that it be open for all to sign. This would accomplish several things. It would (1) expose the management's plan of oppression; (2) unite the workers within the company against oppression; and (3) publicize the fight at MSI for workers facing similar struggles in other companies. It would also serve to expose those who posture as workers' rights advocates, yet who would not sign the letter. Although the letter was addressed to the head of Times Mirror, several of the activists emphasized that the real hope was in the workers' own solidarity, not in appealing to the capitalists.

The letter was a great success with over 75% of the employees choosing to sign. Within just one month of the initial protest and authoring of the letter, the president of Mirror Systems suspended the policy for an indeterminate period. The reason given was that MSI was the only local company in its industry considering this policy and they did not want to "be a pioneer". Naturally there was no mention of concern for workers' resistance.

Although the battle was won for the short term, the workers are prepared for the next attack. None of the other Times Mirror subsidiaries had the policy rescinded. As soon as the management detects an opening they may move to reinstate the policy at Mirror Systems. The corporation is scheduled to begin drug testing in March at several of the larger subsidiaries (such as at the **Baltimore Sun**). This may bring renewed effort on the part of the corporation to try again at Mirror Systems.

Drug abuse is a truly insidious problem that has led to the destruction of countless good people. Some may think testing is just a poorly thought out attempt at addressing that problem. But in reality there is a much more disgusting logic behind it. Due to its invasion of privacy, its inaccuracy up to 30% of the time, and the arbitrary nature of who gets tested, drug testing is obviously just a new tool for intimidating workers. No longer will managers be forced to justify their reasons for hiring and firing. Now they simply need suggest an "impartial test" to harass workers.

This attack against the workers must be fought vigorously. The petition that was so successful at Mirror Systems is only one form that our class may use. All methods of militant mass action will be needed to win on this new front in the class struggle. And this is but one aspect of the all-out assault on the working class. Not until this entire oppressive system is overthrown and true socialism is constructed will the working class have a chance to work in a society free from drug abuse, harassment and intimidation. <>

### **Organize Rank-and-File Action Against the Layoffs at GE-Lynn!**

The following article is from the Feb. 24 issue of **Boston Worker**, paper of the MLP-Boston. Sub-heads added.

GE has announced plans to layoff 3,000 workers in Lynn in the next year. GE is closing down most of its Turbine division in Lynn and consolidating the business elsewhere. It is also laying off an additional 700 workers in its jet engine division because its drive of speed up and automation and farm-out has enabled the company to get much more production out of fewer workers. These layoffs are not temporary but permanent reductions of the work force.

With a layoff of this size many of the workers will be unemployed for long beyond the period of unemployment benefits. Most of those who do find other work will make far less in the service industry jobs available than they are presently making at GE. Sixty percent of the new jobs available today pay less than 7,000 dollars. In addition the large number of unemployed machinists resulting from these layoffs will help employers drive down wages and conditions for workers in the whole machining industry. Already before the layoffs have even begun, GE itself is using the threat of unemployment as a whip to drive those who will remain even harder. GE is harassing and suspending militant workers left and right and disciplining workers even for such small things as clerical errors on work sheets.

Layoffs and unemployment are becoming increasingly important issues for the entire working class. There are over 15 million unemployed and underemployed workers in the U.S. We cannot afford to simply sit by while the rich throw more and more workers into the ranks of the unemployed and the situation of the unemployed becomes worse and worse. (Today less than a third of the unemployed workers in this state get unemployment benefits). The promises of the politicians will never do us any good. It is up to the rank and file of the working class to build up a mass struggle to force the rich to retreat from layoffs and to provide a decent living for the unemployed.

#### **The Politicians Hold a Rally To Keep the Workers Passive**

This past Sunday [Feb. 22] in Lynn, the politicians, together with the sold-out officials of the IUE union, held a meeting at City Hall on the layoffs. 1,000 workers attended. The workers

were not allowed to speak. Instead they were treated to one politician after another who told them that Congress would stop the wave of layoffs that is devastating American industrial workers by taxing the overseas profits of American corporations, providing job retraining etc. This was just so many promises to keep the workers from doing anything on their own to fight GE. Not one these politicians said anything about making GE pay to provide a livelihood for the workers it is laying off.

#### **Oppose the War Drive**

Instead their big push was that the workers should support the Democrats' plan for an even bigger conventional military budget than Reagan is proposing. This they say would mean more contracts and more jobs for GE workers. This is disgusting. Instead of fighting the rich to make them provide jobs, the workers are supposed to rally behind the war plans of the billionaires and beg to build the weapons that will kill workers of other lands. Not only would the workers prostrate themselves before the rich under this policy, but they would get kicked in the teeth for doing so. Since 1981, GE has doubled its military contracts from 3 billion to 6 billion dollars. Meanwhile GE has eliminated 100,000 jobs while raking in over 2 and 1/2 billion in profits a year. Clearly what is good for GE and the Pentagon is not good for the workers.

#### **Not Trickle Down, But Mass Struggle**

Workers at GE must reject the policy of hoping that the Pentagon will help GE and a little bit will trickle down to them. The only way to save jobs and to make the rich provide a decent living for the unemployed is militant mass struggle. The union officials at GE could begin to organize such a struggle if they wanted to. They could be calling demonstrations; they could be organizing slowdowns; they could be organizing the rank and file to defend the militants who are being suspended and fired with mass actions; they could organize a mass refusal to handle farm-out parts until the layoffs are rescinded. But they will not fight. They are too cozy with the company and the capitalist politicians. It is up to the militants among the rank and file to begin organizing the fight. This is a difficult task but it is the kind of thing that workers everywhere must begin to do if we are fight back against the Reaganite offensive of the rich. <>

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Continued from page 5**

Reaganites oppose even a minimum wage in the U.S., and Tambo would have the world believe that freedom for the black workers in South Africa could be acceptable to them. A South Africa where the white capitalists continue to exploit, where the black majority continues to labor without rights, and where a few black "Clarence Pendletons" are allowed to glorify the setup -- this is what the Reaganites will accept.

### **Why Did Tambo Prettify Shultz So Outrageously?**

Why did Tambo prettify Shultz so outrageously? This reflects the essentially reformist stand of the ANC. Its talk of revolution is mainly a bargaining

tool to scare the racists into progress hand-in-hand with the ANC.

But the ANC leadership is mistaken if it believes that the "Broederbond" will hand over power to the ANC. Buthelezi is a more likely candidate for figurehead. But should the ANC achieve pushing aside Buthelezi for the role of racist collaborator number one, it would also take upon itself the mantle of shame that Buthelezi wears today.

Meanwhile the illusions spread by Tambo about Shultz and the Reaganites can only harm the struggle. And by carrying out this meeting on the 75th anniversary of the ANC, Tambo has given a symbolic demonstration of exactly what is wrong with the plans of the ANC. He has shown that underneath the revolutionary words are an attempt to find a common path with such bitter enemies of revolution in South Africa as the Reaganites. <>

## **THE CPUSA'S WORK IN AUTO AND THE CHANGE IN LINE OF THE MID-1930'S**

### **Continued from the front page**

midst of the American workers' movement, defended and organized black workers, and carried out militant organizing against the open shop terror of the auto capitalists.

\* Then there is the period when the Great Depression first hits. We will see how the incredible layoffs of the depression (not so incredible when compared to the plant closings of the last few years in Detroit) essentially drive the CP out of the auto plants. However, despite that, the CP's work doesn't go down the drain. It is able to bounce back. Because it had transformed itself, it is able to find ways to stay among the masses (such as its work in the unemployed movement) and it is able to make its way back into the auto plants.

\* Then there will be the crucial period beginning around 1933. Up to then, the Communist Party was basically the only force seriously trying to organize the auto workers. But at this time many other political trends jump into the act. The reformists and the bourgeoisie take seriously that, if they continue as before, the communists will lead the auto workers. And while the communists lead or are influential in the auto strike wave of 1933, there are new and complex phenomena that come up because of the various other trends which have increased their activity.

This is a decisive period. What happens from 1933 up through such events as the big sit-down strike wave of 1937 will do much to determine the fate of organization among the auto workers for decades to come.

\* And a year or more into this period we will see the CP flinch. In auto, it is possible that this began as early as November 1933 with respect to a key organizing drive at a major auto plant in Cleveland. But in any case, by the end of 1934 the change in the CP's orientation had begun not just in auto but for the work of the CP in general.

From 1935 on, the CP rapidly went further along this path and transformed itself according to the new line. This new line was Browderite revisionism. It was why the CPUSA leadership hailed the wrong line for the international communist movement that was set forward at the Seventh World Congress of the CI of 1935.

This new line led rapidly to destroying the political independence of the Communist Party. Emphasis on work from below was replaced by emphasis on deals from the top with the labor bureaucrats. The CP actually lived on these deals, and its trade union plans depended on the benevolence of John L. Lewis and other pro-capitalist union bureaucrats. And all the while the CP leadership congratulated itself on the alleged great victories it was making in the trade unions.

The Party organizations themselves went

through a process of degeneration and destruction. And the content of Party agitation decayed. The workers were taught not to stand up for struggle and for their own class interests, but to make a fetish of unity with the bureaucrats. This was the meaning now given to "trade union unity".

This history has many lessons for today.

It shows that the CP was only able to deal with the Depression due to its decade of hard work to transform itself in the direction of Leninism.

It shows that the working class movement does not develop in a straight line. The Depression ushered in a period of major upsurges. But it first brought a massive smashup of previous organization. And it ushered in an even more intensified struggle of trends. One of the weaknesses that undermined the CP was its failure to understand why this was taking place and how to deal with it.

And it shows that the revolutionaries must not flinch at the crucial moment, but must persist in struggle. Consider for example the mass union organizing drives that would take place in the Depression. The CP leadership didn't so much lose the struggle for red unionism, a struggle carried out both in building TUUL unions and in work inside the reformist unions, as abandon it at the critical moment. Fifty years later, the working class is still paying the price for this treachery. And fifty years later, there are still those who wish to imitate this treachery as the alleged high point of revolutionary wisdom.

Now let us examine this history in more detail.

## THE 1920'S

### What the Auto Workers Faced in the 1920's

Let's begin with the situation of the auto workers in the 1920's, prior to the Great Depression.

The auto workers faced a cruel and implacable capitalist terror. The bourgeoisie patted itself on the back for the alleged high wages paid by Ford and glorified his so-called concern for the workers. Meanwhile the workers toiled under terrible conditions, were injured and crippled in the factories, and were overworked and then discarded. They lived in a capitalist hell. Detroit itself resembled a company town with police and government run by the auto magnates. The auto plants not only might outlaw talking at the job, as Ford did, but Ford even fired a worker on the pretext that he had smiled on the job. This showed that the capitalists insisted on the right to fire the workers for any reason at all; they could even pick absur-

dities like smiling.

### And the Unions?

And what about the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucrats of the American Federation of Labor? What did they think about this situation?

During this time, a total of eighteen craft unions from the American Federation of Labor claimed jurisdiction over the auto workers -- but none of them lifted a finger to organize in auto.

The only half-way serious union was an independent union, that is, independent of the AFL. This was the United Automobile, Aircraft and Vehicle Workers of America. Or, for short, as it was called at the time, the Auto Workers Union (AWU). This union was not the UAW, the present-day pro-capitalist union. (However, anyone who reads articles about the history of the auto workers should be warned that the term "Auto Workers Union" is used both for this independent union and for the later union that became the present-day UAW, and sometimes the same source uses the term for both unions.)

### What was This Independent Union?

So what was this Auto Workers Union that was the only significant union among the auto workers at the time?

It originated in the nineteenth century as an industrial union in the Knights of Labor.

But since the Knights of Labor were then in a state of rapid decline, it affiliated in 1891 with the AFL as the International Union of Carriage and Wagon Workers (there weren't any cars yet). In the twentieth century, the automobile industry came into existence and grew. As auto workers joined the union, it changed its name, adding the term "Automobile".

This brought the union into conflict with the AFL leadership and various AFL craft unions. The top AFL hacks demanded at the AFL conventions of 1915 and 1916 that the union drop the name "automobile" so as not to antagonize the craft unions that claimed jurisdiction over the auto workers while leaving them unorganized.

The Auto Workers' Union refused this ultimatum. Therefore the AFL suspended it. Who says the AFL didn't care about the rank-and-file worker? Look how militant it was -- when it came to fighting industrial unionism!

The auto union refused the ultimatum and left the AFL in April 1918.

Its leadership was dominated by Socialist Party members. You might think that, having refused the ultimatum of the AFL, this leadership must have been from the left wing of the SP. But the

leadership intensely disliked the left wing of the SP -- and transferred this dislike to the Communist Party after the CP was founded. Nor were the auto workers union's organizers especially fond of strikes -- why, look at all the effort it takes to organize strikes and at the disruption of dues payments.

The Auto Workers Union reached a height of 45,000 members just after World War I, during the post-World War I upsurge in the working class movement. But the depression of 1920 crushed most of the life out of this union. It was left hamstrung and a shell of its old self, but it was still the only half-way serious union among the auto workers.

**What Did the CP Do?**

So this was the situation facing the CP. The auto workers faced savage capitalist terror. The CP had inherited Party organization from the left-wing of the Socialist Party. And in Detroit the CP membership was overwhelmingly proletarian.

With respect to trying to build industrial unions, the CP's basic policy through most of the 1920's (until 1928) was to form oppositions within the AFL unions. But this couldn't be applied to work among the auto workers, as there was no AFL union to work in. Weak as it was, the independent Auto Workers Union was the only union of consequence.

As well, the CP's own style and methods of organization had to be transformed. For example, despite the CP's working class membership in Detroit, few of its members were in unions. This was partially because there was hardly any union for industrial workers to belong to in auto; there were only the AFL craft unions which weren't too active and the weak Auto Workers' Union. But it was also because very many of the CP members were in foreign-language federations and were isolated from the basic work of the CP among the working class as a whole. This was a carry-over from the social-democratic methods of the left wing of the SP.

The CP proceeded to work on several fronts to deal with the situation.

**Working in the Independent Union**

For one thing, the CP decided to organize workers into the independent Auto Workers Union. In late 1922 or so, the AWU leadership made a deal with the CP. The AWU was in desperate straits, and so the AWU leadership made a deal for working together with the CP. 25 or 30 CP organizers were taken into the AWU. It also seems that the AWU leadership muted its tone in the

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union press concerning the CP.

Perhaps one might say that this looks like the same type deal that the CP was going to make later with the AFL and CIO bureaucrats. But there are a number of crucial differences.

For one thing, the CP did not aim at simply a deal at the top. This was only one of the means the CP used at the time to deal with the issue of trade union organizing. We shall see that the CP made strenuous efforts to develop independent communist work at the base. In fact, such independent work developed more and more vigorously.

As well, the AWU was not a totally bureaucratized union, which was completely under the thumb of top hack leadership. In such bureaucratized unions, when one wins the majority of the workers to class struggle, the union hacks just suspend the union rules, or simply throw out the militant workers en masse. The AWU actually had more relation to its members.

And the CP relationship to the AWU leadership was not that of subservience. By way of contrast, in the later deals the CP leadership capitulated to the union hacks.

As we shall see, the results of CP work in the AWU were far different than the result of their later work in the UAW.

#### Transforming the CP in the 1920's

Nevertheless, the CP maneuver with respect to the AWU would have meant little unless the CP had worked diligently to transform itself. This took a number of years and involved protracted work on a number of fronts.

To begin with, the CP strove to mobilize all rank-and-file communists working in auto into the basic communist work. It was not simply a campaign in auto, but was part of the general effort of the CP to turn itself into a party whose members are all active revolutionaries. This was further emphasized in the national reorganization of the CP in 1925. For one thing, the CP tried to build up as many communist units right at the factory as possible. (These were called "shop nuclei" and were actual units of the CP. The CP also strived to build "factory committees" at the plants, which were apparently used as a base of militant trade union activity and were not restricted to communists.)

The shop nuclei were important means of ensuring vigorous communist work at the plants and for drawing all rank-and-file communists into active struggle. The CP was working hard to eliminate the social-democratic type of party bodies, in which the members were passive and mainly only activated in election campaigns, and to replace them with party bodies which were based on the

continuous activity of all their members.

A typical shop nucleus (factory communist group) does not appear to have been large or elaborate. One source describes the typical CP shop nucleus in auto as having from three to twelve members. And work directed towards the factory could not be restricted simply to communists who worked there. The bitter repression by the capitalists required other communists, who worked elsewhere, to be the ones who distributed at the plant gates and provided other support.

According to some sources, the CP had set up shop nuclei in about 20 auto plants prior to the onset of the Depression. They claim that the Detroit organization of the CP had a far larger percentage of its members, 50%, in such factory organization than the CP as a whole, at 10%. On the other hand, these factory cells wouldn't have been developed if it hadn't been the national line of the CP to do this, and if the national CP had not struggled hard to achieve it. The successes in Detroit were helped by the large number of big auto factories in and around Detroit and the solid working class composition of the local CP.

#### Shop Papers

By 1926 the Party was able to begin issuing shop papers in auto. These papers openly proclaimed that they were communist, produced by communist workers at the work place. The first was **Ford Worker**, founded in April 1926, and circulated in thousands of copies. Eventually there was also **Dodge Worker**, **Fisher Body Worker**, **Workers' Bulletin**, **Briggs Worker**, and **Chrysler Worker**. Each issue had from a hundred to several thousand copies each. These were generally speaking four-page papers, costing a penny.

These papers created a sensation due to their exposure of factory conditions and also due to the fact that the bourgeois press was completely servile to the auto magnates -- so that the communist shop papers were the only place where the factory conditions were exposed.

These papers were bitterly persecuted. They could only be distributed in secret inside the plant. So the CP also used comrades who didn't work at the plant to distribute them at the gate, and there were a number of confrontations with the police at the plant gates. Someone would start selling the paper, and then would have to leave before the police came. There was a story of one CP comrade who was arrested three times in one afternoon for distributing a shop paper.

The shop papers were not restricted to pure economic issues. They also agitated against racism, took up the election campaigns of the CP, promoted socialism and the example of the then-

revolutionary Soviet Union, etc.

Starting in 1927, the CP also published a general bulletin for auto workers called **Auto Worker News**. It was also a four-page newspaper, costing a penny, and was written to appeal to the rank-and-file auto worker and not as a slick bourgeois journalistic rag.

### **Bringing the Foreign-Born Into the Work**

All this work would have been impossible without a protracted effort to bring all the foreign-born communists and members of the foreign-language federations into the basic work of the CP. The CP worked to bring these communists into trade unions, into factory nuclei, etc. This wasn't accomplished in one day. But, given the heavy role of the nationality groups in the communist movement, this work was essential.

At the same time, although the CP aimed to integrate the nationality communists into the general work of the party, it continued to build special organization to deal with the problems of nationality workers. There were mutual aid societies, chorus groups, educational associations, the Russian Working Women's Club, etc. for the nationality groups. These groups and their meeting halls were an important means of penetrating the ranks of the working class.

### **The AWU Becomes a Red Union**

All this independent communist work strengthened the CP position in auto tremendously. And it gave the CP the base to carry out its trade union work. The CP strived to have all its auto worker members join the AWU, and it tried to win the union to really aggressive industrial unionism, the defence of the black workers, and so forth.

The SP-dominated leadership of the AWU had proved pretty incapable of steering the union since the depression of 1920. By 1924 the AWU even stopped publishing the union paper. So it is not surprising that the CP soon won the predominant position in the union.

By 1926, the CP started to contest union elections. At this point the AWU leadership went wild. They tried rigging the constitution, although their efforts in this regard seem rather feeble compared to the AFL. For example, the SP-dominated AWU leaders decided, when some CP member was running for office, to rule him out by changing the constitution to require the candidate to have been in the union for a year. So the next year he won.

Thus the vigorous activity of the CP won over the AWU membership, leading to the AWU becom-

ing a CP-led red union. When the Trade Union Unity League was formed in 1929, the AWU affiliated.

Despite the tremendous open-shop terror among the auto workers at the time -- or, more precisely, just because of these conditions -- the workers went on a number of spontaneous strikes in the latter 20's. Actually these were more like departmental walkouts involving one or two departments. The CP and the AWU supported these actions. As well, it seems that the CP and the union activists around it worked to develop factory committees at the auto plants.

### **Weaknesses in the Work of the CP**

On the other hand, this doesn't mean that there weren't certain weaknesses in the CP's work.

For example, as we have seen, prior to 1928 the CP had the stand of carrying out work within the AFL. In and of itself, this was correct, and it led to various successes. But the CP understood the role of this work mechanically. And so this led to the CP negating the prospects of organizing militant unions independent of the AFL and other pro-capitalist unions.

In auto this mistake was manifested in various appeals for the auto workers to build the AFL. For example, in the words of one appeal, the workers were to make the AFL, and particularly the International Association of Machinists, "become the dominating force in the drive" for organizing the unorganized in auto. So it seems the CP sometimes leaned over backward in the name of avoiding dual unionism at all costs. And these appeals came at a time when the AFL was doing nothing in auto; it was the communists and the independent union who were doing whatever was being done; and yet the Party was appealing to the International Association of Machinists to organize.

Well, by 1927, scared by communist influence in auto, the AFL did launch an organizing drive in auto. Hallelujah! This, according to one source, was one of only two whole organizing drives by the AFL in the 1920's. But since it consisted of a few attempts to convince Henry Ford of the wisdom of labor-management cooperation, it amounted to a big zero.

Since the AFL and the IAM added up to nothing in the auto industry in the 20's, this error of appealing to the AFL and IAM doesn't seem to have had much consequence. But it does seem to verify the criticism which Lozovsky (a Soviet communist and one of the leaders of the Red International of Labor Unions) at one point made of the CPUSA leadership of having the tendency to dance quadrilles around the AFL.

In 1928 the line of the CP on trade union work

changed. The CP, without abandoning work in the AFL, decided to organize independent unions in places where the proper conditions existed.

The CP still felt, correctly, that the communists must not desert the masses of workers in the AFL unions. But the AFL had abandoned the huge masses of the unorganized workers, including the bulk of the workers in the basic industries. Unless the communists took independent initiative in organizing these workers, they would remain unorganized. (As well, there was a significant number of militant workers who had been expelled from the AFL.) This did not mean that the CP had given up the struggle for trade union unity or that it had embarked on paralleling mass AFL unions with dual unions. But it did mean that "unity" should not be made into a fetish that, for example, left the millions of unorganized workers, the majority of the working class, in the cold.

This new stand was, to a large extent, a response to various conditions that had arisen, such as the mass expulsions from the AFL in places where the CP had successfully mobilized the workers for struggle. But it was not just that the conditions had changed or matured. It was also a matter of correcting certain errors with respect to the attitude towards the AFL.

## THE DEPRESSION

### The Onset of the Depression

Then came 1929. The Depression hit.

By 1931 there are huge layoffs in auto. For example, employment at various Ford plants dropped from 128,000 workers to, according to some statistics, about 18,000 fulltime workers and 18,000 workers on a three-day week. One doctor in Detroit Receiving Hospital said that they had four cases a day of people coming in who were too weak to survive because of starvation.

The CP was literally expelled from the factories by layoffs. This destroyed the shop nuclei. The work of the CP in auto took a tremendous setback.

Apparently the CP actually tried to keep the shop papers going, but it was down at the lowest point to two shop papers. Furthermore, this didn't only affect the work in auto. The CP itself was disrupted by the first impact of the Depression and lost members.

Thus the CP's work was hit hard. Did this mean that all its decade of work in the 1920's had been lost? And had all the shop papers and factory organization in auto, both the party and the union work, work which had got smashed up by the layoffs, gone for naught?

## The CP Rebounds

Not at all. No, everything had not gone for naught. The CP gradually recovered from the shock of the onset of the Depression.

On the one hand, it organized extensively in the unemployed movement in Detroit, and elsewhere in the country too for that matter. When communism has a setback in one area, it springs up in other areas. As Lenin says: "Communism springs' from positively every sphere of public life; ... If special efforts are made to stop up' one of the channels, the contagion' will find another, sometimes a very unexpected channel. Life will assert itself." ("Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Ch. X) The unemployed movement spread, and through hard work the CP gained influence in it. According to some sources anti-eviction fights in particular were quite successful in Detroit.

On the other hand, the CP began to find its way back to the plants as soon as it could find some workers still there. The old efforts to recast the party into a party of struggle and to establish work place organization had changed the CP itself. The result was that the CP was able to fight hard to reestablish its positions at the factories as soon as any opportunities appeared.

For example, the CP was skilful at using its work to lead or support strikes to reestablish itself in the factories. This can be seen in the CP's work in the Toledo Auto-Lite strike of 1934 [a description of this strike was part of the materials examined in preparation for the Third National Conference -- and later on the speech returns to this material].

And the CP also rapidly recovered from the disorganization of the militant workers caused by the economic devastation. The mass layoffs, the scattering of the workers to find a living, all those factors which we have experienced today and which tear apart organization, undoubtedly affected the CP when the Depression hit. But the CP was able to survive, recover, throw itself into one militant struggle after another, and generally act as the sparkplug for class struggle in the Depression.

Thus the CP obtained results in reestablishing itself quite soon. In 1932, for example, the **Ternstedt Workers Bulletin** and the **Young Ford Worker** appeared. The CP was already not just holding on with some shop papers, but new shop papers were beginning to come up again.

### The Struggle of Trends Intensifies in 1933

But as the CP reestablished itself, it faced a new problem. While the CP essentially led the



strike wave in auto of 1933, it had a hard time growing as much as it wanted and as the situation required. And it couldn't consolidate the auto workers' union. The CP gained influence, but it had difficulty consolidating this influence organizationally.

One difficulty was that 1933 saw many other political trends taking a more serious interest in organizing (or disorganizing) the auto workers. A number of forces jumped in to fight the growing communist influence. There were new company unions. There was activity from the AFL Executive Council. There was also activity from social-democrats, such as the Muste-ite party. The IWW too tried to organize auto workers, but it eventually lost all influence, apparently as a result of stupid strike strategy.

Certain other independent union forces came up. For example, tool and die workers and various mechanics saw their average annual wages cut to one quarter of their previous value. This provided the basis for the formation of an independent (i.e. non-AFL) union, the Mechanics Educational Society of America (MESA) in Feb. 1933. Later in the year it led a strike among these workers. MESA was a craft union of the skilled workers.

So the workers and the CP were faced with a struggle of political trends. Later on it was presented that the workers had been simply flocking into the AFL. This was not the case in auto. The situation was that everyone was having difficulty consolidating, while the communists remained the most accomplished and serious organizers of the auto workers unions, the ones who had experience, the ones who had local organization at various plants, and the ones who were longtime and dedicated advocates of industrial unionism. But the existence of all these trends coming around, as well as the trends arising from the midst of the auto workers, helped block stable growth of the Auto Workers Union.

The CP tried to deal with this situation in various ways. In the case of the other independent union, MESA, the CP gained influence in it. The line of industrial unionism became influential with it, as this craft union had a very difficult time with its strike precisely because of its craft narrowness.

#### **The CP Had Difficulty Dealing With the Struggle of Trends**

But in general the CP had difficulty in analyzing what was going on. They faced a situation where they would wage a struggle and many workers would flock into the Auto Workers Union for a time. But then the AFL or some other trend would decide it was time to promise something.

And many workers would flock in that direction -- until those promises were betrayed. Things were very fluid.

This situation was not only understandably frustrating for the CP, but was hard for it to analyze. Yes, it talked a great deal about the treachery of the AFL bureaucrats and the reformists. It could see the trend of outright treachery, and it could see the trend of communism. So at first sight it looks like the CP talked incessantly of the struggle of trends.

Yet the CP had difficulty analyzing the various political ideas and tendencies among the workers and activists when they weren't solidly attached to some explicit trend. And it didn't really see the difficulties of organizational consolidation in the light of the intensified struggle of trends among the auto workers. Hence it failed to put forward realistic perspectives for how revolutionary organization among the workers would grow.

#### **Unrealistic Plans and Self-Criticisms**

Instead the CP made a habit of berating itself for failing to accomplish the most sweeping plans. It often set unrealistic goals for what could be accomplished right away in terms of rapid growth and the immediate overcoming of the reformists. And it failed to deal much with the political trends manifested in workers and activists that worked with the CP or took up various militant struggles, tending to regard them simply as the good masses, the undifferentiated rank-and-file, as opposed to the AFL bureaucrats and other reformist class traitors.

So the CP criticized itself for the inevitable failure to accomplish exaggerated plans. As a result, various plans and self-criticisms in the CP's journals are rather weird. And also the issue of the struggle of political trends among the workers is submerged or lost as the Party blamed sectarianism, lack of activity, or other major errors as the main factors behind the failure to accomplish big things immediately.

Naturally it was not wrong for the Party to be self-critical: the Party was not free of weaknesses (no Party is) and it had strengthened itself in the past by fighting these weaknesses. There has to be a constant struggle against sectarianism, opportunism, etc. So the CP sought to deal with these weaknesses. But the exaggerated plans weakened this.

And these exaggerated plans and self-criticisms bear the mark of a certain voluntarism as if the Party leadership felt the Party could accomplish anything if it simply decided to do so. This meant overlooking that the class struggle has its own tempo, which is not simply determined by the

Party. This type of plan was a sign that the Party's analysis was failing to deal with various important features of the situation. It was correct that the Party had to exert itself to the utmost (and not simply wait for the situation to ripen) -- and in these days the Party did carry out marvels of heroism and devotion to the workers' cause. But in the long run this effort could only be sustained if the Party understood what it was actually accomplishing, and didn't present absurd goals for each struggle.

It is typical of the CP literature in this period that it labels the failure to accomplish the most sweeping plans lickety-split as major errors, as the result of sectarianism, and so forth. It is only partially an exaggeration to say that, in this period, to find out where the CP was putting its most effort and accomplishing its greatest gains, all one has to do is look and see where it says its greatest weakness is. For example, during the period when the CP is making strides into the unemployed workers movement, one article in the CP's monthly journal **The Communist** was entitled "Unemployed work -- our weakest link" (August 1932).

#### The Summation of the Toledo Strike

We have seen this in the summation the CP made of its work in the Toledo Auto-Lite strike of 1934. This appears in the article "The Lessons of the Toledo Strike" by John Williamson in **The Communist** for July 1934. This strike took place in a factory where the CP at the beginning had no contacts and in a city which was not a concentration point for the Party. Nevertheless the Party exercised a major influence on this strike and made inroads among the militant workers.

Williamson's article gives an interesting description of the strike. But look at the list of tasks for the local communists that it sets. Let's just take part of this -- it would take an hour to go through the whole thing.

To begin with, he says that the Party must grow rapidly: "In the course of all this work, serious efforts to increase the Party membership, not by ten or 20, but by thinking in terms of hundreds. ... with several shop nuclei built in the course of the campaign. It must become a matter of Communist pride that **within the next month** there will be established a Party and a Y.C.L. [Young Communist League] shop nucleus with a Party shop paper in the Auto-Lite plant." (p. 654, *emphasis added*)

So right away the Party must grow by leaps and bounds. This must be done in a month. Why, it is a matter of "pride" -- it certainly isn't a matter of sober analysis.

But this isn't all. Meanwhile the local CP must

be "building a broad rank-and-file movement inside at least 15 selected key local A.F. of L. unions; ... building shop committees of workers or preliminary departments groups in the many unorganized plants. Along with this go ... organizing of a broad Conference of A.F. of L. unions to support this bill [H.R.7598 -- probably the Workers' Unemployment, Old Age and Social Insurance Bill]." (p. 653)

Why, that's just a piece of cake. And the article goes on and on with all the things that can be accomplished at one bound. For example, the Party is also to "rebuild a broad mass Unemployment Council." (p. 653)

And it is also to carry out an "immediate entry into the election campaign [national congressional elections of 1934] as a part of all other activities, through a local ticket as well as the State and Congressional tickets." (p. 653)

Didn't the capitalists call in the National Guard to smash the strike? The article notes that the troops were mobilized from small towns so that they wouldn't know the Toledo workers and strikers. But no problem. This simply "raises sharply the broader question of increased Party work in the small semi-agrarian towns, such as those from which the National Guard troops came." (p. 648)

And everything was to be done right away. If you can't do it, you're no good. You are just following in the traditions of the "sectarian isolation of the past" which must be combated by "a thorough-going mobilization of the Party membership, to avoid any tendency of settling back into the old groove ... and any social-democrats inside the Party who resist this and become obstacles ... must be swept aside and out of the Party." (p. 653)

You would think that the Party in Toledo was the strongest and most powerful local organization in the whole country, just overflowing with experienced activists, trained organizers, experienced communists. Why, it must not only have enough cadre to expand its work many-fold in Toledo and set up many new organizations overnight, but enough to expand into the surrounding small towns.

In fact, such a list of tasks must have been absolute fantasy. In effect, it denigrated the important advance that the Party had made in the Auto-Lite strike. As well it failed to show the local communists how to follow up on these successes effectively, rather than running off in all directions.

(And look at what Williamson's article overlooks. Among other things, it neglects the tasks of training the communists and sympathizing workers -- including the new militants looking to the Party as a result of the strike -- in how to build organization and in party-building. It also overlooked the need for ideological consolidation of the

Party and the masses turning to the Party. And it fails to put its plans in the light of the temper of the masses that would be needed to carry them out. In its enthusiasm for rapid immediate advances, it forgets about most aspects of the CP's work to build itself other than numerical advances.)

### The Perspective for the 1932 Elections

Unfortunately, setting such impatient and unrealistic plans wasn't just a particular quirk of John Williamson. Consider, for example, the general line of the CP on what it could accomplish in the presidential elections for 1932. This was described in an article by C.A. Hathaway, called "The Increasing Radicalization of the Masses and the Election Issues" (in the Oct. 1932 issue of **The Communist**). It states:

"As yet there has been no real arousing of the Party for the election drive, no real realization of what this drive means at this time to the Party. There has been practically no recruiting work in connection with the election campaign."

So you're thinking that maybe so, maybe not. Then you read the next sentence. Remember the Communist Party had 15,000 members at this time.

"The Political Bureau set as its goal before the National Nominating Convention the task of recruiting 10,000 new members of the Party, and 25,000 subscribers for the **Daily Worker**, and neither of these tasks has been seriously undertaken." (p. 875)

Elsewhere in this issue of **The Communist**, this is described as "the recruiting drive to realize the slogan of 25,000 members during the election campaign." (p. 914) So in one election campaign, in a period of a few months, the CP is to jump in membership by 60%, from 15,000 to 25,000 members. Just like that. Or else it must be that "there has been no real arousing of the Party..."

And the failure to achieve this rapid growth in one bound is the occasion for breastbeating. Well, the CP did have weaknesses and errors. And the other criticisms in Hathaway's article may or may not have been right. He wrote basic things about linking up the election campaign with the local struggles of the masses, and it looks quite reasonable. But there is this incredible idea that you can just grow as fast as you like at will. And evaluating the work of the Party on that basis is harmful and corrosive.

### An Example from the C.I.

This type of criticism was not the monopoly of

the CPUSA but also appeared in the Communist International at this time.

Take the comments of the Soviet communist Gusev in his article "The End of Capitalist Stabilization and the Basic Tasks of the British and American Sections of the C.I." which was reprinted in the Jan. 1933 issue of CPUSA's journal **The Communist**. At one point Gusev talks of inner-party democracy and correctly makes a number of points about how this consists of bringing all the members of the party into active work and into the consideration of how to carry out this work. But look what happens when he criticizes the CP's recruitment policy.

Gusev takes up the question of "the attitude towards the new Party members". He deals with how the Party handles workers who, at the height of enthusiasm after a mass struggle, sign a Party card. He presents the idea that all of them can become active Party members if only the Party's work is correct. He then gives the following comments from a CPUSA party instructor as "a typical example from the C.P.U.S.A." of its wrong attitude:

"During the last fights of the unemployed in .... about 150 workers joined the Party. They received Party cards, and maybe were invited two or three times to the meetings of the Party organization, but only 30 out of 150 appeared at these meetings. Therefore, the others were put down as hopeless' and no attempts were made to visit them at home, to consult them, to make them into active Party members, etc. Within a few weeks 120 of them were again lost for the Party.' (From the letter of the instructor.)" (p. 46)

Gusev concludes from this that "The workers have to overcome tremendous difficulties to get into our Party."

But this example apparently concerned workers who hadn't been to a single meeting and who signed a Party card at the height of enthusiasm. Is it really realistic to believe that all such workers will want to carry through with this commitment and be disciplined, dedicated Party members? It must be remembered that belonging to a communist party, where every member is active and sacrifices for the cause of the proletariat, is different from belonging to ordinary, bourgeois or reformist parties where most of the rank-and-file do nothing.

The local organization described above may well have had a wrong attitude towards recruiting. But how can one be surprised that workers who simply sign a card may not decide to be active? Without knowing more about the temper of the workers, it does not appear strange that only one-fifth of workers who signed actually decided to be active on a continuing basis.

### The San Francisco General Strike of 1934

The CP summation of the San Francisco General Strike shows the CP's difficulty in understanding the struggle of trends. Here we will look at the "Lessons of Recent Strike Struggles in the U.S.A. (Resolution adopted by the meeting of the Central Committee, Sept. 5-6, 1934)" This was a report by Secretary of the CP Earl Browder, who had not yet elaborated the revisionist liquidationism for which he was later to become infamous.

This resolution devotes a good deal of attention to the San Francisco General Strike and the struggle against the AFL bureaucrats. Among other things, it opposes various right deviations which play down the open struggle among the workers against the AFL bureaucrats. (At the same time, it presents a somewhat glorified picture of things; later this is used in order to exaggerate the prospects of work in the AFL unions. Something similar takes place with the summation of the Auto-Lite strike. But this resolution itself, and Williamson's article on the Auto-Lite strike, are still fierce against the AFL bureaucrats.)

According to the resolution, there are AFL bureaucrats who must be fought and there are the communists and the other left-wing and rank-and-file forces. When we were studying this resolution, a comrade decided to find out who were these other militants and activists around the communists.

It turned out that the CP-led independent union for seamen and longshoremen on the West Coast had linked up with a group of activists who had their own definite ideas. These activists were not tied up with other political organizations, but it appears that their ideas had a left social-democratic framework. They wanted a more militant struggle and they went against the AFL bureaucrats on certain things, but they were not communists and were not consistent on the question of class struggle unionism against the bureaucrats. (Harry Bridges, who later became tied closely to the CP, appeared to be one of these militants.)

In dealing with the West Coast maritime strike and the subsequent San Francisco General Strike, the local communists constantly had to take the stand of their allies into account. There was the constant question of how far to push on certain things and when to back down to avoid a split.

This complex relation with the left trade union militants was at least one of the factors having to do with how the local communists dealt with the San Francisco general strike. And this isn't noted by the resolution. It simply talks of "communist and Left-wing forces" or of the "rank-and-file" without much analysis of the tendencies among these forces. It also seems that the local com-

munist didn't make an explicit political analysis of these trends they had to deal with.

### The General Line Was Correct

Although the Party had various weaknesses, the general line pursued by the Party until the mid-30's had been correct. As we have seen, it paid attention to transforming itself into a party of struggle; and it was a far tougher, more active, and more disciplined party than the left-wing of the Socialist Party from which it had sprung. It was opposing the reformist stranglehold on the trade union movement, and it engaged in difficult, protracted work to develop the class struggle at the work places. It also didn't simply let its work develop at random, but paid attention to aiming its work at key sections of the working class; it had been putting great stress on "concentration" work. So at various times it gave the call to concentrate work in certain basic industries such as auto, and that's one of the reasons for its successes in auto.

The Depression brought an intensification of the class struggle. But it didn't bring this in a straight line. It gave rise to complex problems for the Party. It became more important for the party to correct its shortcomings. The CP was making advances, and there is much that can be learned from its work. But its weaknesses, of which we have given barely a glimpse, made it harder for the Party to deal with the situation in which the Party itself grew much more slowly than its influence and the size of the struggles it led or influenced.

Instead of correcting its errors, the Party began to abandon its revolutionary stand. While the CP seemed to grow and gain impressive victories in the latter half of the 1930's, in fact it was being destroyed. It was losing its communist soul and step by step becoming an adjunct of the liberals and the trade union bureaucrats.

One of the first changes occurred in its trade union work. We shall see that it abandoned the struggle to smash the hold of the pro-capitalist union bureaucrats. Instead it turned to deals with one section of the labor bureaucrats or another.

### THE NEW LINE

#### The Change Begins -- 1934

Sometime by 1934 a change begins to take place in the CP work among the auto workers. Actually the first example of this may have taken place at the end of 1933 in an Auto Workers Union or-

ganizing drive at the White Motor plant in Cleveland.

### At White Motor in Cleveland

The AWU had a good deal of influence, built up over a period of time, at White Motor. Furthermore, the victory of organizing White Motor might well have given the AWU a lot of momentum. The union activity at White Motor played an important role for the next period of time in rallying wider forces in auto.

The organizing drive at White Motor was led by Wyndham Mortimer, who was a CP member who never proclaimed his allegiance openly. (There seems to be little doubt of Mortimer's CP connection. But in any case he worked closely with the CP forces in auto, and there was no struggle between CP policy and Mortimer's. We shall also see that Mortimer played a major role in the formation of the UAW, in the Flint sit-down strike and other UAW organizing drives, and was one of the UAW's national officers for a period of time.)

The AWU seems to have sewn things up by the end of 1933 at White Motor. But the AFL, which never had lifted a finger to help organize White Motor, saw that the AWU was on the verge of a major victory there. So the AFL began a leaflet campaign to divert the workers into the AFL, or simply to disrupt the AWU.

Wyndham Mortimer, in his autobiographical account Organize! My Life As A Union Man, claims that the AFL leaflets caused some of the militant workers to waver and consider going into the AFL. And he alleges that workers stopped joining any union. So he called a meeting of union activists to consider the question. He says that he told the meeting that the real question is not which union they join, but that whatever they do, it has to be done unanimously. Therefore, he says, let's all join the AFL federal union in auto. And this is what was done.

He claims he stated "I am fully aware that the federal union is not the complete answer to our needs. It is not an industrial union, but under it we can organize our plant. And if we fight for and retain democracy in our ranks, we can, I am sure, use the federal union [the AFL union] as a base to build the kind of union we need and must have."

This talk of democracy is interesting. One might think that this means that, sure, we are going into the AFL, but the local union elects its own leaders, so it will elect the AWU activists. No, no, no, no. The AFL has various ways to prevent this. The AFL Executive Board had said sure, OK, we'll organize something in auto. But,

the AFL hacks slyly added, it isn't strong enough to really be a union yet. It doesn't deserve its own charter. So it shall consist of what the AFL called "federal unions". This means that all the officers of the federal union are appointed by the AFL central leadership -- there are no rights for the rank-and-file members at all. Sometimes officers were appointed with the proviso that they had no power and only the representative of the AFL Executive Board had authority.

So when the White Motor activists went into the AFL, they went in without any guarantee of democracy or anything else. Backward elements are appointed by the AFL to be the officers of the local reason. Wyndham Mortimer does end up somehow with a position as head of the grievance committee. In fact, Mortimer and the activists maintain work at White Motor by defying the AFL officials and rules while working in the AFL union. Otherwise it is likely that the "federal union" at White would have gone down the drain as many federal unions did. (The AFL had no special love for its auto "federal unions". For example, as soon as the White Motor workers formed an AFL federal union, many of them received letters attempting to draw them into different craft unions. Let the federal union fall apart!)

Now this looks bad. The AWU apparently surrendered White Motor without a fight. It appears that the CP flinched in the face of the AFL. And there is the stock capitulationist excuse: broadness ("unanimity") means agreeing to the most rightist alternative.

But one can't judge things simply on the basis of the rationale given by Mortimer or the CP. It would require careful judging of the actual situation at White Motor. The AFL campaign, if it was as disruptive as Mortimer claims, did call for the use of careful tactics. If many workers were going into the AFL federal union or simply losing enthusiasm for any union activity, this had to be taken into account. It seems likely that the AWU should simply have persisted, adopted appropriate united front tactics, and over a period of time won the workers over. (The AFL federal unions in auto did not tend to hold the workers' loyalty for long.) But maybe, under certain circumstances, without abandoning the goal of building the AWU, one could go temporarily into the AFL federal union, keep a militant apparatus in defiance of AFL rules (as was apparently done), and then leave when the workers got fed up with the AFL federal union (as was not done). True, on the face of it, White Motor seems like the last place in the world that one should have applied such a tactic of going into the federal union. But, as we shall see, it is not necessary to make a final judgement on this to see what was happening to the line of the CP.

### A Turning Point

In the coming months the decision at White Motor was imitated elsewhere. It won acceptance in the CP and became a model for work elsewhere in auto. Using White Motor as a base, a Cleveland District Auto Council was organized (in defiance of the AFL officials) to force the AFL to grant the auto workers a charter so that it would become an actual union, not a collection of "federal unions". The AWU was gradually converted into a tool to help accomplish this, with the CP merging its work into the AFL.

Whether there might have been a reason for temporarily joining an AFL federal union at White Motor thus recedes in importance. It only affects a determination of the precise month when the CP began to flinch. Whatever the exact date, over a number of months it became clear that the White Motor decision was taken as a signal to abandon building the AWU and instead turn towards trying to convert the AFL non-union (or federal unions) in auto into an effective, industrial union. It seems likely that not everyone lauded the decision at White Motor at first. (Mortimer tries to shrug this off. He refers to the exposure of a certain CP trade union organizer called Zack as an agent-provocateur, and implies that only Zack was upset at the White Motor decision. This is a dirty way to deal with serious issues of communist tactics.) Nevertheless sometime in 1934, the CP began to take up the White Motor example as the line for auto.

### A New Line is Formally Adopted

By the end of 1934 the CP had adopted what in essence was the White Motor plan for all its work in the trade unions. It posed the question as working in the red TUUL unions versus working in the AFL unions, and it began the process of merging the TUUL unions into the AFL unions. This could not be done all at once, so the CP resolutions on this would have to discuss the situation in various industries and which TUUL unions should be maintained for the time being.

This new stand is expressed in Jack Stachel's Report to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in *The Communist* of November 1934. He defends the crucial role of the TUUL in the past. He also notes that "In the first stages of mass organization in the 1933 period the masses entered all sorts of unions." (p. 1097) He says that later in 1933 "while there has been some falling off of organization in all unions, the A. F. of L. unions remain mass organizations, and that the workers organized and led most of the strikes of last year through the A. F. of L." (p. 1098. He uses the

phrase "through the AFL" to mean that the AFL bureaucracy opposed the struggles and the organization of the new AFL unions, but the workers in the AFL carried out these struggles anyway.)

Stachel says the TUUL unions grew, but the AFL grew more. He stated that "It is true that the A. F. of L. has thus far experienced its largest growth where the T.U.U.L. unions were strongest and most active (mining, needle, textile, etc.) And it is precisely in these industries that we are obliged to change our tactics because of the growth of the A. F. of L."

His perspective is that "If the Left Wing is able to mobilize and lead the workers in struggle within the A. F. of L. it can convert A. F. of L. organizations into instruments of struggle." Hence **"...the whole objective situation and development of the struggle demands that the Party establish its main policy today as one of work inside and building the opposition within the A. F. of L. unions."** (p. 1101, emphasis as in the original)

In the February 1935 issue of *The Communist* Browder has an article "New Developments and New Tasks in the U.S.A." This article also expresses the utmost enthusiasm about how the workers can take over the AFL. Stachel might talk of "building the opposition", but barely a few months later Browder wrote that: "In our latest resolution the concepts of 'minority movement' and 'opposition', as the organizational forms for our work in the A. F. of L., are sharply rejected, as tending to limit the movement to Communists and their close sympathizers; the task is to find such forms which lead to the Communists becoming the decisive trade union force, winning elective positions, becoming the responsible leaders of whole trade unions, and bringing the decisive masses behind them in their support. This position is fully confirmed by our experience in recent months." (p. 109)

Here again we see incredibly unrealistic plans, but this time it is not revolutionary scheme-mongering, but reformist scheme-mongering. Why the CP is going to take over "whole trade unions" of the AFL. Indeed, this perspective has allegedly already been "fully confirmed" by experience.

(The resolution Browder referred to as opposing the concept of an "opposition" is "On the Main Immediate Tasks of the C.P.U.S.A." from the Central Committee plenum of January 15-18, 1935. It is in the same issue of *The Communist*.)

### Was the AWU Sideline?

The rationale for dissolving the TUUL unions is that they have become sideline to the huge AFL organizations. Was that true? I have not investigated the other industries, but this certainly was

a premature judgement in auto.

1933 was a year when the membership of various unions fluctuated a great deal. One source, which is sympathetic to the CP's policies of the latter 1930's, says the AWU reached 5,000 members at one point in 1933 after a big strike at Briggs' plants in Detroit. But, it claims, the AWU declined to 1,500 members later in the year. (As the AWU continued to have an active organization spread over a number of plants, this presumably meant that the membership was basically down to the core of activists at each plant.)

In any case, the AWU maintained organizational groups at a number of factories. And if it had organized White Motor, that alone would have been a breakthrough in consolidating the union and an impetus for other advances.

Meanwhile the United Auto Workers (UAW), which sprang from the AFL federal unions, still had only 25,000 members two years later in 1936. (Given the size of auto plants those days, this means that only a few big plants had mass organization.) This was when the CP had merged the AWU and all its supporters into the UAW, had brought White Motor into the AFL, and had influenced various other "independent" forces to join as well. This is still a small percentage of auto workers and doesn't appear overwhelming in size.

Even more important is the question of what the AFL union was doing. The AFL had assigned William Collins to organize auto. Collins opposed strikes and industrial unionism, promoted reliance on the promises of the government, purged militants, and so forth. Whenever the AFE promised to carry out an organizing drive against the capitalists, workers joined it -- until the struggle was betrayed. Mortimer himself describes that, in 1935, "so successful had the AFL been in destroying the federal unions in the big three that not a single one of the federal unions in GM, Ford, or Chrysler had enough members to hold meetings in the state of Michigan". (*Organize!*, p. 80)

In 1934 the AFL had promised to fight GM. But it betrayed this struggle. Indeed, the AFL locals in Flint, Michigan, ended up as a shell of bureaucrats who betrayed militant workers to GM. We shall see that CP organizers such as Mortimer and Travis had to organize the Flint sit-down strike by keeping everything secret from the local UAW officials (carried over from the AFL federal unions) and by essentially building up a new UAW apparatus.

The AFL federal unions had strength where the workers had led struggles in defiance of the AFL bureaucrats. For example, at White Motor. Or at the Auto-Lite plant in Toledo where the workers had struck despite the no-strike policy of the AFL.

The AFL hadn't established itself as the mass

union in auto when the AWU was liquidated into it. On the contrary, the CP had decided that the mass unions should be built up under the AFL label. It was such events as the strike wave of 1937 that determined how the auto workers would be organized. (And even after the great Flint sit-down strike the UAW was still quite shaky. Its top leadership opposed the sit-down strike wave that followed the Flint strike. It lost three-quarters of its members in the further economic downturn in 1937. And it split in 1939.) But the CP gave up before such crucial events even took place. It consoled itself with the rationale that only by building up the AFL could the auto workers be organized, big strikes waged, etc.

This type of capitulation teaches the working class activists disbelief in their own strength, disbelief in the possibilities of fighting against the powers-that-be. It demoralizes the working class movement and teaches it the lesson of the "realism" of cringing. Even if the CP had fought and lost, thus having to join the bureaucrat union after all, it would have been better than to capitulate in advance.

#### The Reality Behind the New Line

As we have seen, at the beginning it was claimed that the CP would be able to influence and lead whole AFL unions. It is presented that the CP will organize these unions despite the top AFL bureaucracy. In *The Communist*, a good deal of criticism of the AFL bureaucracy continued -- for awhile.

Auto is supposed to be an example of the success of the new tactics. Browder states that "In the auto industry, we have dissolved the Red Auto Workers Union, sending the members into the A. F. of L. federal local unions, and already have under way a serious movement for the uniting of the 80 to 90 locals in the industry into an industrial union within the A. F. of L., a movement which forced the recent national convention of the A. F. of L. to grant industrial union form of organization to the auto industry, as well as to others." (*The Communist*, Feb. 1935, p. 108)

Actually, Browder is somewhat premature about what the AFL granted to the federal union in auto. Still, by mid-1936 the UAW had become an industrial union with the right to elect its own officers. (And soon thereafter was basically out of the AFL, for the UAW affiliated with the CIO and by the end of 1936 the CIO was suspended from the AFL, although the AFL did not officially revoke its charters to CIO unions until Jan. 1938.)

But how was the AFL leadership forced to concede these things? The rank-and-file worker had no right to determine union affairs at all in

the federal unions. First the top AFL leadership had to agree to grant a charter, etc.

What happened was that there were disagreements within the AFL leadership. One section of it went on to form the CIO (Committee for Industrial Organization, later called the Congress of Industrial Organizations) which was condemned by the AFL in the latter part of 1936. Some bureaucrats maintained the old diehard opposition to industrial unionism. But other AFL bureaucrats, the CIO bureaucrats, saw the need for reformism to organize the basic industries if pro-capitalist trade unionism was to continue.

This was why the bureaucrats (or some of them) became willing to form industrial unions. The CP praised this process as the labor bureaucrats responding to the masses. (Of course, in a sense the bureaucrats were responding to the masses. If there had been no mass ferment, none of these hacks would have budged an inch. But the point is that the labor bureaucrats responded with new methods of maintaining capitalist domination over the working class movement.)

Furthermore, John L. Lewis and some other CIO bureaucrats also saw the need to use the communists, who were the only serious force with experience and dedication, to help establish the unions. Of course, this was to be unofficial, and the communists could be pushed aside at the appropriate moment. As Lewis is reputed to have told labor hack Dubinsky in response to objections to using the militants and communists: "who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?" (Lewis' remark is given in Roger Keeran's The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions, p. 140)

So some of the labor bureaucrats were willing to make (unofficial) room for the communists in order to establish pro-capitalist unions. What these bureaucrats wanted from the CP was that the communists would consent to keep their activities within definite limits. And the CP capitulated to this. The details of what happened varies from union to union. But, in the final analysis, this meant that the CP had to keep its activity within the limits of pro-capitalist trade unionism.

### Illusions in the Bureaucrats

The CP began promoting outrageous illusions about various of these bureaucrats. In the first wave of enthusiasm about the transformation of the AFL, Jack Stachel wrote "A New Page for American Labor/An evaluation of the Fifty-fifth Convention of the American Federation of Labor". (See the November 1935 issue of **The Communist**.) Under the incredible pretext that the rank-and-file workers were determining the nature of the con-

vention, he praises how the labor bureaucrats are taking account of the aspirations of the masses. He wrote:

"The struggles that took place at the Fifty-fifth Annual Convention of the American Federal of Labor will go down in history as epoch-making for American labor. Already this has thrown fear into the camp of the ruling class. A new courage and a new vision are taking hold of the working masses. Both the old guard' of the Executive Council headed by the Green, Woll, Hutcheson, Frey group, and the progressives' headed by Lewis, Hillman, Gorman, Howard and Dubinsky, referred to the Fifty-fifth Convention time and again as the most important convention in the fifty-five years of existence of the American Federation of Labor. Both sides [the old guard' and the progressive' AFL leaders], through not fully comprehending the forces at work did, nevertheless, sense that fundamental changes have taken place in the country, in the class relations, and especially in the mood of the masses. Not for a moment could they forget the mood of the masses." (p. 1015)

In this midst of this wonderful progress, which was opening the eyes of both groups of bureaucrats, it was merely a minor thing that they passed an anti-communist clause. Why, how wonderful, they threw out the original clause and replaced it with one that "proposes only [only'!!!] that known Communists shall be barred from membership in the State Federations of Labor and City Central Bodies." (p. 1027) They admit that the "Lewis forces" could have blocked any anti-communist clause, but instead "accept[ed] the premise of the old and original amendment against Communists,..." But nothing could destroy the euphoria, and Stachel holds that "the fact that the original amendment was defeated represents a partial victory for us."

What happened was that the Lewis forces prevented the amendment being passed in a form that could have been used to prevent Lewis and company from utilizing left-wing organizers or to expel pro-capitalist unions from the AFL just because they were industrial unions (and hence "communist"). But they were quite happy to adopt further guarantees of the anti-communist nature of the unions. It is went right along with their plan of utilizing left-wing militants to build up pro-capitalist unions to adopt further guarantees that the militants could be thrown aside after being used.

In general, in the coming years, the CP literature especially praises John L. Lewis. At first sight, this may simply appear like a strange error about a union hack they should have been more vigilant towards because they had loads of experience with his treachery to the working class. But this was not just an isolated error about an



individual bureaucrat. It was necessary or else the whole house of cards they were building would have fallen down. Without Lewis and similar bureaucrats, there are no deals with first the AFL and then the CIO top leadership. Without Lewis and company, there goes the myth that the communists and class-conscious workers could come to an accommodation with the bureaucrats.

## THE UAW

### The Founding of the UAW

But let us return to what happened to the CP's work among the auto workers.

As we have seen, throughout 1934 the CP more and more threw its forces into attempting to build up the AFL federal union. While the official leaders of the AFL federal union smashed up their own union, the CP built it up. The organizations built by the red Auto Workers Union at various factories were used to build up the AFL union, and in December 1934 the AWU was dissolved altogether. The CP continued to have shop nuclei but this too was put in the service of converting the AFL union into a mass industrial union. The CP also organized the production of a paper called **The United Auto Worker**.

To carry out this struggle, the CP had to defy various of the rules of the AFL officialdom. The CP also organized a Progressive Caucus or Progressive movement to serve as broad front for uniting with various union officials for transforming the AFL union into an industrial union. As we have seen, Browder was more excited to crow about the number of union locals involved than to indicate what is the nature of the groups that the CP is working with and what is the basis of their unity.

And the CP continued to support the strike movement.

Naturally there was a limit to the nature of the fight against the AFL bureaucracy that was carried out. For example, although we have quoted Mortimer talking about "fighting for and retaining democracy in our ranks" while joining the AFL, this was one of the issue he compromised on. He describes holding back the workers from demanding elections at various times for fear that this would cause a "split".

He also describes his efforts to hold back various elements who, when enraged from another one of the AFL treacheries, were thinking of walking out from the AFL federal union.

In Aug. 1935 the AFL organized a convention for its union in auto and grants it a charter as the United Auto Workers. However, the union

charter restricted its jurisdiction. And it provided that the union's leadership will not be elected, but appointed by the AFL President.

But the situation continued to evolve. The CIO was founded (as a committee inside the AFL) and dissension broke out in the AFL between its leaders and the rest of the AFL leadership. John L. Lewis smiles on the Progressives in auto, and Mortimer and company smile back. And in the UAW, some of the appointed leadership, such as Vice-President Homer Martin and Secretary-Treasurer Ed Hall, become interested in cooperating with the Progressive Caucus.

On April 27, 1936 another UAW convention opened. This one elected its own officers and set its own course. The convention is dominated by the Progressive Caucus. And after the convention the UAW embarked on an organizing drive against GM.

Apparently the line of transforming the AFL had won. But a closer look says otherwise. We shall see that in fact the setting up of the UAW took place, in essence, via a deal with the AFL (and particularly the CIO) bureaucrats. At each step the CP restricted its freedom of action. It became extremely concerned that nothing was to be done that would alienate the labor bureaucrats and have them give up this implicit dead. The UAW was restricted within the bounds acceptable to the CIO bureaucrats.

### At the Founding Convention

The April '36 convention was free from direct dictation from the national AFL bureaucrats. Or was it? A resolution is proposed endorsing the reelection of FDR as President of the U.S. Various delegates oppose it. (The CP is said to have been passive in on this debate. In the 1936 elections it would run its own candidate for president, but mainly for the sake of campaigning against the Republicans, not to run against Roosevelt.) The resolution is rejected by the convention, which indicates some militant spirit.

At this point, the friends of John L. Lewis at the convention started redbaiting and attacking the left. Lewis made it known that he is going to withdraw a \$100,000 contribution to the UAW if it didn't reverse its decision and endorse FDR. Presumably, besides the issue of the money itself, a large sum for the UAW in those days, this showed that the CIO would in general withdraw support if the UAW didn't toe the line.

Sure enough, under the leadership of new UAW President Homer Martin, the convention reconsidered the question and endorsed FDR for the presidency.

The UAW could not pass beyond what was ac-

ceptable, to a section of the AFL bureaucrats. Even such a mild question as whether to refrain from endorsing the Democratic candidate for president was dictated to the UAW by the top AFL hacks.

### How Did Homer Martin Become President?

Wait a minute! How did Homer Martin, a former appointee, by the AFL top bureaucrats, get elected president? True, Martin had turned toward coming to terms with the Progressives before the convention. But that was about all that could be said of him, and he hadn't even much trade union experience. He was a hack who, as it turned out, would play a disruptive, reactionary and tyrannical role in the UAW.

Actually, the leading prospect for presidency at the convention had been none other than Wyndham Mortimer. But would he run for UAW president? Not at all. He withdraws, thus throwing the election to Homer Martin.

Why did Mortimer simply back out? Why didn't the CP supporters or the Progressives put up any alternative to Martin? This is a question that gets asked later when it becomes clear to everyone that the election of Martin had been an utter blunder.

In his book Wyndham Mortimer claims to have been apprehensive at the time of the election of Martin. He neglects to explain the fact that, as everyone else points out, it was Mortimer's own withdrawal from candidacy that paved the way for Martin.

Now why did he do that? The liberal professor Roger Keeran has his opinion on this question. He states that had Mortimer been elected as head of the UAW, or even run for election, "the attempt would have created a dangerous split between his followers [Mortimer's] and Martin's. Even had Mortimer won, his close connections with the CP might have alarmed AFL leaders, alienated CIO (at this point, still inside the AFL) representatives..." (Keeran, p. 146) This undoubtedly was part of the issue. If Mortimer had won, the AFL and the CIO's John L. Lewis would most likely have come down on top of the UAW. But this means that the UAW was run according to a deal; moreover, a deal whereby the CP agreed to do the work while the bureaucrats picked up the fruits. It was not a written contract; it was an implicit deal with constantly changing terms; but it was a deal whereby the CP and the UAW surrendered their independence.

### An Anti-Communist Resolution

Just to make the terms of the deal clearer, the UAW convention passed a disgusting anti-com-

munist resolution. It called for "unalterable opposition to Fascism, Nazism and Communism and all other movements intended to distract the attention of the membership of the labor Movement from the primary objectives of unionism."

Communists may have to live with such pin-pricks from the union hacks. But the interesting point is that this passed without debate. This is, if anything, even more disgusting than the resolution itself. So it turns out that what was now called working inside the AFL and building up industrial unions was actually hiding the face of the Party. None of the CP's UAW organizers would openly declare their CP sympathies. This was not just a question of protecting certain comrades from anti-communist regulations while having other comrades be spokesmen who put forward a direct and militant defense of communism. No one spoke up to challenge the anti-communist resolution, and the CP contented itself with essentially the ideology of pure-and-simple trade unionism.

Keeran, who seems to believe that this justified CP policy, expresses what was going on as follows: "Len De Caux, who worked in the national office of the CIO, said: Everyone in labor or progressive politics played footsy with the communists at some time or in some way. A rule of the game was that the communist player should not proclaim his communism.' As if to illustrate what happened when that rule was violated, CIO lawyer, Lee Pressman, said: An organizer on the staff once came to [John L.] Lewis and told him that he was a Communist and Lewis fired him. He [Lewis] was not going to be sucked into acknowledging their presence and giving them endorsement. As long as they followed CIO policy and stuck to trade unionism Lewis would leave them alone." (Keeran, p. 23)

It would seem that the CP's silence on the UAW anti-communist resolution was not an accident. Everything was pragmatic. As long as the resolution didn't actually expel anyone, why bother about the spread of reactionary ideology? Wouldn't opposing such ideology be disruptive (it might disrupt the alliance with Lewis and his friends).

### The Progressive Caucus is Disbanded

It appears that the Progressive Caucus was disbanded. It didn't matter that Homer Martin was president. It didn't matter that the AFL hacks are still displaying their power to boss around the UAW. The CP had narrowed its attention. All that it wanted was to get an organizing drive and an industrial union, no matter what its nature. Furthermore, Mortimer was now a vice-president of the union and the Progressives had the majority of the UAW Executive Board. Given what the Pro-

gressive Caucus probably was, there may be no need to shed too many tears over its demise. But its disbanding shows the desire to merge completely with the UAW.

Still, for a moment, everything seemed fine. Homer Martin appoints Mortimer to organize GM in Flint. But it is not long before the first problems arise.

### The UAW in Flint

The first problem takes place when the organizing drive begins in Flint, a center of GM operations and essentially a GM company town.

What did Mortimer do when he went to Flint? He doesn't use the local UAW apparatus, which came from the old AFL federal unions. Mortimer states in his book that this had been reduced to an organization of company spies. Any worker who signed up with the local apparatus had his name turned over to GM and got fired.

So Mortimer organized workers to come to him to join the union secretly. The organizing drive did an end run around the entire local apparatus of the UAW until the local was entirely reorganized. Meanwhile Homer Martin, as head of the national office of the UAW, supports the local UAW officials against the organizing drive.

This is an interesting example of what the great AFL union apparatus in the mass production industries was like.

### The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike of Early 1937

The organizing drive of Flint led to the fierce Flint sit-down strike from Dec. 30, 1936 to Feb. 1937. Brief sit-down strikes against GM had begun elsewhere, leading up to this strike. And the Flint strike in turn set off a great wave of sit-down strikes in a number of industries, with 477 sit-down strikes involving 400,000 workers in 1937.

Much has been written about the Flint sit-down strike. The many incidents of this strike, the mass heroism and initiative of the workers, their defiance of GM and the police, and the leading role of the communist activists are an inspiring story.

But there was also another side to the Flint strike. Here we will only deal with one aspect of what the UAW leadership was up to during this strike, and of the conciliation towards it of the CP.

After the Flint strike began, Homer Martin, UAW president, came to a deal with GM. He agreed to have the UAW abandon the sit-down strikes and leave the struck plants if GM would just negotiate with the UAW. Mind you, there was no contract. All GM had to do was agree to ne-

gotiate. And GM was happy with this. It agreed to negotiate for 15 days, during which time it would not resume operations or move machinery, material, etc. After that, all bets were off.

Mortimer and other of the CP's UAW organizers thought that this deal was a little strange. How can one win by giving up the strike? But it didn't matter. Mortimer and the CP went along with the deal. And so the evacuation of the struck plants began. Had it gone very far or been completed, that would have been the end of the Flint strike. It would have gone down to inglorious defeat -- through faith in the pro-capitalist union bureaucrats.

But GM jumped the gun. Before the strikers had left the key plants, GM announced that it was going to negotiate with the "Flint Alliance" (their own puppet "workers" group of scabs, foremen, supervisors, thugs, etc.) as well as the UAW.

This was too much for Mortimer and the CP. So the strikers did not leave the key plants. The sit-down continued.

The strike continued until GM decided it really had to come to terms with the UAW. It agreed to accept the UAW as the bargaining agent for UAW members at the 17 struck plants (but not the other GM plants); it agreed to negotiate with the UAW; and it agreed not to bargain with anyone else for six months without the approval of the Governor of Michigan. GM also gave a 5% wage increase when the agreement was signed, although this was not part of the agreement. The strike then ended (without a contract, but the bargaining apparently did lead to a contract).

This agreement was a major breach in the open shop and anti-union terror of the auto monopolies. It inspired other sit-down strikes and a wave of organization in various industries. On the other hand, it did not satisfy various of the economic demands of the strikers. This is one of the causes for further worker actions in Flint which soon broke out.

The point of this story is that Homer Martin was willing to sell out the strike struggle in typical reformist bureaucrat fashion. And the CP's new line resulted in their losing the heart to oppose this. It was the workers' good fortune that GM jumped the gun, so that Mortimer and the CP saw that there was no alternative but to continue the strike.

### The Sit-Down Wave of 1937

But if the Flint strike hadn't been stopped too soon, there were still other strikes to deal with. The GM Flint strike inspired a wave of strikes in auto as well as sit-down strikes in various industries. There were 30 wildcat strikes at GM in

the two months following the settlement, and 170 by June. In the next two years, the auto companies say that they suffered numerous work stoppages and slowdowns: 270 at GM, 109 at Chrysler, more than 50 at Hudson, and 31 at Packard.

What else is an industrial union for but to encourage workers militancy? But that was not the opinion of the UAW leadership. Homer Martin didn't want strikes, denounced the strikers, and rebaited the CP for these strikes. Why, these strikes are violations of union discipline.

The CP leadership, when it had originally advocated the line of going into the AFL to build up the UAW, had promoted it as allegedly the way to organize the auto industry, carry out strikes, fight the labor bureaucrats, etc. But now things had come full circle. The CP and its UAW organizers responded to Homer Martin by echoing his typical union hack themes.

Mortimer issued a statement on April 1 that "sit-down strikes should be resorted to only when absolutely necessary." And in July he stated that he had "acted quickly to bring them [wildcat strikes] to a close." Another key CP worker in auto, Henry Kraus, wrote that "The problem is not to foster strikes and labor trouble. The union can only grow on the basis of established procedure and collective bargaining." And so on, ad nauseam.

At the same time, the CP did not come out against Martin's bureaucracy, high-handedness, and treachery. This too verified that the CP's statements against "indiscriminate or helter-skelter use of the sit-down strike" wasn't a matter of trying to ensure that all strikes were well-considered, but that the CP was sacrificing the strike movement on the altar of the alliance with the bureaucrats.

The CP refused to support Homer Martin's iron fist against the strikers, his call to penalize wildcat leaders, etc. If the CP had supported these things, it would have lost any influence on the militant workers. But the CP didn't defend the strike wave either, and it opposed the wildcats. Instead the CP started to harp on the themes of "union discipline", don't go out on strike prematurely, don't wildcat, etc.

The CP wanted the further extension of the UAW. But when the bureaucrats attacked the strike wave, the CP retreated. And the CP leadership, including Browder and Foster, wrote in opposition to various other CP members who were dissatisfied with various actions of the UAW leadership or with John L. Lewis.

#### **Homer Martin's Anti-Communist Campaign**

The CP's stand didn't, however, placate Homer Martin. He continued his campaign against the militant workers, and he dismissed militants from

union positions. But strangely enough, the CP didn't fight back, even when the measures were aimed directly at it. The CP sacrificed everything for "unity".

#### **The August 1937 Convention of the UAW**

In preparation for the coming UAW convention, Homer Martin organized a "Progressive caucus". (The previous Progressive caucus had presumably been disbanded.) His program called for more power to the union leadership and the end to wildcats. He also sought to replace the UAW's two vice-presidents, Mortimer and Hall, with his own nominees, Richard Frankenstein and R.J. Thomas.

What did the CP do? They took part in organizing a "Unity Caucus". This caucus didn't have the object of fighting Martin, but of promoting unity. It agreed with Martin on union discipline and ending wildcats, but added that there must be unity, democracy for the union locals, local autonomy, and an organizing drive against Ford.

What about the union vice-presidents? Well, if Homer Martin wants two vice-presidents, and we already have two vice-presidents, the answer is simple. The Unity Caucus proposed that the union have four vice-presidents, so that everyone would be happy. Unity, unity. Why, the Unity Caucus endorsed Homer Martin himself for reelection.

The 1937 UAW convention adopted the program of the Unity caucus. What about the union officers? After John L. Lewis spoke in favor of the current officers, Homer Martin agreed to a modification of the Unity caucus plan. There were five vice-presidents -- the original two (Mortimer and Hall), the two Martin men on the Unity slate (Frankenstein and Thomas), and one more Martin man (Walter Wells). And Martin dominated the Executive Board that was elected.

#### **Homer Martin Goes on the Rampage**

But no matter how conciliatory the CP, Homer Martin couldn't be calmed down. The reformists and bureaucrats don't become reasonable no matter how much one shouts "unity, unity".

Martin prohibited communications between UAW locals, banned open discussion of Executive Board affairs, banned rank-and-file conferences to ratify contracts, established a secret, anti-communist spy system, and had the Executive Board give him the right to suspend union members without trial. This was done in the fall of 1937. And the CP did nothing.

Martin abolished local UAW papers. He was afraid that militants have control of such local

papers as the **Flint Auto Worker**, the **West Side Conveyor**, and the **Allis-Chalmers Workers' Union News**. And the CP did nothing.

Martin removed Mortimer and Travis from their organizing positions in Flint. (Travis was another CP member, and he had a crucial role in the Flint strike similar to Mortimer's.) And the CP did nothing.

Indeed, Martin put the entire Flint local of the UAW, the local that has just waged the successful fight against GM, under receivership. That means that he took away all their union rights. You might as well be back in another AFL federal non-union. And the CP did nothing.

So the CP simply fights there should be unity in the union. Oh, it wrings its hands, this is all horrible. These actions are violating unity. We must all unite. The CP might protest various actions to the Executive Board, but it did not do anything about them.

### The Economic Downturn of 1937

Meanwhile the economy fell further in the latter part of 1937. 320,000 auto workers were thrown out of work. The UAW lost three-quarters of its membership.

In this situation Homer Martin responded by backing down further in front of the auto capitalists. And he sent GM a "letter of responsibility" giving them the right to fire any workers if only GM would say they had provoked a wildcat strike. Discontent built up among the workers.

### The CP Finally Criticizes Martin

Finally, by January 1938 even the CP began open criticism of Homer Martin. It is utterly absurd, but its open criticism of Martin began with the struggle over the "Ludlow Amendment". Congressman Louis Ludlow had proposed that the Constitution should be amended so that, unless the U.S. was invaded, there would have to be a national referendum before Congress could declare war. The CP opposed this as an interference with collective security. Martin supported it. This was the first issue the CP chose to publicly criticize Martin on.

In any case, the fight was on. The CP constructed another coalition in the name of the Unity Caucus, including former pro-Martin bureaucrats. We will skip over the various maneuvers and counter-maneuvers. But over a period of time Martin became isolated and was abandoned by various of his supporters. As he lost control of the Executive Board, he suspends one bureaucrat after another. This process was temporarily suspended by John L. Lewis intervening in favor of

five suspended EB members. But eventually Martin denounces Lewis for intervention in the UAW, resigns from the CIO Executive Board, and suspends 15 of 25 UAW EB members. He then had goons seize the UAW headquarters, bar his opponents, etc. The CIO leadership supported the suspended UAW union officials.

### The UAW Convention of March 1939

By this time Martin is isolated from most of the union and from the CIO leadership as well. Two "UAW" conventions are held in March. One is held by Martin and his followers, and in June this group reaffiliates with the AFL. (This UAW-AFL eventually collapses.)

The other convention is that of the non-Martin forces. At this convention the "Unity" coalition of bureaucrats that had opposed Martin is predominant. This conference is supposed to mark the highest point of CP influence in the UAW.

Now that Martin is gone, there is once again the question of who to elect President of the UAW. It probably would have been possible to elect any of the prominent members of the Unity group that had fought Martin, including Mortimer. But would the CIO accept this?

Two particular CIO leaders were attending the convention. These were the social-democratic bureaucrats Sidney Hillman (President of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers) and Philip Murray (then Vice-President of the United Mine Workers, later involved in steel for the CIO). They insist that what has to be done is elect R. J. Thomas.

And who is R. J. Thomas? He is one of the last Executive Board members to abandon Homer Martin. He supported Martin until just before the very end, until Martin was suspending fellow bureaucrats right and left and going on a complete rampage.

The CP decided not even to contest this advice. How can it go against the desires of the CIO bureaucrats? It supported R. J. Thomas, and Mortimer and others even declined nominations for the Executive Board. In effect, the CP purged itself from national union office in the UAW.

Mortimer, of course, claimed that he had second thoughts about R. J. Thomas. Why, he says, "I knew Lewis did not want R. J. Thomas as president of the UAW, and I felt that Hillman and Murray had their own fish to fry." (*Organize!*, p. 163) And he regrets that "the delegates did not know ... that there had already developed a split in the CIO, and the struggle to unseat Lewis had begun." If they had known that, they could have backed Lewis against Hillman and Murray. What glorious politics -- choose among the hacks.

### Maneuvering Among the Bureaucrats

The history of the UAW continues with a whole series of more stories of life among the bureaucrats. One of the ironies is that the rightist R. J. Thomas eventually become one of the bureaucrats that the CP relies on against bureaucrats further to the right. And everything just keeps going down hill.

The reason for going through these maneuvers is that they graphically show that everything depends on what Lewis or other bureaucrats say. It is clear that the new policy in trade union work that was formally adopted by the end of 1934 involved corrupt deals with the bureaucrats. And the attention of the CP became concentrated more and more on these maneuvers at the top.

We have seen that the CP was willing to sacrifice one thing after another to their deals with the bureaucrats. And the collapse of these deals would have marked the bankruptcy of the allegedly great achievements of the new line. The compromises and concessions the CP made were not based on what was needed to unite the workers in their own class interest, but on what was needed to maintain an alliance with the bureaucrats. Thus the CP sacrificed the class struggle itself, the only real method of uniting the working class, to these alliances. And, in this fool's paradise of reformism, the CP leadership never realized that, for the bureaucrats, these alliances were a temporary means to an end, not a remarkable move to the left.

### THE PARTY DECAYS

#### Organization at the Base Declines

Meanwhile, what was happening to the CP's organization at the base? The CP had painstakingly rebuilt itself as a party of revolutionary action at the base. Now there was to be a process of tearing this down.

Naturally the CP didn't immediately dismantle everything at the base. If it had done this, it couldn't have made a deal with John L. Lewis or anyone else. Without that apparatus, the CP would not have been of use to anyone. It was precisely the CP organization at the base that was needed to accomplish anything against the open shop terror of the capitalists, the police terror of the company towns, etc.

Instead the change in line meant that the revolutionary content of the work at the base was drained. The rank-and-file communists became, in effect, foot soldiers for the AFL, and then the CIO. The communists did the work, but the pro-

capitalist bureaucrats harvested the fruits.

### The Communist Content of Agitation Drains Away

For example, when the CP decided to merge the red unions into the AFL, it also changed its agitation. Instead of putting the fight for the workers' interests first, the reformist unions became sacrosanct. The agitation didn't talk of building the struggle, inside the AFL if possible, outside if necessary, but of building a "strong AFL".

For example, in November 1935 something called the Communist Auto Workers Faction denounced Francis Dillon, the AFL central leadership appointee as vice-president of the UAW, for calling on UAW members at one plant to cross the picket line of two other unions. It says that "Dillon is trying to ruin the A.F. of L. in auto. Our policy has to be to build and strengthen the A.F. of L. in auto." The AFL's position in auto is the crucial thing; and the workers are to be taught to see to that first.

But the CP's agitation is denouncing the bureaucrats less and less. The CP becomes positively ecstatic about John L. Lewis and the CIO. At the same time, we have already seen that it praised the progress of both the CIO bureaucrats and the anti-CIO diehards at the AFL convention of 1935. And we have seen that it did everything it could to put off any denunciation of Homer Martin. This was called preserving "unity".

At the same time the CP hid the face of communism in the UAW and in trade union work. It doesn't just hide the Party affiliation of various comrades for security reasons. It hid the Party itself, and the stands of communism. It did not take an aggressive stand in response to the red-baiting and anti-communist hysteria of the bureaucrats.

So the CP step by step subordinates and sacrifices everything, even strikes and trade union democracy. The most important issues become the "unity" of the bureaucrats and the health of the reformist union apparatus, not the class struggle.

### The Party Bodies Dissolve

The communist agitation isn't the only thing to suffer. As well, the various party bodies for mobilizing the rank-and-file communists are gradually destroyed. The Party surrenders one type of communist organization after another. Militant organization is one of the things that sets the CP apart from reformist organizations. It gave the CP strength. It provided an organizational basis to mobilize worker militancy. And the bureaucrats would like to see it go. So the dissolution of the party is both for sake of pleasing the bureaucrats

and to put the CP's organizational methods in line with its new reformist line.

By 1939 the Party took a decision to abolish shop papers and also trade union fractions (roughly speaking, the trade union fraction is the "communist caucus" in the trade union). In June 1943 the CP abolished shop branches or units. In May 1944 the CP temporarily ended its existence as a Party and became the Communist Political Association. But the speed of eliminating Party bodies and papers seems to have differed from industry to industry. Instead of laying stress on party-building, it appears that communist organization was regarded pragmatically depending on the trade union task of the moment. Thus in some industries the shop papers disappeared early, while in others they lingered on.

Among the auto workers, the CP allegedly maintained some shop papers until the last fourteen shop papers were abandoned in 1938. But it is difficult to judge how active the shop papers were. For example, the liberal professor Keeran says that 12 shop units in Michigan put out 22 issues from May 1935 to Jan. 1936. (p. 81) If true, this would mean that, on the average, each paper published every five months or so.

#### An Example from Work in Transit

Among transit workers in New York, for example, the pragmatic attitude to organization apparently gave rise to a faster liquidation of shop papers than took place in auto.

Joshua Freeman wrote a university thesis on The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-48. He claims that the CP began to hide the face of communism in the mid-30's:

"Similarly from 1935 on, explicitly Communist agitation among transit workers was increasingly conducted only among those judged likely to be sympathetic, and not among the work force as a whole. In November 1934 the **Daily Worker** urged transit workers to vote Communist and join the CP, arguing that communists are among the most active organizers of a rank and file Transport Workers Union, and as late as the spring of 1935 letters still appeared in the **Bulletin** urging TWU (Transit Workers Union) members to march in the May Day parade. Thereafter such statements and invitations became less common, eventually disappearing altogether as both papers [the union paper and the CP paper] avoided anything that tied the TWU to the CP." [333-334]

This is similar to what happened in auto.

Freeman also talks about what happened to shop papers:

"Communist shop papers also began to disappear. Sometime around 1935 a delegation of TWU mem-

bers---from the sketchy accounts available it is unclear if they were Communists or not---went to Party leaders to complain that the distribution of the **Red Express** [the communist shop paper] was hurting the union drive. Whether for this reason or others, by 1935 several of the transit shop papers had ceased publication and apparently they were all discontinued well before the 1939 Party decision to suspend such publications nationally."

#### Vowing Capitulation to the Union Bureaucrats

How did the CP present its decision to chop itself up piece by piece? It is interesting to listen in to a statement from Roy Hudson, who was the head of the party in Michigan. He is discussing the decision to abolish trade union fractions. He says that, well, yes, we abolished trade union fractions. But, he says, "The Party cannot and will not undertake to decide what its members shall do in their unions, but it will always reserve the right to decide who is worthy of membership in the Communist Party."

How nice. The party will still decide on who can gain admittance. All by itself! Even a sewing circle has that right. But the CP is abandoning the right to fight for the workers to follow a definite course of action. In that case, what is the point of having the Party anyway?

Hudson goes on: "Anyone who, for instance, would violate the democratic decisions of his union, or who would associate with and make alliances with reactionary anti-union forces, would certainly find himself called to account."

Hudson is vowing subservience to the pro-capitalist trade unions. The Party must obey any "democratic decision" of the union. The bureaucrats are passing one anti-communist provision after another, and the Party must obey. The trade union bureaucrats are selling out the workers -- but the Party must obey, if only there is a vote.

It is one thing to ensure that the Party treats the decisions of progressive unions carefully and doesn't run roughshod over what workers decide. But a Communist Party should not even declare that the decisions of red trade unions are binding on it. And it is an example of utter reformism and prettification of the trade union bureaucrats to swear loyalty to the decisions of pro-capitalist, bureaucrat-manipulated, anti-communist-clause unions.

#### The CP Abandoned Its Line Before the Crucial Battle

Thus, the result of the change in line of the mid-30's is that the CP abandoned its revolutionary line before the crucial battles that would determine

the nature of organization among the auto workers. They did not so much lose the battle for organizing the auto workers, as give up the struggle ahead of time and dedicate themselves to building up the pro-capitalist trade union organization.

Through the struggle and sacrifice of tens and tens of thousands of communists, the CP had built up a Party that was different from the traditional parties of the left. This was a party with more revolutionary spirit and fighting capacity. There was no one else who was prepared to lead the working class into struggle in the decisive years of the Depression.

The Depression brought a series of crucial battles in the working class movement. But the Depression did not immediately give rise to an upsurge of the revolutionary forces. It began by disorganizing the militant workers and throwing the CP out of the auto factories due to layoffs. And as the CP successfully recovered from this, it was faced with a new problem. In 1933 many other forces step up their efforts to do work among the auto workers, and the auto workers flowed back and forth from the trade union organizations of one trend to another. This added tremendously to the difficulties the CP had in turning its general influence among the auto workers into stable organizational results.

This zigzag process, in which the crisis does not immediately lead to the great outburst, is not something unusual. World War I, for example, brought a massive revolutionary upsurge in its wake. Yet, at the beginning of the war, the working class movement was faced with gigantic setbacks. Many organizations were smashed up; the reformists converted other organizations into tools to restrain the working class; and the situation was difficult. But the communists persisted, and the upsurge of the masses starting in the latter part of World War I gave rise to the October Revolution and the foundation of the Communist International.

But the CPUSA abandoned its revolutionary line before the crucial moment. Starting perhaps at the end of 1933, but certainly in 1934, its work among the auto workers began to degenerate. It liquidated the red union, the Auto Workers Union, and it sought to build up the AFL union. It worked in the AFL not with the perspective of winning

the workers over to red unionism, but to build "a strong AFL". It no longer encouraged rank-and-file revolt against the pro-capitalist bureaucrats, but instead subordinated everything to deals with them. By the time of the massive upsurge of sit-down strikes, the CP was restricting its framework to the pro-capitalist trade union structure.

#### Some of the Reasons Why the CP Flinched in the Mid-30's

There are a number of causes for the failure of the CP to maintain its revolutionary stand.

For one thing, as we have seen, the CP had certain historic weaknesses in its stand towards the AFL. Prior to 1928 it still had exaggerated ideas of what the AFL could be forced to do and a mechanical idea of what the mistake of dual unionism was. So to a certain extent, their new line in the mid-1930's is a replay on a vaster scale of their earlier mistakes.

The CP also had difficulties handling the question of the increased number of different trends that came up in 1933 among the auto workers. An upsurge is often associated with the springing up of all sorts of trends among the masses. Some of these trends may not last very long, but their existence has to be taken very seriously into account. And the CP is bothered by this. The CP also had difficulty taking proper account of the trends that arise among workers and activists that are near the Party but are still influenced by various non-communist concepts.

This ties into a certain question of mechanical reasoning. There are unrealistic plans that emphasize a rush for quick results. These concepts also disorient the Party in the face of the actual course of Party work in the Depression which was going through many twists and turns. And the search for quick results finally led to accommodations and deals with the bureaucrats.

These are among the causes that weaken the CP in the face of the wrong line that appeared in the mid-30's in the international communist movement and was formalized at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International of 1935. The CPUSA accepts this wrong line, and it made all their weaknesses worse. It ended up destroying altogether the communist character of the CPUSA. <>