

## OUR VIEW OF THE NATURE OF THE PERIOD

by the Rank and File Caucus

1) The present period is overwhelmingly dominated by two factors: a) the crisis of capitalist profitability shows no sign of abating, in fact is deepening, with the result an ever-sharpening offensive by the employers against the work class; and b) the highly organized sectors of the working class, in the trade unions, have up till now been able to mount little, and mostly ineffective, resistance. For revolutionaries, this lack of much successful resistance on the part of the working class decisively colors the whole scene. In this context, statements such as, "at last we're swimming with the stream," and "'78 marked a decisive turning point in the class struggle," are, at the very least, disorienting and misleading. 1978 was still a political bumper. The most striking and important political phenomenon this year has been a continued sharp move to the right by large sectors of the working class.

2) The ineffectiveness of the workers' resistance is explained by the near total lack of preparedness, organizational or political, of the rank and file to combat the employers' offensive. This is, in turn, because the forms of struggle which had, for the decades of post-war prosperity served the class, have become, in a short space of time, utterly inadequate to the new conditions. During the post-war era, the class struggle, at a low ebb, was waged on two levels. First, the union bureaucracy largely took care of the major wages/fringes bargaining; the capitalist prosperity allowed the bureaucracy to succeed in getting for at least the unionized sectors of the class an increasing standard of living. Second, with the bureaucracy ceding total sovereignty over the shop floor to the capitalists, the struggle over local conditions became the main focus for rank and file organization and struggle. Rank and file organization developed at the level of the shop floor and rarely beyond this. With the onset of the employers' offensive these forms of organization and struggle have proved incapable of providing the vehicles for resistance.

Thus the bureaucracy has, as expected, caved into the demands of the capitalists. The bureaucracy cannot fight back for the simple reason that it will not mobilize the rank and file, build its combativity and self-organization and political awareness, for fear that an organized rank and file will get out of hand, thrusting it aside. Moreover, the bureaucracies accept the capitalist system, see no hope for overthrowing it, want in fact to maintain it, and therefore understand that the restoration of capitalist profitability is, within the limits of capitalism, indispensable for restoring prosperity to the working class. The rank and file which long saw the bureaucracy deliver the goods and came to depend upon it, has been caught without an alternative, in the face of the bureaucracy's capitulation.

Moreover, the re-organization of capital--taking place through the concentration of capital, runaway firms, growing technological flexibility a la GMAD, strengthening of anti-labor laws, etc.--has rendered present forms of rank and file organization and struggle confined to the shop floor and to relatively non-mass, non-violent forms, virtually helpless in the face of an employers' offensive organized on a world scale.

3) The bureaucracy can be expected to continue in its role of impeding development of a real fightback. A sense of necessity for rank and file initiated and organized fightback has begun to develop, but a series of clear-cut victories for the ranks, as occurred in '33-'34 is necessary before the context of the struggle will shift decisively. Present situation

is much more like '29-'32; vicious ruling class offensive met by ineffectual resistance.

4) With shrinking profits and no workers' movement to force it to fight for reforms, liberalism and social-democracy worldwide has moved rapidly to the right, but in general has not lost its mass popular base, in the absence of a real alternative. That this phenomenon is not tied to capitalist penetration of the reformist organizations is demonstrated in Europe, where parties like the British Labour Party and, most importantly, the Eurocommunist CP's of Italy, France, and Spain, are shifting their policies to the right without benefit of any PACs or other direct help from the bourgeoisie.

5) With the rapidly expanding real wages of the '60s, liberalism was able to finance social welfare programs for the less well-off sections of the working class by taxation of better-off sectors of the class. The decline in the standard of living of the better-off sector, chiefly experienced as inflation, has engendered a rightward move in the political consciousness of this sector, most importantly indicated by the "taxpayers' revolt. This sector sees massive cuts in social services as the best hedge against inflation. The taxpayers' revolt, i.e., an attack of one section of the working class on the standard of living of another, is the center of U.S. politics in 1978, not the "class struggle."

The sharp move to the right of the DP is very important, but must not be seen as a capitalist conspiracy, financed by PACs. The working class constituency of the DP not only supports this move, but has insisted upon it. This drift to the right is the logic of self-defense by better-off sections of the working class, faced with capitalist crisis, but as yet unable to take on the capitalists.

6) Sectors of the working class are thus being motivated by their objective situation to behave in an objectively racist and sexist manner, and this determines consciousness in this case, leading to the growth of racist and sexist sentiment in the working class. It is this situation, not "reactionary prejudices" being manipulated by the capitalists, that leads to the rise of the New Right.

7) This situation cannot but push the entire political spectrum to the right. Only an organized working class, militantly mobilized, can hope to stave off the employers' offensive and its political results. In the absence of this, all political elements not tied to a rank and file strategy will inevitably be pushed to the right. Elections merely reflect the already existing situation of class consciousness and the existing balance of class forces; for this reason elections will increasingly give victories to fiscal conservatives, especially of the quasi-populist type, e.g. Jerry Brown. The social-democrats, liberals and trade union bureaucracy will have no choice but to follow them to the right in practice, if not rhetorically, in order to remain politically relevant.

8) Coalition politics, i.e., the call for political unity by groups like the Uaw, IAM, NOW, NAACP, etc., must be seen in this context. Nothing in the present situation will serve to render these groups more than bureaucratic shells without the kind of vitality which could seriously challenge the rightward drift of U.S. politics. Moreover, we have seen that when such groups do begin to threaten to take on a mass character and move beyond the control of the DP officials and trade union bureaucracy (CLUW, '75 Jobs Rally), they prove quite willing to destroy them rather than see that happen. Of course, limited, short-run openings for mass activity, like the ERA demo, will be provided by these formations, and we should take advantage of these opportunities, but we can best exploit them by organizing independently, primarily inside the emerging milieu of women and oppressed minority fightback and the rank and file groups in which we have influence  
Events at the '75 Jobs R v

Events at the '75 Jobs Rally, where our influence with a number of rank and file formations (RAFT, UNC, etc.) allowed us to momentarily push the situation beyond the limits set by the DP and labor bureaucrats, provide an example. As a result of the existence of a network of independent militants with a history of independent organization, decisive intervention was possible.

9) Real, material conditions also lie behind the attractiveness of the New Rights' apparently irrational attacks on gays, abortion, etc. To the extent that there is a lack of collective action in the working class, social reality appears to conform to the vision put forward by the right: "every man for himself," "survival of the fittest," "look out for Number One," etc. In the present situation, where potential for collective struggle is not evident, consciousness is primarily conditioned by the role of the worker as a seller of labor power, in competition with other workers. In this context, the family appears to provide the last bastion of protection. Despite its distortions, and its institutionalisation of female oppression, it does provide a situation in which the basic relationships are not totally market-based or based on economic competition, but rather based to some extent on direct "human" relationships. That the reality of the disintegrating family unit does not match up to idealized expectations merely increases the motivation to regenerate it, in the absence of any concrete alternative collective organizational form. As a result, many working people see the women's movement, the right-to-choose movement, and the gay movement as real threats to the survival of the one social institution over which they feel they still exercise some control. It is by understanding the objective roots of these forms of reactionary consciousness that we can begin to develop strategies to combat them.

10) It is most disorienting to see the New Right as principally a capitalist front to smash the unions utilizing the "irrational prejudices" of the working class to do so. The bourgeoisie will only make a concerted effort to smash trade unionism if the unions are effectively combatting the employers' offensive. In general, the bourgeoisie prefers to preserve liberal institutions as long as possible, in order to ease the task of political control and ideological hegemony. (the EC correctly recognizes this in its analysis of fascist movements in the U.S.)

11) While the crisis is pushing the class as a whole to the right, it is at the same time opening limited opportunities for us. The tremendous pressure of the class on the shop floor has sparked struggles in resistance. At present, only in the IBT can we expect to see widespread, militant rank and file activity where we can provide a direct, ongoing, fairly stable organizational lead (MFA, car haulers, grocery). But we can expect many smaller, militant struggles (e.g. Latrobe, Essex, Romeo, Postal Wildcats, increasing militance in public sector) where we can intervene with a strategy different than the bureaucracy's on more than a propaganda level, with the possibility of building organization (although perhaps only temporary) to help carry out a more militant strategy (although we must be honest with both ourselves and those we work with that for the most part these struggles cannot buck the prevailing tide of working class defeats). Our top priority in this work must be connecting with militants, who we must try to win to perspective of building rank and file organization.

12) We can expect that in general for the present the capitalist crisis will hit first and hardest the worst off sectors of the working class, especially blacks and women, as a function of the balance of forces within the class and its political manifestations. Despite this, there is a widespread sense of demoralization here also, reflected in the continued strength of liberal leadership (witness present politics of Black Panther

Party, continued support Carter by large numbers of blacks, etc.). This demoralization was originally engendered by the isolation of the black and women's movements from the white working class, and thus the root cause of the frustration is actually stronger.

However, there has been some revival of struggle recently, as oppression has intensified, and as a function of the fact the survival of a portion of the left cadre of the 60's leads to a much larger left component here than in the labor movement. A small, but highly significant element of the oppressed, especially youth, women and gays is ready to move around issues and campaigns (e.g. Anti-Nazi League in Detroit, Pittsburgh Coalition for Human Rights, CARASA in N.Y., Cleveland work around abortion clinics, anti-Briggs work in LA and Bay Area). While these struggle may or may not produce ongoing organizations, they will involve large numbers of radical, if not already leftist, activists. This must be seen as a crucial area for us, worthy of a major effort, for it is here that we will have our best opportunities for recruitment in this period. We should intervene in these movements with the general line of stressing the absolute necessity of linking up with the working class in order to win, and whenever possible, attempting to forge concrete links with the rank and file movement.

13) Ways must be found to combat the fragmentation ~~mixing~~ and isolation of activists we encounter in various areas of the struggle of the oppressed. One way is to try to build city-wide united front organizations, composed of activists, often leftist, who are increasingly aware of the limitations of single-issue coalitions, as well as the need for left unity. These groups should be built around points of unity stressing the need for a united fight-back by oppressed and workers in the face of the employers' offensive, a point of view increasingly popular in the movements of the oppressed.