

DISCUSSION BULLETIN
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- **The Work Stoppage Event**
- **Incentives Discussion**
- **More on North America**
- **Mid-Atlantic II Report**

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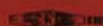


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FRAZIER'S REPORT ON
MIDWEST II WORK STOPPAGE

Midwest
November 15, 1975

TUC
New York

Comrades:

This is a short report on the work stoppage a friend of ours led in his department.

First, a little background. Our friend had been in the department for a little over a year and a half. Most of the people on the line are fairly young--25 to 35--and have medium seniority: a clump at 10 years, another clump at six to seven years and a smaller grouping with two to three years; there is also a group of people with 25 or more years. The department had its first work stoppage in memory last spring over a foreman's throwing away a worker's newspaper. It also participated in an informal overtime ban last spring in response to the suspensions of 12 men in another department for an illegal work stoppage (this was part of a plant-wide action). The department is very important in the plant's production picture. There are about 100 people in the department working on a large foreign cash order. (During the two-month partial shutdown of the plant it will continue to work.) It is an important department to the company.

What happened is approximately as follows: our friend returned to his station from further down the line. He was told by the former shop-committee chairman (FSCC) (now on the line with a station beside our friend) that the steward had been fired and was in the foreman's office. The FSCC commented that we all should stop work to get him back. Our friend responded "OK, let's do it." The FSCC got people from his area of the line, and our friend went down the line, telling people to stop work, why, and to gather in front of the foreman's office. Everyone he spoke to did as directed. Only a few people at the far ends of the department, who did not hear the call, were not involved.

A few minutes after they gathered, the present shop committee chairman came down from the office (he had just arrived) and told people to return to work. The FSCC played no role at all once people had gathered. Our friend, amidst much confusion, asked whether or not the steward was fired. He got no response and very few people left the immediate area, waiting instead for the situation to be clarified and to make sure that the steward was not fired. A few minutes later, the area committeeman came down, reported that the steward was not fired (only the rights and wrongs of the case were being discussed) and that people should go back to work. At this point, people slowly drifted back to work, including our friend. The stoppage had lasted about 10-15 minutes. A small number of

militants wanted to get passes to go home, in spite of what was seen as a victory, to show the company they could not get away with firing a steward. Our friend opposed this action because of the small number of people who would be involved and thus the likelihood of victimization, but made it clear he would go if a significant number of others decided to do so.

About 15 minutes later our friend noticed that the steward, committeemen, etc., were still in the foreman's office, and there was no way to know what had happened, or might be happening to the steward. He decided to organize another stoppage at 10:50 to take place if the steward was still not out of the office. He mentioned the idea to a few militants, who thought it was a good idea. He then went down the line telling people what was up and when to meet. People responded in a positive but somewhat passive way. Nearly all indicated they would be there. People going to the far ends of the line were also told to spread the word of what was up and why. It was clear to many, but by no means all, of the people that the idea and the organization was developed by our friend. The FSCC was told about the idea. He played no role at all, but did take part in a passive way.

At about 10:40-10:45 the steward and the committeemen came out of the office. Our friend discovered that the steward was not fired but that some discipline was still possible. At 10:49 when our friend got up from his job to go over to the office, he saw 30-40 people walking down the line towards him (in the direction of the office). The whole line gathered at 10:50 as arranged, in spite of the fact that the steward was out of the office (most people were probably not aware of that fact--many didn't care--some undoubtedly did not know that the steward's still being in the office was a condition for the work stoppage) and virtually the whole department was angry that they had tried to fire the steward in the first place and saw the action as additional protest.

At this point, the company dropped all charges against the steward (they originally tried to fire him for insubordination). After about 10-15 minutes people finally returned to work, but not without a lot of grumbling (in spite of the clear victory) and a number of people still desired to go home (which our friend successfully discouraged).

At noon, there was a short departmental locker-room meeting at which the steward thanked the department for its support and at which it was announced that there would be a meeting with the company that afternoon to discuss the foreman (who had fired the steward) and also to discuss other outstanding grievances and speedup attempts. At this meeting our friend incorrectly suggested another stoppage, to put pressure on the company, just before the meeting was to begin. His attempt to respond to the militancy of the workers at this meeting did not take into account the limitations to and role of individual departmental actions. Our friend also made a number of general political points about the role of the steward, the grievance procedure, etc. As a result of the day's events, our friend's respect in the department was significantly increased

quantitatively, but not qualitatively. He is clearly recognized by a large number of people in the department as someone to go to if you want something done, if you need some kind of question in regard to the union answered, if you think the department should take action on something, but he is still not recognized by the majority in the department as the departmental "leader."

Two elements went into our friend's decision to lead the work stoppages. First, the mood of the department. He knew people would be angry because of the attempted firing of the steward (work stoppages had taken place in a neighboring department over this issue, but it had never come up before in his department). Second, the importance of the department at that time to the company lessened the probability of discipline for the action. The willingness of the FSCC to take part in the first action was also a factor in the first stoppage, but not an overriding consideration. The stoppage was by no means an automatic response in the department--the steward had been fired for over five minutes before our friend found out and helped organize the stoppage.

After the stoppage was over, people were excited about its having taken place and about its successful conclusion. But most were still somewhat cynical because they realized that even though we had won this minor victory, that the union was still weak, and that the company would try again in the future to do the same thing if they thought they could get away with it. This was part of the motivation behind the desire for going home early in protest, although people later realized that going home would likewise solve none of the fundamental problems. The events were important in building our friend's reputation in the department, and also in the plant as a whole (for instance his role was clearly recognized by the union leadership, if not by all of the rank and file in the department). In discussions over the next few days many people brought out our friend's role to others who had not known how the stoppage was organized.

The report has already gotten too long. If there are any other questions about the action, or any specific additional information you might want, let me know.

Comradely,

Frazier

ORGANIZER'S LETTER TO THE TUC

by Meyers

30 October 1975

TUC
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades:

...

... The other events all took place on Frazier's shop floor. Though I think you've heard about it all, I'll run through it because it indicates some of the problems with the fraction. Frazier took part in a couple of work stoppages three weeks ago which he led (along with the retired shop committee chairman) over the firing of a steward.

After it was determined that the guy had gotten his job back, and before a lunch-time locker room meeting, our friends, on Frazier's initiative, all got together to discuss the situation and decided, correctly, to limit Frazier's locker room meeting intervention on the political points concerning the necessity of fighting to get the steward's job back, the role of the union, company, etc. The foreman, who did the firing, an unpopular bastard, was castigated pretty heavily and the union officials announced a 2 p.m. meeting with management to discuss the foreman's future. At this point Frazier got up and called for the department to stop work then and stand outside the supervisor's office, a proposal which was greeted by passive silence. C, present at the time, got pissed, feeling (justifiably) that Frazier went ahead and freelanced after the fraction had jointly agreed upon a course of action, and to compound matters has always felt Frazier had a certain reputation in his area as being work-stoppage happy. Frazier immediately recognized his error, but later felt (also justifiably) that C (and to a lesser extent, Smith) were ignoring his good work of the morning and singling out the error. This is the blowup I described above. I think it was valuable for C to realize that nothing has changed and that the fraction he's coming back into was the one he left and all the problems are still there that led to his earlier demoralization.

The second series of incidents concerned the presence of a time-study man, in violation (at least partially) of the contract, in Frazier's department a day or two after the above incident. The steward, apparently militant after his firing, called a department meeting to propose that the men stop work, shout to attract attention, and gather around the timer every time he came into the department. Frazier's intervention was limited to asking whether the shop committee intended to support the action. While the committee-man and the acting chairman both verbally supported the action, they refused to put themselves on the line in terms of any formal support.

The discussion in the fraction meeting that night was along the

following lines: I thought Frazier erred and should have come out against the steward's proposal, counterposing to it that the local leadership take action. In a motion I put forward, I characterized the action as more likely to lead to victimization than victory. I argued too one-sidedly against isolated departmental actions. Smith (and Frazier) put forward a motion supporting the specific action proposed by the steward, claiming it was not counterposed to official local action, supporting the latter, and characterizing the action as potentially successful--in the short run. The discussion was confusing and not very productive because there were differences taking place on several levels: the efficacy of the steward's specific proposal, the possibility of victimization, whether such action was counterposed to a broader strategy, whether the shop committee's statements implied they would support the men in their action. As it turned out, the action was successful in the short run in that the company promised that in the future the timer would go to the steward first and notify him as to what he was doing in the department--while the men's IDs were taken up to the supervisor at one point, they were not disciplined.

My feeling remains, however, that though it was not made clear in the discussion, there were counterposed conceptions going down: that is, concrete tactical differences aside, should our essentially propagandistic interventions settle for anything less than a fight for the fullest, most explicit possible union backing/action. As it turned out, despite formal agreement in the fraction that it was necessary to make those points in the department whether or not the specific action was supportable, in two locker room meetings Frazier did not make it (except through back-handed questions about "other departments").

Again, the question showed up in a different light two days later when Smith and C got into a tiff over whether we should expect the shop committee to come out clearly in support of actions which they either encourage the ranks to take or which the ranks take on their own, Smith arguing we had to understand the limitations imposed by legal-contractual considerations regarding "illegal work actions" and settle for "implicit" support. Without getting into what constitutes implicit "support" (i.e., what kind of verbal formulations), I tend to agree with C that, particularly given the nature of the venal bureaucracy, that we must demand a clear statement of support, of involvement to the ranks (which does not mean they have to say the same thing to the company). Any other conception can lead to too much of a tendency to apologize for the bureaucracy's "problems."

...

For class-struggle unionism,

Meyers

ATTACHMENT
(to letter to TUC, 30 October 1975)

November 1, 1975

Comrades,

In regard to [paragraph six of Meyers' report], the description of the difference between C and Smith is not stated accurately. C was arguing that the shop committee should openly take responsibility before the company for actions which were in violation of the contract. Smith disagreed with that conception. The question of what the shop committee should say to the ranks was not explicitly discussed in the five-minute argument between C and Smith. This question was discussed at the fraction meeting subsequently and everyone present agreed that the shop committee should clearly take responsibility for the actions proposed. It was not discussed then whether or not the shop had to implicitly or explicitly take responsibility for the actions, except to note that the responsibility of the shop committee should be clear enough that the ranks would feel betrayed by the bureaucracy if the job action failed and the workers were victimized. There was probably a factual disagreement between C and Smith as to whether the implicit support the shop committee gave the job action at the locker room meeting in question made clear their responsibility for the job action. My feeling at the time and at present is that the statements made by the shop committee clearly indicated their responsibility for the action, even though this was not stated explicitly. The last sentence in Meyers' paragraph on the dispute is a political speculation based on a misunderstanding of the differences being discussed.

--Smith

TUC REPLY

by Douglas

New York
17 November 1975

Mid-West II fraction

Dear Meyers,

I wanted to write you concerning the discussions in the II fraction around the recent shop-floor events and the related article in the II caucus newsletter. After reading the newsletter and your report of 30 October, both Chris and I felt that the discussion had indeed been skewed on all sides and that some comment was necessary.

First, it is not at all clear to us exactly what the real situation in the plant is. The newsletter gives the impression of a generalized speed-up campaign by the company. This, however, is not outlined in your report. The difference in our response to a plant-wide problem felt more or less by a broad cross-section of the union membership versus that of a problem more or less restricted to one department is important. A local-wide strike might appear obvious in the former case, but more questionable in the latter. Also, a particular problem in one department (like the presence of the time-study man) might call for a different response if it could be fed into a campaign against similar problems occurring throughout the plant.

If the speedup problem is intense and generalized, then it would seem incumbent on the fraction to put forward a generalized answer. This the caucus newsletter does not do. The newsletter, at face value and on the conditions it asserts do exist, is extremely insufficient. It calls for a "unified plant-wide response." What is that? It does not do very well for us to excoriate the existing leadership for its failure to deal with these pressing problems and then for us to propose such an abstract response.

Towards the end of the article in question, this abstractness is repeated, and combined with a political error. The newsletter states that a militant leadership would demand a clear veto power over all production changes. In the meantime, the local must make it clear to management that we will not allow them to speed up one area of the plant at a time until conditions have been downgraded for all.

Again, the "in the meantime" section is so abstract as to be virtually meaningless. How should the local "make it clear" to management? Through filing grievances? Have a series of departmental actions? Conduct a local strike over production standards? What?

But the distinction between what a "militant leadership" would do and what we ought to do "in the meantime" is more disturbing. To make such a distinction really lets the existing leadership, by

definition and clear implication non-militant, off the hook. If a veto over production-standard changes is really what you want, are you not going to insist on it until you get a "militant leadership"? This could go for every other demand we raise: we need a militant leadership that will fight for a shorter workweek, full cost-of-living escalator, a workers party, etc., etc., but in the meantime.... Such a distinction would put us in the position of posing our demands abstractly, letting the existing union leadership off the hook until we take power in the union, and settling for less than our program "in the meantime."

Workers' veto power over production changes is an important element of dual power in the factory, workers control of production. It is certainly appropriate to raise this point in connection with speedup problems. But to raise only it and the following abstract sentence about what should be done "in the meantime" offers no leadership or direction as to how to get there. Surely there are some measures that can be placed on the agenda that would help defeat management's offensive and open the door for workers' veto power: a strike against speedup, for instance.

I do not want to make a hard suggestion as to what the fraction should have put forward. That depends on a number of interrelated factors that can only be determined in the field, and would require more information on this end to even make well-informed suggestions. But what went into print just does not do the job.

I would suggest that the fraction review the written material of the Mid-Atlantic II fraction concerning the recent strike situation over speedup and harassment. Though it has problems, and the fraction made some egregious errors, to say the least, it does demonstrate how we can advance important demands over these problems, without sounding hopelessly abstract or ultimatic.

One final point on the newsletter. The line in it that refers to the departmental action and says it could have led to victimization tends to reflect the negative attitude to the action and its possible consequences that seems to have been largely yours in the fraction discussion. I will get into that momentarily. But just for the purposes of the way the newsletter reads, quite frankly it sounds really chickenshit. Virtually any action short of a local-sanctioned strike could lead to victimization. But if you were not in favor of the action, a better way to make the right points without sounding scared would be to (a) demand full leadership backing and (b) argue for generalizing the struggle throughout the plant, if that is called for and possible. The way it sounds now is like the most cautious and lukewarm endorsement of the workers' militancy, reluctantly offered.

Before getting into the discussion in the fraction over the concrete proposals, let me make some general points. There are important differences between the optimal policy in a given situation, and the policy we may be able to actually advocate and carry out. A number of interrelated questions have to be taken into consideration, including: the balance between "propaganda" and "agitation," the

mood of the workforce, the quality and experience of the human resources in our fraction, the relationship of forces between us and the bureaucrats, the degree to which we have a real following (however episodic), the priorities of the fraction, etc. But it is important not to confuse the different factors. Thus, it is possible to arrive at a decision as to what we would like to do and what should be done, but to decide that we simply do not have the capability to do so. The distinction must be conscious, or we run the risk of confusing our own members, or labelling policies that are necessarily but unfortunately limited as superlative and exemplary.

Let me give you a recent example. The Mid-Atlantic II fraction was in a very touchy situation regarding the possible strike over speedup and harassment. The party gave the situation a lot of attention and was instrumental in devising a lot of close-in tactics. It subsequently became clear that the fraction was not fully conscious of just what it was doing, or how to use the tools it was given. Chris went around a few days muttering about giving loaded .45's to three year olds.

All this did not mean that the propaganda and agitation and particular tactics worked out were not excellent. But the fraction just seemed incapable of effectively thinking on its feet in carrying them out. Either the fraction needed to be more thoroughly ingrained in the directions it was given, or more simple, less complicated advice was called for.

The point is that there are distinctions between what ought to be done and what we can actually do. The degree to which we can lessen the gap, the more improved our trade-union work will be.

With respect to the discussion in the II fraction in the Midwest location, the point is that, given the well-known weaknesses in the fraction, it might be quite proper to have a more limited or propagandistic or cautious policy than would normally be desired. Therefore, I am not so concerned to lay out exactly what I think should have been done, as I am to point to a skewing in the discussion that seems to me to have only further confounded the process of arriving at a concrete and appropriate policy.

I want to skip over the first set of incidents, relating to the work action to get the steward rehired, pending the receipt of Frazier's report. What does seem clear is that Frazier violated fraction discipline in advocating policies the fraction had previously agreed not to push.

On the discussion of the time-study man's presence in the department and the steward's proposal of direct worker action to counter this, you noted in your report that the discussion was "confused" and "not very productive." The main point I want to make is that the skewing in the discussion seemed all-sided: aside from the particular courses of action proposed, the main parties to the discussion relied on criteria that seemed destined to flaw the outcome.

The position you advocated, of opposing the steward's proposal and countering that the leadership do something is insufficient and seems to flow from a criterion that would sharply limit our options in such situations. It is insufficient for the reasons I have noted above on the problems of the newsletter: what is it that you want the leadership to do? There is no concrete proposal for leadership action in your report, just as there was only the most abstract call in the newsletter.

There was a correct element in the motion you describe as being put forward by Smith and Frazier: that the departmental action is not counterposed to leadership action. We are for both action by the ranks and by the leadership to back it up and provide full support and protection. Your position seems to err in the direction of opposing action by the workers in preference to the local leadership doing something too categorically. Drawn to its logical conclusions, this would make our policy a parody of what the RU and others accuse us of: "passive propagandism," reliance on the existing leadership, opposition to "rank-and-file action." While we do oppose mere provocations, or wildcats that are doomed from the get-go or that are set-ups by a leadership that has no intention of backing them up, we are not simply for calling on the leadership to solve all problems, and then when they don't, attempting to expose them.

Under our leadership, the workers will be called into direct action. We know that our program and talents require the backing of the membership in action, not just voting for our candidates, for them to be realized and productive in practice. But short of us taking power, it will be necessary both to advocate membership action and to participate in it as well.

In the conclusions of this section of your report, in describing what you saw as the essentially counterposed conceptions, you refer to our "essentially propagandistic interventions." I think you are telescoping two different things: the generally propagandistic character of our work, and specific situations where it is incumbent on us to actually provide concrete answers and actions, and be willing to stand behind them. This does not mean that we must settle for "anything less than a fight for the fullest, most explicit possible union/backing action." We must insist on that, to insure any particular action's success and to expose the leadership. But such a call cannot be translated into opposition to direct action by the workers in circumstances where it seems both called for and wise.

So, I believe the thrust of your argumentation is overly conservative. I do not want to make this point hinge on the specific tactical details, or the relative merits of the fraction involved. But in that particular situation, it seems that your tactical advice was also too conservative. Both the relative success of the action, in backing off the time-study man, and the facts presented in your report and the newsletter, tend to argue that the steward's proposal was not in fact an adventurous provocation likely to lead to victimizations. Since the action of the time-study man is in clear violation of the contract (that is the case in my industrial section of the union and I assume also in this section), since the steward was

pushing for this policy and the workers seemed ready to carry it out, opposing it in favor of some type of "leadership action" would seem not only over-cautious, but chicken.

What clearly was in order was to demand that the steward and shop-committee/local leaders be on the spot to back the action up. That this was not done represents the flip side of the error, and is potentially even more dangerous. That there was resistance to this in the fraction (mostly from Smith) and since C seems to believe that Frazier is "work-action happy" (or at least is seen that way by co-workers) let me emphasize this point. I definitely don't want to see the fraction go on a binge of leading minor shop-floor actions that sooner or later will get them nailed. It is particularly disturbing if the fraction members don't see the necessity of demanding support from the local leadership.

Smith's position that we must understand the legal/contractual limitations on the leadership explicitly solidarizing with a given work action really amounts to letting them off scot-free and putting the entire burden on individual workers, putting them in an extremely precarious position. This is, of course, what is usually done. Either the workers take some action on their own initiative and are disowned by the union leadership, or more occasionally, they are put up to something by a union leader who then proceeds to let them swing on their own while he scurries for cover. Smith's position is hard to read as anything but a softness on the bureaucracy that would justify some variant of these treacherous actions.

Smith needs to understand what every bureaucrat understands: that they can get away with a hell of a lot more than the typical worker on the line. This is not always the case: they can get fired for leading something, or be made a target of special company attacks to intimidate the workforce. But their normally cozy relationship with management usually means that they are given more leeway than the average production worker.

One bureaucrat explained to me at the union training facility when I was there that few leaders in this union have been fired less than three times: it's the necessary battle scars a bureaucrat accumulates in his career. They moreover know that they can bargain to get their job back, and almost always are successful.

Besides these empirical points, the old "don't ask somebody to do something you aren't willing to do" principle comes in. Smith supports a motion in the fraction that goes along with a particular work action, but is unwilling to ask the leadership to stand up to the company for that action. Why is he more concerned with the bureaucrat's problems than the potential victimization that awaits any worker involved in the action?

The careful distinctions you report were drawn between what the bureaucrats say to the workers (whether we insist on an explicit statement of support or a more ambiguous one) are really not the point. Of course, we demand that the bureaucrats tell the workers they will back them up. But the real problem is what they say to

the company! Will the bureaucrats be there with the workers to defend their actions and back the company off? That is the question we want to ask them.

Exactly what language X bureaucrat uses with the company is really a minor tactical point. But our insistence on clear, forthright and explicit action by the union leadership vis-a-vis the company to defend the ranks in action should be unambiguous. To get caught up in what the bureaucrats tell the ranks (which seems to be the way the fraction discussion focused) tends to miss the point.

Given the relative militancy of the Mid-West II location, these sorts of problems seem likely to reappear. Therefore I believe another fraction discussion should be undertaken to get the major points straight. If there is continued disagreement, it should be hammered out rather than lie dormant until some hot situation comes up again and our friends get caught out or put their foot in it.

...

By the way, given the unclarity on our end on the factual situation in the plant (whether there is general speedup or merely isolated department problems) the fraction should determine which is the case and communicate a clear view to us. If the problem is widespread and/or growing, the caucus should speak to it and suggest remedies more concrete than given in the last newsletter.

Note: Jennings just read all of the above and noted that there are possibly other reasons for Smith's reluctance to want to press the bureaucrats for explicit support. It may not be just that the bureaucrats will argue that they cannot do so because to do that would directly violate the contract and open them to victimization, but also that they can argue such "rash" action opens everybody up to victimization, disturbs the "normal processes" of solving these things, etc. I am led to believe that Smith's concern was more that we could not ask the bureaucrats to do things that declare to the company that they are directly violating the contract and hence opening themselves up for company attack. But whatever the case, pretty much the same argument holds: Smith's position would serve as a left cover for the bureaucracy.

For class-struggle unionism!

Douglas

cc: TUC files

LETTER TO THE TUC

15

by Collins

16 June 1976

TUC

New York, New York

Comrades:

Attached are the motions from the Midwest BI Fraction discussion of May 8, 1976 on the subject of incentives. As the voting indicates there was no small confusion. The basic position I argued through three rounds was opposition to and voting against all incentives, including the fixed incentive. The line I argued is basically contained in my three motions. Gilman was my primary opponent and objected I believe to the absolute quality of my stance toward incentives. His motion, which so far as it goes is supportable, was advanced as an alternative to my first motion and they were therefore voted counterposed--though the counterposition obviously had more to do with the arguments in the discussion than the specific content of the respective motions. I still support my three motions though the third one is rather unclear and the last sentence in the first one must be changed to stipulate that we are for including the highest incentive rate now paid into workers' base wages so as to achieve a new base wage and abolish incentives rather than that we are proposing including the highest incentive now paid to the highest base wage now paid and pay all workers in the industry a uniform (highest) base wage--a utopian, non-Marxist position.

The real counterposition in the discussion is between my first motion together with Larkin's motion as opposed to Apple's motion. This is confirmed by the fact that at a local discussion after the fraction Gilman stated that he did not support his motion and had moved to support of Apple's motion.

I believe Gilman's position has its basis primarily in tactical considerations. The entire fraction is opposed in principle to variable incentives. However, since the incentives system is as old as the modern industry of BI itself and is deeply ingrained in the workers' consciousness, since base wages can only be renegotiated at contract time, since the "fixed" incentive does not seem to vary (at least in the short-term sense), since the likely outcome of a struggle against incentive cuts (short of an industry-wide strike to abolish the incentives system) would result in a new, possibly "better" incentives system, the supporters of Apple's position feel compelled to separate the "fixed" incentive out from the incentive system as a whole and treat it differently. So therefore, an RO-supporter steward whose department is ready for struggle against incentive cuts, while of course advancing our program and opposing the incentives system generally, may lead his department in struggle under the slogans "stop the cuts/fix the rates;" he may call for a vote for a new and "better" fixed incentive for his department at the end of the struggle, etc.

This strikes me as a lot of nonsense. It is true that the question is tactically complicated--most questions in this industry are. However, I believe Larkin's motion poses the question correctly, i.e., that fixed incentives are an alternative to a base wage, that the "fixed" quality of the fixed incentive in the long run is fundamentally illusory, that the fixed incentive is an integral part of the incentive system and that therefore any support of fixed incentives can only strengthen illusions in the system itself and constitutes a roadblock to abolition of the system. I also believe that any arguments about being able to "get around" the contract (the fixed incentive as an interim base wage) or being able to "fool" the company into granting the "interim base wage" in one department smacks of gimmickry.

From what reading I have been able to do on the question of incentives in this industry I have found the following. The union was founded on the basic call "equal pay for similar work"--a central call in an industry with an incredible complex of wage, incentive, piecework, quantity systems organized on a more or less plant by plant basis. By 1947 a job evaluation process had been jointly undertaken by the union with management and a form of standard base wages had been arrived at on a district-wide basis (with the major company). The 1947 agreement left unresolved the fact that 50 percent of all employees were paid under some type of quantity, piecework, bonus or incentive program. Attempts to resolve this question between 1947-50 broke down completely. The union position on incentives in 1945 was as follows: "the fundamental principle of the performance and incentive wage relationship is that when regularly required on an incentive job to perform work over and above the requirements of a fair day's work, an employee is entitled to receive equitable extra compensation over and above a fair day's pay." The 1947-50 negotiations broke down over "what is a fair day's work/pay," "what is a qualified employee," "what is the normal pace of work," etc. The union leadership decided to take the position that the company would install an incentive plan and if it did not meet the workers' approval the union would grieve it; over time it would be worked out and the system would sort itself out. The problems with this approach are obvious, and to my knowledge that is still the way it's done today. In 1953 the union officially took the position of giving up on elimination of incentives and to drive for full 100 percent incentive coverage of workers in the industry--thus giving up qualitatively the slogan on which the union was founded. Today, I believe, 80 percent of workers in the industry are covered by some kind of incentive. The fixed incentive is established for any number of reasons--I do not have sufficient information to enumerate them here. The source I read did not mention the fixed incentive as such but dwelt rather on the various variable incentives entirely--which leads me to believe that the fixed incentive is fundamentally incidental to the system. It would be useful, though I think likely impossible, to find out what percentage of workers are covered by the fixed incentive.

In any case, my reading and discussion with friends in the industry have left my fundamental position unchanged. It would be

useful to resolve this discussion since our friends face this question rather frequently. Any comments would be appreciated.

Comradely,

Paul Collins

cc: Chicago, Cleveland

MOTIONS ON INCENTIVES FROM BI FRACTION
(8 May 1976)

Motion (Collins): We are opposed in principle to all incentive schemes as they tie workers' incomes to productivity, sow divisions within the class, prepare job elimination, institutionalize and perpetuate labor/management cooperation in production for capitalist profit, and throw the burden of capitalist economic chaos squarely on the backs of the workers.

Therefore, while resolutely opposing any cuts in the income of any worker, including cutbacks in the incentives now paid, we will vote against any and all incentive schemes.

We counterpose a national base wage at the highest incentive-inclusive pay, a sliding scale of wages and hours.

passed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	7
opposed	0
abstaining	1 full
	1 consultative

Motion (Collins): Opposing any attacks on the income and standard of living of the workers, which would include militant struggle against cuts in existing incentives, does not constitute defense of the incentive system or of a particular incentive in the traditional economist sense of support for incentives--we therefore oppose particular incentives and the incentive system and vote against it, speak against it, and counterpose our program.

passed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	6
opposed	0
abstaining	2 full
	1 consultative

Motion (Collins): A fixed incentive is part of the incentive system, is therefore linked to production, and for the reasons laid out in motion no. 1 we are opposed to it.

failed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	2
opposed	2
abstaining	4 full
	1 consultative

Motion (Larkin): Fixed incentives exist in the incentive program as an alternative to a general industry-wide wage boost "buying off" certain departments for one reason or another, thwarting workers' unity and a general drive for the higher wages. Therefore we oppose fixed incentives and counterpose a general industry-wide increase in wages, and a sliding scale of hours and wages as well.

failed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	2
opposed	3
abstaining	3 full
	1 consultative

Motion (Gilman): We do not take responsibility for, i.e., support or vote in favor of, particular incentives or the incentive system in general. At the same time we oppose and seek class struggle against all attempts to cut the workers' wages through changed or outmoded incentive plans, as well as against speed-up and job elimination whether or not tied to an incentive plan. failed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	1	full
		1 consultative
opposed	6	
abstaining	1	

Motion (Apple): A negotiated frozen incentive, likely fought for through struggle, can be a gain, and a step toward an increased national base wage. failed

<u>Vote:</u> in favor	2
opposed	3
abstaining	4

COVER LETTER

by Collins

8 [July] 1976

TUC
New York, N.Y.

Comrades:

...

Also enclosed are recent contributions to the incentives discussion, one from Gilman submitted on June 25, 1976 and one from me submitted June 18, 1976. Points 5, 6, and 7 of my contribution were submitted to the fraction for vote as the working position of the fraction--it failed with a two-to-two vote and the remainder abstaining. Points 1 through 4 of Gilman's were put to a vote and were defeated by a two-for and three-against vote. His point 5 was withdrawn by Gilman and the "Additional Motion" at the bottom is still a point of discussion. I voted against Gilman's contribution for two reasons: first, because, though he said it was simply an omission and he was opposed to the incentives system in principle, this point was omitted; second, because, in light of his position of roughly five to six weeks for fixed incentives, and because of the continued ambiguities on incentive-related grievances in the June 25 discussion, I rejected in his point 3 the phrase "In seeking to ... win a new incentive..."

The incentives discussion itself is not very clear at present. I believe that we have general agreement on two points: a) that the fixed incentive is of a part with the incentives system as a whole and not some kind of satisfactory alternative to a time-rate wage; b) we oppose the incentives system on principle. The discussion at present is bogged down in the question of our policy toward incentive-related grievances. I had discussions on this question with Knox and Nelson over the July 4th weekend and I think we may slowly be reaching clarity on the question. I won't comment on it now because I'm not satisfied yet with my own thinking on the point and I want to work on it some more.

After receiving this mailing you will be short only the initial contributions to the fraction meeting in early May which started the whole incentives discussion rolling. These will be mailed in ASAP.

Comradely,

Paul Collins

cc: Cleveland, Chicago

by Collins

1. Prior to 1955, roughly 50 percent of BI employees were covered by incentive, bonus, piece work or quantity systems. These type incentives were clearly to provide the motivation for increased productive effort and they vary with production output--thus the term variable incentive. Variable incentives tie workers' incomes directly to capitalist production and its fluctuations, sow divisions within the workforce due to pressure to produce more and faster, undermine safety conditions, represent an alternative to a high wage income, and are a roadblock to the struggle for 30-for-40 and a sliding scale of hours and wages.

2. In 1953, the BI union gave up the traditional union distrust of the incentives system and the struggle for a straight system of hourly pay for all BI workers. Given the fact that 50 percent of BI workers were covered by incentives, and were unwilling to and programmatically incapable of waging a struggle for sufficiently high base wages throughout the industry to lay the material basis for the abolition of the incentives system, the union tops opted for the alternative drive for 100 percent incentive coverage of BI workers. The major BI company agreed with the plan and stated "that the ideal objective would be to cover all employees by some kind of incentive and arrange work processes so that all workers could make some contribution to production and earn incentive pay." [Book reference]

3. Since 1955 a "new" system of incentive payment based on work load and/or equipment utilization with the incentive being paid as a percentage of the base wage was developed. The maximum percentage is based on a given work load and/or equipment utilization and grows smaller (with the base wage as the floor) with decreased work load or equipment utilization performance. (The "old" system was based on a very small base wage with additional payment based directly on piece work or quantity.)

4. Given that some processes of BI production, and required jobs therein, are such that worker performance does not affect the speed or quality of the process, and given that both company and union had decided on 100 percent incentive coverage as an alternative to a system of base wages only, both union and company had to devise a new type of incentive, i.e., a more or less stable average percentage of the base wage--the "fixed" incentive.

5. Three things seem clear from the above: a) that the fixed incentive is part of the incentives system and cannot be separated out; b) that the fixed incentive does not constitute a sort of interim base wage but is an alternative to a higher base wage; c) that the company will try to recoup costs from fixed incentives by some device at the workers' expense, e.g., cutting crew sizes.

6. Conclusions: a) the "fixed" incentive, like the "variable" incentive, must be opposed on principle; b) all illusions in the "fixed" incentive as "as good as" or "functionally the same as" a

higher base wage must be tirelessly exposed; c) a class-struggle steward, while fighting all attacks on workers' income or crew size, must make abolition of the incentives system a central, working part of the class-struggle program in the industry; d) the demand for higher base wages with the highest incentive rate included, linked to the struggle for 30-for-40 and a sliding scale of wages and hours must be counterposed to both fixed and variable incentives.

7. A class-struggle steward, elected on the above positions (among others), would continue to fight for and act on these positions in any struggle against pay cuts or cuts in group size. Whereas the department may well be forced back to work under a new incentives plan after the struggle, the class-struggle steward must not take responsibility for that plan by supporting, advocating or signing that plan. (It goes without saying that the steward would fight for open negotiations as well.) This is true for "fixed" as well as "variable" incentive plans.

--Collins
June 18, 1976

MOTIONS ON INCENTIVES

1. We oppose the incentive system, of which frozen rate bonuses are a part, and seek its replacement with an international base wage increase, including the highest incentive rate.

2. We oppose the attempts of the company to use incentives for speed-up, job combinations and eliminations, layoffs, or to take away any other gains of the workers. We demand union control of safety, a sliding scale of wages and hours, and workers control of production.

3. In seeking to defend against an incentive cut, win a new incentive, or in other related grievable incentive matters, a class-struggle steward would seek to mobilize the affected workers (and others) to call on the Local and International unions to initiate a fight against the incentives system. He would, in addition, exercise the workers' contractual rights in defending or gaining pay rightfully due them by filing a grievance, and if necessary urge class-struggle tactics in order to win that pay and to prevent the company from worsening the workers' job conditions in return.

4. While signing supportable incentive-related grievances, a class-struggle militant should argue for our general program against incentives and for the necessary steps to implement it. He must particularly emphasize the need to oppose trade-offs of incentives for jobs or job conditions. This must be enforced through democratic control of the workers affected over the union's handling of the grievance, including open negotiations and the right to veto any agreement.

5. Insofar as workers are forced to accept the incentive system, a frozen-rate incentive wage is generally preferable to a variable rate. However, a frozen rate must not be posed as a substitute for or a programmatic stage to initiating a struggle against the incentive system and toward an increased national base wage.

Additional Motion:

While our friend Bill was correct in avoiding signing the current bonus grievance until he could consult with the RO, he should sign the grievance if the opportunity avails itself, and in any case argue for a class-struggle approach to the bonus system and the handling of the grievance.

--Gilman
25 June 1976

UPDATE ON THE
INCENTIVES DISCUSSION

by Collins

17 July 1976

TUC
New York, N.Y.

Comrades:

I'm writing (a week later than I had wished) to bring you up to date on the incentives discussion in the Chicago local and BI fraction. Since my letter to you of 8 July (which I just noticed is dated wrongly, 8 June) I have given the discussion a lot of thought and talked to Knox here and on the West Coast, to Nelson, and a number of other comrades. As I pointed out in the July 8 letter the discussion was not at all clear at that point and was bogged down in the question of our policy toward incentive-related grievances. We had had a couple of sharp discussions in the fraction and the local, the most distinguishing characteristic of which was that comrades, myself included, were arguing hard but it was not clear what we were arguing for or against. By June 25 we had gone through almost two months of what I believe was basically a diversionary struggle over the question of whether a fixed rate incentive was different from a variable incentive and somehow supportable. By June 25 the fraction had finally come to the conclusion that fixed and variable incentives are both parts of the incentives system and that we are in principle opposed to both. At the June 25 meeting the ground shifted to the question of whether we should or would file incentive-related grievances in answer to wage cuts or discriminatory wage situations. In a sense, at that point we had returned full circle to the basic disagreement of the May 8, 1976 fraction discussion in which Gilman argued that the stance on incentives contained in my three motions precluded struggles for new incentive rates, resigned the workers to a wage cut, etc. Since there has been a lot of confusion over this question, I'll digress for a paragraph or so.

In BI, the incentive system of payment is an integral part of the wage structure. When the workers' incentives rates drop for whatever reason (decreased production, opening of a new production section which affects the way the rate is figured, expansion of crew size, etc.) by contract the workers have only one way to redress what in effect amounts to a wage cut--to file a grievance. When the grievance is filed the company will either adjust the incentive rates upward or install a new incentive plan, though adjustment upward or installation of the new plan is the company's choice, not the workers'. By contract, the workers can either then passively accept the new plan, or reject it and file a new grievance for yet another plan. So when filing an incentive-related grievance, the workers are effectively filing for a new plan. This specifically was the source of a lot of the confusion. Given my position on incentives, I have rejected throughout the stance of calling for, advocating, filing for, or supporting new incentive plans. This

business with the incentive-related grievance gave me a lot of trouble. I insisted from the first discussion that it was possible to file a "defensive" grievance, one which protested the wage cut but didn't call for the new plan. Part of the problem here is that I was only familiar with grievances that spoke to clear, contractual violations by the company and I couldn't see why a grievance in the case of incentives had to be for a new plan. Incentive-related grievances are not filed over contract violations but as a response to wage cuts or wage inequities. So I was developing a position that we could file incentive-related grievances but not for new plans--a bogus distinction. This bogus distinction was a contradiction in my position, and caused a lot of confusion. When, with Knox's intervention, we had clarified that filing incentive-related grievances is in effect filing for a new plan, I was carrying my contradiction into a convergence with Gilman's position, a position I have argued hard against for months. Needless to say, this was playing hell with any attempt to clarify the discussion. In light of this realization, I thought the question through again on all points, and have arrived at the following stance, a position I explained in the recent July 10 BI fraction meeting and then in the July 11 local meeting.

1. I completely support my position of June 18, 1976 (contained in the last three points of the statement "Fixed Incentives"). I contend that the only logical extension of that position is that we do not call for, initiate, support, or sign incentive-related grievances.

2. It follows from this that Gilman's position of June 25, 1976 ("Motion On Incentives") is counterposed to my position of June 18, 1976, that I am opposed to it, and that I believe it contains the following basic contradiction, i.e., that we are opposed to the incentives system, advance our program, etc. but we file incentive-related grievances. This is most concisely stated in the sentence: "While signing supportable incentive-related grievances, a class-struggle militant should argue for our general program against incentives and for the necessary steps to implement it..." (my emphasis).

3. Succinctly put, one cannot build a struggle against incentives, a struggle to abolish the incentives system, by accepting it. One cannot expose the system by continually using it. Why? Because incentive-related grievances are part of the incentives system. Because a) the incentives system is just that--a system--and locks the workers into a vicious circle: if they don't like an incentive, within the system they have only one way out--grieve for a new plan. Once the thing has gone through the various joint committees they can either passively accept the new plan or grieve for a new one. They not only have only one, legalistic choice but their hands are tied in terms of their response to the company's cuts in their wages. b) Another trap in the system is this--all grievances are, by contract, linked to the no-strike clause. c) The only way out of this vicious circle is to break completely from it at some point. This is the precondition to building a struggle to smash the incentives system. To continually fall back on incentive-

related grievances as a response to drops in the rates, etc. cuts directly across our program and any struggle to break the circle, reinforces workers' illusions in the system, and reinforces one of the system's main aims in that it keeps workers fragmented and locked into the legalistic, contractual, no-strike, no struggle/ no win trap.

4. My stance applies to all incentive-related grievances. We have had at least five cases brought up: (1) the rate of a department drops and the grievance to respond to that; (2) a new section or department opens and the section or department has been excluded arbitrarily from the plan or system--a grievance to respond to that; (3) workers from one department without a plan who are working in a department with a plan--a grievance to respond to that; (4) workers working in a department which has a plan from which they, individually or as a group, have been arbitrarily excluded--a grievance to respond to that; (5) workers excluded from a plan on the basis of race or sex--a grievance to respond to that (to moderate the inequities in payment by getting them covered by the plan). My stance extends to all these cases. Case (1) is the case of the grievance to respond to a drop in the incentive rate (in effect, a wage cut)--our response should be, not to file a grievance for a "better" rate, but to reject the incentives system categorically and to demand base wages with the highest incentive rate paid included; to the workers' response that "the contract and the International won't allow this" our response should be "junk the contract and the no-strike pledge" (and in addition make the necessary points about the necessity to build a class-struggle leadership in the union to oust the bureaucracy). Cases (2) through (5) are all cases where workers are not covered by an incentive plan and are working for straight time-rate wages (and making therefore less money in some cases than those covered by the plans)--I am opposed to calling for extension of the plan to these workers, grieving to do so, or supporting grievances to do so, because by grieving to extend the incentive plan to them we are not only extending money to them but also the whip of self-enforced, intensified exploitation. This is the central point. There is another example which has been raised in which some comrades would support the filing of an incentive-related grievance, i.e., where workers from a department with a lower rate are working in a department with a higher rate--a grievance to iron out the inequity in payment. My position is that we do not moderate inequities by "manipulating" the incentives system but by mobilizing to smash it and replace it with higher base wages for all. Again, I am opposed to filing, supporting, etc., all incentive-related grievances.

So, to sum up, I still stand on my motions of May 8, 1976, my "Fixed Incentives" statement of June 18, 1976, and on the position on our policy on incentive-related grievances laid out in this letter. The argument that has been raised most consistently against my position is this: since we may not be and probably won't be in a position for some time to mobilize a sufficiently powerful struggle to junk the contract, abolish the incentives system, etc., by opposing incentive-related grievances, we are resigning the workers

to a wage cut. To those comrades I would counter that their argument is legalistic and objectivist and fundamentally accepts the parameters on struggle laid down by the company and the pro-capitalist bureaucracy. I would argue further that they should try to keep in mind that it is not we, but the company, who are responsible for the wage cuts and that applying for a new incentives plan is applying for more such wage cuts in the future since that is the very nature of the incentives system itself. To those comrades who worry that my position (against filing to extend the incentives plan to those who are excluded from the plan on the basis of race or sex) is insensitive (or worse!) to special oppression, I would argue that by grieving to extend to these workers the production whip hand over themselves we are doing them no favors. Our program must consistently be: abolish the incentive system, for higher base wages with the highest rates included, 30-for-40, a sliding scale of wages and hours, junk the contract and the no-strike pledge--there is no other answer to the continual wage cuts, wage inequities and intensified, worker-enforced exploitation to which the incentives system gives rise.

In both the BI fraction of July 10 and the local meeting of July 11, I laid out the position contained in points 1-4 of this letter and some of these arguments as an informational report. I did so because there has been a lot of confusion and much heat with little light, and I wanted to give comrades a chance to consider carefully each of the positions now pretty clearly laid out, Gilman's and mine. So, in any case, we now have a clear counterposition and hopefully we will have a fruitful discussion (finally!) in the not-too-distant future.

CGs,

Paul Collins

cc: Cleveland, Chicago

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION
ON PIECE-RATE RELATED GRIEVANCES

by Cobet

The incentive system is a highly complex and pervasive form of wage supplement augmenting the earnings of some 80 percent of the wage workers in the BI industry. The system encompasses tens of hundreds of incentive applications (plans), the earnings potential and actual earnings accruable from each application being determined by a complex formula which is rarely known, much less understood, by the work crew or crews covered by the plan.

It should be obvious that such complexity serves only the BI companies. While, as with simple piece-work systems, the incentive system ties wages to production and, thereby, induces a degree of labor self-discipline, the multiplicity of incentive applications inevitably results in unequal payment for identical work performed at the same level of productivity. It is rarely the case that a skilled and conscientious electrical worker or hoist operator in the department will receive wages identical to those received by their counterparts in another department. This apparent anarchy in wage payment, the fact that incentive earnings can range from nothing to a sizeable portion of income, and the usual inability of a worker to determine in advance his wage rate, are peculiarities which only amplify the divisive and competitive effects characteristic of the piece-rate system of wage payment wherein, as Marx noted, "the exploitation of the laborer by capital is here effected through the exploitation of the laborer by the laborer."

Little of the discussion around the incentive system has sought to challenge our opposition to piece work. We are for the sliding scale of wages and hours and the eradication of the incentive system with compensation; there is apparent unanimity on this. The most serious question so far raised has concerned our attitude towards grievances alleging company violation of the integrity of an incentive application.

Before dealing with this question, a couple of relevant points must be made. First, particularly since the arbitration award in 1969, incentive coverage for a whole spectrum of job-categories has been automatic. If, for example, a BI company constructs a new plant, or section of a plant, it must also construct incentive application formulae to cover the production and maintenance workers assigned to that new installation. So long as they fulfill certain criteria, these formulae are the products of time studies and company discretion. Furthermore, so long as these criteria are not violated, there exists absolutely no basis for grievances. In other words, there is no contractual basis for the hoist operator mentioned above to grieve simply because his counterpart in another department is covered by a more lucrative incentive application; nor is there a contractual basis for a worker performing a non-incentive job to grieve for incentive coverage--a laborer in a department could not successfully grieve for coverage by one of the...incentive applications for that department.

Of equal relevance is the fact that the incentive application is distinct from the job description. A contractually legitimate grievance resulting in an adjustment of the incentive application cannot, in and of itself, effect a change in the job description. Where such a change in job responsibility has occurred, it has occurred with union consent; it has been the result of trade-off bargaining in the pre-arbitration stages of the grievance procedure and has usually, if not always, involved the agreement of those affected by the grievance. This distinction between the incentive application and the job description is of relevance because our attitude towards incentive-related grievances might be far different if the company could, at its discretion, codify job combination and speed-up in the adjusted incentive formula.

With these points in mind, we can turn our attention to the incentive-related grievance. The relevant section of the contract can be paraphrased as follows:

The company may, if it so wishes, establish new incentive applications to cover either newly created jobs for which such coverage is not contractually required or current jobs not presently covered by an incentive formula.

Given a significant change in the production process or crew size, the company shall adjust or replace the current incentive application so as to preserve its integrity by adequately reflecting the changed circumstances. If the new formula is not readily available, the company shall pay an interim allowance during the period required for the establishment of the new or adjusted incentive application provided that its establishment be achieved at the earliest possible date and that this interim period not exceed six months unless extended through mutual consent of the company and the union.

An example is in order. Assume that a portion of a department's maintenance work is performed by personnel drawn from a plant-wide central maintenance gang and that, over a 24-hour period, they contribute an average of 35 out of the 270 man-hours required for the department's production. These 35 man-hours per day will be "charged" to the department and the 270 man-hour total entered as a factor in the formulae determining incentive earnings for this department's workers. As one might expect, if total man-hours were to increase without a corresponding increase in production incentive earnings would drop.

Now let's assume that management has decided to assign maintenance workers to the department on a full-time basis. The jobs are posted, filled and, therefore, no longer contracted out of central maintenance. The same 35 man-hours is required per day; neither the workload on the maintenance personnel nor the workload on production workers has necessarily increased. What has increased is the total man-hours charged to the department's production--charged, not worked. This results from the fact that both actual man-hours worked and those hours during which those maintenance workers are on stand-by are being entered into the incentive formulae. If there are 30 stand-by man-hours per

day, total man-hours have increased from 270 to 300.

Given the above, the union would grieve, alleging that the integrity of the incentive application has been violated; it would demand the establishment of an interim allowance, an adjustment of the incentive application and the payment of all monies lost. If such a grievance were sustained in arbitration, the original incentive application would be adjusted by multiplying total man-hours by 0.90, thereby reestablishing the integrity of the incentive earnings potential. The old plan, let's call it incentive application #40-03, would re-appear as incentive application #40-04.

Just such a grievance was filed and sustained in a major [union] local. While its specifics were far more complex, the general characteristics were identical:

- a. the incentive system was left intact,
- b. a "new" incentive application was fought for and won, and
- c. this new plan effected neither an increase in the intensity of labor nor specific instances of job combination but, rather, simply reversed an attack on the wages of a section of the workforce.

It is precisely such grievances that some comrades would refuse, as a matter of principle, to advocate or sign.

The arguments put forward in defense of this position are reducible to the following attempted syllogism:

1. We are, in principle, opposed to the incentive system.
2. Grievances against the incentive system are part of that system and perpetuate it insofar as they necessarily result in new or adjusted incentive applications, thereby leaving the system intact. Such grievances cut across our program and, when signed or advocated by our friends, undermine the credibility of that program. By signing such grievances we counterpose to our program a no-struggle, no-win strategy which can, at best, result in illusory and temporary gains.
3. Therefore, our friends should refuse to advocate or sign incentive-related grievances.

Before proceeding, let me suggest two partial restatements of this argument. The first has been a recurrent theme while the second is my own design and, I believe, more precise and politically defining.

1. How can you advocate one thing while fighting for its opposite without sounding and acting like an opportunist hypocrite?
2. For those jobs and industries wherein wages are determined partially or entirely by some variant of the piece rate or incentive system, our precondition for defending the working class against arbitrary wage cuts is the willingness of that class to mobilize in sufficient numbers behind our program for the eradication of that system and for the sliding scale of wages and hours.

That the system is rotten, that defensive struggles leave the system intact, that the gains secured through such struggles are temporary and, to one extent or another, illusory, and that these defensive struggles in no way approximate our program are all correct statements--correct in terms of the incentive system and correct in terms of the capitalist system. These statements are in fact telling criticisms of "pure and simple trade unionism." They are not, however, adequate condemnations of the defensive struggle itself. What the proponents of the above position must argue is not that we have a different program or that incentive-related grievances "perpetuate" the incentive system but, rather, that our principled and resolute opposition to wage cuts would, if pursued within the limits defined by the contract, necessarily result in the violation of a higher principle. The incentive related grievance must be shown to effect class betrayal. It must be shown to be analogous, for example, to the act of taking the union to court or of forcing management to implement a racist policy.

Returning to the example given above, where was the betrayal in adjusting incentive application #40-03 and establishing incentive application #40-04? At whose expense was this reestablishment of earnings potential and what is meant by declaring the gain to be illusory?

Of course, one could argue that the bourgeoisie will inevitably attempt to recoup its losses through job combination, speed-up, price increases, etc. But, then again, if those avenues are so readily available to the bourgeoisie one wonders why, in the absence of such grievances, they would avoid pursuing them anyway. Certainly not in the spirit of fair play. After all, their desire to maximize profits must be at least as strong as their desire to avenge cuts in that profit resulting from incentive-related grievances. Furthermore, one could also argue that the bourgeoisie will pursue identical avenues to recoup losses resulting from an increase in the base wage. Therefore? Therefore enter Citizen Weston who, while suggesting that strikes for higher wages were unproductive (temporary and illusory) at least (so far as I know) stopped short of suggesting that support for such strikes violated principle and betrayed other sections of the proletariat. The argument that incentive-related grievances result in betrayal because increased earnings necessarily come out of the pockets of some laid-off worker who, presumably, would have otherwise been retained is an argument deficient in both logic and merit.

Perhaps for this reason the above argument has rarely been more than implicit. More explicit are variations on the theme that incentive-related grievances perpetuate the incentive system, i.e., leave the incentive system intact. It is claimed, for example, that by fighting for a new or an adjusted incentive application we are giving support to the incentive system as a whole. I believe this to be nonsense. I support neither application #40-03 nor #40-04 as acceptable incentive plans, i.e., as politically supportable manifestations of the incentive system. Nor, for that matter, do I support \$8.00/hr. versus \$6.00/hr. as an acceptable alternative to the eradication of wage slavery. But, if my wages are cut from \$8.00/hr. to \$6.00/hr., and if I am able to

reverse that wage cut without committing an act of class betrayal, I might consider that reversal to be a supportable outcome of a necessary, though necessarily limited, defensive struggle. Likewise, I support incentive application #40-04 only as a necessary reversal of the wage cuts stemming from plan #40-03.

Does this cut across our program or undermine the credibility of that program? Not in the least. On the contrary, there is nothing credible about suggesting that sections of the workforce must submit to specific attacks on their standard of living until such time that they are politically and organizationally prepared to overturn the incentive system.

We are simultaneously for the eradication of the incentive system and against its manipulation in the interests of the bourgeoisie. We clearly explain the function of that system and forcefully put forward our programmatic alternative. We struggle against the anti-working-class attitudes and actions induced by the incentive system while (and through) fighting for a principled and militant response to speed-up, job combination and layoffs. We explain that neither the sliding scale of wages and hours nor the eradication of the incentive system can be won or accomplished solely by one individual or one work crew; required is a militant, principled and programmatically defined class-struggle opposition committed to destroying the bureaucratic and class-collaborationist policies of the union's leadership.

At specific conjunctures we will advocate job actions not sanctioned by the contract or union constitution. Less frequently, at first, we will fight for and attempt to organize such actions, but these will be specific situations--such as our agitation for sit-down strikes in II--situations wherein such attempts are warranted by the specific characteristics of the conjuncture and the projected possible evolution of a favorable relationship of forces.

What we will not do, so long as there exists no question of class betrayal, is tell the working class to passively await the offensive battles. Nor will we suggest that they seek to defend their current wages and working conditions through suicidal work actions against the incentive system.

In short: don't let the company get away with a penny; file the grievance without illusions; study our caucus material and help us forge the only kind of organization capable of winning real and lasting gains.

Such an approach neither liquidates our program nor sanctifies the status quo. Neither does it neglect our class bias when confronted with a struggle for the redivision of the surplus value. Rather, it expresses our principled opposition to the incentive system and our equally resolute opposition to wage cuts. Using the language of the contract, we are resolutely opposed to violations of the integrity of specific incentive applications.

Before addressing a secondary, but more worrisome, position vis-a-vis the incentive system proper, another argument deserves "honorable mention" if only because it exemplifies an extreme in mechanical thinking. The argument flows as follows:

1. The incentive system is a complex variant of the straightforward piece-rate method of wage payment. We should therefore be able to extrapolate our attitude towards incentive-related grievances from our attitude towards grievances stemming from simple piece-work.

2. A grievance against manipulation of the piece rate requires demanding that management personnel come out and time-study the job.

3. "Management off the shop floor" is an important element of our program.

4. The grievance therefore contradicts our program and is impermissible from the standpoint of principle.

5. From this example we can extrapolate the impermissibility of filing incentive-related grievances, for these also cut across our program by demanding the establishment of a new incentive application. It could also be added that management time-study of the job "perpetuates" the piece-rate system of wage payment.

The argument is real; the sound in the background is that of Aristotle turning over in his grave.

"Management off the shop floor" is not a demand for the geographic isolation of the boss. It aims at attacking a sphere of management prerogatives and at restricting their ability to harass, intimidate and speed up the work force. We're for locking these jerks in in their offices, but we'll also drag them out if it suits our interests--barring workers control of production and distribution, there exists a whole spectrum of job-related determinations for which we refuse to take responsibility. It is simply insufficient to point to the fact that a piece-work related grievance results in dragging some management flunky out of his air-conditioned office.

But, says the proponent of this argument, the time-study man is a company agent and the result of his study will usually, if not inevitably, lead to a worsening of the piece rate.

Well, if that is true, then it's obviously not a very bright way to proceed. If, however, there exists a legitimate grievance and if the determination of its contractual legitimacy involves, in part, a time-study of the job, then call the damned company agent. Will he work in your interests? Not very often: probably no more or less often than grievances are sustained by "impartial" arbitrators. No doubt it will frequently be necessary to challenge the "findings" of this time-study. But all that tells us is that the deck is stacked in favor of the bourgeoisie, which is the name of the game under capitalism. To repeat an earlier question: where is the betrayal? In deference to both Comrade Collins and brother Aristotle I should note that this has not been the standard argument against the signing of incentive-related grievances.

An argument which was, while not standard, at least central to the early stages of the discussion concerned the so-called fixed or frozen incentive. On this question Comrade Collins and I are in essential agreement.

The fixed incentive is the interim allowance, provided for and extended indefinitely by mutual consent of the union and management. It was argued that the fixed incentive by its very nature does not tie wages to production and, therefore, lacks all of the insidious characteristics of the incentive system. Therefore, fixed incentives are not incentives, and the struggle for a fixed incentive should be seen as supportable and a progressive step forward in the struggle for an increase in the national base wage.

This argument is wrong on every count. Firstly, fixed or frozen incentive coverage is never (never!) attained through struggle, nor is there a contractual basis for such a demand. Its existence depends entirely upon mutual consent. One might expect that a decline in productivity or an increase in shop-floor militancy could cause such an agreement to be terminated. Certainly the bourgeoisie anticipated such an outcome and give appropriate warning in another section of the contract, a section that must have been overlooked by some comrades. This section states that employees receiving an interim allowance and maintaining a performance below that which obtained prior to the establishment of that allowance may have their so-called fixed incentive suspended for as long as the lower rate of performance is "voluntarily" maintained. So much for fixed incentives not being incentives and not tying wages to production.

Even if the above were not the case, there is absolutely no basis for maintaining that the acceptance of a company offer to fix the incentive rates could, in any conceivable way, represent a step forward in an increase of the national base wage. Of greater importance, the argument has nothing to do with defensive struggles against wage cuts but, rather, suggests the fixed incentive as a strategic goal--at best, the argument proposes a gimmick whereby the fixed incentive is used as an euphemism for a wage increase; at worst, it suggests a reformist alternative to broad sections of our program. In neither sense is it supportable.

As for the motions and arguments of Comrade Collins, they rest upon a basic thrust possessing two axes: principled and resolute opposition to the incentive system and an equally resolute opposition to the contract cretinism and the fetishization of grievances which have often characterized the attitudes of our friends. Insofar as his position reflects such a thrust it is entirely deserving of support and, in fact, served as a near exemplary intervention into the current discussion.

But, I believe, the conclusions drawn by Comrade Collins and others are seriously flawed. They generate objections of principle where none exist and shackle the defensive struggles against wage cuts while giving full rein to company manipulation of wages. One need only apply this approach to wages determined entirely by some piece-rate system to appreciate its full impact and serious consequences.

--Cobet
September 6, 1976

by Frazier

1. Many different systems of wage payment go under the name "incentive." All either directly or indirectly tie wages to production levels. The most direct form of incentive is individual piece-work where wage payment is tied directly to the quantity of production. Probably the most indirect is profit-sharing where not only production and efficiency, but the whole dynamic of the capitalist system, play a role. Between these two extremes there is an infinite number of possible combinations and permutations. According to management-oriented studies about 30 or 40 different incentive systems have been described in written form.

2. By relating pay to production, all of these systems encourage increased effort and/or efficiency by the employee. Nearly all of the systems work out so that the predominant part of the increased production reverts back to the employer and a lesser part to the worker in the form of "incentive pay."

3. The offer or hope of increased pay generally results in greater productivity, greater labor discipline and self-discipline and thus the lessened necessity for supervision and increased collaboration with the employer. It tends to lessen labor militancy and decrease the unity of the workforce and results in lower levels of class consciousness.

4. The only basis for management opposition to various forms of incentive systems, besides a general conservatism and unwillingness to change, is the high expense involved with setting up the system to be used (time studies, rate determinations, etc.) and the large amount of work necessary to constantly modify the system to account for various changes in production, technology, etc. For management, the key element in increasing productivity seems to be some form of work measurement. Studies have shown straight daywork (with no norms of any kind) to produce on the average 50 percent to 70 percent of what measurement would show to be a "fair day's work."

5. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1958 one out of every four workers in production and related departments were paid on the incentive basis. Out of the 405,000 workers in steel in mid-1958, 245,000 were paid on an incentive basis. Out of 715,000 in auto and parts 13 percent were on incentive. This low figure is because only 2 percent of auto assembly plant workers are on incentive (most are on a measured day-work system).

6. Because of the increased levels of exploitation, self-discipline and collaboration with the employers, and decreased levels of militancy, unity and class consciousness which generally accompany incentive forms of payment, this system is considerably worse for the working class than straight time payment of wages, and we will therefore use every opportunity to struggle against it and eliminate it as part of the struggle to abolish the wage system in its entirety.

7. We fight at all times for the highest possible wages for all

workers and for them to do the least amount of work necessary to earn this wage. We attempt to minimize the amount of surplus value and the rate of exploitation. Thus we call for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay, for a sliding scale of wages and for increased wage levels. We desire the highest possible hourly wage with time worked being the only factor in determining this wage. Thus we are opposed to all forms of incentive plans.

8. Very often in industry struggles arise around pay rates, speed-up and other piecework-related issues which concretely attempt to decrease, or oppose an increase in, exploitation. At the present time these struggles tend to accept the existence of piecework, not challenging the system itself. How we relate to such reform struggles is a tactical question. The only general guideline is that we must always make clear our demand for the elimination of the piecework system itself and constantly attempt to make this the demand of the piecework-related struggle in which we are taking part.

9. For example, let us assume an individual piecework situation where the worker makes \$1 for every piece produced. Thus six pieces an hour would mean a wage of \$6 per hour. If the company tries to reduce the price to 80¢ a piece, or \$4.80 for the same six pieces, we will oppose this increase in exploitation. To do otherwise would be capitulating to the company speed-up no matter what the rationale might be. As isolated individuals we would fight back with every means at our disposal, from the filing of a simple grievance to a work stoppage if that were to prove possible. As stewards or union officials we would likewise try to fight against this company speed-up through whatever actions were possible for us. We would in any case constantly point out the horrors of the piecework system and how it allows for the very steps the company is taking, and we will, whenever possible, try to transform the struggle against a particular instance of speed-up into a struggle against the incentive system itself. But at any particular conjuncture our inability to transform the struggle into one against the incentive system would not prohibit us from supporting the struggle against the particular company abuse. We would consider it a victory if, in the above example, the company was forced to rescind the piece-rate cut and return it to the old rate.

10. A struggle against abuses in the incentive system, like the speed-up above, is not fundamentally different from the struggle for various reforms of that system. For instance, if two people are doing the same job and for various historical reasons the rates on the job are different, we would support a struggle for the equalization of the two at the highest rate. In some cases, such a reform could be in fact part of a protracted struggle against an abuse, where the rate cut, for example, took place at a previous time and for some reason was not fought when it took place. But in either case, the struggle is for a reform which would lower the rate of exploitation without changing the method of payment or production.

11. The case has been made that to support in any form any struggle to modify the piecework system, either through the winning of a reform or the stopping of an abuse, would be in fact building

support for the piecework system and is thus counterposed to our position in opposition to all forms of incentive. I think that this methodology is rigid and formalistic. Supporting a reform or fighting an abuse in any system does not imply support for that system. For instance, we are opposed to tuition but nonetheless support and take part in struggles against tuition increases. This does not contradict our position of "no tuition." We oppose all forms of affirmative action and preferential treatment, but when necessary we have often used such programs, where they exist, in order to win jobs or job upgrading which we might not have gotten otherwise. This does not contradict our opposition to these programs. While we oppose layoffs and advocate the most resolute fight against them, we also call for unlimited SUB and other demands which by their very nature assume that layoffs will take place. These demands are not contradictory. Winning full SUB and unlimited recall rights would be a victory even if we were not able to win that particular struggle against layoffs.

12. The logic of those who oppose support to all incentive-related reform struggles reduces to opposition to all reform struggles. It is an ultra-leftist position which, because of its unwillingness to struggle for a limited reform, faces the danger of objectively aiding the capitalists. This would be the situation if in the example above (see paragraph 9) the individual refused to wage a struggle against the rate cut, no matter how limited it might prove to be.

13. The real question is not whether we support struggles for piecework-related reforms but rather how we struggle and which reforms we struggle for. In general we would oppose any fight to extend the piecework system to a new plant or mill, or in most cases, even job category. Rather we would struggle for the highest possible day-work wages. In general we oppose all qualitative extensions of incentives, but this also must be seen as a tactical question, depending on the objective circumstances. Likewise, we would generally support all struggles or attempts to get rid of the incentive system, but there are situations when we would not do so, for instance when management wants to replace an incentive system with a much more highly exploitative measured day-work system (there were major struggles around this issue a few years ago in Great Britain).

14. The BI industry has a complicated incentive system which ranges from individual piecework to complicated formulae which depend on combinations of machine usage, material usage, quantity of production, and other factors. I would maintain that this system is not qualitatively different from various forms of individual piecework systems, and that disputes within the incentive system in the BI industry should be treated like all other incentive-related disputes. In this industry as in many others it is a tactical question how we relate our demand for the elimination of the incentive system to the struggle against a particular incentive-related abuse or for a particular incentive-related reform.

15. For an individual pieceworker in the BI industry, the considerations remain the same as for individual pieceworkers in

any other industry. The fact that the overall system of which they are a part is different than in other industries does not alter the necessity for us to support any struggle against increased exploitation or speed-up.

16. A different situation which occurs fairly often is the following. A number of maintenance men are working in a particular department. Some may be paid one rate and some another, depending on whether they are permanently or temporarily stationed in the department, etc. This in spite of the fact that all might be doing essentially the same work. In this situation we would support a struggle to change the incentive system to have all paid at the highest rate. In another situation, the company might add a couple of people to a particular gang. Assuming that production stays the same, by increasing the number of people in the gang, the company would be lowering the incentive rate for the whole gang, thus a direct increase in their rate of exploitation. We would support a struggle which demanded the old rate for all of the workers involved. There are any number of variations on these examples.

17. In the BI industry grievances around the incentive system apparently have to be worded to call for a new incentive system every time any kind of change or modification is desired, no matter how minor. Because of this it has been argued that we can give no support to any incentive-related grievances because they must explicitly call for a new incentive system and we oppose all incentive systems, and therefore don't want to be caught in the position of advocating a new one. Once again this must be seen as a tactical question. If in fact what is being asked for is a new incentive system, for instance for a new department, or for a wholly new way of determining incentive rates, we would probably not give the grievance our support. But if in fact the question was really the elimination of an abuse or for a minor reform, then, in spite of the way the grievances might have to be worded, we would be able to give it our support. The conservatism and class collaboration of the BI union bureaucracy, which is the cause of the necessity for the wretched language in which grievances must be couched, and for the wretchedness of the grievance system itself, cannot let us lose sight of the nature of the dispute and the nature of the solution which such a grievance desires.

18. In the BI industry as in all others, whether or not we support incentive-related struggles and grievances is a tactical question. What is not tactical is our attempt, throughout all of these struggles, to transform the fight for a particular reform into one against the incentive system as a whole and against all incentive forms of wage payment.

--Frazier
September 23, 1976

THE INCENTIVES QUESTION

by Collins

I am writing once more on incentives in order to: 1) reverse my position of 17 July on incentive-related grievances; 2) speak briefly to a couple of points in that letter which, I believe, may cause some confusion as to the nature of the discussion up to June 25; 3) contribute further to the discussion.

On Incentive-Related Grievances

My letter of 17 July states a categorically principled position against the filing of, supporting, or advocacy of incentive-related grievances. After writing this position I pulled out Marx's Wage Labor and Capital and Wage, Price and Profit to further consider the question. It became clear in the course of this reading that on the question of incentive-related grievances I had carried an essentially correct programmatic generalization on incentive/piecework systems into a fundamentally incorrect and ultra-left position on a particular aspect of those systems.

While I have not budged on my basic position of irreconcilable opposition to piecework/incentive systems, I believe I missed the basic point on the grievance question. That point is that in the struggle between capitalist and worker for that new value produced by the worker, we stand always with the worker; and there are circumstances under which groups of BI workers whose wages are under attack are forced to use the incentive-related grievance as the only defensive tool at their disposal. Under these circumstances it is principled to support incentive-related grievances.

I posited in my 17 July letter that the incentive-related grievance was an integral part of the incentives system (which it is) and that the use of these grievances against drops in incentives pay necessarily perpetuates that system (which it does not necessarily do). I further posited the following syllogism: I am on principle opposed to advocating or calling for or supporting the incentives system or particular incentive plans; an incentive-related grievance is at base a call for a new incentive plan; I am therefore on principle opposed to such grievances. On the first point: the workers may very well be in a situation conditioned by a period of general class passivity, the treachery of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and so forth in which the only alternative to passively accepting the pay cut or on the other hand undertaking some isolated suicidal adventurist action is to take the route of the incentive-related grievance. While doing so may for the time being leave the incentives system intact, it does not necessarily bolster or perpetuate the system per se. It is the subjective factor which is centrally important in this connection, i.e., it is the repeated and systematic use of the grievance in deliberate opposition to class-struggle methods over time or justification of the incentive-related grievance as the "reasonable" way to handle pay cuts (for example) which bolsters and perpetuates the incentives system. Alternatively, a class-struggle formation may in a period of quiescence support an incentive-related grievance(s) at one point and six months later use

the opportunity of a sharp rise in class struggle to abolish the incentives system altogether. The determination as to whether the incentive-related grievance is in fact the only tool at the workers' disposal is not a constant but depends on the consciousness and militancy of the workers, the correlation of forces, possibly fissures in the bureaucracy and certainly the intersection by a class-struggle formation in the industry with these conditions. The determination depends on an accurate assessment of these factors by the RO and its arm in the industry at any given time. (I believe that it was the rather mechanical and static assumption of class passivity and the status quo which was at the bottom of the support to "fixed incentives" by the supporters of that position for the first seven weeks of the Mid-West incentives discussion.)

As to the question of the syllogism, I believe that Comrade Cobet has taken it apart on empirical grounds and that the above considerations further lay it to rest.

The Discussion to June 25

I state in my 17 July letter that the discussion to June 25 (at which time the incentive-related grievance became the focus of the discussion) on fixed incentives was essentially diversionary. This is inaccurate and does an injustice to the struggle waged by myself and other comrades against the "fixed incentives" position for several weeks. It also gives the impression that the incentive-related grievances were a clear component of the discussion up to June 25-- which they were not. The discussion to June 25 was a fight against the specific proposition that a fixed incentive rate was not in fact an incentive and was rather a kind of interim base wage, the acquisition of which represented a kind of transcendence of the incentive system which our friends could pull off with a little contractual razzle-dazzle (and, of course, class-struggle tactics?).

Secondly, I state in my 17 July letter that principled opposition to incentive-related grievances is a logical extension of my position up to that point. I do not believe this is accurate since: 1) the position is not logical (it may not make Aristotle roll over in his grave but I believe Comrade Marx may experience some discomfiture); 2) as I have said, I believe the general programmatic position of principled opposition to the advocacy of or support to incentive and/or piecework systems is essentially correct and from this position can flow correct (and logical) specific tactical conclusions as well as those I drew.

Why We Oppose Incentive/Piecework Systems

I believe that it would be useful to explain in some depth the reasons for my general programmatic position because: 1) it has not yet been explained in depth; 2) a clear understanding of the general programmatic position will better facilitate the drawing of the correct tactical conclusions as our work develops.

About a month into the discussion the following quote from Capital was brought in for consideration:

"Wages by the piece are nothing else than a converted form of wages by time, just as wages by time are a converted form of the value or price of labor power." (Capital, Vol. I, Chapter XXI)

The quote was raised to suggest that perhaps I was making too much of the difference between piece rate/incentives and time rate. I introduce the following quotes from the following pages of the same chapter:

"Let us now consider a little more closely the characteristic peculiarities of piece wages.

"The quality of the labor is here controlled by the work itself, which must be of average perfection if the piece price is to be paid in full. Piece wages become, from this point of view, the most fruitful source of reductions of wages and capitalistic cheating."

and

"Since the quality and intensity of the work are here controlled by the form of wage itself, superintendance of labor becomes in great part superfluous."

and

"Given the piece-rate, it is naturally the personal interest of the laborer to strain his labor-power as intensely as possible; this enables the capitalist to raise more easily the normal degree of intensity of labor."

In short the piece-rate (incentives) system of wage payment facilitates the intensification of exploitation and places the proletariat in the role of its own production police. I believe therefore that within the parameters of capitalism (i.e., the system of wage slavery) the piece-rate system of wage payment is in general qualitatively worse for the proletariat than time-rate wages. It follows that to advocate this system as against time rate, or, more to the point in the fixed incentives discussion, to dress piece rate up as time rate or just as good as time rate would be unprincipled.

A concrete example of how these considerations apply in practice may be useful. In 1953, the bureaucracy of the United Steelworkers opted to extend the incentive system throughout the industry rather than fight for the abolition of the system and for the introduction of higher time-rate wages throughout the industry (their former position). This reversal on their part represented a fundamental betrayal of the interests of steelworkers and to have done anything but intransigently oppose this move to the bitter end would have been unprincipled for a class-struggle formation in the industry.

The justification for the 1953 decision and later broad implementation of the basic decision was that 100 percent incentives coverage in the industry would eliminate existing widespread

inequities in wage payment for similar job categories in the industry. The 1953 decision was not a defensive move by the bureaucracy but rather the development of a set of guidelines representing a strategic approach to achieving equal pay for similar work in the industry. It should be obvious that if the bureaucracy was seriously attempting to reshape the steel industry's wage structure in the workers' interests they would have tried to replace the existing system of piece-tonnage-incentive rates with a system which would insure the workers within a given job class a higher, uniform wage independent of group size, product quality, organization of steel production (opening and closing of mills, for example) and amount produced--i.e., with a system of time-rate wages. At the time of the 1953 decision there existed legitimate and widespread dissatisfaction among steelworkers with wage inequities which could have been channeled into a struggle for abolition of tonnage, piece, and incentives in the industry and for a higher time-rate wage structure. While it was (and is) true that the workers desired incentives coverage--it is frequently viewed as a way to raise pay and eliminate inequities--the role of leadership under these circumstances should at the very least have been precisely to educate and organize for the abolition of incentives and their replacement with time rates. Instead, the bureaucracy (unwilling and programmatically unable to wage a resolute class battle on the wages question) deliberately took advantage of the workers' backward consciousness on the question and saddled them with the present system which has not eliminated wage inequities and has brought a larger section of the steel labor force under the very system which facilitates intensified exploitation, sows divisions within the workforce daily, tends to render the superintendance of the labor superfluous, etc. To repeat, resolute opposition to the 1953 decision, its codification in contractual or "working agreement" form, and its broad implementation is in my opinion a question of principle--not tactics.

The Tactical Questions

The incentive-related grievance is a phenomenon which confronts militants in the BI industry rather frequently. The main tactical problem in this regard that arises therefore is the selection of those grievances which are supportable and the struggle (in the course of supporting those that are supportable) to keep the class-struggle program (in particular the demands for the abolition of the incentives system, for higher time rates, and for a sliding scale of wages and hours) to the fore. As I said earlier, whether the grievance is supportable depends on whether it is in fact the only defensive tool at the workers' disposal and whether it is in fact defensive. This depends on the relationship of forces, discontent of the workers with the present system and the breadth and depth of that discontent, etc. If the class struggle sharpens it is more likely that falling back on the grievance system as a response to wage cuts would be posed as an alternative to a sharp battle to abolish the incentives system itself and the incentive-related grievances would tend to be unsupportable. On the other hand, in a period of relative class peace with the bureaucracy still firmly in

the saddle (brittle but not broken) more of the incentive-related grievances could be supported.

However, it seems to me that aside from these general tactical considerations there is little point in pursuing the tactical discussion since numerous examples can undoubtedly be brought up and would have to be dealt with first from the standpoint of the general considerations outlined above and then with each on its own merits. We will have to take these questions on as they arise. For us at this point, the tactical considerations on this question are bound up with developing a class-struggle formation in the industry which is sufficiently experienced in and knowledgeable about the industry to be able to correctly assess the situation in the industry and to correctly evaluate the grievances as they arise so as to be able to make the correct determination on each one.

Special Oppression and the Incentives System

I posed in my 17 July letter the problem of specially oppressed sections of the work force and incentive coverage. I posed the example of a large black section of the work force not covered by incentives, which organizes a grievance for extension of the incentives plan to themselves--as a way of both raising their wages and combatting wage inequities. I did not state a position of opposition on principle to such a grievance but did state a definite bias against supporting such a grievance--primarily for the same reasons as my position on the '53 decision example, its codification and broad implementation stated above, and secondly as an outgrowth of the position of principled opposition to incentive-related grievances. The reason I held off from categorical opposition on principle on this question was because of the significant factor of the race question which I had not thought through in this connection.

Comrade Cobet informs me that the kind of situation I described would not arise in the BI industry so it may be in that sense a moot point. However, the offhand formulation in the 17 July letter I consider unacceptable and, given the state of my thinking on the matter at that time, too conclusive for a question of that complexity and importance. For example, if a significant section of the workforce was simultaneously black, low-paid, not covered by an incentive plan and united around a grievance for incentives coverage, irrespective of whether there is a contractual basis for such a grievance (and while we would argue strongly that such further broad implementation of an equivalent of the '53 decision would not be in their interest and advance our program as an alternative), we would not necessarily oppose their grievance and might in fact end up supporting it. Under such circumstances, given the backwardness of the workforce in this industry, there is a strong likelihood that a racially based opposition to the grievance may be organized. If it came down to our proposals being voted down or stifled and it was whites against incentive coverage for blacks, we would probably end up supporting the black workers' grievance.

Another Variation

Most of this document and the discussion has centered on the BI industry. However, Comrade Frazier has raised in the verbal discussion an example from an agricultural implements plant which should be dealt with. The case is one in which the workers work on a piece-rate system and, given the strength of the union local at this particular plant, the workers on 30 to 40 percent of the jobs have over the years been able to stabilize the rate of production and the quantity to be produced for full pay so that they can literally work a six-hour day and then loaf around, read or what-have-you for the remaining two hours of the day. The company naturally now wants to go over to a time-rate wage structure, leave the production rate as is, and get the full eight hours of work out of the work force. If we have a programmatic position of opposition to piece-rate wage structures and pose time rate as more advantageous for the workers, how do we handle this one when the company's plan is put to the workers for a vote.

Well, obviously we would vote against the company's proposal, even though it represents the imposition of a time-rate wage structure and the abolition of the piece-rate structure. The underlying principle is that we want more money for less work and the company's proposal is the diametric opposite of this goal. At the same time, we explain sharply that it was the piece-rate system in the first place which laid the basis through self-imposed speed-up for the move the company is now making. We still advance the call for abolition of the piece-rate system and we link it to the demand that the production quota not be raised, i.e., that line speed be reduced and to the demand for a time-rate wage structure with the highest piece rate included. At the same time, given the massive layoffs in this particular agricultural implements plant, we argue strongly that not only do we want that two hours per day for ourselves, we want it a la 30 for 40, and if the company wants more production it can simply hire back those workers that are laid off. If our proposal is voted down, our attitude toward the vote for the status quo (assuming opposition to the company's proposal) is a tactical one.

Conclusion

Since most of my work on this discussion has centered on BI, I will conclude that way. The incentives system in this industry is of a piece with things like no-strike pledges, consent decrees, widespread and rabid protectionism and other indices of the bureaucracy's pro-capitalist, collaborationist policies. Therefore, part and parcel of the struggle to expose these policies and oust the bureaucracy must be the fight to abolish the incentives system. This will require a consistent and resolute struggle to raise the workers' consciousness on this question. So even when we support the incentive-related grievances from time to time, we must struggle to keep to the fore our irreconcilable hostility to the incentives system. At the same time, we must keep in mind that the struggle to abolish incentive/piecework can be (and in other industries has been) won under capitalism. We must always link our slogans against incentives to the transitional program, constantly seeking to

transcend the narrow economic parameters of the incentives vs. time-rate trade-union struggle. Our attitude toward incentives must take a prominent place in that section of our program dealing with the wages and hours question:

ABOLISH PIECE-RATE INCENTIVES SYSTEMS!

FOR TIME-RATE WAGES AT NO LOSS IN PAY!

NO TRADE-OFFS IN WORKING CONDITIONS/GROUP SIZE/PRODUCTION RATE!

30 FOR 40! FOR A SLIDING SCALE OF WAGES AND HOURS!

--Collins
November 8, 1976

NORTH AMERICAN REPORT

by Samuels

I was in No. Am. for the weekend of 15-16 October 1976. During that weekend I attended three five-hour meetings: an RO exec on Saturday night, a joint II (No. 2 and No. 6) fraction meeting and RO local on Sunday. Knox was to come in from Chicago on Saturday night in time to make the RO exec but unfortunately missed the II point on the agenda. I was able to have a valuable working lunch with Waters, Douglas and Clarke upon my arrival on Saturday afternoon and extended discussions with Watson, Tott and Waters. Stratton, Harris and Levy came down from the Northeast with me and stayed through the joint II fraction meeting. I believe the trip was useful for them and will encourage selected comrades from the Northeast to make visits to the North American City and other locals as part of their cadre development (not to speak of social "cross fertilization").

Both Foster and Crawford strongly recommended that I attempt to defuse the incensed atmosphere in the local. We want to shift the focus of internal RO life from heated endless discussions on shop-floor small change and petty organizational grievances toward the larger political and organizational differences. It is necessary to impart to the local that the West Coast RO motions were not mere punishment for trade-union aberrations but a temporary cessation of unproductive and often harmful union activism to provide the local and its fractions an opportunity for turning inward, reevaluating and rectifying their perspectives. This inward turn was given a focus with the projected New Year's TU conference. Therefore, we sought to direct the discussion toward, and keep the aberrations in until, the conference.

The weekend focused on the fraction and the functioning of Tott in particular. The No. 6 fraction is our newest fraction, its members having from four to seven months in the plant. It is also our weakest fraction. To put it diplomatically, the caliber of human material sent into the fraction was not of the highest. Its fraction head, Watson, has no previous trade-union experience, much less experience in this industry. Tott, on the other hand, has a great deal of union "experience" of a sort. In the past four years in our movement she has been in four different plants in three distinct industries. She was never off probation long enough to do disciplined, sustained public work in the unions except in LI (which does not easily lend itself to communist union work although she produced our only industrial recruit in our four years in this city). She came to equating being in the RO with being on probation, "probation" understood in the judicial sense. Redding, not unlike Watson in both his strengths and weaknesses, could have provided Watson with much needed RO-loyal backup except early on he slipped on a banana peel (unfortunately, not proverbially) and then discovered he had a severe and chronic back problem which will probably take him out of the fraction. After countless acts of indiscipline the unruly MV quit. This leaves a fraction of Watson, Tott and two youth. Such is the No. 6 fraction.

The fraction got off to an inauspicious beginning by going into open rebellion against the security guidelines for probation period and against the enforcer of those guidelines, Watson, who got support within the fraction only from Redding. This was clearly our weakest, newest fraction with an already demonstrated capacity to run amok in a local which had been degraded to an OC precisely because of its inability to run its own TU work. Therefore, one would think that this fraction would have been subjected to the most rigid interpretation of the relevant West Coast motions which were passed while most of the fraction was still on probation. Instead, as is clear from the No. 6 perspectives written for the 7-8 October PB (and dated 5 October) by Watson who is the most careful and conservative member of the fraction, a post-probation fraction emergence was projected that was not only in clear violation with the West Coast motions but would be at a far more accelerated pace than had heretofore been the case in our other (and better) II implantations. After providing many additional arguments for special caution in this particular plant (paragraph 6), Watson "projects" this "cautious emergence" as consisting of: a) the judicious (!) initiation of floor activities of a defensive character including the filing of grievances on health and safety issues, company harassment, speedup, etc.; b) aggressive (!!) contacting; c) regular attendance at union meetings; d) when the opportunity presents itself (!) intervention at union meetings with trenchant points (!!) that will not brand fraction members as supporters of the RO (!!??) (this may include introduction of motions) (!!!).

Tott's Grievance

We find in Watson's 5 October No. 6 report the first concrete realization of the projected "cautious emergence":

"Two of the friends have been involved in low-level defensive activities over work-load/speedup and company harassment...the other, which involves filing a grievance and taking the initiative among co-workers, will probably be successful as well, and in any event has significantly heightened the profile of the friend involved." (emphasis added)

The "friend involved" was Tott. Her grievance involved co-workers in her location whom she mobilized into mini-job actions. In order to circumvent a negligent and hostile steward and under the advice of her union confidante (a well-known veteran opportunist oppositionist), she wrote a letter concerning her grievance to the local president with a copy for the International. She showed her letter around to co-workers and they suggested she raise her grievance at the upcoming union meeting. She was encouraged by the RO exec to actually mobilize workers to go to the upcoming meeting to fight over this grievance. The upcoming meeting occurred immediately after the settlement of the contract in another company in the industry, and would be centrally taken up with their contract. Therefore, Tott would be put in the position of having to raise her relatively minor grievance at a meeting geared up to discuss the national contract. In fact, interest in her grievance waned among co-workers as attention turned to the contract.

It is important to emphasize that at each point Tott checked out her activities surrounding the grievance with the local exec, and in particular the exec encouraged her to mobilize around her grievance for the contract-centered union meeting. At the RO local meeting prior to the one I attended on 16 October, Tott was praised for her "smart" shop-floor tactics and held up as some kind of trade-union prima donna while Watson was attacked for his commandism, insensitivity and not appreciating Tott's trade-union capacity. What is disturbing is that this policy of cheers for Tott and boos for Watson was worked out in collaboration with Knox who felt that Tott should be given more leeway and that Watson should listen to her. Further, the No. 6 fraction perspectives were worked out in collaboration with Knox, including the aggressive emergence, and this at least in part set the tone for the campaign "spirit" with which Tott's grievance was tackled.

I am in agreement with Crawford's criticisms of that portion of the motion regarding the "grievance campaign" which criticized the local leadership and Knox:

"The fact that such activities were undertaken in consultation with the fraction and RO leadership demonstrates the continued disorientation and weakness that contributed to the degrading of the RO in this area to an OC. Further, we note that Knox, the senior RO member on station in the Midwest, contributed to this disorientation by failing to place the No. 6 fraction work and perspectives in the context of the West Coast RO motions." [see "NA II No. 6 Motion," this bulletin, for full, finalized motion]

Knox had been in the Midwest for a short period and may not have been completely aware of the dynamic within that local. This motion does undercut Knox's authority before he really gets started and undercuts the developing authority of the local exec who for all of their problems and weaknesses are trying to conduct themselves in a loyal fashion and as agents of the center. Nonetheless, I felt that, given that Knox and the local exec were responsible for the misguided perspectives of the No. 6 fraction and for cheering Tott on (at the expense of Watson), it was necessary to note those responsibilities in any motion criticizing Tott's "grievance campaign," though I admit that the motion I offered was much too sharp and categorical.

Hillquist, Tott and their "Oppositional Mood"

I would concur with Waters' characterization of Hillquist and Tott being in an "oppositional mood." They have a symbiotic clique-bloc relationship in which she provides the "raw material" of disgruntlement, resentment and hostility out of which he prepares a legal brief. However, he does not present this "brief" to the local exec or coherently in local meetings: instead he exploits the element of surprise and interjects in a provocative manner. For example, even after the local exec admitted that it was wrong to encourage Tott to mobilize for the above-mentioned union meeting, he made a heated intervention in the party meeting consciously trying to

inflame Tott and any other disgruntled elements.

Tott seems at times to be incapable of assimilating our politics independent of "experience." Thus, she no longer believes it is principled to support the once-favored OMO steward, but only after she personally saw his thoroughly apolitical approach to union work. Her inability to assimilate our program is linked to her reading problems which she has only recently and partially begun to overcome. For her the party is at times a prison in part because of the fact that when she undergoes deep depression she resents instructions and discipline and strikes out at the leadership which enforces the discipline, and in part the party is a prison because she does not comprehend why things are done the way they are.

Hillquist presents a more extensive list of gripes, grievances and positions although he does not present them in a coherent and systematic manner. Further, he tends to be politically pusillanimous and to rapidly retreat under pressure. The unstated proposition of history of NA II is where was Crawford (political chairman of this local during Douglas' "Labor Party" misalliances) and the TUC when Douglas was running amok? He raises the general criticism of the TUC that it devoted too much attention to providing tactical advice on day-to-day union minutiae and too little attention to providing overall strategic guidance. He also attacks Crawford as acquiescing in Douglas' deviations while there and then in New York becoming the "hard guy" hatchet man over the head of the misguided unionists. The TUC is overall indecisive until a massive political error is committed or an accumulation of mistakes leads to a giant mess--then they call in the artillery. His criticisms dissipate under the pressure of open and frank discussion only to reappear as unexpected eruptions. Tott is more open about her grievances and differences although she is openly bordering on hysteria combined with a persecution complex: "The TUC (or its embodiment, Crawford) is trying to drive me out of the movement." Hillquist was extremely disoriented when I talked to him. A footnote: while I was there Hillquist's phone, Benson's phone, and at least one other important number were disconnected for non-payment. In a local composed mainly of high-paid single industrial workers, many of the comrades are chronically in debt and live in squalor.

Waters, etc.

Although Waters obviously enjoyed the job of organizer, and did a first-rate job of energizing a demoralized local and preventing disintegration, she expressed exhaustion of trying to hold together this complicated operation through sheer good will and organizational competence. She expressed a desire for someone with more political bite, like her former political colleague from Boston, Atkins. Whatever her weaknesses, Benson, the youth organizer, seems to have grown enormously since she was in New York, in a difficult assignment. Douglas has acquired the reputation among Hillquist-Tott and other disgruntled elements of trying to get back into the good graces of the party leadership by being a "hard guy" loyalist. Clarke made solid reports to the joint II meeting and party meeting.

I regret I did not have more time to talk to either Douglas or Clarke.

--Samuels
5 November 1976

[This document has been abridged by its author for purposes of publication.]

MOTION
(on the NA II No. 6 fraction)

[The following motion was presented on 16 October at the joint II fraction meeting and the local meeting immediately afterward. The vote at both meetings was unanimously in favor.]

The NA II fraction reaffirms the authoritative RO motion and the NA II shop-floor motion, noting that this motion does apply to the No. 6 fraction. These motions will be reconsidered at the RO gathering in December.

Further, we note that the No. 6 fraction document contains statements such as "aggressive contacting," "filing a grievance and taking the initiative among co-workers," and "intervention at union meetings with trenchant points," which are in contradiction to the authoritative RO motion and the NA II shop-floor motion and cannot be considered for implementation until these motions are rescinded.

Although individual defensive actions in the rigid and narrow sense may be initiated when absolutely necessary and after consultation with the CO, shop-floor organizing and campaigns except for those activities directly dictated by such defensive actions are in clear violation of the West Coast RO motion and the NA II shop-floor motion regarding II work in this period. We note in particular that some activities undertaken around Tott's grievance transcended defensive actions in the rigid and narrow sense and were in violation of the motions. The fact that such activities were undertaken in consultation with the fraction and RO leadership demonstrates the continued disorientation and weakness that contributed to the degrading of the RO in this area to an OC. Further we note that Knox, the senior RO member on station in the Midwest, contributed to this disorientation by failing to place the No. 6 fraction perspectives in the context of the West Coast RO motion and the NA II shop-floor motion.

FOLLOW-UP REPORT
(NA II No. 6)

by Watson

25 October 1976

Dear TUC,

Samuels' visit accomplished its purpose at least for the time being of restoring calm to the No. 6 (and NA II) fraction after a tense couple of weeks. A minor tactical difference over how to proceed in getting Tott's grievance processed, and the mishandling of that difference by the fraction head, had brought to the fore (again) Tott's long accumulated resentment of, and alienation from, the RO. Hillquist appeared ready to act as Tott's lawyer and it looked for a while as if we were on the brink of open warfare.

The TUC's intervention at this point subordinated the situation to the larger disorientation of the local leadership, i.e., that the recent authoritative RO motion had not been applied to the No. 6 fraction. Thus the fraction head and the local leadership had produced a tasks and perspectives document which projected individual emergence of fraction members as TU militants via aggressive contacting, initiation of shop-floor actions (grievances), and possible interventions at union meetings, and the No. 6 fraction head and the joint fraction head had acquiesced in Tott's defense "campaign," getting cold feet only belatedly and over a minor tactical question.

The issue went into the fraction meeting in the form of a lengthy presentation by the joint fraction head and a motion, amended by Samuels [see this bulletin]. Discussion centered around the disorientation of the leadership; Tott agreed that she had taken steps (like xeroxing grievance forms to distribute to her co-workers) that were not necessary to her defense (this had been a point of dispute) and agreed with the motion. (I am aware of, and concur with, Crawford's criticisms of the motion and the way it was presented.)

The fraction also passed three other motions: 1) to separate the No. 2 and No. 6 fractions, in order to facilitate the development of the latter; 2) to hold off on further action of Tott's grievance pending further company action (at this point the question seems to have had a favorable resolution because the company has added a seventh worker to the work group to do the disputed operation, and it doesn't appear that they are going to press disciplinary action); 3) that union rep recall petitions [are] not to be signed without prior consultation with the RO. The last motion is a response to a secondary point of controversy that has been discussed at the last two fraction meetings on our orientation toward union rep recall petitions. The following motion was tabled:

"In general we do not sign shop-floor union rep recall petitions because they usually represent bureaucratic/careerist maneuvers to replace an unsatisfactory union rep with another qualitatively no better. Exceptions to this must be judged on a case by case basis. Taking a stand against clear and flagrant violations of elementary working-class principles (scabbing, vio-

lence against a union member, finking, etc.) or solidarizing with a genuine rank-and-file upsurge could be such an exception."

Tott agreed with the motion but clearly has a different thrust on its implementation, and her position is undoubtedly related to her position on critical support to "militant" union reps. Samuels suggested that someone write up something on the question for the TU conference.

The RO meeting passed the following motion on Tott:

"Understanding the necessity of maintaining RO functioning and discipline, the area RO gravely censures Tott as a result of a conscious and deliberate violation of a clear directive from the fraction head which could have endangered an RO TU implan-tation."

While it was encouraging that Tott voted for this motion, it was clear that the discussion of it and of the II fraction motion upset her (she didn't speak to the latter). Subsequent phone conversations brought out much of Tott's resentment and her fear that the RO is out to get her. In fact, however, she got off light on the fraction situation since her subjectivity and irresponsible functioning were only brought up in passing, and the local leadership and Chris took the brunt of the criticism for their disorientation.

At this point, following her trip to the Mid-West and projecting one to Toronto, she is in good spirits, has had several useful conversations with the local leadership and seems to be coming to an understanding of the politics involved in the current situation (in the first place, the party question); she agrees with Waters that fundamentally the problem is that she has one foot in the plant and one in the RO. I have a cautious optimism about Tott's future in the RO, mainly because I am convinced that she is well-intentioned and wants to stay in. But she gets in a tizzy whenever she perceives (often correctly) that the leadership is not really in control of what is going on, or when she feels that something is going on that she doesn't understand, and she has difficulty in translating her perceptions into politics and so becomes subjective, hostile, provocative, frenzied, etc. There are no shortcuts in the necessary process of politicalization: Tott has to learn to overcome her shortcomings, just as the leadership does. Anyway she and I are trying to work together to explore our differences rather than allowing them to become obstacles to collaboration. If Tott leaves the RO, or if the problems cannot be overcome, the No. 6 fraction will not be viable, especially given Redding's problematic future in it.

I would be more optimistic about Tott if it were not for Hillquist's role in all this which I think is cynical and somewhat pernicious (he tends to obscure the politics and encourage Tott's resentment, has expressed his total lack of confidence in and suspiciousness of the local leadership and has the irritating tendency of raising issues irresponsibly--the bombshell approach). We are trying to raise issues to the highest political plane, to patiently discuss

the political questions with Tott and with the other No. 6 fraction members. Tanner and Adler are about the same--Adler, as usual, somewhat depressed.

We sent fraction members to two recent union meetings which I want to report on briefly:

1) The October local meeting: we sent all four active No. 6 members because we thought the meeting was going to be quite large (200-300 minimum) because of its conjunction with the target company settlement and the interest it generated in the plant, and because we thought that it would be educational. It turned out significantly smaller, but it was educational.

The meeting was attended by about 125 people--one-half bureaucrats and supporters, about 10 or 12 known OMO supporters (six or eight from the RCP-supported caucus, two OL supporters, two Spark supporters) plus a pool of about 25 people sympathetic to the OMOs' points, and a more or less neutral "center" of about 20 to 30 people. The RCP supporters dominated the meeting with their denunciations of the target company settlement and their motion that the local go on record against it. An OL supporter mentioned in passing the need for a shorter work week (six-hour day), but liquidated into the RCP motion. The president repeatedly ruled the motion out of order (on the basis that the local officers supported the agreement!) but after a Spark-supported union rep intervened to point out that a vote was appropriate the president took a voice vote. It is unclear whether the motion passed (the OMOs and supporters were probably just louder) but in any event the OMOs proclaimed a victory and the OL supporter moved that the result of the vote be publicized to the membership and sent to the International. The bureaucrats managed to get this tabled (arguing that they didn't know the details of the agreement--which they nonetheless support!).

After a couple of insignificant points, the RCP supporters put a motion on the floor that for the ratification vote there be a sign-in list for voters and that opponents of the contract be present throughout the voting as challengers. This really got to the bureaucrats and the president abruptly adjourned the meeting leaving an RCP supporter with the mike. He called for an immediate meeting of the rank and file to discuss how to fight the sellout. At this point he was surrounded by goons, a couple of RCP supporters were physically assaulted and they were expelled from the hall (all of this took about three minutes).

The RCP supporters' intervention was unorganized and poorly executed; the bureaucracy was incompetent. The attack was not pre-planned, but was rather the work of a couple of overzealous flunkies; the actual goon squad merely expelled the RCP supporters--had they wanted to trounce them they could have. The attack, as Tott remarked, also had a racial character: the attackers were black, those attacked white and the black RCP supporters were not attacked.

In the aftermath of the meeting, the most prominent RCP supporter (who was fired by the company following the 1974 wildcat, and

remains fired) and one other unemployed RCP supporter were arrested the following day on company property (trespassing) while distributing leaflets on the union meeting and the "gangster" attack; the bureaucracy contends that the motion against the agreement failed; and the RCP supporters are pressing legal charges against the bureaucrats and flunkies who attacked them.

2) We sent an observer to the shift meeting ten days later. This meeting was rather large--85 people: one-third bureaucrats and friends, eight or ten OMOs (mainly RCP supporters, but also two OL supporters and two Spark supporters). OL motions to publicize the results of the vote on the agreement and that the union conduct an investigation of the attack and censure those responsible were ruled out of order.

RCP supporters intervened on three points: 1) That for the ratification vote there be a sign-in sheet for voters, that rank-and-file challengers be present, and that the local hire a CPA to supervise the vote. This was ruled out of order but after the intervention of the Spark-supported union rep (this seems to be his major role) on the appropriateness of a vote, a hand vote was taken and passed (with lots of abstentions; I abstained because of the point on the CPA). 2) That in the event of a rejection of the national or local agreement the local would go on strike; this was out of order because there has already been a strike authorization vote which passed (RCP supporters pointed out that this was also true in '73 but that the local was kept working for seven weeks after two rejections of the local agreement). 3) After a number of independents spoke on their individual grievances, the focus shifted to the local agreement and what it contained. RCP supporters attempted to make a motion that the local reject any local agreement which failed to address forced overtime, speedup, harassment, etc. This was ruled out of order and the meeting was abruptly adjourned.

The meeting was not dominated by the RCP supporters but rather by independents with various shop-floor beefs. There were a couple of heated confrontations between angry workers and shop-floor reps over unsatisfactorily resolved grievances.

RCP supporters went around for about half a day with a petition (which was more like a leaflet) with their three-part motion on the ratification vote and a "no contract, no work" demand. We didn't sign it because of the demand for a CPA to supervise the vote (which runs counter to the principle of democratic rank-and-file control of union affairs) and because it contained a direct lie in stating that the rank and file had unanimously voted for the motion at the shift meeting. They seem to have dropped the petition at this point.

There is a palpable lull in the plant, but interest will probably revive when the national and local agreements are concluded. I expect the upcoming meeting to be well-attended and quite heated. If the local agreement is rejected (as it was twice in '73) the RCP supporters may try to wildcat. The other OMOs are all quiet (the CLP supporters didn't even attend the local meeting--they say they thought it was the next week--or the shift meeting).

Friendly regards,
Watson

by Brule

The Mid-Atlantic II fraction is undergoing a sustained drive by the company to drive it out of the plant. The attack centers on the two key public spokesmen of the fraction, Black and Davidson. Davidson has historically been the leading political spokesman for our friends, while Black is well known in the plant as a militant black worker.

Since last February, when the company arbitrarily removed Black from a job he had held for 6-1/2 years, Black has been moved from one job to another, in violation of his seniority rights. This has exerted considerable financial, emotional and physical pressure. Finally, after this long period of time, the company selected a "permanent" job for Black--one that violates his medical restriction and that makes it extremely difficult to perform the operation, even under medication. The company is persisting in assigning him to this job. Black also sustained another, unrelated injury and has been out of the plant because of this, while the company is disputing this injury as well. Black will probably return to work imminently and be reassigned to this job.

Within the last two weeks the company has gone after Davidson. Some years ago Davidson sustained an industrial injury which severely restricts his ability to work. The specialist we sent him to, as we discovered subsequently, does a lot of work for the company. He has given Davidson a restriction but one not as comprehensive as we desired, leaving the door open for company harassment. Because of the stature of Davidson's specialist, it has been difficult to get other specialists to handle the case.

While Davidson has been regularly hassled about this restriction for several months, the company has recently given up every pretense of abiding by anything resembling even the limited restriction, provocatively assigning Davidson to a job generally recognized in the plant as impossible for him to perform and repeatedly disciplining him for failure to perform the operation.

This act has clearly defined the company's target as being our friends as a whole. If nothing else it has provided clear verification to the workers of our friends' assertions that the attacks on Black were the spearhead of an attempt to drive the MO out of the plant.

At the same time, D. Parks, the only active fraction member on his shift, has been harassed and disciplined. It is unclear whether he was initially targeted as a primary victim by the company. He has a bad personal relationship with one of the supervisors. He also had an unnecessary run-in with one of the union bureaucrats, which seems directly linked to one of his disciplines. Not wanting to make another fait accompli victim by unnecessarily raising his profile, we made a sharp retreat on his shop-floor stance and initially did not emphasize his case in our propaganda, hoping that the company would back off. However, should the company persist in harassing him, as appears the case, we will push more aggressively on his defense.

The attack on our friends seems to be premeditated and well

thought out, and quite possibly orchestrated from the company's national headquarters. From a discussion of local management which we overheard, we know that they consider our friends the only serious threat in the plant. In fact the fraction has demonstrated in the past its ability to have an impact on the work force (the last local union elections, a vote on a union by-law change, a near strike a year ago). At the same time, given the low level of struggle and the continuing atmosphere of intimidation following the wildcat in 1973 (in which many militants, including a prominent local union official, were fired by the company), we do not have a political base. Although we have considerable respect and sympathy, there is still considerable reluctance to get involved in actively defending us.

We are the only organized opposition and have a high profile vis-a-vis the bureaucracy. The local bureaucrats, headed by a fairly slick right-winger, are obviously eager to get rid of us and are undoubtedly collaborating with the company behind closed doors while formally posturing in our behalf.

What the company knows of our internal state is problematical, but they certainly picked a time to attack which is unfavorable for us. Over the past year the fraction has worked long hours with little reward. Contacting possibilities were minimal and the general mood in the plant was one of apathy and demoralization. In addition, the former fraction head, Davidson, was being worked over pretty hard by the company over his medical injury, a process that brought out his weak points and led him to be increasingly disoriented politically.

The West Coast motions noted the failure of the fraction leadership, principally the fraction head Davidson, as well as D. Jensen. As a result the fraction was placed in receivership, with Brule appointed fraction head. The absence of an in-plant fraction head has inevitably led to a certain amount of sloppiness, errors that were not caught on the spot, etc. One upshot of this was a long debate in the RO local in which the fraction as a whole was indiscriminately landed upon, thus in fact doing an injustice to the fraction members who had been the most combative and serious, particularly Black and D. Parks. The point was finally made that all fraction members should not be held responsible for the failure of the leadership.

After a long period of demoralization, Jensen, who had become increasingly dysfunctional because of his inability to live up to his own expectations, announced his decision to resign. There was initially some sentiment to demand that Jensen's resignation be accepted with prejudice, motivated by the fact that he was deserting while the fraction was under fire from the company. However, while there was no disputing the magnitude of Jensen's failure, it was noted that he had generally acted responsibly with respect to the RO: he had informed it of his state of mind several months earlier and had fulfilled an agreement to remain a member through the contract period. It had also become apparent that Jensen had become so dysfunctional that he probably would have been more of a liability rather than an asset in a defense campaign. His resignation was accepted without prejudice.

However, when the RO demonstrated its willingness to let Jensen go, B. Reubens decided to follow suit. Reubens had been drifting away from the RO for some time and had become sloppy in the plant (working unnecessary overtime, etc.). When fraction perspectives were discussed following the West Coast motions, he did not raise any of his problems. But, particularly after an unsuccessful fling as fraction organizer, it was evident that something was seriously wrong with Reubens. After being confronted, his response was to seek resignation while agreeing to stay in the plant. However, it was pointed out that Reubens' eyes, ears and input were crucial to the RO in the defense campaign (particularly since he might be the only one left on his shift). Reubens has agreed to accept a perspective of staying in the RO for at least the period of intense defense campaigning in the next month or two, and will stay in the plant for some months thereafter. It is clear that Reubens, for whom the RO's financial and time demands are increasingly burdensome, is on a trajectory out of the radical movement, although it is possible that our defense campaign might make an impact on his consciousness.

Within the plant there is genuine resentment at our victimization. A somewhat foreshortened and not all that energetic petition we circulated to defend Black in September netted 500 signatures. A large focus of our propaganda has been the role of the bureaucracy: our friends are entitled to a job just like supporters of the bureaucracy, etc. The fact that union elections are coming up makes this point more concrete. However, to put real pressure on the bureaucracy we must mobilize some section of the work force (even if only a handful) to actively defend our friends and thus cut through their isolation. Most of our support has been passive and we have been unable to implement a perspective of launching a defense committee, though it is too early to say decisively whether or not this can be done.

Given the atmosphere of intimidation, political backwardness, and the fact that our friends are only infrequently in the plant, it takes an enormous amount of time to carry out the defense work. In spite of the internal state of the fraction, the response to this challenge by the fraction has generally been good. As for the further allocation of RO/legal fraction forces: this is an open question, in part depending on the amount of momentum we build up in the plant.

Out of necessity a huge amount of time (and money) has been spent on medical problems. In general it can be said that this is not a favorable area in which to do combat with the company: not only is battling over restrictions less amenable to rallying other workers, but the company has the last word most of the time. In this instance, the local contract gives the company doctor the exclusive right to select a third-party doctor in case of a dispute. You need an open-and-shut case to win. In Black's case, the fact that his medical problems could not be objectively diagnosed (through x-rays, etc.) made it virtually impossible for us. In Davidson's case, the pro-company specialist has hurt us. Extreme care must be taken in selecting physicians. They must be willing to back us up, knowing our political convictions. If we don't tell them, the company will (which is even worse and occurred numerous times with this fraction).

We also invested resources in a complaint with the Labor Board. Reflecting the naivete of the government lawyer and euphoria over a previous victory concerning leafletting argued before the Board, we probably had greater expectations than we should have. At any rate, the Board did not file a complaint--it only agreed to "oversee" the normal grievance/arbitration procedure. So the case remains essentially in the hands of a hostile union bureaucracy, with the onus on the fraction to apply pressure to it. It is clear that to the extent that the Board is useful at all, it is in narrow areas like leafletting cases, union organizing activities, etc., rather than harassment and other areas supposedly covered by the contract. Of course, we intend to keep our case active nonetheless.

Outside the active fraction members there are two recent implan-tees with between three and six months in the plant: Jason and Quinn. They have not been utilized in the campaign. If worse comes to worst and our active fraction is smashed, we will hopefully have a future in this plant. (We will, of course, seek further implantation if possible.) In the instance of Jason, though, there is a need for further discussion to see if a long-term fraction perspective is mutually feasible.

--Brule
November 10, 1976