

of the TTU to respond to the demands of its membership will further expose them (something that is continually necessary, since they recently won an NLRB election for representation against the CWA and District 65). [see Workers' Power No. 41].

A Traffic newsletter is also planned as a way of reaching many more of the 22,000 traffic women in the downstate New York area (there are almost 8,900 in Manhattan alone).

One of the most important things to come out of the strike is the understanding of the need for women to organize. The fight against sexism is as much a part of the struggle as the fight against racism. Everyone understands that we must have an independent traffic women's group that will enable us to develop our own skill and leadership.

The development of trained rank

and file leaders will play an important role in any further attempts to join the CWA, by assuring that we control the organizing campaign and enter on our terms, not on the terms of the elitist, sexist and racist CWA International bureaucracy.

Throughout the organization of the strike and the building of a traffic group we received help and support from craftsmen in United Action and TELRUM, for which we are all grateful. In order to beat the Telephone company a movement of all telephone workers must be built, through joint activities and coalitions.

No one group of telephone workers, or no central office alone, can win our demands. The process of making links for united action and joint activities based on mutual respect has begun and will continue. ■

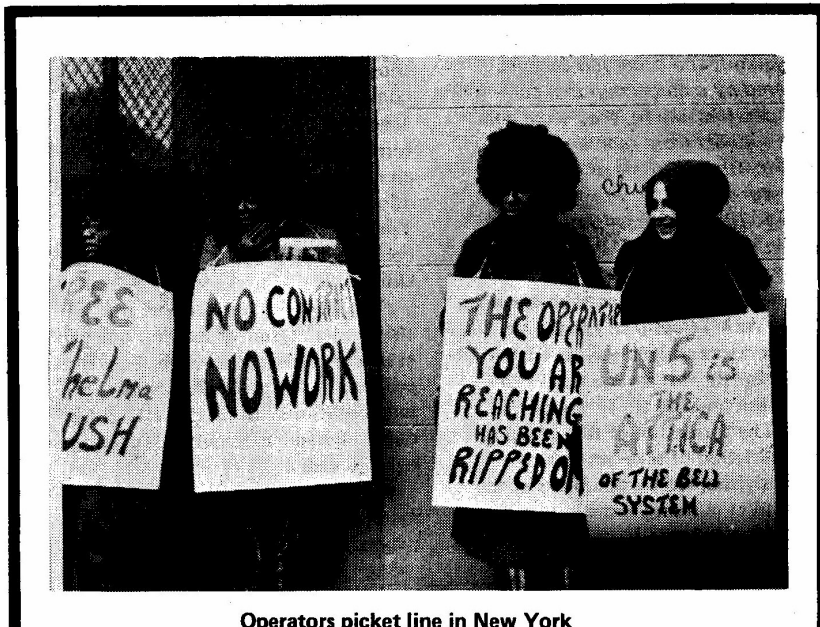
# BLACK WORKERS



## on the move

international socialists

15¢



Operators picket line in New York

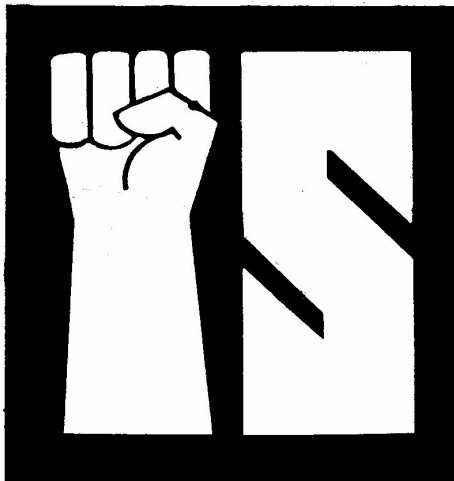
We stand for:

**\* INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM:**  
The displacement of decaying capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism ("Communism") by a revolution from below, controlled by the working class and aimed at democratic rule over all social institutions.

**\* WORKERS' POWER** as the solution to America's ever-deepening social crisis: rank-and-file committees in the unions to struggle for democratic power and to fight where and when the union leaders refuse to fight — independent political action by workers' organizations to fight for labor's needs, in opposition to the Democratic and Republican businessmen's parties — toward an independent party of the working class and a workers' government.

**\* The LIBERATION OF ALL OPPRESSED GROUPS:** independent organization of blacks and women to fight discrimination — an end to all racial and sexual oppression — the uniting of separate struggles in a common fight to end human exploitation and oppression.

**\* WORLD-WIDE OPPOSITION TO IMPERIALISM AND EXPLOITATION:** for the self-determination of all peoples — for an end to U.S. domination of the world's peoples in the interests of corporate power — for workers' revolts against the bureaucratic-collectivist (so-called "Communist") regimes — **FOR WORKERS' POWER EAST AND WEST TO BUILD INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM.**



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## Introduction

*In the 1960's the Black Movement shook the outward calm of American society. From the first sit-ins in 1960 through the heroic uprisings in the cities later in the decade, the Black masses in their anger pushed onto the stage of American politics.*

*Politically, too, the movement progressed -- from a civil rights movement knocking at the door of American society, through the development of Black Pride and Black Power, to the appearance of revolutionary currents which saw the root of Black oppression in the capitalist social system.*

*Today the Black Movement falters. The moderates are ever more timid. The revolutionary groups have failed to forge the anger of the Black masses into a weapon that can be wielded for power. Battered by judicial repression and police assassinations, once-promising groups like the Black Panther Party have fallen apart.*

*Yet behind this hesitation, the movement continues, and a weapon for change is being forged -- through the struggles of Black workers. These struggles point a road forward for the Black masses.*

*The revolutionary socialist approach to Black Liberation is based on these struggles. It is an approach completely different from that of the liberal and reformist political leaders, black or white.*

*Ours is not the road of the Democratic Party, with its vague promises of reform in return for votes. It is not the road of the Black moderate who institutes court suits but shrinks in horror from mass Black action in the streets.*

*It is not the road of the new breed*

*of Black politician who raises the clenched fist, but really wishes to use the Black voting strength as a bargaining counter to get a few crumbs from a declining economy.*

*And it is not the road of those "revolutionaries" whose strategy is to lock the Black masses into alliance with a "progressive" wing of the ruling class.*

*One way or another, all these rely on dispensation from above, not mass movement from below. Well-intentioned though many of these reformers may be, their roads lead nowhere.*

*Revolutionary socialists fight for the rights of Blacks as oppressed people -- for the formation of Black mass organizations, for the right of armed self-defense against repression.*

*But while socialists support the right of Blacks to control their own institutions, the key to Black Liberation does not lie in taking over the stagnant backwaters of a diseased society. The key lies in the transformation of this society into a socialist society of abundance for all in which the racism and economic decay which have kept Blacks on the bottom would be finally overcome.*

*Revolutionary socialists advocate a strategy for Black Liberation based on the struggles of Black workers.*

*Blacks are a large minority in the basic production industries -- auto, steel, etc. They are also concentrated in the new municipal unions. They have begun to organize against racism-on-the-job and against inhuman working conditions. With the new attacks on wages and working conditions in the "New Economic Policy," Black workers are now in the forefront of*

defense for the whole working class.

These struggles must advance to a political level. To win dignity on the job and defend their standard of living, Black workers must fight to end the wage controls, to win full equality on the job and in society, and to break away from the Democratic Party toward a new independent party of workers.

The formation of Black organizations in industry, fighting to democratize and revitalize the unions; and the initiation of independent political action by Blacks and Black workers' organizations, can be steps toward this goal.

At the same time, the economic crisis, which is driving down white workers as it is Black workers, now opens the possibility of overcoming the racism of the past and fighting together on an equal basis.

In the last few years, Black workers' organizations in several industries

have made steps in the direction outlined. Some of these attempts have failed – but much is to be learned even from beginnings which were not followed.

The articles in this pamphlet appeared in the press of the International Socialists. In the first two, organizers of Black workers' groups tell in their own words the issues and problems facing Blacks in the plants, and of the solutions attempted by their organizations. "Black Workers Move at Fremont GM," an interview with Kenny Horsten of the Black Panther Caucus, appeared in International Socialist No. 19, May, 1970; "J.O.B. Fights G.E.," an interview with Louis Smith, now facing prison on trumped-up charges, appeared in Workers' Power No. 39, August, 1971. "N.Y. Operators Organize," part of a continuing coverage of this struggle, appeared in Workers' Power No. 52, March 3-16, 1972.

## Black Workers Move at Fremont G.M.

[The largest industrial plant in Northern California is the General Motors Assembly Plant in Fremont, between Oakland and San Jose. In 1968, a group of black GM workers formed the Black Panther Caucus. A number of the leaders of the caucus were members of the Black Panther Party, but the caucus also attracted large numbers of workers not in the party.

This interview is with Kenny Horsten, founder and Chairman of the Black Panther Caucus. Eventually, management succeeded in driving Horsten from the plant (see below); he now lives in Detroit. In turn, the Black Panther Party did not follow up the promising direction represented by the founding of the Fremont group.]

Q: Would you describe the general situation in the Fremont plant?

KH: When the plant moved from Oakland to Fremont in 1963, General Motors stopped hiring black workers. They didn't come out and say it, but they set a policy that they would not hire anyone who lived outside the Hayward-Fremont area. Well, at that time there were no black workers living in Hayward. They were all living in Oakland.

A group of brothers demanded that this practice be stopped. Management's statement was that they were having too many problems with black workers: "they were always gambling

and fighting, they never came to work on time, they never paid their bills, they were always drinking on the job, and in general, they were just unreliable workers."

This was the position of GM up to about 1965. But as production increased and GM found they had to increase the workforce, they started to slowly bring in more black workers.

Q: What about racist practices once black workers do get hired?

KH: Any black worker in any UAW plant or in any union can tell you that racism does exist. In Fremont it is so subtle that some workers do not relate to it. They've even got a vice-president who's a black guy, who stands up and says that it does not exist. Our shop chairman and international representative took a position six years ago that there was no racism in the plant.

But now with the increase of black workers at Fremont, naturally the problem has come to the front. We find that the majority of newly-hired workers are black. They hire about five black workers to every two white workers. But after that ninety-day probationary period, we find that there is only one black worker left, and those same two white workers are still there.

Q: Are there some jobs that are reserved for white workers only?

KH: I think you should say "reserved for black workers." There are such jobs mainly in the body shop, usually referred to as the sweat shop, the dark room, or the hot house. And they call it this because the body shop

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is where you do the welding and the sparks fly around. You get burned, and there is no ventilation. It's so thick you're actually breathing that gas. That's where most black workers go.

Or they are in the pit where the cars roll overhead and you have to work underneath, where the oil from the transmission and the gas and water drip down into the pit. For eight hours a day you have to drag around in that, and the stuff they've put on the floor that's supposed to absorb the oil. Well, after a while, they've put so much of it down and you're dragging around in all that wet gravel and stuff and you're cussing all that stuff that's dripping on you - in your face, in your hair, and all over you.

And then there's the spray area on the production line where you have to climb inside the cab of a car or a truck and spray paint. You know how small it is inside of a car and you have to wear a mask because when you spray it comes back on your face and gets into your nose and eyes and ears. You can hardly breathe through that mask and if you don't wear it, then you choke on the paint fumes.

**Q:** When it comes time for promotions and getting better jobs, is there clear preference by the foreman and management for white workers?

**KH:** Yes. It is shown by the degree to which management gives the black workers the hard jobs because they know they will have to stay there because they have nowhere else to go. They give the easy jobs to white workers because they know that if they give them the hard jobs, that they'll just quit and go someplace else.

As far as getting out of the pits, the body shops, or the spray booths, management has a provision in the contract that says they retain the

right to job assignment and this means they can assign you to any job they want to. If you want to protest, you have to go through the grievance procedure, which might well take anywhere from 30 days to 7 months and by that time, they might come around and take you off the job.

**Q:** What percentage of skilled jobs are held by blacks?

**KH:** There are about 300 or 400 skilled jobs and I think we have seven blacks. And they came within the last three years.

### Working conditions

**Q:** You raise two issues in describing these degrading, dehumanizing conditions. First, of course, is fighting against blacks or chicanos being given systematically the dirtiest and hardest jobs. The other is fighting against the conditions themselves so that no one is forced to do these jobs. Is there any general struggle over working conditions?

**KH:** There is a section in the contract on work standards which is the only clause we can strike over after the union goes through procedures. Say an individual is protesting a job; usually it is in the soft trim or the body shop. He files a grievance. The grievance is processed and it takes months before he gets a reply to it, or before he hears anything else about it.

Then there may be a settlement which works this way: if you've got ten guys working in that body shop and all of them are breaking their ass doing a job, then one of them might write up a work standard grievance. Then, if he is the fifth man in line, after months the settlement will take the work off him and put it on the ninth man in line. Then the ninth



man will have to turn around and write a grievance and management will stick the work on the first man or something like that.

**Q:** What about some of the broader political issues? What is the feeling in the plant about inflation, repression, the Nixon administration, and the war in Vietnam? What's the feeling there?

**KH:** The broader political issues are almost non-existent in our union. I think that these issues are almost non-existent in just about every union you have in this country, because of the bureaucracy of the union leadership. By consolidating their power the way they have, they decide the direction in which the workers will go on the broader issues. Now when I say isolated, it's not like the guys don't know

what's happening. They do know what's happening because they read their newspaper wherever they live.

If there's any position taken by the union, it is set down by Walter Reuther in Detroit in the form of a letter, and he informs the rank and file what their position is. They are able to do this by directly and indirectly discouraging the rank and file members from attaining union leadership or from even actually participating in any political program other than the Democratic Party.

They set up an organization called the Political Action Committee and the COPE Committee and all these other committees. All these are political committees that are geared for the Democratic Party. Nobody else, no other direction, no other way, and

there is nobody inside those organizations that is going to take it from that. If they try then they're out. Simple as that.

Q: How many women work at Fremont?

KH: Very very few. I think there might be 25 or 30 out of about 5,000 workers.

Q: That's not the office sections?

KH: No, that's in production. There might not be that many women. I'm just estimating.

Q: Are there any women in the caucus?

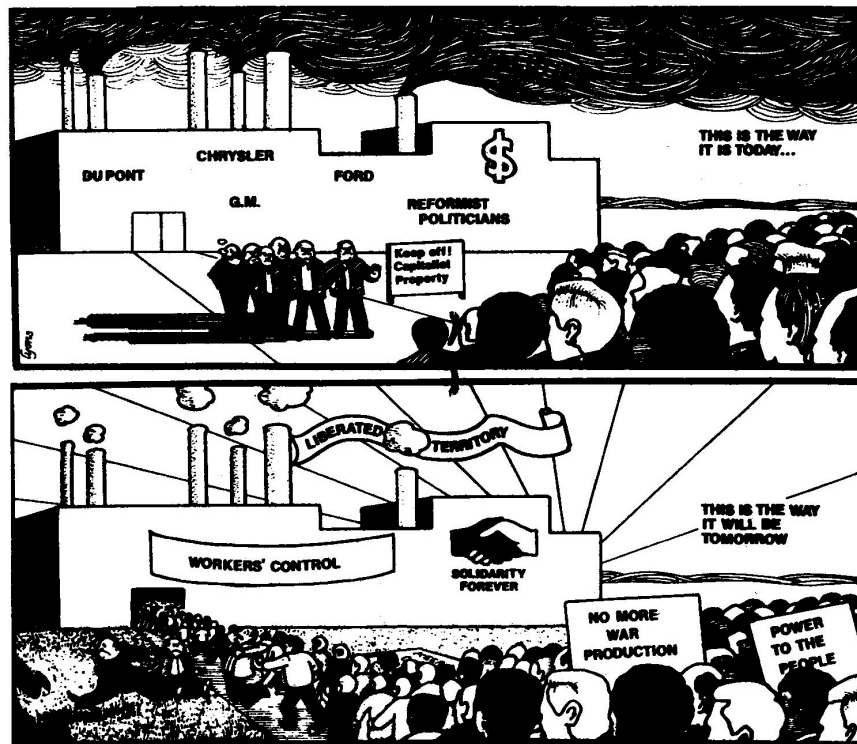
KH: At this time we're engaging upon bringing some of the women to the caucus, but they do not want to participate because of that fear. Well, they don't know yet. Most women out there have families and are working because they need the money and they don't want to be bothered with politics. That is not just the women. That's the majority of the men too. So naturally they aren't going to want to deal with the situation either. We have to start raising these questions.

Q: Does the caucus have as part of its program of demands anything regarding women's liberation, hiring of women?

KH: Well, we point out the large number of women in the workforce in this country and how, in effect, that the women are being deprived of the right of equal employment with equal pay. We demand child care centers and women in union leadership positions.

Q: What about the UAW Women's Bureau?

KH: It is headed by a woman who is obligated to Reuther and that is just like setting something out in the middle of the ocean and leaving it there and hoping that it floats back to



Reprinted from Black Panther Caucus newspaper, March 1970.

land. That's the way it's set up. Now this is the only union that has, believe it or not, a Women's Bureau. But what it deals with is pollution and conservation. They don't deal with women's liberation, and it's going to be kept that way.

But it's necessary to deal with these issues because in Detroit you have a lot of women working in factories. Whereas out here, other than in the aircraft factory in Los Angeles, women are almost non-existent in the UAW plants, in Detroit you have a large percentage of women workers.

Q: A tremendous amount of speculation exists within the radical move-

ment about support for Wallace among white workers. A lot of people thought that it wasn't just a sign of racism, but was also a sign that white workers were unhappy with the unions, with the Democratic Party, and so on, and that because of the unrest among white workers, Wallace was able to demagogically gain some support among them.

In Fremont, there is an actual Wallaceite Caucus functioning inside the GM plant. What exactly do they do, not only about racism, but also when it comes to the question of general workers' issues, production conditions, speedup, and so on? What sort of

guys go into that Wallace caucus; Is it guys who are militant on plant issues, or are they reactionary not only on the race question, but also on plant issues?

KH: The Wallaceite thing only grew up out of the Presidential campaign and before that, it was the Goldwater groups. So you see, the Wallaceites are the latest group that has sprung up and they dealt with some issues that were relevant to the workers, but they were so small. Once or twice they came up with questions about what was the union doing with the money, where were the finances going, but all this came about in the local union elections that were held in June, 1969.

They mainly appeared during the Wallace campaign and were stirred up with the help of the local union leadership.

Now the Wallaceites were never an effective group. They were just a small group of racists. The majority were just poor whites that were out trying to protect their interests, too, because they believed the same story that management and union leadership were perpetrating, and we see these poor whites as being fooled and tricked into believing that the blacks were out to take their jobs.

Q: What are some of the activities that the Panther caucus has engaged in?

KH: Well, we have had two anti-war rallies and the last election came up in June 1969, and myself and some other brothers in the caucus ran for office. Even though we lost; it caused a large turn-out. If we had gotten the same number of votes two years ago, we would have won office.

Q: What percentage of the votes did you get?

KH: I think I got 500 or 600 votes

and some other brothers got 400 or 500 votes. The winners got about 900 votes.

A lot of repression has come down. There's been a lot of harrassment and intimidation, even to the degree where guns were brought into the plant by management and planted on members of the caucus on several occasions. There has been material that has been planted in brothers' cars -- stolen stereos and tape recorders -- to intimidate these brothers and to get them to sign statements. So we find a lot of black workers, older ones, who do not want to relate to that kind of retaliation; they're not ready for it, yet. So this is why we have younger black members in the caucus and there are a few white and chicano and Chinese brothers in the caucus.

Q: Of course, the most effective form of repression in the plant is economic. We understand that you were recently fired. Could you explain how they worked this?

## Harassment

KH: Well, first of all, management has compiled a dossier on me dating back to 1963. From 1963 up until 1968, there were some minor infractions of their assinine shop rules, and I was disciplined for them. And then my record was clear. I probably would have had a clear record right now if it hadn't been for the caucus. I guess, because it wasn't until after the start of the caucus that I've been disciplined systematically. It has averaged out to every two months some kind of disciplinary action has been taken.

Q: For example?

KH: Spitting on the floor, not obeying direct orders from management.

Q: What kinds of direct orders did you not obey?

KH: Well, we were working a lot of overtime and I would ask for permission to go home because I didn't want to work a certain night, and the foreman would say, yes, that I could go home; and then the next day he would say, "Hey, where were you at. I didn't tell you to go home." So, out the door. In other words, there's no redress right there. The foreman said, you're wrong, and he's right, and you are out the door.

Q: Do you find any problems involving blacks in the Black Panther caucus because the caucus also takes in whites?

KH: No. You see, we hold political education classes and we make it very clear to these brothers before they come into the caucus that if we're going to engage in a struggle, we're going to engage in a struggle to overthrow the General Motors Corporation and the avaricious businessman and to run out the bureaucrats and the racists and the fascists and the union leadership.

Now in order for us to do this, we can't be talking about the color of a man's skin, about whether or not he can stand beside us because we see that the union and management use this as a tool, a very effective tool until now, to keep us apart; not just in the unions, but in the communities and this is one of the problems that we deal with from the beginning. We clearly explain and show why it is necessary for us as workers and revolutionaries to deal with that problem of racism.

Q: How did you get involved in politics?

KH: That's kind of a funny thing. First of all, I was born in Detroit and my father was one of the old CIO or-

ganizers.

After I got out of the service, I went into school -- of all the schools, San Francisco State. I really intended to be a social worker. But after I really began to examine some of that shit that I was taking -- a course in political science, which was really, really, really fucked up -- I just found myself working in a factory, something that I said that I would never do.

My old man used to have to work two jobs; like he worked at Dodge Main and Ford River Rouge Plant, and still we never had enough bread to make it on. Every time we needed shoes and shit like that it would be next week's pay-check. And I used to ask my old lady how come he's working 16 hours a day, and he can't feed a family of five as well as he should. We were just as poor as our other neighbors.

And he used to try to explain it. **How the rising prices of food, of clothes, and the fact that black workers had to accept lower pay than these other cats, even though they were doing the same kind of work, how he had to commute farther than the white workers, how it was like dog-eat-dog to get a job and to maintain a job in a plant because there were a lot of poor whites being brought up from the South to do all that hard work and there was always that competitive thing there.**

## Racism and capitalism

Q: When did you join the Black Panthers?

KH: I joined the Party in 1968. I had a lot of questions that were unanswered that didn't begin to become answered until I got older and went into it. And with a lot of reading,

talking to different people, having a lot of discussions with different members of the Party, I began to understand about the exploitation, the avaricious businessman and what role they played in the capitalist system.

All of that has to do with why my old man had to work two jobs for us to barely get by and there was only a family of five of us; why we had to live in a rat-infested house; why his checks wouldn't always buy enough food. Most of our food at that time constituted basic black community diets. There were only biscuits and gravy to eat at the time that he was laid off because he wasn't able to work in a foundry at Ford or he wasn't able to do this or that.

One time I remember my old man got fired off his job and was ashamed to tell my mother about it because he knew we needed the money and he was too ashamed to tell her and they had a big hassle over it and I never understood what they were arguing about for a long time.

All along the wall of our house or any house in that area, you would see rat holes. When my father did work those two jobs, we would eat fairly good, but when he lost one or lost both, and Ford would lay him off two or three months out of the year even though he had seniority, we would have to sit back and tighten up the belt again.

All these things, these questions, that were unanswered at that early stage in my life, but now they are answered as to why it happened. Now I know why it happened and I also think I know at this time how to deal with them.

Q: And that's really what this whole struggle is about?

KH: Yes.■

# J.O.B. Fights G.E.

*[The huge General Electric Plant at Evendale, an industrial suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio, reflects many of the moods and problems of the American working class. Its five thousand factory workers are organized mainly into the UAW.*

*As at so many other plants across the nation, the workers at GE Evendale are beginning to come to grips with two fundamental problems facing American Labor: racial injustice and a union leadership that refuses to fight for its membership. In response to these two problems, black UAW members at GE have formed an organization called JOB.*

*The following is an interview with the chairman of JOB, Louis Smith, conducted by members of the Cincinnati International Socialists.*

*Smith was later tried on trumped-up weapons charges and is now free on appeal. The International Socialists are actively organizing defense against this attempted repression.]*

**WP.** What is JOB, how was it formed, and what does it stand for?

**JOB.** JOB is an organization for the total betterment of black workers. We were organized solely for the purpose of instituting fairness in hiring, to discourage discriminatory practices on the part of both the company and union, and to eliminate intimidation of black workers on the part of company or union.

We found that these practices were so important in the running of the company and union that black workers had nobody they could possibly turn to other than themselves, in order to find some relief from the pressure. So we formed an organization which is known as Justice, Opportunity, and Betterment, bet-

ter known as JOB, to try to implement the Equal Opportunity Law of 1964, to make the company and union adhere to the law.

We have had an uphill fight and we have often been harassed as to our philosophy. The company and union have tried to eliminate us. That I, as chairman of JOB, have been investigated by the FBI and the Defense Department, simply shows me that when black workers try to achieve equal opportunity, the government will try to silence them.

Since we started JOB we have found out that the white worker is as much the victim of this harassment as the black worker and suffers from the same set of conditions. But the white worker has been reluctant to be outspoken simply because he feels through his racist indoctrination that he is better off than the black worker. And the company has made some alliance with the union officials to continue their racist philosophy in order to keep the workers in their present position.

We have a membership (card carrying) of 800. There are possibly 1200 black workers at the company. So I would say that we have a substantial amount of black participation in the philosophy of JOB. I would characterize this as meaning we have the support of the black worker.

In a lot of instances we also have the support of the white worker, because they are seeking leadership to openly and forcefully change their conditions as well.

## Union Inaction

**WP.** What would you say are the major problems facing most workers out at GE?

**JOB.** The conditions that all of us face at the General Electric Evendale plant is that management has systematically done things to degrade the union and the philosophy of unionism.

We have seen the union officials in some instances to be in accordance with the philosophy of top management, allowing management to implement any type of program that they so choose. This is detrimental to all of the workers.

As to speed-up etc., we have at the GE plant what is known as "efficiency and effectiveness". This means that the company tells you how much work you should do per day. The union is in complete agreement with this.

Here again you find a conspiracy. The union officials do not attack the company's dictating to us as to how much work we should do. If you do not put out as much work as they say you should put out, you are reprimanded. If you continue to follow this trend you will be discharged from GE.

The company can claim this is an excuse to eliminate anybody at will and the union will tell you "All I can do is file a grievance and we will try to fight

it in the grievance procedure."

The percentage of grievances won on behalf of workers is so small that it cannot be calculated. And the grievance procedure is very drawn out in any case.

But the grievance procedure is the only tool that the union has agreed upon to use to get redress on the actions taken by management. The union officials continue to choose this avenue even though it is so very ineffective. I think the union knows its ineffective.

This is one of the reasons why I say that the union is conspiring with the company. Because if the union officials were completely sincere and concerned about the workers' welfare, they would find other more effective ways of trying to resolve our grievances.

**WP.** What are the specific problems of black workers? We know that in the auto industry, for example, it's very common for a black worker to wind up in the foundry, the dirtiest, grimeiest, most physically exhausting work possible. Could you draw any parallels to that at GE?

**JOB.** Yes, it's the same identical thing at GE. Blacks have the lowest paying jobs in the GE complex. Blacks are



normally the last to be hired, first to be fired. They're denied promotion and advancement by a conspiracy on the part of both the union officials and the company.

As far as comparisons to a foundry, we have what is called a bailer house. That's where all the trash and dirt is dumped, burned, eliminated or discarded in some manner. Black workers have that particular job. Its a filthy, dirty job and we are trying to make inroads as to equipment, clothing, and heat during the winter months.

We have a job classification system which starts at R-12 and runs to R-25. 85% of the black workers are employed between the 12 classification and the 16 classification, from 17 to 19 you have 10% blacks, from 19 to 25 its 98% white and 2% black. The union is doing nothing to rectify this situation because they have been indoctrinated by the power structure that this is the way things should be.

### Struggle in the unions

**WP.** What is the workers' attitude toward the union leadership at the Evendale plant?

**JOB.** The black workers' attitude is that he's not being properly represented and that the union is racist and that the union officials use racism any time there's going to be any election.

**There are many white workers that are dissatisfied but they haven't been introduced to any form of leadership that would be any better, that would deal with the betterment of all workers, so they go along with just having a union. They're non-participants in union affairs,**

union meetings. I would say maybe 60% of the white workers are dissatisfied with the present union.

**WP.** It seems from your remarks that JOB, rather than setting itself in opposition to the labor movement, seeks to become a very important part of the labor movement and to change that movement. Would you comment on that?

**JOB.** The labor movement, as far as black workers are concerned, is the only avenue we have of achieving any economic or social betterment in this society. We recognize the fact that we are constantly bombarded by the bosses and labor officials telling us what kind of job we will have and that they both work together to keep us down.

Our philosophy of unionism is that we support all workers in their struggles against the bosses: if I'm denied an opportunity the bosses will deny them an opportunity later on down the line. See, bosses and managers know what the labor movement is capable of doing. They know that we, the workers, are the people.

**There's a slogan "Power to the People". We intend to try to implement that philosophy. Because, whether black or white, we are all workers and we should decide what actions our society shall take.**

This is why JOB is so determined to implement our philosophy. Some people have tried to categorize us as a racist type of organization, which is completely untrue. As an organization we do try to uplift the black worker, to help him understand that he is a worker, and of course, we try to implement the law of unionism throughout our total society. ■

## N.Y. Operators Organize Against Racism, Sexism

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*[Most telephone operators are women, and in the cities, most are black. Thus they are doubly discriminated against in our society. According to a 1971 report by a Federal agency, while women make up nearly half the work force in telephone, they are relegated to the lowest-paid, most monotonous jobs, with no opportunities for promotion. Further, one third of all black workers in the Bell system are employed by the New York Telephone Co., where 80 percent of the black workers are women and are mainly employed as operators.*

*In late 1971, a group of women in New York Telephone began fighting back against their conditions, staging a walkout and other job actions. Hampered by membership in a company operators' union, they were able to gain support from rank and file groups in other sections of the telephone workforce.*

*The following article is taken from the continuing Workers' Power coverage of their fight.]*

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New York Telephone Traffic women (operators and clerks) have been meeting for the last several weeks to form a rank and file traffic women's group. The formation of this group is the culmination of several weeks of strike activities, led by operators at the 108th Street building and supported by operators at other buildings [see Workers' Power No. 5].

The strike itself, although it did not win its specific demands, is con-

sidered to have been a major victory by the strike leaders. The second walkout in several months at 108th St. over the questions of racism, sexism, and general harassment, the strike put management on notice that operators will no longer tolerate any sort of crap thrown our way. We will no longer sit there passively, "picking up the lights" no matter what they do.

In addition, several of the worst management personnel have requested transfers as a result of the walkouts. 108th St. has won a reputation as a building that no one in management wants to take on.

Beyond the newly-won self respect, and the recognition that we have the power to strike fear into the hearts of those who oppress and exploit us, has come a firmer recognition of what is needed to carry on the struggle. The formation of a rank and file group is an important first step in the continuation of our fight against the New York Telephone Company and its company union, the Telephone Traffic Union.

The TTU did not support the strike; as a matter of fact, no one can ever remember a time when they supported any action to change our rotten conditions. In fact, the TTU has not even had a membership meeting in over 20 years.

A petition has been drawn up demanding full membership meetings in which business can be conducted. Although people are fairly skeptical about the possibility of actually getting a meeting, the hope is that the failure