



Internationalist Group

League for the Fourth International

Trotskyism and Trade-Union Struggle



**Battle of the Market during 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike led by Trotskyists.
Pickets disperse attack on strike by police and bosses' vigilantes.**

Internationalist Group Class Readings

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Introduction

The subject matter of Marxism and trade-union struggle is vast, with many tactical variations according to the national terrain. It centers on the relationship between the revolutionary vanguard and the mass organizations of the working class. This collection of readings is only intended as an introduction, including excerpts from the writings of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. These works underline a central thesis, that while Marxists work within the unions to provide practical leadership and win the most conscious working-class fighters to the revolutionary organization, communist politics must necessarily go beyond trade-unionism to present a program for socialist revolution. This must embrace all oppressed sectors fighting for liberation from capitalism, and not be limited to economic struggles over wages, hours and workplace issues or for social reforms.

As Karl Marx wrote in the conclusion of his speech to the International Working Men's Association, the First International, later published as a pamphlet under the title, *Value, Price and Profit* (1865):

“Trade unions work well as centers of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system.”

While many ostensibly communist organizations in recent decades have called for “center-left coalitions” in the unions under different guises, this in reality amounts to a program of militant (or not so militant) trade-unionism. And as Lenin pointed out, this “economism” and simple trade-unionism amounts to chaining the workers to *bourgeois* politics, not differing qualitatively from the watchword of the pro-capitalist founder of the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, who summed his program in the single word, “More.” It is necessary, Lenin emphasized, to bring revolutionary consciousness to the working class from without.

In the early 1970s, *Workers Vanguard*, the newspaper of the Spartacist League, published a series of articles (reprinted here) which critically evaluated the trade-union work of the American Trotskyists in the 1930s and '40s. Succumbing to the pressures of the bourgeois onslaught against the unions and the Soviet Union, the SL later drew back from the struggle for leadership within the mass workers' organizations. Following the counterrevolution that destroyed the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet workers state in the early 1990s, the International Communist League (to which the SL/U.S. is affiliated) tried to justify its retreat “theoretically.” In 1998 the ICL issued a new program declaring outdated the central thesis of Trotsky's Transitional Program – namely that “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” According to the now-centrist ICL, Trotsky's statement of the centrality of the struggle for revolutionary leadership “predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness” – in other words, for them it is the working class, not its misleaders, that doesn't measure up to the task.

In fact, the latter-day ICL was describing its own political regression, which was accompanied by a purge of leadership and youth cadres in several sections who went on to form the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International. In subsequent years it has in practice abandoned the program of transitional demands, which Trotsky put forward in the founding document of the Fourth International in order to bridge the gap between the “minimum” and “maximum” programs put forward by the reformist social democrats and Stalinists. The LFI today continues the struggle for authentic Trotskyism, fighting for revolutionary leadership within the unions. An example of this is the program of the Class-Struggle Caucus initiated by the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the LFI, included in this collection.

Karl Marx

Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council: The Different Questions (August 1866)

[excerpt]

6. Trades' unions. Their past, present and future

(a) Their past.

Capital is concentrated social force, while the workman has only to dispose of his working force. The *contract* between capital and labour can therefore never be struck on equitable terms, equitable even in the sense of a society which places the ownership of the material means of life and labour on one side and the vital productive energies on the opposite side. The only social power of the workmen is their number. The force of numbers, however is broken by disunion. The disunion of the workmen is created and perpetuated by their *unavoidable competition among themselves*.

Trades' Unions originally sprang up from the *spontaneous* attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition, in order to conquer such terms of contract as might raise them at least above the condition of mere slaves. The immediate object of Trades' Unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities, to expedients for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in one word, to questions of wages and time of labour. This activity of the Trades' Unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of production lasts. On the contrary, it must be generalised by the formation and the combination of Trades' Unions throughout all countries. On the other hand, unconsciously to themselves, the Trades' Unions were forming *centres of organisation* of the working class, as the mediaeval municipalities and communes did for the middle class. If the Trades' Unions are required for the guerilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as *organised agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour and capital rule*.

(b) Their present.

Too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with capital, the Trades' Unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wages slavery itself. They therefore kept too much aloof from general social and political movements. Of late, however, they seem to awaken to some sense of their great historical mission, as appears, for instance, from their participation, in England, in the recent political movement, from the enlarged views taken of their function in the United States, and from the following resolution passed at the recent great conference of Trades' delegates at Sheffield:

"That this Conference, fully appreciating the efforts made by the International Association to unite in one common bond of brotherhood the working men of all countries, most earnestly recommend to the various societies here represented, the advisability of becoming affiliated to that body, believing that it is essential to the progress and prosperity of the entire working community."

(c) Their future.

Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless [French text has: "incapable of organised resistance"] by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large [French and German texts read: "convince the broad masses of workers"] that their efforts, far from being narrow -- and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.

V.I. Lenin

On Strikes¹

(1899)

In recent years, workers' strikes have become extremely frequent in Russia. There is no longer a single industrial gubernia in which there have not occurred several strikes. And in the big cities strikes never cease. It is understandable, therefore, that class-conscious workers and socialists should more and more frequently concern themselves with the question of the significance of strikes, of methods of conducting them, and of the tasks of socialists participating in them.

We wish to attempt to outline some of our ideas on these questions. In our first article we plan to deal generally with the significance of strikes in the working-class movement; in the second we shall deal with anti-strike laws in Russia; and in the third, with the way strikes were and are conducted in Russia and with the attitude that class-conscious workers should adopt to them.

I

In the first place we must seek an explanation for the outbreak and spread of strikes. Everyone who calls to mind strikes from personal experience, from reports of others, or from the newspapers will see immediately that strikes break out and spread wherever big factories arise and grow in number. It would scarcely be possible to find a single one among the bigger factories employing hundreds (at times even thousands) of workers in which strikes have not occurred. When there were only a few big factories in Russia there were few strikes; but ever since big factories have been multiplying rapidly in both the old industrial districts and in new towns and villages, strikes have become more frequent.

Why is it that large-scale factory production always leads to strikes? It is because capitalism must necessarily lead to a struggle of the workers against the employers, and when production is on a large scale the struggle of necessity takes on the form of strikes.

Let us explain this.

Capitalism is the name given to that social system under which the land, factories, implements, etc., belong to a small number of landed proprietors and capitalists, while the mass of the people possesses no property, or very little property, and is compelled to hire itself out as workers. The landowners and factory owners hire workers and make them produce wares of this or that kind which they sell on the market. The factory owners, furthermore, pay the workers only such a wage as provides a bare subsistence for them and their families, while everything the worker produces over and above this amount goes into the factory owner's pocket, as his profit. Under capitalist economy, therefore, the people in their mass are the hired workers of others, they do not work for themselves but work for employers for wages. It is understandable that the employers always try to reduce wages; the less they give the workers, the greater their profit. The workers try to get the highest possible wage in order to provide their families with sufficient and whole some food, to live in good homes, and to dress as other people do and not like beggars. A constant struggle is, therefore, going on between employers and workers over wages; the employer is free to hire whatever worker he thinks fit and, therefore, seeks the cheapest. The worker is free to hire himself out to an employer of his choice, so that he seeks the dearest, the one that will pay him the most. Whether the worker works in the country or in town, whether he hires himself out to a landlord, a rich peasant, a contractor, or a factory owner, he always bargains with the employer, fights with him over the wages.

But is it possible for a single worker to wage a struggle by himself? The number of working people is increasing: peasants are being ruined and flee from the countryside to the town or the factory. The landlords and

¹ From Marxists Internet Archive. First published in 1924 in the magazine *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 8-9. Lenin wrote "On Strikes" for *Rabochaya Gazeta* [Workers Gazette] when he was in exile. Only the first part of the article is in the archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism; it is not known whether the other parts were written.

factory owners are introducing machines that rob the workers of their jobs. In the cities there are increasing numbers of unemployed and in the villages there are more and more beggars; those who are hungry drive wages down lower and lower. It becomes impossible for the worker to fight against the employer by himself. If the worker demands good wages or tries not to consent to a wage cut, the employer tells him to get out, that there are plenty of hungry people at the gates who would be glad to work for low wages.

When the people are ruined to such an extent that there is always a large number of unemployed in the towns and villages, when the factory owners amass huge fortunes and the small proprietors are squeezed out by the millionaires, the individual worker becomes *absolutely powerless* in face of the capitalist. It then becomes possible for the capitalist to crush the worker completely, to drive him to his death at slave labour and, indeed, not him alone, but his wife and children with him. If we take, for instance, those occupations in which the workers have not yet been able to win the protection of the law and in which they cannot offer resistance to the capitalists, we see an inordinately long working day, sometimes as long as 17-19 hours; we see children of 5 or 6 years of age overstraining themselves at work; we see a generation of permanently hungry workers who are gradually dying from starvation. Example: the workers who toil in their own homes for capitalists; besides, any worker can bring to mind a host of other examples! Even under slavery or serfdom there was never any oppression of the working people as terrible as that under capitalism when the workers cannot put up a resistance or cannot win the protection of laws that restrict the arbitrary actions of the employers.

And so, in order to stave off their reduction to such extremities, the workers begin a desperate struggle. As they see that each of them, individually, is completely powerless and that the oppression of capital threatens to crush him, the workers begin to revolt jointly against their employers. Workers' strikes begin. At first the workers often fail to realise what they are trying to achieve, lacking consciousness of the *wherefore* of their action; they simply smash the machines and destroy the factories. They merely want to display their wrath to the factory owners; they are trying out their joint strength in order to get out of an unbearable situation, without yet understanding why their position is so hopeless and what they should strive for.

In all countries the wrath of the workers first took the form of isolated revolts—the police and factory owners in Russia call them “mutinies.” In all countries these isolated revolts gave rise to more or less peaceful strikes, on the one hand, and to the all-sided struggle of the working class for its emancipation, on the other.

What significance have strikes (or stoppages) for the struggle of the working class? To answer this question, we must first have a fuller view of strikes. The wages of a worker are determined, as we have seen, by an agreement between the employer and the worker, and if, under these circumstances, the individual worker is completely powerless, it is obvious that workers must fight jointly for their demands, they are compelled to organise strikes either to prevent the employers from reducing wages or to obtain higher wages. It is a fact that in every country with a capitalist system there are strikes of workers. Everywhere, in all the European countries and in America, the workers feel themselves powerless when they are disunited; they can only offer resistance to the employers jointly, either by striking or threatening to strike. As capitalism develops, as big factories are more rapidly opened, as the petty capitalists are more and more ousted by the big capitalists, the more urgent becomes the need for the joint resistance of the workers, because unemployment increases, competition sharpens between the capitalists who strive to produce their wares at the cheapest (to do which they have to pay the workers as little as possible), and the fluctuations of industry become more accentuated and crises² more acute. When industry prospers, the factory owners make big profits but do not think of sharing them with the workers; but when a crisis breaks out, the factory owners try to push the losses on to the workers. The necessity for strikes in capitalist society has been recognised to such an extent by everybody in the European countries that the law in those countries does not forbid the organisation of strikes; only in Russia barbarous laws against strikes still remain in force (we shall speak on another occasion of these laws and their application).

² We shall deal elsewhere in greater detail with crises in industry and their significance to the workers. Here we shall merely note that during recent years in Russia industrial affairs have been going well, industry has been “prospering,” but that now (at the end of 1899) there are already clear signs that this “prosperity” will end in a crisis: difficulties in marketing goods, bankruptcies of factory owners, the ruin of petty proprietors, and terrible calamities for the workers (unemployment, reduced wages, etc.). —*Lenin*

However, strikes, which arise out of the very nature of capitalist society, signify the beginning of the working-class struggle against that system of society. When the rich capitalists are confronted by individual, propertyless workers, this signifies the utter enslavement of the workers. But when those propertyless workers unite, the situation changes. There is no wealth that can be of benefit to the capitalists if they cannot find workers willing to apply their labour-power to the instruments and materials belonging to the capitalists and produce new wealth. As long as workers have to deal with capitalists on an individual basis they remain veritable slaves who must work continuously to profit another in order to obtain a crust of bread, who must for ever remain docile and inarticulate hired servants. But when the workers state their demands jointly and refuse to submit to the money-bags, they cease to be slaves, they become human beings, they begin to demand that their labour should not only serve to enrich a handful of idlers, but should also enable those who work to live like human beings. The slaves begin to put forward the demand to become masters, not to work and live as the landlords and capitalists want them to, but as the working people themselves want to. Strikes, therefore, always instil fear into the capitalists, because they begin to undermine their supremacy. "All wheels stand still, if your mighty arm wills it," a German workers' song says of the working class. And so it is in reality: the factories, the landlords' land, the machines, the railways, etc., etc., are all like wheels in a giant machine—the machine that extracts various products, processes them, and delivers them to their destination. The whole of this machine is set in motion by *the worker* who tills the soil, extracts ores, makes commodities in the factories, builds houses, work shops, and railways. When the workers refuse to work, the entire machine threatens to stop. Every strike reminds the capitalists that it is the workers and not they who are the real masters—the workers who are more and more loudly proclaiming their rights. Every strike reminds the workers that their position is not hopeless, that they are not alone. See what a tremendous effect strikes have both on the strikers themselves and on the workers at neighbouring or nearby factories or at factories in the same industry. In normal, peaceful times the worker does his job without a murmur, does not contradict the employer, and does not discuss his condition. In times of strikes he states his demands in a loud voice, he reminds the employers of all their abuses, he claims his rights, he does not think of himself and his wages alone, he thinks of all his workmates who have downed tools together with him and who stand up for the workers' cause, fearing no privations. Every strike means many privations for the working people, terrible privations that can be compared only to the calamities of war—hungry families, loss of wages, often arrests, banishment from the towns where they have their homes and their employment. Despite all these sufferings, the workers despise those who desert their fellow workers and make deals with the employers. Despite all these sufferings, brought on by strikes, the workers of neighbouring factories gain renewed courage when they see that their comrades have engaged themselves in struggle. "People who endure so much to bend one single bourgeois will be able to break the power of the whole bourgeoisie,"³ said one great teacher of socialism, Engels, speaking of the strikes of the English workers. It is often enough for one factory to strike, for strikes to begin immediately in a large number of factories. What a great moral influence strikes have, how they affect workers who see that their comrades have ceased to be slaves and, if only for the time being, have become people on an equal footing with the rich! Every strike brings thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the worker's mind, thoughts of the struggle of the entire working class for emancipation from the oppression of capital. It has often happened that before a big strike the workers of a certain factory or a certain branch of industry or of a certain town knew hardly anything and scarcely ever thought about socialism; but after the strike, study circles and associations become much more widespread among them and more and more workers become socialists.

A strike teaches workers to understand what the strength of the employers and what the strength of the workers consists in; it teaches them not to think of their own employer alone and not of their own immediate workmates alone but of all the employers, the whole class of capitalists and the whole class of workers. When a factory owner who has amassed millions from the toil of several generations of workers refuses to grant a modest increase in wages or even tries to reduce wages to a still lower level and, if the workers offer resistance, throws thousands of hungry families out into the street, it becomes quite clear to the workers that the capitalist class as a whole is the enemy of the whole working class and that the workers can depend only on themselves and their united action. It often happens that a factory owner does his best to deceive the workers, to pose as a benefactor,

³ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow, 1958, p. 260).

and conceal his exploitation of the workers by some petty sops or lying promises. A strike always demolishes this deception at one blow by showing the workers that their "benefactor" is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

A strike, moreover, opens the eyes of the workers to the nature, not only of the capitalists, but of the government and the laws as well. Just as the factory owners try to pose as benefactors of the workers, the government officials and their lackeys try to assure the workers that the tsar and the tsarist government are equally solicitous of both the factory owners and the workers, as justice requires. The worker does not know the laws, he has no contact with government officials, especially with those in the higher posts, and, as a consequence, often believes all this. Then comes a strike. The public prosecutor, the factory inspector, the police, and frequently troops, appear at the factory. The workers learn that they have violated the law: the employers are permitted by law to assemble and openly discuss ways of reducing workers wages, but workers are declared criminals if they come to a joint agreement! Workers are driven out of their homes; the police close the shops from which the workers might obtain food on credit, an effort is made to incite the soldiers against the workers even when the workers conduct themselves quietly and peacefully. Soldiers are even ordered to fire on the workers and when they kill unarmed workers by shooting the fleeing crowd in the back, the tsar himself sends the troops an expression of his gratitude (in this way the tsar thanked the troops who had killed striking workers in Yaroslavl in 1895). It becomes clear to every worker that the tsarist government is his worst enemy, since it defends the capitalists and binds the workers hand and foot. The workers begin to understand that laws are made in the interests of the rich alone; that government officials protect those interests; that the working people are gagged and not allowed to make known their needs; that the working class must win for itself the right to strike, the right to publish workers' newspapers, the right to participate in a national assembly that enacts laws and supervises their fulfilment. The government itself knows full well that strikes open the eyes of the workers and for this reason it has such a fear of strikes and does everything to stop them as quickly as possible. One German Minister of the Interior, one who was notorious for the persistent persecution of socialists and class-conscious workers, not without reason, stated before the people's representatives: "Behind every strike lurks the hydra [monster] of revolution."⁴ Every strike strengthens and develops in the workers the understanding that the government is their enemy and that the working class must prepare itself to struggle against the government for the people's rights.

Strikes, therefore, teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalists only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes "a school of war," a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people, of all who labour, from the yoke of government officials and from the yoke of capital.

"A school of war" is, however, not war itself. When strikes are widespread among the workers, some of the workers (including some socialists) begin to believe that the working class can confine itself to strikes, strike funds, or strike associations alone; that by strikes alone the working class can achieve a considerable improvement in its conditions or even its emancipation. When they see what power there is in a united working class and even in small strikes, some think that the working class has only to organise a general strike throughout the whole country for the workers to get everything they want from the capitalists and the government. This idea was also expressed by the workers of other countries when the working-class movement was in its early stages and the workers were still very inexperienced. *It is a mistaken idea.* Strikes are *one* of the ways in which the working class struggles for its emancipation, but they are not the only way; and if the workers do not turn their attention to other means of conducting the struggle, they will slow down the growth and the successes of the working class. It is true that funds are needed to maintain the workers during strikes, if strikes are to be successful. Such workers' funds (usually funds of workers in separate branches of industry, separate trades or workshops) are maintained in all countries; but here in Russia this is especially difficult, because the police keep track of them, seize the money, and arrest the workers. The workers, of course, are able to hide from the police; naturally, the organisation of such funds is valuable, and we do not want to advise workers against setting them up. But it must not be supposed that workers' funds, when prohibited by law, will attract large numbers of contributors, and so long as the membership in such organisations is small, workers' funds will not prove of great

⁴ Lenin quotes a statement made by the Prussian Minister of the Interior, von Puttkamer.

use. Furthermore, even in those countries where workers' unions exist openly and have huge funds at their disposal, the working class can still not confine itself to strikes as a means of struggle. All that is necessary is a hitch in the affairs of industry (a crisis, such as the one that is approaching in Russia today) and the factory owners will even deliberately cause strikes, because it is to their advantage to cease work for a time and to deplete the workers' funds. The workers, therefore, cannot, under any circumstances, confine themselves to strike actions and strike associations. Secondly, strikes can only be successful where workers are sufficiently class-conscious, where they are able to select an opportune moment for striking, where they know how to put forward their demands, and where they have connections with socialists and are able to procure leaflets and pamphlets through them. There are still very few such workers in Russia, and every effort must be exerted to increase their number in order to make the working-class cause known to the masses of workers and to acquaint them with socialism and the working-class struggle. This is a task that the socialists and class-conscious workers must undertake jointly by organising a socialist working-class party for this purpose. Thirdly, strikes, as we have seen, show the workers that the government is their enemy and that a struggle against the government must be carried on. Actually, it is strikes that have gradually taught the working class of all countries to struggle against the governments for workers' rights and for the rights of the people as a whole. As we have said, only a socialist workers' party can carry on this struggle by spreading among the workers a true conception of the government and of the working-class cause. On another occasion we shall discuss specifically how strikes are conducted in Russia and how class-conscious workers should avail themselves of them. Here we must point out that strikes are, as we said above, "a school of war" and not the war itself, that strikes are only one means of struggle, only one aspect of the working-class movement. From individual strikes the workers can and must go over, as indeed they are actually doing in all countries, to a struggle of the entire working class for the emancipation of all who labour. When all class-conscious workers become socialists, i.e., when they strive for this emancipation, when they unite throughout the whole country in order to spread socialism among the workers, in order to teach the workers all the means of struggle against their enemies, when they build up a socialist workers' party that struggles for the emancipation of the people as a whole from government oppression and for the emancipation of all working people from the yoke of capital—only then will the working class become an integral part of that great movement of the workers of all countries that unites all workers and raises the red banner inscribed with the words: "Workers of all countries, unite!"

V.I. Lenin

What Is To Be Done?

(1902)

[excerpts]

II The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats⁵

Strikes occurred in Russia in the seventies and sixties (and even in the first half of the nineteenth century), and they were accompanied by the “spontaneous” destruction of machinery, etc. Compared with these “revolts”, the strikes of the nineties might even be described as “conscious”, to such an extent do they mark the progress which the working-class movement made in that period. This shows that the “spontaneous element”, in essence, represents nothing more nor less than. consciousness in an *embryonic form*. Even the primitive revolts expressed the awakening of consciousness to a certain extent. The workers were losing their age-long faith in the permanence of the system which oppressed them and began... I shall not say to understand, but to sense the necessity for collective resistance, definitely abandoning their slavish submission to the authorities. But this was, nevertheless, more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than of *struggle*. The strikes of the nineties revealed far greater flashes of consciousness; definite demands were advanced, the strike was carefully timed, known cases and instances in other places were discussed, etc. The revolts were simply the resistance of the oppressed, whereas the systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo. Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, not yet Social Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers; but the workers, were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. In this sense, the strikes of the nineties, despite the enormous progress they represented as compared with the “revolts”, remained a purely spontaneous movement.

We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.⁶ The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia. In the period under discussion, the middle nineties, this doctrine not only represented the completely formulated programme of the Emancipation of Labour group, but had already won over to its side the majority of the revolutionary youth in Russia. ...

⁵ During the period prior to the first imperialist world war, the revolutionary Marxists referred to themselves as “social democrats,” based on the model of the German Social Democratic Party, the largest organization of the Second International. Following the collapse of the social-democratic International in World War I, when most of its national parties lined up behind “their own” bourgeoisies in the imperialist slaughter, the revolutionaries formed the Third International, which reappropriated the name Communist first chosen by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

⁶ Trade-unionism does not exclude “politics” altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted some political (but not Social-Democratic) agitation and struggle. We shall deal with the difference between trade union politics and Social-Democratic politics in the next chapter. —*Lenin*

III Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Politics

The overwhelming majority of Russian Social-Democrats have of late been almost entirely absorbed by this work of organising the exposure of factory conditions. Suffice it to recall *Rabochaya Mysl* to see the extent to which they have been absorbed by it – so much so, indeed, that they have lost sight of the fact that this, *taken by itself*, is in essence still not Social-Democratic work, but merely trade union work. As a matter of fact, the exposures merely dealt with the relations between the workers *in a given trade* and their employers, and all they achieved was that the sellers of labour power learned to sell their “commodity” on better terms and to fight the purchasers over a purely commercial deal. These exposures could have served (if properly utilised by an organisation of revolutionaries) as a beginning and a component part of Social-Democratic activity; but they could also have led (and, given a worshipful attitude towards spontaneity, were bound to lead) to a “purely trade union” struggle and to a non-Social-Democratic working-class movement. Social-Democracy leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social-Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force. Hence, it follows that not only must Social-Democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but that they must not allow the organisation of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness....

Listen to the following: “The political struggle of the working class is merely [it is certainly not “merely”] the most developed, wide, and effective form of economic struggle” (programme of *Rabocheye Dyelo*, published in issue No. 1, p. 3). “The Social-Democrats are now confronted with the task of lending the economic struggle itself, as far as possible, a political character” (Martynov, *Rabocheye Dyelo*, No. 10, p. 42)....

What concrete, real meaning attaches to Martynov’s words when he sets before Social-Democracy the task of “lending the economic struggle itself a political character”? The economic struggle is the collective struggle of the workers against their employers for better terms *in the sale of their labour-power*, for better living and working conditions. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle, because working conditions differ greatly in different trades, and, consequently, the struggle *to improve* them can only be conducted on the basis of trade organisations (in the Western countries, through trade unions; in Russia, through temporary trade associations and through leaflets, etc.). Lending “the economic struggle itself a political character” means, therefore, striving to secure satisfaction of these trade demands, the improvement of working conditions in each separate trade by means of “legislative and administrative measures” (as Martynov puts it on the ensuing page of his article, p. 43). This is precisely what all workers’ trade unions do and always have done. Read the works of the soundly scientific (and “soundly” opportunist) Mr. and Mrs. Webb and you will see that the British trade unions long ago recognised, and have long been carrying out, the task of “lending the economic struggle itself a political character”; they have long been fighting for the right to strike, for the removal of all legal hindrances to the co-operative and trade union movements, for laws to protect women and children, for the improvement of labour conditions by means of health and factory legislation, etc.

Thus, the pompous phrase about “lending the economic struggle *itself* a political character”, which sounds so “terrifically” profound and revolutionary, serves as a screen to conceal what is in fact the traditional striving *to degrade* Social-Democratic politics to the level of trade union politics. ...

Revolutionary Social-Democracy has always included the struggle for reforms as part of its activities. But it utilises “economic” agitation for the purpose of presenting to the government, not only demands for all sorts of measures, but also (and primarily) the demand that it cease to be an autocratic government. Moreover, it considers it its duty to present this demand to the government on the basis, not of the economic struggle *alone*, but of all manifestations in general of public and political life. In a word, it subordinates the struggle for reforms, as the part to the whole, to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and for socialism....

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between *all* classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to

what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: "To go among the workers." To bring political knowledge to the *workers* the Social Democrats must *go among all classes of the population*; they must dispatch units of their army *in all directions*....

Let us take the type of Social-Democratic study circle that has become most widespread in the past few years and examine its work. It has "contacts with the workers" and rests content with this, issuing leaflets in which abuses in the factories, the government's partiality towards the capitalists, and the tyranny of the police are strongly condemned. At workers' meetings the discussions never, or rarely ever, go beyond the limits of these subjects. Extremely rare are the lectures and discussions held on the history of the revolutionary movement, on questions of the government's home and foreign policy, on questions of the economic evolution of Russia and of Europe, on the position of the various classes in modern society, etc. As to systematically acquiring and extending contact with other classes of society, no one even dreams of that. In fact, the ideal leader, as the majority of the members of such circles picture him, is something far more in the nature of a trade union secretary than a socialist political leader. For the secretary of any, say English, trade union always helps the workers to carry on the economic struggle, he helps them to expose factory abuses, explains the injustice of the laws and of measures that hamper the freedom to strike and to picket (i. e., to warn all and sundry that a strike is proceeding at a certain factory), explains the partiality of arbitration court judges who belong to the bourgeois classes, etc., etc. In a word, every trade union secretary conducts and helps to conduct "the economic struggle against the employers and the government". It cannot be too strongly maintained that *this is still not Social-Democracy*, that the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat...

For it is not enough to call ourselves the "vanguard", the advanced contingent; we must act in such a way that all the other contingents recognise and are obliged to admit that we are marching in the vanguard. And we ask the reader: Are the representatives of the other "contingents" such fools as to take our word for it when we say that we are the "vanguard"? just picture to yourselves the following: a Social-Democrat comes to the "contingent" of Russian educated radicals, or liberal constitutionalists, and says, We are the vanguard; "the task confronting us now is, as far as possible, to lend the economic struggle itself a political character". The radical, or constitutionalist, if he is at all intelligent (and there are many intelligent men among Russian radicals and constitutionalists), would only smile at such a speech and would say (to himself, of course, for in the majority of cases he is an experienced diplomat): "Your 'vanguard' must be made up of simpletons. They do not even understand that it is our task, the task of the progressive representatives of bourgeois democracy to lend the workers' economic struggle *itself* a political character. Why, we too, like the West-European bourgeois, want to draw the workers into politics, *but only into trade-unionist, not into Social-Democratic politics*. Trade-unionist politics of the working class is precisely *bourgeois politics* of the working class, and this 'vanguard's' formulation of its task is the formulation of trade-unionist politics!

IV The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organization of the Revolutionaries

The political struggle of Social-Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organisation of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party must inevitably be of *a kind different* from the organisation of the workers designed for this struggle. The workers' organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course, I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organisation of *revolutionaries*, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats)....

I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of

the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and the more solid this organisation must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of the masses); (3) that such an organisation must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we *confine* the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation; and (5) the *greater* will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it....

Communist International

The Trade-Union Movement, Factory Committees and the Third International

(1920)

[excerpts]

Theses on the Trade Union Movement, Factory Committees and the Third International

1. The trades unions, created by the working class during the period of the peaceful development of capitalism, were organisations of the workers to increase the price of labour in the labour market, and for the improvement of labour conditions. The revolutionary Marxists endeavoured by their influence to unite them with the political party of the proletariat, the – Social Democracy, for a joint struggle for socialism. For the same reasons that international Social Democracy, with a few exceptions, proved to be not an instrument of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for the overthrow of capitalism, but an organisation which held back the proletariat from revolution, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, the trades unions proved to be in most cases, during the war, a part of the military apparatus of the bourgeoisie, helping the latter to exploit the working class as much as possible in a more energetic struggle for profits. Containing chiefly the skilled workmen, better paid, limited by their craft narrowmindedness, fettered by a bureaucratic apparatus disconnected from the masses, demoralised by their opportunist leaders, the unions betrayed not only the cause of the social revolution, but even also the struggle for the improvement of the conditions of life of the workmen organised by them. They started from the point of view of the trade union struggle against the employers, and replaced it by the programme of an amicable arrangement with the capitalists at any cost. This policy was carried on not only by the Liberal unions of England and America, not only by the would-be ‘socialist’ trades unions in Germany and Austria, but by the syndicalist unions in France as well.

2. The economic consequences of the war, the complete disorganisation of world economy, the insane prices, the unlimited use of the labour of women and children, the worsening of the housing conditions, all these are forcing the large masses of the proletariat into the struggle against capitalism. This struggle is revolutionary warfare, by its proportions and the character that it is assuming more and more every day; a warfare destroying in fact the bases of the capitalist order. The increase of wages, obtained one day by the economic struggle of one or another category of workers, is the next day nullified by the high prices. The prices must continue to rise, because the capitalist class of the victorious countries, ruining Central and Eastern Europe by its policy of exploitation, is not only not in a position to organise the world economy, but is incessantly disorganising it. For the success of their economic struggle, the wider masses of workers, who until now have stood apart from the labour unions, are now flowing into their ranks in a powerful stream. In all capitalist countries a tremendous increase of the trades unions is to be noticed, which now become organisations of the chief masses of the proletariat, not only of its advanced elements. Flowing into the unions, these masses strive to make them their weapons of battle. The sharpening of class antagonism compels the trades unions to lead strikes, which flow in a broad wave over the entire capitalist world, constantly interrupting the process of capitalist production and exchange. Increasing their demands in proportion to the rising prices and their own exhaustion, the working classes undermine the bases of all capitalist calculations and the elementary premise of every well-organised economic management. The unions, which during the war had been organs of compulsion over the working masses, become in this way organs for the annihilation of capitalism.

3. The old trade union bureaucracy and the old forms of organisation of the trades unions are in every way opposing such a change in the nature of the trades unions. The old trade union bureaucracy is endeavouring in many places to maintain the trades unions as organisations of the workers’ aristocracy; it preserves the rules which make it impossible for the badly paid working classes to enter into the trade union organisations. The old trade union aristocracy is even now intensifying its efforts to replace the strike methods, which are ever more and more acquiring the character of revolutionary warfare between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, by the policy of arrangements with the capitalists, the policy of long term contracts, which have lost all sense simply in view of

the constant insane rise in prices. It tries to force upon the workers the policy of 'Joint Industrial Councils', and to impede by law the leading of strikes, with the assistance of the capitalist state. At the most tense moments of the struggle this bureaucracy sows trouble and confusion among the struggling masses of the workers, impeding the fusion of the struggle of various categories of workmen into one general class struggle. In these attempts it is helped by the old organisations of the trades unions according to crafts, which breaks up the workmen of one branch of production into separate professional groups, notwithstanding their being bound together by the process of capitalist exploitation. It rests on the force of the tradition of the old labour aristocracy, which is now constantly being weakened by the process of suppression of the privilege of separate groups of the proletariat through the general decay of capitalism, the equalisation of the level of the working class and the growth of the poverty and precariousness of its livelihood. In this way the trade union bureaucracy breaks up the powerful stream of the labour movement into weak streamlets, substitutes partial reformist demands for the general revolutionary aims of the movement, and on the whole retards the transformation of the struggle of the proletariat into a revolutionary struggle for the annihilation of capitalism.

4. Bearing in mind the rush of the enormous working masses into the trades unions, and also the objective revolutionary character of the economic struggle which those masses are carrying on in spite of the trade union bureaucracy, the Communists must join such unions in all countries, in order to make of them efficient organs of the struggle for the suppression of capitalism and for Communism. They must initiate the forming of trades unions where these do not exist. All voluntary withdrawals from the industrial movement, every artificial attempt to organise special unions, without being compelled thereto by exceptional acts of violence on the part of the trade union bureaucracy such as the expulsion of separate revolutionary local branches of the unions by the opportunist officials, or by their narrow-minded aristocratic policy, which prohibits the unskilled workers from entering into the organisation – represents a great danger to the Communist movement. It threatens to hand over the most advanced, the most conscious workers to the opportunist leaders, playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie. The luke-warmness of the working masses, their theoretical indecision, their tendency to yield to the arguments of opportunist leaders, can be overcome only during the process of the ever-growing struggle, by degrees, as the wider masses of the proletariat learn to understand, by experience, by their victories and defeats, that in fact it is already impossible to obtain human conditions of life on the basis of capitalist methods of management; and by degrees as the advanced Communist workmen learn through their economic struggle to be not only preachers of the ideas of communism, but also the most determined leaders of the economic struggle of the labour unions. Only in this way will it be possible to remove from the unions their opportunist leaders, only in this way will the communists be able to take the lead in the trade union movement and make of it an organ of the revolutionary struggle for communism. Only in this way can they prevent the break-up of the trades unions, and replace them by industrial unions – remove the old bureaucracy separated from the masses and replace it by the apparatus of factory-representatives, leaving only the most necessary functions to the centre.

5. Placing the object and the essence of labour organisations before them, the Communists ought not to hesitate before a split in such organisations, if a refusal to split would mean abandoning revolutionary work in the trades unions, and giving up the attempt to make of them an instrument of revolutionary struggle, the attempt to organise the most exploited section of the proletariat. But even if such a split should be necessary, it must be carried into effect only at a time when the Communists have succeeded by incessant warfare against the opportunist leaders and their tactics, in persuading the wider masses of workmen that the split is occurring not because of the remote and as yet incomprehensible aims of the revolution, but on account of the concrete, immediate interests of the working class in the development of its economic struggle. The Communists, in case a necessity for a split arises, must continuously and attentively discuss the question as to whether such a split might not lead to their isolation from the working masses.

6. Where a split between the opportunists and the revolutionary trade union movement has already taken place before, where, as in America, alongside of the opportunist trades unions, there are unions with revolutionary tendencies – although not communist ones – there the Communists are bound to support such revolutionary unions, to persuade them to abandon syndicalist prejudices and to place themselves on the platform of communism, which alone is the platform for the economic struggle. Where within the trades unions or outside of them organisations are formed in the factories, such as shop stewards, factory committees, etc., for the purpose of fighting against the counter-revolutionary tendencies of the trade union bureaucracy, to support the spontaneous direct action of the proletariat, there, of course, the Communists must with all their energy give assistance to these

organisations. But they must not fail to support the revolutionary trades unions, which are in a state of ferment and passing over to the class struggle. On the contrary, by approaching this evolution of the unions on their way to a revolutionary struggle, the Communists will be able to play the part of an element uniting the politically and industrially organised workmen in their struggle for the suppression of capitalism.

7. The economic struggle of the proletariat becomes a political struggle during an epoch of the decline of capitalism much quicker than during an epoch of its peaceful development. Every serious economic clash may immediately place the workers face to face with the question of revolution. Therefore it is the duty of the Communists in all the phases of the economic struggle to point out to the workers that the success of the struggle is only possible if the working class conquers the capitalists in open fight, and by means of dictatorship proceeds to the organisation of a socialist order. Consequently, the Communist must strive to create as far as possible complete unity between the trades unions and the Communist Party, and to subordinate the unions to the practical leadership of the party, as the advanced guard of the workers' revolution. For this purpose the Communists should have communist groups in all the trades unions and factory committees and acquire by their means an influence over the labour movement and direct it...

Leon Trotsky

Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay⁷ (August 1940)

(The manuscript of the following article was found in Trotsky's desk. Obviously, it was by no means a completed article, but rather the rough notes for an article on the subject indicated by his title. He had been writing them shortly before his death.—the editors of *FI*.)

* * *

There is one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organizations in the entire world: it is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power. This process is equally characteristic of the neutral, the Social-Democratic, the Communist and "anarchist" trade unions. This fact alone shows that the tendency towards "growing together" is intrinsic not in this or that doctrine as such but derives from social conditions common for all unions.

Monopoly capitalism does not rest on competition and free private initiative but on centralized command. The capitalist cliques at the head of mighty trusts, syndicates, banking consortiums, etcetera, view economic life from the very same heights as does state power; and they require at every step the collaboration of the latter. In their turn the trade unions in the most important branches of industry find themselves deprived of the possibility of profiting by the competition between the different enterprises. They have to confront a centralized capitalist adversary, intimately bound up with state power. Hence flows the need of the trade unions—insofar as they remain on reformist positions, i.e., on positions of adapting themselves to private property—to adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its cooperation. In the eyes of the bureaucracy of the trade union movement the chief task lies in "freeing" the state from the embrace of capitalism, in weakening its dependence on trusts, in pulling it over to their side. This position is in complete harmony with the social position of the labor aristocracy and the labor bureaucracy, who fight for a crumb in the share of superprofits of imperialist capitalism. The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the democratic" state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

Colonial and semi-colonial countries are under the sway not of native capitalism but of foreign imperialism. However, this does not weaken but on the contrary, strengthens the need of direct, daily, practical ties between the magnates of capitalism and the governments which are in essence subject to them—the governments of colonial or semi-colonial countries. Inasmuch as imperialist capitalism creates both in colonies and semi-colonies a stratum of labor aristocracy and bureaucracy, the latter requires the support of colonial and semicolonial governments, as protectors, patrons and, sometimes, as arbitrators« This constitutes the most important social basis for the Bonapartist and semi-Bonapartist character of governments in the colonies and in backward countries generally. This likewise constitutes the basis for the dependence of reformist unions upon the state.

In Mexico the trade unions have been transformed by law into semi-state institutions and have, in the nature of things, assumed a semi-totalitarian character. The stateization of the trade unions was, according to the conception of the legislators, introduced in the interests of the workers in order to assure them an influence upon the governmental and economic life. But insofar as foreign imperialist capitalism dominates the national state and insofar as it is able, with the assistance of internal reactionary forces, to overthrow the unstable democracy and

⁷ This article was first published in *Fourth International*, the theoretical magazine of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. The manuscript was found in Trotsky's desk after he was murdered by a Stalinist agent in August 1940. It was by no means a completed article, but rather the rough notes for an article on the subject indicated by his title.

replace it with outright fascist dictatorship, to that extent the legislation relating to the trade unions can easily become a weapon in the hands of imperialist dictatorship.

From the foregoing it seems, at first sight, easy to draw the conclusion that the trade unions cease to be trade unions in the imperialist epoch. They leave almost no room at all for workers' democracy which, in the good old days, when free trade ruled on the economic arena, constituted the content of the inner life of labor organizations. In the absence of workers' democracy there cannot be any free struggle for the influence over the trade union membership. And because of this, the chief arena of work for revolutionists within the trade unions disappears. Such a position, however, would be false to the core. We cannot select the arena and the conditions for our activity to suit our own likes and dislikes. It is infinitely more difficult to fight in a totalitarian or a semitotalitarian state for influence over the working masses than in a democracy. The very same thing likewise applies to trade unions whose fate reflects the change in the destiny of capitalist states. We cannot renounce the struggle for influence over workers in Germany merely because the totalitarian regime makes such work extremely difficult there. We cannot, in precisely the same way, renounce the struggle within the compulsory labor organizations created by Fascism. All the less so can we renounce internal systematic work in trade unions of totalitarian and semi-totalitarian type merely because they depend directly or indirectly on the workers' state or because the bureaucracy deprives the revolutionists of the possibility of working freely within these trade unions. It is necessary to conduct a struggle under all those concrete conditions which have been created by the preceding developments, including therein the mistakes of the working class and the crimes of its leaders. In the fascist and semi-fascist countries it is impossible to carry on revolutionary work that is not underground, illegal, conspiratorial. Within the totalitarian and semi-totalitarian unions it is impossible or well-nigh impossible to carry on any except conspiratorial work. It is necessary to adapt ourselves to the concrete conditions existing in the trade unions of every given country in order to mobilize the masses not only against the bourgeoisie but also against the totalitarian regime within the trade unions themselves and against the leaders enforcing this regime. The primary slogan for this struggle is: *complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state*. This means a struggle to turn the trade unions into the organs of the broad exploited masses and not the organs of a labor aristocracy.

* * *

The second slogan is: *trade union democracy*. This second slogan flows directly from the first and presupposes for its realization the complete freedom of the trade unions from the imperialist or colonial state.

In other words, the trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class. They cannot any longer be anarchistic, i.e. ignore the decisive influence of the state on the life of peoples and classes. They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.

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The neutrality of the trade unions is completely and irretrievably a thing of the past, gone together with the free bourgeois democracy.

* * *

From what has been said it follows quite clearly that, in spite of the progressive degeneration of trade unions and their growing together with the imperialist state, the work within the trade unions not only does not lose any of its importance but remains as before and becomes in a certain sense even more important work than ever for every revolutionary party. The matter at issue is essentially the struggle for influence over the working class. Every organization, every party, every faction which permits itself an ultimatic position in relation to the trade union, i.e., in essence turns its back upon the working class, merely because of displeasure with its organizations, every such organization is destined to perish. And it must be said it deserves to perish.

* * *

Inasmuch as the chief role in backward countries is not played by national but by foreign capitalism, the national bourgeoisie occupies, in the sense of its social position, a much more minor position than corresponds with the development of industry. Inasmuch as foreign capital does not import workers but proletarianizes the native population, the national proletariat soon begins playing the most important role in the life of the country. In these conditions the national government, to the extent that it tries to show resistance to foreign capital, is compelled to a greater or lesser degree to lean on the proletariat. On the other hand, the governments of those backward countries which consider inescapable or more profitable for themselves to march shoulder to shoulder with foreign capital, destroy the labor organizations and institute a more or less totalitarian regime. Thus, the feebleness of the national bourgeoisie, the absence of traditions of municipal self-government, the pressure of foreign capitalism and the relatively rapid growth of the proletariat, cut the ground from under any kind of stable democratic regime. The governments of backward, i.e., colonial and semi-colonial countries, by and large assume a Bonapartist or semi-Bonapartist character; and differ from one another in this, that some try to orient in a democratic direction, seeking support among workers and peasants, while others install a form close to military-police dictatorship. This likewise determines the fate of the trade unions. They either stand under the special patronage of the state or they are subjected to cruel persecution. Patronage on the part of the state is dictated by two tasks which confront it.. first, to draw the working class closer thus gaining a support for resistance against excessive pretensions on the part of imperialism; and, at the same time, to discipline the workers themselves by placing them under the control of a bureaucracy.

* * *

Monopoly capitalism is less and less willing to reconcile itself to the independence of trade unions. It demands of the reformist bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy who pick the crumbs from its banquet table, that they become transformed into its political police before the eyes of the working class. If that is not achieved, the labor bureaucracy is driven away and replaced by the fascists. Incidentally, all the efforts of the labor aristocracy in the service of imperialism cannot in the long run save them from destruction.

The intensification of class contradictions within each country, the intensification of antagonisms between one country and another, produce a situation in which imperialist capitalism can tolerate (i.e., up to a certain time) a reformist bureaucracy only if the latter serves directly as a petty but active stockholder of its imperialist enterprises, of its plans and programs within the country as well as on the world arena. Social-reformism must become transformed into socialimperialism in order to prolong its existence, but only prolong it, and nothing more. Because along this road there is no way out in general.

Does this mean that in the epoch of imperialism independent trade unions are generally impossible? It would be fundamentally incorrect to pose the question this way. Impossible are the independent or semi-independent reformist trade unions. Wholly possible are revolutionary trade unions which not only are not stockholders of imperialist policy but which set as their task the direct overthrow of the rule of capitalism. In the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can be really independent only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in action, the organs of proletarian revolution. In this sense, the program of transitional demands adopted by the last congress of the Fourth International is not only the program for the activity of the party but in its fundamental features it is the program for the activity of the trade unions.

(Translator's note: At this point Trotsky left room on the page, to expound further the connection between trade union activity and the Transitional Program of the Fourth International. It is obvious that implied here is a very powerful argument in favor of military training under trade union control. The following idea is implied: Either the trade unions serve as the obedient recruiting sergeants for the imperialist army and imperialist war or they train workers for self-defense and revolution.)

The development of backward countries is characterized by its combined character. In other words, the last word of imperialist technology, economics, and politics is combined in these countries with traditional backwardness and primitiveness. This law can be observed in the most diverse spheres of the development of colonial and semi-colonial countries, including the sphere of the trade union movement. Imperialist capitalism operates here in its most cynical and naked form. It transports to virgin soil the most perfected methods of its tyrannical rule.

* * *

In the trade union movement throughout the world there is to be observed in the last period a swing to the right and the suppression of internal democracy. In England, the Minority Movement in the trade unions has been crushed (not without the assistance of Moscow); the leaders of the trade union movement are today, especially in the field of foreign policy, the obedient agents of the Conservative party. In France there was no room for an independent existence for Stalinist trade unions; they united with the so-called anarcho-syndicalist trade unions under the leadership of Jouhaux and as a result of this unification there was a general shift of the trade union movement not to the left but to the right. The leadership of the C.G.T. is the most direct and open agency of French imperialist capitalism.

In the United States the trade union movement has passed through the most stormy history in recent years. The rise of the CIO is incontrovertible evidence of the revolutionary tendencies within the working masses. Indicative and noteworthy in the highest degree, however, is the fact that the new "leftist" trade union organization was no sooner founded than it fell into the steel embrace of the imperialist state. The struggle among the tops between the old federation and the new is reducible in large measure to the struggle for the sympathy and support of Roosevelt and his cabinet.

No less graphic, although in a different sense, is the picture of the development or the degeneration of the trade union movement in Spain. In the socialist trade unions all those leading elements which to any degree represented the independence of the trade union movement were pushed out. As regards the anarcho-syndicalist unions, they were transformed into the instrument of the bourgeois republicans; the anarcho-syndicalist leaders became conservative bourgeois ministers. The fact that this metamorphosis took place in conditions of civil war does not weaken its significance. War is the continuation of the self-same policies. It speeds up processes, exposes their basic features, destroys all that is rotten, false, equivocal and lays bare all that is essential. The shift of the trade unions to the right was due to the sharpening of class and international contradictions. The leaders of the trade union movement sensed or understood, or were given to understand, that now was no time to play the game of opposition. Every oppositional movement within the trade union movement, especially among the tops, threatens to provoke a stormy movement of the masses and to create difficulties for national imperialism. Hence flows the swing of the trade unions to the right, and the suppression of workers' democracy within the unions. The basic feature, the swing towards the totalitarian regime, passes through the labor movement of the whole world.

We should also recall Holland, where the reformist and the trade union movement was not only a reliable prop of imperialist capitalism, but where the so-called anarcho-syndicalist organization also was actually under the control of the imperialist government. The secretary of this organization, Sneevliet, in spite of his Platonic sympathies for the Fourth International was as deputy in the Dutch Parliament most concerned lest the wrath of the government descend upon his trade union organization.

* * *

In the United States the Department of Labor with its leftist bureaucracy has as its task the subordination of the trade union movement to the democratic state and it must be said that this task has up to now been solved with some success.

* * *

The nationalization of railways and oil fields in Mexico has of course nothing in common with socialism. It is a measure of state capitalism in a backward country which in this way seeks to defend itself on the one hand against foreign imperialism and on the other against its own proletariat. The management of railways, oil fields, etcetera, through labor organizations has nothing in common with workers' control over industry, for in the essence of the matter the management is effected through the labor bureaucracy which is independent of the workers, but in return, completely dependent on the bourgeois state. This measure on the part of the ruling class pursues the aim of disciplining the working class, making it more industrious in the service of the common interests of the state, which appear on the surface to merge with the interests of the working class itself. As a matter of fact, The whole task of the bourgeoisie consists in liquidating the trade unions as organs of the class struggle and substituting in their place the trade union bureaucracy as the organ of the leadership over the workers by the bourgeois state. In these conditions, the task of the revolutionary vanguard is to conduct a struggle for the

complete independence of the trade unions and for the introduction of actual workers' control over the present union bureaucracy, which has been turned into the administration of railways, oil enterprises and so on.

* * *

Events of the last period (before the war) have revealed with especial clarity that anarchism, which in point of theory is always only liberalism drawn to its extremes, was, in practice, peaceful propaganda within the democratic republic, the protection of which it required. If we leave aside individual terrorist acts, etcetera, anarchism, as a system of mass movement and politics, presented only propaganda material under the peaceful protection of the laws. In conditions of crisis the anarchists always did just the opposite of what they taught in peace times. This was pointed out by Marx himself in connection with the Paris Commune. And it was repeated on a far more colossal scale in the experience of the Spanish revolution.

* * *

Democratic unions in the old sense of the term, bodies where in the framework of one and the same mass organization different tendencies struggled more or less freely, can no longer exist. Just as it is impossible to bring back the bourgeois-democratic state, so it is impossible to bring back the old workers' democracy. The fate of the one reflects the fate of the other. As a matter of fact, the independence of trade unions in the class sense, in their relations to the bourgeois state can, in the present conditions, be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership, that is, the leadership of the Fourth International. This leadership, naturally, must and can be rational and assure the unions the maximum of democracy conceivable under the present concrete conditions. But without the political leadership of the Fourth International the independence of the trade unions is impossible.

Trotskyist Work in the Trade Unions

By Chris Knox

Part I⁸

The Trotskyist movement has a proud tradition of struggle for the principles of Leninism, under difficult conditions and against heavy odds. In the United States, the core of the leadership which built the original Trotskyist organization (Communist League of America 1928-34) kept up the struggle for over three decades, before the vicissitudes of the Cold War anti-communist witchhunt finally caught up with them and caused their political degeneration and departure from Bolshevism in the early 1960's, The Spartacist League was born in the fight against the degeneration of the Trotskyist movement—in the Socialist Workers Party—and claims the tradition as its own.

This tradition includes the struggle of the Left Opposition against the bureaucratic degeneration of the USSR, the campaign for a workers united front against fascism in Germany, and the battle to build a new, Fourth International to provide an alternative proletarian leadership to the bankrupt Social Democrats and Stalinists.

As in the course of every preceding phase of the struggle for revolutionary socialism, however, it was inevitable that the Trotskyists would make mistakes. Correction of earlier mistakes, while in no way repudiating the earlier struggles and tradition, has been integral to the growth and political and theoretical armament of the movement. If one holds the early Lenin, for instance, up to the mirror of the whole body of Leninism—which incorporates the experience of the Russian Revolution and struggle to build the Communist International—one finds many errors and shortcomings. As James P. Cannon, communist leader and pioneer American Trotskyist, put it, discussing the development of the democratic-centralist vanguard party conception in 1944:

"If our party stands today on far higher ground than that occupied by the amorphous rebel workers' movement prior to the First World War—and that is indubitably the case—it is not due solely to the superiority of our program, but also to the consistent application in practice of the principles and methods of Bolshevik organization. The experience of a quarter of a century has convinced us over and over again that this is the right way, the only way, to build a revolutionary party....

"In politics nothing is more stupid, more infantile, than to retrace ground that had already been covered, to go back and start all over again as if nothing had happened and nothing has been learned."

--*Letters from Prison*

Just as Lenin had early shortcomings which reflected the social-democratic movement he was struggling to transcend, so the American Trotskyists made mistakes which reflected, in part, the arena of the degenerating Communist Party from which they emerged, and in part the national political environment in which they functioned. The history of Trotskyist work in the trade unions in the U.S. was in the main exemplary and includes such high points as the Minneapolis Teamster strike of 1934, which was a model of mass mobilization as well as the first instance of organizing of trucking on the lines of industrial unionism; and the SWP's struggles against the no-strike pledge and the War Labor Board in World War II. However, it also reveals consistent errors which must be studied and corrected by revolutionists today if the movement is to be armed against new dangers. While this history has yet to be fully researched and recorded, its main outlines can be critically examined.

CP Degeneration in the Twenties

Cannon, Shachtman, Abern and the other founders of American Trotskyism were recruited to Trotsky's Opposition suddenly, in 1928, after the issue of "Trotskyism" was considered closed in the American CP, and without having undergone the experience of a conscious struggle against the Stalinist degeneration of the party in

⁸ Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 25, 20 July 1973

the twenties. This degeneration had hopelessly corrupted the bulk of the leadership and cadre of the CP and demoralized, tamed or driven away most of the members.

The leadership of the party was firmly in the hands of Jay Lovestone, a hated, distrusted and cynical factionalist, who controlled the party through organizational manipulation and unprincipled political adaptationism. Identified with the Bukharinite right wing internationally, the Lovestone clique was steering the party in the direction of unbridled opportunism based on pessimism. In the trade unions, Lovestone's policy was to rely heavily on maneuvers at the top in the trade-union bureaucracy, coupled with political overtures to liberals in the form of pacifism, etc. Given the sharp decline of the AFL, this policy meant concentration on the privileged skilled trades, the small minority of the workers who were organized, and virtually no orientation to the masses of unskilled workers.

In the Stalinized Communist International (CI) of the late twenties, leadership of the national sections depended on being able to sense the winds of political change in Moscow and change one's line in time. The rampant factionalism, soon to be replaced by monolithism, had become completely unprincipled. Thus while Lovestone's right-wing opportunism fit his natural predilections and organizational methods, his faction was no more or less identified with any particular political program than was that of his chief opponent, William Z. Foster. Both sought power through adapting to the Comintern breezes, which had been blowing distinctly to the right since 1926, when Stalin blocked with Bukharin against Trotsky, Zinoviev and the ultra-lefts.

Cannon, although he too was influenced by the degeneration of the Communist International, as early as 1925 formed a third faction, the purpose of which was to fight for the liquidation of the programless factions and the building of a collective leadership. It was a somewhat demoralized Cannon who reluctantly attended the Sixth Congress of the CI in 1928, at which he accidentally discovered a copy of Trotsky's critique of the draft program, and became convinced of Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the International as based on the interests of the national-bureaucratic elite in the USSR.

"The Right Danger in the American Party"

At the time of the Sixth CI Congress Cannon had formed a bloc (atemporary alliance, not a fusion of groups) with Foster's group on the basis of the document, "The Right Danger in the American Party." This document, like the bloc that produced it, was contradictory: it was both a principled condemnation of the gross opportunist errors of Lovestone, and a platform for an unprincipled attempt by the Fosterites to get control of the CP on the basis of what they sensed was a new left turn in the making in the Comintern.

Stalin was indeed preparing a new left turn, though he was not ready to break openly with Bukharin at the time of the Sixth Congress. As usual, the turn was forced on Stalin by circumstances which grew out of the previous line. In addition, the turn of 1928 was a plot to outflank the Left Opposition: first to expel Trotsky, then to appear to adopt his slogans. Many members of the opposition fell into the trap and capitulated to Stalin.

"The Right Danger" later reprinted in the Trotskyists' paper, the *Militant*, on which the Trotskyists continued to stand after their expulsion, reflected the signals being sent out from Moscow before the Sixth Congress, indicating the approach of the new "Third Period" turn. It attempted to use against Lovestone letters from the CI complaining about this and that, and pressure from the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU-CI trade-union arm) for more work to organize the unorganized into new unions. While correctly attacking the grossly opportunist and capitulatory blocs of Lovestone with various elements of the trade-union bureaucracy, the document tended to slip into the fallacious third period "united front from below" conception:

"The C.I. line against the United Front from the top with reactionary trade union, liberal and S.P. leaders, and for united front with the workers against them, applies with special emphasis in America."

—*Militant*, 15 December 1928

While the "Right Danger" thus contained some errors reflecting the developing new Stalinist zigzag (and was furthermore limited solely to the consideration of American questions), it was in the main correct. It was principled, from Cannon's point of view, on the need to form new unions in places where the AFL was decrepit or non-existent. While Foster was the extreme AFL-fetishist, the partisan of "boring from within," Cannon had

broken with Foster in 1926 over the Passaic strike, which he felt was an example in which a new union should have been formed under Communist leadership.

After their summary expulsion from the CI which occurred on the basis of their views alone as soon as they solidarized with Trotsky, the Trotskyists attempted to make the most of Stalin's adoption of their slogans and continued to expose Lovestone, who was belatedly jumping on the third period bandwagon. The Trotskyists claimed Moscow's new slogans, "Against the Kulak! Against the Nepmen: Against the Bureaucrats!" as their own and took credit for the pressure leading to the CP's formation of new unions in mining, textiles and needle trades. These were the areas which the Trotskyists had felt were most ripe for the open formation of new unions, in conjunction with continued oppositional work in what was left of the old AFL unions, initial Trotskyist trade-union work centered on these unions, particularly mining in southern Illinois.

This position for new unions in areas abandoned and betrayed by the AFL bureaucrats was soon to be distorted by the Stalinists into a position of dual unions on principle, and opposition to work in the old unions. As consistently presented by the Trotskyist Opposition (both before and after it became "Trotskyist"), however, the "new unions" line conformed to both the objective situation and the CP's ability to intervene in the situation. The AFL unions had been on a rampage of class collaborationism, destruction of militancy and expulsion of "reds" throughout most of the twenties. The thrust of this reactionary drive by the bureaucracy was explicitly against the organization of the masses of unskilled workers into industrial unions, which alone could overcome craft myopia and accomplish the organization of the bulk of the working class. The result was that the AFL unions not only refused to organize new workers, but they shrank drastically, driving away new workers and anyone who wanted to organize them in the process. By the end of the twenties, the crisis of proletarian leadership took the form of the lack of leadership to organize the unorganized.

The duty of revolutionary leadership was, in fact, to fill this gap, and smash the AFL bureaucracy in the process. This condition continued into the thirties, until finally a section of the AFL bureaucracy moved to organize the mass production industries precisely out of fear that if the AFL leadership didn't do it, the reds would. This resulted in the setting up of the CIO which, while it entailed a bitter rivalry with the old AFL leadership, was primarily a matter of the formation of new unions for the unorganized industries rather than a case of rivals directly competing for the same workers with the old unions.

The Trotskyists proceeded from the concrete situation in each case, and advocated new unions only where the struggle to take over the old unions had clearly exhausted itself against the stone wall of bureaucratism. Mining was such a case. The rank and file in areas such as southern Illinois were so disgusted with the betrayals and utter disregard for democracy of the Lewis machine that the basis for a new union really displacing the old shell existed. Opposition leaders in the CP before 1928 had to fight Lovestone policies which were a capitulation not only to the slow moving "progressives" (Brophy, Hapgood, etc.) but to the Lewis machine itself! The formation of the National Miners Union (NMU) by the CP, in conjunction with anti-Lewis leaders, came too late and was further sabotaged by other CP errors of an adventurist character. Rank-and-file pressure caused the progressives to try again in 1932, however, and the CP went along reluctantly with setting up the Progressive Miners of America.

Despite the objective conditions favoring new unions, the CP's third period red unions were a disastrous betrayal. They were disasters because of the manner in which the CP attempted to form them: too late at first, in the case of mining and needle trades, but then increasingly too precipitously, without preparation. Strikes were called in the same manner, as an adventure on the part of a small handful, rather than on the basis of conscious preparation of the mass of the workers. Furthermore, the CP's policy was a betrayal, because it made a principle for the whole movement out of what should have been merely a tactic for particular circumstances. While the CP claimed throughout to be for continued opposition inside the old unions, the core of third period sectarianism made this impossible. The AFL leadership, as well as the Socialist Party, Trotskyists, Musteites, and all other tendencies, were denounced as "social-fascists" and otherwise not part of the workers movement in any sense. This made the united front, in which communists bloc with non-communist working-class leaders in order to expose them and advance the struggle at the same time—an essential part of communist work in the trade unions—impossible. While destroying its handful of new unions through sectarianism and adventurism, the Stalinists thus abandoned and sabotaged work in the old unions, which left the reactionary bureaucrats in control. This not only delayed the final introduction of industrial unions on a mass scale, but ensured that when such unions were formed, reactionaries would lead them.

From the moment at which the “new unions” position of the CP began to mushroom into the full-scale sectarianism of the third period, the Trotskyists fought to expose these errors and warn of the dangers. With tremendous prescience, they warned:

“The new ‘theories’ are attempting to rationalize the AFL out of existence as a federation of unions and abstractly preclude the possibility of its future expansion and growth in an organizational sense....

“The abandonment of... struggle [in the AFL] now taking place under the cover of high-sounding ‘radicalism’ will only prevent, the crystallization of an insurgent movement within the old unions and free the hands of the bureaucrats far more effective sabotage of the new unions, for these two processes are bound together. The result will be to strengthen the effectiveness of the AFL bureaucracy as a part of the capitalist war machine.”

—“Platform of the Communist Opposition,” *Militant*, 15 February 1929

Trotskyist opposition to the sectarianism and adventurism of the third period, like the opposition to Lovestone’s opportunism, was consciously linked to Cannon’s earlier positions in the CP. As such, it carried forth certain errors which contributed to the mistakes of the later work of the Trotskyists in the trade unions.

In addition to condemning Lovestone’s opportunism in the late twenties, the opposition groups (Foster and Cannon) condemned as sectarian his tendency to work exclusively through party fractions in the trade unions rather than building sections of the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), the party’s trade-union organization. This tendency on the part of the Lovestone group dated back to the 1924-25 left turn in the CI. In the U.S., the Ruthenberg/Lovestone faction (Ruthenberg died in 1927) used this turn for factional advantage against Foster, by substituting direct party work in the unions for building the TUEL, which was Foster’s main organizational base. While Cannon had always been for a flexible policy on work in the unions, including building new unions when called for, he was also against the “narrow” conception of the TUEL, which was developed at this time, in which the latter was closely identified with the party. Instead, he was for broad united-front blocs, while maintaining the independence and freedom to criticize of the party:

“In 1925 the present Opposition conducted a struggle against the narrowing of the TUEL into a purely Communist body with a Communist program and for broadening it into a united front organization. This was one of the most progressive struggles in the history of the party.”

—“Platform of the Opposition”

The “Platform” of 1929 then goes on to condemn both the abandonment of united-front tactics with the onset of the third period and earlier failures of both a left and right character: failure to build broad united-front movements where possible and failure to struggle for a leading role of the party within such blocs and movements (including warning that “progressive” bloc partners will betray, etc.).

The error which was buried in this polemic was that the TUEL was designed precisely to be the vehicle to bring the main outlines of the Communist program directly into the unions. It was a membership organization based on a program, not a bloc or united front. It carried out united fronts with other forces. Since these other forces, and much of the TUEL membership itself, had melted away or been driven out of the unions by 1924, the increased identification between the TUEL and the Communist Party engineered by Ruthenberg/Lovestone seemed to Cannon to be a sectarian error; rather, the party should be using the TUEL to seek new allies. Yet Cannon advocated the same watering down of the TUEL’s political nature as did the degenerating Comintern in the late twenties. This watering down gave rise to a policy of blocs as a permanent strategy (the “left-center coalition”) from 1927 on (see WV No. 22, 8 June 1973).

Cannon’s position on trade-union work, then, called for principled united fronts and blocs around the immediate burning issues, together with vigorous party-building and maintenance of the party as an independent force, free to criticize its bloc partners, and always striving to play a leading role. Rather than being confused on the nature of the united front, which he was not, Cannon simply dismissed the TUEL, or the need for anything like the TUEL, as anything other than a vehicle for such blocs or united fronts. This left him with no conception of an organized pole for the recruitment of militants to the full party program for the trade unions, i.e., what the TUEL had been during its period of greatest success (and before the Stalinist degeneration of the CI set in). It is not surprising, then, that the Trotskyists never attempted to create anything like the TUEL, such as caucuses based on the Trotskyist Transitional Program, in the course of their trade-union work. What caucuses they did create had

the character of temporary blocs, usually based on immediate, trade-union issues. This meant that the party itself, able to function openly only outside the unions, was the only organized pole for recruitment to the full program.

That the problems with this approach didn't become manifest until much later, after the rise of the CIO, was due primarily to the nature of the period, which called above all for a united front for the organization of the unorganized into industrial unions. This called for capable revolutionary trade-union organizing, which the Trotskyists, particularly the experienced militants of Minneapolis and Cannon himself, were prepared to conduct. This perspective led the Trotskyists into some of the Stalinist dual unions, the progressives' PMA, and leadership of the historic Minneapolis truck drivers' strikes of 1934.

The Minneapolis strikes stand to this day as a model of revolutionary trade-union organizing. Together with the San Francisco and Toledo general strikes of the same year, the Minneapolis strikes were an important precursor to the organization of all mass production workers along industrial lines.

Part 2

Minneapolis 1934 General Strike!⁹

Throughout the 1930's the American Trotskyists had to work under an overwhelming organizational disadvantage compared to the Stalinists. Expelled in the late 1920's from a Communist Party which had already undergone years of political degeneration, the Trotskyist forces at first numbered no more than 100 as opposed to the CP's 7,000. Furthermore, after Stalin's abrupt shift into the "Third Period" in 1929, many elements in the CP who had been sympathetic to Trotsky were superficially impressed by the new ultra-leftism and apparent adoption of some of the slogans of the Left Opposition and were induced to remain in the CP. The main initial source of Trotskyist recruitment was thus frozen off.

Despite the extreme sectarianism of the "Third Period," the CP reversed its decline and began to grow again during the early years of the Depression. CP-initiated unemployed leagues held militant demonstrations and attracted new forces. Despite the radical disproportion of forces, however, the CP could not tolerate the political threat represented by Trotsky's analysis and program. It immediately set out to destroy the American Trotskyists through physical gangsterism and cowardly exclusionism within the workers movement. Trotskyist meetings around the country were attacked by thugs and sometimes broken up.

"In those dog days of the movement we were shut off from all contact.... Whenever we tried to get into a workers organization we would be expelled as counter-revolutionary Trotskyists. We tried to send delegations to unemployed meetings. Our credentials would be rejected on the grounds that we were enemies of the working class. We were utterly isolated, forced in upon ourselves."

—James P. Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*

Under such circumstances, the Trotskyists did little mass work. Their first duty was to save as many of the vanguard cadre as possible for the program of the revolution. A premature turn to mass work would have in fact meant meaningless, sterile isolation—an abandonment of the Trotskyist program. Opportunities for intervention such as the Progressive Miners of America in 1932 were the exception rather than the rule.

The victory of fascism in Germany in 1933 was a monumental defeat which went unopposed by the Communist International and caused only isolated defections in its ranks. The Left Opposition concluded that the Third International had definitively gone over to support of the bourgeois order, and pronounced it dead as a potentially revolutionary force. Instead of continuing to act as a bureaucratically-expelled faction of the CI, the Trotskyists announced their intention to build a new party and a new international. This coincided with a slight economic upturn which renewed confidence among employed workers and stimulated a dramatic upturn in the class struggle. Strikes increased, and the Trotskyists fought hard to break out of their isolation. They published special editions of the *Militant* for big events such as the Paterson silk strike, sent their leaders on tours, and even managed to speak at some of the larger unemployed conferences, despite continued hooliganism by the CP.

⁹ Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 26, 3 August 1973.

Into the AFL

The Depression heightened the crisis of proletarian leadership caused by the refusal of the bureaucratic, craft leadership of the American Federation of Labor to organize the unorganized in the 1920's. While millions were thrown out of work and millions more forced to accept wage cuts, the AFL continued its class-collaborationist, do-nothing policy, showing no more concern over the unemployment question than the capitalist government itself. After the 1929 stock market crash, AFL-head William Green had even offered the bosses a no-strike pledge, if only they would stop wage cuts (which, of course, they did not, prompting only more inaction by Green)! Most union leaders simply counseled passive acceptance of rampant wage-slashing by the bosses while the AFL campaigned against government unemployment insurance. John L. Lewis of the Mineworkers toured the country putting down strikes against wage cuts. By 1933, AFL membership, continuing its decline, hit a low of slightly over two million, which was about half what it had been in 1920.

The Rooseveltian "New Deal" economic program (under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933-NRA) was designed to improve business by encouraging "rationalization" (promoting government-backed trustification) and raise public confidence in the system through a massive propaganda campaign. However, the strike wave beginning in early 1933 included a high proportion of unorganized industrial workers, which caused Roosevelt to cave in to pressure from the AFL to include a "right to organize" clause (section 7-A of NRA). Actually representing no change in the realm of legal rights, the vague clause had the effect of both promoting company unions and building the authority of the AFL unions: in either case, it was designed to provide the bosses with an agency to contain the upsurge.

While the bosses busily set up company unions to control the workers, the AFL unions also began to expand—despite the fact that many of these unions had previously been reduced to discredited shells—because the AFL appeared to be the agency through which the benefits of the "New Deal" would filter down. The Trotskyists immediately recognized the vital implications of this trend for revolutionary work in the class struggle. "We must march with this instinctive movement and influence it from within," wrote Cannon in the *Militant* (2 September 1933).

The Stalinists, meanwhile, were still maintaining their ruinous "Third Period" policy of creating dual "red" unions everywhere. The supposition had been that the unorganized masses would be organized directly by the CP, over the heads of the AFL. A mere trifle had been lacking for the realization of this plan—the mass movement. Despite some party growth, sectarian isolation of the Communists had been the general result. The established unions were showing some new life, but the Stalinists had destroyed the basis for intervention with their absurd characterization of the AFL as "social fascist" and ordered their people out. The pure sectarianism of their line is illustrated by the fact that where real, industrial unions existed independently from the AFL, but not under Stalinist control—such as the Progressive Miners in the Southern Illinois coal fields and the Amalgamated Food Workers in New York City—the Stalinists maintained their paper "unions" anyway, "independent" of the independents!

The Trotskyist position was in no way a change in basic policy, despite the fact that they had earlier urged the formation of new unions, independent of the AFL, in some areas. The Trotskyists carried forth the Leninist policy of seeking to reach the masses as long as they remained in the reactionary unions, without placing any confidence in the reactionary bureaucracy. The surge into the AFL was a dramatic confirmation of Lenin's policy, and condemnation of Stalinist ultra-leftism, but, as Cannon continued:

"By this we do not at all commit ourselves to the fetishistic belief in the possibility of transforming the AF of L into a fighting instrument of the workers. We do not expect Green and Co. to organize the masses of unskilled workers.... The resurgent struggles of the masses... will probably break out of the formal bounds of the AF of L and seek expression in a new trade union movement."

—*Militant*, 2 September 1933

The course of the upsurge confirmed the Trotskyists' analysis. Massive strikes occurred, but the establishment of new mass unions along industrial lines was thwarted in strike after strike by AFL leaders. The craven betrayal of the nation-wide textile workers' strike in 1934, for instance, confirmed the South as an open-shop haven, which condition persists to this day.

In the entire period, there were only three real victories, all led by revolutionists or professed revolutionists: Stalinists led the San Francisco waterfront strike; the Musteite American Workers Party, later to fuse with the Trotskyists, led the Toledo Auto-Lite strike; and Trotskyists led the Minneapolis truck drivers' strikes. These strikes were successful because they established powerful new unions along industrial lines which spread throughout whole industries and regions. The organization of the bulk of the proletariat under revolutionary leadership, finally displacing the reactionary AFL leaders, clearly loomed. To head off this threat, a section of the AFL leaders later formed the CIO.

Hotel Strike Debacle: a Test of Principle

The turn to mass work did not change the sharp limitations on the Trotskyists' forces. They could only intervene directly in those unions in which they already had supporters. One such place was the Hotel and Restaurant section of the Amalgamated Food Workers of New York, an independent union, which began an organizing drive and called a general strike of hotel workers in early 1934, before the Minneapolis strikes. One Trotskyist particularly, B. J. Field, was propelled into the strike leadership, and the Trotskyists launched vigorously into the struggle. Putting the *Militant* on a special, three-times-a-week basis, they called on the Stalinists to merge their small "red" union into the AFW, urged a united-front policy aimed at the AFL, warned the workers against reliance on Roosevelt's "New Deal," and singled out recognition of the union as the key goal.

In the middle of the strike, however, Field began to pull away from the Trotskyists Communist League (CLA) and showed signs of opportunism. He collaborated too closely with trade-union bureaucrats and government mediators, caved in to red-baiting launched by the bosses, and ignored his party comrades. As Cannon put it, "He disregarded the fraction of his own party in the union—which is always the sign of a man who has lost his head" (*History of American Trotskyism*). With the national spotlight on the "Trotskyist" strike, the CLA expelled Field and denounced his turn to "respectability" in the middle of the struggle. While opportunists howled, the Trotskyists had demonstrated the strength of their principles to serious observers: no matter how temporarily important, mass leaders were always to be subordinated to the general will of the party and its guiding principles.

If the hotel strike had been a disappointment, the Trotskyists soon had another chance to demonstrate that they could lead mass struggle. In the Minneapolis Communist League of about 40 members and sympathizers, they had a core of experienced trade unionists from the CP—with backgrounds stretching back into the pre-CP left wing of the Socialist Party and Wobblies (IWW)—headed by Ray Dunne and Carl Skoglund. Both had been delegates to the Central Labor Union (local AFL council), and had been expelled from their unions in the red purges of the 1920's. In the CP, Dunne had been aligned with the Cannon group while Skoglund had been closer to Foster, but both (along with two of Dunne's three brothers) were summarily expelled simply for questioning the expulsion of the leading Trotskyists. Subsequently they did pioneer work organizing the CLA in Minneapolis, and by the turn to mass work in 1933, they were ready to begin a campaign to organize an industrial truck drivers' union which they had planned before their expulsion from the CP in 1928.

Three Strikes That Transformed the Northwest

They began by recognizing that even though the AFL had failed to win a strike in Minneapolis in decades (the city was a notorious citadel of the open shop), it was necessary to work through the established unions. Orienting toward General Drivers' Local 574, they made a bloc with a minority of the Local exec board, headed by President Bill Brown, which was willing to aid them in a militant organizing drive. Purposefully avoiding an immediate confrontation with the rest of the local bureaucracy, they planned to flood the local with newly-organized workers, cutting across craft divisions, and conduct a strike for recognition of the union by the trucking industry on an industrial basis. The question of leadership would be resolved in the process, through the test of the class struggle.

Since Dunne and Skoglund were working in the coal yards at the time, they began with a coal yard drivers' strike in February 1934, picking the middle of winter, when it would be most effective. Through meticulous attention to detail and advance planning, they took the bosses by surprise, shutting the yards down completely and involving masses of workers in picketing. The strike won union recognition in three days. This increased their base and authority within the union and laid the groundwork for a general strike of drivers and warehousemen throughout Minneapolis in May, which was equally well prepared, also took the bosses by surprise, and won

fairly quickly. The Trotskyists insisted on the inclusion of the warehousemen (“inside workers”), since this made the union truly industrial in nature, including everyone in the companies concerned except office workers.

The bosses retaliated and provoked a third strike in July which lasted over a month. International Brotherhood of Teamsters’ President Daniel Tobin, an arch-reactionary craft unionist, aided the bosses by starting a red-baiting campaign against the strike leadership. Despite the imposition of martial law by Farmer-Labor Governor Olson and the virtual exhaustion of the strikers in a war of attrition, the third strike solidly established the union and the legitimacy of the strike leadership. The bosses didn’t dare try again to smash the former, and Tobin, though he kept trying, couldn’t drive out the latter. It took a full scale war-crisis and government prosecution for “communism” to drive the Trotskyists from the leadership in the Minneapolis Teamsters in the 1940’s. Before then, Minneapolis had become a highly-organized union town, and the Teamsters had spread throughout the Northwest. Farrell Dobbs’ campaign to organize the over-the-road drivers provided the basis for transforming the Teamsters into an industrial union

Strong Words From the Fourth Marx Brother

The Stalinists immediately attempted to discredit the Trotskyists’ role in the Minneapolis strikes. William F. Dunne, an old friend of Cannon and the one Dunne brother who had become a Stalinist, was selected by the Browder leadership of the CP to prove his loyalty by doing the “job” on the Trotskyists, including his brothers. This he did with a vengeance, even going to the point of likening his three brothers in Minneapolis to “the three Marx Bros.” His articles reflected the ultra-left phase the Stalinists were only beginning to abandon. Calling the Trotskyists “a group of strikebreakers in the service of the bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy,” Dunne characterized the Minneapolis settlements as betrayals caused by cowardice, subservience to local AFL bureaucrats and Olson, and general covering up for the “fascist” “New Deal” on the part of the Trotskyists. Dunne claimed that the Trotskyists prevented the development of a full general strike, purposefully holding back the revolutionary thrust of the masses.

In following up these criticisms on the scene, the local Stalinists were severely handicapped by their total lack of any supporters directly involved in the strike, despite the fact that District 9 of the CP, covering Minneapolis, had been the third largest in the Party in 1928. The CP had completely isolated itself from the mass movement. As it attempted to present inflammatory criticism from the outside, the Trotskyists had to oppose physical assaults by angry workers on CP supporters on more than one occasion. Despite the fact that the union had an elected rank-and-file strike committee of 100, the Stalinists demanded “rank and file control” of the strike, and representation for their paper organizations on the strike committee. Only a short time later, when the CP dropped its characterization of the “New Deal” as fascist in favor of a popular-front alliance with Roosevelt and union bureaucrats, the Minneapolis CP lined up with the reactionary Tobin as the latter attempted to smash Local 574 by setting up a paper rival, “Local 500,” and launching gangland thug attacks on 574 members.

NCLC Echoes “Third Period”

The CP’s “Third Period” criticisms were echoed recently, with a distinctly Marcusite crackpot twist, by the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC) in its review of Dobbs’ *Teamster Rebellion* (New Solidarity, 31 July-4 August 1972). “Dobbs sees only the military aspects of the strikes,” says the NCLC:

“... He fails to understand that it was the role of outside ‘forces supporting the Teamsters which was decisive—the embryonic never-realized United Front....”

“The failure of the Trotskyists to adequately conceptualize the process of organizing the class-for-itself led them to constantly blunt the revolutionary dynamic of the situation.”

These proponents of substitutionalism through fraudulent “united fronts” criticize the SWP for being bogged down in “militant trade unionism,” to the point that they “aborted” the “development of a genuine mass strike movement.” Magically, the incorporation of “outsiders” (who? the CP’s paper unemployed organizations? farmers?) in the strike leadership on an equal basis with union members would have changed all this. The NCLC claims that the American Trotskyists ignored the “class-for-itself” model provided by Trotsky in his writings on the German crisis, “citing (incredibly!) Trotsky’s “What Next?” (1932).

Hardly intending to renounce the qualitatively leading role of the employed proletariat as does the Labor Committee, Trotsky (who never used the “class-for-itself” hocus-pocus schematisms of the NCLC) pointed out in “What Next?” that simple trade-union strikes could accomplish nothing in the presence of mass unemployment unless the workers addressed themselves to this question, “drawing the unemployed into the struggle hand in hand with the employed.” But the American Trotskyists understood this very well. They raised the question of unemployment in the *Militant*, fought for a shorter work week, and counterposed the united-front tactic to the CP’s sectarianism in the unemployed movement. In Minneapolis, before the strikes, Trotskyist intervention to this effect in an unemployed conference was followed by a CP walkout.

Furthermore, the Minneapolis strikes were one of the most dramatic examples of broad-based organizing in American history. The leadership took meticulous care at all stages of the struggle to keep tabs on and mobilize support from other unions as well as women, petty bourgeois, professionals, farmers. The unemployed got particular attention. The Trotskyists successfully drew them into the strike struggle and attempted to organize them and support their struggles for better benefits and against grievances. After the strikes, a special unemployed organization, affiliated to the union, was constituted, and part of the leadership assigned to help run it. Relief benefits in Minneapolis were soon the best in the country, and the chances of unemployed workers being mobilized to scab on strikes were slim.

The strike leaders had a good sense of the mood of the workers and the relationship of class forces. If there were some aspects in which they erred slightly on the side of tactical conservatism, this was certainly not a major characteristic of their leadership. Far from “holding back” the struggle or consciousness of the workers, they advanced both to an entirely new level. Shachtman and Cannon came to Minneapolis to help put out a daily strike bulletin, the *Organizer*, which explained everything in terms of the basic conflict between worker and capitalist. Settlement terms were never overrated, but recognized clearly as temporary stopping points, involving necessary compromises, in the ongoing class struggle. Propaganda struggles were waged against backward attitudes, e.g., male chauvinism. The following point, written by Cannon, appeared in the *Organizer* for 18 August:

“We see the issue between capital and labor as an unceasing struggle between the class of exploited workers and the class of exploiting parasites. It is a war. What decides in this war, as in all others, is power. The exploiters are organized to grind us down into the dust. We must organize our class to fight back. *And the women are half of the working class.* Their interests are the same as ours and they are ready to fight for them. Therefore: organize them to take part in the class battle. This is the idea behind the wonderful organization of the Ladies Auxiliary, and its effective cooperation with the union in the struggle.

“Of course, Local 574 cannot claim to be the pioneer in grasping this idea and carrying it into practice. There have been numerous examples of attempts along this line...one that did much to inspire us—belongs to the Progressive Miners of Illinois.” [emphasis in original]

—*Notebook of an Agitator*

The General Strike Question

At the end of the May strike, the CP claimed that the Trotskyists reneged on their call for a city-wide general strike by accepting a settlement, thereby holding back the struggle. What the Stalinists ignored was that the main goal of the struggle up to that point—recognition of the union—was achieved. To press forward arbitrarily would have left the objectives unclear and been an adventurous risk of everything that had been gained. The Stalinists wanted a general strike against Olson. But in their ultra-left haste to denounce the Farmer-Labor governor as a “fascist,” they forgot one small detail: the workers, who had voted him into power, had the illusion that he was on their side. Furthermore, he controlled the bulk of the AFL leadership through F-LP affiliation. An adventurous move at the wrong time could have isolated 574 and led to its destruction. As Trotsky pointed out in “What Next?” (merely one of many, many points the NCLC forgot to read):

“Even though Rosa Luxemburg overestimated the *independent* importance of the general strike in the question of power, she understood quite well that a general strike could not be declared arbitrarily, that it must be prepared for by the whole preceding course of the workers’ movement, by the policies of the party and the trade unions.” [emphasis in original]

The Trotskyists worked to expose Olson's real role, but they knew it would take events in the class struggle to do it. When Olson moved in troops in July, the workers thought he was protecting their interests and began cooperating with the troops. The leadership knew better, and at the risk of some initial unpopularity, the *Organizer* worked to expel these illusions. This was necessarily a slow process of education, but Olson himself speeded it up considerably by raiding the union headquarters and throwing the strike leaders in the stockade. The *Organizer* could then call for a "general protest strike" without the fear of isolation of the leadership at the hands of Olson and his AFL friends. The mere call for a general strike was sufficient to get the headquarters back and the leaders out of jail.

The worst the Trotskyists can be accused of with regard to Olson in the strike events is lack of prior warning, as to the role he would play, i.e., an over-adaptation at first to the backward consciousness of the workers. In their organizing drive before the May strike, the leadership built a mass meeting at which they demanded that Olson address the workers. This was correct, but building the meeting without simultaneous warnings as to Olson's real nature as the head of a section of the capitalist state was an opportunist tactical error.

"The organizing committee also started a pressure campaign to line up Governor Olson as a speaker at the meeting. This was done for two reasons: advance publicity listing the governor as a speaker would help in getting a big turnout for the meeting; and if Olson addressed the workers, he would have to go on record in support of the union campaign."

—Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*

Thus the organizers used Olson's name without, at the same time, attempting to expose him as a faker; thereby they helped create some of the illusions that plagued them. This error flowed in part from a theoretical misunderstanding of the Farmer-Labor Party—a bloc of two classes—as a working-class party (this will be taken up further in Part 3). That this error was subordinate within the general thrust of the Trotskyists' practice is indicated by the fact that they didn't hesitate to attack Olson in the heat of the crisis, even though it went against the stream to do so.

Hardly "holding back" the struggle, the leadership held out to the point of exhaustion of the ranks. At the end, the strike had become a war of "attrition, and there was a small but dangerous back-to-work trickle. Nevertheless, the main objectives were won. As Cannon pointed out to the Stalinists after the May strike, these "quack doctors whose patients always die," (referring to the record of disastrous, Stalinist-led ultra-left "strikes") could not point to a single example of newly-organized workers having achieved so much (*Militant*, 16 June 1934).

The Toledo Auto-Lite strike, which peaked after the May strike in Minneapolis, is held up as an "alternative" to Minneapolis by the NCLC on the absurd grounds that the revolutionary leaders were the heads of unemployed leagues, and had to be brought in from "outside" (*New Solidarity*, 16-20 October 1972). In fact, the only difference this made was that the Minneapolis strikes had better and more conscious advance planning, and afterwards the leadership, having worked inside the union from the beginning, was in a better position to thoroughly displace the craft-minded reactionaries. Both strikes used essentially the same revolutionary methods of mass struggle and achieved similar goals. The same can be said of the San Francisco waterfront strike, in which the Stalinists were involved. This strike was successful because the Stalinists opportunistically worked with leaders like Bridges who were inside the AFL longshoremen's union, which was technically "social-fascist" at the time! The Stalinists did have a dual union on the scene, but it was essentially a useless hindrance and a potentially dangerous divisive factor. When the police raided it along with the Wobblies, arresting hundreds, the workers on strike were not moved to defend it as their own.

Workers Party Formed, NCLC Notwithstanding

The NCLC complains that the Trotskyists spent too much time being militant trade unionists and thus failed to build "a significant revolutionary force in the Thirties." Holding up ex-preacher Muste's American Workers Party as conscious followers of Trotsky's German writings, the NCLC "forgets" that shortly after the Minneapolis and Toledo strikes, the AWP and the CLA fused to form the Workers Party! This fusion came about because the Trotskyists correctly saw the AWP as a leftward-moving centrist force and aggressively approached it, seeking to separate the sound, proletarian elements from the rootless petty-bourgeois dilettantes and other Marcus-like garbage which the AWP had picked up in its long history of unpolitical unemployed work. It was the American

Trotskyists that supplied the better Musteites with a program, not the other way around. The work of the two groups in similar strikes hastened this process. Afterwards, the fused organization worked jointly to consolidate the earlier Toledo victory in the Chevrolet transmission strike in Toledo in 1935, which they almost succeeded in spreading throughout the GM empire. (This was the first successful GM strike, and was a vital precursor to the later organization of auto.)

The period of the 1933-1934 upsurge required exactly the kind of trade-union tactics Cannon advocated: a broad but principled united-front bloc around the key burning issues. In 1934, organization of the unorganized was such an issue. It clearly separated those willing to follow revolutionary leadership from the vast bulk of the trade-union bureaucracy of the time, and the Trotskyists were correct to bloc on this issue and struggle to lead successful organizing campaigns. Precisely this kind of activity in Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco threatened to solve the crisis of leadership in favor of the revolutionists, but the Trotskyists were too small to carry it through. The betrayals of the much larger Communist Party were responsible for the fact that when industrial workers were fully organized, reactionaries controlled their unions. The later blocs of the Stalinists with these CIO reactionaries—for the popular front with Roosevelt—has nothing at all in common with the Trotskyist united front in Minneapolis to achieve union recognition.

The Trotskyists' mistake (besides the theoretical misconception on the nature of the F-LP two-class party) was that they lacked different tactical weapons in their arsenal for different conditions and periods. An independent, Trotskyist-led caucus, expressing a full program of transitional demands for the unions, wasn't so important in 1934 as later, since in 1934 the Trotskyists were in a position to implement their most important demands in practice (although consciousness of the need for political caucuses might have gone hand-in-hand with greater consciousness of the need to make political warnings and criticisms in advance of the crisis, as in the case of Olson at the mass meeting). Later, however, when they weren't in a position to provide direct leadership of the class, the Trotskyists showed inflexibility. They never betrayed the workers as did the Stalinists, but they did miss opportunities and commit some opportunist errors through a policy of blocking too frequently and almost always working through united fronts many of which lacked the clarity of the blocs to organize the unorganized of 1934. Instead of emphasizing their program, they used organizational weakness as an excuse to over-concentrate on alliances around minimum demands.

Part 3

The Primacy of Politics¹⁰

After the formation of the Workers Party (WP) through the fusion of the Musteite American Workers Party with the Trotskyist Communist League of America (CLA) in 1934, the Trotskyists' organizational course took them into the leftward-moving Socialist Party in 1936. After winning a sizeable section of the SP youth they then split off from the Social Democrats to found the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1938. During this period of upsurge, the Trotskyists grew and continued to do trade-union work and other mass work, giving the lie to Stalinist assertions that the Minneapolis strikes of 1934 were the only mass work the Trotskyists ever did. The Trotskyists led mass unemployed leagues, conducted mass defense work and worked in the unions in mining, textiles, auto, food workers, maritime, steel and teamsters, among others. Less spectacular than the Minneapolis strikes perhaps, nevertheless this work was of lasting importance and vital to the building of the revolutionary vanguard in the U.S.

The Trotskyists' policy of broad united fronts continued to play a vital and useful role as long as the bulk of the reactionary AFL bureaucracy fought the establishment of industrial unions. The Workers Party declared its main goal to be the formation of a "national progressive movement" for militant industrial unionism (*New Militant*, January 1935), and the Trotskyists hoped, with good reason, to win the leadership of important sections of the working class by being the most consistent fighters for this minimum but key immediate need of the working class. At the same time they did not hide their socialist politics, in contrast to the Stalinists who attempted to masquerade as simple pro-Roosevelt militants. As much as possible, the Trotskyists operated as open

¹⁰ Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 27, 31 August 1973.

revolutionists. Gerry Allard, CLA member and a leader of the Progressive Miners of America in southern Illinois, addressed the miners about an approaching strike in the following terms:

“Being a Marxist, a revolutionist, it is my opinion that we should militarize the strike, revamp the Women’s Auxiliary along the original lines, augment our forces by seeking the organizational support of the powerful unemployed movement in Illinois, seek allies in the rank and file of the United Mine Workers of America, and go forward once again with the same determination that built this union. This is the road of struggle...”

—*New Militant*, 30 March 1935

Allard went on to appeal to the miners to see their struggle in the broadest possible context, as the impetus for the organization of auto, steel, rubber, etc.

Toledo, 1935: Conflagration in Auto

Following up on the work of the Musteites in the great Auto-Lite strike of 1934, the Workers Party played a key role in a strike at the Toledo Chevrolet transmission plant in 1935, being instrumental in getting GM workers in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Norwood and Atlanta to strike simultaneously. Two Trotskyists, Cochran and Beck, leaders of the Workers Party and Spartacus Youth respectively, were arrested while picketing the Flint, Michigan headquarters of Chevrolet in an attempt to spread the strike into the auto capital (*New Militant*, 11 May 1935).

The spreading of this strike throughout the GM empire was prevented only by the relative organizational weakness of the Trotskyists and the diligent, strike-breaking efforts of the AFL’s appointed head of the auto union, Francis Dillon. Dillon personally headed off a sympathy strike of Buick workers in Detroit and sabotaged the strike at its base in Toledo by threatening to withdraw the local’s charter and splitting the strike leadership at the key point, GM agreed to a wage increase and published a stipulation that it would meet with the union leadership, but because of Dillon’s treachery there was no signed contract. The workers went back solidly organized and undefeated, however, since the company had the militant 1934 strike in mind and had made no attempt to operate the plant with scabs. It was the first GM strike the company had failed to smash, and was an inspiration for the later auto sit-down strikes which built the UAW and established the CIO.

After the strike, the Workers Party published a critical assessment of the strike leadership of which it had been a part, denouncing sloppiness, lack of attention to details (such as not calling sufficient strike committee meetings) and the “fundamental error” of allowing the daily strike paper, *Strike Truth*, to be suppressed (*New Militant*, 18 May 1935). This performance was in sharp contrast to the Minneapolis truckers’ strikes the year previous, in which meticulous attention to tactical and organizational details and the hardhitting regular strike daily had been instrumental in achieving the ultimate victory of the strike. At the same time the Trotskyists were able to recruit the most conscious workers to their organization, with the Minneapolis branch of the CLA increasing from 40 to 100 members and close sympathizers during 1934 alone. Many years later, Cannon analyzed the main weakness of the work in Toledo as the failure to consolidate lasting organizational gains. He blamed this on Muste, who was a “good mass worker” but “tended to adapt himself” to the mass movement too much for a Leninist, at the expense of developing firm nuclei “on a programmatic basis for permanent functioning” (*History of American Trotskyism*).

First Auto Union Caucus Formed

The Workers Party was still working under the disadvantage in Toledo that the revolutionary leadership of the 1934 strike had been brought in from outside the union, thereby lacking sufficiently deep roots to hold the militants together against Dillon’s maneuvering in 1935. Today the Marcusite National Caucus of Labor Committees, a group which has not the faintest idea of what it means to organize the working class, lauds precisely this weakness as the hallmark of revolutionary strategy. Their hero Muste soon thereafter abandoned the WP to return to the church. The deficiencies of the Trotskyists’ trade-union tactics were not to be found in “overrating the unions” as the NCLC crackpots would have us believe, but in the failure to organize firm class-struggle nuclei “on a programmatic basis for permanent functioning” *within the unions*. The struggles in Toledo gave birth to the first auto union caucus, the Progressives of UAW Local 18384, but its program was limited to the militant unionism of the broad united fronts the Trotskyists advocated: for industrial unions, reliance on the power of the ranks as opposed to arbitration or government boards, etc. As such, it had the episodic character of a

united front and lacked the clear revolutionary political distinctiveness which became crucial after the establishment of industrial unions under reformist leadership in the late 1930's.

Another point made by Cannon in drawing the balance sheet of the Workers Party period should be made elementary reading for the Labor Committee, which fetishizes unemployed organizing. The mass unemployed organizations inherited by the Trotskyists in their fusion with the Musteites were highly unstable:

“We reached thousands of workers through these unemployed organizations. But further experience also taught us an instructive lesson in the field of mass work too. Unemployed organizations can be built and expanded rapidly and it is quite possible for one to get illusory ideas of their stability and revolutionary potentialities. At the very best they are loose and easily scattered formations; they slip through your fingers like sand. The minute the average unemployed worker gets a job, he wants to forget the unemployed organization....”

—History of American Trotskyism

The Making of the Modern Teamsters Union

The most lasting achievement of Trotskyist trade-union work in the 1930's was the transformation of the Teamsters from a localized, federated, craft union into a large industrial union. In the 1930's, while long-distance trucking was becoming more and more important, the Teamsters union was still limited to local drivers, divided by crafts (ice drivers, milk drivers, etc.) and dependent on local conditions. Based in their stronghold in Minneapolis, the Trotskyists spread industrial unionism throughout the Northwest through the Teamsters. An 11-state campaign led by Farrell Dobbs to organize over-the-road drivers included conquest of the all-important hub of Chicago and established the principle of the uniform area-wide contract. The campaign's achievements were solidified through a major strike struggle centered in Omaha, Nebraska in 1938, which was won through the same skillful organization that had succeeded in Minneapolis. As in Minneapolis, the building of the party went hand-in-hand with the strike, resulting in an SWP branch in Omaha.

Especially in the mid-1930's, the mass work of the Trotskyists was far-reaching and significant out of proportion to their size. Yet the Trotskyists knew they were not yet a real party and could not become a party leading significant sections of the masses in struggle until the centrist and reformist forces blocking the path were removed. It was for this reason that the Trotskyists entered the SP in 1936: the SP was large, included a rapidly-growing left wing (particularly in the youth) and was attracting militant workers who could be won to Trotskyism. The Trotskyists had to defeat sectarians in their own ranks, led by Oehler, who assumed that the party could be built directly, through the orientation of a propaganda group to the masses. The Cannon-led majority of the WP hardly ignored mass work. It was, in fact, an important part of the entry maneuver. While in the Socialist Party the Trotskyists established new trade-union fractions, notably in maritime (principally the Sailors Union of the Pacific) and auto, meanwhile considerably embarrassing the reformist SP leaders by their class-struggle policies. When they emerged from the SP more than doubled in size in 1938, the Trotskyists, though still small, were in a better position than ever to conduct work in the unions.

CIO Victories Pose Question of Politics

The rise of the CIO through the massive struggles of 1936-37 transformed the labor movement and altered the terms of class struggle in favor of the workers. The organized workers were in a better position to resist the onslaughts of capitalism; however, the new unions were controlled by a bureaucratic layer which shared the pro-capitalist, class-collaborationist politics of the old AFL bureaucracy. Having reluctantly presided over the militant struggles which established the CIO, these new bureaucrats desired nothing more than to establish “normal” trade-union relations with the capitalists, gain influence in capitalist politics, etc. As inter-imperialist war drew closer, the ruling class was gradually forced to temporarily lay aside its attempt to destroy the unions and accept the coalition which the bureaucracy readily offered. Thus the trade-union bureaucracy was qualitatively expanded and consolidated as the chief agency for disciplining the work force, replacing for the most part the Pinkertons and bloody strikebreaking as the principal means of capitalist rule in the hitherto unorganized mass production industries. This process was completed during the Second World War, when the ruling class allowed the

completion of union organizing in key areas in exchange for full partnership of the trade-union bureaucracy in the imperialist war effort (the no-strike pledge, endorsement of the anti-labor wage controls, strikebreaking, etc.).

Besides displacing organization of the unorganized as the key immediate issue, this transformation placed the question of politics in the foreground. The industrial unions had been built, but they alone were clearly insufficient to deal with the outstanding social questions—unemployment, war, etc.—which determined the conditions under which they struggled. With the renewal of depression conditions in mid-1937-38, accompanied by increased employer resistance to union demands, opposition to Roosevelt burgeoned and mass sentiment for a labor party developed, expressed through such agencies as Labor's Non-Partisan Political League (LNPL), the CIO political arm and the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. In order to head off this movement, the bureaucracy invented the myth of Roosevelt as a “friend of labor” and used the Stalinist Communist Party, closely integrated into the CIO bureaucracy, to pass off this warmed-over Gompers policy as a “working-class” strategy—the popular front. The CP unceremoniously dropped its earlier calls for a labor party.

The Trotskyist Transitional Program

The primary task of revolutionists in the labor movement had shifted, therefore, from leading the struggle for industrial unions to providing a political pole of opposition to the class-collaborationist bureaucracy. The Transitional Program (“Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”), adopted by the SWP in 1938, was written by Trotsky largely to provide the basis for such a struggle. It contained demands designed to meet the immediate felt needs and problems of the workers (“wages, unemployment, working conditions, approaching war and fascism) with alternatives leading directly to a struggle against the capitalist system itself: a sliding scale of wages and hours, workers control of industry, expropriation of industry without compensation, workers militias, etc. Most importantly, the program proposed transitional organizational forms and measures designed to advance the workers’ ability to struggle for these demands and to provide the basis for the overthrow of capitalism: factory committees, Soviets, arming of the proletariat and workers and farmers government (as a popular designation of the dictatorship of the proletariat).

Also in 1938, Trotsky urged his American followers to enter formations such as the LNPL and fight for a labor party based on the trade unions, armed with the Transitional Program as the political alternative to the class collaborationism of the Stalinists and trade-union bureaucrats. This reversed the Trotskyists’ earlier position of opposing the call for a labor party on the grounds that the utterly reactionary character of the Gompersite labor bureaucracy could allow the organizing of mass industrial unions directly under the leadership of the revolutionary party. This would have effectively bypassed the need for the transitional demand of a labor party. With the organization of the CIO on the basis of militant trade-union reformism, the balance of power between the revolutionaries and the labor bureaucrats was shifted in favor of the latter. But as the strike struggles achieved the original goal of union organization, and as Roosevelt’s policies led to economic downturn, the newly organized and highly combative rank and file of the CIO unions began to come into direct political conflict with their pro-Roosevelt leaders. The call for a labor party became a crucial programmatic weapon to mobilize a class-struggle opposition to the Lewis bureaucracy.

Though politically armed to meet the new situation, the American Trotskyists nevertheless failed to find a consistent form of expression for their program within the unions. While they propagandized for the Transitional Program, in their press and conducted campaigns for specific demands such as workers defense guards, labor party, struggle against approaching war, etc., their day-to-day trade-union work continued on the old basis of united fronts around immediate issues. As the organization of the unions proceeded and the opposition of the bureaucracy to organizing industrial unions receded, this united-front policy turned into a bloc around simple trade-union militancy with “whole sections of the non-Stalinist, “progressive” trade-union bureaucracy. Criticism of these bureaucrats tended to take the form of pushing for consistent trade-union militancy rather than building a revolutionary political alternative, so that when the “progressive” bureaucracy lined up with Roosevelt for war in 1940, an embarrassing lack of political distinction between the Trotskyists in the trade unions and these “progressives” was revealed.

The course of events in the Northwest Teamsters was a graphic example. For two years after the 1934 strikes in Minneapolis, the Tobin leadership of the Teamsters International continued to try to smash the Trotskyist leadership of Local 574, using red-baiting, gangsters and a rival local. Then a subtle shift began to occur. As the

Trotskyists spread out, building support for the campaign to organize the over-the-road drivers, more and more bureaucrats became won over, including the key leader in Chicago, whose adherence went a long way toward ensuring the success of the campaign. Finally, by the time of the 1938 Omaha strike, Tobin himself began actively cooperating, even supporting the organizing drive against his old allies who still sought to preserve the local power of the Joint Councils at the expense of modernization, and appointing Farrell Dobbs International Organizer.

The 1936-37 strike struggles had finally rendered pure craft unionism obsolete even within the AFL, and old-line craft unionists began to tail the CIO both in order to enhance their organizational power and because the bourgeoisie itself was less resistant and more willing to accept organization of the workers in exchange for the use of the bureaucracy as its labor lieutenant. Throughout the entire area of Dobbs' 11-state campaign, the only serious challenge mounted by the bosses was in Omaha.

The united front to organize the over-the-road drivers was not wrong, but the Trotskyists lacked the means to distinguish themselves politically from the bureaucracy. This could have been done through a caucus based on the Transitional Program. The Northwest Organizer was founded in 1935 as the organ of a pan-union caucus formation, the Northwest Labor Unity Conference, but the NLUC's program was limited to militant, class-struggle union organizing, under the slogan, "All workers into the unions and all unions into the struggle." Eventually the Northwest Organizer became the organ of the Minneapolis Teamsters Joint Council and the NLUC lapsed, since its oppositional role was liquidated. When Tobin began to line up behind the war effort, the Trotskyists in Minneapolis opposed the war and won over the Central Labor Union, but they lacked the basis for a factional struggle in the union as a whole that a political caucus orientation might have provided. Dobbs simply submitted his resignation as organizer in 1940, without waging a political fight. A few years later, Tobin finally was able to crush the Trotskyist leadership in Minneapolis, with the aid of the government's first Smith Act anti-communist trial of the leading militants.

The Two-Class Party

The bloc with "progressive" trade-unionists was reflected politically in the Trotskyists' orientation to the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, with which most of the local trade unions were affiliated. Left-leaning FLP supporters were an important component of the Trotskyists' united front. In 1929, the excellent document, *Platform of the Communist Opposition*, had pointed out:

"The organization of two classes in one party, a Farmer-Labor Party, must be rejected in principle in favor of the separate organization of the workers, and the formation of a political alliance with the poor farmers under the leadership of the former. The opportunist errors of the [Communist] Party comrades in the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota and other states [in 1924] flowed inevitably from and were secondary to the basically false policy of a two-class party, in which the farmer and worker are ostensibly on an 'equal basis,' but where in reality the petty-bourgeois ideology of the former actually dominates."

—*Militant*, 15 February 1929

Written by the American Trotskyists, this statement thus carried forth in hard political terms the criticisms made by Trotsky of the Pepper leadership of the CP in 1924. Pepper had blithely made a fundamental revision of Marxism in order to tail the radical farmers of the FLP into the third capitalist party movement of LaFollette. The Minneapolis Trotskyists, however, failed to implement this policy in their orientation to the FLP. In 1935 they critically supported the FLP candidate for mayor of Minneapolis (despite the current Workers Party position against labor party formations), and in 1938 they supported FLP Governor Benson in the primaries as well as in the general election, without in either case mentioning the need for the "separate organization of the workers." The SWP's September 1938 program for the FLP endorses the adherence of both mass workers' and mass farmers' organizations to the FLP and complains only of the inordinate power of the ward clubs, through which the Stalinists eventually wielded the dominant influence in the FLP. This necessarily blurred the SWP's campaign for a working-class labor party based on the Transitional Program, since in their program for the FLP they were forced to emphasize demands for the petty-bourgeois farmers (loans, easing tax burdens, etc.) which watered down the working-class content of their program and was the inevitable result of the petty-bourgeois nature of the

FLP as a two-class party. While not politically fatal in itself, this lack of clarity was a reflection of an accommodationist bloc with the left wing of the trade-union bureaucracy.

Furthermore, the Trotskyists compounded their inflexible united-front trade-union tactics with an over-reaction to Stalinism. The 1938 SWP trade-union resolution stated categorically:

“While always expanding our program independently and maintaining our right of criticism, our Party in a certain sense supports the ‘lesser evil’ within the unions. The Stalinists are the main enemy.... We unite with all serious elements to exclude the Stalinists from control of the unions.”

–*Socialist Appeal*, 26 November 1938

The Stalinist CP, many times larger than the Trotskyists, was indeed a key political enemy in the unions. Having shifted to the right from a destructive policy of self-isolation during the “Third Period” (1929-35), the CP had become intimate advisers to the CIO bureaucracy and hard right-wingers in the unions, doing whatever possible to crush and expel the Trotskyists. Its main aim was to preserve links to the liberals and the collaboration of the labor movement with Roosevelt and U.S. imperialism. The CP participated directly in the bourgeoisie’s attempt to militarize the labor movement for the war. Thus in maritime, while, the CP and its allies were busy weakening the 1936 West Coast longshore strike, wrecking the militant Maritime Federation of the Pacific and giving backhanded support to the government’s effort to break the seamen’s union hiring halls through the Copeland Act, the Trotskyists made a correct united-front bloc with the militant but “anti-political” Lundberg leadership of the SUP.

Nevertheless, the determination of the SWP to unite with the politically undefined “all serious elements” against the Stalinists in all cases reflected trade-union adaptationism. The SWP’s reasoning was that, unlike standard trade-union reformists, the Stalinists were the agency of an alien force outside the unions—the bureaucratic ruling elite of the Soviet Union—and therefore willing to destroy the unions to achieve their ends. This was an implicit “third campist” denial of Stalinism as a tendency within the labor movement. That the Trotskyists never drew this logical conclusion from their position and pulled back from it later did not prevent them from falling into errors as a result of it even while the CP was at its worst during the popular-front period (1935-39).

The worst such error was the SWP’s “auto crisis” which peaked in January 1939. The UAW was a key battleground between Trotskyists, Stalinists and social democrats in the CIO. Wielding power with a bureaucratic heavy hand, UAW President Homer Martin, a left-leaning trade-union reformist, went so far in his battle against the Stalinists that he eventually lost all authority. To the left of the Stalinists on some issues, he was at base reactionary and made a concerted effort to smash wildcat strikes. The SWP, however, extended critical support to Martin to stop the Stalinists. The crisis came while Cannon was in Europe following the founding conference of the Fourth International in Fall 1938. The SWP Political Committee was being run by Shachtman and Burnham, who were soon to draw the full conclusions from their Stalinophobia and lead a faction out of the SWP (in 1940) denying that the Soviet Union was any kind of workers state and refusing to defend it, and likewise denying that the Stalinists were a tendency within the workers movement. With their own measure of bureaucratic highhandedness, Shachtman and Burnham tried to ram a pro-Martin policy down the throats of the auto fraction in 1938 just as Martin was leading a rump convention of the UAW out of the CIO, back into the AFL and eventually to oblivion. The bulk of the auto union dumped Martin and held its own pro-CIO convention. The SWP had to do an abrupt and embarrassing about-face entailing two issues of *Socialist Appeal* which contradicted each other, for which Shachtman and Burnham refused to acknowledge responsibility.

During the Hitler-Stalin Pact period (1939-41), the beginning of World War II, a general reversal of positions took place. Reflecting Stalin’s deal with Hitler and turn away from the earlier alliance with France, Britain and the U.S., the CP conducted a grudging but definite turn to the left, denouncing the “imperialist” war, alienating its liberal allies and reinvigorating its working-class base. The “progressive” trade unionists with whom the Trotskyists had been blocking on trade-union issues meanwhile became central in the pro-war, patriotic lineup. As a result of this switch, in discussions between the SWP leadership and Trotsky in Mexico in 1940, all the inadequacies of the Trotskyists’ trade-union work then became manifest (see “Discussions with Trotsky,” in his *Writing* 1939-40). “The Stalinists are the problem,” pointed out Cannon: “By their change in line they dealt us a heavy blow. We were forging ahead when they made the switch, paralyzing our work.” Despite this damaging

admission, the SWP leaders were opposed to a policy of maneuver to take advantage of the new situation. Trotsky proposed critical support to the CP candidates in the 1940 elections. He had to reiterate that this was theoretically possible, since the Stalinists had made a sharp, though temporary, left turn and were just as much part of the labor movement as the equally reactionary forces in the unions with whom the Trotskyists had until then been blocking. The SWP leaders objected, saying that it would disrupt the work in the trade unions, in which what were admittedly blocs at the top with “progressives” had been necessary in order for a small force of revolutionists to come forward and begin political work in the unions. Criticizing his followers for lack of initiative, Trotsky went to the core of the problem:

“I believe we have the critical point very clear. We are in a block with the so-called progressives—not only fakers but honest rank and file. Yes, they are honest and progressive but from time to time they vote for Roosevelt—once in four years. This is decisive. You propose a trade union policy, not a Bolshevik policy. Bolshevik policies begin outside the unions.... You are afraid to become compromised in the eyes of the Rooseveltian trade-unionists.”

To the American leaders’ protestations that their forces were too small to preserve an independent course, Trotsky said, “Our real role is that of third competitor,” distinct from both Stalinists and “progressives,” stating that his proposal for maneuver “presupposes that we are an independent party.” Thus the discussions uncovered the fact that the Trotskyists’ lack of an independent political pole in the unions, distinct from episodic blocs and united fronts around immediate issues, had compromised their general ability to maneuver and their independence as a party. They had become over-identified with their bloc partners.

In his report of these discussion to the party, Cannon agreed with most of Trotsky’s points in some revealing passages, while continuing to oppose the proposal for critical support to the CP in the elections:

“...our work in the trade unions up till now has been largely a day-to-day affair based upon the daily problems and has lacked a general political orientation and perspective. This has tended to blur the distinction between us and pure and simple trade unionists. In many cases, at times, they appeared to be one with us. It was fair weather and good fellows were together....

“Then all of a sudden, this whole peaceful routine Of the trade union movement is disrupted by overpowering issues of war, patriotism, the national elections, etc. And these trade unionists, who looked so good in ordinary times, are all turning up as patriots and Rooseveltians.”

—*Socialist Appeal*, 10 October 1940

Thus the primacy of politics in trade-union work had snuck up on the SWP and clubbed it over the head. The problem had not been caused by lack of a principled struggle for the program, nor primarily by blocs which were unprincipled in character. Criticism of bureaucratic allies in the public press had sometimes been weak, but the SWP had vigorously struggled in the public domain for its program, while raising key agitational demands in the unions. The main lack had been a consistent pole, in the unions, for the struggle for the Transitional Program and against the bureaucracy in all its manifestations, i.e., a struggle for revolutionary leadership of and in the unions. Instead of developing such caucus formations as the Progressives of the UAW and the Northwest Labor Unity Conference into political formations in opposition to the bureaucracy, as the early Communists’ Trade Union Educational League had been, the Trotskyists allowed these formations to be limited politically to the character of united fronts: episodic alliances based on immediate issues. As such, not only did they not last, but the Trotskyists themselves, in the unions, became politically identified almost exclusively through these united fronts, rather than through the struggle to build the vanguard party.

Size was not a factor, since in some, ways the problem was at its worst where the Trotskyists were strongest, in the Northwest Teamsters. Rather, the SWP demonstrated a lack of flexibility of tactics and an unwillingness to upset its policy of continual blocs with “progressive” trade unionists on day-to-day issues by a hard, political drive for power based on revolutionary answers to the larger issues. But the larger issues dominated the day-to-day issues, and as imperialist world war drew closer the Trotskyists had to pay the price of isolation for their earlier failure to appear as an independent force in the unions. Unfortunately, they were unable to absorb the lessons of this period sufficiently to prevent the repetition of these characteristic errors. The Trotskyists continued, especially after World War II, to rely on a policy of united fronts on trade-union issues, rather than the

construction of political formations within the unions-caucuses to mount a comprehensive fight for a full revolutionary program.

Part 4

Stalinism and Social-Patriotism¹¹

With the onset of World War II and the wave of jingoism which swept away their trade-unionist allies of the prewar period, the Trotskyists were forced to retreat. They adopted a “policy of caution” in the unions, which meant virtual inaction, especially at first. Although the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was driven from its main base in the Minneapolis Teamsters through a combination of government persecution and attack by the Teamsters bureaucracy and the Stalinists, in general the “policy of caution” had the desired effect of protecting the trade-union cadre from victimization.

However, the “policy of caution” had another side to it. With the rupture of their alliances with the “progressive” trade unionists, the Trotskyists had not dropped their reliance on blocs around immediate issues in the unions. They merely recognized that with both the Stalinists and “progressives” lined up for the war, Roosevelt and the no-strike pledge, there was no section of the trade-union bureaucracy with which they could make a principled bloc. Thus their inaction was in part a recognition that any action along the lines to which they were accustomed in the trade unions would be opportunist, i.e., would necessarily entail *unprincipled* blocs and alliances. Any action not involving blocs and alliances with some section of the trade-union bureaucracy was virtually inconceivable.

At first, the rupture of the earlier alliances and enforced inactivity had a healthy effect, exposing the limitations of such alliances and enforcing the recognition that in trade-union work as in all other spheres of party-building, only principled political agreement assures permanence:

“There is only one thing that binds men together in times of great stress. That is agreement on great principles....

“All those comrades who think we have something, big or little, in the trade union movement should get out a magnifying glass in the next period and look at what we really have. You will find that what we have is our party fractions and the circle of sympathizers around them. That is what you can rely on.... The rule will be that the general run of pure and simple trade unionists, the nonpolitical activists, the latent patriots—they will betray us at the most decisive moment. What we will have in the unions in the hour of test will be what we build in the form of firm fractions of convinced Bolsheviks.”

—James P. Cannon, “The Stalinists and the United Front,” *Socialist Appeal*, 19 October 1940

As the war dragged on, however, opportunities for activity mounted as the workers chafed under the restrictions imposed upon them by their leaders in the name of the imperialist conflict. Rank-and-file rebellion, in the form of unauthorized strikes, broke out in a mounting wave starting in 1942. These led to mounting opposition to the solid, pro-war bureaucratic phalanx. For the most part, the SWP went very slow on participation in these struggles. It wasn’t until 1945 that a formal change of policy was made, although exceptions to the rule began earlier.

While seeking to preserve their precious trade-union cadre through a policy of inaction within the unions, the Trotskyists concentrated on public propaganda and agitational campaigns aimed at the unions largely from the outside, through the party press. The campaign against the war centered largely on the defense case of the Minneapolis 18—the 18 Trotskyists and leaders of the Minneapolis Teamsters who were railroaded to jail under the Smith Act.

Minneapolis Defense Case

¹¹ Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 38, 14 September 1973.

The 18 were the first victims of the Smith Act of 1940, which was the first law since the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798 to make the mere advocacy of views a crime. Initiated in 1941 directly by Roosevelt (ostensibly at the request of Teamsters President Tobin), the case was an important part of the drive by the bourgeoisie, working hand-in-hand with its agents, the labor bureaucrats, to “purify” and discipline the work force for subordination to the imperialist war. The legal persecution consummated Tobin’s attempts to get rid of the Trotskyists in Minneapolis, which had coincided with the lining up of the bureaucracy for the war.

However, because of its clear and open contradiction with the stated principles of bourgeois democracy, and thus with the stated goals of the war, the Smith Act prosecution of the Trotskyists caused a rupture within the bureaucracy and became a point of opposition to the government throughout the labor movement. Publishing the testimony of the chief defendant, James P. Cannon, and the closing, argument of the defense attorney, Albert Goldman, as pamphlets (*Socialism On Trial* and *In Defense of Socialism*), the SWP exploited the case heavily as a basic defense of socialist ideas and principled opposition to the imperialist war. Though they failed to prevent the destruction of the militant Minneapolis Teamsters local under the combined hammer blows of Tobin and Roosevelt, the Trotskyists’ propaganda campaign around the case had a significant impact and aided party recruiting.

The vicious treachery of the Stalinists was underlined and exposed to many by their refusal to defend the Trotskyists against this persecution by the class enemy. Despite the fact that the CP was still opposed to the entry of the U.S. into the war at the time (during the Hitler-Stalin Pact period, 1939-41), it leapt at once onto the prosecutor’s bandwagon.

“The Communist Party has always exposed, fought against and today joins the fight to exterminate the Trotskyite Fifth Column from the life of our nation.”

—*Daily Worker*, 16 August 1941

More than any other force on the left, it was Stalinism, through such fundamental betrayals of class principles as this, which poisoned class consciousness and undermined the fighting ability of the proletariat. Later, during the cold-war witchhunt, when the CP was the victim of the same Smith Act and bureaucratic purge, the militant workers were so disgusted with its role that they were mobilized by anti-communist bureaucrats who smashed virtually every last vestige of class-conscious opposition in the labor movement. Despite its strong position within the CIO bureaucracy in 1941, the CP was unable to prevent the CIO and many of its affiliates from denouncing the Minneapolis prosecution; in 1949, however, the CP’s betrayal of the Minneapolis defendants was held up to it by opportunists in the CIO as an excuse for not defending it against the witchhunt. The Trotskyists defended the CP in 1949, but the CP refused their help, wrecking its own defense committees in order to keep Trotskyists out.

Defense Policy Criticized

While the conduct of the Trotskyists’ defense in the Minneapolis trial was a good *defensive* exposition of the ideas of socialism, it was clearly deficient in not taking an *offensive* thrust, in failing to turn the tables on the system and to put it on trial. The Spanish Trotskyist Grandizo Munis raised this criticism, among others, of the SWP leaders’ defense policy. Although he failed to take sufficiently into account the need for defensive formulations to protect the party’s legality, Munis correctly complained of a lack of political offensive in Cannon’s testimony.

“It was there, replying to the political accusations—struggle against the war, advocacy of violence, overthrow of the government by force—where it is necessary to have raised the tone and turned the tables, accuse the government and the bourgeoisie of a reactionary conspiracy; of permanent violence against the majority of the population, physical, economic, moral, educative violence; of launching the population into a slaughter also by means of violence in order to defend the Sixty Families.”

—“A Criticism of the Minneapolis Trial”

In his reply, Cannon condemned Munis for demanding ultra-left adventurist “calls to action” instead of propaganda, but he failed to adequately answer the charge of political passivity and of a weak, defensive stance. His reply (“Political Principles and Propaganda Methods”) overemphasized the need to patiently explain revolutionary politics to a backward working class, lacking in political consciousness. After the war, when the

shackles of war discipline were removed from the working class, this error was inverted in an overemphasis of the momentary upsurge in class struggle.

Lewis and the Miners: 1943

Most of the opportunities for intervention in the unions during the war consisted in leading rank-and-file struggles against a monolithic, pro-war bureaucracy. The exception to this pattern was Lewis and the UMW. Having broken with Roosevelt before the war because of what he felt to be insufficient favors and attention, Lewis authorized miners' strikes in 1943 which broke the facade of the no-strike pledge. This galvanized the opposition of the rest of the bureaucracy, which feared a general outpouring of strike struggles. Not only the rabidly patriotic, pro-war CP, but other bureaucrats as well, heaped scorn on the miners, calling them "fascist."

While the SWP was correct in its orientation toward united-front support to Lewis against the government and the bulk of the trade-union bureaucracy, the tone of this support failed to take into account the fact that Lewis was a reformist trade unionist, completely pro-capitalist, who therefore had to betray the eager following he was gathering by authorizing strikes during the war. He did this, performing what was perhaps his greatest service for capitalism, by heading off the rising tide of sentiment for a labor party. Focusing opposition to Roosevelt on himself, Lewis misled and demoralized masses of workers throughout the country by advocating a vote for the Republican, Wendell Wilkie, in the 1944 elections.¹² Instead of warning of Lewis' real role, the *Militant* appears not only supportive but genuinely uncritical during the 1943 strikes.

"[Lewis] despite his inconsistencies and failure to draw the proper conclusions...has emerged again as the outstanding leader of the union movement, towering above the Greens and Murrays as though they were pygmies, and has won the support of the miners and the ranks of other unions."

—*Militant*, 8 May 1943

Though written from the outside, and therefore unable to intervene directly, the articles on the 1943 miners' strikes by Art Preis nevertheless reveal an unwarranted infatuation with Lewis which was evoked by the SWP's over-concentration on blocs with left bureaucrats, to the detriment of the struggle for revolutionary leadership.

The struggle against the no-strike pledge reached its highest pitch in the United Auto Workers, which had a militant rank and file and a tradition of democratic intra-union struggle not because of the absence of bureaucracy, but because of the failure of any one bureaucratic tendency to dominate. Despite their fundamental agreement on the war and no-strike pledge, the counter-posed tendencies continued to squabble among themselves as part of their endless competition for office. The wing around Reuther tried to appear to the left by opposing the excesses of the Stalinists such as the latter's proposal for a system of war-time incentive pay to induce speed-up, but in reality was no better on the basic issue of the war.

Auto Workers Fight the No-Strike Pledge

The struggle reached a peak at the 1944 UAW convention. Debate around the issue raged through five days of the convention. The highly political delegates were on their toes, ready for bureaucratic tricks. On the first day, they defeated by an overwhelming margin a proposal to elect new officers early in the convention and insisted that this be the last point: after positions on the issues were clear. The Reuther tendency dropped to its lowest authority during the war because of its role in saving the day for the no-strike pledge, through proposing that the pledge be retained until the issue could be decided by a membership referendum.

The convention was marked by the appearance of the Rank and File Caucus, an oppositional grouping organized primarily by local leaders in Detroit. It was based on four points: end the no-strike pledge, labor leaders off the government War Labor Board, for an independent labor party and smash the "Little Steel" formula (i.e., break the freeze on wage raises). This caucus was the best grouping of its kind to emerge during the war. A similar local leadership oppositional grouping in the rubber workers' union was criticized by the SWP for its

¹² This was corrected (in *WV* No. 30, 12 October 1973), which noted: "Lewis supported Wilkie in 1940 and in 1944 backed Thomas Dewey (also Republican)."

contradictory position: while opposing the no-strike pledge and War Labor Board, it nevertheless favored the war itself (*Militant*, 26 August 1944).

The SWP's work around the UAW RFC was also a high point in Trotskyist trade-union work. Though representing only a partial break from trade-union reformism by secondary bureaucrats, the RFC was qualitatively to the left of the bureaucracy as a whole. Its program represented a break with the key points upon which the imperialist bourgeoisie relied in its dependence on the trade unions to keep the workers tied to the imperialist aims of the state. The SWP was correct to enter and build this caucus, since pursuance of its program was bound to enhance revolutionary leadership.

The SWP's support, however, was not ingratiating or uncritical as was its early support to Lewis. As the caucus was forming before the convention, the SWP spoke to it in the following terms, seeking to maximize political clarity:

"This group, in the process of development and crystallization, is an extremely hopeful sign, although it still contains tendencies opposed to a fully-rounded, effective program and some who are still reluctant to sever completely their ties with all the present international leaders and power cliques.

"There is a tendency which thinks that all the auto workers' problems will be solved simply by elimination of the no-strike pledge. They fail to take into account the fundamental problem: that the basic issues confronting the workers today can and will be solved, in the final analysis, only by political means."

—*Militant*. 2 September 1944

The article went on to advocate a labor party based on the trade unions with a "fundamental program against the financial parasites and monopolists." The caucus adopted the demand for a labor party. It led the fight against the no-strike pledge at the convention and made an impressive showing, although it failed to secure a majority in a direct vote against the pledge.

Despite encouraging developments such as this, the SWP did not formalize a general return to activity in the unions until 1945, when it made a belated turn to a perspective of "organizing left-wing forces" around opposition to the no-strike pledge, War Labor Board, and for a labor party. In 1944, a small oppositional grouping was formed in the SWP by Goldman and Morrow based on Stalinophobia and a perspective of reunification with the Shachtmanite Workers Party, which had split off in 1940. On its way out of the SWP, this grouping was able to make factional hay out of the "policy of caution." Referring to the SWP's inactivity, a member of this faction asked pointedly, "When workers do move on a mass scale, why should they follow anyone who did not previously supply some type of leadership?" (A. Winters, "Review of Our Trade Union Policy," *Internal Bulletin* Vol. VI, No. 9, 1944).

Replying to the Goldman-Morrow group, the SWP majority specifically ruled out caucuses such as the RFC as a general model, claiming that the left wing could not be built by presenting the masses with a "ready-made" program, but only by working within the existing caucus formations. Since the RFC was led primarily by politically independent secondary UAW leaders, "existing caucus formations" could only mean a policy of entering the major bureaucratic power groupings, which is exactly what the SWP did on its return to activity after the war. Despite the comparative impotence of the trade-union bureaucracy and different nature of the tasks in the early thirties, the Minneapolis experience was cited as an example in defense of a policy that emphasized blocking with sections of the bureaucracy and avoiding the presentation of a program independent of, and counterposed to, the bureaucracy in the unions.

This was the perspective followed by the SWP in the post-war period. In the brief but extensive post-war strike wave—the most massive strike wave in U.S. labor history—the SWP emphasized its enthusiasm for the intense economic struggles and under-played its alternatives to the bureaucracy. Against the Goldman-Morrowites, the majority explicitly defended a policy of avoiding criticism of UAW leadership policy at the beginning of the 1946 GM strike in order to maintain a common front with the bureaucracy against the company. For a small revolutionary force of only 2,000 (this figure represented rapid growth at the end of the war period) to take such an attitude toward the vast trade-union bureaucracy simply served to weaken the forces which could have built revolutionary leadership by struggling against the inevitable bureaucratic betrayals.

The relative pessimism of 1941 as to the backwardness of the working class gave way in the post-war period to the optimism of “Theses on the American Revolution,” the political resolution of the 1946 SWP convention. The “Theses” ruled out a new stabilization of capitalism and saw an unbroken development of the SWP into the vanguard party standing at the head of the revolutionary proletariat. The “Theses” underestimated not only the ability of capitalism to restabilize itself but also the relative strength of the trade-union bureaucracy and of Stalinism. Despite degeneration and decline, the CP still had 10,000 members at the end of the war.¹³

This revolutionary optimism was not matched in the trade unions by the open preparation of revolutionary leadership through “third group” caucuses, however, but by an orientation first toward the more progressive bureaucratic reformists who were leading strike struggles or breaking with their previous allies, the discredited Stalinists. Later, as the cold war set in, the SWP broke with its allies and oriented more toward the Stalinists. As in the late thirties, these orientations tended to be based not on maximum political clarity but on the trade-union issues of the moment. Unlike the late thirties, however, the situation changed rapidly into a general purge of reds and hardening of a conservative bureaucracy, with which no blocs were possible. Furthermore the united fronts of the post-war period tended to take the form of critical support for one faction over another in union elections. Besides having a demoralizing effect on the ranks of the SWP’s trade-union cadre, the Trotskyists’ failure to present a hard, distinctive revolutionary alternative in the unions in this period thus contributed to the formation of the new bureaucratic line-up and thereby to the eventual cold-war defeats.

Critical Support for Reuther: 1946

Again the UAW is the most important example, since in 1946 in that union the SWP had perhaps its best case for a policy of blocs. After the war, Reuther began a drive for domination of the union with a show of militancy. He led a 113-day strike against General Motors on the basis of the three-point program: open the books to public inspection, negotiations in public and wage increases without price increases. Though he made his basic support of capitalism and the “right” to profits clear, he was able to mobilize militant sentiment with this program, strike a left posture at the 1946 convention and win the presidency of the union from the Stalinist-backed R.J. Thomas.

Reuther, however, made no effort to fight for and deepen the “GM strike program” at the convention. Though he won most of his votes on the basis of this militant strike program, his real program was opposition to the CP. This appealed to militants also, of course, since the CP had been completely discredited by its thoroughly right-wing role during the war (which it had incredibly attempted to extend into the post-war period—the so-called permanent no-strike pledge—on the basis of the Soviet bureaucracy’s hopes for post-war peaceful coexistence with its capitalist allies). However, Reuther’s caucus also attracted conservative anti-communists such as the American Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU). The *Militant* exposed Reuther’s basic conservatism even on trade-union issues by pointing out that he had devised the “one-at-a-time” strategy (isolating strikes against one company at a time); that he had endorsed the introduction of the “company security” clause into the Ford contract and had capitulated to Truman’s “fact-finding” panel in the GM strike against the will of the elected negotiating body (23 March 1946). It also pointed out that his written program was no better than the Stalinist-backed Thomas-Addes caucus program “except for language and phraseology” (30 March 1946). Nevertheless, the Trotskyists critically supported his campaign for president because of the fact that the militant workers were voting for him on the basis of the GM strike program.

With skillful demagoguery, Reuther had successfully coopted the militant wing of the union, including the earlier Rank and File Caucus (which had dissolved into the Reuther caucus). An approach to this militant wing which would have driven a wedge between the militants and Reuther was needed. In 1944 the SWP had argued “that the time was not ripe for the independent drive of the RFC—despite the fact that these “unknowns,” only running one candidate and without any serious effort, had secured 20 percent of the vote for president at the 1944 convention (*Fourth International*, October 1944). Yet the SWP had not hesitated to raise programmatic demands on the RFC as it was forming, in order to make its break with the bureaucracy complete. In 1946, however, despite criticisms of Reuther, in the last analysis the SWP supported him simply on the basis of his popularity and without having

¹³ This sentence was corrected (in *WV* No. 30, 12 October 1973): “In fact the CP membership was close to 80,000 and had increased during the war.”

made any programmatic demands whatsoever on him (such as that he break with the conservative anti-communists as a condition for support).

Critical Support for Thomas-Addes: 1947

An independent stance might have left the SWP supporters isolated at the 1946 convention, but the establishment of such a principled pole would have helped recruit militants by the time of the next convention in 1947. Instead, the SWP simply tailed the militants—or thought it tailed the militants—once again. In the interval between the two conventions, Reuther consolidated his position on the basis of anti-communism—including support for Truman’s foreign policy—and bureaucratic reformism. At the 1947 convention, the SWP switched its support to the Thomas-Addes caucus, on the grounds that the militants were already fed up with Reuther and an attempt had to be made to halt the latter’s drive toward one-man dictatorial rule. For this bloc, there wasn’t even the pretense of a programmatic basis. Despite the shift of Reuther to the right and the phony “left” noises of Thomas-Addes and the Stalinists, however, Reuther’s complete slate was swept into office largely because of the discredited character of the previous leadership. Only after this debacle did the SWP put together an independent caucus. If such a course had been unrealistic before, after the 1947 convention it was more hopeless than ever. By that time, however, there was no other choice.

The SWP’s course in other unions was similar. In the National Maritime Union, for instance, the SWP supported Curran when he broke from his former Stalinist allies on the basis of democracy and militancy, even though he was already lining up for Truman’s foreign policy and letting the Stalinists get to the left of him on militancy. Later, the SWP had to support the Stalinists against his vicious, bureaucratic expulsions.

Cold War and Cochran-Clarke

In 1953 the SWP was racked by a faction fight and split which in part reflected the penetration into the party of the kind of trade-union “politics” it had been pursuing in the unions. What had looked like a hopeful situation in the immediate post-war period had turned rapidly into its opposite. The betrayals and self-defeating policies of the Stalinists had combined with “reformist trade-unionist illusions to allow not only the consolidation of a monolithic, conservative trade-union bureaucracy, but the successful purge of reds from the unions and the nurturing of right-wing anti-communism within the working class, which made the international cold-war drive of U.S. imperialism virtually unopposed at home.

The purge and pressure of the cold war caused a section of the SWP trade-union cadre to become disillusioned and give up on the perspective of building a vanguard party in the U.S. This defeatism was organized into a tendency by Cochran, on the basis of liquidation of virtually all public party activity in favor of a “propaganda” orientation which would have left the Cochranites, many of whom were officers in the UAW, free to make their peace with the Reutherite bureaucracy.

The Cochranites made an unprincipled combination with forces in New York around Bartell, Clarke and others who considered themselves the American representatives of the Pablo leadership of the Fourth International. Objectifying the post-war creation of deformed workers states in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia into an inevitable, world-historic trend, the Pablo leadership proposed, in essence, that Stalinist and reformist leaderships could be forced to the left by the pressure of their mass base into creating more such states in a situation in which the imminence of World War III made the creation of independent Trotskyist parties impossible: the Trotskyist task, therefore, was to liquidate into the Stalinist and social-democratic parties. It was this essentially liquidationist perspective which brought Cochran and Clarke together into a temporary amalgam in the SWP.

While defending the twists and turns of the SWP trade-union policy, Cannon nevertheless indicated that these twists and turns might have had something to do with the degeneration of the cadre into material for Cochranite liquidationist opportunism:

“Factional struggles in the trade unions in the United States, in the primitive, prepolitical stage of their development, have been power struggles, struggles for office and place, for the personal aggrandizement of one set of fakers and the denigration and discreditment of the other side....

“Cochran’s conception of ‘power politics’ in the party; his methods of conducting a factional fight—come from this school of the labor fakers, not from ours.”

—“Some Facts About Party History and the Reasons for its Falsification,” *Internal Bulletin*, October 1953

The main cause of Cochranite liquidationism lay in the pressures of the cold war and wittchhunt, which had of course, been completely beyond the control of the SWP. However Cannon’s own documents defending the party against trade-unionist combinationism and liquidationism make clear that the party’s position in the trade unions had been insufficiently distinct from “struggles for office and place,” just as it had been insufficiently distinct from blocs with progressive Rooseveltians before World War II.

In the course of pursuing a trade-union policy based almost exclusively on making blocs on the immediate trade-union issues, the SWP had gradually adapted to trade unionism and become less discriminating in whom it blacked with and why. Unlike the Stalinists and Shachtmanites, the Trotskyists maintained their class principles by refusing to make unprincipled alliances or by breaking them as soon as they became untenable. (Thus the SWP switched sides in the UAW in 1947 while the Workers Party of Shachtman pursued Reuther et. al. into the arms of the State Department.) In the final analysis, the SWP remained a principled party of revolutionary socialism by struggling against the fruits of its trade-union work internally and accepting the split of 20 percent of its membership in 1953 rather than making further concessions to trade unionism.

Spartacist League: Learn and Go Forward

The policy of making united fronts in the trade-union movement around the immediate issues is not in itself incorrect. What the SWP did wrong was to see this as its exclusive policy for all periods, except those in which no blocs could be made without gross violations of principle, in which case the answer was to do nothing. In any period of normal trade-union activity, blocs can be made around immediate issues. The task of revolutionists is to forge a cadre, within the unions as well as without, armed with a program to break the unions from their role as instruments for tying the workers to capitalism and imperialism. Such a program must go beyond immediate issues and address all the key political questions facing the working class and provide answers which point to a revolutionary policy and leadership.

While the Trotskyists advanced the struggle for revolutionary leadership dramatically with the right united front at the right time, as in Minneapolis in 1934, they more often tended to undermine their own party building with an exclusive policy of blocs, some of which had little or no basis for existence from the standpoint of revolutionary politics. By presuming that it was necessary for a small force to prove itself in action against the class enemy before it could present itself independently to the workers as an alternative leadership, the Trotskyists’ united fronts tended to increasingly take the form of promoting someone else’s leadership.

The Spartacist League sees as the chief lesson from this experience not the need to reject united fronts, occasional blocs or the tactic of critical support in the trade unions, but the need to subordinate these tactics to the task of building a revolutionary political alternative to the bureaucracy within the unions. A bloc or tactic of electoral support which fails to enhance revolutionary leadership through undermining the bureaucracy as such can only build illusions in reformism. The central conclusion is that there is no substitute for the hard road of struggle to inject a political class perspective of proletarian internationalism into what is normally a narrow, nationalist and parochial arena of struggle. Especially in the initial phases of struggle when the revolutionary forces are weak, it is necessary to make an independent pole as politically distinct as possible, so that the basis for future growth is clear. To this end, the SL calls for the building of caucuses based on the revolutionary transitional program.

Brazil:

Program of the Class-Struggle Caucus

The following program of the Comitê de Luta Classista (CLC – the Class Struggle Caucus) initiated by our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil) was printed as a leaflet in June 1997 and in the LQB's newspaper *Vanguarda Operária* No. 2 (August-October 1997). The translated program is reprinted from *The Internationalist* No. 4, January-February 1998

Introduction: Two decades ago Brazil had a trade-union structure in which the state intervened directly and the *pelegos* (government-aligned bureaucrats) acted literally and directly as agents of the state. A massive struggle was carried out against this under the name of the “new unionism,” which put forward a program of *trade-unionism* (union politics which accept the limits of capitalism), which Lenin polemicized against and which can be classified politically as social-democratic. This “new unionism” under the umbrella of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT—United Workers Federation) is dominant today, revealing its own bankruptcy as it seeks to discipline the workers in the service of the popular front, an alliance which subordinates the workers to a sector of the bosses. Thus, the various enemies we are facing, from the puppet provocateur Artur Fernandes, chief of the pro-police faction against the workers of the SFPMVR (Volta Redonda Municipal Workers Union) and shareholder in CSN (the National Steel Company), who is advised by the Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista, to the fake-leftists of the PSTU [the Morenoite United Socialist Workers Party], Causa Operária and Dodora's Força Socialista, which have supported the gangsterism and thuggery used by the pro-police clique against the SFPMVR, all act as what Trotsky called the “fifth wheel” of the popular front. The CLC's central policy is for the defeat of the tendencies which tie the workers to capitalism.

Who we are: The Comitê de Luta Classista is a group of workers, founded by public employees and open to workers from all other sectors, who understand that all the forms of oppression that we face arise from the capitalist system. Determined to fight against this system, we seek to make our union an instrument in this struggle, together with the exploited and oppressed of the entire world. After the decline of bourgeois “laborism” [*tabalhismo*, a reference to the followers of veteran capitalist politician Leonel Brizola's “Democratic Labor Party”] and the *pelego* system inherited from the military dictatorship, the economist “new unionism,” remaining within limits acceptable to capitalism, demonstrated its bankruptcy. The union bureaucrats seek to discipline the workers in the service of the popular front of class collaboration, a situation which has been further accentuated after the capitalist counterrevolution in the ex-USSR and East Europe. This is shown in Volta Redonda and nationwide, for example in the betrayal of the oil workers' strike. The CLC is not like other union tendencies which exist only to run in union elections. We seek to constantly raise the workers' consciousness, organize them and mobilize them in struggle to carry out the class-struggle program. The key is to forge a revolutionary leadership.

What we stand for:

1. Complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions from the capitalist state. Against any intervention or interference by the bourgeois “justice” system in the union. We repudiate any and all control by the government (ministries, “justice” system, parliament, police, etc.) over the workers movement. It is the workers who decide. Union dues must be freed from the dues check-off controlled by the state and the bosses and be paid directly to the union, so the workers will control the union's money. Against the “union tax,” “labor federation tax,” etc. We condemn the traitors who “invite” the bourgeois courts into the unions.

2. The union belongs to the working class, not to the bosses and their agents. The union meeting of 25 July 1996 disaffiliated the municipal *guardas* (cops) from the SFPMVR, because police (of all kinds) are not part of the working class; they are the armed fist of the bourgeoisie.

Remember Ernane da Silva Lúcio, a black youth murdered by a municipal *guarda*. Remember the repression against the oil workers and the massacres of Candelária, Carandirú, Rondônia, Eldorado, Favela Naval in Diadema (state of São Paulo) and Cidade de Deus (state of Rio de Janeiro). This means that the municipal

workers' historic decision must be extended throughout the union movement by expelling police, *guardas*, prison guards and watchmen from the unions and the CUT.

3. Union democracy. Election of delegates from each sector to represent and mobilize their sectors and keep them informed. All union directors and leaders must be subject to recall by the ranks. The right to form caucuses within the union. Down with the union bureaucrats' witchhunts against class-struggle militants. Mobilize the ranks to defeat all the union bureaucrats, who serve the bosses and the bourgeois state. Maintain a genuine strike fund. Free union programs to teach literacy, technical training and workers education. Seek to establish union radio programs.

The independence of the unions from the bourgeois state, together with union democracy, can be achieved only with a revolutionary leadership. The current union bureaucracies (both the *pelegos* of Força Sindical [pro-company labor federation], etc., and the popular-frontists leading the CUT) act to subordinate the working class to the bosses and their state. These anti-working-class politics were highlighted when Artur Fernandes "invited" the intervention of the bourgeois courts in the SFPMVR against the struggle to disaffiliate the *guardas*.

4. CUT should mean struggle. We defend the SFPMVR's affiliation to the CUT, against company-union federations like Força Sindical and the CGT. No to "partnership" and all forms of class collaboration. The workers' interests are completely counterposed to those of the capitalists. The CUT must withdraw from all joint boards and committees with the bosses and the bourgeois government. We condemn the "CUT Investment Clubs" such as those created by the Volta Redonda metal workers union and in other state-owned companies that are being privatized. We fight to defeat the *pelega* and *neo-pelega* (sell-out) bureaucracy—which is increasingly integrating itself into the state—and for a new, class-struggle leadership. The CUT must break with the popular front and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. For trade-union unity: for industrial unions, drawing in contract workers and those manipulated by bourgeois corporatism. For an organizing campaign to unionize subcontractors' and COHAB (federal housing construction authority) employees, with full rights.

5. An injury to one is an injury to all. When the bourgeois state attacks one group of workers (as occurred with the oil workers and dockers), the power of the working class must be mobilized in solidarity action. During strikes, use mass pickets and factory occupation against the strikebreakers. Hot cargo (refuse to transport or handle) products of companies where the workers are on strike. The working class must be mobilized to defend the landless peasants against the capitalists' brutal repression, calling for workers self-defense militias; for agrarian revolution and not the "agrarian reform" proposed by the reformists. Mobilized the exploited and oppressed against the Cardoso/IMF hunger plan. Unify struggles at the national, continental and international level.

6. Against dangerous and unhealthy working conditions. Fight to stop the dangerous practices of Volta Redonda's City Hall and other cities and companies, such as transporting workers like cattle in trucks together with dangerous implements. Protection against hazardous materials, such as benzene in the steel mills and petrochemical plants, a gas which causes leukopenia (a work-related disease [affecting white blood cells] which these bosses call a "black disease"—a clear example of capitalist racism). Workers committees (without management) on health and working conditions, with the power to stop work when conditions are dangerous. Retirement in line with seniority and with no loss in pay.

7. Against starvation wages. For a large wage increase, especially for the lowest-paid sectors. Make up all lost wages [due to government austerity plans and inflation]. For a living wage with automatic cost-of-living increases (sliding scale of wages). Equal pay for equal work. Committees of workers and working-class families against high prices. Organize a large-scale, class-struggle fight by the workers movement, blacks, women and youth against the starvation minimum wage. This poverty wage (which the PT [Workers Party] and the reformist CUT leadership have collaborated in maintaining) has been the "secret" of racist Brazilian capitalism.

8. Against unemployment, layoffs, privatizations and "labor flexibilization."

Against Cardoso's constitutional "reform." Defend job security at all levels through class-struggle mobilization; no confidence in parliament and the laws the bourgeoisie uses to control the workers. Jobs back now for all those laid off in the Collor regime's "administrative reform." Immediate reinstatement of Regina Célia, the black worker and mother victimized by City Hall's racist firing. Fight against privatizations; cancel the

privatizations that have already occurred. Down with “productivity” programs, which mean more exploitation and less jobs.

The labor movement must organize committees of the unemployed linked to the unions. Unemployment compensation equal to wages of employed workers. For a large-scale public works program with hiring controlled by the workers organizations. Cut the work week with no loss in pay: jobs for all! This slogan can also be an important way to win support from the unemployed for the organized labor movement. Union control of hiring and training, with special attention to traditionally excluded sectors (women, blacks, youth). Workers control of production.

9. For a class-struggle fight against racist oppression and the oppression of women. “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded” (Karl Marx). The workers movement must lead the struggle against black oppression, which is a fundamental part of the struggle against capitalism in Brazil. Smash discrimination, whether open or disguised (“good appearance” requirements, etc.). Army, police: out of the *favelas* (ghettos). Stop the racist murder of street children. Workers defense committees against strikebreakers and the forces of racist repression.

For a class-struggle fight against leukopenia. Open all jobs to women. Free 24-hour child care. We fight against the use of children as cheap labor, which deprives many of them of their childhood and schooling. Free abortion on demand; free, high-quality medical care for all. Defend the rights of homosexuals, Indians and all victims of the bourgeoisie’s discrimination and terror; fight bigotry, anti-Semitism, etc. The struggle against oppression can be victorious only as a struggle against capitalism.

10. Against the popular front, for the class independence of the workers. The popular front chains the workers organizations to politicians and parties of the bourgeoisie. This is class collaboration, which leads to the destruction of the workers’ struggles. From Brazil to Chile, Central America, Indonesia, France, Spain and many other countries, the popular front has meant terrible defeats for the proletariat. Not one vote for any candidate of popular fronts. Against bourgeois parties of the right and “left.”

The working class must break from the PT [the Workers Party of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva], a reformist party which organizes betrayals and repression against the oppressed. All the dominant tendencies within the CUT (and the PT) support the politics of popular frontism, from Articulação [Lula’s tendency] and its camp followers of O Trabalho [Lambertistes] and Democracia Socialista [Mandelites] to the PSTU and the centrists of Causa Operária and the LBI (advisors to Artur Fernandes). The politics of the Stalinists and ex-Stalinists (PC do B [formerly pro-Albania], PCB [formerly pro-Moscow], PPS [another group of formerly pro-Moscow Stalinists]) seek to subordinate the workers to the class enemy. Thus these tendencies stab the proletarian struggle in the back, as we have seen in Volta Redonda, for example during the struggle to disaffiliate the municipal *guardas*.

11. For a revolutionary workers party which fights for a workers and peasants government. Against trade-unionist, syndicalist and “anti-political” illusions. The proletariat can win its class independence only in the struggle for workers power in the interests of all the exploited and oppressed. Against the large landed estates: agrarian revolution (seizure of the land by the peasants). We fight for the end of capitalism and for socialism. Repudiate the foreign debt. Revolutionary expropriation of the bourgeoisie; for a democratically planned and centralized economy run by workers councils to satisfy the needs of humanity and not the bosses’ profits.

11. Workers of the world, unite! Proletarian internationalism. Free Mumia Abu-Jamal now. Against the racist death penalty. Real solidarity actions with workers’ struggles in other countries. Against imperialism and counterrevolution, the working class must defend Cuba, China, Vietnam and the other deformed workers states. The workers of those countries must expel the Stalinist bureaucracies from political power, establishing workers councils under revolutionary leadership. The betrayals of Stalinism, with its lie of “socialism in one country,” prepared the way for the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union by world imperialism, which was a big defeat for the world working class. Socialism can only be international. For the Socialist United States of Latin America, extending workers revolution to the USA and the entire world.

JOIN US!

Vote It Down and Strike!

TWU Tops Push Sellout Deal

On the evening of December 16, in an announcement clearly timed to come out right after a New York City transit union rally had dispersed, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and leaders of TWU Local 100 announced a pact. Despite Local president Roger Toussaint's vow to accept "no zeros" in a wage package, there is no pay hike in the first year (just a \$1,000 lump-sum bribe), and 3 percent each in the next two years, which will be wiped out by inflation.

Significantly, the deal eliminates the "no layoffs" clause from previous contracts. MTA negotiator Gary Dellaverson called a press conference to brag about the union concessions, "including a new layoff option," and NYC transit chief

Larry Reuter has a plan under which "as many as 3,100 employees would be laid off" (*Newsday*, 18 December 2002).

Democratic Party politician Basil Paterson, who was part of the TWU negotiating team, told the press that the MTA knew Toussaint "was never serious about a strike" (*New York Post*, 17 December 2002). NYC transit workers should vote this contract down and prepare to strike. This includes *electing strike committee* and mobilizing New York City labor for a *strike of all city workers*. Break with the bosses' Democratic Party to *forge a class-struggle workers party!*

We print below leaflets issued by the Internationalist Group in the days leading up to the contract deadline.

NYC Bosses Threaten National Guard Occupation

You Can't Run the Subways with Bayonets!

For a Solid Transit Strike, Mobilize All New York Labor!

DECEMBER 10 – With the December 15 contract deadline for New York City subway and bus workers looming, the ruling class has switched into high gear whipping up a fear campaign against Transport Workers Union Local 100. On Friday, December 6, multi-billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg declared that if there is a transit strike "people will die" – supposedly because of traffic congestion blocking ambulances.

Two days later, Governor George Pataki's office leaked that it was preparing to bring in the National Guard to patrol the city in a strike. In their strikebreaking zeal, the capitalist rulers would put NYC under martial law, like after the September 11 World Trade Center attack last year. "Strike Force" screamed the front page of the *New York Post* (9 December) with a photo of a rifle-toting Guardsman. Now Bloomberg and Pataki are in court to get injunctions banning a strike under New York's union-busting Taylor Law, as Mayor Rudy Giuliani did in 1999.

On Saturday, thousands of TWU members flooded into the Javits Center in Manhattan to overwhelmingly vote to authorize a strike. But the Local 100 leadership under president Roger Toussaint, elected in 2000 as part of a "reform" slate, is using this as a pressure tactic rather than gearing up the membership for all-out battle. It is looking to the Democrats in the City Council, who in turn are calling on Republican governor Pataki to intervene!

The battle of New York City transit is not some isolated local dispute, but hits at the heart of international finance capital. Without a steady supply of workers delivered every workday morning, Wall Street can't function. A solid transit strike would also wreak havoc with Bush's war on Iraq. You can bet it would quickly





Sealing the sellout: TWU leader Roger Toussaint embraces MTA chairman Peter Kalikow, December 16, and is suddenly hailed as a “labor statesman.”

be placed on the National Security Council agenda.

Already the bosses’ press is squawking about a “communist underground” in the subways and “Toussaint’s jihad.” When they portray transit strikers as “terrorists,” the unions should tell the red-baiters and labor haters to go to hell. U.S. rulers are the ones who terror-bomb Afghanistan and Iraq and seek to terrorize working people, minorities and immigrants here into submission. What’s needed is to *defeat the bosses’ war through sharp class struggle*.

The TWU ranks must prepare for a hard battle, and they must be backed by the combined strength of the organized workers movement in New York. NYC transit workers should join in struggle with United Air Lines workers, whose union gains are threatened by court action, and West Coast dock workers who were sent back to work under the slave-labor Taft-Hartley law.

Against threats by city and state governments to use strike-breaking laws, transit workers should defiantly reply: ***You can’t run the subways with bayonets!*** We say: Burn their injunctions and *turn the scab law into a dead letter*. If any transit workers or TWU leaders are arrested or fines imposed on the union, all city labor should walk out and *shred the Taylor Law!*

The Metropolitan Transit Authority’s insulting contract offer amounts to a pay cut (no wage increases for two years, plus taking more from workers’ paychecks for health and pension funds). The TWU should declare “*no contract, no work, no extensions – strike now!*” Make the scheduled December 16 labor march across Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall into a *mass mobilization of tens of thousands of unionists and their supporters on the first day of a strike*.

Other unions should join in active solidarity with the transit workers and tie the city’s elaborate “contingency plans” in knots. The TWU is fighting for all of city labor: AFSCME is next up on the mayor’s hit list. We say: *Shut down New York and keep it shut until Bloomberg, Pataki and the financiers fork it over!*

The MTA bosses are guilty of homicide. The Transit Authority’s refusal to follow the most minimal safety rules, in force on all other railroads in the area, has led to repeated deaths

of transit workers. Two track workers – Joy Antony and Kurien Baby – were killed in two days last month because the MTA forced them to work without flagmen to warn approaching trains. Local 100 should have struck the system then and there. TWU militants should demand the formation of *union safety committees authorized to shut down traffic at any dangerous spot*.

The MTA is trying to loot the pensions and sock transit workers with rising health care costs. The TWU should make a non-negotiable demand that there be *full health care for all transit workers* – no “co-pays,” zero deductibles – and campaign for free, quality medical care for everyone.

Transit workers complain of the Transit Authority’s vicious “plantation justice” system of imposing sanctions on its employees in order to “keep them in line.” Since the last contract, management has written up as many disciplinary notices as it has workers. The union should demand that *all disciplines be wiped out*.

The TWU should champion minority and immigrants’ rights. The overwhelmingly black and Latino *WEP (“workfare”) workers should immediately be made union members at full union-scale wages*. The union should demand *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. Meanwhile, all police (such as the revenue cops) should be thrown out of the TWU and the unions: *police are the armed fist of the class enemy, who we face on the other side of the strike barricades*.

New York City rulers are trying to set the population against the transit workers union, even as they plan a whopping fare hike to \$2 a ride. The TWU could win huge popular support by aggressively demanding *free public transit*. We say: *rip out the turnstiles, train the clerks to run more trains to reduce overcrowding, and build the Second Avenue subway*.

The MTA, the mayor and the governor will plead poverty – pretty ludicrous coming from this gang of millionaires and billionaires. The entire city deficit could be paid off from Bloomberg’s piggy bank. The MTA talks about “rising costs,” but *what costs are rising* – it sure isn’t transit workers’ wages! The costs they’re talking about are overwhelmingly debt service to the bankers, some \$2.3 billion a year. Some of these “loans” go back to the 1930s when the city took over the privately owned subways, and they have been paid for many times over. The TWU should demand: *repudiate the debt!*

Clearly, such a revolutionary program is not going to be won by business-as-usual business unionism, even dressed up in “reform” garb. A fighting leadership of the unions must be forged, one that breaks with the Democratic and Republican parties of capital (and second-string capitalist outfits like the Greens and the Working Families Party) and undertakes to build a *class-struggle workers party* that fights for a *workers government*.

We make the city work, and we can make it stop! The transit workers’ fight is the fight of all New York City workers, minorities, immigrants and poor – that is, of the overwhelming majority of the population against the tiny minority of the filthy rich who think they are masters of the universe and can trample on everyone else. A leadership that has the program and determination to stand up to this bunch of capitalist thugs could win wide public support. *We have the power – use it!* ■

FOR ACTIVE SOLIDARITY WITH A NYC TRANSIT STRIKE!

The following motion was put forward in a leaflet by the Internationalist Group at the NYC United Federation of Teachers Delegates Assembly on December 4.

WHEREAS, the government of the City of New York under Mayor Bloomberg, with the collaboration of the City Council, has ordered hundreds of millions of dollars in service cuts, which will result in several thousand lost jobs; and

WHEREAS, the city government is gearing up for a confrontation with the entire labor movement, and has chosen NYC subway and bus workers as their first targets; and

WHEREAS, the NYC Department of Education has already issued instructions to school personnel for "contingency plans" in the event of a transit strike which are aimed at undercutting the effect of such a strike; and

WHEREAS, the Transport Workers Union, like the United Federation of Teachers, is threatened with massive fines and vicious jail sentences under the anti-union Taylor Law for exercising its elementary right to strike; and

WHEREAS, amid the war already underway against Iraq, the federal government under President Bush will likely label a NYC transit strike a threat to national security, as it already did in ordering locked-out West Coast longshore workers back to work under the Taft-Hartley slave labor law; and

WHEREAS, a strike by the TWU would be a front-line defense of all city workers, deserving of our active solidarity and participation in a common fight against the anti-labor offensive;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

THAT the United Federation of Teachers urges its members to join TWU strike lines on the first and all subsequent days of a New York City transit strike, turning them into mass pickets;

THAT the UFT help initiate an immediate citywide mobilization of all NYC workers in the Wall Street or Midtown areas to demonstrate active solidarity with a transit strike;

THAT the UFT instruct its members not

to use any scab transportation instituted by the city to break a transit strike, such as vans or private buses;

THAT the UFT encourage teachers to take their classes to TWU picket lines to provide students with education in the class struggle, with instructional aids such as portable blackboards and cameras to document any arrests;

THAT the UFT inform the Department of Education that the vast majority of teachers and school workers in the NYC city schools will not be able to reach their jobs in the event of a subway and bus strike for lack of public transportation caused by the refusal of the MTA to meet the transit workers' just demands;

THAT the UFT further inform the city that if any teacher or other school worker is disciplined or dismissed for being unable to reach their job due to a strike, the union chapter at that school shall be authorized to immediately walk out in protest and to stay out until any sanctions are rescinded; and

THAT in the event that transit workers, school workers and/or union officials are jailed under the Taylor Law or other anti-labor injunction or decree, that the UFT itself strike against such scab laws demanding that all unionists be released and charges against them dropped. ■



Jean-Loup Gautreau/AFP

Parents and teachers held classes on picket lines during 1997 French truckers' strike.

Screw Mayor Mike – For a Solid Transit Strike!

The Fight for a Class-Struggle Leadership in NYC Transit

DECEMBER 16 – The December 15 contract deadline for New York City bus and subway workers came and went, but the transit showdown continues. With the entire NYC population on pins and needles after a week of non-stop anti-strike hysteria in the media, shortly before midnight Transport Workers Union Local 100 secretary-treasurer Ed Watt went before the TV cameras to announce that the negotiators had “stopped the clock” to continue bargaining. Watt said that “progress has been made primarily in the non-economic areas of dignity and respect for our members.” In other words, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority still hasn’t moved from its provocative “double-zero” proposal for a two-year wage freeze, plus \$1,500 per worker in pension and health care givebacks from the union!

In the last several days there has been a lot of talk about “respect” to cover up the fact that the MTA is hardlining it on the money, and everything else. Two days in a row, the haughty anti-union voice of the city’s rulers, the *New York Times*, ran articles saying that “Respect, Just a Little Bit, Has Become the Underlying Issue” for transit workers. But with all the talk of R-E-S-P-E-C-T, the fact is that the Transit Authority, Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki are all giving transit workers the big Dis. The press is demonizing TWU Local 100 president Roger Toussaint as if he was a card-carrying member of Bush’s “Axis of Evil.” The ruling class is preparing as if for civil war, putting 12,000 cops on strike duty, holding televised police training sessions at Shea Stadium in carrying out mass arrests, and leaking plans to bring in the National Guard to put the city under lockdown.

The clear intention is intimidation. The MTA went to court and got an injunction against the union under the anti-strike Taylor Law, which would dock transit workers two days’ pay for every day on strike. Meanwhile, the city has its own suit to hit the union with a \$1 million fine on the first day of the strike, and \$25,000 for each individual member, doubling the fines every day, plus \$5 million in “damages” to cover the city’s strike preparations. And meanwhile the multi-billionaire “Mayor Mike” tries to get himself a “man of the people” image by going out and buying a \$663 mountain bike! The union leadership, meanwhile, keeps repeating that it has been doing everything it can to avoid a strike, which is unfortunately true.

What should have been happening is to prepare the 34,000 New York transit workers and all of city labor for an all-out strike battle. Expose the MTA’s pleas of poverty by demanding to *open the books!* An *elected strike committee* should be formed to organize mass picketing in every borough, to shut

down every transit barn and TA headquarters at Jay Street, Brooklyn. There should be a *mass labor mobilization to tie up Manhattan’s financial district* and bring the machinery of U.S. capitalism to a screeching halt. The TWU and other transit unions should declare that they will *shut down Metro North, LIRR and PATH commuter railroads as well as private bus lines* in a transit strike. As thousands of union supporters stream over Brooklyn Bridge this afternoon, they should be chanting: “Screw Mayor Mike! For a Solid Transit Strike!” And then turn that chant into reality.

New Directions and Rank and File Caucus: Out-Bureaucrats Are Now In

What’s needed, in short, is hard class struggle against an implacable foe. The main obstacle to such a struggle is precisely the labor bureaucracy which, day in and day out, seeks to conciliate the working class with its capitalist exploiters, the class enemy. Even if they are occasionally forced to call a strike by management’s intransigence, the union tops do so at best in a half-hearted way, fearing that an all-out struggle that unleashed the tremendous power of labor would soon sweep them out of their privileged positions. When the going gets tough, they will drop their empty rhetoric and shove sellout deals down the throats of the membership. It’s necessary to forge a fighting leadership of the unions on a program of intransigent class struggle, against the class collaboration of the present pro-capitalist misleaders who hogtie the unions.

The present “reform” leadership of Local 100 was elected in 2000 in reaction against the contract sellout of December 1999 by the previous leadership under Willie James, a placeholder for TWU International president Sonny Hall. Roger Toussaint was elected Local 100 president at the head of a slate of candidates of the New Directions caucus, which had organized a strong base of support over a decade of opposition activity. ND was supported by a host of left groups, and incorporated the Hell on Wheels opposition caucus politically associated with Solidarity, a loose social-democratic tendency, and the *Labor Notes* magazine in Detroit. But while ND would periodically strike a militant posture, it was in reality a lash-up of out-bureaucrats trying to get in on the action.

Over the years New Directions never actually called for and fought for a transit strike. As a caucus of bureaucrats and aspiring bureaucrats, their only aim was to get themselves elected to replace the Hall/James gang. Moreover, *ND’s entire*

Break with the Democrats – For a Revolutionary Workers Party!



Outside Shea Stadium, cops practice strikebreaking tactics, December 12. Cops out of the unions!

strategy was to appeal to the capitalist courts and the government against the union. In 1994, New Directions sued Local 100 for \$12 million and got a court order to force the TWU to mail out its leaflet with the election ballots. When NDer Tim Schermerhorn narrowly lost to James in 1997, they forced a new election by threatening another suit. In 1998, ND sued again, to demand that e-board members be consulted in contract negotiations. In December 1999, when New York City and state authorities obtained anti-strike injunctions, ND spokesman Toussaint, then head of the Local 100 track division, kept saying, "We are confident that we will defeat this in court."

Telling workers that they can be "confident" of beating the capitalist rulers in the capitalist courts is spreading dangerous illusions. Even worse, by appealing to the courts against the union, *New Directions has repeatedly called on the class enemy to use its repressive apparatus against the workers movement.* Any class-conscious worker would be duty-bound to denounce this blatant violation of the basic principle of labor independence from the capitalist state.

Unsurprisingly, once in office, ND began acting just like its predecessors. Toussaint, who himself had been unjustly fired by the TA with the connivance of the James leadership of the TWU, brought trumped-up charges in the union against prominent Hell on Wheels supporter Naomi Allen, the vice chairman of Local 100's Car Equipment Division. (Her conviction was eventually overturned an appeals committee of the TWU International.) While Toussaint has more frequently held union rallies, he has consistently shied away from a strike. When 1,500 local members at the private Queens Surface, Triboro Coach and Jamaica Bus companies went on strike last summer, Toussaint made it clear to the press that he never wanted a strike in the first place. (He also opposed an earlier walkout in January.) This led the Queens private bus drivers' leaders, allies of Sonny Hall, to push for a breakaway from Local 100, a reactionary move that was roundly

defeated in a referendum.

Now on the outs with Toussaint, the disappointed social democrats formerly around Hell on Wheels have put out a new publication, the *Rank and File Advocate*, which claims to uphold the program of the "old" New Directions before it took power. One of its leaders, Steven Downs, who was a founder of ND and elected on its slate to the Local 100 executive board, complained that in the December 2000 elections, "most of the literature for the local-wide campaign had a bland, generic 'good unionism' feel to it" while claiming vaguely that "many of the New Directions officers, as well as its rank and file activists, continue to hold a vision of unionism that goes beyond simply providing a better service to the members" (*Labor Notes*, February 2001). What that "vision" is these "rank-and-file" bureaucrats coyly leave unsaid.

The 34,000 members of Transport Workers Local 100 have the power to shut down New York City. The last time around, the *Wall Street Journal* (16 December 1999) commented that "Wall Street tycoons and media bigwigs cringe in anticipation of a strike by New York City transit workers." No matter how massive the city rulers' strike preparations, they would only be able to move a small fraction of the 3.5 million daily transit riders on scab buses. But a hard strike battle is necessarily political, and it must be waged on a class-struggle program. *The Democrat friends of the courts and cops are the enemies of labor and the oppressed.*

The New Directions leadership has pursued the political agenda of its predecessors. In the fall of last year, Toussaint endorsed Democrat Mark Green for mayor, and campaigned with Senator Clinton. This year Local 100 backed Democrat Carl McCall for governor, while much of NYC labor officialdom crossed over to support Republican Pataki. The TWU International endorsed Bush's "war on terrorism" over Afghanistan and the Local 100 leadership has not made a peep of protest against the looming



The 34,000-strong Transport Workers Union Local 100 is powerhouse of NYC labor. Union members march across Brooklyn Bridge, December 16, shortly before pact was announced.

invasion of Iraq. Yet U.S. imperialism's wars on these semi-colonial countries are intimately connected to the capitalists' escalating war "at home" against unions, minorities and immigrants. *A class-struggle leadership of the powerful transit workers union would fight to defeat the bosses' war and break with the bosses' parties, to forge a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers government.*

Every Class Struggle Is a Political Struggle

In any serious battle you need to know who your friends and who your enemies are, and a New York transit strike would be a real class battle. A revolutionary leadership would sharply draw the class line. No more capitalist politicians on labor platforms. No more representatives of the police and detectives "unions," either! We say: *cops out of the unions* – they are the armed fist of the class enemy. New Directions moaned about the "oppressed" Transit Property Protection Agents; we say throw them out of the TWU! On the other hand, the WEP employees are fellow workers. Class-struggle unionists must demand an end to this "Worker Exploitation Program" and enroll those already working in transit into the TWU. A crucial strike demand must be *full union-scale wages, benefits and protections for WEP workers*. And since most WEP workers are women, as are many present TWUers, the demand for *free 24-hour daycare near transit locations* is key. In an industry with many foreign-born workers, the union must demand *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*.

TWUers should demand *full pay for Helpers*, and *all provisionals should be made permanent*. *Safety* is a key issue in transit. Every time there is a subway crash or bus accident, managers rush to the scene to blame the drivers. Next they test the workers for drugs and alcohol. These, as well as "random" tests, are simply a way of victimizing workers, when accidents are most often the result of badly deteriorated safety conditions due to lack of maintenance. Transit workers should demand an *end to*

all drug/alcohol testing and the establishment of *union safety committees with the power to shut down unsafe operations*. With the greatly increased ridership and as part of a fight for *union jobs for all* in the face of continued heavy unemployment in the ghettos and barrios, the TWU should demand increased service and thousands of new jobs through a *shorter workweek with no loss of pay*, with all hiring to be done through a *union hiring hall*. Rather than the low-wage "apprenticeship" program, there should be *union-run training programs at full pay*.

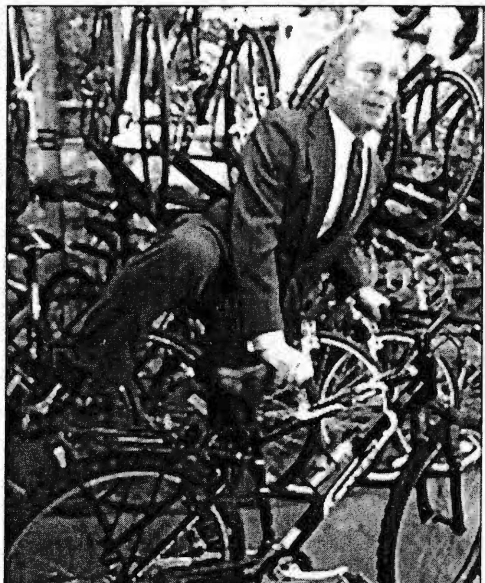
A class-struggle opposition would fight for the independence of labor from the capitalist state in every way. An important issue in the TWU is the dues check-off. Business unionists see this as an important gain, but by handing control over the union's finances to the employer (who deducts union dues from workers' pay), it gives the class enemy a powerful hold over labor. The MTA bosses used this stranglehold after the defeat of the 1980 strike, cutting off the TWU's funds as

part of the penalty for losing. A union that depends on the employer for its finances is always subject to blackmail. A union that collects its own dues is better prepared to fight. The transit workers' struggle must be that of all working and poor people. Instead of simply opposing a fare increase, as the TWU leadership is now doing, the union can win broad support for a strike by demanding *free mass transit – rip out the turnstiles!* Instead of each sector of city workers bargaining separately, and getting picked off one by one, a transit strike should lead to a *citywide strike of municipal workers* that would bring out the power of labor to *shut New York down*.

Forge a Revolutionary Leadership of the Working Class!

The bankruptcy of New Directions and its social-democratic hangers-on has been demonstrated repeatedly in the TWU. In Local 100, there is a small grouping around the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) which in 1999 did call for a strike and criticize New Directions. However, its criticisms are essentially tactical, and its own program is just as *economist* as that of the current and past leadership of the union. An August 1999 leaflet by Eric Josephson, who is supported by the LRP, headlined "Willie Said 10% Yearly Raise: Let's Win It!" This year, the LRP-supported *Revolutionary Track Worker* (6 December) declared: "President Toussaint raised the contract slogan 'Second Class No More!' We have to show that we mean it and will accept nothing less than a *First Class Contract*." So here we have ostensible socialists calling to carry out the alleged programs of James and Toussaint!

The LRP's transit program comes down to wage militancy, and at bottom it aims to pressure the bureaucracy, not oust it. Its recent *RTW* says nothing about free health care, only that there should be "no new or increased payments." It says nothing about abolishing the fare, only "no transit fare hike or service reductions." It calls for an end to "plantation justice," as does



Left: Multibillionaire NYC mayor Mike Bloomberg buys \$633 mountain bike, trying to whip up union-busting atmosphere. "Mike's bike" soon became object of general derision. Right: Militant transit workers marched across Brooklyn Bridge December 16 chanting, "Shut Up Mike, Ride Your Bike!"

the Toussaint leadership, but raises no specific demands. And even though Josephson is now a vice-chairman of the Track Division of Local 100, following the recent MTA killings of two transit workers, the *RTW* wrote that "with blood on their hands," the TA "rushed to implement most of our demands," and they only lamented that "two Local 100 members had to die to win a few of our safety demands." Not a word about union safety committees to shut down unsafe operations.

It's not surprising, then, that the latest *RTW* paper says nothing about Local 100's alliance with the Democratic Party, or about the imperialist war on Iraq. *There's nothing revolutionary about the Revolutionary Transit Worker*. A more honest title would be "Reformist Transit Bureaucrat." Despite their occasional criticisms of New Directions, Josephson was elected to his position as a union official in a campaign in which the LRP gave "critical support" to the ND slate. The "criticism" is simply a left cover for the LRP's own capitulations. Although the LRP occasionally criticizes New Directions and a similar reformist outfit, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, for suing the unions, it does not reject this class treachery *on principle*. In an article about a South African group it was courting, the LRP wrote:

"Revolutionaries cannot absolutely rule out that there may arise exceptional and extreme situations under which using the courts in a union struggle may be necessary, in order to survive an attack and to live to fight another day."

—*Proletarian Revolution* No. 57, Summer-Fall 1998

Shades of those pseudo-socialists who find "tactical" reasons to cross picket lines! In contrast, Trotskyists defend unions led by pro-capitalist bureaucrats against attacks by the capitalist state, insisting that labor must clean its own house. The union belongs to the workers, and even under sellout leadership it must be defended tooth-and-nail against the class enemy, who with their sugary talk of "democracy" want to gut the mass organizations of the working class.

In 1999, the LRP didn't confine itself to pressuring the labor bureaucracy. Interviewed on NY1 local television, Josephson protested the lousy contract and the "police state measures, reminiscent of Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany, and to my mind flagrantly unconstitutional." This sums up the LRP's outlook as a social-democratic current whose lineage goes back to the Stalinophobic tendency of Max Shachtman (as did the leadership of Solidarity). Shachtman deserted from Trotskyism on the eve of World War II refusing to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism. (The Trotskyists defended the Soviet degenerated workers state while fighting for a political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy.) So here in the middle of the transit showdown, the Stalinophobic Shachtmanite LRP grotesquely equated the Soviet Union with Nazi fascism, which obliterated the workers movement and carried out the Holocaust, setting as its measuring rod the bourgeois U.S. constitution! The LRP tries to strike various "leftist" postures, but this is its real *anti-communist* heritage.

Another group which has published articles about New York transit is the Spartacist League. For some three decades, from the mid-1960s to the mid-'90s, the SL stood for authentic Trotskyism. During the 1980 NYC transit strike, it actively fought for a class-struggle program and leadership of the TWU, with articles, leaflets and a special supplement to *Workers Vanguard*. Recently, however, in the wake of the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state, it has pulled back from the struggle for revolutionary leadership in the mass organizations of the working class. The SL of today with its abstentionist politics represents a variety of what Trotsky called "left centrism," mouthing revolutionary phrases that are not translated into action while capitulating to sections of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie.

In 1999, during the weeks before the contract deadline, the SL struck a militant tone, declaring "NYC Transit Workers: You Have the Power, Shut Down the City!" and calling "For Class-

Struggle Leadership! For a Solid Strike!" (*WV* No. 724, 26 November 1999). But when a Brooklyn judge rubber-stamped the draconian city/state injunctions against a TWU strike, the SL suddenly shifted its tune. "Defend Labor's Right to Strike!" headlined a December 14 Spartacist leaflet which pointedly *never called for a strike*. This omission was no fluke. Instead the leaflet advocated: "The key is unleashing the power of the multiracial labor movement in New York City in mass, militant action in a thought-out way, one which minimizes the damage in terms of jail sentences and other consequences." In its December 14 leaflet even the Shachtmanite LRP called for a strike, but the ostensibly Trotskyist SL *dropped* this hot potato.

The SL leaflet said that the ruling class "is outlawing the right to strike. If you don't have the right to strike, you don't have unions!" adding: "Without the right to act as a union, the plain consequence of Giuliani's action would be to make the only recourse ineffective guerrilla struggle." This panicked cry was a subterfuge. *The right to strike for civil service workers and their unions has been outlawed in New York state at least since the Condon-Wadlin Act was passed in 1947!* The SL bowed to Giuliani's *diktat*. NYC corporation counsel Michael Hess told the press that it was illegal for anyone to "threaten, encourage or advocate a strike." NY1 reporter David Lewis spelled it out: "According to city lawyers, if you were marching in that rally today [15 December 1999], whether you were a union member or just a supporter, here's how you could talk about the possibility of a transit strike: you could say, 'The transit workers really ought to have a right to strike, we ought to get that law changed.' But if you said, 'The transit workers should go out on strike,' it could cost you a lot of money." The SL followed the rules.

Recently, a lengthy article titled "New York Transit Workers vs. Union-Busting Austerity" in *Workers Vanguard* (29 November) raised a series of demands on safety, health care, the Democratic Party, the Taylor Law and other issues relevant to the transit struggle, *but pointedly did not call for a strike*. Yet the next issue of *WV* (13 December) headlined: "For a Solid NYC Transit Strike!" What changed in the meantime to cause this shift? What changed is that the weekend before, Local 100 held a mass meeting of thousands of TWU members who overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike. In these circumstances, for the SL not to call for a strike would ostentatiously place it to the right of the Local 100 leadership, which would be too hard for these centrist ex-Trotskyists to sell while still maintaining a pretense of revolutionary politics. So for now they are for a strike . . . unless Bloomberg can get a judge to outlaw advocating it, as Giuliani did.

The Spartacist League no longer fights for revolutionary leadership *within* the unions, the principal mass organizations of the working class. To take one glaring example, the latest *WV* calls for cops out of the union. But have supporters of the policies of the SL fought *inside the union* for the ouster of the Transit Property Protection Agents in the TWU? *WV* does not say so, and we venture to say they have not done so.

Or take another important case: that of Mumia Abu-Jamal. The Spartacist League calls for working-class action to free this courageous radical black journalist on Pennsylvania's death row, as do the Internationalist Group and the other sections of the League for the Fourth International. The TWU is a

key union with the muscle that could really make a difference in the fight for Mumia's freedom. Mumia himself, who is a member of the National Writers Union, wrote a column defending the TWU's right to strike. TWU Local 100 is on record calling for a "new trial" for Jamal, a liberal demand which implies confidence in the bourgeois state's legal system. But while our comrades in the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil have successfully fought for unions and labor federations there to undertake strike action and work stoppages demanding Mumia be freed – *defeating* reformist attempts to call for a "new trial" instead of for Jamal's freedom – have SL supporters fought in the TWU for the union to raise the call to free Mumia, and to undertake strikes or work stoppages for that demand? Again, thundering silence from *WV*.

In the 1938 founding program of the Fourth International (the Transitional Program), Leon Trotsky wrote:

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the frontline trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class. He takes active part in mass trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy. He fights uncompromisingly against any attempt to subordinate the unions to the bourgeois state and bind the proletariat to 'compulsory arbitration' and every other form of police guardianship – not only fascist but also 'democratic.' Only on the basis of such work within the trade unions is successful struggle possible against the reformists, including those of the Stalinist bureaucracy."

The Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International of which the IG is a section continue the Trotskyist program of fighting to oust the bureaucratic labor lieutenants of capital and build a class-struggle leadership in the unions through the struggle for the class independence of labor from the capitalists' state and their parties. We address key class conflicts such as the showdown over New York transit in our effort to forge a revolutionary workers party that can join the factory with the ghetto and barrio, mobilizing the power of the working class as the vanguard of all the oppressed fighting for liberation through international socialist revolution. ■

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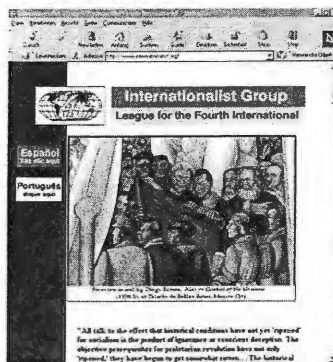
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