

The sizable number of people attending the Chicago Hard Times Conference last month was one indication of the growing spontaneous fight-back and the desire among activists to establish organized leadership in the struggle. But groups like the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) who were the main forces behind the conference, could provide neither a fighting program nor lasting organization for those who attended.

What the Hard Times leadership had to offer was a reformist "Bill of Rights" that never once targeted the capitalist system itself as the cause of the crisis. In addition, an "action program" was presented which was based almost exclusively on electoral reforms and bicentennial "counter" demonstrations.

Speeches and workshops reflected this reformism, especially on the national question. No workshops were scheduled to discuss national oppression, and the "Bill of Rights" included only a passing reference to the fight against discrimination.

In reaction to the outright abandonment of the revolutionary struggle of this country's oppressed nationalities, a Black caucus formed during the course of the proceedings, which correctly targeted Hard Times for failing "to understand the full depth of the racist character of U.S. imperialism."

Efforts on the part of the participants to raise more discussion and take up the fight against national oppression with concrete proposals were stifled. In the anti-repression workshop, a move to oppose the anti-busing segrega-

tionist movement and support the Black and Latino students at South Boston High was tabled without discussion. When the Black caucus asked for an "open mike" at the Sunday plenary, Jose de la Cruz of PSP, making a sham call for "unity," demanded that "action proposals" be discussed instead.

The Hard Times' organizers could not lay the basis for strong multinational working class unity because of the view—expressed by a number of speakers—that the whole U.S. working class is "bought off." Pete Kelley of the Hard Times Planning Committee said in a keynote address: "The average American worker has benefited from imperialism abroad, and the white worker benefits from racism at home."

This view writes off white workers as a revolutionary force in this country and feeds the petit-bourgeois view that the working class as a whole cannot fight discrimination nor lead the struggles of the broad masses against imperialism.

The trade union workshop reflected the same petty-bourgeois pessimism. There was no discussion of a strategy for winning the un-

ions to a revolutionary position, no concrete plans for building caucuses and rooting the fight-back among the industrial workers.

As a further example of the reformism promoted at the conference, the welfare workshop was led by a New York politician who channeled all debate into support for electing "better" officials. The "actions" called for in numerous other workshops also centered on letter-writing and petition campaigns to Congress.

Besides providing a platform for a reformist strategy domestically, Hard Times went out of its way to drum up support for the Soviet Union's schemes for world domination. An international workshop passed a resolution praising Soviet "aid" to Angola and other third world nations and movements as "friendly and helpful." In discussion on Angola, Southeast Asia and Puerto Rico, Soviet social-imperialism's criminal objectives were covered over, and efforts to clarify the role of the USSR and oppose all superpower intervention were silenced.

The Hard Times Conference exposed the centrist role played

by groups like PSP. In an effort to find an "alternative" to the genuine revolutionary movement growing across the country, they dress up a thoroughly reformist and bankrupt program with a few militant-sounding phrases. As a result, they provide a "left" cover for a program that in its basic points corresponds to the electoral strategy and reformism of the revisionist CPUSA.

These centrists end up diverting people away from the path of revolutionary struggle and abandon them to the revisionist leadership. The alliance built between the centrist leaders and the array of Trotskyite sects at the conference indicates their desperation to find an alternative to a real fight-back with working class leadership and an anti-imperialist program.

While willing to put forward the same program as the revisionists and unite with the Trotskyites, these centrists refused to support the National Fight-Back Organization (NFBO) which was founded in December.

In contrast to Hard Times, the NFBO targets imperialism as the source of the crisis, opposes both

superpowers and unites workers of all nationalities against discrimination and chauvinism. The NFBO is also firmly rooted in local organizations among thousands of workers, while Hard Times which brought together a large number of people, was unable to build any type of stable nation-wide organization.

It has also been learned that the conference was in large part funded by the federal government and approved by Eugene Eidenberg, the head of the Illinois State Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) commission which dispenses all federal police funds in Illinois.

Eidenberg approved the conference in his capacity as vice-chancellor of the University of Illinois Circle Campus, the site of the meeting. Eidenberg verified to *The Call* that the conference received several thousand dollars from American Issues Forum, a conduit for the National Endowment for the Humanities (a federal agency). Eidenberg also told *The Call* that he called "all concerned government police agencies" to attend the conference.

'HARD TIMES' MEET-- ROAD TO DEFEAT