

STRATEGY and TACTICS

for the TRADE UNIONS

A month ago the UAW signed a contract with the Ford Co. after a 28 day strike. Ford workers were given a 3% increase, no better than the contract in 1973, and no improvement in the Cost of Living Allowance. There were no changes in the upgrading system to open up the skilled, highly paid jobs to national minority and women workers. Despite a productivity increase of 7% annually in the industry, the reduction in worktime as a result of the new contract was a meager 2% - and 7 days off in the third year hardly amounts to the shorter work week!

After a 4 month strike this year by the Tire workers a contract was ratified which didn't even completely make up for the 1973 sell-out during Nixon's wage freeze. Although 1 in 7 workers in the industry has been permanently laid off, there were no gains around job security, and no progress towards the shorter work week. The workers received no strike benefits during the duration of the strike.

All in all, over 4.5 million workers will have been represented in contract negotiations by the end of this year. At best these contracts have held the line on wages and working conditions, while many of them have represented real set-backs. None can be called breakthroughs for the class.

The role of the left in the workers' movement has been for the most part abysmal. While we will spend most of this week-end analyzing these mistakes and charting a correct path for ourselves in the coming period, I want to highlight the problem by a little example. Outrageous as this example may seem, I didn't make it up.

I work in a tailor shop and am a member of the ACWA. For several years I've been an active member of a city-wide rank and file committee in the industry. We have had to grapple with some very discouraging objective realities: the fact that the clothing industry is dying in Philadelphia, leading to an unusually high unemployment rate among clothing workers; the fact that the workforce is a very divided one - the industry is broken down into many small shops, the workforce is composed of at least ½ recent immigrants who don't know each other's language and don't know English; and finally the fact that all of these factors, coupled

with the marginal nature and non-monopoly organization of this industry, has led to a tradition of collaboration and anti-democratic practices within the union. The workforce, mostly over 40, has been beaten down by sell-out after sell-out, and the lack of any job security had accentuated this defeatism.

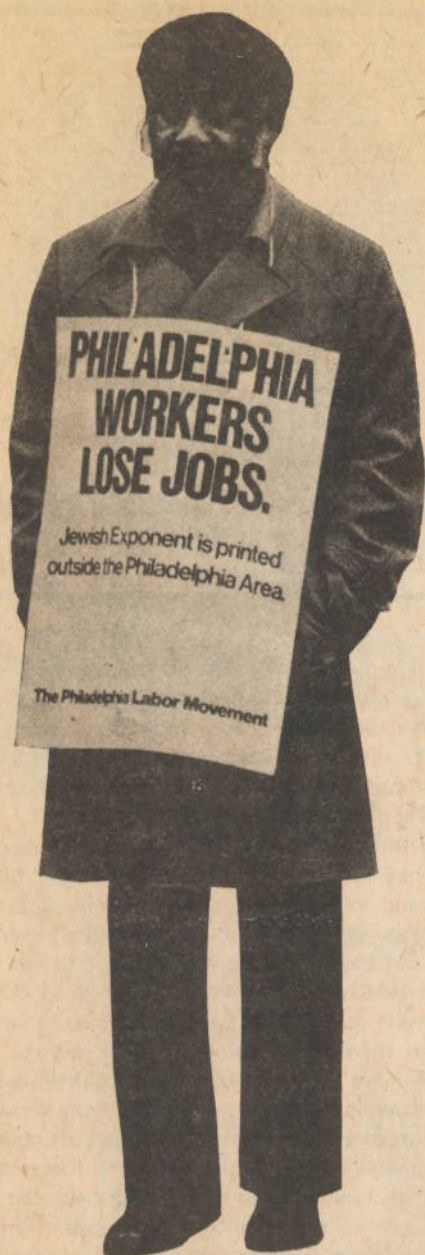
Given these objective factors the rank and file committee has focused on the need to fight for the most basic and immediate economic demands and for basic democracy within the union. Struggle at even this low a level has been extremely difficult, and our work has been constantly interrupted by arbitrary firings and lay-offs as well as economic and psychological intimidation. When there is no union to speak of, the piece work system gives the bosses a lot of opportunities for intense harassment, as I'm sure a lot of you know. We have been forced to accept massive wage cuts and have as yet been unable to ensure a consistent enforcement of even our contract, which is as bad as a contract can get.

In the face of these concrete facts, and in the face of a caucus fighting desperately for its own survival, a member of one of the ultra-dogmatist communist organizations proposed an 8-point principles of unity for the rank and file committee. The first 5 points are pretty straightforward, dealing with the fight for wages, democracy, the right to strike, and for the rights of national minority and women workers. Point 6 reads:

Support all struggles against imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism. Specifically, independence for Puerto Rico, support the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism, support the Palestinian people's struggle to regain their homeland, defeat Zionism and imperialism, support the Azanian and Zimbabwean people's struggle for majority rule against racist South African and Rhodesian rule.

Point 7 goes: *Oppose U.S. imperialism and Soviet social imperialism; expose detente; fight the danger of world war.*

And point 8 reads: *Fight the danger of facism - fight police repression, oppose pornography and all degenerate and chauvinist culture, smash gun control; support*



the right of working class oppressed nationalities and oppressed minorities to bear arms and end forced abortions and sterilizations - for free birth control and free 24 hour day care for all.

These, then, were the points of unity proposed for a rank and file committee in an industry where basic union and contractual rights have been non-existent for years. The person who made the proposal has been in and out of the industry for a couple of years and certainly had been exposed to the realities of the situation. However, the fact that probably not more than 2 people in the entire industry could unite with these so called principles didn't seem to phase our dogmatist one little bit.

While this example may seem more like a parody than a reality, it clearly illustrates the contradictions within our movement which must be solved if the working class is to break out of its present defensive position. And this past period has been an extremely difficult one for the U.S. working class. While major corporations such as GM and AT&T report record profits, we have faced massive lay-offs coupled with system-

atized speed up and total disregard for our health and safety. The major capitalists have indeed protected their profits, a fact which prompts their public optimism about the resiliency of the capitalist system. But they have done this only by intensifying the oppression of the entire working class, with a most particular focus on national minority and women workers.

Our Black brothers and sisters have seen what few advances they made as a result of the civil rights movement of the 60's erode to the point that a national minority youth can expect to be unemployed now for a good part of his or her life. Black unemployment is estimated at 25%, while that figure for teenagers is as high as 54 to 64%.

Living standards have been steadily declining for everyone. There has been a great deal of fanfare about the slowing rate of inflation. However, this optimism is hardly justified when we remember that this only means that prices aren't rising as fast - it doesn't mean they're dropping back to pre-inflation standards! In addition, many cities, faced with possible bankruptcy, have been forced to make drastic reductions in their social services rather than encroach on the sacred profits of the bourgeoisie.

And these profits have been continuing to grow at a rate which should be embarrassing to the corporate crybabies. Corporate profits for the 2nd quarter of this year jumped an average of 33% over the last year, while wage gains during the same period averaged 8.2%. Despite a 6% inflation, the capitalists' cost of production rose only 3.3% and in manufacturing it actually declined 1.4% - and this is thanks to the massive lay-offs and rate cuts. Finally, in the face of the most prolonged recession-depression since the 30's we were faced with the dismal choice between Ford or Carter.

We're here this weekend to try to unite around a communist strategy for transforming the trade union movement into a truly class-conscious force which could realistically challenge the power of capital. In order to do that we must first take a quick look at the particular characteristics of monopoly capitalism today and examine the present state of our trade union movement as it is represented both by its leadership and by its rank and file. Then we will explore the role of the communist movement and develop a strategy for expanding it. This morning's presentation is very broad and should be seen only as an introduction. This orientation will then be broken down into various key points which will be developed throughout the weekend.

Capitalist production has undergone a transformation equal in its implications to the industrial revolution which necessitated organization of the work force along industrial rather than craft lines. This transformation is characterized primarily by the intensification of the process of monopolization. Today organized labor must contend with international conglomerates, who can well afford to sit out a strike because of the gigantic size of their overall holdings. And these conglomerates are no longer limited by the logic of a particular product - today breakfast cereal could be produced by the same controlling team as makes streetlights. The major capitalists are certainly not invincible,

but they are no longer vulnerable to local attacks, no matter how militant and defiant.

Furthermore, the process of production has been transformed by a tremendously accelerated technological advance. The skilled worker is increasingly being replaced by a machine, and technicians and engineers are reduced to button pushers. The process of production has been speeded up beyond belief. In 1972 the average production worker earned \$7,800. The value added per production worker after costs, including wages, are deducted, was estimated to be \$26,200. For each dollar spent on the production-worker's wages, then, the employers netted \$3.36 in added value (surplus value). Obviously the net effect of this development is to create a permanently high unemployment rate as long as the work week remains organized as it is today.

We have a situation, then, where the immediate crisis brought on by overproduction in this particular period is aggravated by the broader, more general and

In general the labor bureaucracy has responded to the situation by making good on their debts to the bourgeoisie. The message has been coming through loud and clear from Woodcock to Shanker, from Meany to Abel: Don't make too many demands during a recession or you'll chase your jobs right out of the country. Major business magazines have been marvelling at labor's admirable restraint and "responsible attitude".

The passivity of the labor bureaucracy is all the more significant when one remembers that 1976 is a very important contract year. At a time when the demand for the shorter work week is clearly an idea whose time has come, the UAW leadership settled for 13 days off over the course of a three year contract - less than a 2% reduction in labor time over a year! One in every 4 auto workers was laid off at some point during last year's recession and 1 in 10 was permanently laid off. And yet Ford reaped its highest profits ever over the last 6 month period. Ford made almost as many cars in the



long term development in the process of production. The temporary lay-offs of 1975-76 due to the recession have been made permanent, to a large degree, by automation, speed-up and movement to cheap-labor areas.

Clearly this calls for the massive mobilization of the working class in its own self-defense. It is no longer sufficient for electrical workers, or auto workers to get themselves together on their own - although this would obviously be a step in the right direction. More than ever before, however, the success of any one struggle depends on the development of unity within the class as a whole. Even the success of contract negotiations is increasingly going to depend on the ability of the trade union movement to coordinate its efforts and hit the conglomerates in many different spheres at the same time. For example, the ITT corporation had \$1 billion in assets in 1961, mainly in telecommunications. ITT now bargains with 15 different major unions in this country, including electrical, auto, teamsters, communications, steel, machinists, chemical, bakers and plumbers. Such a conglomerate obviously can absorb union pressure along any single unit line, and can only be affected by sophisticated coordinated bargaining.

In addition, the phenomenon of multi-national corporations is no longer the exception. In the 25 years between 1945 and 1970 U.S. firms established 8000 subsidiaries abroad, mostly in manufacturing. Obviously this can only be addressed by a united international trade union movement, which means the abandonment of the cold war policies of the AFL-CIO.

past 12 months as during the record 1973 year, with 10% fewer workers. A 2% reduction in work time will not even make a dent in this huge pool of unemployed workers.

At a time when city workers across the country are facing severe cutbacks, Wurf, president of the 700,000 member AFSME said, "the day when unions can deal with problems by force is over. The business of sitting at the bargaining table and saying that we'll cut off the water if you don't come through, that day is gone." The union lost 30,000 members in N.Y.C. due to lay-offs, and not a single strike or job action was called by the union.

It hasn't been altogether easy for the leadership of the unions to maintain the kind of control which makes possible the above sell-outs. It has meant shoring up the structure of many unions - extensions of the terms of office, centralization of the ratification process to prevent local autonomy, and, most important, physical and psychological intimidation of any who would question the acts of class collaboration. We have seen a new wave of red-baiting in almost every union - and even the Millers and Sadlowski's have had to contend with it. Conventions have upheld their unconstitutional anti-communist clauses at a time when reactionary presidents travel to China and most U.S. citizens read about new communist governments with at least honest curiosity.

The general offensive against labor has not been limited to industry, either. The situation has been clearly

reflected in the courts and legislative branches of government. For example, on June 24th the Supreme Court ruled that all nonfederal government workers are exempt from federal minimum wage and overtime laws. For the first time in 40 years the court has struck down a progressive piece of economic legislation by Congress. In addition the enforcement of wages and hours laws have become increasingly lax, while there have been repeated attempts to exclude teenagers from the minimum wage law altogether.

So where is the rank and file during this critical period? The rank and file movement, expressed most clearly in the formation of caucuses, has been growing by leaps and bounds since the late 60's. Caucuses have cropped up in auto, steel, within the teamsters, in clothing shops, among teachers - rank and file revolt has been organized into some kind of caucus formation for at least a short time in almost every union in the country. A great many of these caucuses are formed spontaneously in order to express dissatisfaction with specific union policy - most often they are formed around a sell-out contract, an election, a specific policy of discrimination or a specific offensive by the manufacturer to which the union has failed to respond adequately. These same formations often die out after a specific goal has been reached or after an initial defeat. The election is over, or the contract ratified, and there is no clear understanding of how to pursue more thorough change.

This is not to say that these caucuses have been complete failures. On the contrary: Many of them are responsible for making it possible for the first time for national minority and women workers to be hired in higher-paid job classifications. And these caucuses have also acted as a brake of sorts on the bureaucratic forces. During the last 10 to 20 years there have been a number of splits in the top leaderships of unions, often leading to the ouster of entrenched leaderships. Many of the new leadership have been forced to at least pay lip-service to the aspirations of the rank and file - for example

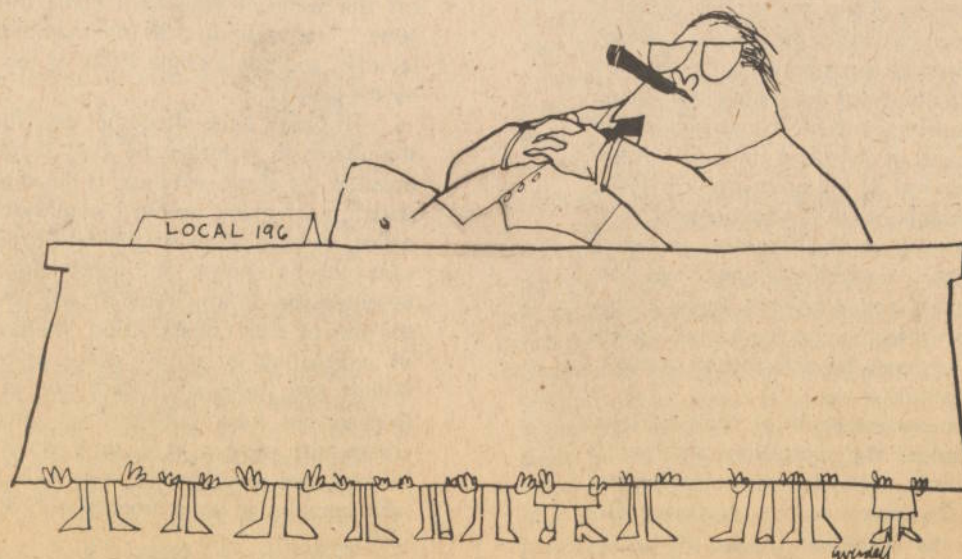
Abel himself ran in order to insure a greater measure of rank and file control. While change at the top is fairly rare, however, there has been a 20-25% turnover rate of local officials. These changes have most often been brought about by some kind of rank and file organization formed to challenge sell-out leadership.

However, for the most part these spontaneous formations born from the anger of the masses have not been able to sustain themselves beyond a specific crisis. They are generally characterized by a total lack of program, stemming from the lack of any strategic orientation. In addition many have failed to attack white chauvinism head-on, the only way which will insure a unified and strong movement. They are easy prey to opportunists looking for a ride to a soft union job. For the most part they are divorced from the militant past of their own union, and they are often consciously isolated from the influence of the left. All of these groups have vacillated in the face of an unstable economic picture. Without class-conscious strategy and program these groupings are trapped by their own cyclical nature - they will continue to sprout at election or contract time, only to die out immediately or soon afterwards.

The crucial element missing in all of these groupings then, is class conscious leadership. The influence of the communist movement has not grown to meet the needs of the spontaneous rank and file rebellion and as a result that revolt remains disorganized, directionless and impotent.

Far from fulfilling its revolutionary tasks, the CPUSA has become professional in pursuing its policy of conciliation with the bureaucrats and tailism behind the rank and file leadership, running after the masses rather than giving its leadership true revolutionary guidance.

Since the early 1970's an increasing number of caucuses have been formed or old caucuses joined by anti-revisionist communists who have gone into the shops because they understand the necessity of estab-



lishing a communist current within the trade union movement. However, the new communist movement is paying for the sins of its own sectarianism and that payment has come in the form of isolation from the masses. At a time when, the working class desperately needs leadership, the new communist movement activists have buried themselves in petty squabbles, sure that they will land in red heaven if they loudly proclaim the dictatorship of the proletariat and denounce "social imperialism". While a few of the advanced workers have been pulled from their base to help form one or another of the new communist parties, the vast majority see communists as irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst.

The price of sectarianism can best be illustrated by a recent event in Detroit. When the terms of the Ford contract became clear the anger and frustration of the masses of auto workers rose to a new pitch. The RCP, claiming to speak for the workers in revolt, called a demonstration of protest for noon that day. Only a handful of workers showed up. The Independent Skilled Trades Council, a large rank and file formation based in the skilled trades but trying to reach out to production workers and at this point totally independent from any communist group, called a demonstration for later that afternoon and about 2000 workers showed up. The OL, a national communist organization claiming to be on the verge of forming a new communist party, didn't even have the forces to call anything.

Clearly the rank and file forces are there and ready - and if we needed any proof of that the Independent Skilled Trades Council should provide it. However the Council is plagued by serious weaknesses. Based in the skilled trades, it is almost entirely white and not only out of contact with the masses of production workers, the majority of whom are Black, but in addition it doesn't recognize the central importance of fighting racism in the auto industry and in the UAW. The membership of the Council fails to understand the potential role of national minority and women workers. What the Independent Skilled Trades Council is missing is class consciousness. What the so-called communist groupings are missing is a concrete understanding of the issues - and without that they have no following. The entire auto workforce is paying the price of the split in the form of a bankrupt three year contract.

Now let's take a look at this sectarianism so prevalent on the left and try to pinpoint where the mistakes are being made.

One of the most serious mistakes of the dogmatists has been their inability to distinguish between middle and right forces, between entrenched bureaucrats and honest but conservative officials, and between opportunist rank and file activists and militant but unconscious leaders. Such an error leads them to label, in fact to attack, all but the most foaming at the mouth "revolutionaries" as sell-outs, thereby seriously offending the bulk of sincere trade unionists who are not only allies but will form the backbone of the new rank and file movement.

Secondly, the dogmatists lack any understanding of the dialectical relationship between the reform struggle and the revolutionary movement, and are

characteristically attracted to adventurist behavior - their proposals often spelling clear disaster for the masses. Finally, the dogmatists have forgotten that people learn from their experience. It is not enough to lecture the truth and to point the correct direction from afar. The dogmatists have failed to root themselves firmly in the working class movement. They see the sum total of their work to be exposure of opposition candidates for their reformism on the one hand, and propaganda about socialism on the other.

In the face of the present offensive by capital against the working class as a whole, the October League says, "The aim of communists should not be to pressure the union bureaucrats into action. Communists work in the reformist trade unions not in order to drive the reformist officials into the struggle but in order to kick these traitors out of the workers' movement." In addition they say, "communists must make propaganda the chief form of activity, always combining it with agitation." Now in some ways both of these statements are undoubtedly true. Unfortunately, both in their newspaper and in their practical work the OL reduces the tasks of communists to those two goals: communist propaganda and exposure of the reformists. Increasingly all their agitational material as well seems to concentrate on exposure of the reformists.

What they *don't* do and what should be the central task of communists is lead the struggle for real gains in the shop and within the union. They talk about taking part in the workers' movement but don't provide any strategic orientation which would guide that participation. In the last analysis the adherents of the OL are parasites on the rank and file movement - using it to try to build their sect instead of putting communist theory to work for the working class.

It is certainly true, of course, that the main aim of communists is not to pressure the union bureaucrats into action. In many ways this is the error made by the CP. But the goal is not just to kick the reformists out of office, either. That may very well be a by-product of our struggle but it is certainly not the focus. Our goal is to develop a trend which has committed itself to the development of true class struggle trade unionism. Such a movement will either force the reformists to the left and to be responsive to the pressures of the masses, or the contradiction will expose the reformists for the collaborationists they are and they will be thrown out of office. What is important is the movement which has been developed, not what happens to any individual or group of collaborators. The OL is so concerned with remaining revolutionary and uncompromising that it makes the same mistakes as many advanced workers who are blinded by their rage against individual collaborators. The OL, like many advanced workers who are without the benefit of Marxist-Leninist theory, can't see the forest for the trees.

The errors of the dogmatists can be most clearly understood when we look at their relationship to two of the most important rank and file rebellions of the period: Miller's challenge to Boyle and the Boyle forces, and Sadlowski's campaign against Abel. Neither of these rank and file leaders are communists or even very consistent leftists. Both have made serious mistakes with respect to the struggle against racism, and even in the fight for trade union militancy. But what is important in both of these cases, is that these individuals are only symbols for a massive upsurge of rank and file militancy. Both represent a new kind of democracy to the masses

and both are speaking to the real questions facing their constituency.

Now the situation is obviously different in the two cases. Miller has been elected and has shown concretely that his version of reformism is severely limited. But what we must understand is just exactly what those limitations stem from. Without such an understanding we are doomed to the response of most of the current dogmatists, that of foaming at the mouth about the sell-outs. Miller was elected president of a union still largely controlled by Boyle's machine. The majority of the executive board are Boyle supporters. The union has just begun to recover from an intense period of division, and is just beginning to deal concretely with problems which have mounted up over a period of years of collaborationism. In this context appears Miller, honest, sincere, but fairly unconscious beyond a vague commitment to reform. He is not a red, and his reformist mentality makes him very vulnerable to redbaiting. He is not surrounded by an on-going and strong rank and file movement to guide him, though he is surrounded by a militant work force. Without the benefit of an organization rooted in the union and guided by revolutionary theory he is bound to vacillate and in the face of conflict to veer toward the right, or to safety. He still correctly sees the main danger to the union as coming from the right and incorrectly has decided to appease this right at the expense of the rank and file movement.

This appeasement attempt has come in several forms: he vacillated around the health and safety wildcats, objectively attempting to put a brake on the movement. He supported or at least didn't fight the move to implement the anti-communist clause in the constitution. In general he has been unable to hold his own against the pressures from the right, and has not had faith in the movement from the base. Rather than rely on his base he has tried to play the diplomat's game — a game he is sure to lose because he satisfies neither the right nor the left.

The communist movement is at a disadvantage in its attempts to influence the movement in the UMW because it does not have any forces working within it. However, our attitude must be to extend support to Miller to the extent that he takes steps in the direction of a class struggle program. Our focus must be on trying to build the understanding among the base for the need for consistent class conscious trade union policies. We must be very careful that while we push for more militant leadership that we do not play into the hands of the Boyle forces who are still very strong. We must move the masses around a concrete program, building the kind of organization which can force Miller to carry out the thorough reform of the UMW while at the same time defeating the ideas of the right.

Sadlowski is a very similar phenomenon, only a few years later and perhaps as a result, a bit more sophisticated. Again, he is not a class conscious fighter. However, he has committed himself against the sell-out of the ENA, has made a stab at dealing with the need for a concrete struggle against racial discrimination beyond the consent decree, and has committed himself to the development of rank and file democracy in the Steelworkers Union. He has also come out against the anti-communist clause in the constitution, although careful to make clear that he has no ties to communism himself.

He is obviously much stronger around issues that



he understands — the struggle for militant trade unionism and the development of rank and file democracy. However, his slate shows to some extent his understanding of the need to develop unity within the workforce. It is representative of the multi-national workforce as well as the various job categories within the union. And most important of all, his campaign has drawn behind it a powerful rank and file following, which has come together in the beginnings of a real rank and file organization. It is in this organization that one will find the advanced workers of the USWA.

What has been the attitude of the left to these groupings? The CP has played out the tailism implicit in its revisionist philosophy. It has maintained an almost completely uncritical support of both Miller and Sadlowski. There is practically no mention of the weaknesses of either leader or of their programs in the *Daily World*, nor does there seem to be any attempt to influence these rank and file movements away from their reformism and towards class struggle unionism.

On the other hand, the dogmatists have gone to the other extreme. The OL, for instance, at first supported the Miller forces almost uncritically. But very soon they were disappointed by what they hoped would be the great knight in shining armor, and screamed hysterically against this sell-out. They chose this year's convention to propagandize against the so-called Miller brand of sell-outism, effectively denying that there could be any difference between Miller and the Boyle forces. The net effect of their actions was necessarily to push Miller into the arms of the right. When the rank and file desperately needed the kind of leadership which would show them how to pursue the struggle within the union and which would tie Miller directly to the forces which he was elected to represent, the dogmatists washed their hands of a difficult situation and shouted revolution from the roof tops.

This error is being repeated around Sadlowski, but this time in an even more acute form. The OL said on



Aug. 9 that "Sadlowski's opposition to Abel in no way promises any real significant changes in the USWA because it, like Abel's, is based on reformism and big business rather than class struggle." Earlier they say that "Ed Sadlowski in the USWA and especially the revisionist CP have latched onto and even developed caucuses as instruments for derailing and suppressing the genuine rank and file rebellion at the same time that they promote themselves into positions in the trade union bureaucracy." In other words, Sadlowski has been reduced to an opportunist whose whole rebellion has been geared to the sole purpose of getting himself a cozy job. The absurdity of this argument should be obvious. But what about linking Sadlowski with Abel as essentially two sides of the same coin?

This too is patently absurd. While Abel stands for the ENA, appointed rather than elected positions within the union and a combination of physical and verbal intimidation of all opposition, Sadlowski has opposed the ENA as being diametrically opposed to what a labor agreement should be, has favored the six hour day and the outlawing of lay-offs contractually, and has demanded rank and file ratification of all contracts. He has called for abolishing compulsory overtime. He has praised the AFL-CIO's position calling for desegregating the schools through busing. Finally, while Abel only recently added the first Black officer to his white and racist leadership team, and this only in the face of the Sadlowski challenge, Sadlowski's running team is multi-national.

The net effect of the errors of the OL, errors which are reflected a thousand times in national as well as local situations by dogmatists of all stripes, is to isolate the communists from the real and viable rank and file movement. By attacking a rank and file movement which is admittedly reformist at this time, the dogmatists are objectively giving support to the present bureaucracies. They are attacking the rank and file itself. Their own theory should have explained to our friends

that without communist leadership and a consistent well-organized base every new trade union leader, no matter how honest and well-meaning will necessarily be pushed to the right. That is the very nature of trade unionism pure and simple. The solution is not to wash our hands of each new leader because he or she plays out our understanding, but rather to create the conditions to make such a swing to the right much more difficult or impossible. We do this by working closely with and within the reform movements within the unions.

Unfortunately we see the mistakes of the dogmatists being repeated time and again by our own forces as well. Comrades reassure themselves by saying, well, may be no one agrees with me, but I know I'm right and they're just backward. At least everyone knows where I'm at! And you get the picture of the brave, self-sacrificing political martyr marching off alone to do battle with those horrible traitors, the collaborationists. In the heat of self-satisfied battle these same comrades get only slightly queasy when they notice that 99% of the workers they are fighting for have chosen to sit it out in favor of a few beers. "Those guys are just all hopelessly backward," they explain reassuringly, "You couldn't move them short of a prolonged famine."

Will, I think that if we're honest we can all recognize a little of ourselves in this picture. Obviously we all know that we won't move mountains or even shake out a few bureaucrats all by ourselves, though. And we really haven't even made a dent in the struggle just because we put out a good anti-racist leaflet. The struggle against tailism and against racism, the struggle for class struggle unionism, are just what the words say — IT'S A STRUGGLE. And struggle means getting down and working with real people and trying to win real victories. It means messing with all the confusing contradictory attitudes in our class, and straightening out misconceptions and fears. It means rolling up our sleeves and fighting for what we want and learning to win and to lose so that all honest forces can still work together, learning to pick up the pieces and go forward no matter how messed up our plan got.

What we're talking about is the need for the communist movement to actively engage in united front tactics within the present-day trade unions. Today's recession not only intensifies the need for leadership in general, but specifically for a leadership which can forge the broadest possible unity among all honest trade unionists to challenge the deathgrip of class collaborationism. Only such a broad unity, organized around the principles of class struggle trade unionism can begin to turn the tide of reaction which is strangling the working class.

The concept of the united front is basically a very simple one. The united front is the conscious coming together of workers of all political persuasions in order to accomplish specific, well-defined partial goals. The united front does not demand unity of political belief, nor does it necessarily demand unity of motives. A united front is a principled agreement to act together to accomplish a specific goal — a goal dictated by the urgent demands of the masses. The tactics of the united

front are particularly important during periods of reaction, when the strongest possible line of defense must be formed to challenge the power of the bourgeoisie. Our caucuses must be united fronts.

The emphasis is clearly on *action*. We are not talking about idle declarations of unity meant only to fill the pages of self-satisfied journals. We are talking about unity of action because we recognize that the working class must learn the lessons of the class struggle through its own experience. It is in the process of leading and interpreting the reform struggle that communists teach the masses the lessons of Marxism-Leninism. The united front is simply the conscious application of this understanding.

We are not, of course, talking about the kind of unity pursued by the CPUSA — a unity which results from slavish accommodation to the reactionary aspects of the leadership they unite with. The common cause which the CPUSA makes with trade union leaders is useless because it is not built around struggle and does not rest its future on the constant forward motion of a rank and file learning from its own experience. The unity pursued by the CPUSA is not a temporary compromise but a capitulation.

The first question then is obviously *around what are we to unite?* The points of unity will vary according to the level of consciousness of the masses and according to the objective needs of the moment. Our only requirement is that the program of the united front clearly lead the working class a step forward towards its emancipation and it must speak to the immediate felt needs of the masses. As communists we are all working to develop the base for class struggle trade unionism which we define as 1) the militant defense of our standard of living in the struggle against capital; 2) trade union democracy; 3) an aggressive opposition to all forms of racial, sexual, political and religious discrimination and a conscious approach to working class unity, and 4) political action and organization of the working class independent of the present bourgeois-dominated political parties. We will go into each of these aspects in great detail later on today.

How does this program relate to our need to develop united front activity within the trade unions today? At the present time we can and must demand a minimal level of unity around the first three points. These thrusts are neither sectarian nor abstract, but correspond directly to the felt and expressed needs of the class. However, independent political action is at this point too advanced a prerequisite for building united front formations in our trade unions. We develop the understanding for this aspect on the basis of united actions coming from the actual conscious needs of the masses. It is important to underline, however, that the time is not far off when all four thrusts of class struggle unionism will be the accepted basis for united action — and we must do all we can to hasten that time forward.

It remains to say a few words about who we choose to work with in the united front. The simplest answer to this problem would be to say that we unite with anyone who will support the basic thrust of our program. Of course this is true. But practically, it's not

so simple, because we must often educate our allies about the various aspects of the program before they can support it. And so we must learn to distinguish our potential allies from our enemies despite the class collaborationist habits and mannerisms these allies may disguise themselves in.

The first distinction we must make is between the bureaucrats and basically honest officials. Trade union bureaucrats are those officials who have been insulated from the workers they represent by a combination of high salaries and lack of accountability to the rank and file.

Local officials, on the other hand, are often forced into much closer cooperation with the rank and file because they must face regular elections. We must never stop pressuring these officials with the principles of class struggle unionism. We cannot afford to develop personal reactions to these officials which prevent us from constantly challenging them to join us in defending the interests of the workers, and which isolate us from their base which is often quite large. These challenges will of course have a dual effect: either mass pressure will force the official to join our ranks or if we have developed the issues clearly and in a non-sectarian way, the contradictions will expose the official to the masses as the class collaborationist he or she really is. The most important thing to remember here is that we are always dealing with principles and program, not with personalities. We must always make clear our desire to join with anyone who will defend the interests of the class. It probably is not possible to emphasize this point too much, given the sectarian tendencies that exist in the broad communist movement.

The important thing to remember, then, is that we are not fighting people, we are fighting against wrong ideas and policies. We will not defeat the carriers of wrong ideas until we have won support for the correct program. Sometimes this leads us to make some alliances which make us uncomfortable because obviously we do develop strong feeling of mistrust and dislike towards those who have sold us out at various points. But as communists we must remember that we are always guided by principle, not emotion. Comrades who question this point should remember the case of John L. Lewis. Here we have an out-and-out reactionary, anti-communist, anti-democratic collaborator who was forced by the objective situation and by mass pressure to change his policies — and this same man went on to play a critical role in the formation of the very progressive movement of the CIO.

Finally, we must learn to analyse the rank and file forces in order to be able to clearly distinguish between left, right, and middle forces. The most common sectarian error made stems from an inability to identify middle elements. In their impatience to get on with the struggle communists have all too often decided that the middle forces are actually right wingers and have been tempted to dump them by the wayside in favor of a more homogeneous left form. There's no doubt that a left-communist alliance could come up with a dynamite program and maybe even a few inspiring actions. But real change won't be brought about without the active

participation of the center. It is our responsibility to make sure that the left learns how to work with the center in order to lead it towards progressive action. Impatience can only lead to rapid isolation and defeat.

The first point we must be clear about is that left does not mean communist. When we speak of the left in the trade unions we are speaking of *all* the advanced workers. Now, obviously, we aim to make every advanced worker a communist, but it is important not to forget that "left" is a category which applies to a far broader group than just communist sympathizers.

Who are the advanced workers, then? First and foremost, they are those who desire to organize their fellow workers because they understand that their strength lies in numbers and unity. The advanced workers are the self-motivated leadership of the worker's movement. Furthermore, they have learned from their experience that workers need to develop a systematic approach to their problems, and they have some understanding of the interrelationship of all workers — they are enthusiastic about the task of caucus building and are interested in other workers' caucus formations. They have at least a superficial understanding of the need to fight racism, which they most often limit to the fight against discrimination. Finally, they tend to seek political solutions, making them generally open though not necessarily friendly to communist ideas. Often they are involved in community or Democratic Party politics.

Workers who make up the middle strata have a much narrower understanding of their own potential and of the tasks ahead. They are issue-oriented, and can be drawn into struggle which will benefit their immediate situation. They are not initiators, and have little or no understanding of the class struggle and the need for a consistent, programmatic approach to their situation. Left to themselves without strong left leadership, the center will tend to fall prey to the opportunism and defeatism of the right. Both Sadlowski and Miller fall into this category.

The right is made up of the labor bureaucracy and their open supporters. The right believes that working people can improve their situation only by collaboration and cooperation with the ruling class.

The future of the trade union movement depends then on the development of the left-center alliance. What are the special responsibilities of communists in this formation? In order to answer this question we must recognize that the left forces within the movement are often obsessed with the same impatience which affects communists. They have a sharper understanding of what must be done than the center, and are anxious to get the job done. This general impatience is often aggravated by the fact that the majority of advanced workers are from the national minorities, while the consciousness of the white workers tends to be stunted by the

contradiction of racism. So quite often the left feels isolated from the middle because of the mistrust growing out of white chauvinism and discrimination as well as general political differences. Without the understanding of a consistent, scientific approach to developing the center, the left tends to slip into individual exemplary action, bordering on adventurism — or they give up in bitter disgust.

This is precisely where communists must play a leading role. It is up to communists to teach the broader left how to lead the center — and at times to teach the left how to temper their demands in order to stay with the center, without compromising their goals. Communists then, have the special responsibility of providing the glue which holds the alliance together. This glue comes in the form of concrete and politically correct program.

The united front, then, is, the agreement of communists and non-communists, advanced workers and honest center forces to work together to protect the immediate interests of the working class. It is an agreement to support a minimum program with the understanding that the winning of such minimum program will benefit the greatest numbers of the class. But does this mean that in joining such a unity movement communists abandon their specifically communist work? By all means, no!

Under no conditions do communists abandon their independent work of communist education, and mobilization of the masses. As Dimitrov points out, "The tactics of the united front are a method of clearly convincing the Social-Democratic workers of the correctness of the communist policy and they are not a reconciliation with the social-democratic ideology and practice."

There can be no doubt that united front work, the task of caucus building for the transformation of our unions into class struggle bodies, is extremely difficult. We are constantly walking the tightrope between sectarianism and right opportunism, or tailism. We are, however, making real progress and will continue to do so as long as we are open to learning from our own experience and the practice of our comrades. We have the opportunity this weekend to pull our collective experience together in order to better chart our course for the coming period. We have begun to establish strong roots in the working class and many of us have seen the application of Marxist-Leninist theory to our work situation bear the first real fruits.

Today we have the opportunity to take a small but important step towards building a united national communist current in the workers' movement — a step that brings us closer to the formation of a vanguard party which will lead the way to socialism.