



LABOR PERSPECTIVES

E.C. Document

I.S. CONVENTION DOCUMENT
NOVEMBER 1978

I.S. CONVENTION DOCUMENT

LABOR PERSPECTIVES

I. INTRODUCTION

For a decade the IS has been committed to building a rank and file movement in the unions. It was the core of our strategy for building a revolutionary workers party in the U.S. If revolutionary socialists could establish themselves as fighters and leaders in the struggles of the day, they could in the long run, build a revolutionary workers organization out of the best fighters in the rank and file labor movement. In line with this proposition we watched for signs of an emerging movement as we established our roots in the working class. We thought we saw the beginnings of a mass rank and file upheaval in the early 70s, but it lost its momentum. The IS continued its work in industry and the unions, work which would eventually pay off in establishing many of our cadres as leaders and respected fighters in their plants and locals. But, the level of class struggle was low, the response of the workers to the crisis slow. There were struggles, but they were generally small and localized. For the IS, times were hard. Sticking it out in the working class cost the IS two splits and the loss of some talented cadre. For a period, the political perspectives of the IS seemed up in the air.

Now things are changing for the better. An emerging rank and file movement, mostly taking the form of a fight to reform the unions and make them fighting instruments of the working class once again, is now visible. As yet, it is small, its leaders often inexperienced, its state of organization dangerously low. But it is real, nonetheless. For us, the first signs of this new movement came with the TDC and then the TDU. Then came the Sadlowski campaign. And most recently the events in the UMWA. We have been participants in, or in close contact with, these and other events. We are now in a position to assess our experience, to examine the forces in society that are molding this new movement, and to point toward the next steps for the IS and the union reform movement. This document will attempt to do that.

II. TRENDS AFFECTING CONSCIOUSNESS

General Economic Crisis

Crisis returned to capitalism, on a world scale, in the late 1960s. For business it meant an end to nearly three decades of prosperity and expansion. It meant declining profit rates, slumping productivity, and the return of recessions on a serious scale. For the working class and the labor movement the new economic trends meant an end to a continuous growth in the living standards, and particularly the income, of organized workers. Even before the employers seriously resisted sizeable wage and benefits settlements, inflation began to undermine the real income of all workers. Real wages actually sank, for the first time in years, in the early 70s. Unemployment grew with each recession, seldom returning to pre-recession levels during each subsequent recovery.

The return of economic crisis, however, affected labor through more than the general trends it created. It forced business and capital to change their habits. It created new movements of capital, new attitudes among owners and managers alike, and, therefore new problems for labor and the working class. One of the earliest and most obvious changes was

an intensification of various attempts to raise the sinking productivity rates of most industries by attacking working conditions more and more. Part of the traditional set-up between the corporations and the union leadership had always been the agreement that in exchange for continuous improvements in wages and benefits, the unions would allow management to retain control over working conditions. Much of the shop floor power won by the big industrial unions in the 1930s was given away during the 40s and 50s. Along with some technological changes this deal produced productivity increases averaging over 3% a year in manufacturing during the 50s and 60s. But during the 70s this rate fell to an annual average of little more than 2%. So, industry after industry began its attack on existing working conditions--this was the first phase of the Employers' Offensive.

These trends produced somewhat of a rebellion in the early 70s. In trucking there was the wildcat of 1970 and the formation of TURF, a short-lived opposition group in the IBT. There was the 1970 Postal wildcat. Wildcats were general in auto, particularly at the newly re-organized GMAD plants. If anything was the symbol of the first phase of the employers' offensive it was certainly GMAD. There was a long strike by N.Y. Telephone workers, which began as a wildcat but was made official. In the coal mines the wildcat movement continued to grow, and one of the first political strikes, the Black Lung strike, in years was carried to a fairly victorious conclusion. This strike movement throughout industry looked like the birth of a rank and file movement that would sweep away the old bureaucratic leadership. But, with the exception of the UMWA, this didn't happen. In fact, the movement virtually disappeared after 1971 with the imposition of wage controls, and a brief return to rising real wages during the early part of the economic boom of 1972-73.

The recession of 1974-75 was a shocking experience for the American working class. Only the oldest workers had experienced anything like it. But, in the short run it did not bring rebellion. Rather it brought fear and caution. In the short run, the recession both forced and allowed the employers to up the ante on their offensive, as we shall see. In the long run, however, the return of cyclical crises has undermined the security that workers could expect from capitalism. It, along with future recessions, will be one of those experiences which force the working class to organize in its defense and bring into question the viability of capitalism.

Trends Undermining Union Power

If the economic affects of the crisis called for greater union resistance to a growing employers' offensive, they also re-enforced pre-existing trends that tended to undermine the size and power of many unions.

For one thing, the crisis excellerated the movement of capital away from the traditional areas of union strength in the northeast and midwest toward the south and southwest. In search of improved profit margins, industries with relatively low capital requirements, like clothing and textiles, simply picked up and moved south--or abroad--to low wage, non-union areas. They sought not only low wages, which would tend to disappear as areas became more industrialized, but the higher productivity that comes with the weakness of union traditions and the accompanying acceptance of management's right to management. There were, of course, plenty of tax breaks to boot. Eventually, even capital intensive industries, like electrical, electronics, rubber and to a lesser extent, auto developed "southern strategies." In these cases it was a matter of

locating all new or expanded facilities in the south. GE and Westinghouse, both traditional bastions of CIO strength, now boast a non-union workforce composing about 50% of their total. The rubber companies operate several large non-union plants, as does GM, in the south. Newer industries, such as the explosive semiconductor industry, operate non-union from the start. Most of the decline in the proportion of unionization, and now the absolute numerical decline in union membership, is the result of this movement of capital. By showing that they can keep unions out in the south, however, these corporations have encouraged resistance to unionism, and even union-busting throughout the country.

Another trend that has weakened labor's strength has been the trend toward a growing concentration of capital through corporate mergers. For one thing, this growing concentration of capital places more resources in the hands of any given employer with which to resist union demands or to go on the offensive against the union. This was one of the factors behind the boldness of the BCOA this year.

The merger trend also undermines union power in another way. The mergers of the late 1960s and of the second half of the 70s are not generally along any rational industrial lines. Although general monopolization certainly continues, these mergers run across industrial lines. The mergers are, of course, rational from a financial or investment point of view. But unions that once dealt with the management of a company they had completely organized, now find that huge divisions of that company are organized by other unions or not organized at all--most cases a bewildering combination of both. The IAM or UAW may strike the aircraft producing division of United Technologies, but that corporation still has assets and income from half a dozen other divisions, each an industrial giant in its own right. Even more difficult can be a situation such as Essex Wire, which is itself the result of several previous mergers, and is now a division of UT. Because it is a product of earlier mergers Essex is only partly organized and that part by a dozen or so different unions. In effect, these unions bargain solely on a single plant basis--meaning that a strike at any one plant has about the same effect on UT as a BB gun on an elephant.

The merger trend, itself, tends to re-enforce the movement of capital to the south and southwest, since upon merger the least efficient operations, almost always the old ones in the northeast or midwest, tend to be closed down and any new ones built in the sunbelt. In the wake of industry's move southward, follows the migration of other traditionally organized jobs. In particular, construction, trucking, and communications all show a gradual shift toward the south and southwest. In some cases this brings unionism to the new area; more often it creates a non-union sector of the old industry, as in both trucking and construction. And once again, this encourages non-union operations in previously unionized parts of the country, and union-busting as well.

The decline of unionism in America is also, of course, a result of conscious policies. First, it is the result of the policy of American capital to keep unions out once the move southward has been made, to extend this to union busting in a growing number of cases, and to press the attack further on the union where there is organization. But it is also the result of the policy of most of the American labor leadership, a policy of cooperation, complacency, and conservatism that prevented the organizing of the unorganized. Only after years of defeat is the labor bureaucracy timidly reversing its attitude toward organizing, and then with

an exaggerated dependence on the effects of legislation (which was also defeated because of timidity) and pretty much the same bag of discredited tools.

The decline of union power in America, now visible to all, is having an important influence on the consciousness of activist unionists. It discredits the union leaders who have allowed it to happen, and it points to a simple answer with explosive class struggle implications. Massive organizing drives will heat up the class struggle and will require new methods of struggle. Among the activists and reformers in the unions there is a general and growing awareness of both these facts.

The Rise of the Employers' Offensive

The employers' offensive did not begin at once in all industries, it was not a plot or conspiracy, and until recently was not really organized beyond any one industry. But the employers' offensive was the inevitable result of the crisis of capitalism, for which reason it was inevitable that it become general, affecting virtually every industry and job. In speaking of an employers' offensive we mean more than that employers try to get more work for less money, for that is always true. Rather we mean an organized effort by employers to change the balance of power and, thereby, to intensify their normal efforts to raise the rate of exploitation.

Scientific management, speed-up, management perogatives, etc. have been with us for decades. The capitalists have never been kind, considerate, or even the slightest bit fair. But during times of general business prosperity, the pressures on capital to bleed the working class are less. During the years from WWII to the end of the 1960s a deal was worked out between most employers and most union officialdoms. In essence the deal said that the employers would provide a more or less continuously growing level of income and benefits, and in return the union leaders would guarantee labor peace and give management the right--within certain limits--to control the workforce in such a way as to continually increase productivity.

In most industries the employers offensive began as a push to increase productivity by pushing the deal to its limits, and in some cases to renegotiate those limits--particularly the already eroded power of the union on the shop floor or work place. The object, of course, was to hold up slumping profit rates. (The employers' other main protector of profit rates was the raising of prices at a faster pace in order to keep profit margins large, or, in the case of industries like steel, at the average level for all industry in order to hold onto investors.) But the 1970s have been a period of below average capital investment in real plant and equipment, itself a result of the crisis and the sickness of capital, and relatively little technological advance. Thus, increases in productivity have more typically come from the hides of the workers. Even where technology is involved, the introduction of new techniques is used to simultaneously increase the workload in most cases. On the average, however, productivity increases have been well below the levels of the 60s, so this aspect of the offensive continues and grows, leading to more aggressive attacks on unionism, and increasingly on unions themselves.

The employers' offensive on the shop floor and at the work place shows up in government figures on the cause of strikes. In the 1960s about 15% of all strikes were over "plant administration." That was about 700 strikes a year. In the 70s, the number of strikes over "plant administration" has risen to 1,200 a year, which is 22% of all strikes. A

significant proportion of these strikes are "unauthorized." The labor leadership did not encourage these strikes, rather it attempted to suppress them with considerable consistency.

In most cases, the labor leaders granted the concessions demanded by the employers. In some cases, like trucking and steel, this meant contractual changes; in most it just meant that the union leaders continued their policy of allowing management a free hand, while management increased the use of that free hand.

In the late 60s and early 70s the effects of inflation were more visible than the employers' offensive and the way to fight it more in line with the standing deal between labor and management. During those years, the size of contract settlements grew significantly. In 1967 the average annual increase in wages and benefits over the life of the contract was 5.1%. By 1970-71 it was around 9%. From the vantage point of labor this was a response to inflation. From that of capital, it was a cause and it had to stop. Hence, Nixon's New Economic Policy and wage controls in 1971. The employers were no longer willing to pay a higher price for a free hand at the work place; now they wanted it both ways. There was not yet any attempt to reduce wages, just to hold down increases to levels more in line with real gains in productivity. This, of course, was the basis of the old deal, but now in order to collect, the employers had to get tougher at the bargaining table as well as at the work place. In general the employers have succeeded in holding the line on settlements and, since 1975, even reducing their size somewhat.

Up to the recession of 1974-75, the employers' offensive in most industries was just a matter of turning up the heat rather than breaking the rules. There were some exceptions. In construction a large scale union-busting drive was mounted early in the 70s. To most workers and union officials alike, it seemed just a case of their own boss getting nastier--something peculiar to them, and something that might go away in time. While there was resistance--wildcats, contract rejections, and some rank and file organization--there was not the consciousness that this was, in fact, an employers' offensive, that is, a self-conscious act of class war. It would take a series of events--a recession, the miners' strike, the defeat of labor law reform, etc.--to demonstrate just how widespread and how serious and persistent the employers' offensive was. It would take these events to show even a small layer of activists in the labor movement that their own individual experience, with their own boss and union leadership, was now something faced by most workers, that a state of active class war existed.

The Heritage of the 1960s

The working class began to experience the effects of the economic crisis and the employers' offensive as an era of mass social and political movements drew to a close. The anti-war movement, the Black liberation movement and the women's movement had died or been crushed as mass movements by the early 70s. But they produced far reaching results that profoundly affected the working class--even though working class participation had been minimal.

The anti-war movement played a role in the military defeat of the U.S. by the Vietnamese people. That movement helped make anti-war sentiment the majority viewpoint. That sentiment lasts to today and extends to potential military adventures in the Mideast or Africa. While there appears

to be a rise of cold war sentiment, aided by the Carter Administration, and George Meany's faction of the labor bureaucracy, most of those active unionists old enough to have lived through the second half of the sixties have a general anti-war outlook. Among Vietnam Vets this outlook seems even stronger. This outlook is not a well worked out or consistent anti-imperialism, but it is the basis for the development of one.

Most workers today still hold a narrow, pro-America, and basically U.S. nationalist outlook. Sharp changes in the cold war, or explosions in the Mideast could obliterate the experiences of the Vietnam era. But at the same time, other forces are undermining a pro-war or pro-imperialist outlook among the more politically aware. Multi-national corporations are now a highly visible force, one very much involved in the employers' offensive. Increasingly, it is clear that these and other sections of capital stand behind much of U.S. foreign policy. While few people who haven't been through the Left in America understand or even know about the economics of imperialism, there is skepticism and cynicism about how interested these corporations are in "human rights."

Even more far reaching were the effects of the social movements of the 60s, particularly the Black and women's movements. First, both of these movements had a deep effect on the consciousness of Black people and women. Black consciousness became synonymous with aggressive pride. While oppression and discrimination remain, and Blacks fall far behind whites in economic conditions, Blacks did succeed in strengthening their position in some better paying industries, notably auto. Blacks are also a more powerful force in many unions and in the labor movement generally than ever before. These changes, dealt with in more detail in the Black Commission's document, have also affected the way whites view Blacks. Racism, of course, is still the dominant ideology and practice among white workers. But more and more white union activists understand that Blacks cannot be counted out of any new movement within the union and, furthermore, that this means recognition of the fight for equality for Blacks. Black and conscious white unionists still have to fight to make that recognition the active practice of the labor movement, but the general recognition of Blacks as a part of American culture and society that is a result of the Black Liberation struggles of the 60s aids that fight.

Another aspect of the Black movement of the 60s, however, has tended to retard the re-emergence of the struggle for equality. Unlike the anti-war or women's movements, the Black movement was suppressed by force and violence, as well as by political means. The suppression of the riots of the late 60s, the murder of a number of leaders of the Black Panther Party and other liberation groups, these brutal facts are not easily forgotten. For Black people to step out in a militant way carries greater consequences than for almost anybody else in this society. For this, and other reasons, there is a lingering caution among Black workers. There are struggles, and certainly Black people are not about to return peacefully to the old days, but like those of whites in the unions, they tend to still be within "acceptable" limits, within channels. The pressures of the crisis and of the attack on the gains of the 60s from the Right will change this, but for now the development of a Black movement is slow.

The women's movement also left its mark on American society and on the labor movement. The details of this are in the Women's Commission document. To summarize, women have become a much greater proportion of the workforce. While most of these gains have been in traditional "women's

jobs" there have also been important gains in industries and occupations previously closed to women. The notion of equality for women has become a more or less official part of the ideology of the country. A good deal of the content of women's liberation has become part of the consciousness of large numbers of women. As a result women play a more aggressive role in many unions than ever before.

The attacks on the social gains of the 60s have been focussed particularly on gains made by women--abortion rights, affirmative action, alternatives to the traditional family, child care, etc. As a result of this, and of the stronger position of women in the workforce, a new women's movement has begun to appear. This is being fed by, and in turn is encouraging, women's organization within the unions. The growing emphasis on organizing the unorganized and on various legislative coalitions between labor and the women's movement will also continue the slowly changing attitudes of men in the working class toward women.

In summary, it is possible to say that the movements of the 60s have had a significant impact on the culture of America and on the consciousness of sections of the working class. Blacks, women, and other oppressed groups as well, have far more pride and aggressive consciousness than in the past. Changes in the objective position of women and minority groups in the workforce, combined with what appear to be permanent changes in consciousness, mean that they will play a far more central role in the development of the reform movement in the unions, the organization of the unorganized, and all the other major developments that lay the basis for a revolutionary workers movement. The attitudes of white workers will change because Blacks and women are in a better position to force these changes and because, in the face of the crisis, no one will be able to go it alone. The movements of the 60s have changed the rules by which politics are played in the American labor movement.

The Nixon-Ford Era

Changes in consciousness within the working class, however, are by no means a simple or homogenous process. For if the movements of the 60s created important changes of a more or less permanent character, there have also been enormous forces working against those changes. If the 60s can be characterized as a period of progressive social movements, the 70s must be understood as a period of reaction to those movements. We don't propose to summarize the history of that period, but rather to state the aspect of that reaction that is most important to the development of a workers movement.

Virtually every Right Wing strategy for the past decade has been based on one central belief--that the white working class had abandoned its traditional adherence to liberalism. Specifically, that forced to choose between racial integration and equality and its traditional economic liberalism, white workers, union and non-union, were choosing racism. For Nixon this meant the basis of an electoral strategy, for Wallace a third party attempt, for the New Right a majority base for ultra-conservatism. This observation has received a lot of evidence in the past ten years. "Hard hats" beating upon peace demonstrators, white flight to the suburbs, the 1972 elections, white working class resistance to busing and affirmative action--not in the south but in strongholds of Democratic Party liberalism and industrial unionism.

The facts and the trends are undeniable. Racism continues to be a

strong force in the working class, one that divides and weakens labor. Sexism as well divides the class. There is a working class audience for today's attacks on women's rights as there was for the attacks on the Black movement several years ago. But the particular move to the right among white workers in the late 60s and most of the 70s was based on a certain perception, a false one, but a very traditional one. Many white workers believed that it was Blacks who were the primary threat to their living standards. Pre-existing racism made this perception possible, but there was more to it than that. Whites saw Blacks as threatening their jobs, their seniority and therefore their income through affirmative action. Blacks on welfare were thought to be the number one cause of rising taxes, another threat to income. Black pride was thought to be arrogance that was causing a rising crime rate. Equal opportunity in housing was seen as a threat to property values and to the safety of neighborhoods. Busing, it was said, would downgrade the quality of education for white children. In other words, Black people and their liberal white allies were responsible for real or potential erosion in the living standards of working class whites. Right wingers of every stripe have harped on these themes in their attempt to perpetuate this way of seeing things.

These attitudes still prevail, but there are forces working to undermine the apparent validity of the facts on which this outlook is based. In a number of industries, affirmative action has been a fact for a number of years and the resulting changes in seniority a long standing fact. In steel, for example, seniority is now based on time in the plant, rather than the old, discriminatory time in department. This has been in effect for four years. This means, that among whites, there is now a considerable base of younger whites who would suffer from a return to the old system, a large body of somewhat older whites who have not really been hurt by the changes, and a decline of the negative effects of the changes among older whites. Thus the material incentives for returning to the old system are declining and those for perserving the existing system are growing among whites as well as among Blacks and women. It would be too glib to simply assume that there will be no further reaction from the whites, but it is clear that the perception of more and more whites that affirmative action is a material threat is one the decline. The Bakke decision, of course, encourages white backlash, but it is likely to have more impact where affirmative action is newer and still appears as a threat to the majority of white workers.

Other trends that were thought to be evidence justifying racism have declined. Crime rates are generally down. Suburbs don't become slums when working or middle class Blacks move in. And the evidence is that after busing has been in effect for two or three years very little changes in the education system and most white people adjust to it--although there is still a movement toward private schools and attempts to get tax breaks for them among working class whites.

More important, however, is that the real threats to the living standards of all workers are now becoming more and more visible. The capitalist crisis, the employers' offensive, and the political assaults on labor are detailed throughout this document and won't be repeated here. The point, however, is that the perception that it is Blacks who are the main threat to white living standards is necessarily being replaced by the perception that it is, in fact, the American ruling class that is the real threat. Racism and racial polarization are still strong and will remain

strong. And, of course, people can and do have contradictory ideas. They can develop economic militancy and even political radicalism while still holding racist views. But among the more active and conscious white unionists the choice between the two perceptions is clearer. Since it is these activists, of all races and sexes, who are becoming the leaders of economic militancy and reform sentiment, it is their ideas that will increasingly form the ideas of broader sections of the class, and that points in a positive direction, even if it is one with great difficulties in front of it.

There is, of course, another aspect to the Nixon-Ford era--Watergate and its aftermath. Much of the puss of America's political system came out for all to see. The general notion that politicians are a corrupt lot was confirmed. The methods a supposedly democratic system uses to perpetuate itself came into clear view. And Watergate set off an era of disclosure--CIA, influence peddling, Bert Lance, etc. While most people may not pay much attention to the detail of these disclosures, the rot of the system is visible for those who become politically active in the course of defending or trying to change their unions.

Conclusions

The American working class entered the second half of the 70s with a series of experiences and changes that play a vital role in the development of genuine class consciousness. America had been defeated in war by a tiny Asian nation and by the opposition of much of the American population. Massive social movements had changed the make-up of a good deal of the workforce and transformed the consciousness of the oppressed section of the working class. A President had been forced to resign in disgrace. There had been wage-price controls and then a jolting recession. The real enemy of the working class, the capitalist class, had launched an offensive against working conditions and even wages and benefits. The brief flirtation of some white workers with the Republican Party had ended as a failure, and many of the reasons for that move to the right began to recede in importance. Forces for unity and resistance were growing, but organizers were needed to make them real. The force that appeared not to have changed was the labor bureaucracy. Clinging to all the old ways, tied to a deal that no longer worked, the American labor leadership faced the second half of the 70s as though nothing had changed, when in fact almost everything but them had changed.

III. POST-RECESSION SITUATION

The Declining Labor Movement

General trends in the economy had been reducing the proportion of union members in the workforce. The recession brought on the first absolute decline in union membership since the 1920s. In 1976 and again in 77, union membership dropped. But even this numerical decline does not tell the whole story. Many of the unions suffering the greatest decline are the industrial unions of the CIO. Even where membership figures do not show a decline, this often masks a decline in that section of the union on which its power and influence are based. Sometimes this even means a decline in the union's share of the workforce and, therefore, of production. This is true in trucking, rubber, construction, electrical, and even in coal mining where the union is growing numerically even as it

looses its share of production. This erodes bargaining power. Even the failure to grow means a loss of power greater than the mere numbers imply. New industries, with products that compete with older ones, such as plastics, undermine the position of existing unions.

The declining proportion of union members, on the one hand, and the rise of greater and greater concentrations of capital, on the other, means an overall shift in the balance of power that affects much more than collective bargaining. It has greatly altered the balance of power in politics as well. The "American Politics" document discussed the effects of this change. What it means specifically for the labor movement and for the labor leadership is that for several years a largely invisible and undetected decline in their political influence was occurring. The debacle of 1972 could be explained by divisions and George Meany's conservatism. In any case, no one expected much with a Republican administration. This change in the balance of power did not become totally visible, at least to the labor bureaucracy, until the Democrats came to power.

What was not recognized was that the change in the balance of power was not just a matter of the New Right or of a revival of the Republican Party, but change in that balance within the Democratic Party as well. The formation of corporate PAC's, the intensification of lobbying, and the billions of dollars that went into these and other efforts were directed towards Democrats as well as Republicans--54% of PAC money went to Democrats in 1976.

Business was the first to perceive the change in the balance of power. It understood that this was not a change in the potential power relationship between the working class and capital, for while capital is concentrating, it is also growing at a slower real rate. But it is, nonetheless, a real change in the state of organization of capital and labor. Understanding this, business decided to make further assaults on the organizational state of labor--weakening existing unions, resisting organization, busting unions.

Employers' Offensive: A New Stage

The recession was a shock to business as well as to labor, and a very costly one at that. Furthermore, it was clear from the start that the recovery that began in 1976 was a weak one. This, combined with the weakness of labor gave business both the motivation and the opportunity to intensify their offensive. In industrial and bargaining terms, this new stage of attack saw the spreading of three main forms of attack.

The first was a further intensification of the attack on working conditions. As industries began to call back their employees from layoff, they were able to reorganize the work so that visibly fewer workers performed more work. A familiar example of this was the attempted GMization of Chrysler in 1976. Usually more lax than Ford or GM, but always in worse financial shape, Chrysler decided to impose the sort of discipline associated with GMAD. This was mainly expressed by increasing discipline and, often by refusing to settle grievances over disciplinary matters. This get-tough attitude played a big part in causing the strikes in the summer of 1977.

Another, and much newer, increase in the offensive was the rise of "take-away" or "give back" demands on the part of management. One of the assumptions of the long-standing deal between labor and capital had been that each contract was to bring somewhat more for labor. Now management

was saying, no, the unions had to give up some of what they had already won. Take-back demands were important in aerospace, newspaper, rubber, coal and many other industries. In almost all cases they are backed up by an aggressive willingness on the part of the company to take a strike as long as needed. This too is clearly a new attitude. In effect, this new approach was the first step in actually breaking the deal with labor.

Related to this is the growth of a uniquely American form of "wage drift." Wage drift refers to a non-contractual deal that, in one way or another allows wage rates to change. In Britain, wage drift was always upward and was one of the reasons for the strength of the shop stewards there. In America wage drift since the recession has become negative. A professor at the Harvard business school estimates that in private industry wage drift due to non-contractual changes--in rates, incentives, etc.--has produced a downward trend of 1-2% in the last two years. This wage drift is truly a give-back, since it is done with the complete cooperation of the union.

Probably the most significant new element in the employers' offensive, however, is union-busting. Some union busting had been going on for a number of years, notably in construction and newspapers. In both those industries union busting, at an earlier stage, was encouraged by the untypically high wages and strict working conditions associated with craft unionism. Ironically, the craft unionism that had brought such good conditions, and therefore often justified their exclusionary and racist policies, made union-busting all the more feasible. Craft unions traditionally squabble with each other as much as with the boss--until recently, over 60% of all strikes in construction were jurisdictional. They also don't always even recognize each other's picket lines. This has been particularly true of the printing trades. So, those old unions, the ones that survived even the vicious employers' offensive of the 1920s, began to lose ground during the 70s. In the mid-70s, union busting of various sorts spread to other industries in varying degrees. Trucking, beer, retail food, rubber, electrical, and numerous individual situations within a great many industries--Essex being an example. Preparation for even greater assaults on existing unionization began as various consulting firms began giving seminars and publishing books on how to break unions. Most recently, and highly alarming, is the organization of the Committee for a Union Free Environment by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This Committee is headed by R. Heath Larry, the former chief negotiator for U.S. Steel. The evidence mounts that the capitalist class in general is now committed to the most fundamental break on the deal with labor, a break with the toleration of unionism altogether. Of course, not all corporations are ready to make their move. While it seems fairly clear now that U.S. Steel, for example, has a long range commitment to de-unionization, it is not about to take on the USW while the leadership of that union provides it with such loyal service.

The employers' offensive has become conscious, organized, and general. This, however, does not mean that it is identical or as intensive in all industries or occupations. By and large, giant capital intensive corporations, such as GM, U.S. Steel, etc. have upped their attacks in more or less traditional ways, seeking primarily to increase productivity. They do not, as yet, need to totally break the deal with the labor bureaucracy, just to change some of the limits of that deal. But it would be a mistake to think, as much of the Left in America has for years, that these corpora-

tions prefer unionism because the union leadership helps discipline the workforce. The truth is they tolerate unionism so long as the union leadership can deliver productivity growth--the discipline is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Also, in those types of corporations the balance of power in collective bargaining terms has not altered so much as it has for society as a whole. It is very unlikely that the companies could succeed in busting the UAW in the Big Three, or the USW in Big Ten Basic. But if labor continues to decline and to lose its general influence, matters could eventually change for the worse. One thing is clear. If union busting is to be stopped some big changes in the way labor thinks and operates are needed.

Public Sector Crisis

The general crisis of capitalism has, of course, produced a fiscal crisis in its public sector. From the vantage point of capital and of capital accumulation, most of the labor expended on the public sector and most of the goods and services produced there are unproductive, waste in an economic sense. In the main, the billions of dollars spent on the various levels of government are a drain on capital accumulation.

Under the conditions of the 1950s and 60s (U.S. domination of the industrial capitalist economies and the world monetary system, expanding trade, etc.) the drain on capital caused by the Permanent Arms Economy actually helped offset the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and was therefore a positive factor in capitalist prosperity. But under today's conditions (inflation, high unemployment, intensified trade competition, unstable monetary relations, falling profit rates and strains on the credit system) arms and most other state spending is one more barrier to investment and, therefore, economic expansion and capital accumulation.

The capitalist class has been aware of this, in one way or another, for many years. To minimize the drain on capital, the ruling class has for the past ten years attempted to shift the burden of taxation even further onto the shoulders of the working class, and to draw the line on spending that benefits the working class or oppressed groups in society.

On the first count, shifting the tax burden, they have had a good deal of success--through the policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations. All taxes, of course, have risen enormously. From 1965 to 1975, for example, tax revenues of all levels of government (federal, state, local) rose from \$144.9 billion to \$331.6 billion. The share of this tax burden carried by the capitalist class has actually declined during that period. In 1965, corporate taxes composed 18.9% of all tax revenues; by 1975 its proportion was down to 14.3%. Income taxes, which are paid almost entirely by the working and middle classes, rose from 36.5% to 43.4%. Sales and property taxes remained proportionately the same. If social security taxes (or "contributions," as they are called) are added to this, the shift of the burden to the working class is even greater, for these virtually quadruppled in that ten year period--and are now rising even faster.

While this general shift, along with the simply enormous absolute increase in all taxes, has been enough to spark a taxpayers "rebellion," it has not done much to relieve capital in an era of crisis. For even though the Republican administrations--and the Democrats as well--helped shift the burden and held the line on any new social programs, they could not deal with the effects of inflation--that ever-present characteristic of

the crisis--on the budgets of all levels of government. At the federal level, the share of various anti-poverty, welfare, education, social security, etc. programs grew from 19% in 1969 to 55% in 1976. The costs of administering and the payments required for the existing programs had quadruppled. High unemployment rates, and the shift of jobs from the northeast and midwest caused welfare and unemployment rolls to rise. But inflation, which rose 55% in that period, also provided a continuous upward push on federal spending.

Big business was not, and still is not, ready to cut off the poor, or to reduce their conditions to Asian levels of poverty. The burning cities of the late 60s are still too vivid a memory, and too great a threat. Their strategy, as yet, has not been massive assaults on social spending, but peripheral assaults directed at holding the line. Instead, they have been content to let the older industrial cities of the U.S. decline and decay by minimizing the proportion of the total tax revenue of the country (federal, state and local) that flows to the cities. This is done by lobbying against sufficient federal aid to the cities, or to locally financed education, on the one hand, and extracting state and local tax give-aways as blackmail for not moving South, on the other. The matter is made worse by the fact that business/capital has been moving south and even further eroding the tax base of the old industrial cities.

Yet it is precisely the cities that foot the biggest part of the total public employee payroll--consistently 52%. Thus, the bulk of the effects of the crisis faced in the public sector by ruling class pressure to hold down costs, falls on the cities. In particular, it falls on local and city employees. Local government employees comprise 59% of all civilian government employees. And, local employment has accounted for well over 60% of the total increase in public employment in the last ten years.

The fact that the public sector crisis falls sharply on city workers, rather than more generally on all public workers and on the beneficiaries of social programs, is in part a result of America's peculiar federal system. In countries where funding for welfare, public works, publically owned capital projects (roads, bridges, etc.), and so on, are more centralized, as in most European countries, the crisis would appear more muted at this stage. In fact, the more extreme sorts of situations, such as New York City or Cleveland, could be avoided simply by greater and more consistent federal aid. But, as we have pointed out, that would tend to shift public funds toward the working class and away from capital at a time when capital is experiencing a crisis in its ability to accumulate. So the resistance of Big Business to this approach is intense.

The political expressions of capitalist insistence that public employees foot the bill for their problems are numerous and all point to increased difficulties for public employee unionism. In the case of New York, the capitalists took the surprisingly "un-American" step of by-passing those institutions designed to cover-up who really runs the show, by stepping in directly and handing out orders. Big MAC and the dictat it handed to the public worker unions was unusually crude, but nevertheless, effective means of holding down labor costs in the public sector.

The taxpayers "rebellion" is another tool in the hands of the capitalists, particularly since it is directed mainly at property taxes, which are the only significant source of internal revenue for the cities. Big Business opposed Proposition 13 because it went too far and threatened

future increases in income and business taxes at the state and local level that would actually increase the burden on business over the years. But, business is, in fact, quite active in agitating the taxpayers "rebellion." For example, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce dispatched Shearon Harris, its chairman and also a GM director, to Michigan to join in the tax-cut crusade there. He made it clear that the Chamber was launching a campaign to use tax-cut sentiment and organizations to cut down government spending. Obviously, this is another direct pressure against the public employee unions.

Then, of course, there is the general right-wing offensive and the New Right in particular. Aside from the role played by the New Right in the tax-cut movement, they also have at least one organization specifically directed against public employee unionism. The Public Service Research Council, which appears to be part of the complex of New Right organizations that center around Richard Viguerie, is dedicated to destroying these unions. When it appeared there might be a postal strike, for example, they went to federal court to get an order requiring the Postal Service to fire anyone who struck and requiring the government to maintain postal service by using federal troops.

Finally, there is the emergence of a new wave of fiscally conservative Democratic Party politicians. Boiled down, their program is a combination of tax-giveaways to keep business in the older industrial cities and states and "efficiency in government" by which they mean nothing more than wage gouging and speed-up for public workers.

Taken together, this is an impressive and alarming array of forces lined up against public workers and their unions. The lay-offs of 1974-75, the concessions extracted in city after city, a drop in real wages of public employees in the last ten years, all attest to the success the offensive against public workers is having already. What, then, lies ahead and what can be done about it?

From one point of view the public employee unions would appear to be in good shape. They are among the few unions that are growing, and growing rather fast. AFSCME passed the million mark this year, making it the largest union in the AFL-CIO, and the AFT has about a half million members. The huge NEA shows continuing signs of unionism and even militancy, and other unions, like the SEIU, are also growing. But even these apparently optimistic figures are deceptive. Some of the long term growth of these unions is simply a reflection of the growth in public employment in areas already organized. Of course, there is organizing, but in recent years this has tended to mean mergers or successful raids on existing associations, such as the CSEA in N.Y. State. While the move from association to genuine unionism is progressive, it does not really represent a change in the balance of forces. Collective bargaining, as opposed to legislative pressure, is still non-existent for many organized public workers and weak for others, in spite of the progress that has been made. Striking, of course, is illegal for most public workers.

The weak position of public workers is compounded by the vicious state of warfare that exists between the major public employee unions. The AFT, led by Albert Shanker, and AFSCME, led by Jerry Wurf, each leads a small coalition of other unions engaged in public employment in a battle against the other. There are raids, fights over the recruitment of existing associations, such as in N.Y. State, and competition in new organizing drives. This fight does not stem from any real differences over bargaining

strategy or techniques, but over political differences that have little to do with bargaining. In one sense Shanker and Wurf represent two wings of American social democracy: Shanker standing with Meany and the ultra-cold war, anti-affirmative action wing, and Wurf generally allied with the more liberal elements in labor, such as the UAW. Shanker appears to be more the aggressor in this war, but neither side shows any interest in a truce. The situation is scandalous and potentially disastrous.

When it comes to protecting the interests of public workers, the differences between Wurf and Shanker are more apparent than real. In fact, they share the same fundamental strategy and approach when it comes to union affairs. Both Shanker and Wurf came to power in their respective unions and built their reputations in the labor movement on one fundamental point--their rejection of the old public union image as the beggar on the door of the state legislature or city council or board of education. Both set about to organize the unorganized--quite successfully in the 1960s, and to win genuine collective bargaining, also with some successes in those days. But when the going got tough, they reversed themselves. Both Shanker and Wurf have explicitly stated that they can no longer win in collective bargaining so they must shift the emphasis to the political arena. To be sure, there is a more aggressive approach to politics than in the old public union pressure tactics. But direct action, the strike, work place organization, all have taken the back seat to lobbying and electoral activity. The results of this strategy have ranged from pathetic to disastrous. Disunity and disagreement were responsible for the failure to get a national collective bargaining act, one of labor's less noticed defeats in the 95th Congress. On the electoral end AFSCME in particular took much credit for the election of Maynard Jackson in Atlanta and of Michael Dukakis as Governor of Massachusetts, both of whom turned, almost immediately, on AFSCME, forcing unsuccessful strikes in both cases. Then there was Kansas City, where AFT and COPE-supported Councilmen, Education Board members and the Mayor, fired 200 custodial workers who honored an AFT picket line--not one of the labor-supported politicians opposed or even criticized this action. The events of 1978 have shown the same, unbroken pattern, in city after city.

If the political strategy of the major public employee unions has been a flop and their behavior in organizing drives a scandal, their functioning at the bargaining table can only be described as surrender. AFSCME, AFT, NEA, SEIU and the other unions representing public workers consist of countless thousands of separate bargaining units. Most of these bargain on their own in isolation, without much help from the national union, except the advice of a staffer at the District level. Locals in this situation are in a bad position to win much unless they represent the workers in a service vital enough to have real leverage--sanitation, transportation tend to have this sort of clout. So, even under the best of circumstances, with a militant, dedicated local leadership, bargaining is difficult. In fact, things are even worse than this. First, the national policy is generally not to fight, not to strike. So, the first advice the local is likely to get is "cool it." In Atlanta, both before and during the strike it took a good deal of maneuver to get any support from the national level of AFSCME. Additionally, since large bargaining units like New York City tend to set a kind of pattern for other cities, the policy of surrender there spreads. The incredible losses suffered by public employees in the past few years must be attributed to

the policy--including their so-called political strategy--of the top leaderships of these unions, in particular both the Wurf and Shanker variants.

The leaderships of these unions have, so far, been unwilling to understand that the attack on public workers in an integral part of the overall capitalist offensive. It will not stop and it is not simply a matter of the momentary state of this or that particular budget. In fact, except for a few places like Cleveland and NYC most cities and states are well into the black again. But, as one AFSCME economist noted, "They seem to be fighting us whether they have the money in the budget or not." They are doing this because behind the liberal politicians at the state and local level, as well as in Congress and the White House, are some very insistent and powerful businessmen telling them, in various ways, that the public sector, or at least its cost, must be permanently reduced. One of the few public utterances of this sentiment was in the Wall Street Journal, which called for the virtual dismantling of the federal budget--except for defense, internal security, and social security. On the state and local level the form it often takes is the rising demands by business for increased tax give-aways--not to move into that area, but as a bribe to stay there. This means, of course, someone else must pay the taxes or costs must be reduced. Proposition 13 type moves mean that no one else is willing to assume the burden, and intensified the business-initiated push to reduce the public sector as a proportion of the economy.

Not understanding this, or not admitting it, the leaders of the public employee unions allow the locals to find for themselves, and generally treat bargaining as though it were nothing more than a local or at most state-wide affair. From that point of view no strategy for success is likely. And indeed no observable change in understanding or policy appears to be coming from the existing leadership.

Some public workers have decided not to wait. Strikes among public workers were on the rise in 1977 and 78. In the summer of 1978 a virtual strike wave swept American cities. Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Louisville, Memphis, San Antonio, New Orleans, and others saw strikes. Almost all of these began as wildcats. All were viciously opposed by the city administrations, many of which were elected with the help of the public employee unions. Virtually all of the strikers, or those who started the strikes, were in the kinds of occupations that do have some clout--sanitation, transportation, and firemen for the most part. More often than not the strikes lost or were a draw because they remained isolated due to opposition from the higher levels of the union involved. A strike wave such as this, supported by the entire union, would have been a different matter.

These strikes point to real dissatisfaction and the desire for change. Other important developments show the same thing. At the conclusion of the 1978 AFSCME Convention a women's caucus was formed. At the AFT Convention some of Shanker's more outrageous cold-war moves were defeated. But generally, given the level of dissatisfaction that must exist, what is most amazing about these unions is the almost total lack of any serious opposition to the incumbent leadership. In the AFT older opposition elements have either made peace with Shanker--at least on the basic questions of organizing, bargaining, and political tactics--or folded up their tents altogether. All that remains of a once sizeable opposition is the United Action Caucus under the direction of the

Communist Party. In AFSCME the women's caucus is the first sign of any type of on-going opposition, but obviously it cannot substitute for a broad opposition based on changing all of the central policies of the union. It is rumored that the CP is setting up an opposition group, but that is likely to be small and sectarian like the UAC in the AFT and the NSWRFC in the USW. In other areas of public employment, where the pressures of the offensive are not yet as great, federal employment and the Postal Service, opposition slates have or are challenging the top leaders and in some measure their policies. But in the AFT and AFSCME-- nothing.

The solution to this problem lies in two directions. One, of course, is the pulling together of the activists from the strikes of the last couple of years. But these strikes are local and like the strike movements of the early 70s may not produce any organization within the union. Also, they are not all represented by AFSCME. Within AFSCME and the AFT, however, there are also an unusually high proportion of political radicals and socialists of various types. The lack of any real opposition in these unions is, in part, a testimony to the disunity and directionlessness of the Left. To be sure, various Left groups do their own thing. Usually this is resolutions over various lofty political questions of the day. This approach is exemplified in different ways by both the CP and the SWP. While it is important to raise questions like the Bakke decision and to fight for the rights of women and minorities in the union and on the job, to do so without organizing and preparing for a change of the basic bargaining policies and eventually the leadership of the unions both guarantees frustration on the political questions and continued defeats on the economic front. The Left is divided, for the most part, on positions, strategies and tactics derived from past experience and not from careful consideration of the new situation that faces the working class, labor, or public employees in particular. There is an opportunity, and a crying necessity, for this form of sectarianism to end. The Left, or at least the more sane and less sectarian elements of it, could provide the core for a broad opposition movement, overlapping and allied with the various movements of the oppressed, such as the AFSCME women's caucus, in both the AFT and AFSCME. To do so requires only a modicum of perception about the real problems facing the unions and their members--rather than lengthy debate over the questions of the past no matter how real they may be or seem to be. We don't propose to write the whole program for such an alliance, but it is clear that it must center around turning the unions' policy toward a nationwide fight on the bargaining level, a truce and rational plan for organizing the unorganized, a strengthening of the ties between the white collar and blue collar sections (put crudely, one has clout, the other a bit more of the politics), a commitment to the struggles of the oppressed, and the training of a new leadership in the course of the coming struggles. If the Left could take some steps in this direction in these unions, it might begin to reverse the situation there and also to give the Left some credibility in the eyes of other active unionists.

Response of the Labor Bureaucracy

Everything was changing. Everything, that is, but the theory and practice of the labor leaders. They held on to the old ways. Within this context, however, the labor leaders did attempt some tactical shifts

in response to the changing situation. The first such shift was at the bargaining table in the late 60s and early 70s. Seeing that trying to catch up to inflation by simply increasing the wage settlements, or even by adding COLA provisions, would meet too much resistance--and finally meet wage controls--there was a push to shift the emphasis in contracts to benefits. Part of the long standing deal was that the basic size of contract settlements was determined by the economic state of the corporations. Within that framework, the union negotiators were free to haggle over how to split up the given total settlement. The attempt to push up the size of the settlements was short lived and, in any case, ended with wage controls. So, there was a shift in emphasis from money to benefits. Benefits as a percent of gross average earnings in the Big 3 auto contracts rose from 21.4% in 1965 to 33.6% in 1974.

But the benefits strategy also had its limits. The cost of major benefits, in particular medical insurance plans, rose faster than almost anything else. In the period of a few years, the benefits strategy, too, became too costly to the corporations. Still unwilling to fight, the labor leaders turned increasingly to their main alternative strategy--politics. Just as the balance of power between capital and labor was beginning to shift, unfavorably, and just as many white workers began to move to the right in a conservative response to the social movements of the 60s, the labor leadership decided that what they couldn't or wouldn't win at the bargaining table, they could win through political channels. The Humphrey campaign of 1968 saw one of the biggest labor efforts in years. But Humphrey was defeated. By 1972, the labor leaders were split--over Vietnam and over a liberal commitment to civil rights. Meany boycotted the elections, actually giving backhanded support to Nixon. The McGovern campaign was one of the worst defeats ever for the Democratic Party. It seemed that the most liberal elements had captured the party machinery and reformed its structure. They were taught a lesson. The Democratic Party was abandoned by those forces that really make it work--sections of the ruling class and the labor bureaucracy in tow. In a couple of years the real bosses of the party returned from their brief exile, the more radical forces made peace or retired. Labor launched its campaign for a "Veto-proof Congress." The Democrats increased their majority, but still no victories in material terms.

While the results under the Republican administration were few, labor had constructed what appeared as an impressive political machine. All the modern techniques had been mastered--computerized mailing, massive phone banks--more and more members, usually local officials, brought into activity at election time, and the lobbying efforts of the AFL-CIO and many individual unions seemed as slick as any. As 1976 approached, all hopes became pinned on a Democratic victory. All the past failures could be blamed on Nixon and Ford. Now, however, there was the chance for a Democratic administration and a Democratic Congress. This one-two punch would save the labor leaders from their cul-de-sac in bargaining. Full employment programs, national health insurance, increases in social security, unemployment benefits, and workers' compensation, and other legislative gains would take pressure off the contracts by spreading the burden among the entire capitalist class.

Legislation, it was hoped, would also solve another problem, that of increasing labor ranks once again. The labor leaders were aware that their declining proportion of the labor force was undermining their power in

politics and bargaining--even if this awareness came late. During the 70s organizing efforts were increased. The number of petitions for representation elections was up 2,000 a year by the second half of the 70s. But the number of elections won was down from 57% in 1968 to 49% in recent years. This was a sign of growing employer resistance--combined with the continuing commitment of labor to its worn-out, legalistic organizing techniques. Labor hoped to change this through legislation--common situs picketing for the building trades, labor law reform for the industrial unions, and a national bargaining rights bill for public employees.

As in 1972, labor entered the early stages of the 1976 election period disunited and without a common strategy. Meany, as usual, was committed to the number one candidate of the permanent arms economy, Henry Jackson (anyone who doesn't think that the capitalist class operates in the Democratic Party, check out this character). For the liberals there seemed no candidate. They would have liked Kennedy, but at that time Chapa quidic wasn't much of an alternative to Watergate. First the UAW and then the other liberal unions latched on to Jimmy Carter. Carter was an unlikely hero for liberals, but he was quick to make promises, he was not part of the Washington "establishment," and anyway Humphrey was too old and sick. So, the Democrats returned to the White House and the Congressional majority was increased.

But, as we know, the results have been a disaster. Not one of labor's primary goals has been achieved. All of this is detailed in the American Politics document and won't be repeated here. The conclusions we need to draw here are two: 1) the capitalists succeeded in foiling labor's efforts within the Democratic Party as well as in the White House and Congress, the master's voice was heard; 2) no pressure has been taken off of the contract settlements and the bargaining process. Each of labor's attempts at a new strategy--still within the limits of the old deal--had failed.

The Rise of the Reform Movement

There have always been reform movements in the unions when labor runs into trouble and the bureaucrats are unable to or unwilling to fight back. Even during the 1950s and 60s, with the class struggle relatively quiet, there were some reform efforts--efforts, that is, to democratize, clean up, and give life to a labor movement grown soft. But with the return of economic crisis and the accumulating failures of the existing labor leadership, the reform movements have grown, become more widespread, and are more visible today.

The predecessors of today's movements began in the late 60s and early 70s with the first appearance of the economic crisis. Miners for Democracy, Teamsters United Rank and File (TURF), and the United National Caucus in the UAW were important early efforts to turn things around. Furthermore, they presented a picture of the opposition forces in labor that very much colored the IS's, and much of the left's, view of how the labor bureaucracy would be deposed. At that time, the labor bureaucracy appeared as a monolith vis-a-vis the rank and file. They disagreed on some specific political questions, like Vietnam, but in their relationship to the rank and file and to the capitalist class the labor bureaucracy was united. The movements that arose to change things, therefore, were of a fairly pure rank and file character. They included some local officials where locals were still fairly democratic--particularly in the

UMWA--but mostly they were composed of stewards, committeemen and just plain rank and filers. The reform movement of that period had the character of a more or less clear confrontation between two social forces within the labor movement.

The reform movement that is now emerging in a number of unions is not such a simple affair. Nor could it be. Since the early 70s the employers' offensive has intensified, the accumulation of failures on the part of the labor leaders grown great and more visible, splits within the top levels of the bureaucracy are more common, and tensions between layers of the union hierarchy stronger. Breaks between sections of the officialdom produce openings for opposition elements in many cases. And, of course, the electoral successes of the reform movements change the nature of the situation. The reforms produced by the MFD in the UMWA have opened up the structure of that union so that the rank and file forces now control numerous locals, have influence at the District level, and even have a measure of leverage on some members of the IEB. The Sadlowski victory in District 31 in 1974 means that the reform forces have operated from loftier heights than most reform movements--facing both the positive advantages of that position and its negative pressures and temptations. The defensive position of the Teamster leadership, under attack from employers and investigation by the government, helped give space for the development of TDU and PROD. We will go into more detail on the changes in the bureaucracy later, for now it is only important to understand that these changes open up opportunities for the ranks, tend to show that the bureaucracy is not impregnable, and also, in many cases, bring some sections of the officialdom (usually lower sections more subject to rank and file pressure) into the camp of reform.

The movement that is arising today is not the pure rank and file movement facing the monolithic bureaucracy that the IS expected. It is generally a movement of union activists, both rank and file and office holders, who are aware of the failures of labor. This movement is most visible in the Teamsters, the USW, the UMWA, where it has achieved some level of national, or international organization. But it exists, often confined to the local level, in many other unions. We will assess the state of this movement in a few unions in the next section. For now, we only wish to assert the existence of the reform movement as one of the forces in the field as the working class approached the events of 1977-78.

IV. 1978: A TURNING POINT

Dashed Hopes

1976 seemed to bring hope to the labor leadership. Tens of thousands of workers were returning to their jobs. Inflation rates were relatively low. And the hope of a Democratic victory at the polls a further lessening of the pressure from the employers. But it was not to be so. The employers, as we have seen, intensified their attacks, unemployment remained high, prices again rose at double digit rates. And, the hope of the Democrats turned out to be one of the bitterest disappointments.

Late 1977 and early 1978 saw a number of bitter strikes. The Iron Ore Range strike against U.S. Steel--showing that U.S. Steel was willing to take a strike. The "Me Too" steel strikes, in which several companies tried to take away the parity their workers had with Big Steel. A number of strikes throughout Essex Wire. The UAW and IAM strikes in aerospace.

The Detroit Chrysler wildcats. Beer and grocery strikes out West involving Teamsters and other unions. In all of these cases, and many more we are less familiar with, the employers were showing a more ruthless face. In many cases the union leaders were forced to make a stronger stand than was customary. Often this was a measure of the strength of the reform forces--weak in the UAW, stronger in steel. But it was also because of takeaway demands and threats to the union's basic power and authority. While most of these strikes were not caused by actual union busting moves, it was clear that most of them involved an attempt by the company to change the balance of power in bargaining and at the work place. In a growing number of cases union leaders took a strong stand because they were defending their authority and prestige, as well as the union's power. At the same time union activists and reformers at the lower levels of the union were turning up the pressure for a fight because they could see that the union's power was under attack. Up to this point, however, more activists experienced this as something particular to them, to their union or even to their local union. Then came the miners' strike.

The Miners' Strike

For those who followed it, it was fairly clear months before negotiations started that the BCOA was out to cripple the UMWA, to establish operator authority in the mines, and to take back some of the gains of the past--notably the health care system. What is more, it became clear that this was a decision made by important sections of the ruling class. The highest levels of the energy industry and of basic steel, notably U.S. Steel, were out to solve their economic problems at the expense of the miners. It was their perception that the miners were divided, their leadership weak and pliable, their ranks exhausted from extensive wildcats. What they could not yet hope to do to steel workers, they would try on the miners.

The employers misunderstood the real dynamics in the mines and in the UMWA. All of this is described in the book Battle Line by Moody and Woodward, and will not be repeated here. It is enough to say, as one miner said at the time, they were right about Miller, but wrong about the miners. For 110 days the miners stuck it out against all odds, defying Carter, the courts, as well as the corporate giants that stood behind the BCOA (these include not only the energy and steel companies, but the Rockefeller, Mellon, Morgan and Kirby financial empires that stand behind them). The determination of the miners forced the employers to split and draw back on some of the aspects of their plan. The leadership of the UMWA prevented a clear victory for the miners and some important things were lost. But the miners had frustrated the BCOA's attempt to break the power of the UMWA nationally and at the mine level.

The miners' strike was a highly visible event. After all, it threatened to turn off the lights of half the country and perhaps even turn recovery into recession. Who these employers were and what they were up to became clear after a while, as did the real intentions of the Carter Administration after announcing the use of Taft-Hartley. Thousands of workers saw their own experience in that of the miners. The general nature of the employers' offensive, and of how far it was going, became visible. Articles on business's new tough stand were no longer confined to the business press, but appeared in the daily papers and national news magazines.

The employers had hoped that public sentiment, including the rest of labor would go against the miners because of the potential threat to jobs and income created by the lengthening of the strike and the rejection of various offers. The threat never materialized in spite of all the noise made about it. More important the sentiment among the working class public did not run against the miners. Among union activists sentiment was strongly for the miners. In fact, an apparently spontaneous solidarity movement spread across the country. Literally thousands of trade unionists were drawn into some kind of activity in support of the miners. Money and food collections, car caravans, public rallies, etc. Often initiated by radicals, these nonetheless spread beyond the usual territory of the Left. Many workers saw and understood that this was a fundamental attack on all of labor. The miners strike and the solidarity movement had an effect on the consciousness of many active unionists and reformers --for it was these forces that responded most consistently. It introduced the idea of class conflict, of capital and labor involved in an on-going war in which there were many skirmishes and battles. The miners' strike was one such battle, their own experiences were now understood to have been skirmishes or battles in the bigger war. Some had understood this before, some still didn't get the message. But the degree in which this view spread and became recognized represents a genuine and important change in the consciousness of a crucial, even though still small, section of the working class.

Fiasco In Congress

The miners' strike was an important battle in the class war, but it was not the only one raging at the time. While far more polite in form, the class war was also raging in the Halls of Congress. As the miners were defending themselves, labor's legislative program was being hacked to pieces. Business had upped the ante in the game of lobbying, as well as the purchase price of Senators and Congressmen, and was collecting the rewards. The new balance of power in politics became visible at the same time the employers sought to further change that balance on the industrial front. In brief, the labor leaders, right up to the top, were presented with an overall assault on their power. They hadn't understood this too well in the field of bargaining or organizing, but now they were taking it on the chin in the arena that was the centerpiece of their whole new strategy--politics. Probably nothing made this clearer than labor's overdue discovery that business was going to fight labor law reform. Not one business leader of any significance could be found to support labor law reform.

The labor law reform bill was, in fact, a rather moderate one. Basically it did little more than make it a little harder and more expensive to break the law. It even included a clumsy attempt to outlaw stranger picketing that was written up by the BCOA. It was incomprehensible to the labor leadership, when they began lobbying for it in 1977, that big business could object. After all, U.S. Steel, GM, etc., they already were organized. What did they care if law breakers like J.P. Stevens finally got organized? What the labor bureaucracy had not understood was that the capitalist class, or at least the most powerful elements in it, had changed their mind about unions. They had tolerated unionism during prosperity and prosperity was gone. Unionism was still, even after years of attacks on the shop floor, after years of ever smaller

settlements, an expensive proposition. Union wages were, on the average, 16% above non-union. Pensions for union members were 24% higher, and various insurance plans (medical and other) 46% more expensive. Productivity gains were slowed down or destroyed by the enforcement, or even semi-enforcement of rules governing working conditions and health and safety provisions and laws. This was precisely the case in the coal mines where relatively strong enforcement of conditions and safety matters produced a decade of declining productivity. Even in industries where the union has given away so much of its enforcement mechanism and power that there seems little left, as in auto, the union remains a nuisance, and an arena for resistance. For all that the UAW has surrendered over the years, the Big Three still have to negotiate work standards--a drawn out, tedious process, which still does to some extent prevent management from having a totally free hand. So, the employers have decided to go after unionism itself--to break them where possible, to erode their power when that is as far as they can go. Labor law reform is directed at strengthening union power throughout industry, and the capitalists who count would have none of it.

In 1978, even the top levels of the American labor bureaucracy got the message. That is why Fraser, Meany, and others jumped on the band wagon for the miners. For one moment they let their fear and disgust of the miners militancy recede and publically put themselves on the side of the strikers. That they did so after Taft-Hartley, while the miners were breaking the law, makes it all the more amazing. But Meany and Fraser understood, in their own way, that they were defending themselves, their own power. No doubt they hoped this display of militancy would also have an immediate effect on Congress--for they still didn't understand how much the balance of power had already changed in their beloved Democratic Party. Their actions then, and the now innumerable "class war" statements that have come from them since the defeat of labor law reform, have legitimized the changes in consciousness among the reformers and activists. They have helped to kill the pluralistic illusions that have clouded American working class consciousness for a quarter of a century, illusions that they themselves have peddled for as long.

Changes in the Labor Bureaucracy

1978 has brought to the surface a number of changes that are occurring in the labor bureaucracy. Some have been a long time coming, but they took clear and visible form this year as a result of the events we have described. It is crucial for the reform forces and the Left to understand these changes and the likely results of them, if we are to succeed in the next few years.

The first is the beginnings of the fragmentation of the bureaucracy in their relationship to the rank and file and to the employers. The fragmentation is of two basic types: one, breaks within the top levels of the union hierarchy; the other, stresses or breaks between different levels of the union hierarchy. In the past, the succession of top union leaders has been accomplished by mutual agreement within the inner circles. There have been fights, such as between Fraser and Woodcock in 1970. But these remained sealed within the Star Chambers of the International Executive Board. Today, there are more fights and more of them occurring in the light of day for all to see. Unmanaged contests for top office are taking shape in several unions--URW, APWU, NALC, AFGE, OCAW, and CWA. In most cases the attack is from the left and about union

failures in bargaining and other areas. In most of these cases and other less visible internal fights, the break by one section of the leadership to the left is not the result of rank and file pressure or organization. It results from the employers' attacks and the weakening of the union itself--its decline of influence, prestige, and bargaining clout. Of course, a potential rank and file threat is often implied in the logic of the situation, but in most situations today it is the employers who are unwittingly dividing the top officials. This division changes the relationship of the bureaucracy to lower levels of the hierarchy and to the rank and file. The bureaucracy no longer appears as a monolith and, therefore, no longer appears unassailable.

The growing stress between different layers of the union leadership also tends to undermine the bureaucracy's power over the ranks. The top levels of leadership depend on district or regional officers and staff, and they in turn on local leaders to enforce the policy of the top. When lower sections are alienated from the top, this tends to break down the enforcement mechanism. In many unions, for example the UAW, the inaction or collaboration of the top policy makers in the face of intensified employer attacks puts the local leadership on the spot. It is they who can be, and this year were in big numbers, voted out of office. This tended to open the door for the weak reform forces at the local level in the UAW. It also must be understood as part of the process that moves Fraser to the left politically, for these local leaders are his troops for the Washington strategy. Because Fraser is not yet willing to break his side of the deal with the Big Three in bargaining, he is forced to up the ante in politics. The same sort of stress between top and local leaders is causing breaks in the bureaucracy of the CWA. Local leaders in some big cities, and apparently in the south, are making moves against the top. At the CWA convention they succeeded in preventing a dues increase, which was understood to be a vote of no-confidence. A five year old truce between these local leaders and Pres. Glenn Watts has been broken and it is rumored that the Director of Dist. 1 in New York will go for Watts' seat. These people are not reformers, but the content of the attack is from the left. They are opposing Watts' policy of defending AT&T's monopoly position as the only way to defend jobs. Instead they call for organizing the non-Bell System companies. Clearly, a fight around this issue has progressive consequences. Genuine reformers and militants can build their strength by pushing this fight and raising related questions about the union's basic bargaining posture, bureaucratic methods of organizing, etc. In general, these splits between different levels and sections of the bureaucracy offer opportunities for the reform forces. But at the same time, it should be understood that most of the fights that result from them, at this point, are not the same thing as a reform movement. The eyes of these most recent high level oppositionists are focussed on the attacks from above that threaten their power and prestige, more than they are focussed on the needs of the ranks. Campaigns and events created by breaks in the hierarchy can be supported and used by militants and reformers without any illusions that these eleventh hour oppositionists share our conception of what unionism can become.

There is another change in the bureaucracy which needs clear understanding. For the first time in thirty years important sections of the American labor leadership are moving to the left. The flurry of class

struggle rhetoric that has come from Fraser, Kirkland, Winpisinger, and others is not an off the wall mistake. Nor is it just rhetoric to fool the masses. It is a genuine move to the left. Like the splits in the bureaucracy it is more the result of the attacks from above than of any momentary fear of rank and file rebellion. It is not primarily directed at the ranks of labor or designed to head off some imagined move from the left. More than anything it is meant to convince the capitalists that labor is serious about its political strategy. Fraser's statement, for example, is a plea to industry to lay off their political attack so that he doesn't have to up the ante in industry.

The move to the left represents a change in the ideology of a number of top leaders from corporate liberalism to social democracy. In place of the pluralistic philosophy which saw labor as one of many minority interest groups pushing for influence, the labor leadership is increasingly coming to accept the view that society is divided between two main classes. Along with this is a more sophisticated understanding of their political strategy. Coalition politics are now better understood in class terms. And like the social democrats of Europe, it means even more emphasis on winning things for the working class through politics. The move to the left is real enough, but its limitations are also real.

The move to the left has a context--politics and the political arena. Again, like the Europeans, it does not extend to one's practice in industry. Social Democrats, after all, are class collaborators. It is quite clear that, at least for some time to come, even the left-moving bureaucrats have no intention of changing their fundamental approach to labor relations at the industrial level. They will attempt to defend the union from attacks on its organizational integrity, and even to up their efforts at new organizing. But they will do so in the conservative terms to which they are accustomed--as long as the employers and/or the union membership allow them.

There is another side to the limits of this move to the left. This move to social democracy is to be expressed within the confines of the Democratic Party. Unlike the Europeans, American social dem's are pledged to the Democratic Party or to a reformed version of it, and opposed to independent political action. They will function in line with Michael Harrington's theory of the labor party within the Democratic Party, which only needs to expell the remaining conservative elements. The fact that all the events of the past couple of years have done great damage to this theory will not stop them from functioning in this context. Each new failure brings a renewed pledge to pit more money, people, and forces into the Democratic Party. The coalition of social movements of which Fraser speaks, is to carry out its crusade for justice within that framework. That this strategy will limit the effects of this coalition is certain.

In so far, however, as this coalition is moved into the streets in its efforts to influence the Democrats it will actually help expose the strategy--in the long run. And, in so far as the rhetoric of this movement is a class rhetoric it will help create legitimacy for the ideas to point to an alternative, independent strategy. It will be an opportunity for the Left to push on the contradictions between the actions of any mass movements that arise and their class consciousness, on the one hand, and the collaborationist practice of the labor leaders and the limits posed by working in the Democratic Party, on the other.

The Opposition Forces

Though the reform movement is now visible, the fact remains that it is still quite small, inexperienced, poorly organized, and limited in its outlook. But it is, nonetheless, in this movement that the leadership elements for bigger, more politically advanced workers movements and organizations are taking shape. It is in this milieu that the first elements of genuine class consciousness, beyond that held by a small number of leftists who entered the labor movement to do political work, has appeared. For all its difficulties and faults, we, the IS, regard this movement as ours and we make no conditions on it for our participation. Rather we work to build it, as well as to advance its political consciousness. To do both we must understand where this movement is today. Since we are much smaller than the movement as a whole, we have direct contact with only some sections of it. Basically our viewpoint has been developed by participation in, or ongoing contact with, the opposition forces in the UAW, IBT, USW, APWU, NALC, CWA, and UMWA.

In no union is the reform movement close to taking power today. In the UMWA, of course, the MFD took over a few years ago. But most of the UMWA leadership has collapsed or turned into their opposites--Miller working closely with old Boylite Sam Church, Patrick and Trbovich gone. The UMWA is, in fact, hardly controlled by anyone; rather it is run by an uneasy coalition of men who are under attack from most of the rank and file. The new opposition movement in the UMWA is not yet in a position to take over the international union. In the USW, the reformers, loosely construed at that, control two or three positions on the IEB, with the possibility of a third or fourth in the person of Dave Wilson. These individuals do not all identify with the Fight Back forces, although they tend to agree on policy. In the Teamsters, PROD and the TDU together, which they are not, do not amount to a serious challenge to the IEB or Fitzsimmons. In no other unions is there even a national opposition organization or well defined network of reformers. Rather there are small forces, here and there, at the local level who have not succeeded in carrying their contact beyond the most informal stage. On the other hand, as we have already noted, there are a number of opposition bureaucrats, or bureaucratically minded local leaders, who are pressuring or contesting for power in the hopes of a tougher bargaining stance, without necessarily being committed to any change in union structure or basic policy. For example, in the Letter Carriers, Vincent Sombrotto, the head of the New York local, is running against incumbent president Vacca. Sombrotto has a reputation stemming from his role in the 1970 wildcat and is generally somewhat more militant in his bargaining posture. But he does not appear to have a particularly different outlook on the question of industrial unionism in the Postal Service; that is, democratic mergers of the postal unions, than anyone else in the leadership. Supporting Sombrotto can open opportunities for more militant forces, but even his victory will not end matters for that union. In brief, the reform movement has a long way to go before it is likely to control any union.

It is also true that the leadership of the reform movement, generally, is still quite inexperienced. In the case of the UMWA, where sentiment for change in a militant direction is clearly massive, there are no well known credible candidates for top offices around which the forces for change can rally. This actually creates a situation in which many militant rank and filers feel the need to support the most right wing sections

of the leadership on the grounds that anyone is better than Miller. It is not that the leaders and activists in the opposition elements don't know they need credible candidates, it is that none of them have enough experience or reputation to be those candidates just now.

The development of leadership has proved to be a difficult task in many situations. Both TDU and PROD, for example, have had difficulties in developing a coherent leadership team. PROD, for a long time attempted to solve this by substituting the staff for a leadership of working Teamsters. TDU, more conscious of the problem, has gone much further in developing local and national leadership bodies, but it was a long hard process by all concerned. One of the limitations on the Postal Contract Coalition that was formed to fight for a decent contract in the 1978 negotiations was that, while it had some talented activists, it did not have the time, or the traditions behind it, to develop a recognized national leadership that could mobilize people for a fight. The truth is, the development of an authoritative leadership takes time and/or long-standing traditions of organization and political leadership of a democratic and militant kind. These traditions are lacking in the American working class to a greater degree than in most countries. Prosperity, McCarthyism, and a policy by the labor bureaucracy that was meant to keep the lower levels of leadership, and even more so the rank and file, out of the real decision making processes are the main culprits behind this reality. But the reality exists, nonetheless, and must be addressed by the reform movement itself. So far, this has tended to happen only where radicals played a central and responsible role in building the movement. We would point out, however, that the behavior of the employers and the political changes in the bureaucracy are aiding this process at the moment.

As we have pointed out, the reform movement is a mixed phenomenon. It is not the pure--and highly abstract--rank and file movement envisioned by us years ago. Because it has obtained some small inroads into official positions it faces a variety of pressures. On the one hand, the winning of positions, locally and nationally or at the district level, strengthens the hand of the reform forces. On the other, it also creates new pulls and pressures. In the UMWA, IEB members who opposed the various offers were pledged by the union's constitution to speak out for these settlements. A more serious example stems from the victories of the Fight Back forces and their ability to find allies on the IEB of the USW. Balanoff and the Fight Back forces have no choice but to seek allies on the IEB, for they are not in the business of simply making moral gestures. They must actually use their position to defend their gains and try to expand them. The rank and file, after all, wants positive change, not a bunch of morally righteous losers. But the carving of alliances at the top levels of the union brings pressures, and often the necessity, to compromise with your allies and even your enemies.

More often than not new social movements view themselves in terms of older, more acceptable traditions. The traditions, or at least the best ones, are weak or hidden in the American labor movement. Some ideas, like democracy and the right to a decent job and standard of living, are safe because they are part of the mythology of America. Particularly for white workers in the better jobs, these ideas have legitimacy. They are strong in organizations like TDU and the Independent Skilled Trades Council in the UAW. To most radicals it seems ironic, but it is nonetheless true that these "All-American" ideas play a role in radicalizing these higher paid

white workers--because they believe they have these rights, they are often all the more outraged when these rights are finally threatened. But there are other traditions that affect the way workers in different unions respond. For example, the UAW, more than most unions, has always made a big deal out of how progressive it was--even when it wasn't (see the CC document on the UAW). Opposition forces within the UAW tend to frame their program and ideas in those same terms, fighting the leaders on their own turf and with their own words. The move to the left by the UAW bureaucracy, in particular, will tend to shift the whole tradition to the left. The traditions of the UMWA, of course, have played a big role in forming the new militancy of the past ten years. But most unions have far more confused, bureaucratic, and weak traditions. Most unions, for example, do not have a tradition of opposition caucuses--election time slates, perhaps--such as the UAW. So, in the Steel Workers, for example, there remains much reluctance to actually form a national opposition group. More generally, the tradition of caution is a strong dampener on the development of an organized movement.

More often than not, radicals have been insensitive to the traditions of the union and therefore unable to use them positively. Mostly, they try to by-pass them and end up in isolation or without much influence. New traditions are being created and radicals can play a key part in reviving the best traditions of the 1930s and the past. The point is to use the best elements of past traditions--not the least of which is class consciousness--to help form the new consciousness. Fraser's speech on class war, for example, appeals to two "traditions" of the UAW. The first, of course, is the heritage of the 1930s, which most radicals appeal to. But the second is hardly ever used by radicals. Fraser talked of reviving the labor-Black alliance of the early 1960s. To many radicals the Reuther-King alliance was a conservative thing. So, the left often talks abstractly about alliances with the oppressed. This is a mistake. The coalitions of the 60s had a potentially radical side, in spite of the intentions of Reuther or King and we should not be afraid to use that side of things to concretely illustrate the need for alliances and mass action.

The premise of this document is that there is arising a section of the reform movement that has become genuinely class conscious. This is true, and probably the single most important fact of the day. But it is still a class consciousness bound by the traditions and experiences of the American working class. It is not yet revolutionary or even socialist for most union activists. The political vision of most reformers and militants is still more molded by the ideas of the labor bureaucracy than by the Left. The Democratic Party, for example, is still seen as the political arena of the working class in spite of the anger and cynicism about it. Reform, not revolution, is still the guiding principle in the American working class.

Having stressed the limitations of consciousness, in order to guide our own understanding of the tasks of revolutionary socialists, we wish to reaffirm that the direction of consciousness is positive. The dynamic that is creating a reform movement and within it a class conscious layer cannot be reversed so long as the crisis of the system continues. Rather the old illusions will be stripped away as the system is less and less able to provide a decent living standard for workers, as the employers attack unionism itself, and as the limitations posed by the social democratic ideology of the labor bureaucracy lead them into conflict with

the felt needs of the lower levels of the union, both rank and file and official.

1978 and the enormous events of the year have brought class consciousness back to the labor movement and to American politics as well. Class consciousness has been reflected in the behavior of the ruling class as well as in the move of the labor bureaucracy from liberalism to social democracy and the emergence of a class conscious section of the reform movement. These facts alone, make 1978 an important turning point for the American working class. It is a certainty that events more momentous lie down the road. The danger of more serious defeats than occurred this year is real. But at the same time the opportunities for the reform forces and for revolutionary socialists will be greater. Before spelling out some of these opportunities, we will examine the state of the Left and of the IS in particular.

The American Left

The first and most obvious fact about the American Left is that in its vast majority it is outside of and isolated from the working class. The Left, as a whole, including those in or from the working class, enters the current period with a political heritage that is defined by almost every event on earth except the experience of the American working class for the past ten years. That is to say, that even the politics of those radicals and socialists who have been active in the working class for a number of years tend to be defined by debates on the Left that have nothing to do with the needs of building a revolutionary workers movement. One's attitude toward China, Russia etc. remains a more powerful source of political definition than one's views on the current struggles of the working class. For much of the Left one's opinion, for or against, Trotskyism, is a more powerful determinant of political loyalty than one's positions on the events of today. Even questions that are of great importance to the working class today, such as women's liberation or Black liberation, are often discussed in terms and abstractions in which the working class barely exists.

The second prominent fact about the American Left, one closely related to the first, is its incredible disunity. This is not just a matter of the countless numbers of sects that bewilder and confuse anyone who is first coming around the Left, but the inability of a majority of these sects to work together even where they seem to agree. Both the proliferation of organizations--all of them tiny--and the inability to cooperate derive from differences that are defined by the past--and often the very distant past and as we said by differences defined in isolation from the real class struggle. The consequence of these facts is that to most workers, and even most class conscious reform activists the Left appears ridiculous, almost irrelevant. These activists cannot understand why Left groups cannot cooperate on issues or campaigns on which, it would seem, everyone agrees substantially. The explanations for this division usually confound the problem.

Unfortunately, the divisions that exist cannot be wished away. We don't just mean that people can't be made to agree on everything--that is never likely to happen, but it is also not what is needed to create steps toward unity and cooperation. What we mean is that the mere bemoaning of disunity, or even rational discussion of it, is not enough to make people see the priorities that are needed to pull at least the best ele-

ments of the Left together--not on every question, but on those questions of building the working class movement here and now. Events are needed to change the consciousness of the Left just as they change the consciousness of workers.

The miners' strike and other events in the last year or so have had an impact on some sections of the Left. Support work around the miners' strike saw a great deal more cooperation than is typical, and for a growing number of socialists the ideas of unity and regroupment have been put back on the agenda. Political regroupment is dealt with in the IS Perspective document; here we wish to take up the question of cooperation and unity of action among sections of the Left. But the impact of the miners' strike was not great enough to force very many groups to reprioritize their political work, in particular to put working class work more at the center of their activities and thinking. The best response came from the IS, NAM, soft maoist collectives, including those in the PWOC orbit, and various independent radicals. Organized Maoism, the RCP, both wings, and the OL did little and were thoroughly sectarian. The CP and SWP generally acted in a sectarian and isolationist manner, with some exceptions. Based on the experience of the solidarity movement for the miners, our assessment is that the next steps toward cooperation can best be taken by unified activities among those groups that responded best to that situation. There is clearly some level of agreement about trade union work between these groups, and the opportunity exists to expand and deepen that agreement. This doesn't mean we are ruling out cooperation with other groups, such as the SWP or the CP, for in certain situations we already cooperate in some measure with both groups. Rather, it means that we see the greatest possibilities in coalitions with NAM, PWOC, the collectives, and the independent Left in and around the labor movement.

Becoming Part of the Labor Movement--The IS Experience

To a greater degree than most Left groups, the IS set out, some eight years ago, to "go to school in the working class." We had our political traditions, positions, and preconceptions like most other groups. But we were highly aware of the isolation of the Left from the working class. So, we were prepared to let our actual experience in the working class shape our understanding of how to build a revolutionary movement in the class. There was, of course, a political framework for this. We, unlike most other Marxist trends in the U.S., believed that the revolutionary organization, and eventually the party, had to be built in the working class. We rejected the ideas, still held by many groups, that you first set up the party and then attract the class. These two political notions are the basis for the largely successful work of the IS in industry, and for our ability to change as the times changed.

Our first ideas of how to function in the working class were shaped by and in the events of the early 70s--the wildcats and the purer type of rank and file group like TURF and the UNC. Crudely put, our view was one of a rank and file upheaval characterized by mass direct action that would eventually carry the rank and file opposition groups to power. This meant a dual emphasis: first on the shop floor struggle--that is, the day to day expression of the wildcat phenomenon, and secondly on improving the political programs of the rank and file groups. The IS, together with some older socialists, had much influence on the programs of TURF, the

UNC and a number of local caucuses we worked in or controlled. Fights over program usually included issues like clarity on Black liberation, women's liberation, the labor party, etc. The logic of this dual approach was that if this was the group that would eventually lead the rank and file to power it had to have the right ideas. The conclusion of this was that we did not put much emphasis on functioning within the local union as a part of it, but relating to it more or less as outlaws. Many radicals still function on a similar dual approach, and remain largely outside the day to day affairs of the union.

This approach has proved to be inadequate. The reason goes back to what we said about people first expressing their desires for change through traditional means. For all their cynicism, distrust, and disappointment it is to the union that most workers turn when they feel the need to do something. This is as true of wildcats as it is of daily grievances or other matters. And it continues to happen in spite of the generally negative response from the union officials. This is because the unions are the only class organizations the workers have and the union leaders the only recognized, legitimate leaders with the power to do anything. If the radicals and reformers are to become recognized leaders they must function as a part of the union, fighting to change it, to be sure. Thus, the IS has learned how to function as a part of the union.

We have also learned how to synthesize that lesson with our basic commitment to direct action, shop floor and work place struggle, and participation in all the events that, in total, make up the life of the union and the industry. Our most successful efforts tend to be those that carry on all of these activities within the context of the union. For example, the success of TDU is based on the participation of TDU activists in scores of struggles, including many strikes--authorized and unauthorized--attempts to reform the by-laws of a number of locals, contract campaigns, intervention in grievances, persistent participation in union meetings and events, running for office, etc. etc. TDU, in short, isn't just a programmatic group that holds its own regular meetings. It is part of the life of the union, mostly at the local level so far, but internationally in some campaigns, and nationally in a number of contract fights. Because of the nature of the Teamster bureaucracy it is usually necessary to fight one's way into the life of the union. Another example of this approach, to pick just one in the UAW, is the United Coalition at Local 51. The UC was built over the past few years through a series of actions--a wildcat, demonstrations, in-plant struggles. But the UC activists were also an active part of the union as stewards, committeemen, the Treasurer for a while. This year the UC came within a small number of votes of taking over the entire local Executive Board--winning the in-plant vote, but losing to a mobilization of the retirees by the administration. The UC is now recognized as a major force in the local. In both the TDU and the UC it is known that there are socialists in the leadership, who are respected for their dedication to fighting unionism and their abilities as leaders.

Not all political activity within the union has to be carried out through the caucus of its program, as we once thought. In both the USW and the UAW, for example, IS women and sometimes other radicals, have helped to form or build both official women's committees and semi-official women's caucuses that function within the union. These women's groups,

and others like them arising in these unions, are not only a part of the life of the union and the plant, but are an active part of the emerging women's movement. Similarly, we have conducted activities around Southern Africa support work within the context of the union. The miners' work was conducted with official union endorsement in most cases.

Being a part of the union's life, changing that life, and eventually seeking to control the unions must be central to any strategy for building a revolutionary workers movement in the U.S. In the long run, the socialist movement must seek political hegemony in the labor movement. This cannot be done by abstaining from activities that seem too trivial or removed from the greater events of the future. For the truth is, what happens in the future is in part determined by the position of the reform movement and of the socialists within it today. We can already see, for example, that the reform movement, or the rank and file generally, do not take over the union and change it in one fell swoop. To successfully contest for the top levels of the union, the movement must have positions of strength in the lower levels. In the UMWA, it is the fact that the militants control countless locals and influence numerous district Executive Boards that gives that movement its authority and sticking power. In unions without the referendum vote, that is, where the elections of top officials occur at conventions, it is virtually impossible to either win elections or change the constitution unless your movement controls many locals. This is basically the case in the IBT, UAW, AFT, AFSCME, and many other unions. Even in unions that have the referendum vote, such as the USW, it is difficult to actually change things without like-minded locals in big numbers. So, we have learned that both tradition and structure have their effects on strategy.

In becoming part of the labor movement, a social trend within a reform trend, we have learned something else. We, the IS, can not do it alone. That is, the IS alone cannot bring socialist consciousness and organization to the American working class, or in all likelihood even to the members of the IBT, UAW, USW, etc. Like every other Left group, the IS is small, too small to carry out its tasks alone. Class consciousness is growing and even socialist ideas are emerging in new quarters. But the creation of socialist consciousness is, ultimately not a spontaneous process; it requires organization and effort by those who already have the ideas and experience. We have learned, from our experience in the labor movement, that unity and regroupment must be put back on the agenda, not because Chairman Hua or Ernest Mandel has decreed it, but because the American working class needs it and, without saying it in so many words, demands it of the Left.

V. WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Major Issues Facing Labor

All of the processes we have described are certain to continue in one form or another. The crisis (and almost certainly a recession), the employers' offensive, changes within the bureaucracy and the growth of union reform movements, and a political climate in which attacks on the working class--on unionism, the rights of the oppressed, and almost all social programs--are typically fronted by the New Right and backed by Big Business. In short, it is a period of intensified class struggle. Just how "one-sided" this class struggle will be is dependent on the

forces in the unions, the development of the movements of the oppressed, and ultimately on the Left.

To understand what those forces fighting for change in the labor movement can do in the coming period we need to have some idea of what the major issues facing the unions and the workers will be. We don't claim that these are the only issues around which radicals can organize and fight, or that the Left or the IS should limit its activity solely to work in the unions. Nor do we see any "get rich quick" schemes in these issues or in the events coming up in the next few years. What we do see is opportunity and a way to focus activity.

The first area of issues might be called the defense of unionism, for it is clear that the ruling class has abandoned its policy of toleration. This fight begins in the work place, where the oldest and most persistent form of the employers' offensive is conducted. Their fights to increase productivity at the expense of working conditions and health and safety measures is ultimately directed at further weakening, or destroying, the union's work place organization. Preventing this involves an offensive posture. It involves pressuring, rebuilding, and becoming part of the union's work place organization--the steward system by whatever name it is called. For the IS this is simply a continuation of existing practice understood in a new political context and a new stage of the employers' offensive. But, as we have learned, it is a complicated process in which alliances with elements in the local union which we otherwise oppose become necessary from time to time and in which we attempt to push any move to the left by the union leaders, even our enemies, to its limits. In this, as in other fields, we are not just critics or cranky oppositionists that denounce every move to the left as fakery or cooptation. We are organizers and builders, the best defenders of the union.

Defending the union also involves some political fights that will take place at every level of the union. In particular, the pressure to make the unions organize the unorganized and to do this in an effective way is crucial. This isn't just a matter of resolutions at union meetings or conventions. It also involves way of involving ourselves, the Left, the local unions directly in the organizing process. The organizing of the unorganized is essential to the defense of unionism and of working class living standards. But to succeed it must be more than the nickel and dime affairs conducted by most unions today--and lost more often than not. Organizing must become a crusade, one that is seen as part of the overall movement of the working class and the social movements of the oppressed. A broad based movement for unionization, by the way, can be a key element in bringing the unorganized into political coalitions down the road. So long as union organizing is seen as a series of administrative and legal problems, as it is by the bureaucracy today, it will not succeed fast enough to reverse the decline of unionism.

Another aspect of the defense of unionism is the question of merger. Mergers among unions are fairly common today. Some mergers, of course, are just meant to preserve a dues base and have no strategic significance. But in industries where unions have been divided by craft lines or by past history (CIO vs. AFL, or "Commie" vs. liberal) these divisions usually spell disaster. Earlier we gave the example of the printing trades, where old craft divisions have allowed the capitalists who control the newspaper industry to make progress in smashing unionism. Another example, a situation with the potential for disaster, is the continued divisions and

rivalry between the AFT and the NEA. In general we are for, and fight for, mergers, and before that alliances between unions in the same industry. But another problem arises immediately, for most of the actual mergers that take place or are now being discussed are bureaucratic monstrosities in which the rank and file is likely to have even less power and influence than it did in the divided unions. So, the radicals, reformers, and militants must be prepared to fight for union democracy at the same time. At times this may even mean opposing a specific merger plan although generally it would be better to seek out allies in the other unions to fight for change after the merger. Where mergers are not practical or desirable (like absorbing all the food unions into the Teamsters) we are for coalition bargaining and fight for rank and file control over that procedure. The concentration of capital is forcing the merger movement, but with it is returning an idea basic to both unionism and socialism, the idea of class solidarity, of unity of our class against their's. The Left and the reform forces should be the advocates of unity with a democratic content.

Closely related to unity are the questions of equality and liberation for the specially oppressed sections of the working class, above all women, Blacks, and Latins. As we have seen, the attacks on the working class include a vicious assault on the gains made by women and minority groups in the 60s. This, of course, includes their position in the workforce as well as special programs and rights won in the last decade. In general terms, this means that the Left and the reform forces must fight to make the labor movement, and the individual unions, an ally for the movements of the oppressed. In day to day terms it means fighting for the implementation of or the defense of affirmative action, special training programs, and contractual provisions that favor the oppressed. Unity between white and Black workers, between men and women, requires a genuine fight for equality.

Political strategy, itself, is becoming a major issue within the unions--if only because the current strategy is such a failure. To change the political balance of power, the bureaucracy is proposing a top-down sort of coalition politics within the context of continued functioning within the Democratic Party. We believe that the top-down nature of the proposed, and already formed, will weaken these efforts and tend to preclude mass mobilization. The role of the Left and the reform forces is not to oppose such coalitions, per se, but to attempt to fill them with democratic content and mass action. Fraser's coalition meeting for this fall, for example, will propose little more than intensified lobbying for common goals to a select group of big shots from various Black and women's groups, environmentalists and union leaders. Rather than just denouncing the thing as a fraud, we should get our locals to call on this coalition to mobilize labor ranks along with women and Blacks in mass action, local and national, to pressure for the common legislative program of the coalition (ERA, labor law reform, national health insurance, etc.). We want a coalition from the bottom up that engages in direct mass action. This, surely, the Left can agree on.

A trickier question is that of the Democratic Party. It is apparent that any political strategy that is carried out within the Democratic Party is almost certain to fail. By this we don't mean that labor or the oppressed can't wrench anything from Congress or the White House. But, history shows that it is mass movement and direct action that usually

- produces results, even when the Democrats are in power (the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, are two examples), and not the initiatives of the Democrats. Furthermore, it is now clear that in spite of a fairly impressive effort by labor to increase its influence in the DP, the opposite has occurred. It is business which is gaining influence and moving the DP to the right. Traditionally, there are two major ways to respond to this sort of situation. One is to propose a break with the DP and the formation of a party, controlled by labor and the oppressed-- basically, a labor party. In periods of crisis in America this idea has achieved considerable popularity, though never enough to do the trick. The other response, of course, is to do more of the same, that is, to elect more and better Dem's, to reform the party, capture it. This is the strategy of American social democracy and of the labor bureaucracy. While we see evidence that labor party sentiment is on the rise, making its first appearance in decades, it is clear that for some time labor will put more effort into the DP, not less.

This is, in a sense, another example of the working class trying to change things by using what it views as its traditional organizations. American political tradition says that the DP is the party of labor, of the minorities, of the little guy. But there is a fundamental difference between the DP and the traditional channels of unionism. The unions, even corrupt and bureaucratic, are working class organizations. The DP is not. It is, in fact, a capitalist party controlled ideologically and financially by the capitalist class, or sections of it, regardless of who sits in the Democratic National Committee (which also explains why so few radicals or even respectable labor leaders ever sit on that body). All of labor's attempts to share this party with the capitalists wind up as expensive failures, futile attempts to outspend the capitalists in their own party. Most workers do not view the DP in this way, of course, as they do not have a clear class view of how society works. Then, also, most workers are Democrats by tradition and will not change until the leaders they look to change--whether these leaders are today's bureaucrats, union reformers, or radicals. We believe that although the social democratic strategy will carry the day in the short run, and possibly even appear to make some headway (like a Kennedy run for the top), the need for mass, class political struggle will collide with the limits imposed by the DP, and furthermore, that the Democrats will not even deliver much of what labor wants.

At this point, massive campaigns around the idea of a labor party, or calls for an immediate break with the DP, are not possible. The labor party position is a minority position in the unions. We do not propose to raise the labor party as an agitational slogan in the unions at this time. But we do think the time has come for education and propaganda in favor of a labor party and about the nature of the DP. The IS will prepare serious literature on these and related subjects and will gladly work with others who share a commitment to independent political action to spread this idea. We don't expect events to have advanced enough to make a labor party real by the 1980 Presidential elections. But we would not rule out independent political action by some sections of labor in local, state, or even Congressional elections. This would mean some limited agitational work--not limited in our commitment to it, but in its effect on national politics. For the moment, however, our tasks are primarily educational.

The Organization of the Reform Movement

The labor bureaucracy is highly organized by virtue of its control of much of the unions' apparatus, occasionally augmented by an administration political caucus--as in the UAW and AFT. The reform movement, today, is very poorly organized. Only in the Teamsters is there actual organization at the international level, TDU and PROD. In truth, even these organizations are partly the result of a situation peculiar to the IBT. The leadership of the IBT is openly corrupt, which makes opposition to them legitimate, even with the rest of the labor bureaucracy. The IBT leadership is under investigation, in fact a number of them, making their behavior highly visible and their ability to rush the opposition problematic. And, the leaders of the IBT were, until very recently, largely apolitical. This made many of their early attempts to head off both TDU and PROD rather clumsy and ineffective. In other unions, where typically different conditions prevail, the building of opposition organizations is far more complex, which is not to say that building TDU was easy.

A brief look at the state of organization of the reform movement in a few other unions reveals a fairly grim picture. Ten years ago, the UAW had a small, but vital opposition group in the UNC. Today it has none. The real dynamism behind the UNC was always the skilled trades dissatisfaction with UAW policy. That dynamism still exists, but it is now expressed through the Independent Skilled Trades Council (ISTC), which by its very nature is a pressure group for one interest within the union. This is true although the leaders of the ISTC are largely veterans of the UNC and hold opposition views as individuals. The other major independent group is the COLA on the Pension Committee which is also a pressure group, directed at the coming contract, but without an oppositional outlook among its leaders. Beyond these, there are only local opposition caucuses. Some of these are in contact through an informal network, but there is not now a body of leaders around whom could be built a national group with any reality to it.

In steel the situation would appear to be different. There are recognized leaders at the national level in the leadership of District 31, and possibly a couple of other districts. But in the milieu of the various anti-McBride forces there is a strong feeling that national organization is premature. It is not just the top leaders who feel this, but people at the local level as well. It is felt that open oppositional organization, as opposed to just an electoral organization at election time, would bring on a fight for which they are not prepared. Further, some people feel the positions they hold now in their locals or districts are too precarious to withstand an attack now. This caution has a basis in reality. For the number of activists in the reform movement is a very small percentage of the union's membership, most of which remains passive right now. A similar feeling prevails in the UMWA where the problem of a recognized national leadership is greater than in the ISW. In the postal unions there is an oppositional network, but as yet no organization. In the AFT and AFSCME there is no significant opposition in spite of the presence of a large proportion of radicals and a fairly high level of strike activity (though more teacher strikes seem to be attributable to the NEA than the AFT).

Unfortunately, organization at the international level is no simple matter. It can be true that premature attempts at it will, in fact, only

- postpone the reality of it. People who went through groups like MFD, UNC or TURF, each of which failed in its own way, are often reluctant to turn right around and try again.

We, the IS, have learned something about what is needed to make national organization work. We learned it in TDU as well as situations where there is no national organization. We have learned that the central question of national organization is the creation of a leadership that knows and trusts each other and is trusted by the activists of the group. We are not talking about the development of celebrities, but of people who by their actions gain the confidence of others. Until TDU developed such a leadership it was a very fragile operation, saved in part at least by the clumsiness of the attacks on it. The problem faced by the reform elements in most other unions is that they lack a leadership grouping that is both broad, aware of itself as such, has worked together enough to have mutual trust and respect, and has a large enough base to feel the self-confidence needed to take the step of forming a national organization. If we can draw from our experience in TDU, then, we would have to say that what is needed in most unions is not a quick jump to national organization, but a series of campaigns, actions, and interventions, by the reform forces, at the national level, that allows them to develop a leadership in the sense we just described. The rest of this document will address itself to some opportunities for doing just that.

The Contract Round

Contract fights are an excellent opportunity for the reform movement to build itself because they raise many issues of vital concern to most workers, often they are national--though in our view local contract fights can be important as well--and they are legitimate. TDU, after all, came out of the Teamsters for a Decent Contract. It is, in fact, doubtful if TDU could have been formed in any other way. PROD, which was formed another way, around a different sort of leadership than we are talking about, still doesn't have an authoritative, indigenous Teamster leadership. We are not, of course, proposing some formula which says have a contract campaign and then set up your national opposition. Nothing in life is that simple, not even TDU. Rather, we mean that contract activities can be a good chance to further the process of developing leadership.

1978 was a year of visible labor "troubles," of strikes and contract rejections. But it was a "light" year in terms of the number of workers covered by expiring contracts. 1979, on the other hand, is a heavy year. Contracts covering some three and a half million workers expire in 1979. In 1980 the contracts of another two and a half million workers will expire. In 1979 four important Teamster contracts expire: Master Freight, April 1; UPS, May 1; Carhaulers, June 1; and California Cannery, July 1. Opposition forces exist in all these jurisdictions. In April, the Rubber Workers' contracts with the Big Four expire. Westinghouse and GE contracts, primarily with the IUE and UE, expire in June and July. The Big Three-UAW contracts are up in September. In 1980, USW contracts with Aluminum expire on June 1, and those with the Big Ten Steel Companies on August 1. The CWA-Bell System contract expires in July 1980. These are only the biggest national contracts. There are scores of others as well. All of this does not necessarily mean that 1979 will see even more

strikes and turmoil. None of the workers whose contracts expire next year are likely to repeat the performance of the miners. Struggles around the contract may be less visible. But there will be some and there is potential in those struggles for strengthening the reform forces. In the Teamsters, there are already two contract campaigns under way. A Majority Contract Coalition has already been formed at the initiative of TDU around the Master Freight Agreement. TDU activists have also launched the Carhauleders Contract Coalition. Both of these coalitions have already succeeded in bringing in forces broader than TDU. There is also the possibility of activity around the UPS contract. In auto, the COLA on the Pension group, and more indirectly the Shorter Work Week group, have begun pressure campaigns, while other forces are also discussing how to intervene. While we are not aware of any specific activity around the upcoming contract, in both the URW and the IUE there have been recent election contests for top positions in which the negotiation of the last contract was a major issue.

It is not the purpose of this document to spell out what should be done in each contract. In most cases its even too early to say. But we will attempt to point out under what general conditions these contracts will be renegotiated, and what we think the general emphasis is likely to be. In this, we are really discussing only the bigger industrial union contracts. And, of course, we realize that if a contract campaign is to have a chance to succeed, the radicals can't just pick issues on the basis of their own political or moral priorities. The contract campaign must focus on the issues that are actually on people's minds.

The big industrial contracts that expire in 1979 are some of the best in the country, in spite of all the sell-outs of the past. On wages and benefits, in particular, the UAW, IBT, URW, IUE-UE contracts are way above average. This means that, for the most part, the workers covered by these contracts have not experienced a decline in real wages. They may not have advanced much either. But the talk in 1976 and again right now is that in most cases wages, per se, or benefits will not be a fighting issue. If, of course, any of these unions goes for an exceptionally puny settlement, this could change. But that is not likely. One exception in the carhauleders' contract where money is an issue by virtue of possible changes in the rate for "backhauls."

More than likely the 1979 contracts will be negotiated as the economy heads for a recession. We can expect the economy to be slowing down and real growth to be declining or even going negative. But it is also quite likely that big lay-offs will not have hit, even by the time of the UAW contract. Thus, while there will be a good deal of nervousness about the economy, the negative effects of big lay-offs and corporate losses on bargaining, will not necessarily have their full force. In fact, if anything, the economic situation will tend to harden the employers' position on those issues we expect to be more central, issues associated with working conditions and union power at the work place. This is because the early stages of recession are usually accompanied by slumping productivity.

Just how productivity-related issues get handled can be a complicated matter. In the Master Freight Agreement, for example, they may mean emphasis on changing the grievance procedure and on the way in which the supplementary contracts are ratified. In auto, this could mean more em-

phasis on local contracts. In rubber and electrical, working conditions have been major issues at the national level for the last couple of contracts, with huge concessions made in rubber in particular. In any case, it is our belief that generally it will be these kinds of issues that workers will be more willing to actually fight around.

Elections and Conventions

The emphasis of the IS's work in industry has always been on mass direct action, whether that is a small maneuver on the shop floor, or an explosive wildcat strike. The opportunity for consciousness to make rapid advances and for tight-knit solidarity to develop is obvious. But these kinds of opportunities can seldom be created and don't come along all that often. A movement must have a life of its own between direct action confrontations. Contracts and other pressure campaigns are one type of activity. Participating in the internal affairs of the union is another. Conventions and elections offer important opportunities to build, unite and educate the reform forces. In addition, of course, elections are the way the reform movement takes power locally and nationally.

An example of how organized convention struggle can strengthen the reform movement can be seen in the recent intervention of the cadres of the reform movement in the USW at that union's convention. For several days the cadres of this movement, particularly those from District 31, the Iron Range, and the opposition group at U.S. Steel's Homestead Works met together to plan strategy on various issues. Their major focus was on the right to ratify. On the one hand, the convention revealed the weakness of the reform movement. They were not able to carry a single vote. On the other hand, it was clear that this opposition was considerably larger than those in the past--at least in the past 20 years. The planning meetings ranged in size from 50 to 200 people. The delegates influenced by the reform cadres ranged from a rock bottom of 317 to over 1,000. The fact that they lost did not demoralize these activists, however. For along side the experience of getting beaten in votes was the experience of working together, in a more or less organized fashion, for the first time. There is more of a sense that they compose a movement and share common goals and ways of viewing things. This was an important step forward.

Local union elections have as their main purpose winning power. More often than not this will not be a question of sweeping all the top positions, but of sharing power or being a minority in the local leadership--a tricky proposition about which we will present no glib generalizations. Nevertheless, these elected positions, as well as positions on things like the education committee, women's committees, local newspaper, offer opportunities to organize and train people, and to make it clear that the oppositionists are capable of playing a constructive role in the daily life of the union. Election campaigns themselves are a good time to organize and expand the forces of the opposition. Our recent experience in the local elections in the UAW, while mixed in results, improved our position in most locals as a legitimate--if not always loved by the incumbents--force in the life of a number of local unions. The local elections coming up next April in the USW will be still another test and opportunity for the reform movement there. In at least one case, Homestead, the reformers are likely to capture another important local. At a higher level, the re-run of the Wilson-Plato election in Baltimore will

probably put another reform-minded person, Dave Wilson, on the IEB of the USW. Radicals and reformers should support Wilson in spite of his past aloofness from the Fight Back trend.

In most cases the reform movement is still in no position to contest the top positions in their unions. This is easier in unions like the USW and UMWA that have a referendum vote. In others, where the candidates are elected at a convention, it is far more difficult. But the basic reason that the reformers are not able to shoot that high is the weakness of the movement itself. Yet, as we pointed out earlier, pressures on the bureaucracy from the employers' offensive, and to a lesser extent from below (though this is more often implied than real) are leading to splits at the top of a number of unions. In some cases it is a matter of old-time oppositionists of a bureaucratic character, like Sombrotto in the NALC, taking advantage of the failures of the top leaders. In others, as in the Rubber Workers, it is an actual split on the IEB of the union. In the CWA a combination of these two seems to be brewing, with the Big City network of bureaucratic oppositionists uniting with dissatisfied elements on the IEB. Whatever the case, there are a number of contests for top offices taking place or coming up. We have mentioned those in the NALC, APWU, URW, OCAW, CWA. So far as we can tell, in none of these cases is it a matter of a reform or rank and file movement, or really any kind of movement, going for power. It is rather a case of a section of the hierarchy breaking to the left on certain issues. In the postal unions the issues are around bargaining posture. In the URW and CWA organizing the unorganized are central issues in the break.

The reform forces in these unions are generally quite weak. They are in no position to enter the field as a third force. Yet, the issues around which the election will be fought are central to the ideas of the reform movement itself. We do not know enough about some of these cases to endorse this or that candidate. But in situations where the issues are real and important ones, particularly those related to the defense of the integrity and power of the union vis-a-vis the employer, we believe that the burden of responsibility lies in the direction of supporting and helping to elect the left-moving sections of the bureaucracy. The reformers can use the campaign to educate people on the issues around which the campaign focusses. This does not mean emphasis on how terrible the opposition candidate's past record is, and how nothing will change. It means trying to build real sentiment among the membership favoring aggressive bargaining or organizing. Sentiment that can help build a reform movement and actually build pressure to make the new officers, should they win, carry out some of their promises, or rather to carry them out in a more effective way than those with bureaucratic politics usually do. This leads to another important point. An election campaign is an exercise in politics, not a demonstration of the sociology of trade unions. We support one candidate because of his or her stand on the issues, and we should conduct our part of the campaign around those political questions. Discussing the issues will give the reformers more opportunity to educate people on how organizing drives and contract bargaining should be done than the ham-fisted attempts so typical of the American left in explaining why this candidate won't ever get it right because of his social position.

A Newspaper for the Reform Movement

The building of a movement and a leadership requires education, debate, knowledge of what is going on. The move to the left by sections of the bureaucracy requires more sophistication on the part of the reformers, not only in the realm of union politics, but in broader political affairs as well. And for the reform movement to actually become a mass movement it must become aware of itself. Today, there is no vehicle for carrying out these tasks. The papers and magazines of the various left groups cannot substitute for the organs of a movement. For one thing they are seen as what they are, the house organs of various sects. For another, they do not reflect the problems peculiar to the union reform movement. And, in general, they are too far in advance of the consciousness of most of the activists and even of the leaders of this movement to be viewed as something that is the property of this movement.

We believe that the development of the class consciousness, sophistication and unity of the leaders and activists of the reform movement across union lines is now a necessity for this movement's success. Contract campaigns, strikes, union events, all offer opportunities for building. But a movement needs ideas and politics to grow, win victories, and successfully contend with its enemies. A national newspaper that deals with the issues, problems, analysis, and news of the union reform movement, and of the movements of the oppressed and important national political questions, and even international affairs of relevance to workers, can begin addressing this task.

This paper cannot be a front operation for any Left group, nor can it be a "line" paper. It will have to reflect many points of view within the reform movement. Furthermore, it will need the active support of some of the better known leaders of the reform movement--though not necessarily every celebrity. It must be, in reality, a broad coalition effort, including elements of the Left that actually function in the reform movement, but not dominated by any of them.

We believe that this paper is an idea whose time has come, that it will receive the support of leaders and activists. For even those who don't understand the need for political training the way that socialists do, understand and desperately feel the need for information. A broad, radical labor paper can provide not only news, but technical information on grievance procedures, contracts, legal rights, and union structure--things that are important for making tactical decisions. There is another reason that many activists will favor such a paper. Within their own union, and even across union lines, there is the need for communication. A newspaper can help coordinate isolated individuals and groups by providing information.

People must, however, feel that this paper is theirs, something they can affect, and something they can explain to their fellow workers. Something, in short, they can identify with. This means that for now, this paper cannot be a socialist paper. Socialists can and should participate in it, write for it, help frame its ideas. And, of course, much of the analysis presented in it would, in fact, be socialist or marxist in content. But the paper cannot be the advocate of socialism, or seen as the possession of socialists alone. The paper's political content would be class conscious and radical, but not explicitly revolutionary. Other papers, specific to one union, already do this, but they do not deal with broader social questions or with the labor movement as a whole.

While they are important and useful within their own union, they can't create that sense of a class-wide movement which is now needed, and at last possible.

The central theme of this paper, and much of its political definition, would be the defense of the labor movement in the face of the employers' offensive. The issues we have emphasized throughout this document would be many of the issues the labor paper would follow and analyze consistently. It would not be just a carping critic of the labor bureaucracy, but a tribune of the labor movement generally. But with a difference. That being that this tribune speaks for the rank and file, for union reform, for militancy and solidarity, for democracy, for strengthening work place organization, for organizing the unorganized, for coalitions from below as well as above, for mass action as well as lobbying. It will support actions of the labor leaders when that support is justified and disagree when it must.

The class conscious militants need a voice. They need communication among themselves. And they need a way to speak to those who are not yet class conscious. A broad based, radical labor paper could meet these needs. The formation of such a paper would be a great advance for the best elements of the working class. It is an opportunity for those on the Left to show that they can work together to play a positive role in building the working class movement. Finally, we believe that such a paper will be a big step toward the creation of the consciousness, the combativity, the self-confidence that comes with a mass movement, and the establishment of new, radical traditions in the labor movement that will lay the basis for the emergence of a socialist trend in the labor movement which will give unity on the Left and socialist re-groupment its reality.