

2nd National Conference

UWOC Convenes, Maps Battle Plans

The cars started rolling into the Detroit church from across the country, Friday night, June 24. Alabama, Massachusetts, California—over 30 chapters of the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC) from coast to coast and Hawaii were represented. Men and women of all nationalities, young people and veteran workers, 175 elected delegates and members of UWOC came together at the 2nd National Conference to strengthen the struggle and organization of the unemployed.

It was a conference of fighters. From hundreds of picket lines at unemployment offices, to joining major struggles of the working class like against the International Hotel evictions in San Francisco, each step of the way the unemployed in the Detroit church had been in struggle. The March 5th demonstration in Washington, D.C. of 1000 against the cutoffs of federal extension benefits, especially, was like a watershed marking a major leap forward for UWOC.

In the past year, thousands have begun to look to UWOC for leadership or at least information on the situation facing the unemployed and many supported the conference in spirit and financially as well. This in turn has strengthened the active core of UWOC. The banner strung across the stage, "Stand Up! Get Organized! Fight Back!", spoke to the immediate purpose of the meeting. Members came to Detroit looking for ways to further develop UWOC as the leading mass organization of struggle of the unemployed.

Tackling Key Questions

This sense of purpose and outlook united and characterized the debate in the meeting and was in itself a significant advance for the struggle. Workers from all parts of the country, laid off from many different jobs and with varied experiences, put their heads together and struggled together to figure out how to build UWOC and the struggle of the unemployed. They discussed how to make it into an organized fighting force representing the millions of unemployed against the attempts of the capitalists to crush them and use them to drive down the whole working class. Of concern to all was how to build off and consolidate the advances of the past year, to sum up the present situation and map out a battle plan for the struggle ahead.

Chapters had already discussed many of the points up for discussion before coming to Detroit. Questions and the final agenda were out to the chapters ahead of time, so people would familiarize and struggle over the points up for discussion. Several chapters proposed resolutions dealing with key problems, which were distributed ahead of time and were before people during the whole conference.

The conference was organized around the resolutions, relying on the strength and collective experience people had had together in their local chapters. Each chapter had three voting delegates, and before each major question was called, the chapters caucused to get more clarity on the questions and decide which way their representatives should vote. Several roll call votes were taken on points of struggle during the meeting.

Much of the first part of the conference was spent summing up the present situation. As person after person spoke to the attacks on the unemployed in city after city, a common theme was unmistakable—it's happening where I come from too! It was no longer possible

to see a vicious new bill cutting benefits in Washington state apart from the way the cuts in the federal extension was coming down in New York state. It was crystal clear, the unemployed and the whole working class faced a full-scale attack, a full-scale and systematic attack on the unemployment insurance system, which workers before had fought to win. This unemployment insurance system stands in the way of the drive by the capitalist class to drive down wages, bust unions, force people into working for minimum wages or even less in public and private jobs to bail themselves out of their deepening crisis they are in. Millions face starvation level jobs; millions more still find no work at all.

Out of the first day's discussion, a battle plan for the coming period took shape. The first day ended in some confusion over what would be the best way to focus the struggle around unemployment. While the bulk of the membership was listening to the evening's cultural activities—songs, films and a skit prepared by one of the chapters—the leading group of the conference met to cut through the confusion and struggle out a resolution for the Fall campaign to unite the membership around.

Mapping Out the Battle Lines

The resolution adopted the next day says, "Right now, the fight against the overall attack on our jobs, benefits and standard of living often takes the form of many individual battles. These include fights against the way the job program comes down, against harassment at the unemployment centers, against bills in the state legislatures. That is where the battle lines are being drawn sharply right now. We would be missing the target by a mile if we didn't join the struggle where it is being fought, didn't unite with the actual battle that is taking place, organize it and build it up.

"On the other hand, our task is much broader, because in reality the attack is a national attack, and reflects a national policy of the bosses and their government. In the course of the separate battles we fight, we have to constantly put out what the source of the attack is and find the ways to actually expose and mobilize people to go up against this source."

Having reached general agreement on the situation and the way forward, an outline of a campaign was unanimously decided on by the conference to build the fight for "Jobs or Income" under the present conditions. Under the slogans "Stop the Attacks on the Unemployment System" and "Union Jobs at Union Wages," UWOC will aim to build public opinion and struggle against the government's policy toward the unemployed. As a part of this, three main demands were decided on to be included in a national petition, "No More Cuts in Benefits—Unemployment Benefits to Meet Our Cost of Living for All Periods of Unemployment," "Down with Carter's Slave Labor Law and Forcing Us into Slave Wage Jobs!" and "All Government Job Programs Must Be Union Jobs at Union Pay!"

To build around this program, regional demonstrations are being planned for the end of October (when the last 13 weeks of federal extensions is to be phased out) directed at the federal government in unity with a demonstration for the same day in Washington, D.C. In January, at the time of Carter's State of the Union address, UWOC plans to draw all its forces together

for several days of demonstrations in D.C., putting forward its program for unemployment and demanding to meet with Carter and Congress.

In taking this campaign out the conference resolved to unite with the struggle of employed workers throughout the country, to fight to carry the struggles around unemployment into the unions and hailed the call to form a national workers organization in Chicago on Labor Day weekend, resolving to link up closely with this organization in building the fight of employed and unemployed alike.

Strengthening Organization

Having settled on a plan of action for the coming period, the conference next addressed itself to several other problems of organization: how to raise the level of the organization both on the local and national levels, to better coordinate its activities, and how to struggle out questions which come up in between national meetings.

A national steering committee was nominated by the leading committee for the conference and elected by the conference for the organization as a whole. This committee will meet as often as necessary and possible. In addition regional coordinators on the steering committee will be responsible for several chapters in their area of the country to coordinate activities, help sum up experience and focus in on problems as they come up in different regions of the country.

The steering committee was chosen from those who have been active in building the organization of the unemployed, most in touch with the sentiments of the broad masses of workers and with a clear understanding of the road ahead, and committed to building the struggle. The committee itself reflects the growing strength and breadth of UWOC and is composed of all nationalities, men and women, young and veteran workers alike.

In addition to the friendly competition in sales and subscriptions to the *Unemployed Organizer* (the new name of UWOC's newsletter decided on at the conference), and the institution of dues and membership cards, the conference decided to begin the publication of an internal newsletter.

The internal newsletter will be able to sum up different experiences in the struggle and help point the way forward for UWOC as an organization in addition to the new steering committee. The purpose of the newsletter would be to go into questions in the work in a deeper way than the *Unemployed Organizer*, which is intended for the broadest numbers of unemployed. It will be an important way to struggle out and achieve unity on important questions which the conference did not have time to take up, such as building UWOC in the neighborhoods, the fight around discrimination and unemployment and the question of undocumented workers.

Coming out of the conference, UWOC members were enthusiastic about the success of the conference, the problems which had been resolved and the plans decided on. In the short course of two days the way through many difficulties and uncertainties had, through shared experience and struggle, been charted. In the past year, many big steps have been made in the organized ranks of the unemployed. On the basis of summing up these advances, the 2nd National UWOC Conference was a tremendous stride in developing UWOC into an organized fighting force capable of leading the broad masses of unemployed in battle. ■

Kent State...

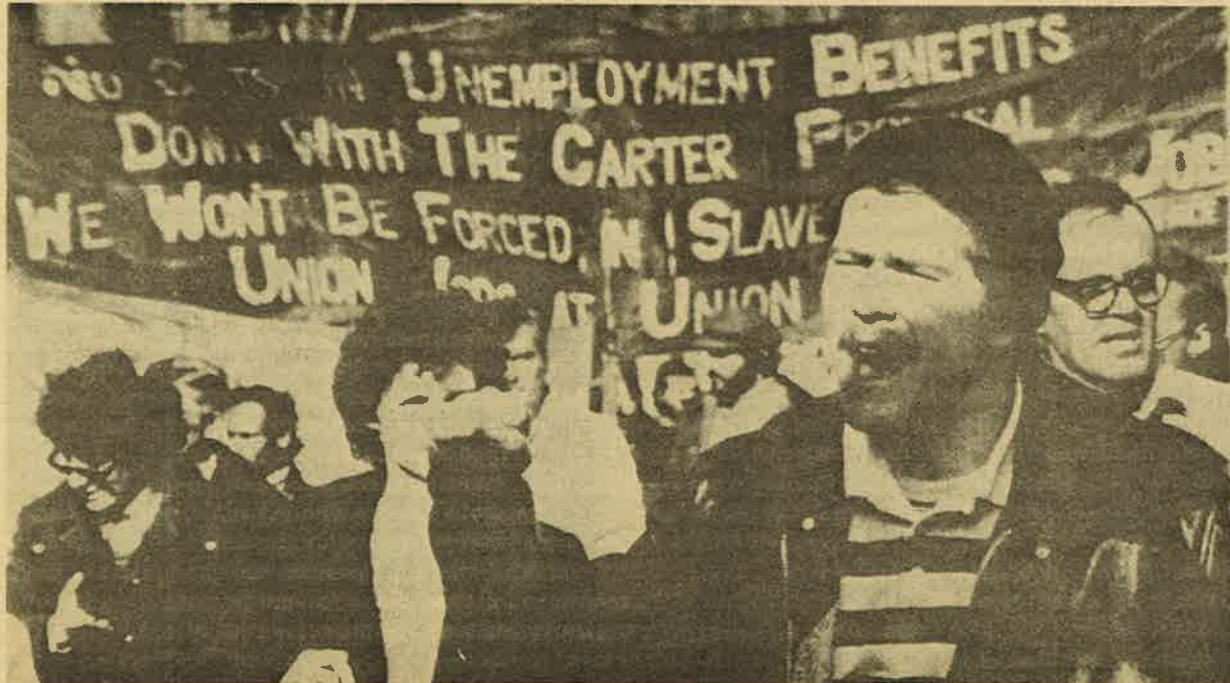
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themselves as being on the same side as those responsible for the May 4, 1970 murders.

How to assess the student movement of the '60s, its militancy and the development of a revolutionary thrust within it is a big question among students at Kent State. As part of giving leadership to the struggle, the RSB combats the reactionary summation of the bourgeoisie about the events leading to May 4, 1970 and struggles with fellow students over the pacifist summation (both sides were to blame) that is still strong among sections of the students.

From Jimmy Carter to KSU President Olds, many representatives of the ruling class have been talking of "healing the wounds of the Vietnam era and putting the deep divisions it caused into the past." Why? Because the thought of another movement against them, like the one in the 1960s, strikes fear into their hearts, especially as they drag us closer to another war, and deeper into economic crisis. They are calling on people to cooperate with them even as they bring down more and more attacks.

The spirit of Kent and Jackson State is breaking through this myth of cooperation with our rulers, just as so many other struggles are doing daily. The students of Kent will keep on fighting to make sure that their proud past of resistance is not buried. They are learning that the spirit of Kent and Jackson State, the spirit of struggle, points the road forward for every future battle. ■



Summing up victories won and lessons learned in battles like last winter's campaign against benefit cuts, unemployed workers from all over vowed to "Stand Up, Get Organized, Fight Back!"