

Work Summed Up

ATM and the UAW Convention

The United Auto Workers Union held its international convention in Los Angeles, the week of May 15. The convention was tightly controlled by the labor bureaucrats and was used mainly as a stage for capitalist politicians like Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy. Clearly the bureaucrats wanted to use the convention to strengthen the system of capitalism, to tie the union to the tail of the capitalist political parties.

Communists are duty-bound to expose these capitalist tricks, carry out a determined struggle to overthrow imperialism, and stand with the people of the world against both US and Soviet imperialism. Only a genuine communist party can lead the workers to smash imperialism and establish the dictatorship of the working class. The working class can never carry out these tasks unless it becomes aware of its role as the leading class in society. This knowledge can only come when the proletariat sees its relationship to all other classes and groups in society.

With this in mind, ATM assessed its tasks in regard to the autoworkers convention and concluded that it was imperative to carry out a campaign of political agitation around it--as extensive and all-sided campaign as was possible. We set up a convention headquarters where workers could meet to discuss their common struggle. We mass distributed the REVOLUTIONARY CAUSE to hundreds of autoworkers around California and to convention delegates. We organized a daily ATM Convention Bulletin which was simultaneously distributed in 5 auto plants in California and to the convention delegates. We put out 6000 bulletins per day. The Convention Bulletin explained the daily cover-ups and sell-outs of the bureaucrats and exposed them as traitors to the working class.



Delegates from the independent parts shops hold demonstration at this year's UAW Convention. They demanded an end to plant closings.

POLITICAL LINE IS DECISIVE

The first and foremost consideration in carrying out any action is the political and ideological line. If the line is not correct, no matter how well organized you are, you cannot be successful. Therefore we had to carefully develop our line on the convention, to see it in the context of our overall line on the trade unions and our line for work in auto in particular.

ATM views the national question as a key issue in auto, particularly the fight against the vicious national oppression faced by Black auto-

workers. We focused the attention of the autoworkers on the case of Gary Tyler, the Black youth framed for murder in Louisiana. We showed the role of the auto industry capitalists in this whole scheme of things, pointing out that General Motors has built 7 of its last 9 auto plants in the Southern US. We put before the autoworkers the tasks of fighting for the freedom of Gary Tyler, of upholding the right of the Afro-American nation to self-determination, forcing the UAW to undertake vigorous efforts to organize all auto plants in the south, and to end the national oppression of Black workers in the auto industry. In a similar fashion we called on the workers to support the struggles of the people of Azania and to demand that the UAW give material support to the liberation movement in that country.

Another critical issue for auto workers is the question of union democracy. Many auto workers spontaneously recognize the lack of democracy, indeed 50 locals submitted resolutions calling for direct election of convention delegates. Through our agitation we were able to show that the lack of democracy is the result of the policy of the imperialists. Woodcock, Frasier and other top UAW officials are part of the labor bureaucracy--a strata of the working class which is bought off by imperialism. We showed concretely that with the extra profits the auto companies make off their workers in the Third World countries, they are able to pay Woodcock \$67,000 per year. In addition, the imperialists hand out political privileges, like Woodcock's recent appointment as US representative to China. In exchange for these bribes and privileges, the bureaucrats agree to keep the workers in line--thus the lack of union democracy. For the imperialists, any increase in union democracy means the rank and file might kick out the bureaucrats and bring in class conscious leaders. In this way we tried to link the workers' spontaneous anger at the sell-out union hacks to a class conscious understanding of imperialism.

There were, however, serious shortcomings in the line which we carried out. First of all, we did not raise the call for socialist revolution until the last convention bulletin. Throughout the convention campaign we should have helped draw workers to the conclusion that only the dictatorship of the proletariat can resolve the problems of imperialism. Failing this, the workers were left with the conclusion that the solution lies in a more democratic trade union, or in militant class struggle alone. Connected to this error was our failure to popularize the necessity for a new communist party except in the pages of the REVOLUTIONARY CAUSE. This is a serious right error which has begun to crop up throughout our trade union work, and which stands out glaringly in our work around the convention. Our political exposures should have shown that only a proletarian party, a Marxist-Leninist party, can help the working class to play its leading role in its role as the emancipator of all the oppressed in society. While each bulletin didn't have to discuss the question of socialism and the party, ATM most definitely should have been raising these questions more consistently in the course of the campaign.

TWO LINE STRUGGLE WITHIN ATM

To arrive at a correct line, ATM went through a process of two-line struggle. For example we confronted the question: what is the relationship between the politics of mass and communist organizations? ATM for some time has worked with a rank and file caucus that included militant trade unionists as well as Marxist-Leninists. The caucus is organized in militant opposition to the

Learn from Working Class History

The Great 1919 Steel Strike

September 22 marks the anniversary of the Great 1919 Steel Strike. On that date 367,000 workers in 50 cities walked off the job in the largest and longest nationwide steel strike in US history. For nearly 4 months strikers battled scabs, police, National Guard and the US Army for their right to unionize and for the 8-hour day. Although the steel monopolies defeated the strike itself, many class-conscious workers emerged during the battle and later went on to join the newly-founded Communist Party USA. The 1919 strike was not simply a trade union battle, it was the angry cry of the poor and oppressed against the entire system of capitalist slavery.

WORLD WAR 1 WORKERS DIE FOR IMPERIALIST PROFITS

The strike broke out shortly after the end of World War 1. That war wasn't fought to "make the world safe for democracy" as claimed by then President Wilson. The two great superpowers of that time--Germany and England--went to war in order to redivide the world's markets and resources. Each power wanted the other's colonies and they were willing to engage in mass slaughter to get them. Before this inter-imperialist conflict was over 9 million people were dead, 5 million reported missing, 7 million permanently disabled and 15 million seriously wounded.

What were the results for US capitalists? The war created 20,000 new millionaires. US Steel Corporation's profits rose from \$81 million in 1913 to \$224 million in 1917. Bethlehem Steel's stock dividends jumped by 200%, Dupont Powder Corporation's by 458%. US monopoly capitalism became even more highly concentrated

economically and politically.

It was another story for the working class in the US. Over 53,000 sons of workers and farmers were killed on the battlefields of Europe. War-caused inflation drove real wages down by 12%. The monopolists in government and in the press worked up a patriotic hysteria against strikes and labor organizing because it "would hurt the war effort."

But many US workers refused to fight their working class brothers of other countries. Socialist Eugene Debbs proclaimed that "the master class has always declared the war, the subject class has always fought the battles." The working class, he continued, "has nothing to gain and all to lose--especially their lives." The Industrial Workers of the World and left wing socialists held large anti-war rallies and called on workers to turn the imperialist war into a civil war.

And in one country the workers did just that. In 1917 the Bolsheviks led a successful socialist revolution which inspired workers throughout the world. Writing about the effect of the Russian Revolution on the steel strikers of 1919, the Interchurch World Movement wrote "They have a vague idea that big rich people who run things 'arbitrarily' even in mills, are coming down in the world. Russia, moreover, means to them the rise of workingmen to power. They have a vague idea that poor people who have been run for a long time, on farms and mills, are coming up in the world and are beginning to run themselves."★



Steelworkers of 1919 stood up against the huge monopoly corporations, the government and the AF of L bureaucrats to demand an 8-hour day and the right to organize.

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auto companies and the union bureaucrats. Some ATM comrades advocated putting out the bulletin in the name of the caucus and at its political level. They argued that we would be more likely to involve workers and develop nationwide contacts. Other comrades said that it was decisive for ATM to put out the bulletin in its own name. After doing a concrete investigation, we assessed that the caucus wasn't sufficiently unified politically or organizationally to put out a daily bulletin. Even more importantly, the situation called for a communist analysis of all the issues facing workers in the UAW--from the role of the Democratic Party to the need for socialist revolution. No mass caucus could honestly put forward such an analysis. For ATM to do so in the name of the caucus would have destroyed our relationship with them in the long run. In principle we would have supported the distribution of both ATM and caucus literature had this been practical, but we opposed substituting trade unionist politics for communist politics.

We also had a two-line struggle on whether we were even capable of publishing the bulletin and distributing it statewide. Some comrades argued that we are too small, didn't have the forces for such a massive undertaking, lacked sufficient time to prepare, lacked the funds, etc. Perhaps, they argued, we could scale it down to one or two leaflets. Other comrades pointed out that we would remain small and continue to lack forces unless we seriously took up our nationwide tasks. We have a developing base in auto and thus could follow-up with workers after the convention. We have to break with the small circle spirit which still sees our tasks as limited to one plant, one city or one region. Once the comrades grasped the political significance, many new people volunteered to help distribute, workers came forward to donate money, we overcame the technical and organizational problems.

RESULTS OF THE CONVENTION WORK

During the convention workers greeted the daily bulletins and issues of the RC with great enthusiasm. For one thing, they were quite amazed to see the same people back every morning with fresh news of the convention. More importantly, many workers commented favorably on the bulletins, particularly the exposures of the union leadership. A number of advanced workers and militant trade unionists took up secret distribution of the bulletins inside their plant. In one plant, a regular distribution network was set up to get the bulletin out to most departments. Since the convention, the regular distribution of the RC has increased significantly at several auto plants.

Through mass distribution of our agitation, class conscious workers came forward--anxious to get a deeper understanding of the questions raised in the bulletin and REVOLUTIONARY CAUSE. After the convention, ATM carried out propaganda work and recruited a number of workers into study groups.

The convention bulletin and convention center also provided an opportunity for different rank and file caucuses to meet. As a result, two caucuses are coordinating California-wide activity. They met later and issued their own leaflet summing up the convention and urging unity between workers in the two plants.

ATM is proud of our work around the UAW convention, particularly of the long, hard hours put in by dozens of dedicated comrades who wrote, printed, translated and distributed the Daily Bulletin. On the whole we believe that we were successful in carrying out some of our nationwide tasks, bringing class consciousness to the workers, exposing the labor bureaucracy, and helping to establish on-going organizational forms which will continue the struggle in the future. In this small way we hope to have contributed to the larger struggle for socialist revolution and the building of a genuine communist party. ★